



# Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Issue No. 2/17 April 2017

*Affiliated with BirdLife Australia*

- The Club aims to:
- Encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat; and
  - Encourage bird observing as a leisure-time activity

*This bird is looking a little tatty, but the underwing shot is great!  
Photo taken by Peter Weinstock at Rutherford on 7 April 2017.*



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## President's Column

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Travel and birding; wouldn't it have to be the number one subject for the wayward meanderings of a day-dreaming birding brain? And where do you dream of going? The Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania or Roebuck Bay in north-west Australia for their migratory waders and other shorebirds? Perhaps you're an admirer of rainforest species? South America, South East Asia, New Guinea and the Congo, perhaps, with their Toucans, Cotingas, Hummingbirds, Trogons, Broadbills, Fairybirds, Birds of Paradise and Fruit-doves all springing to mind. Then there are the seabirds - the Antarctic, Sub-Antarctic, Arctic and even the tropics support a varied array of species in often large congregations. Maybe parrots are your forte, New Guinea and Indonesia to the north encompass a wonderful diversity in this group as does South America. Perhaps you'd like to go to the Andes to see an Andean Condor, the highlands of Europe, Central Asia or Africa to see a Lammergeier or the Philippines to see the Philippine Eagle? Yet I'm only barely touching the tip of the iceberg.

Despite our sometimes hankering for something exotic and different, every one of those exotic places is not viewed as exotic to the people that live there. Just take our own backyard for instance, we have nigh on 450 birds recorded in the Hunter,

including rarities. Although beautiful in their own way, and often generating much interest, local rarities aren't always the showiest when compared to the locals. Birds we take for granted like Eastern Rosellas, Rainbow Lorikeets, Australian King-Parrots and Crimson Rosellas rival some of the most colourful birds in the lands we consider exotic. Then there's our woodland birds, made up of incredible endemic groups, the Petroica Robins, a diversity of Honeyeater families, Pardalotes, Quail-thrush, Australian Grass-Finches, Whistlers, our flycatchers and Babblers to name but a few. Locally we have wonderful Owls, the Rufous Scrub Bird, Rock Warblers, Scrubwrens, Lyrebirds, Catbirds, Bowerbirds and the most important estuary in NSW right on our doorstep.

When I think about it, it was the local species that built my love for birds, and many of them seemed very exotic to see as a youngster, and still do. So, next time you're pining for the Fjords to see a Norwegian Blue, look out the window and take a look at why our own avifauna is so often turning many a day-dreaming birder green on one of those far away exotic shores.

**Allan Richardson**

## New Members

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### **The Club extends a warm welcome to:**

Robert Cuffe of Valentine  
Joanne Davidson of Millers Forest  
Gavin & Jannine Deneen of Lemon Tree Passage  
Chris & Denise Kane of Tamworth  
Jo-Ann McRae of Belmont  
Alan Morris of Bateau Bau

Michael Murphy of Boat Harbour  
Claire Philip of East Maitland  
Sarah Stevens of Adamstown  
Peter Weinstock of Rutherford  
Louise Williams of TBC

**We hope to see you at club meetings and outings.**

## Health and Safety Awareness for Activities

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When attending field outings, ensure you are wearing appropriate clothing, including wet weather gear in inclement weather, and suitable footwear. It is advisable to bring a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent and to carry water.

Please sign the attendance register at field outings and also at meetings. If you leave an outing early, please let the leader know before you go.

Participants attend at their own risk and should refrain from any behaviour that might put themselves or others at risk. That includes assessing whether they have the level of fitness required for the advertised outing. If in doubt, contact the leader beforehand.

## HBOC Life Membership for Mike Newman

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Mike has long championed the study, documenting and protection of Hunter Region birdlife, leading by example and mentoring many others. He has authored more than 40 papers about his long-term studies at sites such as Green Wattle Creek, Morpeth and Warekeila. As an

Editor of HBOC's journal *The Whistler* since 2008, Mike has encouraged and coached many new authors while at the same time enhancing *The Whistler's* reputation as a high quality publication.

## HBOC Bird of the Month

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The "Bird of the Month" is a regular feature on the HBOC Facebook Page. If you're already on Facebook and not following the Club's official page, then why not?!

### February – Rufous Whistler

This time we show a female, with her characteristic streaky breast. Pairs of Rufous Whistlers are very common in our Region over September-March. They establish regular territories in our drier woodlands and their calls resonate through the bush. Both sexes call, and it is a very familiar experience to be amongst them. They could never be accused of hiding their presence! A few birds stay on through the winter months but most depart northwards.

### March – Brown Falcon

It is a common raptor (bird of prey) in the Hunter Region. Pairs are found almost anywhere in the region except in high altitude forests; however its stronghold is the western parts of the region such as the upper Hunter and around the Goulburn River. They take small mammals (up to the size of a rabbit), snakes, birds, and even insects sometimes. The plumage varies, some birds are quite pale and some are dark, however most are intermediate in colour (like this one). They all have the characteristic "double tear" pattern at the eye i.e. two dark stripes. When soaring, they hold their wings in a classic V shape, a very characteristic ID feature for them amongst the local falcon species.



*Female Rufous Whistler by Alwyn Simple*



*Intermediate coloured Brown Falcon by Alwyn Simple*



*Brown Falcon in flight by Alan Stuart*

## Club Activity Reports

### Boys Walk, Avondale College, Cooranbong

19 February 2017

Many people would sleep in on a gloomy Sunday morning and perhaps even have breakfast in bed, especially when the weather was threatening rain. However, there was no sleep-in for these 20 keen birders! They showed up bright and early with a smile on their faces, binoculars in their hands, cameras round their necks and ready to walk miles in search of new bird species... and off we went!

It was not long before the first new species was spotted (at least it was new to some) – a very secretive and rarely seen Black Bittern was spotted flying over Dora creek as we were walking along side. It was also seen sitting in a tree on our way back. Unfortunately, true to its shy nature, it didn't stick around for photos.



*No breakfast in bed for these early risers*

Other highlights were Crested Shrike-tit, Varied Sittella, Black-faced Monarch with young, Azure Kingfisher, Regent Bowerbirds and many more.

I want to thank on behalf of HBOC Maurice Asthon, for his valuable time in showing us his favourite patch and for his extensive local knowledge of the area.

After over four hours of walking we headed to Cooranbong Park to have a well-deserved morning tea. The bird count was performed during the refreshment – this being a challenge to me as a first-time outing leader – but everyone was pleasantly patient.



*Large-billed Scrubwren by Rob Palazzi*

Those who stayed behind after morning tea spent some time at the park, with the highlight there being a Southern Emu-wren spotted by Krishna.

The outing wrapped up and our exhausted but satisfied birders headed home. No doubt our early risers had an early night to rest their tired feet.

**Lene Parashou**

### Tahlee

7 March 2017

On Tuesday March 7, 22 intrepid birdwatchers from HBOC ventured out to Tahlee, on the north-western foreshore of Port Stephens. It started off with miserable weather on arrival, although keen watchers saw two Bush Stone-curlews at the entrance gate.

On arrival, our host, Stuart Fleming, welcomed everyone to the property, and gave a brief overview of the expected walk, before we all ventured out in the squally weather to see some birds on the foreshore.

The tide was just starting to turn and we were rewarded with the spotting of Bush Stone-curlew, Grey-tailed Tattler and Bar-tailed Godwits. The weather was against us, so we decided to turn around and head to the back of the property to see a few different water habitats.

Arriving at the back of the property, we heard the sound of Noisy Miners making a racket, and eventually discovered they were chasing a Pacific Baza. The Baza gratefully stopped in a tree and allowed the group to take some photos. The group meandered and split up allowing for different birds to be seen. Some caught a glimpse of a couple of male Scarlet Honeyeaters, while



## Club Activity Reports

many in the group spotted a Koala and passerines along the track.

Walking further along the track we came across some eaten casuarina seeds, but sadly no Glossy's today. Venturing further we arrived at a big open space which took us back to the bay and overlooked Swan Bay. Pelicans, terns, and a few Pied Oystercatchers flew by. In the trees, a few observant twitchers saw a pair of Varied Sittellas.

We arrived back at the Dining Room for morning tea and got to see an Osprey drift overhead. After a sumptuous morning tea provided by Tahlee, most of the group continued birdwatching, and although some headed off, a challenge was put to find the Bush Stone-curlew again. On the way there, a pair of Sacred Kingfishers were patient enough to be photographed.



*Koala by Bruce Watts*

In the beach with the mudflats exposed an Eastern Curlew, some more Tattlers, a Striated Heron, and a couple of Silver Gulls were feeding. For those who continued down the road, they were able to see Yellow Thornbill, Leaden Flycatcher and a lone Pheasant Coucal. The final farewell was greeted by a Nankeen Kestrel trying to hover, but soon gave up and was blown inland by the strong breeze.



*Striated Heron by Rob Palazzi*

It was a great day's birdwatching, with a final count at the end of the day as the last people left of 67 different species, with a count of over 200 individual birds observed. Thank you to all.

## Stuart Fleming

### Ourimbah and Pioneer Dairy

**4 April 2017**

Despite miserable, rainy weather 11 members made the journey outside the Hunter to Ourimbah and Tuggerah. A total of 66 species were seen and heard despite the weather.

We started our observations at a location known as the Ourimbah 'DMR' Area. The area starts as 'rainforest' then opens up to become sparsely wooded grassland.

The 'rainforest' area was very wet. We were continually skirting large puddles and needed to detour to cross a creek. We saw Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Large-billed Scrubwren, Topknot Pigeon, Eastern Yellow Robin, Green Catbird, Lewin's Honeyeater, Eastern Whipbird, Brown Gerygone, Wonga Pigeon (heard) and Golden Whistler.



*The intrepid mid-weekers braving the rain*

### Club Activity Reports

As the vegetation became sparser two Rose Robins appeared. Other sightings were Red-browed Finch, Superb Fairywren, Bell Miner (heard) and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo.

The second location for the day was Pioneer Dairy, Tuggerah. This area is open pasture with a large body of water and a swampy creek. On the way into the area we saw White-breasted Woodswallow and a large flock of Topknot Pigeons, about 30 of them, dropped into the top of a Liquid Amber (I think).



© Bruce Watts

*Rose Robin by Bruce Watts*

On the water we saw Black Swans, Pelicans (indicators of the amount of water here), Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck, a single Black-winged Stilt, Darter, Purple Swamphen, Australasian Grebe, Wood Duck, Hardhead Duck and Coots. The find of the day was six Freckled Ducks.

In the areas away from the water we saw White-headed Pigeon, Figbird, Straw-necked Ibis, Swamp Harrier, Whistling Kite and Grey Butcherbird.

The intention had been to visit a third location, McPherson's Swamp, after lunch. However, just as we were preparing to get back into our cars the rain re-started quite heavily so we headed home.

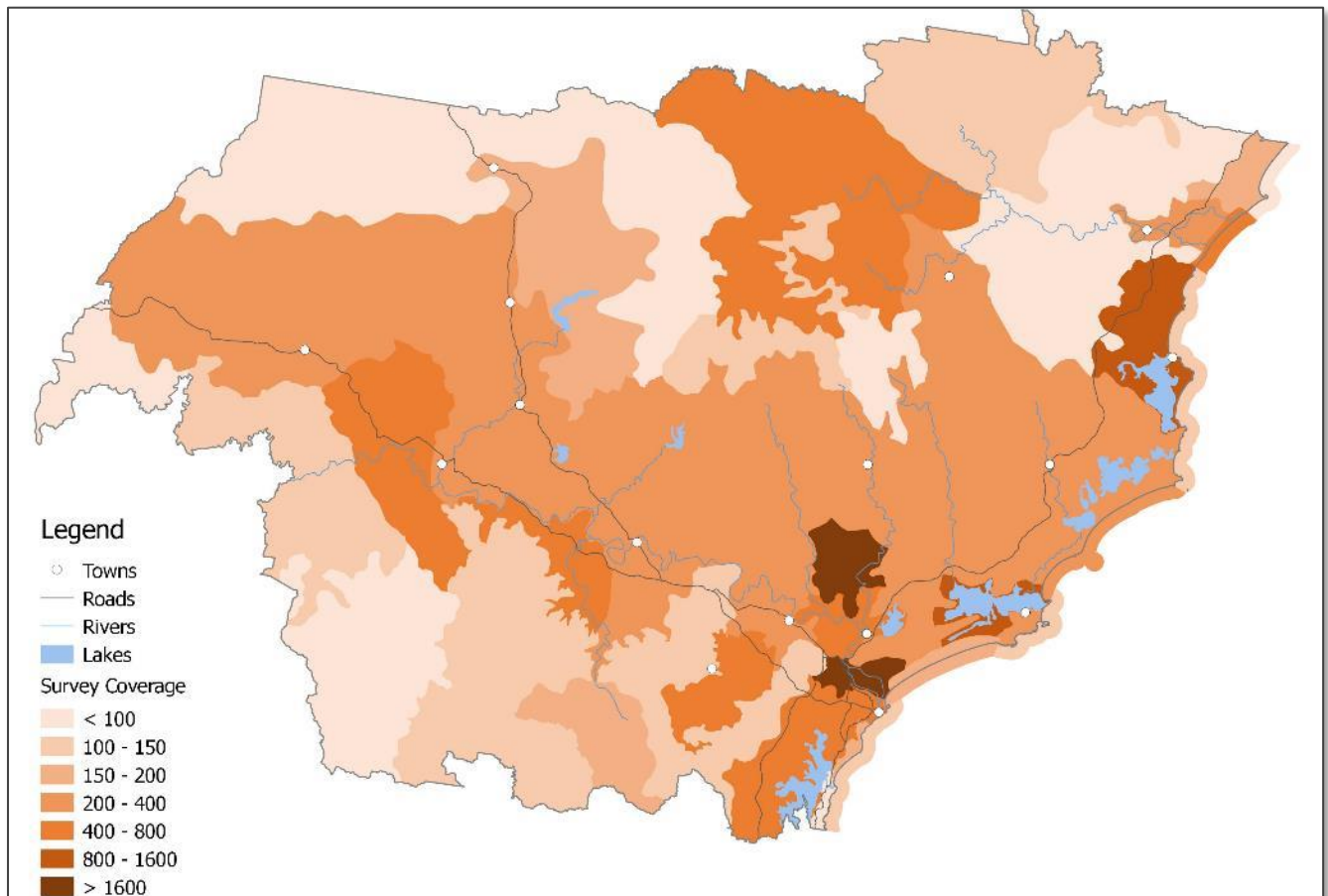
**Rob McDonell**

# BirdLife Australia Atlas Hunter Region Coverage

The BirdLife Australia Atlas database holds around some 30,000 surveys undertaken within the Hunter Region adopted by HBOC. With the recent release of the improved Birdata web portal and accompanying App, the number of surveys is potentially set to increase at an even greater rate.

continuous areas of similar uniform or mosaics of habitat type and geography.

Reliable mapping is dependent on having sufficient survey data to draw upon. Many of the remoter areas of the Region have a relative paucity of records – see the accompanying map of survey effort. These areas include



The Atlas data enables the Club to analyse and review records from within the Region, to be used for both study and educational purposes. An example of this is the new species mapping included in the latest ABR and showcased in the previous Newsletter.

This mapping helps us to understand individual species distributions and movements in the Hunter, and potentially track distribution changes through time. The mapping process involves the analysis of surveys and species records within individual “mapping bioregions”. The bioregions were drawn up (and have subsequently been revised on a number of occasions) to reflect

Ulan/Durrigere, Wollemi National Park, Liverpool Plains, the western slopes of the Barrington Tops, Monkerai and the Manning Valley hinterland.

If you find yourself out and about in these areas then please consider undertaking an Atlas survey or two, to further our knowledge of birds in our Region. Even better, set up a couple of survey sites for which you intend to undertake repeat visits throughout the year. You never know what you might find, or what you may teach us!

**Dan Williams**



## Future Club Activities

### Easter Camp to Durridgere

**14 to 17 April 2017**

Following the demise of the planned camp at Borah Reserve (due to access issues), this year's Easter Camp is to be held at the highly popular destination of the Durridgere State Conservation Area.

The entry to Durridgere SCA is from Summerhill Road, which runs off Ulan Road. There are two ways of getting there from Newcastle – either by taking the Golden Highway and turning left about 7 km west of Cassilis, towards Ulan, or by the scenic route, via the Bylong Valley Way then turning towards Wollar and from there following the signs to Ulan. At Ulan turn right, onto the Ulan-Cassilis Road.

Summerhill Road is about 5 km south of the turn-off from the Golden Hwy along the Ulan-Cassilis Road, or about 30 km north of Ulan. Take Summerhill Road and drive along it for 4.5 km. Along the way, there is a sweeping left bend, followed by a sweeping right bend. About 1 km further, at another sweeping left bend, there is an entry into the forest, with a sign saying 'Durridgere Central Trail Only' and some mail boxes.

Follow the forest track (which initially heads west, then south) for about 3.3 km until you get to a fork in the road. At this point, veer left, and follow the track to the campsite (which is the old homestead site, beside the dry creek bed).

Camps are only for members of HBOC but it is possible to join the Club at the camp. Camping fees apply (at Durridgere it will be \$2 per person). The Sir Ivan fire did not affect Durridgere SCA.

### Sunday Outing to Woko NP

**23 April 2017**

The April Sunday Outing to Woko NP also has an optional camping component for the ANZAC Day weekend from the Saturday to Tuesday. Contact Robert McDonald on 0408 877 827 for details. The meeting place for the Sunday outing will be at the Woko campground.

To reach Woko campground from Gloucester, drive 14 km north along Thunderbolts Way then turn left onto

Curricabark Road. Follow this road for another 14 km before taking a right on the Flood Detour Road into Woko National Park (about 1 km), then turn left into Woko campground.



*Woko NP from NPWS website*



#### **Bird & Nature Photography Tours**

#### **Amazing Destinations!**

- \*South Africa-Kruger Safari.**
- \*Darwin, Kakadu, Katherine.**
- \*Cairns, Daintree, Atherton.**
- \*Flinders Ranges & Gluepot.**
- \*Hunter Valley.**
- \*Riverwood Downs Weekends.**

**Contact: Dick Jenkin** [0407 267207](tel:0407267207)

E: [richardnjenkin@bigpond.com](mailto:richardnjenkin@bigpond.com)

W: [www.jenkinphotography.com.au](http://www.jenkinphotography.com.au)



## Using Birdata Workshop

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Most of you by now will have heard of Birdata, the newly released portal which facilitates user access for data entry and data retrieval into BirdLife Australia's national Atlas database for bird records. The Hunter Bird Observers Club supports the Atlas project.

Although the new Birdata portal is very easy to use, there is no reference manual available for it and many people haven't had time to delve into its secrets. To help address this and show local birders how easy it is to become involved, we are arranging a workshop at the Wetlands Centre on Friday 12 May. Participants will learn how to put data into Birdata, how to get data out, how to find out where a particular species has been recorded, how to find out what species have been recorded in a particular area, and much more.

Details about the workshop are in the info below. To register, email [secretary@hboc.org.au](mailto:secretary@hboc.org.au) . There will be a limit on numbers so get in quick.

**Workshop: Using Birdata (BirdLife Australia Atlas)**  
**Friday 12 May**  
**Hunter Wetlands Centre, Shortland**  
**Presenters: Andrew Silcocks (BirdLife Australia) and Alan Stuart (Hunter Bird Observers Club)**

BirdLife Australia manages a national Atlas database for records of Australian birds. Birdata is the newly released portal which facilitates user access for data entry and data retrieval. At the workshop, attendees will learn how to use the Birdata portal and the smartphone app. The format is intended to be highly interactive and participation is encouraged.

### Program

**8:30-11:15. An Introduction to Birdata**

- Birdata's relationship to other databases
- How Birdata is used: Nationally, Regionally, Locally
- The survey types and how to select which one to use
- How to register
- Entering data using the portal
- Entering data using the mobile phone app
- Amending a record before submittal
- Amending a survey after submittal

Session includes: Morning Tea 9:45-10:05

**11:15-12:00. Field practice session**

**12:00-13:00. Lunch**

**13:00-14:30. Retrieving and Analysing Data**

- Your own records
- Other peoples' records
- Data for a site
- Data for an area
- Data for a species

**14:30-15:30. Other Survey Types: when and how to use them**

- Shared Sites
- Shorebirds 2020
- Special Projects

**15:30-16:00. Afternoon tea**

**16:00-17:00. Troubleshooting / Open Forum**

- Share questions, problems and solutions

**17:00. Close.**

Cost: \$20 per person (includes lunch). Members of Hunter Bird Observers Club: no charge.

You must pre-register to attend. To register, email [secretary@hboc.org.au](mailto:secretary@hboc.org.au) . Please indicate if you are a financial member of HBOC when registering.

## Recent Observations

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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 the easiest way is to send an email to [hunterbirding-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.au](mailto:hunterbirding-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.au) . You can choose either to receive individual emails or a single daily digest. Alternatively, email me at [scythrops@yahoo.com.au](mailto:scythrops@yahoo.com.au) and I'll sort it out for you – what could be easier?! In addition to being a forum for interesting discussions on issues such as bird identification and behaviour it is also a great place to report your observations. Some of the Hunterbirding observation highlights from the last couple of months include:

- A pair of Comb-crested Jacanas with three dependent young at Cattai Wetlands on 3 February;
- A Little Friarbird observed at Wingen on 10 February;
- A Common Noddy photographed at Dudley Beach on 13 February;
- Around 25 Fork-tailed Swifts counted at Wingen on 19 February, along with 40 White-throated Needletails;
- An Oriental Pratincole present at Hexham Swamp from 21 February to 25 February;
- An Australasian Bittern observed in flight at Hexham Swamp on 22 February;
- A Lesser Sand Plover reported at Stockton Sand Spit on 26 February;
- An out-of-range White-eared Honeyeater photographed at Awabakal NR on 28 February;
- A Common Noddy photographed at Newcastle Baths on 28 February
- An Emerald Dove and Powerful Owl reported at Glenrock SCA on 1 March;
- Two Red-footed Boobies and a dark morph Kermadec Petrel seen from the Forster Pelagic on 12 March;
- Two Oriental Cuckoos reported from the Barrington Tops on 14 March and 16 March;
- A Common Noddy observed at Bar Beach on 20 March;
- A Singing Honeyeater reported at Durrigere Road on 21 March;
- Regent Honeyeater photographed at Goulburn River NP on 23 March;
- An Oriental Cuckoo photographed at Ash Island on 4 April and present until 9 April;
- An injured Spectacled Monarch found at Carrington and later released at Shortland on 10 April.

Bird records are obtained by the club through a variety of means, in addition to bird records communicated via Hunterbirding others are received through the BA atlas database, club outing sighting sheets, the club night observations forum and direct communications with the record officers. Of particular interest to the club are those records of regional significance, including sightings of the more unusual species, observations of breeding activity, early and late records of migratory birds and significantly large counts. A selection of records of this nature reported at the club nights and through direct communications is provided below. Unfortunately, space limitations do not enable all of the records to be reproduced here. However, the club is appreciative of all records that are received and all contributors are acknowledged in the Annual Bird Report.

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Black Kite	1	25/02/2017	Hexham Swamp	T. Kendall
Glossy Ibis	3	25/02/2017	Morpeth WWTW	T. Kendall
Little Raven	c.60	28/02/2017	Bureen/Martindale Rds	T. Kendall
Pink-eared Duck	86	25/02/2017	Morpeth WWTW	T. Kendall
Rufous Fantail	4	8/03/2017	Galgabba Point	J. Adams
Varied Sittella	6	8/03/2017	Galgabba Point	J. Adams

## Club Activities April to June 2017

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
<b>APRIL 2017</b>			
Friday - Monday 14-17 April	Easter Camp	Durrigere State Conservation Area	Lorna Mee 0499 015 500 Robert McDonald 0408 877 827
Tuesday 18 April	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Sunday 23 April	Field outing – Woko NP	8.00 am with optional camp	Robert McDonald 0408 877 827
<b>MAY 2017</b>			
Monday – Sunday 1-7 May	Photo Twitch	Photograph as many species as you can during any consecutive 12-hour period during this week	Robert McDonald 0408 877 827
Tuesday 2 May	Mid-week Outing – Tocal	8.00 am meet at Tocal Homestead Visitor Centre off Tocal Road	Dinah Stehr 0402 091 951
Wednesday 3 May	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Allan Richardson 0459 806 176 All members welcome
Friday - Sunday 5-7 May	Tocal Field Days	9.00 am – 5.00 pm Roster full, visitors welcome	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171
<b>Wednesday 10 May</b>	<b>Club Meeting</b>	<b>7.00 pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland</b>	<b>Speaker: Andrew Silcocks “Bitterns in Rice Project”</b>
Friday 12 May	Birdata Workshop	8.30 am – 5.00 pm Hunter Wetlands Centre	Marg Clarke 4933 2981 0412 616 030
Saturday 13 May	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30 am Ash Island 10.00 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
Tuesday 16 May	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Saturday – Sunday 20-21 May	Regent Honeyeater / Swift Parrot Surveys	Various locations as desired or directed	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237 <a href="mailto:mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au">mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au</a>
Sunday 21 May	Field outing – Minimbah Sand Plain	8.00 am Caltex Service Station at Nabiac	Lucas Grenadier 0401 945 761 <a href="mailto:lucas.grenadier@environment.nsw.gov.au">lucas.grenadier@environment.nsw.gov.au</a>
Sunday 28 May	HBOC Family Picnic	9.30 am Blue Gum Hills Regional Park	Robert McDonald 0408 877 827
<b>JUNE 2017</b>			
Tuesday 6 June	Mid-week Outing – Green Point	8.00 am meet at the entrance at Green Point Drive, Belmont	Gary Tong 446 7139 / 0419 753 397
Wednesday 7 June	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Allan Richardson 0459 806 176 All members welcome
<b>Wednesday 14 June</b>	<b>Club Meeting</b>	<b>7.00 pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland</b>	<b>Speaker: Dick Jenkin “Birding in Argentina”</b>