



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 2/08

April -May 2008

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

Committee

The aims of the club are:

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

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

Committee Members:

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

NEWSLETTER DEADLINES FOR 2008

Edition

Copy Deadline

June/July	24th May (note earlier date)
August/September	3 rd August
October/November	28th September
December 2008/January 2009	30th November

Conservation Coordinator

Ann Lindsey

Activities Officer

Lorna Mee

Life Members

Wilma Barden
Sue Hamonet
Ed Hamonet (dec)
Alan Stuart

NEW MEMBERS:

We welcome the following as new members of HBOC

- Gabrielle O’Kane of Charlestown
- Kelly Swarbrick and Brad Wilkes of Fennell Bay
- Peter Naylor of Estelville
- Alwyn Simple of Singleton

Membership Fees for 2008 are now due

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

President's Report

I must have been 11 years old when my cousin showed me an article she had cut out of the local newspaper about a pair of Powerful Owls seen in Blackbutt. I read fast, excited about a bird I had not yet seen. The real highlight was found at the bottom of the story, a plug for the Hunter Bird Observers Club that opened my eyes to the fact that I wasn't alone in my love of birds.

I must admit my memory isn't that great, mainly cause my mind is always elsewhere, but I do remember my first ever meeting. Mum came with me and we sat up the back (where I would stay until now). The talk was on birds of New Guinea I think and I remember the bored look on Mum's face, but for me it was like heaven.

Now 13yrs on, it is a great honour to be president of the club I've been a member of for over half my life and the one that has meant so much to me. I must admit that when I was first approached to become president my first thought was 'no way'! The thought of past leaders and the magnificent job they did, and continue to do, was extremely daunting. I just hope I can be half the president that they were.

Those of you who attended the AGM would have seen how nervous I was fronting my first meeting. These nerves resulted in me forgetting to thank our outgoing president Liz Crawford so I'll take the chance now and reach a much wider audience. I have never met a happier person than Liz and I think this is the key to being a great president. Her warm approach and broad smile was always appreciated at club nights. Her sense of humour is gold and the way she makes new members welcome is second to none.

These aspects resulted in a fun, light-hearted meeting that was truly a joy to attend. Liz is an extremely hard worker behind the scenes as well, and working along side the committee she has helped shaped this club to what it is today. So Liz on behalf of the club and myself I thank you.

Autumn is well and truly in the air.....as are the Noisy Friarbirds, Striated Pardalotes and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. Let the club know what movements are happening in your local area, every report is important.

I recently attended the Wollar camp, my first club camp in years, and I can't for the life of me think why I hadn't been to more! It wasn't the birds that made it so good, nor the canned food or not showering for 4 days.....it was the people! Happy hour was awesome. I spoke to members I had never met before as well as those I've only really chatted to briefly at meetings. We are so lucky to have such a broad range of personalities in our club.

So come on people get out there, get active, meet some new people and most of all see some spectacular birds!.....and report them!

Until next time,
Grant Brosie

2008 AGM

This years AGM saw a changing of the guard with the departure of Liz Crawford as President. The five-year term has become something of a tradition and Liz's reign was one of the most constructive, competent and friendly that we have experienced.

HBOC has become a more broadly based organisation, punching above its weight on conservation and community issues as they affect birds. At the same time we have not lost the sense of fun and involvement with birdwatching that has always been our strength. Thanks Liz.

The new President is Grant Brosie who has been a member of the Club for half of his life and may well be the first person to have joined as a Junior and gone on to scale the dizzy heights of leadership.

The new Committee is a balance of the old and the new with Tom Clarke and Rowley Smith continuing their sterling efforts as Secretary and Treasurer. New Committee members are Jack Adams, Craig Anderson and Colin Goodenough.

All other positions were filled by the usual mixture of ballot stuffing, blackmail and bribery. Just joking.

AGM (contd)

The outstanding moment of the evening was the elevation of Alan Stuart to Life Member. A full list of his positions over 24 years of membership would fill this newsletter and embarrass Alan - Treasurer (1987-1996) and President (1998-2002) being the highlights. He is, of course, still involved in many ways including his 14th year as Editor of our Annual Bird Report. In his reply Alan emphasised how much enjoyment he has gained from HBOC involvement over the years. Congratulations, Alan.

BELL MINER RESEARCH

Kathryn Haythorpe, a University of Newcastle Honours student is seeking assistance and information on the occurrence of Bell Miner populations in the local region. She is studying the observed correlation between large numbers of Bell Miners and eucalypt canopy dieback. It is thought that this is due to the ability of the bird to “farm” the psyllid insects parasitising the trees. They do this by excluding other insectivorous birds from the resource and eating only the sugary outer coating of the insect (the lerp) leaving the insect intact and thus leading to an increase in psyllid numbers and stress on the host tree.

Her study aims to document where and how this process is occurring, including to what extent bell miners are actually causing eucalypt canopy decline (as opposed to merely being a secondary symptom of some other problem, such as lantana invasions) and to determine which areas are most likely to be affected in the future. The project involves:

- mapping the distribution of local colonies including areas affected by canopy decline,
- measuring the density of bell miner colonies including changes over time and
- looking at interactions between bell miners and other birds.

She needs assistance from members of HBOC with experience in, or knowledge of, these matters, particularly knowledge of local colonies or anecdotal knowledge of how these colonies have changed over time. She is also looking for volunteers to help with the fieldwork component of the project.

If you can help in any way contact Kathryn on 02 4921 6014 or send an email to her supervisor at Michael.mahony@newcastle.edu.au

REPORTING of THREATENED SPECIES

From Alan Stuart

From time to time some Club members raise questions about whether or not to pass on news of sightings of threatened species (i.e. a species listed as Endangered or Vulnerable under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act). The concern raised is that if many people go to an area to attempt to see the particular birds, the risks to the welfare of the birds may be increased and/or breeding success may be affected.

It is, and always will be, an individual decision about whether to pass on such news (or to delay, for example, until breeding is completed). However, when any report of such a sighting is received by HBOC, in general the information will be made available to all members.

The Club has a well-defined set of birding ethics (sent out annually to all) and we expect members always to abide by those ethics, which include not to go onto private property without permission, and not to jeopardise the welfare of a bird. Our belief is that HBOC members behave responsibly and so long as that belief continues to hold, the Club will continue to make sightings information available so that everyone can have the opportunity to become familiar with some of the rarer birds of the Region.

In certain cases in future, especially relating to the email bulletins that I sometimes send out, we will not provide precise details of the location in the main message, but we will make that information available should any member specifically request it.

Library

Robert Macdonald continues as Club Librarian and he advises that we have purchased a copy of the revised (2008) Christides & Boles bird list.

TRIPOD?

Neville McNaughton has donated a telescope to HBOC (thanks, Nev) This will be very handy. Even more useful if we had a tripod. So if you have an old tripod you don't really need, please consider donating it to HBOC.

VALE FAY THOMSON.

With great sadness we report the loss of a member and friend, in Fay Thomson, who passed away on 10th March, 2008 after a long and courageous battle with her illness.

Fay, with her husband Doug was a long-time member of H.B.O.C. – a great lover of nature and the outdoors, and a keen birdwatcher. We of the camping fraternity have enjoyed their company on many occasions.

She was possessed of a great sense of humour and a dry wit, and her contributions at campfires and “happy-hour” gatherings are a priceless memory for us. She will be sadly missed, but fondly remembered.

A large part of Fay’s life was devoted to caring for others, earlier through her chosen career of Nursing, and in later times as a tireless worker with hospital based organizations providing for the welfare of hospital patients. Surely a special place is reserved for such selfless souls. We do know that a spot will be waiting for her at that ever-expanding campfire circle in that place where all old birdos gather – and the billy is always on the boil.

The sincere condolences of all members are extended to Doug, Andrew, Angus and Esther.

PROGRAM NOTES

Outing to “Beechwood” Tierneys Road. 15 members enjoyed mixed foraging flocks and Top Knot Pigeon in a White Beech tree laden with fruit

Clean Up Australia Day. 16 people filled over 50 bags of rubbish and gathered many larger items

Mid-week Outing to Watagans. Road conditions to Watagans forced a reschedule to a mixed bag of sites around Ryhope and Cooragang.

Port Stephens Survey

The annual survey of wader numbers with NPWS took place in early February with Alan Stuart coordinating from a HBOC perspective. About 1700 birds were counted. The number was down by 400-

500 from the previous year due mainly to the very low number of Black Swans.

INCIDENT-PACKED 2008 EASTER CAMP AT WOLLAR.

Anthony Gooden

Our camp officially started on Friday but some enthusiastic campers arrived on Thursday. The site is a private property, generously provided by a Sydney resident, Mr Marty Filipczyk, for a small fee and apparently the club has used this property several times in the past. Most people camped but a cabin provided very enjoyable and comfortable shelter for the other few. The happy hours were held under the verandah.

The property sits about 8 km out of Wollar within the Goulburn River National Park and its terrain is virtually seamless with the NP. There were a couple of obstacles to overcome. 1) the steep, scree-ish driveway; 2) the tough ground – under a shallow soil cover, there was heavy clay and granite making it hard to pitch tent pegs. ((Taking a couple of hours to dig a pit toilet that could only be used once was a real joy. Ask Robert and Grant. Luckily, we had a permanent toilet as well)) and 3) trying to keep clouds of grass burrs out of socks, pants, shoelaces etc.

A great crowd of 29 members attended and this would have been 2 more if Sue and Charlie had been able to negotiate the steep drive and not had to detour to Munghorn Gap. They were missed and some members visited them. (I suspect they wanted more birds as well?). It was a very social group and happy hours and bird counts were well attended. The snacks were most appreciated.

Our weather wasn’t too bad but we had fairly strong winds and occasional rain showers. [Every time it rained, Robert rushed to pack up – I wonder why??.] It was also cool at night – making it easier to sleep.

Overall, we had around 80 birds for the camp including wonderful views of rock warblers, brown and white throated treecreepers, fabulous views of turquoise parrots and little lorikeets, black-chinned, white-eared, white-plumed, brown-headed, yellow-faced and white-naped honeyeaters, a couple of spotted quail-thrush, red-capped robins, crested shrike-tits, fan-tailed cuckoo and horsfield bronze-cuckoo, glossy black and yellow tailed black cockatoos, spotted and striated pardalotes, weebills and jacky winters. A good range of birds.

Wollar –cont'd

Birders, being birders, tend to wander in the bush and are averse to sticking to paths – if there are any (which there weren't). After all, the orchids, fungi, flowering shrubs, rock formations and birds DON'T stick to the paths.

Nev and I went out for a hour or two at 8.30am on Sat morning to just look over the ridge into the gully behind the camp and finally got "home" at 3.30pm – after an estimated 12 to 14 Km walk which ended at the Merriwa turnoff on the Mudgee to Bylong road – the opposite direction to the camp. We cadged a lift back to the camp with a VERY wary young couple. There is some beautiful, stark scenery out there. It is a pity we couldn't appreciate it at the time.

A couple of bods left on Sunday but the majority reluctantly departed on Monday to join the end of holiday traffic and some took the opportunity to visit The Drip – a natural granite rock formation near Ulan. It is an awe-inspiring place to visit and there was some good birding as a bonus. I actually saw 3 pairs of rock warblers around the 1.5km path.

Unfortunately, one couple didn't get home without some drama. Leone and John had to spend a night in Mudgee due to car probs but, luckily, John is a brilliant?? mechanic and they were home by late Tues.

All in all, a great camp and we are very grateful to Marty, the owner of the property, for the opportunity to camp in a remote area uncluttered by Easter crowds. Our thanks to Di for her organization. I just hope she was able to "reconnect" with Frank??

WE WERENT LOST – THE REAL STORY

Anthony Gooden and Neville McNaughton

After the end of a very long day, it was easier to say we had been lost. However, at the start of Saturday, Neville and I had set out on a deliberate PROJECT.

On the way, we observed the sandstone caves with their various colours, the wombat burrows (if that is the correct term), saw a few birds but were always conscious of the PROJECT.

Our subject wasn't going to be easy but we had plenty of time and ample stores (a small bottle of water and 2 small packs of sultanas). We also wanted to get a feel for the real National Park – so we decided to walk the whole thing while looking for our PROJECT.

We meandered up hill and down dale (seemingly hundreds of times) and then followed a sometimes dry watercourse so we could look up and admire the craggy rock outcrops high above – where we had been at some time (we think).

As we fell over huge boulders, got our feet wet in muddy water and busted our backs crawling under fallen trees, we were able to observe a red-capped robin, red browed finches, spotted pardalotes and yellow robins bathing at water holes. But we were ever mindful of our PROJECT.

Eventually, without fanfare, we came to our destination (human habitation) and there, at the same time, we saw our PROJECT quarry. We were excited.

With our news, we rushed back (12 – 14Km) to the camp (read struggled through long grass, crawled to the road and then waved a car down to beg a lift).

At the bird count, with proud pumped up chests, we announced our finding. To help the club and particularly our campers to have a better end count, we had gone in search of THE WHITE-BREASTED SEA EAGLE - soaring beautifully above us well out west away from the ocean - and it was within walking distance of the camp.

Wouldn't you believe it? After all the planning that had gone into our day, bloody AS said it couldn't go into the list. "Too far" –my sore legs!! How ungrateful can you get? Never again will we go out on a limb or an escarpment or down a wrong gully or dry watercourse to try and brighten lives.

I'm taking a protractor next time and it is strictly 5Km all round (on roads).

Voyage to some New Zealand islands and Macquarie Island

from Alan Stuart

In November/December 2007, 11 HBOC members/partners did a wonderful 12-day ocean voyage to the sub-Antarctic islands of New Zealand and to Macquarie Island. The trip was organised by Heritage Expeditions, with 48 passengers, 6 staff and a Russian crew. Heritage do these trips several times each summer, and things are well organised by now so we had a smooth trip, figuratively speaking. Literally, it was not always so smooth - the Southern Ocean lived up to its reputation!

For several of us, the trip had its genesis in quiet moments at sea on pelagic trips off Newcastle, with discussions about "what an interesting trip" and "wouldn't it be nice" if we could all do it together. That led to the initial booking, with help from Phil Hansbro to set things in motion. Word soon spread that it was going to be a "birdier" trip than usual and by the time we sailed, about half the bookings were for birders (usually it's just a handful). Most were Aussie birders intent on adding to their Australian lists.

The trip commenced with a dinner in Dunedin, and then next morning we embarked. It was a glorious day and everyone was on deck for the interesting passage through Dunedin's long harbour. There was plenty of good birding (oystercatchers, shags, etc), which culminated with huge numbers of Sooty Shearwater just offshore from the harbour mouth. Several hundred thousand birds were on the water, and they rose constantly in flocks of 20-100 as the ship approached.

The next few hours at sea were very pleasant, but then a squall came up and drove us all inside. That introduced us to "The Bridge", a wonderful spot that was warm and dry and had uninterrupted views in 3 directions. With 25 or so birders sometimes present, plus occasional partners, and rough seas, it wasn't always a picnic in there, but from then on it was where most of us spent most of the daylight hours whenever the ship was at sea.

By the first night the sea was decidedly lumpy and quite a few didn't make it to breakfast. Others, like me, unfortunately did! Around midday we arrived at the first of the NZ island groups - The Snares. It's not possible to land owing to the massive density of burrow-nesting seabirds (~6 million nesting birds) but we were able to cruise around in the ship's inflatables ("Naiads") which afforded us excellent views of Snares Crested Penguins (thousands of them) and Hookers Sea lions (a creature we came to know very well by the end of the voyage).

Other highlights were extended views of a foraging Fernbird, our first sightings of Antarctic Terns - an exquisite bird that we saw often subsequently - and yes!, the all black Snares form of the NZ Robin up close. All this in a wonderfully sheltered lagoon - no waves, no wind, a great physical relief to us after the previous 24 hours. But soon, it was time for the 24 hour run to the Auckland islands. By now most of us had our sea legs, so the voyage was turning into fun (such things are relative!).

Eventually we reached Enderby Island, a large island in the Auckland group and one of the first where introduced pests (rabbits, rats, etc) were successfully eradicated. As a result the endemic bird life is thriving. We spent a full day ashore, initially in a group walk across the island after which we wandered at will for the remainder of the day. Some people opted for a leisurely day enjoying up-close time with the local wildlife, while others went on long walks around the island perimeter.

Birding highlights were the many Double-banded Plovers, reasonable numbers of the flightless Auckland Island Teal, many Yellow-eyed Penguins, and frequent brief glimpses of NZ Snipe. There were also many NZ Pipits, so unafraid and you could get quite close. And there were the bad guys - we all found out individually that male Hookers Sea lions are determinedly territorial, and a bit of a scary sight when snarling at you from just a couple of metres away, jowls pulled back and fangs exposed. In the bar that night, how the stories grew!

Overnight we moved to Auckland Island and sheltered in its harbour, alongside several fishing ships - even they thought the seas were rough! In the morning we wandered through the rata forest and along the rocky shoreline. Birds were few but the scenery was terrific, especially in the forest

which was incredibly anarchic - no tree grew straight; it was a scrambly walk but enchanting.

After lunch we set off south, destination Macquarie Island, a day and a half at sea ahead. Birds were plentiful as we crossed the shelf and then things quietened down. However, the tension was growing palpably - Australian waters were coming up! By 10:00 a.m. all the Aussie birders were up on the bridge and the countdown was on although it was almost another half hour before the captain confirmed we were in Australian waters. Who would be the first to see an "Australian" bird? Who would be the first to get a tick for their Aussie list? Well, not me on either count, but no complaints either.

We spent all day on the bridge, and it was light enough to identify birds until nearly 9pm. In the morning, just 10km or so in front of us - Macquarie Island emerging from the mist. A tremendous and inspiring sight! And, what's that? King Penguins in the water, many of them. And, a flock of Royals. And then some Gentoo Penguins too. All this before breakfast!

We anchored near the base station while various formalities took place and then we steamed south, to Sandy Beach for what was the absolute highlight of the trip. Except for lunch back on board, we spent the day ashore wandering around a large colony of penguins - Kings and Royals. The main breeding colonies were off limits but we had plenty to see and do. It's forbidden to walk up any closer than 5m to a penguin, but we soon learnt that if you stayed still these inquisitive creatures would come up to check you out. My bright yellow waterproof trousers proved particularly interesting to them, and received many a nibble.

The beach also had many resting Elephant Seals - the big ones each a few tonnes of sublime ugliness and smelliness that only a mother could love. But there were also many recently weaned youngsters whose mothers had returned to the sea leaving them to fend for themselves. They were cute - no other word fits. 100kg or so in weight, balloon-like in shape, huge soulful brown eyes, inquisitive. They certainly added to the magic of the day.

Next morning we returned to the base station and went ashore, including to the mess for a splendid morning tea and to watch the weather balloon being released. The latter was a bit of an anti-climactic event but after the earlier excitement of seeing the famously elusive Redpolls, we needed something to calm us down. Many Giant-Petrels (both species) were in the area, and we also had good views of the Rockhopper Penguin colony near the base.

Heading back to the ship, some people had good views of a Blue Petrel (which, next day at sea, we all saw well). Our final activity was in the Naiads offshore from a very large King Penguin colony at Lusitania Bay. The sight and smell of 250,000 birds on the beach was an experience in itself, but the highlight was the King Penguins at sea coming over to look at us and vice versa. They certainly are inquisitive!

Then, we began the northern voyage, again with all the keen birders up on the bridge until we finally departed Australian waters. After 1½ days at sea, we reached Campbell Island and anchored in its well-sheltered harbour. Next morning, some people took the option to walk to a Southern Royal Albatross breeding colony where many pairs of birds were courting.

Others including me opted for a fairly strenuous walk across the island, which certainly got rid of the cobwebs of several days of little exercise (and much food), plus we found our own albatrosses to admire. The following morning, more walking/sightseeing for some and a bush-bash for others to search, unsuccessfully, for the very rare flightless Campbell Island Teal.

Inevitably it was time to leave and have the final day at sea before berthing at Invercargill and disembarking full of happy memories. Although the seas were heavy at times, most people adapted to them, new friendships were made, all the birders saw almost all the birds, one person saw their 600th Australian bird and two people saw their 700th. So, everybody was happy. I'm not exactly sure what the non-birders did on the trip, but they seemed happy too.

Continued next page

(contd) In New Zealand

Six of us (Mike Newman, Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford, Ann Lindsey, her brother Ken Bainbrigge, and me) went to NZ a week before the ship sailed, and also a few days afterwards, to do some extra birding.

Our first major destination was Tiri Tiri Matangi, an island off Auckland where we stayed for two nights. Pests have been removed from Tiri, volunteers have done great work in rehabilitation, and the NZ birds are thriving. We saw many species on Tiri, mostly native birds, and mostly present in good numbers. We dipped on kiwi (Lesser Spotted is present, and we heard several but couldn't close in on any) and Chris did very well with a Takahe (this is an in-joke).

Then, we relocated to the Miranda Shorebird Centre, on the Firth of Thames south-east of Auckland. We stayed two nights at Miranda, with one highlight being to re-meet people who had come to Newcastle for the 2007 Shorebirds Conference. Our full day of birding coincided with the annual NZ shorebirds census, so we had plenty of people around to talk with. Many Bar-tailed Godwits were present although we didn't see any of the famous ones with radio transmitters fitted, that had been successfully tracked as they flew to and from their northern breeding grounds. Rarer birds included a flock of ~30 Wrybill, a few NZ Dotterel (some in partial breeding plumage) and a lone Hudsonian Godwit that eventually (after many hours) raised its wings and confirmed the ID. Two immature terns caused much discussion. Local experts identified them as Little Terns: our discussions continued unabated!

We then drove across country to Paraparaumu in the southwest of North Island, finding Skaup and NZ Dabchick along the way but dipping on Blue Duck (not for the last time). Our next stop was Kapiti Island, another nature refuge, older and with more mature vegetation than on Tiri. Once again we had good birding, culminating very late that night with views of Lesser Spotted Kiwi - what a hard get that was. From Kapiti we made our way to join the cruise, and then afterwards to Christchurch where we hired cars to go up into the mountains around Arthur's Pass. The terrain here was difficult and most of our target species proved elusive - the

notable exception being the Kea, which is impossible to miss.

PS

Mick Todd, long time HBOC member has finished uploading his photos from the subantarctic trip. This set of photos includes Campbells Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross and Campbell Island Pipit. www.wildlifing.com

Mick is now based on Hobart doing a PhD study on **Masked Owls**. Australian Geographic has kindly offered to run a fundraiser for his project from April to June.

In all Australian Geographic shops (eg Charlestown) it will be possible to purchase a Masked Owl sticker as well as donate money to the project – or you could simply post money to Australian Geographic by mail. Mick's project is quite costly involving vehicle hire, travel costs, tracking devices etc so all contributions are welcome. Over the next 12 months he will be doing Masked Owl surveys around Tasmania and there may be opportunities for people to join him for a chance at a Masked Owl sighting

PPS

Your editor was also in New Zealand when the Sub-Antarctic expeditioners were there and bumped into Mick Todd on Stewart Island and Alan & Margaret Stuart in Christchurch. Such a small country! Such a nice Lesser Spotted Kiwi on Kapiti Island

TWITCHATHON 2007 - the last words

Alan Morris the Twitchathon Coordinator has announced some of the less publicised but very important details.

About \$15,500 was raised for the Birds Australia Discovery Centre at The Armory, Sydney Olympic Park, the new headquarters for the Sydney Office of Birds Australia

The money is to be used for the supply of education equipment and new displays at the Centre.

And the winner of the Rarest Bird Prize was submitted by Greg Clancy of the Black-necked Stalkers. A RUFIOUS SCRUB -BIRD. As Alan Morris says this is not the sort of bird you can

dedicate a large amount of time to searching for in a Twitchathon.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

For those who are not on the email list – and if not why not? - these are the highlights of the most recent missive.

A Frigatebird! Seen on Ash Island over Easter by a group of Sydney birders. Tentatively identified as an immature Greater Frigatebird. If confirmed, a first for the Hunter. If you happen to see it (along the coast?) do what you can to confirm the ID – a photo would be nice.

Phil Hansboro reports a Brown Noddy on Easter Sunday at Manning Point and also, in the same area, an Arctic Tern fishing in the surf with Common Terns.

Just before Easter, Alan Stuart had a couple of days at Harrington/Old Bar area. Lots of small waders were present-- 300+Red Necked stints, 20+ Sanderling, 90+ Pacific Golden Plovers and nearly 50 Red-capped Plovers. Also, 55 Double –banded Plovers, including a group of 45 that may have arrived together recently.

By comparison, Harrington was relatively quiet – some waders about but not many and a Spectacled Monarch the only real highlight in the rainforest area.

FUSSIN' FLYCATCHERS

By Lois Wooding

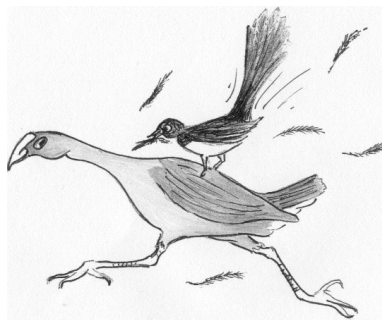
I have a full year of Australian birding under my belt now, but occasionally something happens which triggers a flashback to my thirty-some years of Canadian bird-watching memories. One such incident occurred in December.

While working my way along my bird atlassing route at Salamander Bay a loud fussing noise caught my attention. The cause of the commotion was easily located. On previous trips I had recorded the construction and subsequent occupation of a Willie Wagtail nest. The Wagtail parents had been most attentive and today they were in full-on defensive mode.

About four metres away from the nest, on the far side of a channel, two Pacific Black Ducks had

hauled out on the bank and were hunkering down for a duck-nap—a non-threatening act one would think. Obviously the Wagtails felt differently. One began dive-bombing the ducks, and uttering shrilly incensed Wagtail expletives. The attack was maintained until the ducks conceded defeat and paddled off, presumably in search of a more peaceful spot for a snooze.

During this confrontation the second Wagtail remained close to the nest, but it suddenly became extremely agitated. A Purple Swamphen was making its way along a branch beneath the nest. The attack on the ducks paled in comparison to the ferocious assault that was launched upon the Swamphen. Both Wagtails flew at it relentlessly. At one point, one Wagtail rode the Swamphen like a demented, avian jockey, pecking viciously at the Swamphen's back. It was too much. The Swamphen, despite its obvious size advantage, splashed and flapped its way out of range, emitting startled protestations.



Willie Wagtail behaviour reminds me of the Eastern Kingbird, a feisty, black and white, North American flycatcher of similar size. It gets the drop on other passerines by returning to the prairies and establishing its territory hard on the heels of winter. By the time the first wave of insects emerges from the snow's melt-water Kingbird young are loudly demanding food. The Eastern Kingbird may not wag its tail, but its scientific name, *Tyrannus tyrannus*, is a “spot-on” indication of a temperament that can equal any Wagtail in fierceness. Having been buzzed by furious Kingbirds when inadvertently crossing their territorial boundaries, I found myself empathizing with the Wagtail-harassed ducks and Swamphen.



Tyrannus tyrannus

So where the bloody hell is Sargents Gap Road?

Australia Day Weekend camp at Isaacs Creek

So how was I to know that installers of road signs were to fail in consulting the makers of maps? My map clearly labels the road that follows Isaacs Creek up stream from the Isis River, as Isaacs Creek Road and there is no reason why it should be called anything else! Blindly confident I have then proceeded to call it by that name in my “directions to camp ground” handout prior to the January Long Weekend, happy in the knowledge that my directions were so good that no one could possibly get lost.

Imagine my surprise as I stepped out of my car to post an HBOC sign at the turn-off and I read the words “Sargents Gap Road”. Right there and then I must admit to feeling a little confused myself but regathered and boldly posted the sign despite the obvious error of the local council. A few minutes drive along this road and I was very relieved to find the early birds had found the camp in any case and so far as I can determine, everyone else that decided to camp that weekend also made it with no problems. Phew.

Isaacs Creek Reserve is possibly the most well known spot for people wanting to explore the Timor Caves but it satisfies the birdwatcher by providing plenty of opportunities to experience close encounters with the local avifauna. Set in what can best be described as dry habitat, the camp is situated on the banks of a flowing stream with a couple of holes deep enough for a relaxing bathe. One bend downstream from the camp the stream disappears underground forcing lots of birds to drop in close to the camp for a drink. How good is it to relax in front of your camp in a fold-up chair, binoculars at the ready and be entertained by the procession. I must admit to being late for happy hour on two consecutive days having been unable to drag myself away from these delights.

A feature of this camp was the number of reports each evening of successful breeding observations. There were many species feeding fledged youngsters including Wedged-tailed Eagle, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird and Noisy Friarbird. Cuckoos had obviously been active here during the nesting period as proven by the sighting of a Brush Cuckoo being fed by a Leaden Flycatcher and a Horsfields

Bronze-Cuckoo receiving food from an overworked Superb Fairy-wren.

The motivation to nurture offspring is unquestionable and this was demonstrated amazingly well in the case of the Yellow-faced Honeyeater family. A nest was discovered on a branch high above one of the tents and it was assumed that the invisible youngsters were being fed by a pair of busy adults. An inspection the next day revealed a damaged nest and a couple of very young birds laying on the ground. The rescue operation was handled very well by a couple of our members after fixing a man-made nest to a branch much lower down at step ladder height. A strawberry tub was tied to the branch and filled with grass and the two chicks placed inside. After a short time only the parent birds were back at it feeding their young. Thanks to Leone and Chris mostly and maybe some other helpers.

One of the most elusive birds in my experience is the Cicadabird. It is one of those species that I only encounter very occasionally and it is often most likely that a record of “heard only” is placed in my notebook. Two mornings in a row my ears pricked up to its call and on each occasion for the following half hour or so I was slowly driven mad as I failed to get visual confirmation. Even more frustrating to be told by others that “yes, it was just here a minute ago” and “you should have seen it – an elegant male – beautiful plumage.” **“Well thanks very much!”** This past summer I have heard more Cicadabird calls than I have for a long time and I was so determined to see one that I was not going to let this chance go. Finally I did get a glimpse and I’m afraid the emphasis was on glimpse; a retreating male flying down the creek. Something to look forward to next year no doubt.

The last bird sighting of my time at Isaacs Creek was, on the other hand, very sweet. Most of the camp had packed up and shot through and an easy stroll to the edge of the area produced a pair of Tawny Frogmouths. There they were, just about at eye level and happy to allow a humble observer a close encounter to remember.

Tom Clarke

Mixed Foraging Flocks a Feature at “Beechwood”

Outing to Tierney’s Road, Martinsville 24th
February 2008

It’s always good to go look at some new areas and enjoy the birds they produce. What an opportunity was it then when HBOC was invited to check out “Beechwood” with its variety of habitats and the wonderful company of Pat Tierney. Pat has been busy restoring some of the natural ecosystems along the creek and within the rainforest and is a very keen student of nature. Without being a confirmed birder, Pat is nonetheless excited about seeing many species using parts of her property that represent different communities.

Beechwood was once an orchard but those days are in the past and most of the citrus trees have been removed. The best thing about Beechwood is that it shares a boundary with the Watagan National Park and the rainforest section is a continuation of that community. It was just great to find a small mob of Topknot Pigeon sitting in the top of a White Beech (*gmelina leichardtii*) that was heavy in fruit. I think that those birds had completed a great feast and were content to laze about with full bellies without moving much for fear of bursting.

Of most interest was the occasional encounter with a mixed foraging flock of passerines. The group was mostly made up of Brown Gerygone, Striated Thornbill, Brown Thornbill, Lewin’s Honeyeater, Silvereye and Rufous Fantail. For several minutes the best thing to do was to simply stand still and enjoy the parade as these birds slowly worked the canopy. On one occasion it proved most convenient to lay down on the ground and watch as neck and arms were beginning to ache from looking upwards through binoculars. Or perhaps I’m getting old.

Every time I go birdwatching there is always something that amazes me with its fundamental simplicity and prompts me to record a new experience. This day we witnessed a group of four Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo flying silently by without uttering a single peep. How positively strange to see these birds without first hearing their call and then to watch them move across the landscape and disappear without a farewell.

Heading back towards the house our group was delighted to find both Golden Whistler and Jacky Winter feeding dependent fledged young. No sign of nests anywhere but I would like to think that these birds had successfully bred on the property.

The “bird call” was a most enjoyable circle with Pat joining in with sightings for the day. And how good was it to sit about in the shade of some great tree and get served cups of tea by our host? The only proviso being that we come back some day and find a rare or endangered bird or two.

Tom Clarke

Directions to Swans Crossing camping ground.

Anzac Day Long Weekend 2008 Camp at Kerewong State Forest (Swans Crossing)

1. Travel north along the Pacific Highway to Kew (bypassing Taree and heading towards Port Macquarie).
2. Turn left off the highway at the Kew traffic lights and head for Kendall.
3. Travel along the Comboyne Road for 6.8km. This will take you through Kendall and about 4km the other side of the town.
4. Turn right into Black Creek Road and travel about 300m.
5. Turn left into Upsalls Creek Road and travel 10.1km to Swans Crossing.

Note: The last two turns should have signage directing you to Swans Crossing.

The camping ground is maintained by Forests NSW and has toilets, barbeques and water. You may choose to bring your own drinking/cooking water.

Bring your own compass, GPS, whistle (so you don’t get lost)

Enjoy the forest and its birdlife.

Take your rubbish home.

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT FEB/MAR 2008

2007				
Dec	Red Knot	1	Newcastle Ocean Baths	G.Brosie
	Red-necked Stint	2	“	“
	Red-whiskered Bulbul	1	Dudley	“
	Southern Emu-wren	3+	Awabakal N.R.	“
	Striated Pardalote	2+ny	Tenambit Common	“
Dec 20	Black-necked Stork	1	Wingham Brush	J.Adams
Dec 27	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	300+	Hexham Swamp	T.Clarke
	Common Greenshank	1	“	“
	Latham's Snipe	6	“	“
2008				
Jan 29	Regent Honeyeater	1+1juv	Clarencetown [garden]	L.Storm
Jan 12	Buff-banded Rail	1+5dy	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
	Pheasant Coucal	2	“	“
	White-bellied Sea-eagle	1juv	“	“
Jan	White-fronted Chat	2+ne	Ash Island	G.Brosie
	Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	Warners Bay	“
	Osprey	1	Forster	“
	Emerald Dove	1	“	“
	Russet-tailed Thrush	1	“	“
	Regent Bowerbird	1	“	“
	Forest Raven	Many	“	“
	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	3	Booti Booti N.P.	“
	Southern Emu-wren	5+	“	“
	Red-capped Plover	Dy	Old Bar	“
	Arctic Jaeger	2	“	“
	Brown Quail	4+10dy	“	“
	Azure Kingfisher	1	Old Brush	“
	Whiskered Tern	1	Lenaghans Drive	“
	Regent Bowerbird	1	Glenrock N.R.	“
	Topknot Pigeon	5	Kurri Kurri	“
Jan 6	Dollarbird	2+1dy	Mirabooka	C.Goodenough
Jan 13	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	40	The Hill	“
Jan 28	Laughing Kookaburra	2+1dy	Sunshine	“
Jan 31	Dollarbird	2+1dy	Muswellbrook	“
Jan	Grey-crowned Babbler	6-8	Beresfield [crematorium]	W.Barden
Jan 13	Sanderling	18	Mudbishops [Old Bar]	A. Stuart
	Red-necked Stint	179	“	“
	Little Tern	~200+dy	“	“
	Common Tern	300+	“	“
	Pacific Golden Plover	1	“	“
Jan 12	Pied Oystercatcher	12	Harrington	“
	Bar-tailed Godwit	53	Harrington	“
Jan 1	Eastern Grass Owl	1	Ash Island [8.37[m]	
Jan 2	Red-whiskered Bulbul	1	Caves Beach	
Jan 25	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	Boat Harbour	T.Clarke
Jan 29	Little Penguin	1	Fly Point	“
Jan 1	Striated Heron	1	Speers Point	M.& K.Fisher
Jan/Feb	Channel-billed Cuckoo	2juv	Kotara Heights	J.Nicholls
Jan/Feb	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	40+	Raymond Terrace	F.Humphreys
Jan 28	Diamond Firetail	1	Timor [“Renmark”]	A.Stuart
Jan 20	Buff-banded Rail	1	Fingal Bay	B.Shields
Feb 13	Yellow Wagtail	3	Ash Island	“
Feb 7	Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	Speers Point [garden]	C.Mann
Feb 5	Blue-faced Honeyeater	1	Speers Point [garden]	S.Hamonet
Feb 5	Powerful Owl	Heard	Blackbutt/New Lambton	A.Stuart
Feb 13	Eastern Koel	1juv	Belmont South	J.Cockerell
Feb	Sacred Kingfisher	1	Raworth	G. Brosie
feb	Buff-banded Rail	1	Morpeth Common	G Brosie

Feb	Eastern Grass Owl	1	Ash Island	G.Brosie
Feb 5	Little Wattlebird [feeding Koel]	1	Little Pelican	J.Adams
Feb 10	Black Bittern	1	“	“
	Grey-tailed Tattler	8	Black Ned’s Bay	“
Feb 13	Pallid Cuckoo	1juv	Wingen	“
Feb 15	Pheasant Coucal	1	Merewether [garden]	J.Maidment
Feb 11	Brahminy Kite	1	Fenningham’s Island	T.Burgin
Feb 5-12	Red Wattlebird [feeding Koel]	1	Fingal Bay	“
Feb 13	Crimson Rosella	1	Merewether	J.Maidment
Feb 2	Satin Bowerbird	Pr	Frying Pan Ck.[Chichester S.F.]	“
	Black-faced Monarch	1f	“	“
Feb 3	Rock warbler	3-4	Brokenback Ra [Pokolbin side]	J.Goswell
Feb 19	Sooty Oystercatcher	33	N’cle Ocean Baths Rock Platform	J.Thomas
Feb 8	Little Penguin	4	“	M.Roderick
Feb 12	Square-tailed Kite	1	Weston	S.Roderick
Feb 13	Arctic Jaeger	1	Nobby’s Breakwater	A.Richardson
	Brown Skua	1	“	“
Feb 19	Black Falcon	1	Mt. Arthur Coal Mine	G.Newling
Feb 21	Horsfield’s Bushlark	15	“	“
Feb 22	Spangled Drongo	1	Saltwater Reserve	A.Stuart
Feb 21-22	Pied Oystercatcher	28	Manning River estuary	“
Feb 21	Eastern Reef Egret	1	Harrington breakwater	“
Feb 22	Beach Stone-curlew	2	Mudbishops Point [Old Bar]	“
	Regent Bowerbird	1m	Saltwater Reserve	“
Mar 9	Powerful Owl	Heard	Blackbutt Reserve	“
Feb	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	~35	Singleton	D. Allen
	Nankeen Kestrel	Pr	King Edward Park	“
Mar 8	White-bellied Sea-eagle	2	City beaches	“
Mar 15	Blue-faced Honeyeater	3	Speers Point	R.Walker
Mar 8	Rainbow Bee-eater	26	Carrington to Tahlee road	L.Wooding
Mar 9	Peregrine Falcon	1	Salamander Bay	“
Mar 11	Crested Pigeon	35+		A.Lindsey
Mar 11	Wedge-tailed Shearwater	500-1000	Nobby’s	R.&M. Stewart
Mar 10	Plumed Whistling duck	1	H.W.C.	“
Mar 20	Tawny Frogmouth	1+2dy		
Mar 7	Eastern Osprey	1	Dudley beach	T.Clarke
Mar 3	Rainbow Bee-eater	6	Congewai	K.Peters
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	2	“	“
	Brown Treecreeper	2	“	“
	Gang-gang Cockatoo	1	“	“
	Glossy Black Cockatoo	2	“	“
	Little Lorikeet	20+	“	“
	Painted Button-quail	2	“	“
Mar 14	Plumed Whistling Duck	1	H.W.C. [Water Ribbon swamp]	P.Lightfoot
Mar 13-15	Noisy Pitta	1	Peach Tree park [Upper Allyn]	L.Mee
	Paradise Riflebird	Pr	White Rock camp [Upper Allyn]	“
	Rose Robin	Abundant	Upper Allyn	“
	Crested Shrike Tit	1	“	“
	Wompoo Fruit-dove	1	“	“
	Topknot Pigeon	30	“	“

HBOC ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

DATE	EVENT	MEETING TIME & PLACE	CONTACT(S)
Thursday 10 April	Ash Island Mangrove Removal	8.00am School House	Robert McDonald 4952 2941
Sunday 13 April	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon Sandspit Car Park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 15 April	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entrance to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Saturday 19 April	Hunter Wader Survey	7.00am Ash Island 7.30am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Chris Herbert 4959 3663
Sunday 20 April	Field Outing Corrabare State Forest	8.00am Millfield School	Lorna Mee 4988 6579
ANZAC WEEKEND Friday-Sunday 25-27 April	Camp at Swans Crossing	Turn left at Kew, right at Black Creek Road, left at Upsalls Creek Road.	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 6 May	Mid-week Outing Morpeth	8.00am Cemetery in Butchers Lane Morpeth	Keith Laverick 4958 8365
Wednesday 7 May	Club Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm –10.00pm Garden Suburb School	ALL members welcome
Wednesday 14 May	Club Night	7.30pm The Wetland Centre	Speaker TBA
Thursday 15 May	Ash Island Mangrove Removal	8.00am School House	Robert McDonald 4952 2941
Saturday 17 May	Hunter Wader Survey	6.00am Ash Island 6.30am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Chris Herbert 4959 3663
Sunday 18 May	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon Sandspit Car Park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 20 May	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Sunday 25 May	Field Outing Warkworth & Jerrys Plains	7.30am Maitland Railway Station	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Tuesday 3 June	Mid-week Outing Glenrock SRA	8.00am Car Park in Burwood Road near old railway track	Garth Cooksley 4954 9620
Wednesday 4 th June	Club Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm Garden Suburb School	ALL MEMBERS WELCOME
Long Weekend Saturday 7 th to Monday 9 th June	Camp on Private Property “Rock Dhu”	Scotts Creek Road Murrurundi	Di Johnson 4975 1777
Wednesday 11 June	Club Night	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Walter Boles Taxonomy of birds.
Thursday 12 June	Ash Island Mangrove Removal	8.00am School House	Robert McDonald 4952 2941
Sunday 15 June	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon Sandspit Car Park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872