



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 6/08

December 2008-January 2009

Newsletter articles welcome – contact Newsletter Editor Peter Phillips.
34 McIntyre St, Cardiff 2285
Tel: (02) 4956 9090
Fax (02) 4954 7118
juniper@hunterlink.net.au

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.
(affiliated with the Bird Observers Club of Australia)

P.O. Box 24, New Lambton, NSW 2305

Telephone: (02) 4958 5942

Website www.hboc.org.au

Email info@hboc.org.au

Committee

President: Grant Brosie
Vice-president: Paul Baird
Secretary: Tom Clarke
Treasurer: Rowley Smith

Committee Members:

Ann Lindsey
Liz Crawford
Robert MacDonald
Craig Anderson
Jack Adams
Colin Goodenough

Conservation Coordinator

Ann Lindsey

Activities Officer

Lorna Mee

Life Members

Wilma Barden(dec)
Ed Hamonet(dec)
Sue Hamonet
Alan Stuart

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*

NEWSLETTER DEADLINES FOR 2009

Edition

Feb-March 2009
April-May 2009
June-July 2009
August-Sep 2009
October –Nov. 2009
December 2009- Jan 2010

Copy Deadline

1 February 2009
29 March 2009
31 May 2009
2 August 2009
4 October 2009
29 November 2009

NEW MEMBERS

The Club wishes to extend a warm welcome to Dan Williams of New Lambton, Bruce & Lesley Hosken of Mulbring and Ian & Rita Martin of Adamstown Heights. We hope to meet you often at Club Nights and on Club Outings and Camps.

Membership Fees for 2009

\$30.00 Single and Family. \$5.00 Junior
Members may pay at Club Night or send cheque or money order payable to HBOC to PO Box 24 New Lambton 2305

Membership forms can be obtained at Club Night or by downloading from the website www.hboc.org.au

Tribute: Wilma Barden

In the passing of Wilma Barden on Friday 7th November many of us have lost a very dear friend and a companion of more than thirty years.

The importance of the role Wilma played in the formation of H.B.O.C. could not be overstated. She was a foundation member, and indeed, hers was the inspiration and drive that led to the actual birth of a bird group, at that time under the umbrella of Newcastle Flora & Fauna Society. In those early days she was the very soul of our organisation, leading outings, providing guest speakers, and insisting on the meticulous keeping of records. She was mentor to us all and we were both in awe of her abilities, and inspired by her great enthusiasm and willingness to encourage others and share the great knowledge that was hers.

Wilma was a fiercely proud Australian, and had an enormous awareness and a passionate love of the outdoors, of birds, of native plants, and of all natural things, and she was totally committed to their preservation. Sadly, all this great knowledge and drive is lost in her passing.

In 1996 HBOC celebrated its 20th anniversary. It was an occasion, quite significant in the life of our club. At that time we achieved a membership of 200, and we elected our first Life Member. Fittingly this honour was bestowed on Wilma, and she accepted the award with great pride. I know she has taken quiet satisfaction in reflecting on the growth and success we have achieved over the years of our existence. But this is only part of the legacy she has left. Her tireless devotion to her work with the Freckled Duck at the Wetland Centre, the endless hours of weeding and planting to contribute to the habitat and the welfare of the natural creatures that make a home there are also a lasting testimonial. May these contributions always be recognized and appreciated.

Our sincere condolences are extended to her daughters, Narelle, Lianne, and Vicki, and her two granddaughters, Zoë and Dakota. There are so many happy memories for them to reflect on, as there are for us, her friends. We are all better for having known such a unique and inspirational person. She will be sadly missed but lovingly remembered.

(written by Sue Hamonet)

BIRDS AT THE HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

Bird Observer Club members have been saddened by the passing of Wilma Barden, who was instrumental in founding our club and was also a dedicated worker and advocate for the Hunter Wetland Centre from its earliest days. Other members can tell the full story of her contributions but our most recent encounter with Wilma was when we took over recording the monthly and annual reports of bird sightings at the Wetlands Centre.

For many years Wilma and others conducted comprehensive surveys of birds at the Hunter Wetlands Centre. Wilma then compiled monthly and annual records which go back to 1998. This brief summary of the results of her surveys is dedicated to the work of Wilma.

Each year a total of over 130 birds were recorded at the Centre. Thirty-one species were observed breeding in 2007, including five different species of ducks, four egrets, a Tawny Frogmouth and a Dollarbird. In previous years Brown Quail, Wandering Whistling Duck, Brown Goshawk, Buff Banded Rail and Red-rumped Parrot have been recorded as breeding.

Some of the more interesting sightings have been a Black Necked Stork in 2004 and a Barn Owl in 2005. Last year a Little Friarbird and a Little Lorikeet were observed for the first time, so we are always adding to our list of species observed.

A more detailed analysis of Wilma's records will be an interesting future project.

Shortly before her death Wilma handed the written and computer records over to us and we are very anxious to continue this record keeping. We already have some people such as Paddy Lightfoot, Diane Rogers, Ann Lindsey and Geoff Nicholls who help us maintain records, but we would like to enlist help from others.

and enjoyed lots of birdcalls. 38 species seen plus 10 heard only.

(Birds at Hunter Wetlands Centre (cont'd))

We are particularly interested in sightings of waders, raptors, honeyeaters and crakes and rails, and also in observations of breeding and nest building.

There are several ways which you can help us by reporting sightings by:

- Having your observations recorded by HBOC in their newsletter (we check in each issue)
- Notifying us directly by email rstewart@netcall.com.au or ph 49632029
- Taking an observation sheet for 2009 on which you record your sightings and return it to us at the end of the year. Although the sheet allows for monthly records there is no need to survey every month. You are always guaranteed a good day's birding when you visit the Wetlands Centre. So if you are willing to take an observation sheet contact us by email or phone.

Contact: Robert & Margaret Stewart

PROGRAM NOTES

- Wader Surveys: (from October) The Waders are back (lots of flags).
- Twitchathon – success financially, publicity-wise and in the various races– see many articles below
- Hunter Catchment Day. Big family turnout at the Wetland Centre with Alan Stuart & Paul Baird kept busy organising kids and telescopes.
- Outing to Bengalla. 40+ people attended first ever Bird Day held at Bengalla. HBOC members helped with identification and other birding skills
- Midweek Outing to Seahampton – 22 members walked the section of old railway

Values in Earlier Times

from Alan Stuart

Lately I've been searching through back issues of The Emu looking for old records for the Hunter Region. During my searching, I came upon an article about Painted Honeyeaters which is reproduced below. It appeared in the 1915 issue of the journal and its publication aroused no discussion in any subsequent issues so far as I can tell. In other words, what happened was fully in line with people's values at that time. Below is the article, which was written by Thomas Austin of Cobbora NSW in October 1914. Some things have improved with time!

Painted Honeyeaters. *While riding through one of the paddocks of the Cobborah Estate, on 24th September 1914, I saw a pair of Painted Honeyeaters [also, he cites the then scientific name] fly into a pine-tree, and then into two other pine-trees. In the third tree was their nest, on to which both birds went for a few seconds, one after the other; then both flew away. The nest appeared to be practically completed, so I visited the tree again on the 27th. For a few minutes I could see neither nest nor bird, and was just starting to ride away when the male appeared, and went to the nest for about one second, then flew off. I sat down about 10 yards from the tree, in a position where I had as good a view of the nest as I could possibly get. After watching it for a few minutes I thought I saw that something moved on it, and upon closer inspection there seemed to be a bird sitting in the nest. I started to climb the tree, and when I was within about 10 feet of the nest the female bird hopped off, but did not fly away. She came a little closer, had a good look at me, and went back on to the nest. Then the male appeared and fed her (that, evidently, is what he was doing when I saw him go to the nest at first). The nest was at the extreme end of a thin branch, so I had to scoop the eggs. While I was doing this the birds were hopping about, sometimes in the nesting-tree, but mostly in a dead box-tree a few feet away. Both birds uttered a peculiar, plaintive kind of whistle the whole time. I cut off the branch containing the nest. I shot both birds, and*

when skinning them found the stomachs full of mistletoe berries.

Ground truthing survey of Hexham Swamp and Ash Island

from Ann Lindsey

An Australia-wide aerial survey of waterbirds was conducted in October and November 2008 and HBOC was asked to do a land-based ground truthing survey so that numbers and species seen from the air could be verified. The surveys were led by John Porter and Richard Kingsford from the University of NSW.

The project will provide valuable information on the total Australian population estimates for waterbirds and provide critical information on the importance of wetlands.

Eleven members of HBOC participated in surveys of Hexham Swamp and Ash Island on the 2nd November, one day before the aerial survey. Lorna Mee and Joy Nichols covered Pambalong Nature Reserve and the wetlands nearby; Mike Newman and Steven Cox started at the southern end of the old railway line which crosses Hexham Swamp and met up with Harold Tarrant and Neil Fraser who started at the northern end. Ann Lindsey, Neville McNaughton, Jude Westphal, Lois Wooding and Pam Durie walked a part of the water pipeline on the eastern side of Hexham Swamp and later surveyed Ash Island.

The weather was perfect and Hexham Swamp was covered in water. In all 68 species were seen, the majority being wetland birds. Highlights included 263 Black Swans some with cygnets and active nests, 831 Pacific Black Ducks, 905 Grey Teal, 353 Chestnut Teal, 81 White-necked Herons, 297 Cattle Egrets, 103 Glossy Ibis, 3 Australasian Bitterns were heard, 70 Whiskered Terns. Several species of waders were present including 149 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 2 Red-necked Stints, 1 Bar-tailed Godwit, 3 Latham's Snipe, 169 Masked Lapwings and 2,718 Black-winged Stilts. One Spotted Crake was seen and one Spotless Crake was heard. Hexham Swamp always has a number of raptors and 7 species including 1 Black Falcon were present.

Of course, we were unable to see all of the Swamp from the survey points and many birds would have been missed. Ash Island yielded 250 Chestnut Teal, 220 Grey Teal, 131 Black-winged Stilts, 10 Common Greenshanks, 8 Marsh Sandpipers amongst others. The results of the survey will be passed on to the Shorebirds 2020 Project and the University of New South Wales.

It is always a delight when so many HBOC members heed the call and turn out in all weathers to take part in population surveys.

Many thanks to all participants.

TWITCHATHON 2008 - RESULTS

This years NSW & ACT Twitchathon (run by Birds Australia) was preceded by a showing of "Chasing Birds" on the ABC which generated great interest and renewed rivalry between the usual suspects. The follow-up publicity was good with the Hunter Thickheads scoring a terrific photo in Saturday's Newcastle Herald. In total 42 teams containing 124 participants raised up to \$18,000 for two good causes including HBOCs Mangrove Removal Project at Milham Pond (Ash Island)

Local Teams did very well as usual.

1st in the main race with an incredible 237 species were the Hunter Home Brewers (their third win in a row) with (menacingly close on their heels) the Menacing Monarchs with 236. The Woodswallows were whacked-out on 225 (4th) and our Dodgy Drongos were fifth on 223. There was a time when 200 was an impossible target. Now talk is of 240 (10 per hour) as the new standard. The Hunter Thickheads scored a handy 193 but did this by confining themselves to the Hunter and minimising their impact on the planet's diminishing oil supplies.

Lorna Mee & Paul Baird (Crested Shrike Twits) won the champagne race in bubbly style with 164 species and a good nights sleep

Prizes and final results at HBOC Xmas Club Night.

PS –The CHASING BIRDS DVD may now be in HBOC Library

Tab’ were mooted before the Brewers embarked on the ‘Dummy Run’. Cracker’s Disco was held on the Friday night, with the Brewer’s voting their Top 10

And now a few modest words.....

Twitchathon 2008 – The ABC of Good Brewing
from Jacqueline Winter

October 2008 and the calendar was gravitating heavily towards the annual NSW / ACT Twitchathon. The lead-up to the 2008 event was punctuated by the screening of “Chasing Birds” on ABC TV – a film that documented 3 teams and the goings-on during the 2003 Twitchathon. Mick Brew had endured a string of ABC radio interviews in the days preceding the show though this didn’t prevent him from carrying out some ‘good oil gathering’ in the preparation for the Hunter Home Brewers title defence.

“Chasing Birds” screened the Thursday evening before the 2008 Twitch. Around 8 hours after the show had ended the Brewers were on the road, headed for the same locations they had just watched themselves running around on national television – *generally* the same locations anyway. Perhaps it was the humiliation of being done over like a Barking Owl’s breakfast on national television that spurred them on this year? More likely it was the sniff of a 3rd consecutive victory, aspiring to join the now legendary ‘Grey Toilet Thrushes’ and sparring partners, the ‘Whacked Out Woodswallows’, as teams to have achieved the elusive hat trick of wins.

Following mid-year threats of changing their now tried and tested route, the boys decided that if they did actually get the hat trick, that they would agree to try something different in 2009. Besides, there was a reasonable amount of face to be saved after seeing the cringe-worthy complacency of lying around in a park in the 2003 silver-screened affair in which they were monstered by the Woodswallows, as well as being beaten by local doyens, the Hunter Thickheads. The bottom line was that it was simply too tempting not to head back onto the same route, especially in light of the ruthless efficiency they had now built upon with this run.

And so it was, Mick, Steve, Ando and Grena Brew piled into Larry Landcruiser and were Gunners-bound early on the Friday morn. Eric the Esky was primed and the predictions in the annual ‘Twitch

Twitch moments to celebrate their 10th campaign this year. They will be pleased to explain what these are in person.

Come 2:59pm Saturday and 3 of the Brewers were locked onto a perched Red-winged Parrot, which soon thereafter became Bird No. 1, keeping the Twitch Tab bookies happy. A new record was set at their starting point this year, with a total of 51 seconds spent there. They all agreed that this was highly inefficient birding and jumped quickly into the vehicle to get to the next location. Spotted Harrier and Plum-headed Finches were welcome accomplices to the customary White-winged Fairy-Wrens and Singing Bushlarks on their next tick session.

Their key woodland site was red-hot and Turquoise Parrot, Speckled Warbler, Diamond Firetail, Inland Thornbill, Brown Treecreeper, Crested Shrike-tit and Hooded Robins (the latter feeding dependant young) were all seen. The Scissors Grinder that they somehow missed in 2007 was also added to the list along with a Black Falcon that did a very timely flyover. A Little Eagle also soared overhead, the 5th of what was to be a great haul of raptors for the lads this year. Blue Bonnets were mopped up en-route to the Southern Whiteface site where the pre-brewed White-eared Honeyeater was also seen – the first time they had found this bird since their first Twitch in '99. Of greater concern was the lack of Common Bronzewing and this was commented on literally seconds before Grena Brew alerted them all to a barrelling bronzy weaving its way through the trees.

Zebbs presented themselves up as the 100th bird before heading to their first wetland site where a flurry of new birds was seen, though nothing of crippling magnitude. Down in the creek the resident Blackbird was conspicuous by its absence but Azure Kingfisher and White-backed Swallow eased the pain a little. The Black-eared Cuckoo seen the day before was alas a no-show. The Brewers then made a twilight dash into the Gunners poo-ponds to try and find the Freckled and Blue-billed Ducks seen there a week earlier by a certain oil baron. It was a dip, but Pink-eareds were still a very handy tick.

The Breeza Plains did not produce their customary nocturnal trio this year, although joining the Barn Owl were a Nankeen Night Heron and remarkably a Black-tailed Native-hen, spotlighted being flushed from the table drain. An executive decision had been made to eat earlier than normal this year and Quirindi's 'Bleached Possum' Chinese restaurant provided the boys with a right-royal take-away shandy that went down a treat and which was to accompany them in some form or another for the remainder of the Twitch. Edging closer to their camp, the same punctual Masked Owl obliged by being perched in the same fork, same tree as it was in 2007 – this bird was keen to be brewed.

Just 5km short of their camp, Larry Landcruiser struck the Brewers a blow with a flat-tyre. This was actually a tick for Larry and Toyota manuals sprung forth out of the glove box, making for a painfully slow pit-stop – they couldn't even manage a Boobook call during the time spent changing the tyre. On their way again and following a Tawny Frogmouth gratefully mopped in the campground, the brewing team rested for the remainder of the night with 129 on the notebook scoreboard.

The rainforest dawn chorus was a bounty of new birds as it always is. Soon however, a high-pitched whistling call was one that they didn't recognise and it seemed to be coming from Larry Landcruiser; indeed it was another leaking tyre. This was a potential tragedy as a second flat tyre, stuck in the rainforest, could have been disastrous and without time to bird their key rainforest site they had no choice but to make like a tree and get outta there. Whilst they rallied, a female Paradise Riflebird seen feeding in a tall shrub above them was some consolation (especially for tick-happy Ando Brew!) but they had to count their losses and head for Dungog to fill this deflating tyre and pray to the brewing gods that it would be a gradual leak and not a second flat.

As it turned out, it was to be a slow leak and they were able to brew-on. There was a lot of pressure now placed on the rainforest back-up sites – far more than was in any of Larry's Twitch-weary tyres! Fortunately these spots came through with some great birds such as Regent Bowerbird, Catbird, Wompoo, White-headed Pigeon and Cicadabird.

Downward through the valley they continued, armed with 174 species just as 8am clicked over. It was decided to visit one of their woodland sites en-route to the Hunter Estuary, where they needed to be for the high tide. The woodland was generally quiet but it did produce Black-chinned Honeyeater and White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike. Some very good oil nearby also produced New Holland, Blue-faced Honeyeaters and the mop of the twitch in the form of a pair of Blackbirds in a backyard.

A quick scan of Hexham Swamp produced White-necked Heron and 3 new raptor species before it was time to hit the estuary on-tide. A lone Yellow-tailed Black-Cocky flying along Cormorant Drive was an unconventional tick – a great mop, bringing veritable pandemonium to the fore. The estuary was looking good and at 10:15am they notched up their 200th bird (Mangrove Gerygone) before heading over Stockton Bridge. Peering nervously from the bridge towards the sandspit, it looked promising – there were bulk birds present. Before working the spit, Grey-tailed Tattlers, Tereks and Golden Plovers were

ticked from their respective locations. An Eastern Osprey was the first maiden bird for 2008 and a flock of Needletails zooming down Stockton Beach were a very welcome sight. Half a dozen wader species were present on the sandspit along with Caspian and Gull-billed Terns plus a Pied Oyk. After writing-off dips such as Blackwit and Great Knot it was time to leave Stocko and head for the big city.

Scoping from a new coastal location in Newcastle provided them with what they could have reasonably expected such as Sooty Oyk, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Tern and, eventually, a Gannet. Although there were lots of Shearwaters working the inshore waters they were all the usual **Wedge-tailed**. They left here just before midday, perched on 220 species and with 4 hours up their sleeve. It was then time to roll the Ash Island dice to see what they could find.

Red-kneed Dotterel was the first new bird – a good start. Then followed Little and Tawny Grassbirds and the obligatory White-fronted Chats. Sharp-tailed and Marsh Sandpipers were found as well as Greenshank.

Ash had come through with the goods and at the all-important time of ten-to-one with 227 under their belt, it was time to begin the great brewer's mop-up.

First stop was the now famous Green Wattle Road (where the 3 teams had converged on "Chasing Birds"). This was to be a very productive visit as they picked up some great birds such as Painted Button-Quail, Varied Sitella and their second maiden bird for 2008 in a Pacific Baza. Then followed an early Maggie Goose at Seaham, Geoffrey (Mallard) at The Terrace and Musk Duck on the Brewer's first ever visit to Grahamstown Dam. A Grey Goshawk near the botanic gardens brought a tumultuous applause from the Brewers and this was their 15th raptor for the twitch.

The Goshawk took them to 236 with which they arrived at the Wetlands Centre. With the goose already in the bag, there were no 'dead certs' here. They couldn't even find what was to be their biggest dip, a Black-fronted Dotterel and nor could a Latham's Snipe be found. They only managed one species from the final location, Wandering Whistling Duck, and so moved to 237 which was their final tally – one less than last year's record total.

Mick Brew collected the lists from the various teams and soon it was revealed that the Brewers had gotten up – just. They had pipped the Menacing Monarchs by one single bird. A new outfit, the Rampaging Raptors came in with an impressive debut of 226, just pipping out the Woodswallows on 225 who were well down on last year's score. Those Dodgy Drongoes nearly matched them on 223 and it is a testament to the contemporary competition that a score of 223 only gets you to 5th place.

'Relief' was certainly the operative word for the Brewers and all agreed (Eric included) that the recovery after the near-tragedy in the rainforest was fine brewing and worthy of celebration. Over a couple of hard-earned brews they resolved to start thinking of where to commence the 2009 crusade – the emphasis being on "thinking". There are many options on the brewing table but rest assured that the lads will be out there somewhere in NSW on the last weekend in October doing what they do best – chasing birds.

Jacqueline Winter

Not only, but also.....

Twitchathon 2008:

The Menacing Monarchs' second year.

from Robert MacDonald

After the success of last year the Monarchs decided not to make too many radical changes just a bit of re-shuffling here and there. As we did last year we decided to head to our starting location a few days early and just take it easy and enjoy bird watching the areas we will use for the race. Despite the lack of water at the Macquarie Marshes there seemed to be even more birds than last year, even if most of them were Woodswallows. The major surprise was when we found an area which had quite a number of Pied Honeyeaters in it, and also finding Plum-headed finches in a number of places. On the day before the race after looking at many Red-rumped parrots we finally found a Mulga Parrot, Michael doubted they existed in the marshes.

On the day of the race we had our pre-race ice cream and filled the car up with petrol, half an hour before the start, we started to wander around the starting spot. We hoped to find some White-browed Babblers and stick with them to the start of the race, unfortunately this did not occur so our first bird was Hooded Robin. By the time we left this site we had already reached 31 species, including birds such as Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Southern Whiteface, Spotted Bowerbird, Crested Bellbird, Little Button-quail, Budgie, Crimson Chat, Plum-headed Finch, Diamond Dove and Masked and White-browed Woodswallows.

The next stop was to try and see the Black-chinned Honeyeater and while waiting there we saw Plum-headed Finch and Budgie again (never any doubt for either species), we eventually heard the Black-chinned Honeyeater. Next stop was the area we had the Pied Honeyeaters earlier; we had barely stopped the car and they were calling. A small dam we had stopped at earlier that day and had the 2 common species of Dotterel proved to be very successful with a pair of Black-tailed Native-hens sitting there. The spot for the Banded Lapwings was next and, yes, they were still in that paddock.

Then it was on to the Painted Button-quail spot which was also successful as was the Brown Quail spot which also had White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike at it. The final designated spot was for the Singing Bushlark which did not disappoint and showed up right on cue. By the time we got to Willies Retreat we had seen 81 species these included Red-winged Parrot, Ground Cuckoo-shrike, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Mallee Ringneck and Emu.

When we reached Willie's we raced to see the 300+ Plumed Whistling-duck we had seen earlier that day and as I pulled up at the dam there were none to be seen and we had just wasted 20min on a dip. Next stop was the reed beds at Monkeygar Creek where we found a pair of Black Falcons, Yellow-billed Spoonbills and Black-faced Woodswallows. We then decided to head along Gibson Way and see if we could pick up some of the species we had already missed and, with little luck, we only found a few- with the highlight being Mulga Parrot. Also we ticked Western Gerygone, Pallid Cuckoo and Rufous Whistler. By the time it was dark we had seen a total of 105 species so far.

With the new time restrictions at night we did not dash back to the other side of the marshes in hope of finding a Barking Owl. On our drive to Copeland we identified Southern Boobook, Barn Owl and Tawny Frogmouth along the way. During our mandatory three hour non-driving period a Sooty Owl called and mid snore I yelled out "Sooty Owl" as did Michael as he was awake because of my snoring. He woke me up properly so I could confirm the call as it was still calling.

The second day started with most of the birds we expected to find at Copeland being there, the main ones we could not find was Pale-yellow Robin and Large-billed Scrubwren, which we also missed at Harrington later. We did find the rarer species of the area: Spectacled Monarch, Noisy Pitta, Regent Bowerbird, Russet-tailed and Bassian Thrush, Wompoo Fruit-dove and Logrunner. At Harrington we missed the Varied Triller, but did pick up some waders across at Manning Point we also saw a Brahminy Kite and Osprey. Although the heath at Crowdy Bay was disappointing, we did find a Forest Raven. We left the northern areas with 186 species.

Next came the quick dash south to make up time and clean up the wetland and eastern woodland areas.

Our first woodland area proved good as it was mainly to find Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, the second woodland area helped us clean a couple of extra woodland species. Next we drove to Grahamstown dam and found the Great-crested and Hoary-headed Grebes and Musk Duck. We then headed to Stockton Sandspit which proved rather disappointing although we did have some good waders there - just not as good as last year.

We then headed in to Newcastle baths. The drive in took twice as long as usual and we could not find a Sooty Oystercatcher anywhere and there were no extra seabirds to be found; we did however find a Common Tern and a Ruddy Turnstone. Next we decided to head towards Awabakal. When we had been driving for about 20min and are not even halfway there we decided to cut our losses and head for Ash Island, at that point we heard a Common Koel which we thought we may dip on. We had seen 219 species at this stage with about an hour and a half left.

We then quickly called in to Newcastle Wetlands Reserve picking up 3 more species, and filled up with petrol. We then headed off to Ash Island, which was much kinder to us than Stockton Sandspit, we saw 3 species of wader there and picked up European Goldfinch and Buff-banded Rail. Next out to Pambalong and Hexham swamps where we were pleasantly surprised to see Whiskered Terns flying around. From there we drove back through Minmi picking Long-billed Corella.

When we got to the Wetland Centre we were on 232 one short of last years total with 20min to go. As we got out of the car we heard a bird we would have been embarrassed to miss - Striated Pardalote. We then headed into the Wetlands Centre and picked up the other 3 species leaving us with the great total of 236. Unfortunately this left us one behind the winners. Congratulations Brewers.

Robert McDonald
Head Monarch

Australasian Bittern and Australasian Little Bittern Survey 16th November 2008 and the week succeeding that date.

from Lorna Mee

A Birds Australia survey was promoted and developed by Andrew Silcocks. HBOC undertook the survey between 16th November and the week succeeding that date. Expert opinion and anecdotal evidence from birdwatchers have identified that the population of Bittern seems to be declining and its range contracting.

In order to understand the current status of both Australasian Bittern and Australasian Little Bittern, a survey program was established. The aim of the survey is to obtain data to develop an estimate of the population.

General method of survey was used as follows:

- After arriving at the wetland, allow a little time for the Bittern to become less wary.
- Become familiar with the Bittern calls.
- Listening surveys should be at least 30 minutes.
- Bitterns are most likely to be seen when flushed.
- There is a possibility of flushing a Bittern when walking a transect.
- Surveys should begin mid October and continue until March.
- The best time to hear booming males is 2 hours around dawn.
- The next best time is 2 hours around sunset.

Weather conditions affect “booming” with optimum conditions on warm calm conditions. Cold or windy conditions make it more difficult to hear and they call less.

The water level of a wetland is important, typically 30cm deep with a combination of tall reeds or similar vegetation for shelter with shorter vegetation into which foraging birds may venture. Phragmites and Typha, and shorter vegetation, Baumea, Juncus and Bolboschoenus.

There is almost nothing known of the courtship, breeding, and social behaviour, any information collected is important.

Historically **Australasian Little Bittern** has been sparsely reported. In 1984, nine birds were reported at a dam near Moruya, then mostly in ones at Casino, Lake Brewster, Riverina, Deep Creek, Narrabeen Lake, Penrith lakes & Dareton. In 1986, twenty birds were seen on the one day at a swamp near Gunbar in the South West of the State. (State Annual report)

One or two birds have been reported in the Hunter Region over the past 20 years: TWC and NWR (1994), TWC(2004),Bolwarra and Hexham Swamp(2006),Walka Waterworks (2007). (HBOC Annual report)

Australasian Bittern has been reported more frequently at least 4-5 different sightings in various wetlands in the Hunter for most years.

In *The Barham District, An Historical summary 1930-1999*, Little Bittern was not considered rare but very hard to flush, due to its practise of the “frozen stance”.

A number of nests always in Cumbungi, were found over the years, with 5 eggs in a typical clutch. The species seems to be a late nester, most nests found in December to January, unlike Australasian Bittern which seems to “boom” and breed in September to October. (excerpt from “Birds of the Barham District” by Peter Disher)

Anecdotal information from 1959 indicates that there was a known “Little Bittern” site at Walka Waterworks when it was operating as a power station.

Results of the survey:

6 people participated from HBOC.

- Walka Water Works. No Bitterns sighted or heard.
- Hexham Swamp. No Bittern sighted, birds heard on survey in previous week.
- Ash Island. No birds sighted or heard.
- Tomago Wetlands-Australasian Bittern heard on weekend of survey, 2 birds seen in week succeeding survey.
- Hunter Wetlands Centre. No bitterns heard or sighted on survey

Thank you to those people who assisted and participated in the survey. Our survey techniques will improve and our knowledge of the birds will increase with future surveys.

SIGHTINGS WANTED - BANDED OSPREY on the Coast of NSW

In all, ten birds have been banded on the MNC since 2005, and birdwatchers are vigorously encouraged to report sightings of any banded Osprey to Tony Bischoff on 02 6582 5055

(email <mailto:gcbabbler@optusnet.com.au>), Dave Whitfield on 02 6585 5852 or Andy Marshall at NPWS 02 6588 5505.

Observers need to CAREFULLY record the band colours, which leg each band is on, and which colour is on top or bottom. There are three bands on each bird, and with a limited number of colours available, it is critical to record the combination EXACTLY. Greg Clancy has also banded many more birds on the Far North Coast in a similar way – two of which have already been recorded on the Mid North Coast and one live bird 714km from the place of banding.

Your assistance in helping to monitor Osprey survival and dispersal is greatly appreciated.

Tony Bischoff
45 Hart Street
Lighthouse Beach NSW 2444



Banded Osprey 04 Sept 2008 - photos by Tony Bischoff

The Osprey banding project was introduced on the Mid North Coast of NSW in 2005 by DECC – NSW NPWS. The project was commenced in response to a lack of information regarding dispersal details of fledged young from their natal area. The Mid North Coast Region of NSW supports the most southerly significant breeding population of Ospreys on the eastern coast of Australia; hence the study of a species at the edge of its distribution range may provide critical data for this threatened species.



Osprey nest 04 Sept 2008 –photo by Tony Bischoff
OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT AUG/SEP 2008

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT OCT/NOV 2008

2008				
Aug 18	Wandering Whistling Duck	50+	N'cle Wetland Reserve	T.Clarke
	Australasian Shoveler	5	Shortland [Golf Course Dam]	“
Aug 26	Swamp Harrier	1	Munibung Hill	“
Aug 29	Blue-faced Honeyeater	4	Wallsend [garden]	“
	Large-billed Scrubwren	2	Martinsville	“
Sep 10	Brown Goshawk	2	Munibung Hill	“
Sep 14	Buff-banded Rail	2	Stockton Sandspit	T.Clarke
	White-throated Gerygone	1	“	“
Sep 28	Eastern Osprey	1	“	“
Sep 30	Rufous Fantail	1	Floraville Reserve	“
	Black-faced Monarch	1	“	“
	Crested Shrike-tit	1	“	“
Sep 29	Pied Currawong	Pr =2dy	Shortland [garden]	A.Lindsey
	Common Greenshank	22	Ash Island [Area E]	“
	Red-kneed Dotterel	16	Kooragang Is. [Sharpies Flat]	“
Sep 6	Torresian Crow	2	Luskintyre [Sth of Hunter R.]	C.Anderson
Sep	Regent Bowerbird	1	Morpeth Common	G.Brosie
Oct 7	Baillon's Crake	1	“	“
	Topknot Pigeon	3	“	“
	Banded Lapwing	6	Phoenix Park	“
	Singing Bushlark	1	Bolwarra	“
	Shining Bronze-cuckoo	1	Kurri Kurri	“
	Tawny Frogmouth	2	Morpeth Common	“
Oct 4	Blue-faced Honeyeater	4	Pelican	C.Anderson
Oct 11	Grey Goshawk	2	Blue Gum Reserve	M.Fisher
Oct 12	White-bellies Sea-eagle	1	Teralba [Cockle Creek]	C.Mann
	Whistling Kite	1	“	“
	Black-shouldered Kite	1	“	“
	Striated Heron	1	“	“
Oct 14	Wandering Whistling Duck	40+	H.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	6	“	“
	White-throated Gerygone	1	“	“
Oct 6	Rufous Songlark	2	Wingen	G.Newling
Oct 9	Brown Goshawk	1	“	“
Oct 6	Dollarbird	1	“	“
Oct 5	Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	“	“
Oct 6	Fairy Martin	~30	“	“
Oct 9	Rufous Songlark	Many	Moobi [West of Scone]	“
	Brown Songlark	2	“	“
Oct 8	Blue-faced Honeyeater	Pr n2y	Edgeworth [garden]	L.Walker
Oct 8	Brown Quail	1	Kotara [garden]	J.Nicholls
Oct 6	Pheasant Coucal	1	Jerrys Plains	“
Sep 16	Little Black Cormorant	30	Fennel Bay	C.Goodenough
Sep 29	Spangled Drongo	1	H.W.C.	“
Oct 3	Little Black Cormorant	30	Dora Creek	“
Oct 7	Channel-billed cuckoo	1	Newcastle West	“
Oct 8	Black-tailed Native Hen	2	Martindale	H.Tarrant
	Painted Honeyeater	2	“	“
	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	1	“	“
	Diamond Firetail	3+	Doyles Creek	“
	Spotted Harrier	1imm	Yarrawa	“
Oct 1	Satin Flycatcher	Pr	Vacy	“
	Brown Songlark		Bureen	“
	Rufous Songlark	C	“	“
	Rainbow Bee-eater	1	“	“
	Sacred Kingfisher		Martindale Creek	“
Oct 29	Turquoise Parrot	3	Aberdeen [off Blairmore Lane]	M.Hamonet
Oct 19	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2	Golf Course	R.Walker
Oct 1	Leaden Flycatcher	Pr	Cromarty Bay	M.Evans

Oct 1	Black-fronted Dotterel	2	Cromarty Bay	M Evans
Sep 25	Black-faced Monarch	1	Corlette Point [Corlette]	“
Sep 30	Tawny Frogmouth	1nest	Merewether	J.Maidment
Oct 23	Noisy Miner	3nest	“	“
Oct 13	Australian Raven	1nest	“	“
Oct 15	Grey Butcherbird	2+n2y	Newcastle University	C. & R.Goodenough
Oct 22	Grey-crowned Babbler	6	Kitchener	“
	Aust. Spotted Crake	1	Dora Creek	“
Oct 31	Australian Raven	2+2dy	Glendale	“
Nov 1	Buff-banded Rail	2	Dora Creek	“
Nov 12	Eastern Koel	1	Kitchener	“
Oct 16	Latham's Snipe	10	Winding Creek	T.Clarke
Oct 27	Little Penguin	1	Boondelbah Is.	“
	Gould's Petrel	6	“	“
	Tawny Grassbird	Heard	“	“
	Peregrine Falcon	2	“	“
Nov 8	Figbird	3	Wallsend [garden]	“
Oct 15	Swamp Harrier	1	Stockton Sandspit	“
	Australian Hobby	1	“	“
Oct 26	Striated Heron	4	“	“
Oct 12	Brahminy Kite	1	“	“
	Eastern Osprey	1	“	“
Oct 14	Crested Shrike-tit	1	Floraville Reserve	“
Oct 31	Red-chested Button-quail	1	Wingen [garden]	G.Newling
Nov 2	Peregrine Falcon	1	“	“
	Noisy Friarbird	Pr + 3fy	“	“
	Australian Magpie	Pr + 2fy	“	“
	Magpie-lark	Pr + n3y	“	“
Oct 9	Wood Sandpiper	1	Pokolbin [opp. H.V.Gardens]	A.Richardson
Nov 12	Little Tern	2	Newcastle Ocean Baths	H.H.Brewers
Oct 20	Banded Lapeing	13	Morpeth	“
Oct 26	Eastern Osprey	1	Stockton Sandspit	“
	Pacific Baza	1	Green Wattle Ck.	“
Nov 10	Plumed Whistling Duck	2	North Bellbird	“
Nov 12	Ruddy Turnstone	9	Newcastle Ocean Baths	“
Oct 25	Masked Owl	1	Nr. Gresford	“
Nov 12	Grey Goshawk	1	Teralba	G.Tong
Oct	Brown Goshawk	1	Green Point	“
	Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	“	“
Nov 12	Crested Pigeon	2	Shortland [garden]	A.Lindsey
Oct	Pied Currawong	2+2fy	“	“
Nov 9	White-faced Heron	50	Tarro Wetlands	R.Smith
	Pacific Heron	15	“	“
Nov 11	Eastern Osprey	1	Stockton Sandspit	D.Allen
Nov 7	Pied Oystercatcher	2	“	“
Nov 7	Dollarbird	1	Edgeworth [garden]	R.Boyce
Nov 8	Willie Wagtail	5	“	“
Nov 9	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	1	“	“
	Magpie-lark	2nest	“	“
Nov 10	Eastern Koel	1	“	“
	Blue-faced Honeyeater	1	“	“
Nov 11	Eastern Whipbird	2	Gateshead	“
Nov 1	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2	Hillsborough	H.Boyce
Nov 4	Swamp Harrier	1	Shortland	“
Nov 6	Grey-tailed Tattler	2	Winda Woppa	T.Clarke
	Little Black Cormorant	50+	“	“
	Sooty Oystercatcher	2	“	“
Nov 11	Satin Bowerbird	1	Wallsend [garden]	“
Oct 15	White-throated Needletail	4	Woodville	M.Newman

Oct 20	Topknot Pigeon	40	Paterson River	M Newman
Nov 11	Painted Button-quail	1	Martins Creek	M.Newman
	White-winged Triller	2	“	“
Nov 6	Grey Goshawk	3	Green Wattle Creek	“
Oct 8	Black-tailed Native-Hen	2	Martindale	H.Tarrant
	Painted Honeyeater	2	“	“
	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	1	“	“
	Diamond Firetail	3+	“	“
	Spotted Harrier	1imm	“	“
Oct/Nov	Striped Honeyeater	Nest	Bolwarra [garden]	“
Nov 9	Blue-faced Honeyeater	1imm	“	“
Nov 1	Australian Hobby	1 ndy	Vacy	“
Oct/Nov	Rufous Songlark	Several	Maitland	“
Nov 8	Brown Songlark	1	Largs	“
Oct 6	White-winged Triller	1	Walka Water Works	“
Nov 2	White-winged Triller	1	Doyles Creek	“
Nov	Hoary-headed Grebe	6	Walka Water Works	“
Nov 2	Black Falcon	1	Hexham Swamp	“
Nov 6	Black Falcon	1	Bureen	“

Midweek Outing 2 December, 2008

Hunter Wetlands

Judi Thomas

The last of our successful series of midweek outings for 2008 was held at the Hunter Wetlands. Twenty four enthusiastic regulars and one new member met at the entrance at 7.30am in fine warm weather. We had arranged for early entry as the usual opening time is 10am: far too late to observe early morning bird activity.

For our first walk we hurried past the ponds to avoid their distraction, and headed towards the rainforest. We were rewarded with a special sighting of 2 adult Buff-banded Rail with their immature young. The four were together in grasses in the creek bed so we were able to watch them for some time; unlike the usual sighting when they quickly disappear. The December outing was chosen to coincide with the expected nesting of Cattle, Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets and as we walked on we noticed young egrets in many nests. The usual Australian White Ibis nests remained in amongst the Egret nests. In the same area we observed several Nankeen Night Herons and quite a few Whistling Kites roosting or flying overhead. Plenty of easy prey for them! By the time we returned to the Visitor's Centre for morning tea we already had a growing list of observations including Rufous Whistler and Rufous Fantail.

From our morning tea tables we could see turtles on the bank and a Willy Wagtail's nest with three quite large young being fed by an adult Wagtail. After morning tea some of the group remained around the ponds to observe the water birds while the more energetic dared to cross a very busy road to the wetlands opposite. On arrival we disturbed one Latham's Snipe but were unable to find others. There were many nests of cormorants; Pied, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants plus some Darters and Great Cormorants.

Our total species observations for an excellent morning of birding was 74 plus 5 heard but not seen. As it was the last midweek outing for the year 21 members adjourned to the adjacent Golf Club for lunch. We have had a very successful year of birding and look forward to resuming our Midweek Outings in 2009. Why not join us?

HBOC ACTIVITIES PROGRAM 2008/2009

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE	CONTACT(S)
Saturday 13 December 2008	Hunter Wader Survey	Ash Island 8.30am Other Locations as directed 9.00am	Alan Stuart 49528569 Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Jack Adams 4971 5334
Sunday 14 December 2008	Annual Lathams Snipe Count. Pambalong Swamp	8.30am Minmi Pub	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Thursday 18 December 2008	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago house	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Saturday 10 January	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30am Ash Island 8.00am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Jack Adams 4971 5334
Sunday 18 January	Field Outing to Homebush Bay	7.30am HWC Shortland 10.00am Newington Armory Sydney Olympic Park	Lorna Mee 4988 6579
Tuesday 20 January	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Weekend 24-26 January	Camp at Myall Lakes	Private Property "Myall View"	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Sunday 1 February	World Wetlands Day	Hunter Wetlands Centre	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 3 February	Mid-Week Outing Walka Water Works	7.30am WWW Car Park	Keith Laverick 4958 8365
Wednesday 4 February	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm Garden Suburb School	All members welcome
Saturday 7 February	Hunter Wader Survey	6.30am, Ash Island 7.00am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 49538569 Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Jack Adams 4971 5334
Sunday 8 February	Port Stephens Wader Survey	8.30am At Various locations around Port Stephens as instructed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 almarosa@bigpond.com you must ring or email Alan to book a place
Wednesday 11 February	Club Meeting & Annual General Meeting	7.30pm Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Tom Clarke Ground –nesting birds at Stockton Sandspit.