

It has always been exciting to do a 'birding' around the big salt lakes and salt channels in the Murchison - sight of an Orange Chat at Lake Austen or on the Lyndon River being a prize.

However, in the salt-affected areas of the northeastern wheatbelt the scene varies greatly. There are less small (< 20 cm) land birds in the samphire immediately surrounding the salt lakes and channels. At the end of August 2000, four sites were surveyed for the Bird Atlas. Two received fresh run-off from a large granite rock, one in woodland just behind the low sand dune surrounding a large salt lake and the fourth was in an 'early' samphire area surrounded by degraded crops on two sides, elsewhere by low shrubs grading into woodlands.

The sites with run-off from granite hills yielded many small birds in the fringing shrubs (up to 2 m high) including: Western Gerygone, Grey Fantail, Singing Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater (at its northern-most range) and Horsfields

## IN BRIEF

### SMALL LAND BIRDS IN SALT AFFECTED AREAS IN THE NORTHEASTERN WHEATBELT

by Mary Bremner



White-fronted Chat

Bronze-cuckoo. One of the sites had many Native Plum bushes (*Psyrax* sp.) covered in green fruit.

The woodland site had large old Salmon Gums and York Gums with numerous nesting hollows and fallen logs, but no young trees and little undergrowth except for some flowering Daisy-bush (*Olearia* sp.).

The only small bird seen was the Singing Honeyeater. Why the paucity of bird life? Although the eucalypts were not producing nectar there should have been plenty of insects.

The fourth area was a hive of activity, with Red-capped Robin, White-fronted Chat and Splendid Fairy-wren. There was possibly a lot of other small animal life, as Nankeen Kestrels and a Black-shouldered Kite were circling overhead. Perhaps it was the fact that it was the junction of four habitats that made this area so good for birds?

The Salinity Action Plan commenced in 1997. Are we 'birdos' taking enough interest in these saline areas? How important are they or, with revegetation, could they become?

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