



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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2010 Annual Report

Introduction.

The 2010 Annual Report of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on the 9th February 2011. It is available via the Club website.

This Annual Report consists of an overview of 2010 in the main body of the report with the detailed reports, submitted by the section coordinators, attached as appendices. It incorporates the 2010 Annual Financial Report. The report reflects the organisational structure of HBOC.

Acknowledgement is given to all members for their personal involvement and contributions to furthering the aims of HBOC in 2010.

1. Management & Administration

This section of HBOC includes management and administrative areas that facilitate all aspects of Club operations through its committee structure and other appointed positions.

The Annual Financial Report for 2010, printed separately, forms part of this Annual Report

Additional aspects of this report are raised as follows: Despite difficult times of widespread financial stress HBOC maintains the sound financial position established in previous years. The invested funds provide income, security and resilience to unpredictable future circumstances.

HBOC has been able to meet its "large ticket" financial demands through the use of funds sourced from its collaborative relationships with other organisations. Funds from Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG), Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (HCRCMA) and the BASNA Twitchathon have funded publications and the habitat rehabilitation work on Ash Island. In 2010 HBOC received a substantial contribution (\$10,000) from the Port Waratah Coal Services (PWCS) which has been directed (as recommended by PWCS) to funding equipment needed for the field studies and IBA program (\$5,000), publication costs (\$3,000), future educational activities organised by the Club (\$1,000) and through HBOC, donations to Birds Australia (\$500) and the Australasian Wader Study Group (\$500). The Annual Bird Report continues to be completely funded through an ongoing annual contribution from NCIG. The level of contributions becomes evident when it is considered that since 2008 \$30,000 dollars have been obtained. (NCIG-\$2,000 ongoing annually, HCRCMA-\$ 8,000, 2008 Twitchathon -\$10,000, PWCS -\$10,000). HBOC again acknowledges the generosity of these organisations.

A desirable consequence is that HBOC has maintained its membership fee structure at its present level for several years thus minimising any financial barrier for members or potential members wishing to join the Club.

Other sections of this Annual Report document the role of other organisations in the successful achievement of HBOC aims, highlighting the desirability of fostering suitable relationships for other than financial purposes.

It must be emphasised that in all relationships that the club has with other organisations, especially those providing financial support, HBOC vigorously asserts and maintains its independence as an environmental organisation.

Recognition is given here to an often over-looked aspect, that is, the goodwill of members. Members absorb costs in the course of their volunteer activities and in doing so they make significant financial contributions to the operation of the club. For example, the in-kind contributions to the rehabilitation projects is approximately \$69,000 since 2003 and the in-kind costing estimates for the recent IBA monitoring surveys is in the order of \$26,000. These examples are only a part of the large total volunteer effort.

2. Membership Matters

Administrative, personal matters and services related to the membership.

Membership Secretary: The appointment of a membership secretary has provided considerable advantages by allowing the rationalisation of tasks previously performed by the Secretary and Treasurer.

Club Membership: The total number of members at December 2010 was 271, including 19 new members and one junior member. Overall the club lost a very small number of its total membership during the year with reasons for resignations being; moving out of the district, living too far away to make good use of the Club (especially in view of fuel prices), financial difficulties, or loss of interest. No indication of dissatisfaction, from those who responded, was received regarding the range of activities offered by the Club.

Hunter 300 & 350 Club: This group is a testament to the fine bird watching skills of its members, two additions were made to the 300 club roll while a further two members graduated to the 350 club. Total membership of the 300/350 group in 2010 is 24.

Sister Club: The Committee has supported the proposal to form a sister club relationship with the Nova Scotia Bird Society in Canada.

Library: The extensive library continued to be well used by members each Club Night.

Digital Photo Library: The development of the digital photo library continued this year with an increased bank of images that can be used in presentations and non-commercial community education. Members are encouraged to use this increasingly valuable and accessible asset.

E-mail Service: The e-mail service continued to play a much needed role in Club communications. This efficient means of distributing special messages, bird sightings and other interesting information keeps members informed, especially between Newsletters.

Hunter-birding: This online forum for sharing bird information, reporting sightings and for general discussion saw a membership increase from 49 to 115 members in 2010. Increased e-mail traffic covered a diversity of topics including the significant contribution of sightings for the HBOC records and Annual Bird Report. This group forum plays an important role in communication, increasing the knowledge of birds and enriching the experience of birdwatching as a hobby. Further growth is anticipated in 2011 and with it a greater diversity and quality of birding knowledge. The Hunter-birding moderator and all contributors to the site are acknowledged for their contributions to the Club.

Hunter Site Guide: Work on the development of the comprehensive electronic Hunter Site Guide has resulted in the compilation of the site list and map. Modes of delivery of this resource, potentially interfacing with Google maps, are being considered, but much more time is needed to fine tune this resource before it can be made available to members.

3. Activities:

Includes the planning, organisation and participation in the leisure -based bird watching and social activities of the Club.

Outings: HBOC implemented a successful program of outings including the monthly, midweek outings, camps and annual Twitchathon primarily focussing on the recreational needs of members.

Monthly outings covered a range of locations and habitats including; Seal Rocks, Tahlee/Carrington, Belmont Lagoon, Walka Recreation and Wildlife Reserve, Watagan Mountains, Bow Wow Gorge, Abernethy, Will-O-Wyn Lochinvar, Ash Island/Stockton Sandspit. Land based Seawatch outings also took place.

Mid-week outings continued to be very popular and well attended with locations including; Newcastle Foreshore, Watagan Mountains, Toronto Wetlands, Kitchener/Ellalong area, Myuna Bay, Ash Island, Rathmines, The Brush, Dudley/Fernleigh Track.

The *long week-end camps:* The attendance at these camps varied in direct correlation to the prevailing weather. The January camp was held at Oaklands near Coolah Tops, eight people. Thirty five members attended the Easter camp at Barraba, the Borah stock route proving to be an excellent birding site. Eight people continued the "migration" after Easter to the contrasting North Border Ranges. "Springdale" at Martindale was the venue for the ANZAC camp with ten happy and wet campers. The June Kerewong State Forest / Swan's Crossing camp was again very, very wet only four people. "The wettest October camp ever" saw eleven campers at Cattai wetlands in October.

The *mid-week camp* in September was based at the Dorrigo Mountain resort at Dorrigo.

Additionally an off-peak camp was held at historic Belltrees with 14 people attending and three camps associated with the Rufous Scrub-bird surveys took place in the Gloucester Tops and Landsdowne.

The *BASNA Annual Twitchathon* fund raising and recreational birdwatching event saw seven teams from HBOC participate. The Menacing Monarchs 1st place and the Hunter Home Brewers and Dodgy Drongoes equal 2nd place in the main race while the Crested Shrike-twits, filled 1st place in the Champagne race. Notable was the achievement of the hardy members of the Dry-throated Buzzards who cycled the entire event. The sponsorship of the Hunter teams raised about three thousand five hundred dollars for the BASNA nominated conservation projects while total sponsorship from NSW & ACT is expected to be in excess of twenty thousand dollars. The Twitchathon provides an accessible conduit through which members can contribute to other bird-related conservation projects.

In addition to the leisure and social benefits enjoyed by everyone, these outings are also a source of valuable observational data for the Hunter Region.

The many members including, the Club Activities Officers, those organising, coordinating and leading outings and to all those attending, thank you for your involvement. The generosity of the landholders of private properties is also acknowledged.

4. Club Night:

The monthly Club Night is one of the feature activities of HBOC.

Eleven Club Night meetings were held at the Hunter Wetland Centre in 2010, with attendance being very similar to that in 2009. (Feb AGM and Club Meeting 72, March 50, April 61, May 51, June 46, July 49, August, 61, September 60, October 48, November 32, December 68. The unusually low figure for November was attributed to the threat of severe thunder/hail storms.

The Guest Speaker Program included local, national and international subjects which covered conservation issues, research findings, travel and general interest. Topics included East Lake Macquarie Shorebirds, Wetland Habitat

Restoration, The Great Princess Parrot Adventure, Newhaven after the Wet, Detecting Woodland Birds, Birding the Mediterranean, Woodland Birds for Biodiversity Project, Ann's Amazing Antarctica Avifauna Adventure, Hall's Babblers, Birding in Costa Rica. In formulation the speaker program the committee seeks to establish a balance of topics and a range of speakers. Thank you to all presenters for their time expertise and effort in preparing and presenting these informative talks.

Bird of the Evening is always well received by members and this was the case in 2010. Members are encouraged to volunteer to present a Bird of the Evening segment secure in the knowledge that it is not necessary to use the often daunting technological aids offered by power point and digital photography to give an interesting talk.

The "Observations" segment continued to provide a valuable opportunity for members to share and report local bird sightings, the atmosphere of the meeting complementing Hunter-birding e-mail group discussion forum. The information exchanged is always valuable as it adds to the clubs records and collective knowledge.

The December Christmas meeting was again a successful way to end the year with members enjoying the friendly and social atmosphere, the chance to win a prize in the raffle and a wonderful supper. However this meeting did highlight some growing concerns regarding the use of audio-visual equipment in the theatre. Difficulties have disrupted the smooth flow of this and other meetings and it is hoped that the problems will be addressed with changes to equipment in 2011.

Thank you to all members that cheerfully perform the many tasks associated with Club Night, phone calls, open up, lock up, setting out and packing chairs, distributing badges, attendance books, the library, technical assistance and providing that much needed cup of tea. Thank you all.

5. Newsletter

HBOC's regular newsletter, that communicates club news, the event calendar, interesting sightings, Club outing and other reports and birding articles of general interest, to members, selected birding organisations and the public, either directly or via the HBOC web site.

The bimonthly Newsletter continues its history as a quality publication and vital means of communication as it links members within the Club through its news reports, and other birding articles. The Newsletter is widely distributed to the wider community through its distribution to other bird clubs and through the Club website which provides ready public, and member, access.

The subject of a name for the Newsletter mooted last year is still alive and a decision should be forthcoming in 2011. Additionally the scale and role of electronic distribution of the newsletter remains under discussion.

The many members who contribute articles to the Newsletter are thanked for their interest, time and effort in providing the raw material on which the Newsletter is totally dependent. The Club is indeed again indebted to the dedicated editor and the printing and distribution team for delivering such a high quality service to the Club.

6. Special Interest Group

At present, this section offers the opportunity for members with a special interest in bird photography to develop their bird watching and photographic knowledge / skills while promoting birds and the environment.

Interest in bird photography flourished in 2010 with many members contributing to the Club night meetings, the Newsletter and digital library. Significantly, the introduction of a display of members' photographs at each Club meeting provided a focal point for much discussion and enjoyment at these meetings. Photographers' work was also highlighted at the BASNA symposium drawing much comment and helping to raise the awareness of Hunter Region birds amongst the delegates. A small public display was held at the DECCW offices in Newcastle and serves as a forerunner to similar displays in 2011. Photographers have been encouraged to contribute to the

development of a new Club logo and this work is still in progress. A “phototwitch” event is being considered for 2011.

The organisers and contributors are thanked for their efforts in enhancing the recreational aspects of birdwatching and for raising public awareness of Hunter birds. A warm invitation is extended to all members to contribute photographs in the coming year.

7. Conservation

This section is primarily concerned with issues relevant to the protection of birds and their habitat in the Hunter Region and beyond. It helps link the areas of HBOC endeavour and the community through its collaborative partnerships, networking and advocacy.

Please refer to the detailed Conservation Report - Appendix A

The following aspects are highlighted:

The ability of HBOC to make meaningful statements on bird related conservation matters is intimately linked to the bank of quality supporting background information that is forthcoming from members through other sections of the Club (especially Field Studies and Data Management).

HBOC continues to maintain and extend its relationships with outside agencies. During 2010 HBOC members met with industry and government agencies, often at their request, to influence management decisions by providing advice to optimise the implementation of strategies that will benefit the Hunter Region’s bird life. Largely through HBOC’s local effort, a perceived increase in the level of awareness and willingness to engage in bird related matters, by these agencies, is becoming evident. This pleasing trend, although difficult to measure, is a rewarding outcome.

HBOC was active in addressing the following issues: the decline in the Southern Cassowary, Tillegra Dam, Warkworth Mine extension, Offsets, Hunter Economic Zone and the decline of the Regent Honeyeater, Ellalong Lagoon, the oil spill in Newcastle Harbour and the proposed T4 Terminal Project. (See Appendix A for details)

Amidst the mounting number of issues there have been several notable successes for local conservation, viz. the scrapping of the planned Tillegra Dam project; the restoration of tidal flows has positive outcomes for the Hexham Swamp, Tomago and Kooragang wetlands.

Thank you to the Conservation Coordinator and all members of the Conservation Committee for their continued efforts, for their expertise and experience in providing a necessary service, not only for HBOC, but also for the community at large, as they strive for better environmental outcomes.

8. Field Studies and Data Management

Comprises those issues concerned with collecting data, monitoring bird populations and maintaining data records which underpin the HBOC research and conservation effort while at the same time making a worthwhile contribution to members’ leisure-based bird watching.

Please refer to the comprehensive Field Studies and Data Management Report - Appendix B.

The acquisition, recording, analysis and reporting of field studies data represent a highly significant component of the core business of HBOC.

Members were very active in 2010 as part of the regular, systematic field studies conducted within the Hunter Region. The constant effort approach provides raw data for analysis and monitoring of bird populations

generating important records for the future and it allows HBOC to pursue its conservation goals supported by reliable and objective information.

The following list summarises HBOC survey activity the results of which are reported through other avenues: Hunter Estuary Shorebirds, Tomago Wetlands, Lake Macquarie Shorebirds, Port Stephens Waterbirds, Worimi Nature Reserve, Swan Bay, Newcastle Rock Platform, Kooragang/Ash Island Wetlands, Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works, Walka Recreational and Wildlife Reserve, Blackbutt Reserve, Irrawang Swamp, Hexham Swamp, Greswick Angus Seaham, Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot Survey, Ibis Count, Latham's / Painted Snipe Count, Australasian Bittern Survey. Additionally individual members supply systematic data resulting from personal projects.

The well established program of systematic surveys was extended in 2010 with HBOC accepting responsibility for monitoring six Hunter Region Important Bird Areas. This is part of the Important Bird Areas (IBA) program launched by Birds Australia, in conjunction with Birdlife International, in October 2009.

A feature of HBOC IBA work has been the development of survey methodologies and data analysis for monitoring the Rufous Scrub-bird. The results of this work will form the basis of the monitoring programs in four other IBAs in NSW and Queensland. The knowledge gained will also be applicable to other species such as the Australasian Bittern. HBOC has acquired a "Songmeter" and is currently acquiring the associated software and a compatible computer deemed essential for the progress of these studies.

A further significant development in 2010 was the finalisation of an arrangement with Birds Australia for HBOC to receive all recorded Atlas data, for the last twelve years, for the Hunter Region. Annual updates are anticipated. These vital records will allow HBOC to better track changes in distribution and abundance of species and establish all important trends over time at a regional scale. Historical HBOC hard copy records for the Hunter Region have been modernised to digital format making this data based readily searchable.

The Hunter Region Annual Bird Report is the main reporting vehicle for HBOC data. The Annual Bird Report No 17 (2009) was published in 2010 with data for 437 Hunter Region species. The report also notes that there are 74 threatened bird species in the Hunter region. The Whistler, HBOC Special Report No.5 "Seabirds of the Hunter Region", a paper in *Stilt* together with the papers presented at the BASNA Symposium provided complementary reporting outlets in 2010.

An emerging and encouraging trend is the increase in the number of member sightings being submitted via the use of the Atlas sheets. Reporting via the online forum Hunter-birding is also significant. Regardless of the source, leisure time observation or systematic study, the importance of reporting observational records should not be underestimated as they are extremely valuable in increasing our knowledge of birds and allowing any conservation endeavours to be supported by reliable information.

Hunter Region sightings which *might* be regarded at this stage as highlights for 2010 are listed below for readers' *general interest* only. Many species in this preliminary listing *are yet to be fully reviewed and finalised by the Records Appraisal Committee*, an essential process that preserves HBOC's reputation for reliable records.

King Quail at Tomago

White-headed Petrel in June and Nov

Tahiti Petrel in March

Black Petrel in Nov

Streaked Shearwater,

White-bellied Storm-petrel in March

Many Black-bellied Storm-petrel in Nov

New Zealand Storm-petrel (only addition to the Hunter species list for 2010)

Red-footed Booby

Brown Booby

Australian Little Bittern in Dec

Black-tailed Native-Hen in Feb
Bush Stone-curlew and Beach Stone-curlew (Breeding attempts by both of these two extremely rare threatened species in our Region)
Wood Sandpiper in Jan
Wandering Tattler in Nov
Sooty Tern in Feb
Common Noddy in Mar/Apr
Black Noddy in Mar
Red-winged Parrot in May
Budgerigar in May & Nov
Forest Kingfisher in Jan and Oct
Rufous Scrub-bird: surveys at Gloucester Tops confirmed good numbers are still present there
Singing Honeyeater – several records
Inland Thornbill in May
Southern Whiteface – several records (first records for many years)
Ground Cuckoo-shrike in May

HBOC is indebted to the coordinators and to the many members, who organise and participate in acquiring and reporting observational data, for their expertise, dedication, and persistence in the pursuit of knowledge and better environmental outcomes for Hunter Region birds.

9. Projects

Comprises the “hands on” conservation projects that restore selected areas of bird habitat in the Hunter.

Please refer to the comprehensive Milhams Pond and Stockton Sandspit habitat restoration Project Reports. Appendix - C.

Milhams Pond Ash Island: Rehabilitation of the saltmarsh community centres on controlling mangrove encroachment an issue which is seen as the major threatening process for this habitat. Mangrove removal and seed exclusion have been conducted under licence and in collaboration with KWRP and NPWS. Funding is via a Caring for Country Coastcare Grant and funds from the 2008 Twitchathon.

HBOC volunteer hours in 2010 were 302 hours bringing the total volunteer hours in 2009/2010 to 500 hours while contractor hours total 480 hours for this period. Expenditure at the end of 2010 is \$25.700 from a total grant of \$30.000.

The project manager’s report indicates that Milhams Pond is free of mangrove plants capable of producing seed in the next year. A program of secondary follow up seedling removal is planned for 2011, the HBOC volunteer effort again being supported by the contractor, Trees in Newcastle.

Stockton Sandspit: Habitat treatment in 2010 focussed not only on roost areas but also on the feeding and breeding habitat at this site. Stockton Sandspit was impacted by the August 2010 oil spill in Newcastle Harbour with the ensuing clean-up being facilitated by the Newcastle Port Corporation with support from the NPWS and DECCW. This clean-up was successful with no ill effects on the Sandspit being observed since its completion.

Overall HBOC volunteer effort in 2010 was 408hours which brings the in-kind contribution since 2003 to approximately \$69.000. This program has been highly successful as measured through the breeding success of Pied Oystercatchers and Red-capped Plovers and the large increase in the use of the site by Pacific Golden Plovers.

Note: Much work still needs to be done to maintain the advances made with both Milhams Pond and Stockton Sandspit. Members are encouraged to contribute their time to these projects to support the

volunteer team and ensure the health of these sites. The dedicated project manager and volunteer team are to be congratulated for ensuring the successful rehabilitation of these sites.

10. The Whistler

HBOC's research-based, occasional periodical of refereed papers and notes that places on record observational details and analysis of HBOC members' field studies.

Please refer to the Joint Editors Report Appendix - D.

The HBOC Whistler continues to be well received within the birding community as evidenced, in part, by the interest the publication generated and the positive feedback that was forthcoming from delegates attending the BASNA Symposium and the BOCA Forum.

Volume 4 featuring threatened species was planned to be issued in 2010 but will now be distributed in Feb 2011, Volume 5 will follow later in 2011.

The costs of publication have been provided directly and indirectly through the sponsorship of the HCRCMA and now more recently through a generous contribution from Port Waratah Coal Services. HBOC acknowledges with gratitude these financial contributions.

The Whistler team, of editors, authors, referees and production personnel, is congratulated and thanked for its dedication and resolve during 2010 to ensure that the Whistler remains a quality publication of benefit to birdwatchers and the community.

11. Education & Promotion

To equip club members, the organisation and the broader community with the knowledge, skills and capacity to not only enhance the bird watching experience, but also to support the conservation of Hunter birdlife and its various habitats; and

This section includes avenues for members to champion birds, the environment and HBOC to the broader community.

For the purpose of this report these two aspects are linked as many HBOC activities have shared outcomes.

HBOC Website: The HBOC website continues to evolve as an important "front line" source of information for the community and as a promotional tool for the Club. Its accessibility often means that it is the first point of contact for people seeking information about birds in general or HBOC in particular. An increase in the number of enquiries originating from the web-site has been evident. In 2010 the website underwent further refinement thanks to the skills of the website managers.

Publications: HBOC publications such as the Annual Bird Report, The Whistler, The Club Newsletter, Special Reports and Birding Routes pamphlets continued to provide educational and promotional benefits in 2010. The Special Report "Sea Birds of the Hunter" became available in 2010.

BASNA Symposium: HBOC hosted the BASNA Annual General Meeting and Symposium in March 2010. Members presented a variety of papers reporting findings of Hunter Region bird studies and projects to the visiting delegates. The excellent photographic display and field excursion strongly promoted the birds of the Hunter Region. HBOC received very positive feedback reflecting the excellence of the program and promotional material. The role of the Hunter Valley Grammar School and Maitland City Council is acknowledged.

BOCA Forum: HBOC was represented at the BOCA Forum held in Leeton where HBOC publications, (the Annual Bird Report and the Whistler), and the club's IBA monitoring program received informal but significant exposure generating much interest amongst delegates.

BIGnet: HBOC was active in the BIGnet association of birding clubs through the personal presentation of habitat rehabilitation reports to the meeting and participation in the meeting of conservation officers that discussed issues of common concern.

Bengalla Bird Day: HBOC again represented at the Bengalla Bird Day organised for employees and their friends at the Bengalla mine. As in the past this event was most successful in raising awareness of the local birds amongst those people attending.

Events: Other events in which HBOC participated included; The Kooragang Family Festival Day, Clean up Australia Day, Stockton Sandspit Planting Day with KWRP.

Community Asset: Plans for a combined bird hide /educational /display area at the Walka Recreation and Wildlife Reserve have entered the Development Application stage. This facility is being developed in collaboration with Maitland City Council. Interpretative signage will be a feature of this facility.

Print Media: Hunter Region birds and HBOC were positively promoted through an increased number of articles on bird related matters appearing in the local press.

Whether it was through formal presentations to meetings or clubs, being interviewed for media reports or more simply through informal conversations members are thanked for their personal efforts in promoting Hunter Region birds and HBOC.

12. Concluding Comment

It has been a year of steady progress, the membership base is strong, the financial position is sound, attendance at club activities is comparable with that of other years, and there is a solid core of participation in the Club's survey and volunteer work. A pleasing aspect of 2010 has been the significant growth in the reporting of bird sightings through the use of Atlas record sheets and through the online forum Hunter Birding. A feature, that again becomes evident on review of the year, is the high degree of collaboration that HBOC enjoys with other organisations. The ongoing maintenance of these relationships is vital for HBOC to accomplish its aims. Also evident are the range and depth of members' involvements in producing successful outcomes for the Club. There always appears so much that could be done but *every* contribution is important and assists in making HBOC an effective organisation working to benefit our bird life.

Acknowledgements

Finally and importantly HBOC is indeed fortunate to have so many supportive and cooperative members who work willingly for the Club. I wish to thank the Office Bearers, the 2010 Management Committee and the interested members that regularly attend committee meetings for their commitment to the Club. Thank you also to the coordinators of the various sections of the Club, members of the sub-committees, small groups, survey teams, editors, record officers, technologists, authors, photographers, club night assistants, production and distribution teams, field volunteers.... in fact *all* members for their goodwill and contribution to the 2010 HBOC birding year.

Paul Baird

(HBOC President 2010)

