



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc
PO Box 24, New Lambton, NSW 2305
www.hboc.org.au

ABN 62 415 889 446

Conservation Report 2012

HABITAT REHABILITATION

HBOC acknowledges the diligence of the staffs of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority and HBOC members who have contributed to the restoration of bird habitat in the Hunter Region. This report mentions but a few of the projects.

Green Wattle Creek Rehabilitation 2012

Two additional sets of surveys were conducted as intensive campaigns to continue evaluation of the recovery of patches which had been burnt and rehabilitated by Lantana removal. In total 157 two-hectare surveys were conducted. A draft paper evaluating the impact of habitat modification on eight bird species has been discussed with the Crown Lands Department with a view to publication in *Australian Field Ornithology* during 2013. The surveys identified a number of statistically significant differences between the surveys sites as well as trends over time. Some of these differences relate to the bush rehabilitation process and are generally favourable to the bird population of Green Wattle Creek. M. Newman

Tomago Wetlands Restoration Project 2012

NPWS staff worked hard on this project this year and two sets of tidal gates are now open allowing salt-water inundation of the wetlands. Saltmarsh vegetation is spreading and four species of resident shorebirds and ten species of migratory shorebirds visited the wetlands, mostly for the first time. Other species include Australasian Bittern, Australian Little Bittern, Glossy Ibis and Australian Spotted Crake.

Hexham Swamp Rehabilitation Project 2012

All but two of the Ironbark Creek tidal gates are open allowing tidal inundation. Bird populations and diversity continue to increase. Australian Painted Snipe have been observed during two periods in January (4 birds) on the eastern side and in October (19 birds) on the southern side of Hexham Swamp.

Kooragang Dykes 2012

Migratory shorebirds have returned again to roost on the restored area of the dyke wall at the northern end. In 2013 NPWS may have funding to continue the restoration work.

Ash Island

NPWS and Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Project continue to restore wetlands on Ash Island. HBOC manages ongoing mangrove removal in certain areas of shorebird habitat. (See separate report on *Ash Island Mangrove Removal Project*.)

Stockton Sandspit

Tom Clarke and his team continue to maintain this site for shorebirds. It looks simply fabulous. (See separate report on *Stockton Sandspit Shorebird Habitat Rehabilitation*.)

HABITAT DESTRUCTION & THREATS

2012 saw no reduction in the number of projects threatening bird habitat in the Hunter Valley. A list of actions taken by HBOC follows.

February – reply from Office of Environment and Heritage in response to a submission sent in 2011 about the **revocation of land from Hunter Wetlands NP** (Swan Pond) to facilitate ongoing development of additional coal rail lines.

March – submission to Mr Burke, Federal Minister for the Environment, concerning inadequacy of **Murray-Darling Basin draft plan**. AL The Plan was signed into law on 22 November 2012.

The Basin Plan names 2,750 gigalitres as the baseline target for the amount of water to be recovered for the Murray-Darling environment.

It also includes an adjustment mechanism which will mean that 2,750 gigalitre figure could be reduced if it's shown the same environmental outcome could be met by using less water more efficiently; it also means the target could be increased to 3,200 gigalitres, where that's achieved through infrastructure and efficiency improvements and not through buybacks, and therefore can be shown to have no greater adverse socio-economic impact on the Basin.

It's that mechanism that the Federal Government has already committed to using, to return a total of 3,200 gigalitres to the Basin environment. [<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201211/s3638832.htm>]

March – **Wallsair Development Application** discussed at the Newcastle City Council meeting attended by AL (submission against this project sent in 2010). The application for 476 flights per month was rejected and the number of flights per month was set at 136. An amendment to allow 224 flights was defeated. The rest of the application was approved and permission was given to build additional aircraft hangars.

March – **Barbed wire on Hexham Swamp** (initial negotiations with NPWS and Hunter Water Corporation in 2011 AL).

In response to a reminder letter of March 2012 to Hunter Water Corporation, small lengths of PVC pipe were put on the upper strand of barbed wire fencing separating private land from National Park land. Reply received March.

April - submission commenting on the **Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan**. AL

April - submission objecting to the proposed **expansion of Soldiers Point Marina** in the direction of Dowardee Island, which is known to support four threatened bird species. M. Roderick.

June – submission against **recreational shooting in national parks** in NSW sent to Premier and Minister for Environment. AL

July - AL and Kristy Peters attended a community meeting concerning the Green Paper, a **preliminary paper for changing planning laws in NSW**.

August – AL spoke in Land and Environment Court against the **Warkworth Extension**.

October – letter from Environment Defenders Office re Warkworth Mine Extension. HBOC's file on the Warkworth Mine Extension has been closed and will be held for 7 years at the Grace Records Management Delivery Centre, Waterloo.

August – submission to the **Inquiry into the Management of Public Land** in NSW. AL
Acknowledgement of receipt of submission to the Inquiry into the management for public land.

August – letter to Ausgrid asking for **bird diverters to be put on powerlines on Wagtail Way**. AL Reply received August.

November – AL met with Ausgrid to discuss bird diverters on Ash Island. Ausgrid has no funding for the installation of bird diverters on Ash Island. When funding becomes available, Ash Island will be a priority. No time line for this available.

September – submission against ARTC's **Hexham Relief Roads project**. AL

September - submission to Mr T. Burke, Federal Minister for the Environment, Mr G. Combet, Federal Member for Charlton, Ms S. Grierson, Federal Member for Newcastle, objecting to **weakening of environmental laws** in response to the *Protect the Places You Love* campaign organised by BirdLife Australia. Prepared by K. Peters. There has been a positive outcome and the Prime Minister has “put the brakes on the move” to hand back environmental powers to state governments. Reply received November.

October - submission against **Northbank Enterprise Hub project** to construct a business and industrial park, on Tomago Road, Tomago. The project site is north of and adjacent to the PWCS T4 offset package and west of and adjacent to Hunter Wetlands NP.

November – letter to Minister for Environment against **listing of birds species as ‘game’** prepared by M. Newman, signed by A.Lindsey. Copies sent to MPs O’Farrell, Baumann, Hornery, Owen, Rhiannon, Faehrmann and opposition, J. Robertson.

November – submission against **Corroba Mine project** prepared by M. Roderick. Notice of Review and Public Hearings reply received November.

November – Letter from Dept of Planning informing HBOC of the approval of the **Maules Creek Coal Project**. (HBOC made a submission against this project in October 2011).

December – submission against QR National’s **Hexham Train Support Facility project**. AL

December - Response from Department of Environment and Heritage to an email sent to Robyn Parker, Minister for Environment, concerning amendment to the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002.

" The amendments only allow the shooting of native game birds on private lands for pest mitigation purposes. The amendments do not allow shooting of native game birds on public lands. Shooting of native and non-native ducks for agricultural management purposes, for example to protect crops from damage, is not banned and already occurs on private lands.

The Government's amendments to the bill make it clear that licences will only be granted for sustainable agricultural management purposes, not for recreational hunting. The amendments will also ensure that no threatened species are included in the schedule of native game birds and that the office of Environment and Heritage will continue to have strong oversight of the management of native game birds."

Port Waratah Coal Services Terminal 4 Project

April - Submission against this project sent to Dept Planning. AL
Offsets purchased by PWCS include Ellalong Lagoon and land at Tomago.

April – invitation from Cate Faehrmann, NSW Upper House Greens MP to inspect Swan Pond. AL attended.

August – AL spoke at a forum attended by Christine Milne, Leader of the Greens, so that she could hear first hand community concerns about developments around Newcastle Port. AL spoke largely about destruction of Swan Pond by T4 and Rail Flyover Modification projects and effects on birdlife.

September - AL attended site inspection of Swan Pond with Craig Baumann, Member for Port Stephens. Letter from Craig Baumann thanking AL for site inspection of Swan Pond, T4 and NCIG sites and copy of reply to him from Minister for Environment.

September - The project was referred to the Planning Assessment Commission.

November – The Coal Terminal 4 Action Group (CTAG) actively campaigned against T4 in 2012. HBOC belongs to this group. A meeting convened by CTAG attended by M. Roderick.

December –Senator Lee Rhiannon, Greens senator for NSW, invited HBOC to accompany her for an inspection of the Hunter Estuary by helicopter. M. Roderick attended. HBOC was mentioned positively in her ‘adjournment speech’ on 27 November as follows:

“The Hunter Bird Observers Club has expertly and thoroughly documented their concerns that the proposed T4, if built, would permanently destroy a key element of the wetland ecosystem of the Hunter estuary and the Hunter Wetlands National Park. Two wetland sites, Deep Pond on Kooragang Island and Swan Pond on Ash Island, will be destroyed if T4 goes ahead.

Unfortunately these two sites lie just outside two RAMSAR listed wetlands.

The Hunter Wetlands National Park received RAMSAR listing in 1984, and the nearby Hunter Wetlands Centre was listed with RAMSAR in 2002. Despite the important role they play in the wetland ecosystem, Deep Pond and Swan Pond were not listed, nor were they gazetted by the New South Wales government as part of the national park. The New South Wales government has now rezoned land on Ash Island to pave the way for the fourth coal loader to proceed.”

The Senator also published a shorebird-oriented blog on her website, highlighting the plight of shorebirds when their habitat is destroyed by development.

December 2012 – Rumoured that the T4 project has been scaled back.

NCIG Rail Flyover Modification

May or June – Site meeting with NCIG to inspect Swan Pond site of the Rail Flyover Modification Project attended by A.Lindsey, L.Crawford, C.Herbert

July - Submission to Australian Government (SEWPAC) asking that this project be deemed a ‘controlled action’ under Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

July – Submission against this project

July – Letter to Ausgrid with regard to the conflict in the information HBOC has received from NCIG about the relocation of powerlines on Swan Pond

September 2012 - 12 years of bird survey data from Swan and Wader Ponds sent to NCIG. Payment received \$15,000.

Hexham Swamp & Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Projects Steering Committee News

July - AL's application for membership of this committee was successful. Out of the four meetings scheduled A.Lindsey attended three and a site inspection of Swan and Wader Ponds on Ash Island in March.

The opening of the two remaining tidal gates on Ironbark Creek has been delayed until 2014.

Bird-related articles in Catchment News: A. Bittern survey - November, A. Painted Snipe and Shorebirds at Stockton Sandspit - December.

Plans in conceptual stage for bicycle paths on disused Richmond Vale rail lines and Tarro to Shortland former pipeline maintenance track.

Hunter Wetlands National Park Plan of Management involvement

There have been 6 meetings of the " Hunter Wetlands National Park Plan of Management Stakeholder Working Group" during 2012 with HBOC having been represented at each one. Chris Herbert and/or Ann Lindsey have represented HBOC at all these meetings which have been devoted mainly to discussions concerning various issues in the Hunter Estuary and making sure that everybody understands as many aspects as possible. For example Chris gave a presentation on shorebirds in the estuary and the problems they face. This will hopefully aid the stakeholders in reviewing the draft plan of management that will be produced during early 2013 by Jo Erskine (NPWS).

Restructure of Catchment Management Authorities

Local Land Services – Minister Hodgkinson announced 'Local Land Services' will be effective as of January 2014. Local Land Services will comprise natural resource management, agriculture advisory services, emergency management, and pest & weed management control. This will involve a restructure of Catchment Management Authorities (CMA), Department of Primary Industries Agricultural Extension (DPI) and the Livestock Health and Pest Authorities (LHPA). The 13 CMAs have been reduced to 11, and the remaining CMAs are required to reduce costs by \$11 million. This cost saving will be met by reduction of staff. The new structure is open for comment by staff and unions for the next few months, and will be in place by June 2013.

AL made comments on line to the 'Have your say' website of the proposed Local Land Services which amalgamates CMAs, Livestock, Health and Pest Authority and agricultural advisory services currently provided by the Dept. of Agriculture. AL disagreed with the boundary change which removes the Bylong Valley area from the current CMA boundary. Rivers and creeks in Bylong flow into the Goulburn River and ultimately the Hunter River. AL noted the working relationship HBOC enjoys with the CMA.

BirdLife Australia Regional Groups Conservation Officers Teleconference

AL has taken part in very few of these teleconferences in 2012 and wishes to resign.

Media 2012

Newcastle Herald 27 April 2012 - T4 and Swan Pond - based on interview with A. Lindsey

NBN TV news 29 April 2012 - Swan Pond and T4 - A. Lindsey

NBN TV news 26 October 2012 - A. Lindsey with Minister for Environment Robyn Parker - Tomago Wetlands restoration

ABC Radio1233 27 December 2012 – A. Lindsey interview about Australian Painted Snipe

Report prepared by **A. Lindsey** (AL)
December 2012