



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Hunter Bird Observers Club 2014 Annual Report

Introduction

The 2014 Annual Report of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on the 11th February 2015. It is available via the club website at www.hboc.org.au. This Annual Report consists of an overview of 2014 in the main body of the report along with detailed reports from appropriate co-ordinators attached as appendices.

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 2014, printed and presented separately, forms part of this section of the Annual Report.

As has always been the case, HBOC was represented by an enthusiastic committee that met monthly, along with other devoted members that also attended and took part in discussions on management matters between meetings. There are such a range of issues and responsibilities that the committee handles that it is easy to underestimate the workload that the committee (and supporting roles) deals with. The committee and other contributing members are thanked for their support and input throughout the year.

In our first full year as an affiliate of BirdLife Australia (BLA), HBOC has forged a good working relationship with the national organisation, collaborating on issues surrounding conservation, data management and promotional matters. Locally, HBOC has continued to maintain excellent relations with private and public organisations. The promotion and undertaking of cooperative efforts is an important aspect of the role of Club management and that of the membership in general. The benefits of these collaborations are evident in virtually every aspect of the Club and we acknowledge the contributions of collaborative organisations and those members who have been involved in this regard. The Club has a deserved upstanding and highly respected position as one of the peak environmental organisations in the Hunter. The members are to be congratulated for consolidating this reputation and the vast amount of volunteer effort that goes into helping the Club function is also worthy of recognition.

I would like to acknowledge 2 people that are standing down from the club's management team, hopefully only temporarily because they are both *travelling*, as opposed to *relocating*. Firstly, Liz Crawford is sailing the high seas with Chris Herbert for an "unspecified period". Although not a committee member herself, Liz has for a number of years taken on a plethora of important tasks that she has undertaken wilfully and skilfully. These include being the newsletter editor, the production manager for *The Whistler*, webmistress and activities register manager amongst the various other more "bird-related" jobs (such as counting shorebirds and searching for leg flags). Liz was often the HBOC representative at BIGnet meetings and was recognised at the 2014 AGM as a Life Member of HBOC. Secondly, our Hon Secretary Kristy Peters is also taking on a nomadic lifestyle in 2015, but on a more terrestrial range. Kristy initially served on the committee and then was the secretary for 3 years. Kristy should be recognised for taking possibly the most detailed and accurate minutes I have seen. Kristy also assisted with the Promotion and Education part of the Club and regularly checked the [info@hboc](mailto:info@hboc.org.au) email address; often the first interface that the public have with HBOC. *Thank you to you both and hope to see you again soon.*

2. Membership

Administrative, personnel matters and services related to the membership.

Membership Secretary: In 2013 our Membership Secretary (Rob Kyte) introduced a number of initiatives to diversify the membership and increase our supporter base. Many of these initiatives (which include discounts at retail outlets) were enjoyed again by the membership in 2014. Also, working closely with the Treasurer, Rob has produced a comprehensive, regularly updated database of the membership which facilitates reliable communication with members.

Club Membership: At year-end 31 December 2014 there were 306 financial members. This total continues a steady year-on-year increase in our membership numbers (year-end total for 31 December 2013 was 303 members). There were 41 new members in 2014 (18 single, 24 family and 1 junior) while 38 members from 2013 did not re-join in 2014. Adjustments to the year-end total were made due to changes in membership type and members leaving the club.

Hunter 300 & 350 Club: A fun component of the Club where those keen birders who have seen more than 300 species in the Hunter Region publish their tallies on the website (though only following peer review for those with more than 350 species on their list). 2014 saw the continuation of a peer-review process for 350 Club members and once settled, tallies on the website will be amended. Badges are available for those reaching the 300 and 350 species milestones. One member reached the milestone of 400 late in 2014 but as their 400th species will require scrutiny from NSW ORAC it will need to be reviewed before it can be accepted officially. If all is in order, a “400 badge” will be presented during 2015. It also looks likely that other members will reach the 400 mark during 2015 because as I type this there are 2 or 3 people ‘teetering’ on the brink of that milestone tally.

Library: The extensive library continues to be well used by members each Club Night. Several additions to the library were made in 2014, with the most popular acquisition being the “Atlas of the Birds of NSW and the ACT” published by the NSW Bird Atlassers (the lead author being HBOC member, Dick Cooper). A list of all books in the library has been posted on the inside of the cupboard door where the books are housed. Thanks go to librarian Colin Goodenough for his efforts in maintaining the library.

Digital Photo Library: The digital library received a well-deserved boost in 2014, thanks to efforts by our book-keeper, John Cockerell. An audit of the digital photo library was undertaken by John, revealing that there were a number of slides that had been incorrectly numbered and named, which has been corrected. Atlas numbers for each slide have been clarified, as well as the challenge of bringing the slides up to date with the latest taxonomic revisions. At the time of writing, the digital club library comprised 3898 photos with 616 Australian species represented. It is a fantastic resource for Club members to access and assist with (we are always looking for more images).

E-mail Service: The e-mail service continued to play a vital role in Club communications. This efficient means of distributing important messages and other interesting information keeps members informed, especially between Newsletters. It also provides an important link to those who receive their Newsletter electronically. Thanks go to Alan Stuart for his long-term maintenance of this service to the membership.

‘Hunterbirding’: This online forum for sharing (predominantly local) bird information, reporting sightings and for general discussion saw 48 new members join the list in 2014 (slightly down on the amount that joined in 2013). This brings the total number of subscribers to 218 (although some addresses are bouncing so there are effectively 187 ‘active’ members). Members are encouraged to join the forum, either with a view to read posts or to contribute to discussions. Contributors to identification threads are encouraged to explain why they arrived at an identification, to add to the educational benefit of the chat group resource. Additionally, an archive for all emails sent to Hunterbirding exists, thus allowing cross-referencing to previous discussions on all topics.

The Club recognises the efforts of the Hunterbirding moderator (Dan Williams) and also thanks all contributors that make Hunterbirding happen.

3. Activities

Includes 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 Sunday and midweek outings, camps and other events, primarily focussing on the recreational needs of members.

Monthly Sunday outings covered a range of locations and habitats with attendances varying, often in association with either the location of the outing, other activities happening at the time or, at other times, the weather. The annual 'New Members Day' occurred again in June and was as always a popular day and great way for the established membership to make new members feel welcome.

Long weekend camps: The Australia Day Camp to Myall View (on the western shores of the Myall Lakes) was enjoyed by a healthy contingency of eager campers to this very popular location for HBOC camps. The Easter camp at Borah Travelling Stock Reserve (near Barraba) was well-attended with an extensive bird list generated in the woodlands of the Liverpool Plains. The June Long Weekend camp was at Windy Station, right at the very north-western extremity of the Region. Despite wet conditions, a small group of campers enjoyed some very rewarding birding 'on the edge'. The October camp saw a return to Pomany Stud in the Widden Valley (formerly known as 'Holbrook'). Unfortunately we were not able to access the 'old favourite' site at Table Bay Creek, but a good turn-out of members enjoyed the birding and scenery on offer along Blackwater Creek instead.

Mid-week outings and camps are aimed at providing a relaxing and enjoyable but still serious morning of birding and this was certainly achieved thanks to the contribution of all those who volunteered to organise and lead outings. They continued to be very popular with attendances being consistently between 20-30 people. Eleven mid-week outings and one camp were organised in 2014. Some of the highlights of the year were the sighting of Noisy Pitta and Powerful Owl at Blackbutt Reserve and the sighting of another Powerful Owl at Glenrock SCA. A very pleasant and profitable excursion was made to Central Coast Wetlands where we birded with members of the Central Coast group. The September camp at Old Bar was a great success, with Regent Bowerbirds and Green Catbirds at Saltwater National Park and Comb-crested Jacanas at Cattai Wetlands.

The *BASNA Annual Twitchathon* fundraising birdwatching event is always popular with HBOC members and several teams connected with HBOC took part in the various race categories in 2014. Again, the winning team from the Main Race went to a HBOC team; this time to first-time winners, the Dodgy Drongo's. The Dry-throated Buzzards team stayed true to their cycling-only format whilst the Rampaging Raptors tackled most of the twitch on foot! Approximately \$4000 was raised by HBOC-related teams within a NSW & ACT total of more than \$20,000. Funds raised in 2014 will go to BirdLife Australia's Conservation Knowledge Portal Project.

In addition to the leisure and social benefits enjoyed by everyone, the above outings are also a not-to-be-underestimated source of observational data for the Hunter Region. All records from HBOC activities are routinely submitted to the BirdLife Australia Atlas plus highlights are reported at Club night meetings or via the Hunterbirding email chat group and used for the Annual Bird Report. Members are encouraged to do likewise with their individual sightings.

To the many members, including the 2014 Club Activities Officer (Lorna Mee), 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.

Club Night meetings were held at the Hunter Wetlands Centre every month in 2014 except January, with an average attendance of 52.4 members per meeting, slightly up on 2013's average (Feb AGM and Club Meeting = 62; Mar 12 = 55; Apr 9 = 45; May 14 = 52; Jun 11 = 52; Aug 13 = 51; Sep 10 = 49; Oct 8 52; Nov 12 = 54 [Jul/Dec not recorded])

The Guest Speaker Program included local and national subjects covering conservation issues, research findings, travel and general interest. In formulating 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 a short, 5-10 minute piece (sometimes longer by arrangement) that usually precedes the main speaker at Club nights. Members are encouraged to present a Bird of the Evening segment in any format (be it pictures, poetry, powerpoint or prose).

The “Observations” part of meetings is a good opportunity for people to share their local sightings and contribute to the knowledge-base of our birds.

On some nights there were distribution maps based on BirdLife Australia Atlas data in the Region shown, with the audience asked to guess the species. These segments have proved popular and have generated much discussion about the intricacies of atlassing as well as bird distribution in the Region.

The July Club Night was again aimed at raising funds for a conservation issue of relevance to the Club. In 2014 it was the ‘protection of beach-nesting shorebird habitat in the Manning Estuary’ that was chosen to be the recipient of funds raised at the July Club Night and the December raffles.

The December *Christmas Meeting* was again popular, with a diverse array of speakers as well as a fantastic spread of food and drinks.

Many thanks to all of the people that chip in to ensure that Club Nights happen smoothly – it is a great team effort every month.

5. Newsletter

HBOC’s regular newsletter communicates Club news, the events 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 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. There is always a good supply of articles and photographs submitted to the editor ensuring a high quality and sizeable Newsletter. The many members who contribute articles and photographs to the Newsletter are thanked for their interest, time and effort. There was a changing-of-the-guard during 2014, with the regular editor (Liz Crawford, who has served as editor for several years) stepping down, as previously mentioned. Dan Williams stepped up to the plate and delivered a high quality publication in his first edition, for the December issue. We wish Dan well in this new important role. Huge thanks also go to the printing and distribution team (Robert and Margaret Stewart) for delivering such an important 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.

There were no formal organised activities for the Special Interest Group in 2014 and the Club is looking for an injection of energy and ideas of how to stimulate this part of the Club again. Of relevance is the fact the biennial conference of the BirdLife Australia Photography Interest Group is being held in Newcastle in February/March 2015 (hosted by HBOC), perhaps providing an opportunity to invigorate interest in the Club’s Special Interest Group.

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.

With over 70 species of birds in the Region now listed as threatened and many habitats providing habitat for a diversity of bird species under threat, the conservation arm of the Club is vitally important. These efforts were again led by Ann Lindsey, who has reiterated that she would like to relinquish the position after many years of service. For the Club to be able to be involved at the forefront on conservation matters in the Region depends on the dedication of members and the bank of quality supporting background information that is forthcoming through other sections of the Club (especially Field Studies and Data Management). Ann wrote this for the 2013 Annual Report and it is appropriate that it remain for 2014:

“It is imperative that HBOC’s conservation work continues and in order for this to happen a new conservation officer is urgently needed. HBOC has a very good name in both industrial and government circles and avifauna welfare is now on most agendas. It has been a hard slog to reach this point and if HBOC wants to keep bird conservation in the forefront we need to keep up the momentum. We all like to go birdwatching but if we want to see birds, then we need to make every effort to preserve their habitat. One of the main jobs of the conservation officer is to keep track of correspondence. As you will see below, other members are prepared to write submissions and letters. Conservation effort is the responsibility of every member of the Club.”

On the downside, 2014 saw more lack of effort to improve the state of Market Swamp and Newcastle Wetlands Reserve (NWR) despite HBOC composing letters to Newcastle City Council. In the meantime, part of NWR was purchased by Roads and Maritime Services, necessitating a licence for HBOC entry and a lock so that members can access the site.

The Warkworth Extension Project was back in the Land and Environment Court under the guise of a new proposal, despite an earlier case having been rejected earlier in the year. HBOC wrote more submissions on the matter and appeared at the Public Hearing in December. There has been no determination as yet.

Again, HBOC maintained its position on the proposed “T4” fourth coal loader project on Kooragang / Ash Island by Port Waratah Coal Services (PWCS) and many members stood in front of the HBOC at the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) hearing in Newcastle in August (where Ann ably represented the Club in addressing the hearing). Although the project was approved by the PAC, some gains were realised, such as a 5 year approval lapse period instead of 10 years and that the Tomago offset area be functioning successfully for a minimum of 3 years prior to construction commencing at the project site.

A report was released by BirdLife Australia in late 2014 outlining 5 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) across Australia that have been recognised as being “in danger”. Unfortunately, one of those 5 was the Lower Hunter IBA, recognised as vitally important for Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters (both endangered nationally with the latter being Critically Endangered in NSW) but “in danger” due largely to the Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ) development. The Club contributed greatly to the IBA being listed initially through ongoing records of both species in the area and was involved in the monitoring of a breeding event within the HEZ in 2007, published in Australian Field Ornithology in 2014; a contributing factor to the IBA being acknowledged as “in danger” in 2014.

On a positive note, the Joint Regional Planning Panel rejected the extension to Soldiers Point Marina including on the grounds of negative impacts on endangered bird species. This is a great win for birds and raises the profile of this inappropriate development. Trevor Murray is to be recognised for his efforts in representing the Club on this matter. Mining logistics company, Orica was fined for polluting in the Hunter Estuary and as a result has to pay more than \$750,000m some of which will go to further works on rehabilitating the Kooragang Dykes.

Other submissions were made or letters were written about numerous other local, regional and broader conservation issues.

8. Field Studies, Data Management and Records Appraisal

This section of HBOC addresses collection of data, monitoring of bird populations and maintenance / appraisal of records which underpin the HBOC research and conservation effort while at the same time making a worthwhile contribution to members' leisure-based bird watching.

Field studies and data management are inherently linked - no field studies program has any significant value unless the data from it are appropriately managed (including storage, analysis, and dissemination of results). Records appraisal is undertaken by a Records Appraisal Committee that oversees the assessment of rare and unusual reports of birds in the Region.

This part of HBOC is particularly strong and underpins many of the conservation efforts and published work in *The Whistler* and the Annual Bird Report.

Field Studies

A feature of HBOC's Field Studies program is the high degree of collaboration with other conservation-minded organisations – such as the Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Project, Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia, Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) offices in Newcastle, Nelson Bay and Gloucester, Department of Primary Industries (Crown Lands) and BirdLife Australia. Individual Club members often receive similar strong support from relevant organisations when conducting their regular surveys.

IBA monitoring was a significant component of HBOC's Field Studies program again in 2014 and will continue to be so in future years. Several other field studies are also co-ordinated by the Club, including multi-participant surveys that HBOC organises, such as the Port Stephens Waterbird surveys, Broughton Island surveys and surveys of the Singleton Training Area (Australian Department of Defence). The full text for Field Studies can be seen in the comprehensive Field Studies and Data Management report in Appendix A.

Data Collection and Management

HBOC has a variety of ways by which data from field studies and from opportunistic sightings by local birdwatchers are managed. 2014 saw further entrenchment of the initiatives started in previous years and which have substantially enhanced HBOC's data capture and management capability and the analysis and reporting of data.

An important development is the continuation of an arrangement that is in place with BLA to receive all the data for the Hunter Region from the BLA Atlas database ("Birdata"). In July 2014, HBOC received the 2013 data from the Atlas and also an updated data set for the period 1998-2012. The availability of the Atlas data considerably enhances our knowledge of the distribution and relative abundance of species in the Hunter Region, and will allow us in future to have a much better handle about how these may be changing. An Excel-based program developed by Ian Martin allows statistical reports for individual species to be readily generated. In 2014, with the help of Dan Williams, we have made good progress in developing a GIS platform for analysing the Atlas data. Already, the benefits from being able to examine point data have become apparent.

The main vehicle for data analysis and reporting is the Hunter Region Bird Report. The 2013 Bird Report (#21 in the series) was published in October 2014, with data for 445 species. Once again, the Atlas data were included in the Report with also a summary of the full 16 years of prior data (for all locally common species).

HBOC's journal *The Whistler* is another important vehicle for data analysis and reporting. The bulk of the work to prepare Volume 8 of *The Whistler* was completed in 2014 and it is now sent for printing. Distribution to Club members will commence with the February 2015 program of activities. Volume 8 contains several papers where the authors analysed data from regular surveys which they carry out.

A paper detailing results from the first 3 years of the Rufous Scrub-bird monitoring project was published in the journal *Australian Field Ornithology* (AFO) in 2014, as were papers in AFO about the response of eight bird species to woodland rehabilitation at Green Wattle Creek and a significant breeding event of Regent Honeyeaters in the Hunter Economic Zone (near Kurri Kurri) in 2007. A paper summarising 6 years of shorebird monitoring in the Manning Estuary was published in the international journal *Stilt* in 2014.

HBOC is indebted to the Field Study and Data Management coordinators (Mike Newman and Alan Stuart) 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. Alan Stuart is the editor of the Annual Bird Report and his untiring commitment to this role is greatly appreciated and duly acknowledged.

Please refer to the comprehensive Field Studies and Data Management Reports in Appendix A.

Records Appraisal

Records appraisal committees are an important part of modern birdwatching. As our knowledge of the status and distribution of birds increases, there is also a need to 'manage' the reliability of the information that contributes to that knowledge. This is done within HBOC by the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC). The RAC assigns categories to each bird species and decides whether records of Category 3 (and some Category 1 and 2) species can be accepted. For 2014, the RAC members were Mick Roderick (Records Appraisal Officer), Ann Lindsey, Fred van Gessel, Phil Hansbro, Dick Jenkin, Craig Anderson and Allan Richardson. A comprehensive outline of the roles and responsibilities of the RAC was published in the February 2014 HBOC Newsletter and is available for download on the website.

In some cases, the rarity of a bird can be such that it needs to be assessed by a higher authority. There are 2 records committees that assess such species and when they are recorded in the Hunter Region, their review is deferred to them. For nationally rare birds, the BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) is the authority, whilst for state-significant birds, the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC) is the authority. Both committees maintain a review list of species required to be submitted when a sighting is claimed.

28 cases were reviewed by the HBOC RAC in 2014, whilst 2 cases relevant to the Hunter reviewed by both BARC and NSW ORAC. No new species for the Region were added during 2014 (though 2 new species found or seen during 2014 may be added to the Hunter Region list during 2015 following reviews by the appropriate records committees).

An account for each species assessed by the HBOC RAC, as well as cases reviewed by BARC and NSW ORAC for birds seen in the Hunter Region, can be found in the Records Appraisal Committee Report for 2014 (Appendix D).

9. Projects

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

A comprehensive run-down of works undertaken as part of the Ash Island and Stockton Sandspit Habitat Restoration Projects is available in Appendix B.

Ash Island: Mangrove seedling removal at Swan Pond and Wader Pond was not carried out at all during 2014 due to the lack of a permit. However a new permit, PN14/333, was received in December 2014 that allows for mangrove removal over all the areas of interest within the Hunter Wetlands National Park. Particular areas of interest to HBOC on Ash Island include; Area E (Swan and Wader Ponds), Teal Waters, Milham Pond and Phoenix Flats. Work under this permit will be carried out in 2015. During 2014, work was carried out at Milham Pond and Phoenix Flats under the original Milham Pond permit, P09-2034, which was still valid until 30th December 2014.

Again, Milham's Pond proved to be a challenging part of Ash Island mangrove control activities, but successful efforts were made and were assisted by groups such as Conservation Volunteers Australia. Monitoring and evaluation of the effort at Milham's Pond has shown that sustainable levels of maintenance have not yet been realised there. To help protect the large investment made each year in removing mangrove seedlings, Mangrove Propagule Exclusion Devices (MPEDs) have been installed at key locations to restrict the flow of mangrove seeds without affecting fish passage. As soon as the first sign of mangrove seeds creeping in was noticed, the task of repairing the MPEDs was carried out. This was completed in early August on the same day that a new

replacement boom was installed. 2014 was the first time that both an exclusion boom and MPED have been in place on time to protect against mangrove seedling recruitment so next year's efforts (2015) will tell us how effective the combination actually is.

Stockton Sandspit: Since the commencement of record-keeping at Stockton Sandspit (16th April 2003) an aggregate of 5457.5 hours of volunteer work has accrued. The value of this effort in terms of productive habitat for shorebirds is immeasurable of course, but when figured against contractor rates, it amounts to an in-kind value of over \$207,000. Volunteers visited the Sandspit on 23 occasions to carry out restoration works during 2014 and a total of 626.5 volunteer hours of their time was put to very good use (due to the collective efforts of non-HBOC organisations providing volunteers to assist).

The 2014 volunteer effort focussed on maintaining high standard saltmarsh and shelly sand areas, removal of mangrove seedlings over all areas plus the annual Clean Up Day activity. With the additional volunteer resource in 2014, restoration of other non-roost areas was also targeted. A permit issued by NSW Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries NSW) was also received via NPWS in June 2014, allowing for mangrove seedling removal within a defined zone at the Sandspit.

More good news was enjoyed at the Sandspit during spring 2014 when the resident breeding pair of Australian Pied Oystercatchers (listed as Endangered in NSW) successfully reared a chick. This the 19th nesting attempt at the Sandspit since 2007 and the 8th successfully reared chick observed during this time.

Members are encouraged to contribute their time to these projects to support the volunteer team and ensure the health of these shorebird habitats. The dedicated project manager (Tom Clarke) 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 in Appendix C.

Although no editions of *The Whistler* were printed during 2014, sufficient copy has been edited and formatted for a 64 page 2014 issue, which will be number 8 in *The Whistler* series. This will be printed in early 2015. The Hunter Local Land Services (formerly the Catchment Management Authority) have again provided financial assistance towards the publication costs of *Whistler #8*, demonstrating the value of the publication to land managers concerned with the protection of environmental assets of the Hunter Region.

Mike Newman and Harold Tarrant are editors of *The Whistler*, whilst Liz Crawford has been the production manager (and was for *Whistler #8*). It will remain to be seen if Liz will also be available as production manager for the 9th edition. The other production and distribution personnel and of course the authors/referees, are congratulated and thanked for dedication to the demanding task of producing *The Whistler*.

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

The effectiveness of displays and activities directed to community education is always difficult to evaluate, however in 2014 HBOC efforts were rewarded by an increase in public exposure and a pleasing increase in the number of members volunteering their expertise to inform the community about recreational birdwatching and conservation issues.

The resource base of the Club relies heavily on quality photographs provided by members and the work of the Digital Library book-keeper. As we have seen earlier in this report, this resource continues to expand. The interest generated by these images and the ensuing conversations provide a very effective means of

communication with the public. There was also an increase in the development and production of large laminated display posters dedicated to specific aspects of birds and their environment in the Hunter. Resources such as “handouts” were augmented by materials courtesy of BirdLife Australia.

Very pleasing in 2014 was the increase in the number of members participating in the organisation and running of these club events. The skills and expertise of members are a vital resource and should be further fostered in 2015.

Website: The HBOC website moved providers late in 2014 and thanks to the efforts of Rob Kyte and Alan Stuart we now have a “new look” website that is still taking shape to some extent. Rob in particular had to act swiftly when news filtered through of the imminent need to switch providers and thanks to his efforts the move was relatively seamless for this crucial interface between the Club and the rest of the world. The opportunity for us now is to work out how to do more with the website in terms of attracting new readership.

Publications: As previously mentioned, the Hunter Region Annual Bird Report No. 21 (2013) was published and was once again a high quality publication, now containing many colour photographs and illustrations along with the remarkable amount of closely reviewed records and analysis. Alan Stuart (who has been editor for each of the 21 years that the bird reports have been published), the production team and field observers are to be congratulated for this respected publication.

Several members have authored or co-authored papers dealing with regional birds that have been published in periodicals such as *Australian Field Ornithology* and *Stilt*.

New birding route brochures for the Dungog, Scone, Cattai Wetlands and southern Port Stephens areas were prepared during 2014 (spear-headed by Alan Stuart and designed by Robert Kyte). These are all available electronically from the club’s website, as are most of the earlier series of birding route brochures.

Events:

HBOC was represented at some key public events during 2014, as outlined below.

(i) *Maitland City Council Youth Forum* – Workshop on the birds of Walka Water Works for lower Secondary students, number were generally low due to a clash of dates.

(ii) *Tocal Agricultural Field Days* – This was a first time event for HBOC. Display centred on Birds and waterways on farms, a survey of Noisy Minors in rural local areas, HBOC promotion and recreational birdwatching. Good exposure and participation. Recommended for 2015.

(iii) *BirdLife Southern Seminar* – HBOC members presented papers addressing the monitoring of the local Important Bird Areas (IBA) and highlighting the involvement of HBOC in the IBA program.

(iv) *Inaugural Australian Bird Fair Sydney* – General promotion of recreational birdwatching, birds in the Hunter region and conservation issues. Good exposure and participation at a major international event that is proposed to be an annual occasion on the national birding calendar.

(v) *Welcome to Shorebirds at Stockton Sandspit*- Community awareness of the importance of the Sandspit and other important shorebird sites to migratory and local shorebirds. Good exposure and participation.

HBOC representatives also participated in other community events (such as Clean Up Australia Day).

12. Notable Highlights

Some Club members gave presentations about their own studies at the 2014 Australasian Shorebirds Conference in Darwin, with the result that Alan Stuart and Lois Wooding received the award for best paper and an honourable mention to Liz Crawford and Chris Herbert. Congratulations to those HBOC members.

The Water Research Laboratory at the University of NSW won the Environment and Heritage Award at the Engineering Excellence Awards in Sydney in September 2014 for their work on the Tomago Wetlands Restoration Project, of which HBOC was a major contributing organisation. Ann Lindsey represented HBOC at the awards night in Sydney.

13. Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for the assistance I have received during my third term as President. As always there are too many individuals to mention, but rather I will express a collective thanks goes to those many people who have assisted in making this wonderful club function as effectively as it does.

Mick Roderick (HBOC President 2014) 11 February 2015