

FAUNA



BIRDS ON FARMS

A national project of the RAOU

by Brenda Newbey

THE Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU) has set up a project to find out what success revegetation programs and remnant protection are having in bringing birds back into rural areas. The project is called "Birds on Farms" and it involves surveying specific sites of remnant vegetation eight times over two years to determine which birds are using the area.

The WA project was launched at the Mullewa Wildflower Show in August 1996, and by December, 124 potential participants have expressed interest and 34 farms have registered with the scheme. So, what do we hope to achieve?

Birds are considered to be good indicators of the health of a farm - if there are many different bird species present, the ecosystem is in good condition. The goal of the Decade of Landcare is to achieve sustainable landuse by the year 2000. More than half way through this plan our knowledge of the causes of land degradation has greatly improved and measures are being taken by many land managers to slow down the destructive processes. Revegetation and protection of remnant vegetation are two of the main techniques for the turn-around to sustainable farming. But have these actions helped native birds, especially those that were on the decline?

To find out, we need people to nominate remnant vegetation areas on their farm that can be studied. Ideally, the remveg patch should be 50 ha or more, and comprise varied habitat, but smaller sites of specific habitat type could also be useful. If you are yourself a birdwatcher, you

could nominate your site, and take all the records. Alternatively, if you feel that you do not have the time, or the birdwatching knowledge, but you would still like to know what birds you have in your bushland, the RAOU will match your site up with a birdwatcher.

As the information is collected, we will be able to answer questions such as which species are declining or increasing in range. A picture of bird use of revegetation of various types and ages and of remnants should emerge, and information on quite small local areas should also become available. Farmers will be able to compare data from their own properties with similar properties. Ideas for further management to increase bird diversity should become clear. In addition, anyone who is involved with Farmstay or Ecotourism will find the data helpful to their visitors.

There is no firm quota for participants, but it is hoped that at least 90 farms with 50 ha sites will become involved, plus a minimum of two hundred additional small sites such as those on small farms and road verges. The Main Roads WA will be contributing in this area, which should provide good information on the importance of the corridor effect.

If you are interested, please contact me before May 1997.

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