



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

Hunter Bird Observers Club 2016 Annual Report

Introduction

The 2016 Annual Report of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on the 8th February 2017. It is available via the club website at www.hboc.org.au. This Annual Report consists of an overview of 2016 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 2016, printed and presented separately, forms part of this section of the Annual Report. Once again, a dedicated management committee (and other supportive members) met monthly to discuss management matters relevant to the running of HBOC. Although it can be easy to underestimate the workload the committee and supporting roles deal with, there was a very diverse range of issues and responsibilities handled by the committee again in 2016. The committee and other contributing members are greatly thanked for their support and inputs throughout the year.

Throughout 2016 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 club's affiliation with BirdLife Australia continued to enhance HBOC's collaboration on various endeavours successfully again throughout 2016. 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 building strong relationships with other organisations in the promotion and protection of Birds in the Hunter. The Club has a deserved an 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 committee gratefully recognises the vast amount of volunteer effort that goes into helping the Club function.

2. Membership

Administrative, personnel matters and services related to the membership.

Membership Secretary: Rob Kyte, our Membership Secretary, continues to introduce initiatives to diversify the membership and increase our supporter base. A diversity of initiatives, including discounts at retail outlets, were again enjoyed by the membership throughout 2016.

Rob's collaboration with Treasurer, Judy Little, has produced a comprehensive and regularly updated database of the club membership which facilitates reliable communication with members and the HBOC Committee.

Club Membership: There continues to be a steady year-on-year growth in our membership numbers with 58 new members joining in 2016 (14 family, and 30 single). There were 30 memberships from 2015 that were not renewed in 2016, including 10 family, 21 single and 1 junior membership.

At 31 December 2016 there were 345 financial members of HBOC, an increase of 16 from 31 December 2015 and a new club record.

The Hunter 300 & 350 Club: are a fun and self-challenging component of the Club where 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). Badges are available for those reaching the 300 and 350 species milestones and several "300 Club" badges were presented during 2016. Additionally, the 3rd and 4th "400 badges" were also presented during 2016 (both observers seeing the same bird as their 400th, being a Red-tailed Tropicbird off Port Stephens in February). The fifth official Hunter 400 total was also reached during 2016. There is an ever-growing group of keen birders looking to find those elusive few birds to take them to the next milestone and 2017 may just be the year.

2016 also saw the introduction of milestone badges for the numbers of birds photographed in the Hunter Region; with 200, 250 and 300 badges to aim for. It is very likely that there are many members that have already surpassed one of those milestones from their photographic efforts over the years, so we will hopefully see further interest in this new initiative during 2017.

Library: The extensive library continues to be well used by members each Club Night. A thorough stocktake of the library was carried out during 2016 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. As of 2017 the library comprises some 448 books, 66 reports and many issues from nine journals related to Australian birding.

The audio visual library includes 36 audio CD's, six CD-Rom and six DVDs.

Digital Photo Library: The digital library continued to grow during 2016, thanks to the work of John Cockerell who continues to do a great job maintaining this important resource. During 2016 the total of 3494 images was increased by some 453 images taking the library's current file count to a total of 3947 files at the time of writing. Four new species were added to the library during 2016 with the Digital library now comprising a total of 622 bird species. It is a fantastic resource for Club members to access and assist with, and we're always looking to add to current files with different plumages phases of existing species as well as adding new ones.

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.

Electronic social media has become an increasingly popular means for birders to share and catch-up on what is occurring locally in regard to the Hunter's birds. This is reflected in the growing numbers of people joining the HBOC Facebook page. During 2016 the numbers following the HBOC page increased by 159 from 215 to 374

'Hunterbirding': This online forum for sharing (predominantly local) bird information, reporting sightings and for general discussion continued to grow in interest during 2016. It has become an important place where local issues, such as identification and interesting sightings are first fielded to the wider Hunter birding community. 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 this 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 once again recognises the efforts of the Hunterbirding moderator (Dan Williams) and also thanks all contributors that make Hunterbirding happen and interesting.

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 during 2016, including the monthly Sunday and midweek outings, camps and other events, primarily focussing on the recreational needs of members.

Monthly Sunday outings: Monthly outings, 11 in all, covered a range of locations and habitats, with attendances varying in association with either the location of the outing, other activities happening at the time or, in some instances, 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: Five successful camps were held in 2016 with an range of 15-32 participants. Bird list totals at the camps varied according to the time of year and the numbers of members present. The Easter Camp at Munghorn Gap proved that this reliable location is still a great place to bird in the Hunter Valley and represented the most productive in terms of bird species observed reaching a total of 102 species.

From the dedicated team who support and organise the camps a big thank you goes to that indefatigable group of hardy camp goers that turn up for early morning walks despite the weather conditions, including the very wet and the cold. The camps would not be possible or nearly as enjoyable if it were not for those volunteers who organise the camps and/or lend their expertise and local knowledge to enhance the experience of other camp goers. The camps remain a great way to get out into natural surroundings and bird habitats with like-minded people.

A big thank you also goes to those that share their images and writing skills to share camp experiences with the wider club through reports in HBOC Newsletters throughout the year.

Mid-week outings and camps: Eleven mid-week outings were held in 2016. Generally attendance was between 20 and 30 members, with 35 at the Christmas outing and lunch. One of the highlights of the year was our first visit to Tahlee Ministries, where we saw a total of 66 species, including Bush Stone-curlew and a Common Sandpiper.

Our camp at Seal Rocks was a great success with 20 members attending. One hundred species were seen or heard in the vicinity of the camp.

The Mid-week outings, while relaxing and enjoyable, involved some serious field studies with all observations being entered on Birddata. One pleasing feature of our 2016 program was the large number of members who volunteered to lead outings. Thanks to all those who contributed.

The *Annual Twitchathon* fundraising birdwatching event "went national" in 2016, with coordination happening by BirdLife Australia and several new rules and initiatives put in place. It is always a very popular event with HBOC members and several teams connected with HBOC took part in the various race categories in 2016. Again, the winning team from the Main Race went to a HBOC team; the Dodgy Drongo's, notching up a hat-trick of wins; both in the NSW Main Race and the National Event. Approximately \$3500 was raised by HBOC-related teams within a total of approximately \$15,000 in NSW. NSW funds raised in 2016 will go to the recovery of breeding seabirds on the islands off Port Stephens (the beneficiary for NSW that was put forward by HBOC).

In addition to the leisure and social benefits enjoyed in the various activities by everyone involved, 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 and the 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, particularly with the introduction of the new BirdLife Australia data portal, including easy access through the Birddata application designed for our phones.

To the many members, including the 2016 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 2016 except January, with an average attendance of 58.3 members per meeting, that's half a member down on 2015's average of 58.8 (Feb

AGM and Club Meeting = 68; Mar = 60; Apr = 61; May = 63; Jun = 46; Jul = 53; Aug = 59; Sep = 53; Oct = 70; Nov = 40; Dec = 68) Thanks to Sue Hamonet for this information.

The Guest Speaker Program in 2016 gave us a travel blend from distant and local destinations; from Shorebirds in China with Tom Clarke, birds in Papua New Guinea with Dick Jenkin, the birds of Gloucester Tops with Alan Stuart and we were taken off to Southern Ocean islands off South America, from Port Stanley to the Horn with Mick Roderick. There were various programs on bird study and observation; from Carol Proberts about high volume Honeyeater migration in the Blue Mountains, 50 years of banding at Munghorn Gap from Graham Fry, and a thorough treatise of Australian Cuckoos by Alan Morris. We were enlightened by the scientific research work of Hollis Taylor on the calls of the Pied Butcherbird and in October we were privileged to hear author Tim Low reveal wonderful facts about this country's avifauna, which strongly suggest that the genesis of the world's avifauna come from our very own part of the world.

We ended 2016 with our very popular and well attended December meeting, but perhaps most satisfying of all, in May we looked back across forty years at our club's own genesis; beginning in a committed group of local nature enthusiasts who were not satisfied to just look at birds, but were devoted to ensuring that birds continued to find a home in the Hunter's future.

Bird of the Evening is a short, 5-10 minute piece, sometimes longer by arrangement, that usually precedes the main speaker at Club nights. All members are encouraged to present a Bird of the Evening segment in any format; be it pictures, poetry, powerpoint or prose.

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

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 to be a quality publication and an important means of communication, which 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 second 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 throughout a week in late September whereby competitors attempted to photograph the most number of species within a specified timeframe. Michael Kearns took out the trophy again, snapping more species than anyone else in an 8 hour period. Another "Phototwitch" is planned for 2017. Thanks go to Robert McDonald for organising these fun events. As mentioned earlier, badges for HBOC members that have photographed more than 200 species in the Region have been introduced.

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.

There are 90 species or subspecies of birds in the Hunter Region that are listed as threatened under either State or Commonwealth threatened species legislation. Further, those habitats that provide home for a

diversity of currently non-threatened bird species are also under threat; thus the conservation arm of the Club remains vitally important.

2016 saw a significant shift in the way threatened species legislation is enacted in NSW with a major review ending in the passing of the “*Biodiversity Conservation Act*” and “*Biodiversity Conservation Bill*”. HBOC made a submission to the NSW government on the proposed reforms, outlining the shortcomings and how they will effectively “wind the clock back” on biodiversity conservation in NSW. At the time of writing we are yet to see how exactly the new laws will be implemented but conservation groups are unanimous in their concern that they are likely to have a profound negative impact on the way threatened species assessments are done in NSW.

Following on from the addition of the Eastern Curlew and Curlew Sandpiper to the threatened species schedules of the national *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act) during 2015, a further five species of migratory shorebird that occur in the Hunter Estuary were added to the list of nationally threatened bird species during 2016. These were:

- Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* (Critically Endangered)
- Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* (Endangered)
- Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica baueri* (Vulnerable)
- Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* (Vulnerable)

Furthermore, the Swift Parrot was ‘upgraded’ from endangered to critically endangered during 2016, mostly due to recent discoveries of acutely significant threats discovered at their breeding sites in Tasmania. The Hunter Region remains one of the strongholds for this species on mainland Australia, further evidenced by records of at least 10% of the entire population having wintered here in 2016 (with ~6% found at a single site on one day).

Likewise, the Hunter remains a stronghold for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater and it was very heartening to see several young fledged from nests in the Upper Hunter late in the year, as well as evidence of successful breeding in the Lower Hunter; the first confirmed breeding in the area since the 2007 breeding event in the Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ). Another small victory was won for Regent Honeyeaters during 2016, with the Land and Environment Court finding in favour of the residents group that claimed a developer and Cessnock Council acted illegally in approving a subdivision within HEZ without having performed adequate assessments on potential impacts to Regent Honeyeaters.

The Dusky Woodswallow and White-bellied Sea-Eagle were both added to the schedules of the NSW *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* as Vulnerable species during 2016.

HBOC continues to manage migratory shorebird habitat in the Hunter Estuary (see ‘Projects’) and was involved as a key stakeholder in the development of a plan by the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG) to remove more than 15ha of mangroves from Fish Fry Flats on Ash Island.

HBOC put forward the proposal for the beneficiary of the 2016 Twitchathon (NSW funds) to go to the breeding seabirds of the islands off Port Stephens. It is likely that at least \$15,000 will be provided to important conservation projects on these islands as a result.

In terms of local conservation issues, HBOC was involved in making submissions and/or having representation on projects including, but not limited to:

- Warkworth Extension Project, Warkworth;
- Richmond Vale Rail Corridor Project, Shortland to Kurri Kurri;
- Soldiers Point Marina, Port Stephens;
- North Stockton Swing Mooring Upgrade; and

- Boomerang Park rezoning, Raymond Terrace

Overall, HBOC has maintained through 2016 a very strong presence in conservation matters, both locally and regionally.

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 programs organised by HBOC and those conducted by individual Club members continued at about the same levels of activity which were reported for 2015.

Autumn/spring surveys of Broughton Island resumed after an 18 month hiatus.

The Club's work in surveying the Barrington Tops and Gloucester Tops IBA was again focussed 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.

The monthly surveys of the Hunter Estuary continued, including simultaneously at the newer tidal wetland sites Tomago Wetlands and Hexham Swamp.

A new initiative for 2016 was to have several members start to monitor the waterbirds at their local/favourite wetlands. Many of these are important second-tier wetlands in the region, sometimes hosting sizeable populations of waterbirds and some having breeding colonies of cormorants etc. This will lead to several new tables in the 2016 bird report.

In August, BirdLife Australia released its new Birddata portal and this reinvigorated our efforts to encourage local birdwatchers to submit records into the BLA Atlas. As a result, there was a surge in reporting in the final months of the year, and with several new Atlassers registering.

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*).

A GIS based method for showing species distribution maps based on Atlas data was refined in 2016 and a method for showing timelines for migratory species was also developed. The maps and timelines were used in the 2015 bird report, which was published in late 2016.

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 2016, 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.

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. In 2016, no cases relevant to the Hunter were assessed by BARC or ORAC.

25 cases were reviewed by the HBOC RAC during 2016, 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 2016 (Hooded Plover), whilst another new species under review at the time of writing of last year's annual report (Crimson Chat) was accepted by the HBOC RAC. 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 2016 (which will appear as an appendix to the 2016 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 Mangroves: The effort from volunteers these days continues to be mostly about the hand-removal of mangrove seedlings that have invaded designated areas of interest (Milham Pond, Phoenix Flats, Swan Pond, Wader Pond) over the previous year.

Over the course of 2016, a total of 176 hours of volunteer contribution was made from a combination of HBOC members, Conservation Volunteers (CVA) and others with an interest in the estuary. This brings the aggregate since 2005 up to 1850 hours.

Stockton Sandspit: Volunteers from Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) have a long association with this site and over the last 16 years have held a strong site presence. Over the last 4 years, HBOC members have been ably assisted by various crews through CVA as well as TAFE students and others. This year the additional help from Green Army was a bonus.

Volunteers representing International Student Volunteers, Wetland Care Australia, TAFE, CVA and HBOC visited the sandspit on 17 occasions to carry out restoration works during 2016 and a total of 425 volunteer hours of their time was put to good use. Since we have been keeping records (16th April 2003) an aggregate

of 6,482.9 hours of volunteer work has accrued. It needs to be acknowledged here that 3 visits by a Green Army crew are not included as volunteer effort but valued just the same.

The 2016 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. This has always been the case over the years. With the additional volunteer resource enjoyed once again this year, restoration of other non-roost areas was also targeted.

Combined Volunteer Effort: The value of these combined volunteer efforts in terms of productive habitat for shorebirds is difficult to quantify of course, but when figured against contractor rates, it amounts to an in-kind value of over \$336,000. This is not an insignificant sum.

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.

The Whistler number 10 was issued in December 2016. The 10th volume marks a significant milestone, with an interesting brace of full length papers, which includes papers treating specific behavioural aspects of Hunter bird species, including mimicry of the Black-eared Cuckoo and Rose Robins in the Hunter, as well as a look at the birdlife of some Hunter locations, such as raptors at Morpeth and the birdlife at Belmont Lagoon. Threatened bird species status in the Hunter Region area also brought up to date in this volume, in line with latest legislative developments, changes in species' status or additional species added to threatened species schedules. The number of new authors in this edition is encouraging for the editors, who remain committed to broadening the authorship of this important component of the Club.

Mike Newman, Harold Tarrant and Neil Fraser are editors of *The Whistler*, with Liz Crawford as 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 2016 HBOC again anticipated raising the awareness of birds within the communities of the Hunter Region, which was successful through a number initiatives.

Total Field Days: We once again had a display stall at Total Field Days, inside the Hunter LLS marquee which they provide free of charge for community groups. There was a steady stream of visitors all three days and our birding routes proved very popular. We'll be back there again in 2017.

Biodiversity Day: This event is organised by the Office of Environment and Heritage in conjunction with NPWS and held at the Blue Gum Hills Reserve in Minmi in late September. In 2016 the event was a great success with nearly 1000 people attending, despite threatening rain and wind. HBOC held a stall alongside BirdLife Australia and both tents proved to be popular with attendees with the many educational activities being taken up by young and old.

Aussie Backyard Bird Count: This national week-long event, organised by BirdLife Australia, is aimed at getting broader participation in birding from the non-birding community. Events are held around the country

and counts made by 'citizen scientists' and entered into a national database. HBOC participated at 2 events promoting the bird count; one at Cardiff and one at Tabbil Forest near Dungog.

Maitland City Environmental Youth Forum: HBOC through the expertise of Paul Baird presented 4 talks on 'endangered species' to Years 5-8 students. Many of the community do not understand the plight of threatened species and such subject matter is often received thoughtfully by young people.

HBOC wishes to thank the many members who helped raise the profile of birds and enhance public environmental awareness in 2016. 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 an indispensable interface between the Club and the rest of the world and again saw much activity during 2016. Our server provider was capably changed this year, by our 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 Kyte and Alan Stuart continue in keeping the website running and up-to-date, which is an ongoing task and crucial for the trouble free service it provides.

Facebook: As mentioned earlier the number of followers of HBOC's Facebook page has increased considerably by 159 during 2016. A number of interesting posts throughout the year elicited much interest in the page.

Publications: As previously mentioned, the Hunter Region Annual Bird Report No. 23 (2015) was published during 2016. No. 23 was once again a high quality publication, benefiting from 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 23 years of 'service') and Rob Kyte (as Production Manager, producing a tremendous looking booklet), along with the contributing field observers are to be congratulated for this well respected and treasured publication.

During 2016 Hunter authors either authored or co-authored papers dealing with regional birds that have been published in periodicals such as *Australian Field Ornithology* and *Stilt*.

12. Memorable events

40th Birthday Luncheon

In 2016 we celebrated 40 years of the Hunter Bird Observers Club, both during the May club meeting and with a celebratory luncheon, where many of our present and past members came and reminisced about old times.

Max Maddock

Perhaps most satisfying aspect of the 40th luncheon for many of those who have been members for many years was that Max Maddock was able, despite prolonged sickness, to come along and celebrate the 40th luncheon along with them. Max devoted much of his life to the cause of bird conservation and study and it is with respect and fondness that we remember his passing. May the example of his devotion rub off on us all.

13. Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for the wonderful assistance I received during 2016; my first year as HBOC President. I hope that in the reading of this Annual Report that it is obvious to you all, that the success of the club during 2016 was not due to the endeavours of any one person, least of all one who might have an illustrious title; for there are many important contributors that only together have realised a successful HBOC in the past year. HBOC's success did not just come about because birds are fascinating and beautiful to a group of bird loving people, although they are, but because the voice of birds cannot be easily heard in the modern world. However, during 2016 HBOC was a success because very devoted people who sit amongst us here have devoted significant portions of their lives to being the voice for birds in the Hunter, which cannot otherwise be heard. There are too many individuals to mention for their contributions, so I express a sincere collective thanks to those who have helped keep the club operational and remaining strong, (including those that have assisted me personally along the way and stood in when work commitments have taken me away). I would however, like to give special thanks to the members of the Management Committee who have dependably

steered the club's course throughout the year. Being President of HBOC would have been a far more difficult job without the assistance and seemingly untiring enthusiasm and commitment of Vice President, Alan Stuart. Alan is always a great sounding-board on many issues as they arise and he as well as others have strongly supported my duties during 2016. 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.

Allan Richardson (HBOC President 2016) 8 February 2017