

Appendix A - Conservation Report for 2011

2011 was my last year as conservation officer for HBOC after accepting the position officially at the beginning of 2003 as a result of Max Maddock's insistence that I take on the job. I think he knew that my heart was in conservation and he worked on that until I was hooked. I have never regretted doing so and despite the many frustrations and some degree of anxiety I have enjoyed it immensely.

I had never been a great letter writer, but I can say that my skill in that direction progressed in leaps and bounds. I must have written countless letters over the years, and the thing is that the letters do not have to be great works of prose; certainly mine were not. One of the many things I discovered is that letters do make a difference so long as they are based on fact, and, the only thing better, is lots of letters pertaining to the same issue. The research needed to deal with such matters as development applications or issues around threats to bird welfare and their habitats has kept my mind alive and active and above all, it was interesting. My computer skills went from nothing to sufficiently adequate to deal with emails, the web and manipulating data albeit at a basic level. I attended many meetings which gave me the opportunity to hear other viewpoints and arguments and to meet people from industry, government and the community.

Needless to say, I did not do the job alone and could not have done it without the generous support of the conservation committee which I formed (in my own interests) because I knew I would need help. Max, Liz Crawford, Mike Newman and more recently Mick Roderick fixed up my letters and unwound my woolly thought processes. Neil Fraser who resigned from the conservation committee at the end of last year was a great researcher and sent me many short versions of very long, convoluted development applications. Chris Herbert and Dan Williams dealt with any maps I required.

In short, it was me who gained from this grand experience of being HBOC's conservation officer. However, I am tired now and this position needs some new blood to deal with the pressures of increasing development around the Hunter Valley. In the interests of our avian companions, it is my greatest wish that HBOC's conservation work continues and that the new conservation officer enjoys the job as much as I have done.

In 2011 the HBOC conservation committee was invited by National Parks, the Port Waratah Coal Services Terminal 4 Project (T4), Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (HCRCMA), the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP), the Newcastle City Council and other organizations to work with them and provide expert opinion about birds and their habitat.

Following is a list of issues addressed in 2011:

Hunter Wetlands National Park – HCRCMA's Hexham Swamp Rehabilitation Project

Ann Lindsey (AL) attended three meetings of the steering committee for this Project. In September an approval from the Department of Planning and Infrastructure was received to go to the next stage of the Project and open a further three tidal gates at Ironbark Creek. These were opened on the 29 September 2011. On behalf of HBOC, AL was invited to open a gate, but was unable to attend. Apologies were tendered. Six gates, equivalent to four fully open, are now allowing tidal flow to the wetland and it is expected that the last two gates will be opened before winter 2012 and that this will achieve the target inundation of 700ha in Hexham Swamp.

As requested AL updated the November meeting on the diversity and abundance of birds during 2011 compared with 2010.

In November HBOC sent a letter to the Environment Manager of Hunter Water Corporation, asking for modification to the barbed wire fencing installed on the eastern side of Hexham Swamp. The invisible nature of the fence has the potential to harm birds which may fly into it and become entangled. As a result of discussions with National Parks about the barbed wire, the ranger flagged part of the barbed wire fence with bright ribbon in December.

Hunter Wetlands National Park – Ash Island

As a result of a verbal report by AL backed up by a letter from HBOC member, Joy Nicholls, the Rebel Flying Club flyway zone on Ash Island was restricted in the vicinity of Australian Painted Snipe habitat.

An on-site meeting on Ash Island with Robyn Coombes, the environmental officer for Ausgrid (formerly Energy Australia) was attended by AL and Neville McNaughton in March about birds hitting their powerlines. Four priority areas were identified – Wagtail Way and Palm Road, Phoenix Flats and Teal Loop. Ausgrid is anxious to reduce impacts on the environment by their powerlines. Hopefully, bird-deflecting devices will be installed in the near future where the lines are over land. It is more difficult to install devices where the lines are over water. Ausgrid is developing an implement which may be able to address this problem.

In November letters to the Minister for Environment NSW, Ms Parker, the National Parks Association, Mr Burke, the Minister for the Environment, Australian Government, and Birdlife Australia objecting to the removal of 18.5 ha of wetland from Hunter Wetlands NP - Ash Island, Area E site. An acknowledgement from Ms Parker, and a letter from Mr Burke were received.

Hunter Wetlands National Park - Stockton Sandspit

In September, 2011 AL went with National Parks to inspect a potential future breach in the sand wall at the eastern end of Stockton Sandspit. It was agreed that the wall required maintenance and that steps would be taken to build up the wall.

Hunter Wetlands National Park - Kooragang Dykes

National Parks undertook works to stabilise the Kooragang Dykes in April and the works were completed in May. 215 metres of the sea wall have been repaired and the level has been raised by 200 mm. Several species of shorebirds are roosting on the new work.

Hunter Wetlands National Park - Tomago Wetlands

Funding from the Caring for the Country Hotspots programme became available to modify the eastern north-south drain at Tomago Wetlands. National Parks commenced work and new tidal gates were installed.

Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority

HCRCMA requested information on community assets and ran workshops accordingly. The workshops provided an opportunity for community members in various locations to identify and record local natural assets and their value for social, economic or environmental reasons. Participants were also asked to identify what they perceive as potential threats to these assets and their capacity to manage them. AL *et al.* made a list of significant bird sites and Dan Williams entered the sites on the HCRCMA database.

PORT WARATAH COAL SERVICES Terminal 4 Project (T4), Kooragang Island

Liz Crawford observed that the species, Black-tailed Godwit, had been omitted from the list of birds in the T4 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act) referral. In response AL sent a letter in August, to the consultants, EMGA Mitchell McLennan, PWCS and the Dept of Sustainability, Environment Protection Branch. A copy of the Birds of Deep Pond from *Whistler 2*, 2008, was also sent to the consultant. The omission has been noted and this species will be included in the list.

An email was received from the T4 Project in May, 2011 saying that it was unlikely that PWCS would pursue the option for a berth on the North Arm of the Hunter River and that HBOC data for the North Arm were no

longer required. PWCS looks forward to further cooperation in the future. The T4 Project was referred under the EPBC Act and deemed a 'controlled action'.

Mike Newman attended a T4 community meeting in October and has presented a report. The environmental assessment for the Project is due in 2012.

Eastern Star Gas Liquefied Natural Gas Export Terminal

The proposed site for this project is on Kooragang Island adjacent to the western approach to Stockton Bridge, with possible shipping berths in the North Arm downstream of Stockton Bridge.

An HBOC submission was sent by email to the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, EPBC Act Referral Department, Canberra, disagreeing with the company Eco Logical who wrote the referral. Eco Logical claimed that the project was not a 'controlled action' under the EPBC Act. In view of the proximity of migratory shorebirds' roosting and foraging habitat and the potential for adverse effects from dredging the North Arm, HBOC counter claimed that the project should be a 'controlled action'. This Project has been deemed a 'controlled action' under the EPBC Act. The Environmental Assessment for the Newcastle LNG Facility is anticipated to go on public exhibition around mid 2012.

Newcastle Port Authority

In September, 2011 AL attended an Oil Spill forum organized by Seabird Rescue and Native Animal Trust Fund. National Parks and the Newcastle Port Authority also attended. A good outcome for HBOC presence at this meeting was an invitation to give a presentation on shorebirds and their important sites in the Hunter Estuary to the Oil Spill Management Response Team. The presentation was given in November by AL.

Hunter Wetlands Centre (HWC)

Dan Williams is the new representative for HBOC on the HWC site management committee. Many thanks to Harold Tarrant who has resigned from this committee for his contribution over the years.

HBOC sent a submission to Newcastle City Council objecting to an application by HWC for proposed camping on the site. An acknowledgement from Newcastle City Council was received.

Market Swamp and Newcastle Wetland Reserve and Newcastle City Council

The Final Action Plan for **Market Swamp and Newcastle Wetland Reserve** was accepted subject to an on-site meeting with Tom Clarke to discuss the details of the proposed engineering design for flow control structures during the preparation of the environmental assessment. The environmental assessment will be prepared before the implementation of the Management Plan. Newcastle City Council has installed a gate on the call car road at Sandgate Road.

Blackbutt Reserve, Newcastle

Joy Nicholls attended the **Blackbutt Management Plan** community meeting in April on behalf of HBOC.

Worimi Conservation Lands Stockton Beach

In April, HBOC member, Lois Wooding, gave a presentation to the community consultation group for the Worimi Conservation Lands (Stockton Beach). The group has the historical/heritage information in place and is now proceeding with ecological data.

Walka Waterworks

In August HBOC member, Jim Smart, wrote to the Maitland Council Manager responsible for Walka Waterworks objecting to excessive mowing to the edge of the wetland. The Council is aware of the excessive mowing habits of the people interested in the miniature rail track. A plan to define the suitable limits of mowing is in progress and hopefully it will be restricted to no more than two metres either side.

Green Wattle Creek Crown Reserve at Butterwick - Reports from Mike Newman

A hazard reduction plan involving controlled burns has been drawn up for the Reserve at Green Wattle Creek by the Crown Lands Department and Rural Fires Service. The plan involves a staged burn of a mosaic of 10 patches over five or six years. In the longer term the area will be burnt over a ten to 15 year cycle. The initial schedule allows intervals of at least two years for a burnt patch to recover before an adjacent patch is burnt. Riparian borders will be left. Most of the burns will be outside the spring breeding season.

The aim is to protect wildlife diversity and enhance the bush quality. Lantana and weed species are being progressively removed. Consultation with HBOC member, Mike Newman, in the selection of the areas to be burnt and the schedule has been excellent. The plan has flexibility to delay the schedule if the burnt areas have not recovered sufficiently to provide refuges when adjacent areas are burnt.

The long-term studies at Green Wattle Creek as published in *The Whistler* 3 provide base line data. Four additional 2ha sites have been set up in burnt areas to measure the rate of recovery of bird populations. Additional data is being collected at these sites to determine how the birds are using different layers of the vegetation. Mike Newman is monitoring its recovery and noting what birds are using the area. In December, he flushed a pair of White-throated Nightjars from a spot close to where they have bred previously and it is suspected that they have young. It is very encouraging to know that the area is suitable for nightjars within six months of the burn. Following the burn at Green Wattle Creek Speckled Warblers are again numerous and appear to be breeding profusely. Painted Button-quail numbers have also been restored to the numbers regularly observed more than a decade ago.

Ellalong Lagoon and surrounding forest

4000 ha of land around Ellalong Lagoon and the lagoon itself were put on sale by Hardie Holdings. HBOC wrote to Steve Meadows representing the Communities of Congewai Catchment Inc. advising that HBOC could offer information on natural attributes and bird data as support.

In September letters were sent to Robyn Parker, NSW Minister for the Environment and Brad Hazzard, NSW Minister for Planning and Infrastructure about the advertised sale of Ellalong Lagoon and surrounding forests asking that they be incorporated into the national park system. A copy of the HBOC submission to the Department of Planning was sent to Cessnock Council and receipt of the letter was acknowledged.

Walkworth Extension Coal Mine

AL presented at the independent **NSW Planning Assessment Commission** about the Warkworth Extension at Singleton in November. This Project has been rejected by HBOC and other environmental organisations, the local community and the Singleton Council.

AL gave a ten minute presentation to BIGnet in April about DECCW offset principles and related them to the proposed Warkworth Extension Project

A submission to **Coal and Gas Strategy Scoping Paper NSW Government** was sent in April. An acknowledgement was received.

Maules Creek Coal Project, Boggabri

HBOC sent a letter in support of the Birds Australia Southern NSW and ACT Group's submission objecting to Ashton Coal's Project in October.

Conservation of shorebird habitat in the East Asian Australasian Flyway

In April Liz Crawford, HBOC member, sent a series of largely the same letter to Mr Burke, Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Senator Bob Brown, Leader of the Australian Greens, Mr Hunt, Shadow Minister of the Environment, Mr Chen Yuming, Chinese Ambassador to Australia, Mr Kim Woo-Sang, Ambassador from the Republic of Korea to Australia, Mr Gerovich, Australian Ambassador to the Republic of Korea and Dr Raby, Australian Ambassador to China asking for the protection of tidal mudflats in the Yellow Sea and raising the following points in the relevant letters:

- At future meetings of the bilateral migratory bird agreements Australian delegates ask their counterparts what is being done in their countries to retain sufficient appropriate habitat to ensure that birds can successfully stage there on migration;
- The Australian government advocates for the issue of shorebird habitat loss to be listed as a standing agenda item at each Conference of Parties of Ramsar, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on Migratory Species (the Bonn Convention);
- You request and lobby for the issue of reclamation of shorebird habitat in the Yellow Sea to be included as a major agenda item on the program for the next IUCN World Congress to be held in the Republic of Korea in late 2012; and
- The House of Representatives Joint Standing Committee on Treaties undertakes a parliamentary review of Australia's performance in maintaining its obligations to international environmental treaties.

Bohai Bay, China

In July HBOC sent largely the same letter to Senator Bob Brown, Leader of the Greens, Dr Raby, Australian Ambassador to China and Mr Chen Yuming, Chinese Ambassador to Australia, asking for the protection of remaining shorebird habitat in Bohai Bay and reminding them of their obligations to shorebirds under the Agreement between China and Australia on the protection of Migratory Birds (CAMBA).

Travelling Stock Routes

A submission was sent by HBOC to the Livestock Health and Pest Authority Review in September pointing out the importance of travelling stock routes to birds.

Red Fox

A submission was sent to the Director of the Wildlife Trade Regulation Section, Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities objecting to the introduction of the Red Fox for the pet trade.

Distribution of *The Whistler 4*

The Whistler 4 copies and covering letters were sent to 11 local governments of the Hunter Region. 10 covering letters with copies of *The Whistler 4* were sent to the 10 sitting members of the Hunter Region: Charlestown, Newcastle, Wallsend, Port Stephens, Lake Macquarie, Myall Lakes, Upper Hunter, Maitland, Cessnock and Swansea. Garry Edwards MP Swansea replied thanking HBOC for *The Whistler 4* and expressed his interest in conservation.

CSIRO Survey Form

In response to an email from the recently formed CSIRO coastal cluster, HBOC member, Chris Herbert, filled in a survey form. This group was formed to examine science uptake in Australian coastal management. Part of this project is to analyse the role of coastal champions in linking coastal science with coastal policy. This will help planning for effective coastal management in the future.

NSW Government

In April the planning instrument, Part 3A, was scrapped by the new liberal government. There will be a review of planning legislation over the next 18 months.

Hunter Estuary Technical Working Party

Chris Herbert attended the Hunter Estuary Technical Working Party meetings during the year. Bank stabilisation works along Stockton Channel are proceeding upstream from the small boat harbour at Stockton. It was agreed that no works would be conducted at the Pacific Golden Plover roosting site in Stockton Channel between September and April when the plovers are present.

WetlandCare Australia

This organization is conducting a Fox Threat Abatement Project for Shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary. HBOC members participated in a fox scat and tracks workshop and have contributed fox sightings and fox scats to the project. Chris Herbert gave a presentation on shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary at a WetlandCare Seminar aimed at informing all parties involved in the use and care of the Hunter Estuary.

Ann Lindsey – Conservation Officer for Hunter Bird Observers Club