



# Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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## **Hunter Bird Observers Club 2015 Annual Report**

### **Introduction**

The 2015 Annual Report of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016. It is available via the club website at [www.hboc.org.au](http://www.hboc.org.au). This Annual Report consists of an overview of 2015 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 2015, printed and presented separately, forms part of this section of the Annual Report. Once again, a passionate management committee (and other dedicated members) met monthly to discuss management matters relevant to the running of HBOC. 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.

HBOC continued to be a well-respected organisation within the broader community; working closely with both private and public entities. 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 affiliation with BirdLife Australia has enhanced this ability to collaborate successfully as well. 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 thank our outgoing Hon Secretary Grahame Feletti for his accurate minute-keeping and enthusiastic contributions to committee meetings throughout 2015.

#### **2. Membership**

*Administrative, personnel matters and services related to the membership.*

*Membership Secretary:* The Membership Secretary (Rob Kyte) continues to introduce 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 2015. Working in collaboration with the Treasurer (Judy Little), he has also produced a comprehensive and regularly updated database of the club membership which facilitates reliable communication with members.

*Club Membership:* HBOC membership at 31 December 2015 is 329 financial members. There continues to be a steady year-on-year increase in our membership numbers with 55 new members joining in 2015. This includes

28 single, 26 family and 1 junior. 30 members from 2014 did not renew their membership in 2015. Other factors affecting membership totals include 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). 2015 saw the continuation of a peer-review process for 350 Club members and tallies on the website have been amended. Badges are available for those reaching the 300 and 350 species milestones and several “300 Club” badges were presented during 2015. Additionally, the second “400 badge” was also presented during 2015 (to the author of this Annual Report). It is probable that other members will reach the 400 mark during 2016.

*Library:* The extensive library continues to be well used by members each Club Night. A thorough stocktake of the library was carried out during 2015 and the computerised list updated and added to the website. Printed lists are now available in author, title and subject order. Library material was rearranged so that books are now in the front and journals behind them. A “Library Sub-committee” was also formed at the end of 2015 and will report to the general committee on matters relevant to the Club’s library.

*Digital Photo Library:* The digital library received another boost in 2015, thanks to John Cockerell who does a great job maintaining this important (and growing) resource. John took it upon himself to further identify subspecies of as many images as he could, adding that extra detail to our digital collection. At the time of writing, the digital club library comprised 3494 photos of a total of 618 species. 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 again 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 38 new members join the list in 2015. This brings the total number of subscribers to 255 (although some addresses are bouncing so there are effectively 224 ‘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 birdwatching 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:* Monthly 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 the Smiths Lake Field Study Station was very popular, particularly considering there was an option to cool down with a swim in the lake. Easter saw a return to Durrigere State Conservation Area, north of Ulan. A very impressive tally of birds was noted (particularly for

autumn), highlighted by a Diamond Dove that several lucky campers were able to see. The June Long Weekend camp saw a return to an 'old haunt', with a visit to *Wongalee* at Appletree Flat, west of Jerrys Plains. Not only was the birding rewarding, but the views across the valley were reward to members that made the climb to the top of the ridge. The October camp was held on the banks of Martindale Creek, just to the south of the 'birding Mecca', Medhurst Bridge. Despite the searing heat, an enjoyable time was had by all, including some 'budding birders of tomorrow' that kept the marshmallows cooking away.

*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. Ten mid-week outings were held in 2015, with one cancelled because of the April 'East Coast Low' storm. Generally attendance was between 20 and 30 members, with 35 at the Christmas outing and lunch at the Hunter Wetlands Centre. One of the highlights of the year was a visit to Hexham Swamp, a new location for several of us. Here we saw two Black-necked Storks as well as over 2,000 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and six different raptors. The midweek camp at the peaceful setting of Riverwood Downs on the Karuah River was a great success with 22 members attending. Eighty six species were seen or heard in the vicinity of the camp. Thanks go to Max Blanch for organising this.

The *BirdLife Southern NSW 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 2015. Again, the winning team from the Main Race went to a HBOC team; the Dodgy Drongo's, notching up their second consecutive title. Approximately \$3500 was raised by HBOC-related teams within a total of more than \$20,000. Funds raised in 2015 will go to the Powerful Owl 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 2015 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 2015 except January, with an average attendance of 58.8 members per meeting, well up on 2014's average (Feb AGM and Club Meeting = 56; Mar = 51; Apr = 61; May = 66; Jun = 43; Jul = 56; Aug = 61; Sep = 54; Nov = 61; Dec = 79 [Oct not recorded]) Thanks to Sue Hamonet for this information.

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.

The August Club Night was a fundraiser for seabird research programmes on the breeding islands off Port Stephens. An entertaining talk by Yuna Kim (Gould's Petrel researcher) was eagerly received by the audience.

The December *Christmas Meeting* was well-attended as always, with a diverse array of speakers, a hearty spread of ‘Christmas Cheer’ nibbles, all in the setting of the wetlands centre conference room (instead of the theatre).

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. Thanks go to editor Dan Williams, completing his first full year in this important role, and to the printing and distribution team (Robert and Margaret Stewart) for providing 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.*

A “Phototwitch” competition was held in September whereby competitors attempted to photograph the most number of species within a specified timeframe. Michael Kearns took out the trophy, snapping 87 species in an 8 hour period. Another “Phototwitch” is planned for 2016. Thanks to Robert McDonald for organising these.

## **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 well 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.

It was rather sobering that 2 species of migratory shorebird that frequent parts of the Hunter Region were listed as ‘Critically Endangered’ nationally in 2015; the Eastern Curlew and Curlew Sandpiper. The Regent Honeyeater also joined the list of nationally Critically Endangered species, having been ‘upgraded’ from Endangered midyear, whilst the Painted Honeyeater was listed as Vulnerable nationally also. Both of these threatened woodland bird species are known to breed in the Region and HBOC has played a large part in supporting conservation efforts to reverse their declines. Unfortunately, those declines were probably exacerbated by the approval of projects during 2015 that HBOC have been involved in opposing, such as the Warkworth Extension Project.

The “T4” fourth coal loader project on Kooragang / Ash Island also received approval, but not before HBOC was further able to air their ongoing concerns at a second Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) hearing in Newcastle (where the Club President addressed the hearing). Although initially rejected by the Joint Regional Planning Panel, the proposed extension to the Soldiers Point Marina has now been resubmitted under a different concept plan and this will no doubt attract a lot of attention from HBOC during 2016.

These are just some brief examples of ‘big ticket items’ that HBOC has been directly involved with. Indeed, the Club maintains a very strong presence in conservation matters, both locally and regionally. Several other submissions were made or letters were written about numerous other 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, Data Collection and Management*

Field Studies programs organised by HBOC and those conducted by individual Club members in general continued at about the same levels of activity which were reported for 2014. Exceptions were that the Club's work in surveying the Barrington Tops and Gloucester Tops IBA and the land birds of Broughton Island were scaled back compared to previous years. For the Barrington Tops and Gloucester Tops IBA, the survey work has progressed from the intensive program of the initial 5 years, into a more sustainable effort based on monitoring 11 of the more readily accessible Rufous Scrub-bird territories supplemented by studies of the behaviour of individual Rufous Scrub-birds (including use of Song Meters) and some effort spent searching for new territories. For Broughton Island, an initial 3 years of surveys have established a baseline set of data about the land birds there, which will be the basis for monitoring for changes in future years.

In 2015, HBOC worked with the management of Tahlee Ministries, on the northern side of Port Stephens, to develop a bird monitoring program for their property. Regular monthly surveys across the range of available habitats are now being conducted by Tahlee staff whom we have helped train. The data will also flow into the BirdLife Australia Atlas, which continues to be HBOC's preferred and recommended method for data management. New monitoring programs at Sugarloaf State Conservation Area and in the Belmont/Fernleigh area also were newly started, in both cases by a Club member.

Once again during the year we received a complete data set of Hunter Region records from BirdLife Australia, which has been used to inform our annual bird report analyses as well as analyses of individual species (e.g. in publications such as *The Whistler*). Atlas survey effort continues to occur at reasonable levels, which is important to establish trends in bird populations (though an increase in atlas survey participation would provide much more information that could be drawn upon). Also, towards the end of the year we successfully developed a GIS based method for showing species distribution maps and those maps are now being rolled out when appropriate opportunities present themselves (for example, they have been used in 2x club night presentations plus some Hunterbirding and Facebook postings).

The main vehicle for data analysis and reporting is the Hunter Region Bird Report. The 2014 Bird Report (#22 in the series) was published in October 2015, with data for 447 species (including 2 new species for the Region). Once again, the Atlas data were included in the Report with also a summary of the full 17 years of prior data (for all locally common species).

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.

### *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 2015, the RAC members were Mick Roderick (Records Appraisal Officer), Ann Lindsey, Dan Williams, 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. Fred van Gessel stood down from the RAC during 2015 (replaced by Dan Williams), having served on the committee since 2000, and so a great thanks is extended to Fred.

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.

26 cases were reviewed by the HBOC RAC during 2015, whilst 5 cases relevant to the Hunter were reviewed by NSW ORAC (no cases were reviewed by BARC). A single new species for the Region was added during 2015 (Great Frigatebird), whilst a report of another potential new species is under review at the time of writing (Crimson Chat). An account for each species assessed by the HBOC RAC, as well as cases reviewed by NSW ORAC for birds seen in the Hunter Region, will be found in the Records Appraisal Committee Report for 2015 (which will appear as an appendix to the 2015 Annual Bird Report later this year).

## 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 A.

*Ash Island:* Work was carried out at many of the important sites on Ash Island after having secured a permit to do the work in late 2014. The effort to remove mangrove seedlings in Area E began in early January and after just two visits both Wader Pond and Wader West were cleared of two-year's worth of invasion. By February the work was complete. The last week of March provided favourable tides for work to begin at Milham Pond and this period took care of Zones A, B, C and 65% of Zone D. Another brace of visits in early April had Phoenix Flats completed by the end of the month.

Over the course of 2015, a total of 249.9 hours of volunteer contribution was made from a combination of HBOC members and Conservation Volunteers (CVA). This brings the aggregate of effort on Ash Island since 2005 up to 1679.6 hours.

*Stockton Sandspit:* Late March saw a single effort at removing mangrove seedlings and the job was done within an hour; a testament to the great work that has happened there over the years, keeping on top of the issue. The first Sunday in March was the “traditional” Clean Up Australia effort is made and 4 hours effort saw the collection of 20 bags of rubbish plus lots of larger items. In 2015 at the Shelly Sand (‘The Shelly’) part of the sandspit, primary clearing of vegetation was undertaken by crews of International Student Volunteers, supervised by a local CVA Team Leader. The first visit included three days in late May where all of Big Island and 60% of The Shelly was completed. A second visit in June completed The Shelly and a few days later the rotary hoe treatment was carried out by two NPWS field officers.

Volunteers visited the sandspit on 15 occasions to carry out restoration works during 2015 and a total of 601 volunteer hours of their time was put to good use. Since records have been kept (16th April 2003), an aggregate of 6,058.2 hours of volunteer work at Stockton Sandspit has accrued.

Unfortunately 2015 was to be an “unsuccessful year” for the nesting pair of Australian Pied Oystercatchers; especially disappointing after the success of 2014. However the resident Red-capped Plovers managed to have

an average breeding success compared to other seasons with at least 5 attempts and 5 runners reared to independence.

*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.***

Whistler number 9 was issued in December 2015. The volume was 68 pages, mostly involving full length papers, which provided a good balance between the inventories of bird in parks and reserves, as well as in depth accounts of the status of individual species (Varied Sittella) and families of birds (Swifts) in the Hunter Region. There were three first time authors. However, the number of short notes and papers submitted was disappointing to the editors, who remain committed to broadening the authorship of this important component of the Club.

Mike Newman and Harold Tarrant are editors of *The Whistler*, whilst Liz Crawford is the production manager and Rob Kyte the cover designer. 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.***

In 2015 HBOC again anticipated raising the awareness of birds within the communities of the Hunter Region. However, it was a year of mixed success as several high exposure events fell foul of severe weather conditions.

*Total Field Days:* Following our success in 2014 HBOC was offered a sponsored site in the Local Land Services (LLS) marquee which would provide substantial financial benefits and the chance of increased public exposure and opportunities for cooperation with other environmental groups. The HBOC display was prepared with the theme of the importance to birds and landholders of remnant native vegetation on farms. This is an issue of local concern and it also reflects the wider BLA program of Birds on Farms. The April weather event caused serious damage to local infrastructure and the Total organisers took the difficult decision to cancel the event for the first time in its history. The club has confirmed its interest in the 2016 field days and intends to use the same theme and display materials ensuring that the hard work and time spent by our volunteers will be well utilised.

*Biodiversity Day:* This event is organised by the Office of Environment and Heritage in conjunction with NPWS and Lake Macquarie Council and is held at the Blue Gum Hills Reserve in Minmi. In 2015 the event was cancelled due to safety reasons associated with high winds. Although this was a well-considered and necessary decision it was a source of disappointment as Biodiversity Day, based on past experience, provides a potentially high level of exposure for the Club. The proposed theme was Endangered Birds of the Hunter and this will be rescheduled for 2016.

*Environmental Expo – All Saints College Lochinvar:* HBOC was invited to mount a display and give talks to students from Years 7-10 as part of an 'Environmental Expo' involving both government and non-government environmental groups. The structured, small group of HBOC presentations explored the concept of Endangered Species. Endangered birds in the Hunter Region were used to illustrate levels of endangerment, impacts, causes and student activities to help "Save the Species". This proved to be a most successful event with about 200 students being formally involved in the HBOC program.

*Welcome to Shorebirds:* HBOC participated in the annual event organised by LLS to raise awareness of local and migratory shorebirds at Stockton Sandspit. Visitors were treated to a magnificent view of the shorebirds including the critically endangered Eastern Curlew and Beach Stone-Curlew and endangered Australian Pied Oystercatcher. Club members provided expert assistance to ensure visitors experienced excellent viewing of the birds together with stimulating information. Again a storm threatened the event and it eventually curtailed the activity.

HBOC wishes to thank the many members who helped raise the profile of birds and enhance public environmental awareness in 2015. Special thanks also to the Club photographers whose work makes these displays possible and to Rob Kyte for his time and skills in preparing the stimulating and visually appealing posters.

*Website:* The HBOC website continues to be a crucial interface between the Club and the rest of the world and saw much activity during 2015. Maintenance of the website required action when it was compromised early in the year, with once again Rob Kyte and Alan Stuart acting swiftly to manage the situation. Arising from this, we now have a dedicated 'Webmaster' (Steve Merrett) who works tirelessly behind the scenes to not only enhance the security of the website, but to make improvements and facilitate updates as required. The efforts of Steve, Rob and Alan in keeping the website running and up-to-date cannot be underestimated, as it is an ongoing task.

*Facebook:* Although the Club has had a Facebook account for several years it essentially was dormant for most of that time. In June we decided to become more proactive in our use of social media, and since then we have posted 5-10 messages per month about club activities plus a "Bird of the Month" theme (which has proven very popular). The number of subscribers has almost trebled since June.

*Publications:* As previously mentioned, the Hunter Region Annual Bird Report No. 22 (2014) was published and was once again a high quality publication, again containing many colour photographs and illustrations along with the remarkable amount of closely reviewed records and analysis. The production team, in particular Alan Stuart (still the sole editor after 22 years of 'service') and Rob Kyte (as Production Manager, producing a tremendous looking booklet), as well as the contributing field observers are to be congratulated for this respected publication.

Several members 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 Murrurundi and Port Stephens West and Newcastle Wetlands were prepared during 2015 (motivated 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.

## **12. Notable Highlights**

### **Green Globe Awards**

The NSW Government's Green Globe Awards are the leading environmental recognition program, celebrating excellence, leadership and innovation in sustainability. HBOC put together an entry titled "Community Cooperation in Sustaining Birdlife" in the Community Sustainability category. The entry was chosen as a finalist and Ann Lindsey (chief author of the application) and Lucas Grenadier represented HBOC at the awards night in Sydney. HBOC received a "Highly Commended" award for the category which was an outstanding effort.

### **BirdLife Australia Photography Interest Group conference**

In February/March 2015 the BirdLife Australia Photography Interest Group (a special interest group comprising members from all over Australia) held their biennial "Digital Photography in the Bush" conference in Newcastle. HBOC hosted the event, which was held at the Hunter Wetlands Centre (lectures, workshops, meetings etc) and surrounding areas. Around 90 delegates attended the event. Excursions were made over a period of 6 days to numerous localities with the aim of photographing local birdlife, led very ably by HBOC



members. The Club was also involved in the planning of the event and several members attended lectures and formal events at the wetlands centre.

The feedback from the organisers was extremely positive and they extended a hearty thanks to all HBOC members that gave their time during the course of the event. The Club would also like to extend the same appreciation to the members that volunteered during this event.

### **13. Acknowledgements**

I am extremely grateful for the assistance I received during 2015; my fourth and final term as HBOC President. There are too many individuals to mention and I will express a sincere collective thanks to those who have helped keep the club operational and remaining strong, (and to those that have assisted me personally along the way). I would however, like to single out one person for particular thanks. Being President of HBOC would have been a far more difficult job without the assistance and seemingly untiring enthusiasm and commitment of Alan Stuart. Alan was a great sounding-board on many issues as they arose and was in many ways something of a mentor during my presidency. As President, it has really become apparent to me just how Alan really does keep much of the ‘thread’ of HBOC bound together and I consider it appropriate to acknowledge that here.

**Mick Roderick** (HBOC President 2015) 10 February 2016