



NEWSLETTER

Issue 2/11 April 2011 - May 2011

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc affiliated with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia

The Club aims to:

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

The Fox Threat Abatement Plan

At the February Club Night, Adam Fawcett, NPWS Senior Ranger (Pest Management) gave a comprehensive presentation on the Fox Threat Abatement Plan (TAP). Fox predation is listed as a key threatening process under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* in NSW. NPWS has developed a Fox TAP to try to reduce the effects of fox predation on various threatened species including, in the Hunter Region, Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby, Broad-toothed Rat, Little Tern and Pied Oystercatcher. Adam discussed the techniques used to reduce fox numbers and to measure the effects of fox baiting on populations of targeted threatened species.

This season, Little Tern nesting colonies on Manning Spit (opposite Harrington), on a sandbar in Farquahar Inlet and at Mudbishops Point north of Old Bar probably benefited from fox baiting to reduce fox numbers. However, these birds nest in areas subject to considerable human disturbance and both signage and community education are being used to reduce these impacts. Storm surge is another hazard that can erase susceptible nests. Prior to the 2009-10 nesting season, vegetation on part of Mudbishops Point was raked to expose bare sand – habitat favoured for nesting by Little Terns. The ongoing management of these sites has resulted in an increase of the Little Tern fledging rate from ~55% in the 1996-97 breeding season to 71% in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 breeding seasons.

To qualify as a Fox TAP site, breeding colonies of the key shorebird species must be identified and monitored and a site plan prepared for review against set criteria. Recent surveys of Stockton Bight by HBOC members and NPWS Rangers have shown at least 6 pairs of Pied Oystercatchers and up to 40 pairs of Little Terns attempting to breed. It is possible that this area will be considered for future implementation of the Fox TAP.

Apart from targeted fox baiting to protect known populations of endangered species, NPWS also undertakes general fox reduction programs and is currently working to reduce fox numbers on Kooragang and Ash Islands, both important areas for shorebirds.

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Please send Newsletter articles direct to the Editor, Liz Crawford at: chrisliz@tpg.com.au

Deadline for the next edition is 31 May 2011.

HBOC postal address:
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Website: www.hboc.org.au

President's Column

Just a few things to keep in mind:

In May, members of both Birds Australia (BA) and Bird Observation and Conservation Australia (BOCA) will be asked to vote on the proposed merger of these organisations to form one national birding body, BirdLife Australia. Information packs have been sent to members of both BA and BOCA and further details on voting procedures will follow later this month. All BA and BOCA members are strongly encouraged to vote on this important issue to ensure that the outcome is representative of the respective memberships.

Please give some thought to volunteering to give a short talk at Club Night as part of the 'Bird of the Evening' segment of the meeting. As mentioned previously there is no need to use "technological devices" as part of your session, just a short talk on a birding subject of your own choosing will be sure to add interest and variety to the meeting.

Check that you are up to date with your membership fee for this year as there are quite a few subscriptions still outstanding. If you are not sure if you have paid yours, check with Treasurer Joy or Membership Secretary Ian.

Keep a lookout for the human equivalent of one of these (see photo below), male or female, and report your sighting to a member of the committee!



Secretary Bird - Jim Smart

Interestingly, the feathers of the Secretary Bird were used historically as writing quills, hence the name of the bird.

Go camping this Easter, especially as the HBOC camp is in the bird-rich Capertee Valley. (See February Newsletter [available on website www.hboc.org.au] for details or contact Lorna Mee on 4988 6579).

Keep an eye on the migratory waders, they are colouring up and getting fatter by the day as they build their energy stores for the long and arduous trip to their breeding grounds. Many have already gone, but you never know, you may get the chance to wish them luck as you wave them good-bye.

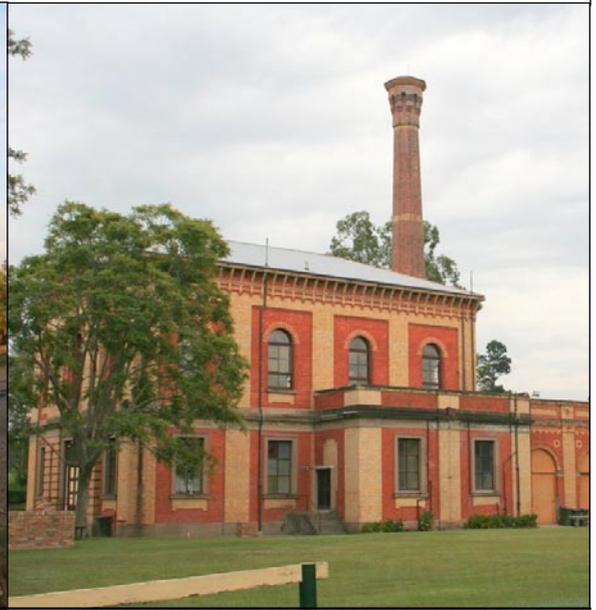
Happy Easter and Good Birding!

Paul Baird

HBOC Committee for 2011

President	Paul Baird 4938 5039
Vice President	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237
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Treasurer	Joy Nicholls 4957 3612
Committee Members:	Hayley Boyce 0421 175 922 Robert McDonald 0408 877 827 Lorna Mee 4988 6579 Kristy Peters 0438 328 049 Allan Richardson 4977 2508 Dan Williams 0408 023 262
Conservation Coordinator:	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Membership Secretary:	Ian Martin 4943 9256
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Featured Birdwatching Site: Walka Water Works



The dam at Walka Water Works, 2km north of Maitland Court House, was built in the 1880s as the storage pond for the first reticulated water supply to Newcastle and surrounding villages. After World War I it was replaced by Chichester Dam. After World War II it was used as the cooling water pond for a power station. It is now a popular passive recreation site.

The dam at Walka Water Works is one of the few bodies of good quality deep fresh water in the lower Hunter. The full range of expected aquatic birds can be seen on the lake and in the surrounding vegetation. It is a fairly reliable location for the deep water specialist species including all grebe species, Musk Duck and Blue-billed Duck.

Walka serves as a drought refuge for waterbirds during dry periods out west. When good rain occurs outback most birds depart to breed.

Starting in April 2003, HBOC has been carrying out monthly bird counts at Walka and has accumulated some interesting data over the past eight years.

The land surrounding the dam was cleared at the time of construction of the dam but has now regenerated into fairly good quality Spotted Gum woodland. The full suite of Lower Hunter woodland birds can be expected there.

Near the historic buildings there are picnic facilities and toilets. Walka is a pleasant place for a family outing as well as a good birding site.

Jim Smart



Clockwise from top left: Surveying Walka Water Works; the original pump house which housed three James Watt & Co steam engines; male Musk Duck displaying; Great Crested Grebe; and Black Swans - Jim Smart

Club Outing Reports

Woods Point, Morisset

Mid-week outing

Tuesday 1 February 2011

The first mid-week outing for the year was to the Lake Macquarie Conservation Area at Woods Point, Morisset. As it was forecast to be an extremely hot day, we did not expect many to turn up and were surprised to have a gathering of 15 people.

Some of the birds seen were Eastern Osprey, Nankeen Kestrel, Sacred and Azure Kingfishers, Lewin's and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Yellow Thornbill, Grey Shrike-thrush, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Dollarbird, Grey Butcherbird, Galah, Little Corella, Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, Eastern Rosella, Superb and Variegated Fairy-wrens, Mistletoebird, Red Wattlebird, Silveryeye and Varied Sittella.

Flying overhead were White-throated Needletail, Fork-tailed Swift, Welcome Swallow and White-breasted Woodswallow. Along the bank of Pourmalong Creek we saw White-faced and Striated Herons. It was good to see the Eastern Osprey were still in the area around their nest.

After morning tea and doing the bird count, which totaled 50 species seen and 2 heard, we all decided to stop as the temperature had already reached the high thirties.

Val and Don Moon

Stockton Sandspit

Midweek Outing

Tuesday 1st March, 2011

February HBOC Newsletter printed an article: "Featured Birdwatching Site: Stockton Sandspit" described by Tom Clarke. This was the site chosen for our mid-week outing for March. Once again the Stockton Sandspit lived up to expectations despite a very hot and windy morning.

Twenty members arrived at the Sandspit at 7.30am which was half an hour after high tide. We were joined by Kim West from NPWS Newcastle Area. Kim wished to find out more about our areas of interest in Newcastle. We also acquainted her with the different species of waders.

Due to the westerly wind the water on the 'beach' stayed high for several hours which kept the birds on

the Sandspit itself. Large flocks of Eastern Curlews, Bar-tailed Godwits, and a few Black-tailed Godwits were watched for some time and each in turn was put to flight by a juvenile White-bellied Sea-Eagle and a Swamp Harrier. Also present were nine or more Pacific Golden Plover, crouched in the long grass which made them difficult to count. Red-capped Plovers were in their usual spot near the far bank. Three Little Egrets, several White-faced Herons and passing Pied and Little Black Cormorants along with Little, Common, Caspian and Crested Terns were seen. The three resident Pied Oystercatchers mingled with the shorebirds.

Apart from the shorebirds there were Little Wattlebirds, Brown Honeyeater, Superb Fairy-wrens, and Mangrove Gerygone, and one sighting of a Brahminy Kite.

We walked along the bank at the side of Nelson Bay Road to Fern Bay to look for the Grey-tailed Tattler which often roost on the rocks there. There were none in their usual place but looking further on we could see a large number of birds on the timber oyster racks beyond the mangroves. There were Whimbrels roosting in the mangroves and as we came closer, with the help of telescopes, we were able to see there were 65 Grey-tailed Tattler and 6 Terek Sandpiper on the timberwork. This was a great discovery and those with telescopes helped others to count these.

On returning to the Sandspit we walked down the estuary side to see that many of the godwits and Red-capped Plover had moved into the water to feed. When we completed the bird call we had collectively seen 43 species.

As the temperature had reached 35 degrees, lots of participants left at this point. The hardy continued on to Stockton for lunch where they were able to see shearwaters very close inshore from the start of the Stockton breakwall.

Judi Thomas

Watagan Mountains

20 February 2011

It is always pleasant to explore the tall forests of the Watagans. We started with the Gap Creek walk, spotting 25 species including: Black-faced Monarch; Rufous Fantail; Yellow-throated, White-browed and Large-billed Scrubwrens; Bassian Thrush; and Brown Cuckoo-Dove.

At Boarding House Dam we observed Gang-gang Cockatoo and Azure Kingfisher and heard Superb Lyre-

Club Outing Reports cont.

bird and White-throated Treecreeper, in addition to 21 other species.

On the road to The Pines we found a puddle being used by Scarlet, Fuscous and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters for drinking and bathing. A White-headed Pigeon perched in a tree overhanging the road gave us an unexpected sighting.

Thanks to Toni Marsh and Peter Struik for organising an interesting itinerary through beautiful forests.

Liz Crawford

Port Stephens Waterbird Survey 18 February 2011

15 members of Hunter Bird Observers Club, in conjunction with the local Nelson Bay NPWS, did the annual summer survey of Port Stephens on Friday February 18, in ideal conditions. As usual, this was a boat-based survey, with 6 vessels simultaneously surveying the various parts of the Port. We had good counts of many shorebirds, mostly fitting reasonably well with the counts from the previous 7 years of surveying there (7 summer surveys, 3 winter ones). The numbers of cormorants, ducks, swans, etc. were down on normal. The highlight was that we found 166 Australian Pied Oystercatchers present. We have long known that Port Stephens is a stronghold for this endangered species in NSW. This year's count is the highest ever, and the trend over the past 5 years has been for the numbers to be increasing every year.

Where do they come from? There are no recent breeding records for Australian Pied Oystercatchers from Port Stephens and only one known historic record.

Until recently, the total population for Australian Pied Oystercatcher in NSW was estimated at 234-250 birds. From the survey work by various HBOC members in recent years, we know that a similar number of birds occur just within Hunter Region sites. This summer, we had 280-300 Australian Pied Oystercatchers in the Hunter Region (in addition to the 166 in Port Stephens, there were 72 birds at Forster/Tuncurry and 36 birds in the Hunter Estuary in February, plus smaller parties elsewhere).

Alan Stuart

Port Stephens Bush Stone-curlew Census

Thursday 7 April 2011

The Bush Stone-Curlew is listed as endangered in NSW. Locally there is a small population that exists around the western shores of Port Stephens and we know that at least 1 or 2 pairs have reasonable success rearing young birds. To gain a better understanding of the Port Stephens population, bi-annual surveys have been established by NPWS, Port Stephens Council and HBOC. The inaugural census was held on the evening of 26 August 2010 and 25 HBOC volunteers turned out to help that night. Birds were recorded from 4 locations during that survey.

Surveys are proposed to occur just before and after the breeding season (as happens at Gosford), so to this end a survey was conducted on Thursday 7 April 2011. Again, over 20 HBOC volunteers turned up to be stationed at various locations in Port Stephens for the call-playback / listen / spotlighting technique used to determine the presence of birds. Unfortunately we only recorded birds at 2 sites this time around (one at Lemon Tree Passage plus a pair and a fledged young at Bobs Farm). This is the first post-breeding census we have run, so perhaps the birds are more difficult to find at this time? It is difficult to tell, but one thing that seems almost undeniable is that the Port Stephens population is very small and hence vulnerable to further decline. More information about the distribution of birds is important to inform management strategies to keep the population viable.

If you are interested in being involved in future surveys come and see me at a meeting or contact me via email mickhbb@yahoo.com.au.

Mick Roderick

HBOC Membership Fees for January - December 2011 are now overdue

Membership Fees for 2011 are \$30.00 Single and Family, \$5.00 Junior

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

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

If you prefer to pay by electronic transfer, please include your name in the transaction to:

Greater Building Society; BSB 637000; Account No. 782260316; Account Name: Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

A Year in the Life of the Wardens at Broome Bird Observatory

After 15 years of enjoyment from Birds Australia, we decided to give something back and applied for positions at Broome Bird Observatory (BBO). We were surprised by the lack of applicants, especially Australians, and were offered the positions of Wardens. With intensive training on shorebirds with HBOC members, we felt confident to “give it a go”. The role is complex involving front-office operations, repairs and maintenance, running tours, assisting with research projects, promotion and fund raising, education and information.

2010 was the first year that BBO had linked up with the WA Department of Environment and Conservation **Camp Ground Hosts programme** and we had many skilled retirees and travellers visit for one month each to help upgrade the facilities and assist with guests and visitors. In return for volunteering for a month we could offer free camping and birding tours. Our Camp Ground Hosts assisted with painting, carpentry, track clearing, cleaning, preparation and cooking for the birding courses. We managed to repair the shadehouse, install aircons for the Assistant Wardens, refit the shop and office, sort the library and make the Warden’s house inhabitable.

‘Waving the Waders Goodbye’ Courses in March and April entailed serving 3 meals per day for 6 days and taking participants on tours with course work in between. Each afternoon from 4 pm – 6 pm (sunset) we set up scopes on the beach and logged as many flocks as possible, including the species, number, shape and direction of migration. This work has been recorded by Chris Hassell over 15 years and combines with Global Flyways data collected on stopovers along the route. The birds generally separate into species before attempting the trip, then they may take a few practice flights and return to the same spot. These attempts are also recorded. Towards sunset and evening seems to be the favoured time to leave, because it is cooler and the birds will burn less energy.

Ongoing research projects:

- Monthly mud sampling, collecting and sorting the benthic fauna in Roebuck Bay has been done by BBO staff and volunteers for 12 years. Core samples are taken at 2 points in Roebuck Bay, the samples are washed in sea water, then all invertebrates are placed into alcohol (to euthanase and preserve). Every 3 months the invertebrate samples are drained of alcohol, packed with cotton wool and shipped to NIOZ in Holland for analysis. The invertebrates are the main food of the waders and the study is looking at long-term changes in the bay.

- Cannon netting with Global Flyways is the best way to see the shorebirds up close and we were privileged to work with Chris Hassell and Adrian Boyle who seem to know each bird personally. It is a good way to involve locals and visitors, with an experience which stays with you.

- Bush bird banding allowed us to experience all the birds around the observatory first hand, learn biometric techniques and involve children who were camped with us. Some of those children will make excellent birders in the future.

We were surprised to find that the BBO is self-funded, raising money from the tours, accommodation and birding courses. Once we realised this we set about chasing grant money, which helped us to buy new scopes for use on migration watch and research work. We attempted to run a few extra ‘Birding for Beginners’ Courses, but our first course missed the advertising deadlines, although the second one was very successful.

Although the hours were long and we had few days off to explore the region, we felt pleased that we had put in a big effort and achieved some great results. Feedback from campers and visitors was very supportive. We met some wonderful people, many experienced birders and researchers, including Dr Clive Minton’s Victorian Wader Study Group and of course, some of the most amazing avian travellers in the world.

Thank you HBOC for encouraging us to “have a go”!
We hope you all “migrate” to Broome Bird Observatory soon!

Peter Struik and Toni Marsh

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Matthew Blyth of Toronto
Lauren and Mark Branson of Hamilton
L. Winston Filewood of Forster
P. Clark Gormley of Merewether
Judi Homewood of Artarmon
Sue and Sophie Horrocks of Nelson Bay
Robert Kilkelly of Rutherford
Angela Lane of Nelson Bay
Margarite Morris of New Lambton
Katrina McGrath of New Lambton

We hope to meet you at Club outings and meetings

Declining Woodland Birds

It is widely acknowledged that our woodland birds are declining. Various causes like habitat loss, the fragmentation of remnant vegetation and drought have been proposed as causes. However, driving through the Hunter Region with its many wooded areas it is easy to underestimate the seriousness of the issue. Certainly this seems to be the case with the planners and regulators who continue to condone the clearing of remnant native vegetation.

The most recent issue of *Birds Australia's* journal the *Emu* is a special issue dedicated to "Declining Woodland Birds" (Volume 111, Issue 1, 2011). This excellent resource provides some new insights into how the decline occurs and why remnant native vegetation is stressed and suboptimal bird habitat. An article by David Watson highlights the importance of the supply of water and nutrients to soil to the abundance of the invertebrates on which insectivorous species prey. The effective flow of nutrients also impacts on seed generation and populations of granivorous birds. Well with hindsight that is all pretty obvious, but it is also necessary to take into account the impact of all the small water storage dams and the compaction of the ground by cattle on the infiltration of water as this exacerbates the impact of drought.

For sometime I have jokingly said the most reliable location I know locally for the Speckled Warbler is in an olive grove in the Duns Creek area. In order to better understand this anomaly I survey the olive patch monthly. During my March survey I realised that my survey area had all the ingredients of high productivity habitat as it is irrigated. While my initial focus was the Speckled Warbler, the surveys have shown the olives and immediate surrounds to be a very "birdy" spot with

regular records of Striated, Brown, Yellow and Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Jacky Winter, Doubled-barred and Red-browed Finches and occasional records of White-throated Treecreepers and Painted Button-quail; a hot spot for insectivorous and granivorous species. I have previously highlighted to the owners the benefits of keeping the grass short for the ground feeders. Of course the Australian King Parrots, Crimson Rosellas, Magpies and Silvereys also find the olives tailor-made habitat.

The *Emu* also has an article on the decline of the White-fronted Chat in NSW, hardly a woodland bird but the paper is included on the basis that many of the causes of decline are similar. Formerly chats were known from over 50 locations in the Sydney Basin, but this has decreased to just two areas and local extinction appears inevitable as a consequence of urbanisation and the disregard of the environmental value of marshy areas. Chat populations are under threat in the Newcastle area from the same pressures, namely urban spread and the industrial development of the Hunter Estuary. During the 1990s I found chats in the middle of the Butterwick floodplain near Woodville. I wonder if they are still there as we have large expanses of floodplain which are seldom if ever visited by birdwatchers.

The *Emu* papers are a terrific resource for those mounting a case for the preservation of our remaining woodlands in the Hunter Valley. Do not be deceived by the apparent abundance and greenness of the Hunter Valley, our remnant vegetation is mainly in areas low in nutrients (e.g. ridges) and the ground is very dry. Our insectivorous and granivorous birds are doing it hard.

Mike Newman

Australia's First Natural Historian

When nervously preparing for your next HBOC pelagic trip, spare a thought for those early Europeans who sailed uncharted seas with nothing but sextant, spyglass and quill pen for technology. That's what William Dampier did. Twice! Well, more actually, if you count some of his dodgier exploits. But this article concerns itself with Dampier's two Australian voyages in the leaky, wood-worm riddled navy sloops *Cygnets* and *Roebuck*. These ships were barely 2.5 times the size of HBOC's *MV Argonaut* charter. Now that's really scary.

History has not been kind to Dampier. He is variously described as an English gentleman, a pirate, a privateer, a hydrographer, a plant collector and a Royal Navy Captain, contradictions which seem to have had a

cautionary effect on most biographers. Compared to other explorers, his voyages rarely rate a mention. One wonders if Aussie historians snubbed him for those famously quoted journal extracts where he described New Holland as, "...of a dry sandy Soil, destitute of Water..." and the people as "...the most miserable wretches in the universe..."

Alex George's book, "William Dampier in New Holland," has done much to correct my residual classroom impression of Dampier as someone who seemingly bumped into Australia's west coast by accident, took one look, and promptly departed for more interesting climes. He was not only the first Englishman to set foot on Australian soil, his descriptions of the flora

Australia's First Natural Historian cont.

and fauna he encountered earns him the well deserved title of Australia's first natural historian.

Little is known of Dampier's first Australian visit, other than his January 1688 landfall near Swan Point, east of Cape Leveque, W.A. Fortunately, the journals and charts from his 1699 expedition, made on behalf of the British Admiralty, are meticulously detailed. They contain a wealth of information about the Western Australian coastline from Shark Bay to Lagrange Bay (south of Broome) which future explorers such as James Cook found invaluable.

Dampier made extensive notes about the Australian environment, landscape, soils, vegetation, tides, sea floor, winds and weather, plus he collected and described 23 plant species. Also recognizable from his journal notes are descriptions of: 3 more plants; a phytoplankton; 14 fishes; 3 marine mammals; some terrestrial mammals (including marsupials); 1 land reptile; 3 marine reptiles, (including a turtle); 2 oysters; 1 cephalopod; an insect and 17 species of birds. Other references to plants, seashells, and a marine alga have yet to be identified. This list strikes me as a very creditable effort for a visit lasting 36 days during which his leaky ship was in constant need of attention.

For those of a botanical bent, Alex George's account of Dampier's plant collection reads like a detective novel. George, an Australian botanist and taxonomist of international repute, is one of a legion of botanists to work on the collection. Dampier saw a lot during his travels, which took him three times around the world. In Australia he collected selectively for specimens he had not seen elsewhere. Three hundred years later the collection still survives in Oxford's herbarium, a testament to Dampier's knowledge of collecting and preserving specimens. But getting it back to England was a near thing. The *Roebuck* finally succumbed to the ravages of wood-worm and sank off Ascension Island. Dampier managed to salvage the specimens and his journals. For many weeks Dampier, the collection and the crew sheltered under tents constructed from the ship's sails until they were rescued by some passing British ships.

The British Navy fined Dampier three years' wages for losing their ship, which seems incredibly harsh, but there was an upside to this punishment. In an effort to avoid penury, Dampier published an account of his exploits. The venture was hugely successful, bringing him public acclaim, reinstated social status and a tidy fortune. Volume III contains the first formal written account of Australia's natural history.

Alex George's account of Dampier's life, and the problems associated with the plant collection make for an excellent read. Then, at the end, rather like in this article, I discovered Dampier's Aussie Bird List. "... *Shear-waters* [and] *Fowls the like of which we had not seen in the whole Voyage...several large Sea Fowl* [and] *a sort of white Sea Mews...*" He shot some of these sea-birds and put a water-spaniel overboard to retrieve them so they could be sketched and described. Dampier summed up the land birds as follows: "*There were but few Land Fowls: we saw none but Eagles, of the larger sorts of Birds, but 5 or 6 sorts of small Birds. The biggest sort of these were not bigger than Larks; some no bigger than wrens, all singing with great variety of fine shrill Notes.*" He also encountered various waterbirds: "*The Water-Fowls are Ducks (which had young Ones now, this being the Beginning of the Spring in these Parts) Curlews, Galdens, Crab-catchers, Cormorants, Gulls, Pelicans; and some Water-Fowl, such as I have not seen any where besides.*" Interesting field notes! Seventeen avian species have now been formally identified from his notes.



The illustrations, in Dampier's "A Voyage to New Holland" are the first published drawings of Australian flora and fauna. They are crude, but recognizable and were thought to have been drawn by the ship's clerk, James Brand. The bird drawings show several species known to Hunter birders, but my favourite by far is a bird that survives in our region while declining in many other areas, the Pied Oystercatcher.

Reference

George, Alex S. (1999). 'William Dampier in New Holland: Australia's First Natural Historian'. (Bloomington Books: Hawthorn).

Lois Wooding

Twitchathon-funded Projects

Proceeds from the 2008 Twitchathon. The money raised in the 2008 Twitchathon was divided between the *Hunter Bird Observers Club Migratory Wader Site Restoration Project* (on Ash Island) and the *Gosford Friends of the Bush Stone-curlews*. These two projects will be expending the funds over a two-year period and they are still in progress.

Proceeds from the 2009 Twitchathon. Several meetings have been held by BASNA on the management of the funds raised in 2009 which were to be used in the *monitoring of Important Bird Areas (IBAs)* in NSW. A sub-committee (Peter Marsh, Rod Kavanagh, Alan Stuart, Tony Dymond & Alan Morris) was established by BASNA to prepare guidelines for the disbursement of funds to NSW bird clubs who have indicated they plan to undertake surveys in the various Regional IBAs. BASNA will provide more details about this Project in due course; however the Guidelines were adopted by BASNA in March 2011.

Proceeds from the 2010 Twitchathon. Since we raised more money than expected, we were able to provide \$12,000 to each of the recipient projects: the *Kangaroo Island (SA) Glossy Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project* and the *Bush Stone-curlew Nature Conservation Working Group*, which is involved in captive breeding and release of Bush Stone-curlews in the Murray River region.

Proceeds from the 2011 Twitchathon. In consultation with all the Regional Groups, BASNA received a number of ideas for the Twitchathon Project in 2011. At its regular meeting on 7/3/2011 BASNA adopted the project *Monitoring the Powerful Owl in the Wider Sydney Region*. This project will be supervised by Dr Rod Kavanagh and aims to obtain records of all the breeding events of these nocturnal predators throughout the Sydney Basin and for the first time have landscape-wide data on the well being of a peak avian predator.

Alan Morris, Twitchathon Co-ordinator

Great Eastern Ranges Initiative and Bird Migration within Australia

The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative aims to maintain and improve long-term connectivity conservation of mountain ecosystems running the length of eastern Australia. The 1,200 km New South Wales section of the Great Eastern Ranges is the current area of focus.

On 24 February 2006 the Hon Bob Debus MP, the then NSW Minister for the Environment, announced the NSW Environmental Trust had allocated a budget of \$AUD 7 million over 3 years to establish the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative in NSW. The key means for achieving the vision in NSW are the Business Plan 2007–2010, a Communication and Community Involvement Strategy, and Partnerships for integrating a great range of conservation activities in priority areas.

Drawing together the efforts of the various community, industry, government and non-government groups

already working in the area, the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative will strengthen the resilience of natural ecosystems and the native plant and animal species they support, in the face of climate change and other ecological threats.

A series of animated maps from the 2010 pilot project between Birds Australia and other partners in the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative has been presented on their website. This work was done by Andrew Smith in 2010.

<http://www.greasterranges.org.au/site-information/resources/bird-of-australia>

Click on a species map and let it scroll through the months; it gives you a great picture of the patterns of seasonal latitudinal bird migration through the ranges.

PLEASE NOTE: Club membership fees were due on 1st January 2011. If you haven't already paid your 2011 fees by the time you receive this newsletter then you are now unfinancial and will not receive any further newsletters or mail-outs until you become financial again. If you are not sure of your position, please contact Joy Nicholls on 4957 3612 or Ian Martin on 4943 9256

HBOC Camera Twitch

Inspired by the popular Twitchathons, this event encourages anyone with a camera to go out and photograph birds regardless of camera type or lens size.

The date: 16 - 17 July 2011.

The aim: To photograph as many Australian bird species as possible in 8 hours.

Entry: There is no entry fee and you don't need to pre-register.

Your approach to this event can be as competitive or non-competitive as you want. You can use it as a reason to go out looking at birds for 8 hours, or simply a chance to have fun while satisfying your own curiosity about how many species you can photograph in a day.

While only an 8-hour event, we have made the competition a full weekend in duration to allow people to get out at a time that suits them instead of a definitive start/finish time.

Prizes: At the moment, bragging rights will be the main prize as well as the winners will get to see their names up in lights (well included in the article for the HBOC Newsletter). Participants are encouraged to submit their favourite, or worst, photo of the day along with their species list.

Rules:

1. You are limited to a consecutive 8hr block over the nominated weekend. You choose start and finish times.
2. Please observe the Club's Code of Birding Ethics – available on our website at the following link: <http://www.hboc.org.au/resources/documents/Code%20of%20birding%20Ethics%20FINAL%20sept07.pdf>
3. Birds must be totally wild and free, and photographed within Australia (pelagic species are allowed).
4. No call playback allowed. (Pishing is acceptable)
5. Baiting is not allowed. (Bird feeders are acceptable)
6. Any photo counted must allow the species to be easily and unequivocally identified (when combined with knowledge of location). Whilst outright image quality is not the aim, we encourage people to try to get as good an image as they can, if only for their own satisfaction.
7. You may travel with others for company etc, however individuals can only count the birds they actually photograph.
8. Upon completion, you have a week to sort through your photos and compile your species list (preferably in taxonomic order). All totals (and web-sized images you wish to show) are to be e-mailed to Darryl Luck at darryl.luck@hotmail.com
9. Closing date for submitting your list is 24 July 2011.

Mid-week Camp in September 2011

The mid-week camp will be held at Seal Rocks from Monday 19 to Wednesday 21 September 2011.

Accommodation at Seal Rocks is limited and very popular. If you are camping you should have no trouble but it might still be a good idea to book early. If you want a cabin you should waste no time in booking. There are 2 caravan parks at Seal Rocks:

1. Seal Rocks Holiday Park, ph 1800 112 234. This is where organised outings will start from but cabins may already be booked out.

2. Treachery Camp, Seal Rocks, ph 4997 6138, about 3 km south of the township. Limited cabins may still be available.

The only other accommodation seems to be cottages which could be OK on a shared basis, e.g. there are 2 nice looking lighthouse cottages available at \$300 a night for 4 people; ph 4997 6590. Look up stayz.com.au for other cottages or search 'Seal Rocks accommodation'.

Hunterbirding

Hunterbirding is an email group set up by HBOC that is run through the Yahoo Groups. It is a great way to keep in touch with the latest goings-on in Hunter Region birding. Members are able to report sightings, post questions to the group and get involved with group discussions on bird-related issues. If you are interested in joining the group then please visit the HBOC website for details on how to sign up: <http://www.hboc.org.au/index.cfm?menukey=27>. You can choose either to receive individual emails or a single daily digest. Alternatively, email me at scythrope@yahoo.com.au and I'll sort it out for you – what could be easier?! The following article highlights some of the reports and discussions that have happened on hunterbirding within the last two months.

February

Proceedings were started with discussion on the status of Common Sandpiper in the Hunter. They are generally uncommon in this part of the world, with two or three birds typically present in the Hunter Estuary each summer season. A sighting of three birds together in January was the highest count this season. Another status discussion was had on Plumed Whistling-Duck, with a pair observed breeding at Morpeth Common. This would constitute only the fourth breeding record in the Hunter. Aside from regular large counts at Doughboy Hollow (south of Singleton), they are not often seen elsewhere and typically in small numbers.

Channel-billed Cuckoos featured heavily this month – starting with observations on the number of chicks raised by a single host. Although usually only one chick is reared by an adoptive set of parents, occasionally two chicks are reported and even an occurrence of three chicks with one parent Pied Currawong was mentioned from this season. The increased distribution of the species was also noted, with mention of having to travel north of Raymond Terrace to see them 30 years ago. Now they are commonplace in the suburbs of Newcastle. The interest in this species then seemed to spark reports of every Channel-bill and Koel observation in the region! A few highlights elsewhere included a count of 166 Pied Oystercatchers on the Port Stephens wader survey – the highest count yet and great news for this threatened species. An observation of around 50 Wedge-tailed Shearwater following a trawler up Throsby Creek was unusual for them to be so far into the harbour. Lastly, the observation of a White-throated Nightjar nest with egg, which subsequently hatched, was particularly heart-warming – especially as photographs capturing the events were shared!

March

It was the Sooty Oystercatcher's turn for a high count this month, with no less than 42 recorded around Newcastle Ocean Baths! There was also a White-winged Black Tern reported frequenting the nearby breakwall. It seems that this species has been seen by many observers this year, except the one observer who wants it more than anyone else – you (and every other hunterbirder for that matter) know who you are!

A Request for Information (RFI) went out seeking reliable sites for Glossy Black-Cockatoo and Gang-gang Cockatoo. The request was (as always) met with several useful suggestions, but then also morphed into a discussion on the occurrence of Pilotbird in the Hunter Region. This species has its northern limit in Wollemi National Park, where they favour the moister south-facing gullies and the cooler areas of the basalt-capped peaks. The conversation then changed track again to highlight the benefits of using Google Earth or Google Maps for sharing bird sighting information. For those of you who are unaware, the HBOC recording area is provided in such format – just type the following into the Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com.au/>) search box: http://www.hboc.org.au/resources/documents/hunter_region.txt

Further discussions on species' status within the Hunter was had too – they've been popular of late! The occurrence of Zebra Finch within the Lower Hunter was queried. It is understood that the only place where they are reasonably common is in the vicinity of Bolwarra and Largs. Unfortunately they are now absent from the Hunter Estuary, where they used to be recorded in counts of up to 50 before the disappearance of Big Pond (now a coal loader) in around 2001.

An interesting behavioural observation was made regarding a Caspian Tern that was seen from a Port Stephens pelagic this month. It was witnessed pirating a Crested Tern for food, as is typical of Arctic Jaegers or Frigatebirds. Apparently this behaviour was previously unrecorded in Australia, so it was a rare spectacle for the fortunate observers. Finally, there was concern from a few subscribers that hunterbirding was not working at one point. It turned out that it was just a quiet period, in which no-one had posted anything for a week! So please, keep your contributions coming and spare the fears of your fellow birders!

Dan Williams

Club Night Observations February 2011 - March 2011

Please note that all sighting reports published in HBOC's newsletter or its on-line forum (Hunterbirding) are unofficial and have not been confirmed by the club. Such reports are publicised in order that others can be made aware of the sighting(s) reported and have the chance to help verify them. Official records of bird sightings in the Hunter Region appear in the Annual Bird Report, for which written submissions supported by field notes and photographs are a vital part of the process for acceptance of locally uncommon/rare species.

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Australasian Darter	2+2dy	9/02/11	Dora Creek	G.&R. Goodenough
Australasian Figbird	4m+3f	7/02/11	Shortland [garden]	H.Boyce
Australian Hobby	1	9/02/11	Belmont South	J.Cockerell
Australian Owlet-nightjar	1	4/02/11	Kurri Kurri [garden]	C.Maybury
Australian White Ibis	105	23/02/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
Bar-shouldered Dove	3	16/02/11	Ash Island	H.Boyce
Bar-shouldered Dove	1	9/03/11	Warners Bay	R.Walker
Black Bittern	1	6/03/11	H.W.C. [Canoe Trail]	G.Nicholls
Black Swan br	29	23/02/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
Blue-faced Honeyeater	Pr	25/2/11	Eleebana [Stobbart Reserve]	A.Gooden
Brown Quail	5	12/2/11	Belmont Lagoon	M.Blyth
Brown Thornbill	60	8/03/11	Wollombi [Narone Ck Rd]	B.&J.Greig
Buff-banded Rail	1	30/01/11	Dora Creek	C.&R. Goodenough
Buff-banded Rail	1	2/02/11	Dora Creek	C.&R. Goodenough
Collared Sparrowhawk	1juv.	15/02/11	Kulnura	B.&J.Greig
Cormorant [spp]	~100	10/01/11	Carey Bay	J.Hissey
Dollarbird	1+1dy	1/02/11	Blackbutt Reserve	P.Lightfoot
Eastern Koel	1	2/08/11	Belmont South	J.Cockerell
Eastern Rosella	40	9/03/11	Wollombi [Narone Ck Rd]	B.&J.Greig
Flame Robin	1	21/12/10	Barrington Tops [Polblue]	T.Clarke
Flame Robin	1	21/12/10	Barrington Tops [Murray Trail]	T.Clarke
Flame Robin	3	3/02/11	Little Murrays Trail	T.Clarke
Flame Robin	2	3/02/11	Barrington Trail	T.Clarke
Flame Robin	1	3/02/11	Junction Pools Trail	T.Clarke
Flame Robin	3	2/03/11	Edwards Trail [Barrington]	T.Clarke
Flame Robin	6	3/02/11	Little Murrays Hut	T.Clarke
Gang-gang Cockatoo	3Prs	27/01/11	Wollombi	B&J.Greig
Gang-gang Cockatoo	9	1/03/11	Wollombi [Narone Ck Rd]	B.&J.Greig
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	4	26/02/11	Clarencetown	per R.Walker
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	4	8/03/11	Wollombi [Narone Ck Rd]	B.&J.Greig
Golden-headed Cisticola	Pr	8/02/11	STW Belmont	J.Cockerell
Grey Goshawk	1	5/02/11	Belmont South	J.Cockerell
Grey Goshawk	2	23/02/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
Latham's Snipe	1	28/01/11	Pambalong N.R.	T.Clarke
Little Corella	60	3/02/11	Dora Creek	C.&R. Goodenough
Little Friarbird nb	3	27/01/11	Shoal Bay	M.Blyth
Little Penguin	1	19/01/11	Dutchmans Bay	T.Clarke

Club Night Observations February 2011 - March 2011 cont.

Little Penguin	1	7/02/11	Dutchmans Bay	T.Clarke
Little Penguin	3	25/01/11	Dutchmans Bay	T.Clarke
Long-billed Corella	9	4/03/11	Dora Creek	C.&R. Goodenough
Long-billed Corella	2+1dy	1/2/11	Dora Creek	C.&R. Goodenough
Musk Duck	1	19/01/11	Mambo Wetlands	T.Clarke
Olive Whistler	1	23/12/10	Thunderbolts Lookout	T.Clarke
Olive Whistler	1	3/02/11	Black Swamp [Barrington]	T.Clarke
Olive Whistler	2	1/02/11	Junction Pools [Barrington]	T.Clarke
Olive Whistler	1	2/02/11	Little Murrays Trail	T.Clarke
Pheasant Coucal	1	20/01/11	Mulbring	B&J.Greig
Pheasant Coucal	1	Nov/Dec 10	Eleebana	A.Gooden
Pheasant Coucal	1juv.	6/02/11	Eleebana	A.Gooden
Plumed Whistling-Duck	2+6dy	Feb 11	Morpeth Common	R.Kilkelly/G.Brosie
Red-browed Finch	50	9/03/11	Wollombi [Narone Ck Rd]	B.&J.Greig
Red-browed Finch	27	23/02/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
Regent Honeyeater	1	7/02/11	Luskintyre	T. Black
Rockwarbler	Pr+1dy	25/02/11	Laguna	B.&J.Greig
Royal Spoonbill	42	9/2/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	R.&M.Stewart
Royal Spoonbill	9+imm	23/02/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
Satin Bowerbird	2	26/01/11	Wallsend [garden]	T.Clarke
Scarlet Honeyeater	10m+6f	20/12/10	Wollombi	B&J.Greig
Sooty Oystercatcher	39	28/02/11	Rock Platform, Newcastle	J.Thomas
Spangled Drongo	3	8/02/11	Bobs Farm	R.&M.Stewart
Spangled Drongo	1	23/02/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
Spotted Quail-thrush	1m	8/03/11	Kitchener	R.Kilkelly/G.Brosie
Striated Heron	1	6/02/11	Toronto	P.Durie
Tawny Frogmouth	2juv	6/02/11	Eleebana	A.Gooden
Tawny Frogmouth	2+2dy	2/03/11	Eleebana [Stobbart Reserve]	A.Gooden
Wandering Whistling-Duck	4	23/02/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
Whistling Kite	3	30/01/11	Dora Creek	C.&R. Goodenough
White-breasted Woodswallow	8	20/01/11	Pambalong N.R.	T.Clarke
White-fronted Chat	8	14/01/11	Ash Is. [Swan Pond]	T.Clarke
White-throated Needletail	2	27/02/11	Warners Bay	R.Walker
White-throated Nightjar	2	13/01/11	George Booth Drive	A.Richardson
White-throated Nightjar ne	1	24/02/11	George Booth Drive	A.Richardson
White-throated Nightjar	1+1dy	28/02/11	George Booth Drive	A.Richardson

Erratum: Lois Wooding recorded 2 Beach Stone-Curlew on 20/01/11 in Port Stephens
(NOT Bush Stone-Curlew as recorded in the February Newsletter)

Note: dy = dependent young m = male
 f = female nb = nest building
 imm = immature ne = nestling
 juv = juvenile pr = pair

Wanted : Old Binoculars!

If you have any old binoculars hanging around that you no longer need, please consider donating them to the Club for use on Field Days when we interact with the community and show them the joys of bird-watching!

HBOC Activities April to June 2011

APRIL

Wednesday 13 April	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Chris Herbert – Western Australia Part II – Cape Range to the Nullarbor Bird of Evening: Mick Roderick
Saturday 16 April	Hunter Wader Survey	7.00am Ash Island 7.30am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton
Tuesday 19 April	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
EASTER/ ANZAC CAMP 22 – 25 April	Capertee Valley plus Migration to Grenfell Region	"Binalong", private property in Capertee Valley, 46.31km from Rylstone along Glen Alice Road	Lorna Mee 4988 6579

MAY

Tuesday 3 May	Mid-Week Outing – Botanical Gardens Heatherbrae	8.00am Car park at Gardens (\$4 parking fee)	Keith and Margaret Woods 4963 3070
Wednesday 4 May	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Paul Baird 4938 5039 All members welcome
Saturday 7 May	Hunter Wader Survey	10.00am Ash Island 10.30am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton
Monday 9 May	Volunteer Day at Ash Island – mangrove seedling removal	7.00am Milham Pond, Ash Island	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Wednesday 11 May	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Mike Newman, Alan Stuart & Ian Martin – Rufous Scrub-bird Surveys Bird of Evening: Kristy Peters
Saturday/ Sunday 14/15 May	Regent Honeyeater/ Swift Parrot Survey	Various locations as desired or directed	Mick Roderick 0421 761237 Please contact for information
Sunday 15 May	Volunteer Day at Stockton Sandspit – weeding and birdwatching	9.00am at Stockton Sandspit carpark	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Tuesday 17 May	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Sunday 22 May	Field outing to Broke / Bulga	7.30am Broke Fire Station	Allan Richardson 0403 942196
Monday 23 May	Volunteer Day at Ash Island – mangrove seedling removal	7.00am Milham Pond, Ash Island	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Sunday 29 May	Volunteer Day at Stockton Sandspit – weeding and birdwatching	9.00am at Stockton Sandspit carpark	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785

JUNE

Wednesday 1 June	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Paul Baird 4938 5039 All members welcome
Tuesday 7 June	Mid-Week Outing – Morpeth / Tenambit	8.00am Cemetery, Butchers Lane, Morpeth	Ray McLean 4987 4512
Wednesday 8 June	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Holly Parsons – Superb Fairy-wrens Bird of the Evening: Joy Nicholls
Friday 10 June	Volunteer Day at Ash Island – mangrove seedling removal	7.00am Milham Pond, Ash Island	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Long Weekend 11 - 13 June	Camp at <i>Myall View</i> , Violet Hill Road, Bulahdelah	Private property – bring everything you need.	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Saturday 18 June	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30am Ash Island 10.00 am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton
Sunday 19 June	Field Outing to Kitchener area	8.00am Poppethead Park, Quorrobolong Road, Kitchener	Liz Crawford 0412 722 644
Tuesday 21 June	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm