



# NEWSLETTER

*Issue 5/09 October - November 2009*

## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc

affiliated with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia

### Committee

President: Paul Baird  
Vice-president:  
Grant Brosie  
Secretary: Tom Clarke  
Treasurer:  
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### Committee Members

Craig Anderson  
Liz Crawford  
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Robert MacDonald  
Ian Martin  
Mick Roderick

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Liz Crawford

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### The aims of the club are:

- To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat;
- To encourage bird observing as a leisure-time activity



This Pacific Golden Plover was seen in Stockton Channel by participants in the Shorebirds 2020 Workshop on Saturday 10 October 2009.

Photo - Chris Herbert

Membership Fees for 2010 are \$30.00 Single and Family, \$5.00 Junior  
Membership forms can be obtained at Club Night or by downloading from  
the website: [www.hboc.org.au](http://www.hboc.org.au)

Please pay at Club Night or send cheque or money order payable to HBOC:  
PO Box 24, New Lambton 2305.

Telephone: (02) 4958 5942

Newsletter articles are always welcome - please contact Editor  
Next newsletter copy deadline 28 November 2009

## President's Column

At a recent BIGnet meeting, it was interesting to note that information from both the UK and Australia indicated that some bird clubs and environmental organisations are enjoying expanding membership while others are in decline, both in membership numbers and financially. This situation raises the question, "What are the successful clubs doing well that contributes to their success?" Four principles emerged. First, there was a "focus on the membership", members both individually and collectively saw value in their activities leading to active participation, personal satisfaction and a strong sense of involvement. Second, the successful clubs were "visible" within their communities. Third, the clubs were active in creating linkages and collaborations with other organisations, much to their mutual benefit. Finally, an ecosystem approach was generally taken to conservation and environmental issues.

As mentioned in the previous Newsletter a small working group from the HBOC Committee has been seeking ways to sharpen the "focus on the membership" by optimising the opportunities for members to be meaningfully involved in Club activities. It is important that there is widespread awareness of these opportunities and also that there are avenues available through which members can be supported in their recreational, social and conservation activities. Although HBOC is well recognised and respected by the birding and conservation community due to its depth of experience, reliable, validated data and professional commentary, there is a need, as indicated by recent membership feedback, to better promote Hunter birdlife and the Club within the general community. As a consequence attention was given to providing mechanisms for increasing "visibility" (i.e. the promotion of Hunter birdlife and HBOC), within our community. Likewise, the identified need for an emphasis on "education" was also included in the revision. Incidentally, HBOC is not alone in this respect as other clubs have identified the "education" issue as a priority by formally including it in their structures.

The working group's "focus on membership", (by clarifying existing and potential opportunities for involvement and support), has resulted in a proposed revision of structural aspects of HBOC. The features of this revised structure include:

1. a framework where club activities have been arranged in defined but often interdependent areas;
2. rationalisation of tasks in order to broaden the opportunity base;
3. creation of potential areas for involvement to better satisfy identified need; and
4. provision of avenues for membership support

through an augmented "assistant" network, strengthened communication channels and role guidelines for essential positions.

At the time of writing this column the details of the working group's recommendations are still to be considered by the HBOC Committee, however, following any amendments and acceptance by the Committee, the details will be sent, as a separate mail-out to members. This will occur before the November Club Night meeting when the details of the proposals will be presented together with opportunities for discussion and member feedback. When you receive your copy I would encourage you to please offer any feedback (either directly to me, a Committee member or at the November meeting), and to take up any opportunities that will help you to enjoy a personally satisfying and strong sense of involvement with your club.

On the 10 October the Shorebirds 2020 – Shorebird identification and counting workshop took place at the Hunter Wetlands Centre. This successful workshop, supported by Shorebirds 2020, HBOC and the HWC provided opportunities for birders to learn about resident and migratory shorebirds, develop field skills in identification and counting while enjoying the company of like-minded people. HBOC presenters, Mike Newman, Ann Lindsey, Alan Stuart, Liz Crawford and Chris Herbert are to be congratulated for their high quality presentations and organisation. What a great example of a combined package of education, promotion, and recreation in action. Congratulations!

The annual Twitchathon will take place at the end of October. This fund raising, 24-hour bird watching epic encompasses adventure, fun, frustration, elation and importantly the chance to make a significant contribution to the conservation of birds. In the past 5 years, over \$78,000 has been raised for a variety of conservation projects, including \$10,000 for the HBOC Shorebird Roost Protection Scheme. HBOC teams, apart from their competitive success and star status in "Chasing Birds", have made significant contributions to this fund raising effort, so please consider joining in, either as part of the deadly serious main race, or the laid back (champagne) event or as a fundraiser or donor. Your support will be greatly appreciated. Proceeds this year will assist the BASNA Important Bird Area project, especially those areas in far western NSW.

As I finish this column, the raucous calls of the Channel-billed Cuckoo and the distinctive but incessant Koel, presently outside my window, remind me to go bird watching in the morning.

Good Birding! Keep Looking! **Paul Baird**

## Trip Reports

### Stockton Sandspit and Cemetery

Mid-Week Outing 4 August 2009

On Tuesday 4 August 2009, twenty-one members of the mid-week bird group fronted up for our outing to Stockton. The morning was bright and sunny but an icy wind blew under Stockton bridge.

At Stockton Sandspit we were rewarded with 2000 plus Red-necked Avocets in the near distance and 68 Bar-tailed Godwits, Australian Pelicans, Little Black Cormorants, Pied Cormorants, Great Cormorants and White-faced Herons were at the pond. Being far too cold to enjoy morning tea under the bridge, we adjourned to

the cemetery which was surprisingly sheltered, being surrounded by the growth of thick trees. Many of the group had never been there before and were agreeably surprised by the bird life and the ambience of the place. The thickly wooded tracks surrounding the cemetery yielded many Brown Thornbills, Eastern Spinebills, Red-browed Finches, Willie Wagtails, White-cheeked and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters.

We ended our outing with a total of 55 species seen and 5 heard.

**Margaret Woods**

### Mid-week Camp, Nundle

14 - 16 September 2009

Thirty-two members attended the mid-week camp at the delightful township of Nundle. We were all prepared for the chilly highland weather but instead were greeted with clear sunny days of 26 to 28 degrees. For those not familiar with them, the mid-week camps are at the luxury end of the camping spectrum. We stayed at Fossickers Tourist Park, some in cabins and some camping with luxuries like hot showers and a fully equipped camp kitchen. Activities are a mixture of organised outings and free time to explore new areas or return to sites that appealed.

On Monday afternoon we headed 15 kilometres south of town to Teamsters Rest Reserve which is part of the 162 hectare Crawney's Travelling Stock Reserve (it will be a tragedy for birdwatchers if the government carries out its plans to close and sell off these reserves). Birds were plentiful here including White-naped Honeyeaters, Rufous Whistlers and Buff-rumped Thornbills. Our bird count on the first night was a respectable 79 species.

Next morning we headed off in convoy to Sheba Dams, east of town. The birds were not exceptional but the setting was. We saw the usual suspects like Aussie Grebes, Crimson Rosellas as well as a Wonga Pigeon. Red Wattlebirds, Striated Pardalotes and White-eared Honeyeaters were nest building. After morning tea we dispersed to various sites between Hanging Rock and Nundle. Those of us who went down the Two Mile Walk were lucky enough to see Red-browed Treecreepers and a flock of at least 50 Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos. That evening we pushed the bird count up to 108.

On Wednesday morning we went north to Chaffey Dam. The reserve below the dam wall did not produce the promised Plum-headed Finches but we had some good birding with sightings of Crested Shrike-tits, Rufous

Songlarks and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters. A highlight of this site and of the whole trip was the number of birds nesting or feeding young, including a Restless Flycatcher, White-plumed and White-naped Honeyeaters, Magpies and Satin Bowerbirds.



White-plumed Honeyeater at Nundle - Bob Rech

Our final bird count was 121 species seen and 6 heard. Anyone looking for a pleasant break for a couple of days with some good birdwatching could do worse than visit Nundle.

**Robert Stewart**



Fairy Martins at Numdle - Steve Happ

## Trip Reports continued

### A Perfect Day at Ellalong Lagoon

Field outing 23 August 2009

Well you should have been there! We were, taking in the most magnificent scenery, spotting the first of the migrants, meeting all types along the road and enjoying the best of spring weather. To describe all the delights that were enjoyed on the outing to Ellalong would take up the whole newsletter so I will restrict myself to some of the more delicious treats.

Ellalong Lagoon is recognised as a major water body on the floor of the Hunter Valley and serves as a well-used drought refuge for many water fowl and waders. These types can easily be encountered and from any vantage point that gives you views of the open water a telescope will get you pretty close. But birds of the muddy margins and rank grasses can be a bit more challenging. Good thing that access to the water's edge at the upstream point of the lagoon places you right in it and a little patience will reap great rewards.

Our first stop is down the lane opposite the pub where the longer we stayed the better the bird watching got. I'm referring to the lagoon of course not the pub. Black-fronted Dotterel were the pick of the sightings until we finally latched onto some Latham's Snipe. Fantastic to find these birds so early in the season and everyone agreed these were their first for the year. These birds made sometimes brief appearances at the water's edge but mostly lurked behind tufts of grass where they resembled snipe-shaped

shadowy figures. Why do they need to be so difficult? All they had to do was, for just a minute, parade and be identified; but no. Eventually the best count was 5 snipe and if there was any more then it's just bad luck.

With hardly enough time to settle down from this excitement, the call of "glossies over here" went up. I think there were eight Glossy Black-Cockatoo mostly hanging about together in the tops of the she-oaks about 500m away and living up to their name of Casuarina Cockatoo. The scopes were needed but there was no doubting the red panels in the tails.



Away from the lagoon we could see many eucalypts in flower and the thought of perhaps seeing some rare nectar feeders was on most people's minds. Well it just didn't happen but masses of Musk Lorikeet are always a joy and some wonderful views the reward.

A morning of great bird watching was capped off with one of the best things to do in this part of the world – sit in a fold-up chair on the hill looking over the lagoon with the escarpment of the Watagans in the back ground, have a cup of tea and take time to absorb it all. I'm referring to the grandeur of the scenery of course, not the tea; unless you've spilt some on your lap in which case you may be a little distracted to be impressed by it all.

Back to the point, I think that this privilege needs to be preserved for all who value the beauty of nature and, fingers crossed, the place will be handed over to the people as conservation land sometime soon.

**Tom Clarke**

### Club Benefits

The Club has an extensive **library** of excellent books, CDs, DVDs and videos available for borrowing by members. **Photo Library:** Wanting digital bird photos to use in a talk? Contact John Cockerell by email: [jb@cockerell.ws](mailto:jb@cockerell.ws). Slide photos of some birds are also available.

**Photographers:** donations of digital photos of Australian birds are most welcome, especially from travels to other regions. Please provide 500kB .jpeg files to John Cockerell with your name on each photo and/or in the file name.

John Cockerell: [jb@cockerell.ws](mailto:jb@cockerell.ws) or 0429 435 008

**HBOC car stickers and badges** can be purchased from the Treasurer, Rowley Smith.

**Club T-shirts and Polo Shirts** can be ordered at Club Night from Liz Crawford or by email: [chrisliz@tpg.com.au](mailto:chrisliz@tpg.com.au).

# Observations

## Flagged Shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary

Following on from Ann Lindsey's article on banded/flagged birds in the last HBOC newsletter and Liz Crawford's talk on Red Knots at the last club meeting, I thought I would keep in the same vein and share some interesting observations from the Hunter Estuary last year.

On 13 September 2008, Craig Anderson, Steve Roderick and I did the monthly wader survey along Kooragang Dykes (along the north-eastern side of Kooragang Island). On the day we noticed a number of banded / flagged shorebirds, with combinations as follows:

1. **Red-necked Avocet** – **Orange** over **Green** flags on left tibia
2. **Eastern Curlew** – **Orange** flag on both tibiae
3. **Red Knot 1** – **Orange** flag on right tibia
4. **Bar-tailed Godwit** - **Green** flag over **Orange** flag on right tibia
5. **Red Knot 2** – Metal band on left tarsus, White flag on right tibia
6. **Red Knot 3** – **Blue** flag over **Orange** flag on left tarsus

We know that all birds with orange over green flags (or bands) (Red-necked Avocet) were banded in the Hunter Estuary in 2004, as part of two honours projects investigating Bar-tailed Godwits. Those with orange flags (Eastern Curlew and Red Knot 1) were flagged in Victoria some time since 1990. The others were more interesting. The following information came from the Australasian Wader Study Group (AWSG):

**4. Bar-tailed Godwit** – flagged in Yalu Jiang Nature Reserve, Liaoning Province, China. Approximate co-ordinates 39deg 48min N, 124deg 0min E on 24 to 28 April, 2002. The resighting was a distance of approximately 8573 km, with a bearing of 156 degrees, from the marking location.

**5. Red Knot 2** - flagged in the Auckland area, North Island, New Zealand. Approximate co-ordinates 37deg 0min S, 175deg 0min E, sometime since 22 December 1991. The resighting was a distance of approximately 2161 km, with a bearing of 275 degrees, from the marking location.

**6. Red Knot 3** – flagged in Obitsu Estuary, Kisarazu, Chiba, Tokyo Bay, Central Japan. Approximate co-ordinates 35deg 25min N, 139deg 54min E, sometime since May 1999. The resighting was a distance of approximately 7695 km, with a bearing of 169 degrees, from the marking location.

Note that the “blue over orange” as we reported for this last Knot is a combination that does not exist and, after much to-ing and fro-ing of emails across the Equator and Tasman Sea, was considered most likely to be a discoloured “blue over white” combination from Japan.

Then, as I was looking more closely at the colour-combinations of this last bird on photographs that I took on the day, I noticed bands on a fourth Red Knot that we didn't notice on the day of the survey. Look at the following photo of birds resting on the dykes. The right-hand bird standing close to the water is banded. A zoomed crop of the photo is also below.



This bird caused quite a stir amongst the banding community and the email traffic started once again! Banders from 4 countries had input into the discussion until finally it was decided that the origin of the bird could not be confirmed, mainly due to the fact that we can't see the right leg (which is tucked away).

It was a great exercise and it was exciting to have observed at least 3 birds roosting on the dykes that were banded in 3 foreign countries, including 2 in the northern hemisphere. It just goes to show that we should always be keeping an eye out for bands and flags on birds, and not just shorebirds – see the article on the banded Regent

Honeyeater in the last newsletter. I was also fortunate to be on a SOSSA (Southern Ocean Seabird Study Association) pelagic last weekend when we re-captured a Wandering Albatross that was banded off Wollongong by Bill Lane in 1979, had been recaptured twice in the 1990s in New Zealand waters and is still wandering the oceans to this day, thirty years after its first capture. There is much to be learnt about birds by using these banding techniques.

## **Red Knots in the Hunter Estuary - September 2009**

During the past decade, HBOC has monitored shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary on a monthly basis. These surveys have revealed that Red Knots, a migratory shorebird which breeds in Siberia and Alaska during the northern hemisphere summer, commonly arrive in the Hunter Estuary in September and October, with flocks generally in excess of 500 birds. Unlike many other shorebirds which stay in the estuary until March or April the following year, most Red Knots carry on to Victoria and New Zealand during October and November. In October 2006, 1500 Red Knots were recorded in the estuary, but by mid November 2006 only 23 remained.

September and October are the prime months for spotting flags or bands on these migrating birds in the Hunter Estuary. Rob Schuckard, a New Zealand shorebird expert, visited the Hunter in late September to look for Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots banded in New Zealand. These birds sport white flags and a variety of colour bands on their lower legs. The colour bands identify individual birds and their banding sites.

According to Higgins and Davies (1996), the southward migration route for Red Knot passes over the Pacific Ocean, while the northward route passes along the east Asian coast. Numbers peak in northern Australia during southward migration, with birds passing through the eastern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria destined for south-eastern Australia and New Zealand (Higgins & Davies 1996). In contrast, birds that pass through north-western Australia disperse along the northern coastline and to southern Western and South Australia, with apparently little movement from north-western Australia to south-eastern Australia and New Zealand within a year (Higgins and Davies (1996) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 3: Snipe to Pigeons*. Oxford University Press: Melbourne).

So far this season, four Red Knots have been seen in the Hunter Estuary with orange flags (Victoria), three with white flags (New Zealand), four with yellow flags

A good lesson from the September 2008 wader survey was that when confronted with large groups of shorebirds, it's a good idea to take a series of photographs if you are able to, because there is always the chance that important details will go unnoticed on the day.

**Mick Roderick**

(Northwest Australia), and one with white over black flags (Shanghai, China). It is interesting to see the yellow-flagged birds passing through the Hunter Estuary – have they followed a different migration route by coming down the east coast rather than the west coast of Australia, or have they come across from northwestern Australia to the eastern coast?

Critical to the survival of migratory shorebirds is an understanding of their migration routes and important staging sites. Only in the last two years has a significant staging site in the Yellow Sea been discovered at Bohai Bay, China. Reporting sightings of flagged and banded birds is one way we can assist in helping to understand the requirements of Red Knots.

If you have a boat, Kooragang Dykes is a great place to view shorebirds and search for flags over the high tide period (about two hours before local high tide to two hours after local high tide). Without a boat, Stockton Sandspit is the best place to search for flagged shorebirds – the birds usually move from Kooragang Dykes to the beach in front of the Sandspit about 2 hours after local high tide and stay for about an hour or two before flying upriver to feed on intertidal flats within the North Arm of the Hunter River or within Fullerton Cove. (Local high tide is about one hour after Sydney high tide). This is a narrow window of opportunity. A telescope is probably necessary at the Sandspit as it is difficult to get close enough to the birds to see colour flags and bands with binoculars.

Please report your flag sightings to the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) by email:  
mintonsoz@ozemail.com.au

Alternatively, contact:

Ann Lindsey 02 4951 2008 ann.lindsey@bigpond.com  
Liz Crawford 02 4959 3663 chrisliz@tpg.com.au  
Alan Stuart 02 4952 8569 almarosa@bigpond.com  
Mick Roderick 02 4023 0322  
fred\_barney\_72@yahoo.com

**Liz Crawford**

## **Milhams Pond Saltmarsh and Shorebird Habitat Protection Project**

Milhams Pond is located on Ash Island and forms part of the Ramsar-listed Hunter Estuary Wetlands. This area consists primarily of coastal saltmarsh and provides an important feeding site for shorebirds.

Ongoing surveys in this area by the HBOC have shown the encroachment of mangroves into the saltmarsh. The prime cause most likely is due to increased tidal influence as a result of continuing and additional deepening of the Hunter Estuary for shipping. Mangrove seeds carried by the rising tide are deposited higher into the saltmarsh areas where they grow and create a closed canopy. The result is a mangrove forest replacing a saltmarsh.

This project aims to rehabilitate the saltmarsh area of Milhams Pond through the removal and treatment of the encroaching mangroves and installation of an appropriate mangrove propagule exclusion device to prevent the introduction of additional seeds. It has been demonstrated previously on Swan Pond, Wader Pond and part of Milhams Pond (all on Ash Island), that saltmarsh and shorebirds will return once mangroves are removed.

Volunteer efforts have been able to manage the previously cleared northern half of Milhams Pond with follow-up work removing seedlings plus the gradual primary treatment of saplings in the more established areas. It was agreed that funding be sought to pay for contractors to carry out the bulk of this primary treatment and to assist with some secondary work to give the volunteer effort a much needed boost. It was estimated that approximately \$28,500 would be required to achieve the removal of mangroves from Milhams Pond and to install a mangrove propagule exclusion device. In 2008, HBOC approached Birds Australia Southern NSW and ACT (BASNA) for partial funding of this project. Half the funds (\$10,000)

raised during Twitchathon 2008 were granted to the Project. In addition, HBOC was successful in obtaining a Caring for our Country Coastcare grant for \$18,200.

The project is run as a partnership between HBOC and Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP) with KWRP responsible for most of the administration, a community education component and liaison with other government agencies while HBOC takes responsibility for project design, site supervision of contractors and volunteer effort.

At this stage a Permit for removal and exclusion of mangroves from Milhams Pond has been secured from the NSW Department of Primary Industries under the Fisheries Management Act 1994 and a contractor has been engaged to remove mangroves within a defined area (about 2ha) using a combination of hand-removal techniques and chain saw operation.

Contractor site works commenced on 31 August 2009 and Part A of that effort is scheduled for completion by the week starting 26 October 2009. A second contractor effort will take place next winter from about May to July 2010.

Volunteer works started on 19 June 2009 and will continue through each winter for the duration of the Mangrove Removal Permit until December 2014. The volunteer effort of follow-up weeding is crucial to the success of the project and together with the installation of the mangrove propagule exclusion nets helps protect the funded investment at Milhams Pond.

HBOC thanks Twitchathon 2008 for the tremendous support towards the project, which aims to improve habitat for shorebirds on Ash Island.

**Tom Clarke**

## **The Birds Australia Southern NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2009**

Yep, it's on again – the Birds Australia Southern NSW and ACT (BASNA) Twitchathon. For those of you not aware of the Twitchathon, it is a fundraising competition organised by Birds Australia each year whereby you aim to record as many different bird species as possible in a given 24 hour period. In 2009, the Twitchathon will be held on the weekend of **Saturday 31 October** and **Sunday 1 November** and will run from 4pm on the Saturday until 4pm on the Sunday. There are 3 broad categories, including children's races, a not-too-serious 'Champagne Race' and the somewhat-more-serious 'Main Race'.

This year's Twitchathon aims to raise money to assist in the management of the far western NSW Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Money is needed to establish a fund that will contribute to the cost of setting up appropriate monitoring sites and to establish monitoring regimes at each IBA. In addition, the money may be used to provide funds to volunteers to cover the cost of fuel and other essential items, so that they will be prepared to travel out to these locations on a regular basis to survey and monitor the remote sites. These IBA sites include some of the Paroo River lakes, some of the ephemeral lakes around Tibooburra, and various reserves of the far west that include plains and mountain ranges and provide habitat for Bourke's Parrot, various Grass-wrens, Quail-thrushes and Babblers, not to mention Freckled Ducks, migratory shorebirds and indigenous waders like Inland Dotterels and Banded Stilts.

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**The 2009 Twitchathon aims to raise about \$20,000 to assist Birds Australia's IBA Project. In the past 5 years we have raised nearly \$80,000 for various beneficiaries, including shorebird habitat rehabilitation on Ash Island.**

As if the challenge of pitting yourself against the clock in a race to locate as many species as you can in a day's birding is not enough, there are some great prizes to be won. There are several prizes for the winners and runners-up of the various categories as well as prizes for the 3 people who raise the most funds and for the team that records the most number of birds per km travelled (as long as they record more than 180 species). There is also a prize for 'rarest bird' and for the first time, a prize for the 'biggest dip'!

Spanning into November, it is probably as late as a NSW Twitchathon will ever be and daylight savings will have

already started – so plan that crucial Saturday afternoon carefully! The Twitchathon needn't be a mad race – you can go at your own pace, no matter how fast or slow you wish to. Remember that fundraising is the main purpose of the event, so if you cannot take part, you could consider sponsoring one of the Hunter teams. In recent times, the Hunter Region has dominated the event with virtually all winning teams either being HBOC members or finishing their run within the Hunter – a testament to the great diversity of birds we have here on our doorstep.

Contact Pixie at BASNA for your 2009 Twitchathon kit – email: [basna@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:basna@birdsaustralia.com.au)

For further information on how to register / donate or to ask any questions on my favourite subject, contact me on 0421 761237 or email [mickhbb@yahoo.com.au](mailto:mickhbb@yahoo.com.au)

**Mick 'Brewer' Roderick**

## **Important Bird Areas**

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are sites of global bird conservation importance. The IBA Program is a global network of 314 sites established by BirdLife International. Its purpose is to detect trends in target species, detect change in habitats, identify threats, and make remedial actions. Each IBA meets one of the following four global criteria used by BirdLife International.

### **A1. Globally threatened species**

The site must regularly support threshold numbers of a Critical, Endangered or Vulnerable species, as categorised by the IUCN Red List (IUCN is the World Conservation Union, formerly known as the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources).

### **A2. Restricted-range species**

The site forms one of a set protecting 'restricted-range species' (birds with a global range of <50,000 square kilometres).

### **A3. Biome-restricted species**

Species restricted to a single biome have been used to identify IBAs in some countries but not Australia. Biome-restricted species are however documented for IBAs identified by the other criteria. Australia has been divided into seven biomes.

### **A4. Congregations**

A4i. The site supports > 1% of the world population of a waterbird (similar to Ramsar Convention Criteria) or seabird.

IBAs are priority areas for bird conservation – Birds Australia aims to monitor birds at our IBAs, advocate their importance to government, and work with land-

holders and other local people to conserve them. Five IBAs have been identified in the Hunter Region

### **Hunter Estuary IBA**

The Hunter Estuary and associated swamps support the endangered Australasian Bittern and more than 1% of the world population of Chestnut Teal, Red-necked Avocet, Eastern Curlew and sometimes Latham's Snipe, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Straw-necked Ibis.

### **Hunter Valley IBA**

Hunter Valley IBA extends from Kurri Kurri west to Broke and southwest to Ellalong and Millfield. This IBA regularly supports significant numbers of the endangered Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater.

### **Lake Macquarie IBA**

Lake Macquarie IBA extends around the southern half of Lake Macquarie, including Wangi, Morisset, Wyee, Gwandalan and Swansea. It supports significant numbers of the endangered Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater in years when their favoured trees are flowering.

### **Barrington/Gloucester Tops IBA**

This IBA contains one of four remaining populations of the vulnerable Rufous Scrub-bird as well as the near threatened Flame Robin at the highest altitudes and the restricted-range Pale-yellow Robin, Paradise Riflebird, Green Catbird and Regent Bowerbird and the biome-restricted Australian Logrunner at lower altitudes.

### **Cabbage Tree and Boondelbah Islands IBA**

This IBA is a breeding site for >1% of the global population of the Vulnerable Gould's Petrel.

For more information on IBAs, try the website:

<http://www.birddata.com.au/iba.vm>

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## Important Bird Areas continued

Birds Australia has fostered the identification and collation of IBAs in Australia and will launch the IBA program on 22 October 2009 with an insert in *Wingspan*. It is important for people to know that IBAs are not statutory - they have no protection under law - and therefore should not be seen as a threat to landholders.

Long-term monitoring of IBAs will be the responsibility of the local Bird Club, with an annual report required. Assistance to monitor IBAs in remote areas will be sought from Bird Clubs - perhaps an annual camp-out will be organised to target remote areas.

Wanted: An IBA Contact Person for HBOC!

**Liz Crawford**

## Resilience

500 metres from my door, as a bird flies, there's a magical place. It's an artificial wetland created for the purpose of draining a sports complex built on land reclaimed by fill from the Salamander tip. The other side is edged by a large tract of native bushland. Birds find the intersecting habitats of grass, water and bush very attractive. On average, I have visited the site three times a week for almost three years, recording 110 species to date.



On Saturday, 27 September 2009, 70% of the bushland burned. I watched the billowing smoke and flames and said a silent, sad goodbye to the next generation of incubating chicks unable to escape from nests and tree hollows. A helicopter hovered overhead, its suspended bucket scooping up water from the larger of the two ponds. I could only imagine the panic among the waterbirds. The special classroom where I had learnt so much about local birds was gone, and my documentation probably rendered irrelevant.

It was two days before the site was declared safe, and I approached it prepared for the worst. To my amazement the birdsong was almost deafening. The resident pair of swans glided by with customary elegance; the Nankeen Night Heron "quowked" from the depths of the swamp;

White-browed Scrubwrens, Superb and Variegated Fairywrens were busy everywhere; Yellow-faced Honeyeaters chased each other; soot-covered Magpies looked more like ravens as they scavenged through the ashes; Treecreepers worked the blackened bark in search of barbecued treats; and the Azure and Sacred Kingfishers were definitely "getting on with it"! In no time I logged 42 species and hope returned.

Interestingly, the burn occurred precisely within an area of floral and faunal biodiversity being vigorously contested by environmentalists and developers. Nearby houses were spared, and the fire was contained before it could ignite a second section of native bush or the low scrub bordering the water's edge.



I could still hear the birdsong as I walked home. I tried to suppress my cynicism by concentrating on ways to record regrowth and reoccupation. Obviously my swamp will struggle for a while, but the avian resilience I had just witnessed, boded well for recovery should the area be given half a chance.

**Lois Wooding**

# Field Study Day

## Field Study Day – Columbey National Park

On Tuesday 29 September 2009, seven HBOC members visited Columbey National Park (formerly known as Uffington State Forest) which is on the Seaham – Clarencetown road. The park has extensive areas of regrowth dry woodland. Wallaroo Creek, which forms the boundary on the Clarencetown side, provides good waterholes and rainforest type vegetation in stark contrast to the dry woodland habitat.

Previous visits suggested the area might be suitable for Speckled Warblers and Buff-rumped Thornbills, two small ground-feeding birds which are scarce in the east of the Hunter Region. The Speckled Warbler is listed as vulnerable under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995.

Our group made 6 surveys for these species, mainly along Eagleton Road which runs through the centre of the park. Buff-rumped Thornbills were seen on five of the surveys and a total of ten groups were observed. Details of the habitat in which the groups were found and associations with other species of birds were recorded. However, no Speckled Warblers were located.

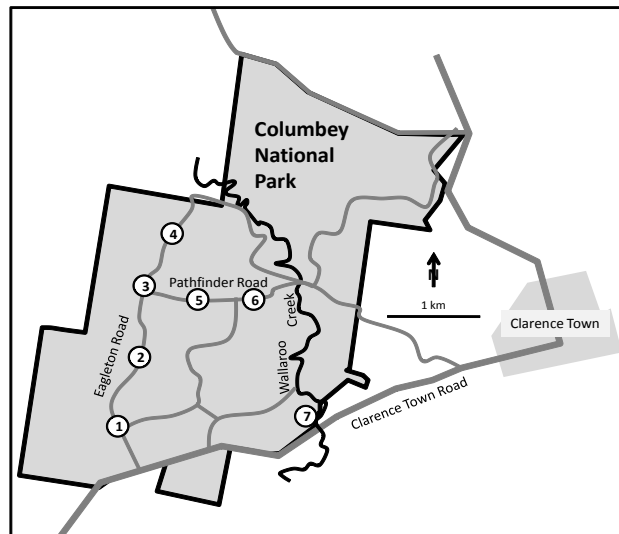
Following morning tea we conducted a general search of an area adjacent to Wallaroo Creek and found two more groups of Buff-rumped Thornbills and finally the last bird seen was a Speckled Warbler exactly where it had been seen on previous visits some years ago.

Based on the high density of groups (17 groups/km<sup>2</sup>), Columbey National Park is ideal habitat for Buff-rumped Thornbills which favour areas where there is a combination of shrub layer and bare ground with leaf litter. The challenge is to understand the difference in foraging requirements of the Speckled Warbler.

A total of 43 species were seen including a Spotted Quail-thrush, another elusive species which had been previously recorded in the park.

The concept of the Field Study Day is an evolution from the Atlas Days HBOC used to hold. In this case we went out with clear objectives to understand two scarce species. By carrying out systematic field work we were partially successful and have raised more questions which will require a return visit and some modification of our survey approach. The Birds Australia Atlas remains an important part of these studies.

**Mike Newman**



Survey Locations in Columbey National Park.



Regrowth woodland habitat in Columbey National Park - formerly Uffington State Forest, west of Clarence Town.  
Photos - Jim Smart

## Call for 2010 *Whistler* Papers

It is intended to publish two volumes of *The Whistler* during 2010. One volume will be dedicated to Threatened Species including a major article reviewing the status of the Hunter Region's threatened species. In addition there will be a normal issue of *The Whistler* with the usual mix of articles.

For both volumes we are seeking an indication of interest and potential contributors are encouraged to discuss possible articles with the Editors. In particular we wish to encourage more short papers and notes. These are easier to write and help create a diverse journal.

When contributing articles please follow the instructions to authors in *Whistler No. 2* and do not format your paper (i.e. submit in A4 format without columns or headers). However you should use the correct English and scientific names for birds and provide references according to the instructions. Your Tables and Figures should be submitted separately together with the raw data allowing the production team to standardise presentation.

**Mike Newman**  
**Harold Tarrant**  
**Joint Editors**

## Limb of Addy Camp

3-5 October 2009

Pouring rain on the coast over the October Long Weekend inhibited a few potential campers from venturing further west where the skies were overcast but the rain held off during the day. Limb of Addy, south of the Mangoola Coal Mine Project (formerly known as 'Anvil Hill'), is a few kilometres north of Denman. The woodland campsite is on private property which has been selectively logged and partly cleared in the past, but regrowth is flourishing. It is a haven for threatened and declining woodland species. Brown Treecreepers foraged on windrows of timber from past clearing efforts. Speckled Warblers, Diamond Firetails, Hooded and Red-capped Robins foraged in the leaf and bark litter strewn liberally over the ground.

Buff-rumped Thornbills' tinkling calls led us to their nest sites, carefully hidden behind exfoliating strips of bark on old trees. Eastern Yellow Robins' beautifully camouflaged cup-shaped nests positioned in the forks of trees were betrayed by the agitated adults scolding human intruders. With long lenses and remote shutter controls, some wonderful shots of the robins feeding their young were obtained. And the ultimate in simplicity – a Jacky Winter's saucer-like nest on the horizontal fork of an outer branch. Spring had sprung in the bush!

There were gentle walking trails through the woodland and beside open farmland. For the more adventurous, a steep slope scramble past caves and sandstone cliffs provided opportunities for sighting Rock Warblers and Peregrine Falcons. Woodland, dense understorey, cliffs, open grazing paddocks and farm dams provided a good variety of habitats. At least 110 species were identified.

A magic place to escape the coastal downpours and enjoy the company of like-minded birdos!

**Liz Crawford**



**Eastern Yellow Robins at nest - Lorna Mee**



# Australian Birdfair

LEETON NSW, 13-15 NOVEMBER 2009



Australia: The Land of Parrots

**The Australian Birdfair showcases our native wild birds, and the ecosystems of which they are part and dependent upon.**

**VENUE** Yanco Agricultural Institute, Leeton-Narrandera Road Trunk Road 80, Yanco (8 km south of Leeton). Shady, full equipped facilities including air-conditioned conference and seminar rooms, catering and accommodation.

**EXHIBITORS** An Invitation is extended to potential exhibitors wishing to be part of the Australian Birdfair. Please see contact details below.

#### KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Flights of Fivebough** The very popular meet and greet BBQ held at Fivebough Wetlands. Enjoy the spectacle of thousands of Glossy Ibis and Whiskered Terns come to roost together with the many thousand of other waterbirds.
- **Birdwatching Tours by TEMP**
- **Seminars and lecturers** Music, photography, art and educational seminars for school students.

#### CONTACT DETAILS

**Tracey Valenzisi, Australian Birdfair Coordinator**

**P** (02) 6953 2215 **M** 0407 262 496

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## Wetlands & Waterbirds Conference

MANAGING FOR RESILIENCE

**The Wetlands and Waterbirds Conference is organised by Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust, Charles Sturt University and the Waterbird Society.**

#### PLENARY SPEAKERS

- **Professor Max Finlayson** A wetland ecologist and past-Chair of the Ramsar Wetland Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel and past-President of Wetland International's Supervisory Council.
- **Assoc. Prof. David Paton AM** Graduate of the University of Adelaide (B Sc. Hons) and Monash University (Ph.D) has contributed to the understanding and management of Australia's natural environment for three decades.
- **Dr Chris Elphick** Assistant Professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, at the University of Connecticut.
- **Dr Iain Taylor** Vertebrate ecologist working mainly on wetlands and waterbirds, with research concentrating on the ecology and conservation of waterbirds in estuarine and inland freshwater wetlands and on the significance of rice fields as a habitat for waterbirds.

**Delegates wishing to present papers, contact Dr Iain Taylor**

**E** [itaylor@csu.edu.au](mailto:itaylor@csu.edu.au)

#### CONTACT DETAILS

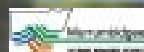
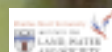
**Conference Convenor**

**E** [temp@tempmanagement.com.au](mailto:temp@tempmanagement.com.au)

**W** [www.fivebough.org.au/wetlands-and-waterbirds-conference](http://www.fivebough.org.au/wetlands-and-waterbirds-conference)



LEETON NSW, 9-12 NOVEMBER 2009



Images Peter Merritt [www.merrittimages.com](http://www.merrittimages.com)

# Observations from Club Nights August - September 2009

*These reports are not authenticated records: researchers are advised to check with the observers before citing.*

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Australasian Figbird	2	18/07/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Australasian Grebe	23	16/08/2009	Mt Arthur mine site	G Newling
Australasian Shoveler	21+	18/07/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Australasian Shoveler	20	11/08/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Australian Brush Turkey	1	9/09/2009	Millfield	R Greig
Australian Hobby	1	30/07/2009	Aberdeen	G Newling
Australian Hobby	1	30/07/2009	Bylong	G Newling
Australian Hobby	1	1-9/09/2009	Raymond Terrace	F Humphreys
Australian King Parrot	2	15/08/2009	Wyee Point	D Moon
Australian King Parrot	2	26/08/2009	Wyee Point	D Moon
Australian Pied Oystercatcher	15	10-11/08/2009	Manning River	A Stuart
Australian Reed Warbler	B	21/08/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Black Falcon	1	9/08/2009	Morpeth [over High St]	G Brosie
Brahminy Kite	1juv	30/07/2009	Sandgate	D Allen
Brown Gerygone	2	11/08/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Brown Songlark	1m	12/09/2009	Bayswater Power Stn	G Newling
Buff-banded Rail	1	15/09/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Channel-billed Cuckoo	2	1/09/2009	Cooranbong	D Moon
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	14/09/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	16/09/2009	Warners Bay	R Walker
Collared Sparrowhawk	1	4/08/2009	Wingen	G Newling
Collared Sparrowhawk	1	15/09/2009	Glenrock Homestead	A Stuart
Collared Sparrowhawk	1	16/09/2009	Mummel River junction	A Stuart
Common Blackbird	1m	20/08/2009	Charlestown [garden]	D Raine
Crimson Rosella	2	25-26/08/2009	Wyee Point	D Moon
Double-banded Plover	63	10-11/08/2009	Manning River	A Stuart
Eastern Barn Owl	1	22/07/2009	Merewether [garden]	R Nicholas
Eastern Barn Owl	1	27/07/2009	Fort Scratchley	D Allen
Eastern Barn Owl	1	5/08/2009	Toronto	L Crawford/C Herbert
Eastern Barn Owl	1	12/08/2009	Ash Island	D Allen
Eastern Barn Owl	1	5/09/2009	Eleebana	A Gooden
Eastern Barn Owl	1	28-29/09/2009	Swansea	J Adams
Eastern Curlew	17	12/08/2009	Stockton Sandspit	G Newling
Eastern Koel	1	17/09/2009	Warners Bay	R Walker
Eastern Osprey	1	6/07/2009	Teralba	L Crawford/C Herbert
Eastern Reef Egret	1+1imm	29/07/2009	Merewether [rock platform]	R Nicholas
Eastern Reef Egret	1	2/08/2009	Bar Beach [rock platform]	C Anderson
Fairy Martin	6	16/08/2009	Mt Arthur mine site	G Newling
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1	20/07/2009	Galgabba Point	G O'Connor
Glossy Black Cockatoo	2	14/08-5/09/2009	Wyee Point	V Moon
Glossy Black Cockatoo	4+1juv	6-9/09/2009	Wyee Point	V Moon
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	30	3/08/2009	Wollombi [Narone Ck Rd]	R Greig
Golden Whistler	1	8/08/2009	Wollombi [Narone Ck Rd]	R Greig
Grey Goshawk	1	18/07/2009	Edgeworth	R Boyce
Grey Goshawk	1	18/07/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Grey-crowned Babbler	2	18/08/2009	Wingen [garden]	G Newling
Hoary-headed Grebe	65	16/08/2009	Mt Arthur mine site	G Newling
Horsfield's Bushlark	3	16/08/2009	Mt Arthur mine site	G Newling
Jacana	2	8/08/2009	John Browns Lagoon	L Crawford/C Herbert

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Latham's Snipe	2	15/09/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre [Water Ribbon Pond]	P Lightfoot
Latham's Snipe	1	1-9/09/2009	Newcastle Airport	D Luck
Little Grassbird	1	18/07/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Little Grassbird	1	11/08/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Little Tern	5	10-11/08/2009	Manning River	A Stuart
Masked Lapwing	Pr + 3dy	29/07/2009	Warners Bay [Esplanade]	R Walker
Musk Duck	1f	1/06/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre [Water Ribbon Pond]	P Lightfoot
Musk Lorikeet	4	12/08/2009	Lemon Tree Passage	P Hill
Musk Lorikeet	20	5/09/2009	Eleebana	A Gooden
Noisy Pitta	1	10/08/2009	Harrington	A Stuart
Peregrine Falcon	1	30/07/2009	Near Scone	G Newling
Pheasant Coucal	1	17/09/2009	Speers Point	L Brook
Pink-eared Duck	1	1/06/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre [Brambles Pond]	P Lightfoot
Pink-eared Duck	130	29/07/2009	Morpeth [Cemetery swamp]	A Lindsey
Plumed Whistling-Duck	~75	12/08/2009	Doughboy Hollow	G Newling
Plumed Whistling-Duck	100+	13/09/2009	Doughboy Hollow	A Stuart
Red-backed Fairy-wren	3	9/09/2009	Dungog	L Mee
Red-kneed Dotterel	1	15/09/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Red-rumped Parrot	15	7/08/2009	Broadmeadow	K Peters
Regent Bowerbird	1m	13/07/2009	Minmi Regional Park	R Boyce
Regent Honeyeater	3	2/08/2009	Kitchener	D Allen
Scarlet Robin	1	13/07/2009	Tomago	G O'Connor
Spangled Drongo	1	12/07/2009	Dudley Bluff	V Moon
Spangled Drongo	1	11/08/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	2	30/07/2009	Sandy Hollow	G Newling
Spotted Harrier	2	18/07/2009	Mt Arthur mine site	G Newling
Spotted Harrier	1	12/09/2009	Bayswater Power Stn	G Newling
Spotted Quail-thrush	2	22/08/2009	Bucketty [Boree track]	R Greig
Spotted Quail-thrush	2	2/09/2009	Millfield	R Greig
Spotted Quail-thrush	10	3/09/2009	Millfield	R Greig
Spotted Quail-thrush	1	14/09/2009	Glenrock Homestead	A Stuart
Square-tailed Kite	1	10/08/2009	Crowdy Bay N P	A Stuart
Square-tailed Kite	1	4/09/2009	Crowdy Bay N P	A Stuart
Tawny Frogmouth	2	4/09/2009	Wyee Point	V Moon
Tawny Grassbird	2	18/07/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Tawny Grassbird	2	11/08/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P Lightfoot
Topknot Pigeon	15	11/08/2009	Harrington	A Stuart
Tree Martin	4	18/08/2009	Wingen [garden]	G Newling
Wedge-tailed Eagle	1	10/07/2009	Buchanan	R Boyce
Wedge-tailed Eagle	6 2on	5/08/2009	Mt Arthur mine site	G Newling
Wedge-tailed Eagle	1on	12/09/2009	Bayswater Power Stn	G Newling
White-faced Heron	1	13/07/2009	Minmi Regional Park	R Boyce
White-fronted Tern	23	10-11/08/2009	Manning River	A Stuart
White-fronted Tern	40	4-5/09/2009	Manning River	A Stuart
White-plumed Honeyeater	1	20/08/2009	Hunter Wetlands Centre	R Stewart
Wompoo Fruit-dove	1	11/08/2009	Saltwater NP	A Stuart
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	30	17/08/2009	Wollombi	R Greig
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	2	16/07/2009	Edgeworth Heights School	R Boyce
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	20	27/07/2009	Edgeworth	R Boyce
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	7	31/07/2009	Edgeworth Heights School	R Boyce

All observations offered at Club Nights are recorded in the Club's database and may be used in the Annual Bird Report. Your observations are welcome - uncommon birds and breeding records are particularly interesting.

## HBOC Activities - October to December 2009

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
<b>Wednesday 14 October</b>	<b>Club Meeting</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetlands Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: Alan Stuart – Birds of the Hunter (100 years ago)</b>
Saturday 17 October	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30 am Ash Island 8.00 am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Is Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 - Swansea
Tuesday 20 October	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Sunday 25 October	Field Outing: Hawks Nest	8.00am Tea Gardens Hotel	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Saturday/Sunday 31 October – 1 November	TWITCHATHON Join a team & help raise money for Birds Australia	4.00pm Saturday to 4.00pm Sunday for a BBQ at Hunter Wetlands Centre (\$4.50 entry)	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237
Tuesday 3 November	Midweek outing: Kilaben Bay	7.30 am western end of Kilaben Road	Garth Cooksey 4954 9620
Wednesday 4 November	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm – 10.00pm Garden Suburbs School	All members welcome
<b>Wednesday 11 November</b>	<b>Club Meeting</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetlands Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: Mike Newman - Australian Pied Oystercatchers in Southeast Tasmania – A Most Ingenious Species</b>
Saturday 14 November	Hunter Wader Survey	6.30 am Ash Island 7.00 am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Is Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 - Swansea
Tuesday 17 November	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Saturday/Sunday 22 November	Field Outing to Mogo Creek	8.00am Cessnock McDonalds	Lorna Mee 4988 6579
Tuesday 1 December	Mid-Week Outing McGregor Park & Jesmond Park	7.30am Park at end of Cambridge Drive, Rankin Park	Margaret & Keith Woods 4963 3070
Wednesday 2 December	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm – 10.00pm Garden Suburbs School	All members welcome
<b>Wednesday 9 December</b>	<b>Xmas Club Night</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetlands Centre</b>	<b>Topic: Members' Night</b> - bring your slides, anecdotes, videos and a plate to share the festive spirit
Sunday 13 December	Annual Latham's Snipe Count, Wetlands in the Lower Hunter	8.00 am Minmi Pub for Pambalong Nature Reserve; or other wetlands of your choice	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Tuesday 15 December	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	<b>Please ring to confirm</b> Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Saturday 19 December	Hunter Wader Survey	10.00 am Ash Island 10.30 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Is Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 - Swansea