

## **Annual Report : Appendix A. Conservation Report for 2010**

Members of the conservation committee for 2010 were: Paul Baird, Mike Newman, Neil Fraser, Max Maddock, Mick Roderick, Bob Greig, Peggy Svoboda, Liz Crawford and Chris Herbert and Ann Lindsey who convened the committee. Only one committee meeting took place in March and further matters were dealt with by email.

HBOC continues to be acknowledged as an “expert” in bird-related issues in the Hunter Region. The reasons for this are many and varied: the increasing involvement of our membership in the reporting and archiving of sightings either through the Club or through the Birds Australia Atlas Project; HBOC publications such as the Annual Bird Report and the occasional journal, Whistler, make huge contributions to the knowledge bank of the Hunter’s birds and a particularly important addition is the Birds Australia Hunter Region atlas database for use and analysis. This has allowed members to generate valuable data on population numbers and distribution for instance. Other members such as Max Maddock are busy analyzing data collected over years of field studies. Max has spent most of 2010 reviewing historical publications going back to the 1970s and earlier and his archival long term data collected since 1970s. His aim is to gain an overall picture of issues involved in the obvious pattern of decline in biodiversity in wetland ecological conditions. These are having cumulative negative impacts affecting many species of waterbirds and he is concentrating on writing up the findings for use in the conservation arena. At the moment, he is focussing on the four egret species, Straw-necked and Australian White ibis and Nankeen Night Herons, including the influence of the drought – flood cycles. He has been finding parallel declines in a wide range of other species, long believed to be common in the Hunter.

With this sound background and the ability to quote sources in correspondence, the conservation sub-committee and other members are able to make meaningful statements on bird-related conservation matters.

During the year HBOC met with industry and government agencies, often at their request. We had ongoing discussions with BHP Billiton (BHPB) and Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG) and met with Port Waratah Coal Services (PWCS) with regard to the new T4 coal loader proposal on Kooragang Island. We worked with the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (HCRCMA), the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) and local national park officers on matters such as the official description of our Ramsar site (Ecological Character Description of the Kooragang Component of the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar site), the proposed stabilisation of the Kooragang Dykes, the ongoing rehabilitation of Hexham Swamp, Tomago and Kooragang Wetlands. We took part in the conservation meeting initiated by BIGnet, worked other bird clubs, Birds Australia’s new conservation officers and Newcastle’s Green Corridor movement.

Several HBOC members sat on various committees such as the Hunter Floodplain Network, the HCRCMA steering committee for Hexham Swamp and Kooragang Wetlands. ANYMORE?

There is a limit to how many conservation issues members can address and no sooner is one issue finalised than another takes its place. Open-cut coal mining which is destroying much of the Hunter Valley continues unabated.

But amidst all the gloom there were some wins for conservation in 2010. The Tillegra Dam proposal was scrapped; Hexham Swamp, Tomago and Kooragang wetlands with the restoration

of tidal flows are looking fabulous; at a species level, the Rufous Scrub-bird study is a classic example of how facts-based management can result in excellent outcomes. In the mid 1980s, based on excellent research, it was predicted that this species could face extinction between 2010 (northern sub-species) and 2030 (southern sub-species) unless destruction of habitat halted. Practices were put in place and the Important Bird Area (IBA) monitoring conducted by HBOC has demonstrated that the protection of the core habitat in national parks has halted the decline. Ongoing monitoring will assist the formulation of appropriate management strategies to ensure the survival of this rare species. It so encouraging to be able to provide an example of conservation-related effort with a positive outcome. Green Wattle Creek provides another example on a smaller scale, where, following ongoing consultation with fire management authorities, the proposed area to be burnt for hazard reduction was changed to minimize impact on breeding birds.

Other members of HBOC have contributed to the on-ground management and conservation of areas such as Stockton Sandspit and Ash Island through sheer physical hard work and persistence, for which, I for one, am extremely grateful. A separate report has been written about these activities.

Several matters were addressed by the conservation committee during the year and letters or submissions were written:

- decline of the Southern Cassowary
- Tillegra Dam proposal
- Warkworth Mine Extension
- NSW Minerals Council
- Hunter Economic Zone at Kurri Kurri and the decline of the Regent Honeyeater
- Ellalong Lagoon and surrounding forest
- Oil spill in Newcastle Harbour in August

A big thank you to all the committee members who were so diligent and supportive throughout the year.

Many species of birds are in serious decline – the Regent Honeyeater is in danger of becoming extinct and the White-fronted Chat has disappeared from many of its former habitats to mention but two in a long and depressing list. Habitat destruction is the single greatest cause of this decline. It really is up to members of bird clubs to continue to complain and agitate about this state of affairs if they wish to continue to enjoy recreational birdwatching.

Ann Lindsey 31 December 2010

### **Notes on matters addressed**

BHPB arranged a meeting with HBOC about their Hunter River Remediation Project and the infilling of the Kooragang Island Waste Emplacement Facility in January. We were informed about the design of and proposed revegetation around the two sedimentation ponds. BHPB would like to revegetate the surrounding areas in a manner compatible with birdlife but there are constraints. After completion no future maintenance of vegetation is planned. HBOC insisted that

shallow-rooted native vegetation including grasses should be used and introduced weeds and grasses must be avoided at all costs.

A letter was sent to the Department for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) about the decline of the Southern Cassowary in North Queensland.

A letter was sent to the NSW Minerals Council questioning their attitude to the mining green offsets hitherto agreed to and approved. A reply was received and HBOC wrote a further letter discussing some of the issues raised.

A letter was sent to the Wilderness Society about the inadequacy of the bird surveys done as part of the Tillegra Dam EA. In November the Tillegra Dam proposal was scrapped by the State Government.

A letter was sent to the NSW Dept of Planning re the Hunter Economic Zone development at Kurri Kurri which has gone into receivership and how this will affect Regent Honeyeater habitat. Replies were received from Department of the Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW), Planning and DEWHA.

Ann Lindsey received notice that there was a change in management of the access to the Tomago site of Hunter Estuary NP. The new managers, ADW Johnson, invited HBOC to receive new keys.

ADW Johnson are managing 241ha of land for the Northbank Enterprise Hub's proposed subdivision for industrial purposes. (Tomago House is situated in the middle of the proposed subdivision). HBOC attended a community consultation meeting.

HBOC was invited to sit on the Hunter Floodplain Network initiated by I & I NSW as part of the Hunter Coastal Hotspot Project. Kristy Peters has taken up this position on behalf of HBOC.

HBOC conferred with Cumberland BOC on the matter of the Warkworth Extension and both Clubs sent submissions in June.

HBOC also sent a submission to DEWHA Mining Section observing that the proposed mine extension does not meet Australian government offset principles

Newcastle City Council are in the process of organizing the rehabilitation of Market Swamp and Newcastle Wetlands at Sandgate. HBOC was invited to attend relevant meetings. No actual work took place in 2010 to achieve this although Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) did maintenance at Deepwater Creek, Sandgate, to protect the rail line from flooding.

Ann Lindsey sat on the Hexham Swamp and Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Projects steering committee and attended meetings and site inspections.

As a result of a serious oil spill in Newcastle Harbour in August, HBOC wrote to the Port Authority asking to be informed about future measures to be undertaken which would prevent another similar incident. The operations manager is willing to attend an HBOC committee meeting in 2011 to discuss various issues.

Ellalong Lagoon and surrounding forest are included in the revamped development proposal by Hardie Holdings' Sanctuary Villages despite their having been set aside for conservation in a

previous MOU with the Planning Department. HBOC wrote to the Minister for Planning asking that Ellalong Lagoon and surrounding forest remain undeveloped and set aside for conservation.

The conservation committee negotiated with PWCS with regard to their request for HBOC data on Kooragang Island.