



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 4/08

August-September 2008

Newsletter articles welcome – contact Newsletter Editor Peter Phillips.
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(affiliated with the Bird Observers Club of Australia)

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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

Conservation Coordinator
Ann Lindsey
Activities Officer
Lorna Mee

Edition	Copy Deadline
October/November	28th September
December 2008/January 2009	30th November

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

NEW MEMBERS

The Club wishes to extend a warm welcome to Robert Kyte, Daniel Allen, Wayne Ellis and Marj Kibby. We hope to meet you at Club Nights and on Club Outings and Camps.

Membership for Hunter Bird Observers Club
\$30.00 Single and Family. \$5.00 Junior

New members may pay at Club Night or send cheque or money order (payable to HBOC) to PO Box 24. New Lambton 2305.

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

Presidents Column

Well these crisp mornings have certainly slowed my birding of late. Recently while surveying my local patch I watched fairy-wrens and thornbills happily feeding and singing whilst I shivered on the half frozen grass. I'm always amazed at how such small birds can handle such cold conditions.

On the subject of surveys, the Walka Water Works surveyors Paul Baird, Lorna Mee and Jim Smart have had a win in their battle to have a voice on what happens to one of Maitland's best birding sites. This is a great achievement for both them and the birds of Walka and a huge congratulations and thanks must go to the Walka Three (I declare this to be their official title from now on).

It goes to show that doing something as simple as regularly surveying a location can have much broader and lasting effect on the local environment and birdlife. Off the top of my head the club (or club members) are currently surveying sites such as Awabakal, Garden Suburbs, Tank Paddock, Greswick Angus, Newcastle Foreshore, Tenambit Common, Green Wattle Creek, and of course the extremely important wader surveys on Ash Island, Stockton and Port Stephens. These surveys are the key to conservation in the Hunterhow can you save if you don't know what you're fighting to protect.

Spring is approaching fast (thank god) and soon the migrants will be arriving for their breeding/non-breeding season. It's also the time of year when an odd disease starts affecting certain individuals. Symptoms include faster heart rate, the urge to stay awake into the small hours, the need to drive vast distances and the ability to tell the difference between a Yellow-rumped and Buff-rumped Thornbill at 100km/h. Yes that's right, its Twitchathon time!!!!!!

The Twitchathon (26th-27th, October) is a fundraiser (though some of us tend to forget this part) and half of this years donations are going towards mangrove removal on Milhams Pond, Ash Island. This makes it a real Hunter affair and I urge members to form as many teams as possible, the more teams the more donations. Twitchathon is what you choose to make

it. Some choose the long haul of the main race whilst others are quite happy pottering around their suburb in the champagne race. Why not see how many species can be found between Glenrock and Swansea, or in your backyard, or in the Hunter Valley. It's totally up to you how much birding you want to do and that's the joy of Twitchathon.

Until next time,
Grant Brosie

MIDWEEK OUTING

Tuesday 3 June 2008

GLENROCK STATE REC. AREA

from Garth Cooksey

The weather forecast was for showers, rain and strong winds but that did not deter 15 HBOC members from getting their regular birding fix, daring mother nature to turn on another June storm. The first part of the day was along the boardwalk next to Flaggy Creek allowing us all to take in the beautiful scenery. This is an area occupied by Bell Miners and they were ever present, oblivious of the threatening weather. In the understorey were White Throated Scrubwrens and Eastern Whipbirds.

Leaving the Bell Miner territory, Yellow Faced Honeyeaters and Noisy Miners were seen – we were finding it difficult to spot any “quality” birds. Birds, like us, prefer a nice day to get out and about.

We crossed the Flaggy Creek Bridge –no ducks – but we did see some Rainbow Lorikeets darting about in the canopy. At this stage the group was beginning to spread out in an increasing effort to see some birds. At the power line crossing we spied some Magpies and Noisy Miners foraging in the short grass for anything brought to the surface by the rain.

Due to last year’s storms the bridge over Little Flaggy Creek is no more, so we took a detour up the hill to a roadway crossing. It was at this point we realized that Anthony was no longer with us – could he be lost? No, it turned out that he, Mike and Dianne had found a Bell Miner nest with young, and spent some time watching the antics.

Pressing on with few bird sightings and the sky getting darker we came upon the shmick new viewing deck – very flash. After admiring the deck our eyes turned to the even more beautiful view and were soon rewarded with several male Scarlet Honeyeaters foraging in the blossoms across the valley. Their brilliant scarlet plumage darting and flashing in the eucalypts made up for the lack of birds so far.

With renewed spirits a majority of us pressed on down to the valley floor – the others needed their caffeine fix and turned back. Along the valley track we came across Brown Gerygones, male and female Golden Whistlers, and quietly churtling whipbirds. Rather than go back the way we came, due to the wet and slippery track, it was decided we would go around via the scout camp. We made it to the beach with the weather holding but then nature deemed it was time to rain.

Some time later we straggled back to the car park, soaked. A cup of tea, a chat, and a bird call later we were all happy, we’d had our birding fix.

THE WHISTLER 2008 Edition

HBOC Committee is very keen to produce a 2008 issue of The Whistler to follow on from the success of the first edition. A Publications Sub-committee has been formed to assist Editor Liz Huxtable in this task. Details about how to submit articles, including Instructions to Authors, will be available shortly and probably will be similar it not the same as those provided in Issue 1. If you have any ideas about a potential article for the next issue please start to draft it as soon as possible so that we can fast track the eventual publication. Also it is far easier for Liz and her team of reviewers if articles come in one by one rather than in a big rush towards the end.

Three types of articles are sought, all with a focus on some aspect of Hunter Region birdlife:

- (1) papers of up to 10 pages or so in length, describing for example a study made of a particular species or habitat, results of some regular surveys of an area,
- (2) short notes of 1-2 pages , for example highlighting some important observation about bird behaviour that has not been described and
- (3)book (or film) reviews relevant to the Hunter

If in any doubt as to what might be suitable contact Liz Huxtable or Alan Stuart.

MIDWEEK OUTING
Tuesday 1 July 2008
LAKE MUNMORAH STATE REC. PARK

From Anthony Gooden

Quail-thrush, lyre birds, bower birds, tawny grass birds, rose robins and emu-wrens!! – these are some of the birds we didn't see on our mid week outing.

A comfortable bunch of 21 people gathered at the Pay entrance to this NPWS property [the machine can take credit cards and does so very quickly and quietly!!].

Later on, we also didn't see eastern yellow robins, noisy friar birds, scaly-breasted lorikeets, cormorants or cockatoos. Yep, you guessed it. We had fairly quiet birding but we still had a great day – especially for those who hadn't been there before. It is a wonderful mainly dry forest and heath park with a couple of different habitats.

It was sunny but there were strong westerly winds (which probably affected our birds). The winds flattened out the seas and allowed us fabulous views of breaching and spout-blowing humpback whales – and diving gannets closer to the shore. The views were spectacular and some of us filled in time looking at different plant life – low cover acacias, grevilles, miniature casuarinas and more.

Oh yes, we did see some birds – lots of New Holland honeyeaters, a few white-cheeked honeyeaters (a good opportunity to compare the two), yellow-faced honeyeaters, tawny-crowned honeyeaters, little wattle birds, several white-bellied sea eagles and an osprey, on the rock ledge, being harassed by 2 ravens, silver gulls, rainbow lorikeets and eastern rosellas. We heard numerous whip birds.

A quiet day for birds – a total of 30 species – but everyone enjoyed themselves and most were still there for lunch at one of the fancy picnic areas within the park.

Once again, a big thanks to Val and Don Moon for their organization and leadership – despite some birdos' desperate attempts to get lost!!

ROCK DHU CAMP

Queens Birthday Weekend. 7-9 June 2008

from Di Johnson

Off, on, off, on ----- this was how the weekend seemed to be panning out. Phone calls regarding access to Peter Norvill's property 'Rock Dhu' (approximately 4,000 acres) after a rather rainy period in Newcastle preceded the weekend. However, the gods smiled on us, plus Peter emailing that Murrurundi had had only light rain that week, because it turned out to be a great weekend socially and bird wise. However, we did have to spread out far and wide to achieve the 73 bird species for the winter weekend.

Upon arrival at the cottage, I could hear the contented sighs of bird watchers as just in front were Double-barred and Red-browed Finches, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and lots of Superb Fairy-wrens. A nice little collection with visiting Crimson and Eastern Rosellas and the ubiquitous Magpies. In fact this proved to be a great vantage point.

Robert pointed out that on the Thursday he had just sat and let the birds come to him. Now what more could a keen birdo want! Flocks of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Noisy Friarbirds, Striated and Spotted Pardalotes, Weebills, Yellow Thornbills and Red Wattlebirds flew through or called in the trees along the babbling creek in front of the tent mob.

On the Saturday, we headed out to the neighbouring property 'Rockley', climbed the gate (though I thought I'd take the fence and got a zap for my troubles) and were drawn to the huge basalt Rock Dhu (Black Rock so-named) projecting above the rolling hills. Musk and Little Lorikeets with their distinctive calls sped above us from tree to tree. The Rock was formidable and proved to be enticing to other HBOC members as they climbed it the next day, along with a herd of agile goats. Two Peregrines swooped above us at the peak and in the distance Wedgies soared in the heights.

A SPECIAL “ORDINARY” BIRD DAY.

From Anthony Gooden

The next day Jane, Peter’s assistant, very kindly drove us out to ‘The Waterfall’, a lovely idyllic scene amongst the hills with Golden and Rufous Whistlers, GSTs, Grey and Pied Butcherbirds and Eastern Yellow Robins seen in the area. After lunch, she drove us up the steepest hill behind Peter’s house (sheltering the plane he flew solo around the world) and the view was spectacular. We learnt that a mini observatory is going to be built on the property which will entice many of us back together with the comfy accommodation with everything you’d possibly want.

The surroundings are interesting revealing either Peter or Jane’s quirky sense of humour. For instance the metal frames with the sign ‘Mental Hospital’ and the pristine toilet with the TV plonked in front with the sign ‘Peter’s Office’ to name just a few. I thought the wooden outhouse with the door ajar and a sign in front of the toilet ‘A large brown snake lives here’ was just taking the jokes too far. These displays together with the large gallery on the hill add to the adventure of the place.

Once again a very successful HBOC weekend, one to be remembered until next time.

Thanks to Robert MacDonald who also submitted a report on this event (ed)

As the earliest arrival on a miserable day Robert positioned his camp so that he could sit dry under the tarp and view of group of dead trees in the middle of the paddock. This became a staging post for many species until the mist lifted. Short walks revealed flocks of Yellow-rumped and Striated thornbills, Red-browed firetails and Double-barred finches. Eventually 8 campers arrived and 12 others who preferred the comfort of cabins. The Storms offered their tow-rope but this time Robert did not need it!

Robert and others in the first group to the waterfall saw an interesting range of birds including Rose Robin, Golden and Rufous Whistler, Little and Musk Lorikeet, Scarlet, White-naped, Brown-headed, Fuscous and White eared Honeyeaters, White-throated treecreeper and Grey Shrike-thrush.

I happened to be over near the Uni and at a loose end, so I decided to go to the Wetlands Centre. Although I am a member, I hardly go there and should really visit it more often.

I had some lunch at the new café – it is beautiful looking out from the balcony. Then I decided on a quick wander in the area around the main building. I didn’t want to go too far as more rain threatened. However, there were sporadic sun moments.

Well, in a little over an hour, I saw 36 species of bird – including yellow-faced, brown, white-plumed and white-cheeked honeyeaters, willie wagtails and cheeky grey fantails, eastern spinebills, several duck species – hardhead, wood, pacific black (or pac black – as an ex-president calls them?), Australian shovellers, Australian grebes, royal spoonbills, egrets, ibis etc etc,

But what made the outing special was the beauty in some of the “ordinary” birds. I saw, for the first time, a juvenile golden whistler male – just coming into colour – patches of gold through his underbody and a “collar” but no white chin. I had fabulous views of yellow thornbills in the patchy sunlight. They are really bright gold and a beautiful little bird. A black-faced cuckoo-shrike sitting in a casuarina – the sun shining on this stunning smoky grey and black bird. I had a good view of a striated pardalote – often very difficult to find even if you can hear them. Even the black/white butterflies were sparkling in the sunlight. And, as another sun shaft visited, a full colour male superb fairy wren came out of the undergrowth to say hullo. He glowed.

I was on my own and not in a hurry. And no, I hadn’t taken any substances of any kind. It was very uplifting and peaceful to be there and have wonderful birds – close at hand (close at binocular?) and easy to find.

“We” probably should use the Wetlands Centre more. It is very accessible and offers a diverse variety of birds and habitats. We don’t have to see the rarest bird on earth or find 20,000 birds in half an hour to have a good birding day!!

Twitchathon 2007: The Menacing Monarchs first attempt

from Robert MacDonald: Head Monarch

Being our first year away from the Drongos made the Monarchs very nervous. Although we were confident that our route would be successful we decided to head to our starting location a few days early, and thus the twitchathon adventure was started. In the days leading up to the race we decided to just take it easy and just enjoy bird watching the areas we will use for the race, some areas proved a little disappointing and some had little surprises.

We were delighted to find Banded Lapwings with young in the driveway of the place where we were staying. The major surprise was when on the first morning there I told Michael that I would meet him in half an hour back at the cabin, about 3hrs later he showed and to my surprise he had found Painted Honeyeaters.

On the day of the race we had half an hour before the start, we started to wander around the starting spot and when we stumbled across a family of White-browed Babblers we decided to stick with them and they become the first bird of the race.

By the time we left this site we had already reached 34 species, including birds such as Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, southern Whiteface, Spotted Bowerbird, Crested Bellbird, Common Bronzewing and Masked and White-browed Woodswallows.

On the way to Willie's Retreat an odd bird flew in front of us I slammed the brakes and we jumped out it was a Black-eared Cuckoo, then I realized that this was the site we had found Crimson Chats a day earlier. Suddenly I saw a flash of red but it ended up being a Red-caped Robin, which we thought we had dipped on, and then I saw this red-rumped bird fly past - it was a female Chat.

Further down the road we had a Swamp Harrier posing as a Spotted but by the time we reached Willie's Retreat the race total was 66 birds. These included Red-winged Parrot, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Mallee Ringneck and Emu.

When we reached Willie's we still had not seen some of the supposedly easy to see species, we rushed in to find the Painted Honeyeater and easily heard the 'geor-gie' call. As we were heading back to the car we found the species we had missed, Bluebonnet, Cockatiel, Singing Honeyeater and Banded Lapwing. At this stage we still had about an hour of light so we decided to try and find the Black-tailed Native-hens we saw on the way in a few days earlier. Luckily they were still there as were the Diamond Doves we had seen and by the time it was dark we had seen a total of 91 species.

We dashed back to the other side of the marshes in hope of finding a Barking Owl, Michael started his impersonation and an Owlet Night-jar called and after 5min of our attempts to sound like it, the Barking Owl called. We then dashed off to the starting spot for the next morning sharing the driving for this section of the race and picking up Barn Owl and Tawny Frogmouth along the way. After about one and a half hours sleep at our destination I was woken by our fifth night bird -the Southern Boobook.

The second day started with most of the birds we expected to find at Copeland being there, the main one we could not find was Large-billed Scrubwren, which we also missed at Harrington later. We did find the rarer species of the area, Spectacled Monarch, Pale-yellow Robin and Logrunner, and at Harrington we had Varied Triller, Regent Bowerbird and Osprey. Although the heath at Crowdy Bay was disappointing and we had our first real argument over time and as the driver my decision is final, we left the northern areas with 169 species.

Next came the quick dash south to make up time and clean up the wetland and eastern woodland areas. This drive was the biggest gamble of the race, as you never know what the Pacific Highway may throw at you. Our first woodland area proved disappointing although it is only a backup, then when we got to our second woodland area it was blocked off with a fence around it. We were relying on this site and were growing increasingly frustrated with the goings on. We decided to cut our losses and head to the wetland areas with a total of 192 species, including Musk Lorikeet, European Goldfinch, Zebra Finch and Rufous Songlark.

Luckily the wetland areas from Pambalong on were extremely good and we ended up with what we thought was extra time and we decided to head for Newcastle Baths where for the first time on twitchathon we had a Sooty Oystercatcher.

We did manage to see most of the waders that occur in the estuary, the only common one we missed was the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. By the time we left the baths we were on a total of 227 species, including Whiskered Tern, Glossy Ibis, Pallid Cuckoo and many Waders.

We then quickly called in to Newcastle Wetlands reserve picking up 4 more species including Wandering Whistling-duck.

Dashing across to the Wetland Centre we realized our clocks were wrong! My fault as I had organized the setting of the clocks.

We were almost out of time so we could not dash around the wetlands and only picked up 2 more species giving us a total of 233, which equaled the old record but unfortunately two teams beat it.

Congratulations, Brewers.

AND NOW, FROM NEW ZEALAND!

The following is to be sung in a mournful NZ accent

No moa, no moa
In old Ao-tea-roa.
Can't get 'em
They've et them
They've gone and there ain't no moa!

from *The Ancestor's Tale*
by Richard Dawkins (page 289)

ATLAS SPREADS ITS WINGS- A FIXED-SITE BIRD MONITORING NETWORK

From *Wingspan* June 2008
James O'Connor and Chris Tzaros
Birds Australia Research and Conservation Dept

After years of dedicated bird surveying, atlasers are now in a position to justly claim that they contribute to the best biological database in Australia. There is increasing interest in using Atlas to inform government and agencies of the state of the environment, In fact, there is so much demand for Atlas data that we can scarcely keep up, and all the while the precious data keeps flooding in, increasing our ability to tell a story about what is happening to Australia's birds and why.

Atlas is ready to take the next step in building our strength as a national bird-monitoring network. To do this, there are a few small but critical things atlasers can do to add value to their data-gathering efforts. The first of these is to use a standardised technique such as the 2-hectare, 20 minute search method. This enables the statisticians to allow for search effort when looking for population trends. The second is to go back and survey the same site regularly. Even visited once or twice a year, these 'fixed' sites give us the strongest information of all on what is happening to bird populations and communities. And the third is to incorporate count data into any survey.

Of course, it is not always easy to get to a site on a regular basis, and there are currently large areas in remote parts of Australia that do not have 'fixed' sites. To address this, the Atlas has developed a series of communal fixed sites in remote Australia which anyone travelling through can stop and survey. The first set of these communal sites will be available on Birdata.

For more information contact James O'Connor at j.occonnor@birdsaustralia.com.au or (our local Atlas coordinator) Anne Lindsey. polytelis@bigpond.com

Hunter Seawatching

“*Seawatching*” – observing oceanic animals from the shore (with an emphasis on birds in this particular Seawatch).

The concept of ‘Seawatching’ is certainly not new to birdwatching, but is a recent addition to the range of activities offered by HBOC. Seawatching is generally an activity that is more associated with searching for marine mammals from shore.

However, a whole new world of birdwatching opportunities is on offer when it comes to ocean birds, which for many remain a mysterious guild. Obviously the best way to see the ocean-dwelling (or ‘pelagic’) species is from a boat. However, such things need to be organised and trips are few and far between (for logistical and cost reasons) and require the punter to enter the wild blue yonder of the open ocean where many people are not willing to go (for logistical, cost and *chundering* reasons!).

Short of heading out in a boat, the next best thing is find a good spot on the shore to set up a scope, a deck chair and a thermos (maybe an esky?) and see what flies past.

The inaugural ‘Hunter Seawatch’ was held on Saturday 28th June at Fort Drive, Newcastle (near Nobby’s Beach). This site provides a good vista onto the ocean at the point where ocean birds seem to come closest to the coast around Newcastle (actually it is Newcastle Baths but Fort Drive is very close and it is slightly elevated, which is an advantage).

Despite the fact that Fort Scratchley’s re-opening celebrations forced participants to lug their scopes in on foot, a good crowd of around 20 people were in attendance.

Conditions were favourable for a comfortable and leisurely seawatch, which translated as not so ideal conditions for seeing a large number of ocean birds. A gentle westerly breeze combined with a moderate swell meant that the seas were generally calm.

We did manage to see some good birds including 12 Black-browed Albatross, 2 Yellow-nosed Albatross and some Fluttering-type Shearwaters that were just too far away to call an ID. A White-fronted Tern made several passes along the rock platform, enabling excellent flight views. An Aussie Pelican was seen flying east until it was about 2km offshore before doing a u-turn and heading back for the coast – we wondered what it’s motives were.

Whale numbers were far fewer than recent weeks though a large, leaping pod of Bottlenose Dolphins that joined the surfers off the Cowrie Hole made for a great spectacle.

The 2nd Seawatch was held at the same location on Sunday 27th July. A similar-sized crowd turned up to once again could only be described as “too good” weather! There were more birds evident today and many of the Shearwaters were close enough to identify (as Fluttering). However, most birds stayed “wide” and could only be seen to be rising shapes on the horizon. Nonetheless we were able to get decent views at a few Black-browed and Yellow-nosed Albatross as well as the Fluttering Shearwaters and Aussie Gannets. There were quite a few White-fronted Terns around on this day, with at least 6 birds seen. A Sea Eagle was observed by a few people early on soaring above Fort Scratchley.

Ironically just 2 days later the big southerly winds and swell brought the birds in much, much closer, with 50+ Black-browed Albatross seen in just over an hour’s observing. Obviously, this type of birdwatching is best done when the conditions are good (i.e. ‘bad’) but having organised events allows us to get together as a group and discuss the various birds we see (it’s quite a social event!).

The next Seawatch will be on Sunday 31st August, with perhaps a gap between that one and November. For further info if you are interested in joining us, contact me.

Mick Roderick
0421 761 237
fred_barney72@yahoo.com

Birds Australia Conservation Forum 2008

from Liz Crawford

“Conservation Through Knowledge” is the motto of Birds Australia, whose Sydney branch is now located at the Birds Australia Discovery Centre in the Newington Armory at Sydney Olympic Park. The Centre was officially opened on 24 May 2008, with a spontaneous flypast by chortling galahs and rainbow lorikeets! It will be staffed by volunteers every weekend, when the general area is open to the public.

On the same day day, Birds Australia held a Conservation Forum consisting of seven presentations on the theme of “journeys”.

Subjects ranged from bird journeys revealed by atlassing data to epic journeys revealed by band recoveries; from personal journeys of landscape rehabilitation and massive social change to reverse decline in woodland birds, to intimate journeys tracking Sooty Owls in the coastal forests of Gippsland. By tracking Sooty Owls, researcher Rohan Bilney found 136 roosts in foliage, 77 roosts in caves and rock clefts and 58 roosts in eucalypt hollows! Band recoveries have revealed long lives and long journeys for many birds: Silvereyes fly over 2000 km every year between Tasmania and the mainland, the oldest aged 18 yr 7 mth; Australian White Ibis aged 26 yr 1 mth; Pacific Black Duck aged 27 yr 1 mth; Short-tailed Shearwater aged 39 yr 10 mth; and a Wandering Albatross aged 44 yr.

Anyone with a love of birds would benefit from membership with Birds Australia. Check out their website on www.birdsaustralia.com.au and support our national birding organization.

NATIVE ANIMAL TRUST FUND

New emergency rescue number

0418 628483 or 0418 NATIVE

EFFECTIVE BIRD HIDES

from Mike Newman

On a number of work related visits to Pt. Pirie in South Australia I have made a rushed visit to a nearby dam climbing the steps to a hide on the dam wall in eager anticipation and often 40C plus heat. Usually the dam is dry or reduced to a few distant pools of water. Last year near Noosaville I made two visits to a substantial lagoon where a well advertised hide stood at the waters edge. Alas to enter the hide you had to walk along an open path and every water bird was disturbed. No Pygmy Geese today and a distant Jacana was better observed from outside the hide. These experiences do little to inspire people with a latent interest in birds but in both cases had clearly been erected at great cost by a local community wanting to tick the “lets have a bird hide to attract tourists” box.

An Australian bird hide which does excite me is the double-decker at Hastie’s Swamp on the Atherton Tableland. You can enter without disturbing the birds and sit almost in touching distance of loafing Whistle Ducks perched on adjacent logs. Hastie’s Lagoon often holds very large numbers of birds and the sound of a large flock of Whistle Ducks is amazing.

Another memorable hide of modest construction was at Seven Spirit Bay in Northern Territory Arnhemland. Just getting to this hide along a track through mangroves by the side of a crocodile infested lagoon was an adventure. Although I did not get my targeted Chestnut Rail there was the opportunity to try and distinguish the different types of northern fantails from a crocodile secure observation platform. A large splash and squeals suggests something was less lucky (one less pig?). This was followed by a coarse croak and a Large-billed Heron flapped past. Subsequent visits indicated this iconic species had a nearby roost.

Hides do not have to cost a lot of money and depend on the success of a grant application. In New Zealand a small group of HBOC members visited the Miranda Bird Sanctuary last November to see the returning migrant shorebirds and that very special endemic New Zealand wader the Wrybill. We were directed to a spot on the shoreline where the only feature was a homemade hide constructed from waste material and periodically patched up by volunteers.

A feature of this hide is that it could be relatively easily moved if necessary in response to changes in the shoreline contours and wader roosts. In exposed locations the function of the bird hide is to provide shelter from wind and rain as well as to prevent disturbance of the birds.

In the UK the RSPB have a wealth of experience in presenting birds to people and the impact can be fantastic. Loch Ruthven in Scotland is the stronghold of Slavonian Grebe with about 12 pairs nesting. A track along the side of the loch allows a hide to be entered without disturbing the birds. Sitting quietly in the hide provided excellent views of this exquisite bird without the need for a telescope. Bonus birds included a Goldeneye and a brief visit by an Osprey. The Slavonian Grebe and Osprey are among the UK's rarest breeding species and both have been the focus of TV updates in weekly program called Springwatch which is hosted by Bill Oddie monitoring their progress through the breeding process. Consequently there was a steady trickle of visitors to the Loch Ruthven hide.

At Rutland Water, the UK's largest reservoir, there are 24 hides of which sixteen have disabled access. Winter waterfowl and gulls are the main feature of this area. However some hides have been constructed overlooking scrapes and islands which are managed to provide feeding and breeding habitat for wading birds. These were the main reason for my recent summer visit even though I was in the dead season between the spring and autumn migrations.

One bird I particularly wanted to see was the Green Sandpiper. To my delight as I opened the shutter and looked out one flew off with its characteristic white rump contrasting with black upper parts and tail band. Three sandpipers were present and one flew

towards the hide and landed directly in front. At this stage I realized I had a Wood Sandpiper as well as the more distant Green Sandpipers and was able to make field notes on the key field characters like the yellow legs eye stripe and barred tail of the Wood Sandpiper.

Superficially these two sandpipers are rather similar when you are not used to them and both have spotted upper parts so it was great to compare them in the field. However examination of field guides subsequently showed I had missed a key identification characteristic the dark under wing of the Green Sandpiper. The manner in which the scrape is managed with a thin film of water to provide feeding habitat immediately in front of the hide resulted in these exceptional views of birds which can be very twitchy.

On a subsequent visit I was surprised to see a well marked Greenshank in breeding plumage which is much more impressive than the winter plumage we usually see in the Hunter. Also present was the similar sized Redshank a rare species in Australia. Then I saw another similar sized wader again with red legs and a partially red slightly down curved bill. Most of the head and neck were white contrasting with black sides.

On this occasion there were three other bird watchers present and as they were not leaping around I concluded something common was involved so instead of making field notes I asked what it was. Have you guessed? (A ffur; spelt backwards) A moulting male which had probably moved north from the Ouse Washes, where they breed. The legs were much redder than the bird seen on Deep Pond in the Hunter a couple of years ago. A number of Black Godwits were also present in their stunning breeding plumage.

Walking to another hide I joined a small group of bird watchers admiring no less than five Ospreys soaring over a hill. Several pairs are nesting in the Rutland Water area, one on a platform in front of one of the hides constructed as part of the Osprey re-establishment program in the English Midlands.

Ospreys became extinct in the UK in 1916 but became re-established on Speyside in Scotland in 1960. I was lucky to stumble over the initial nest, guarded round the clock by the RSPB, while on holiday in 1961. There are now 160 pairs attempting to nest annually in the UK.

In stark contrast the “Robin Hide” was set in the wood overlooking a small pond. In addition to the pond habitat there were a number of bird feeders providing a smorgasbord of food options for finches and tits.

All the RSPB hides have approaches along paths through woodland or shielded by wooden fences so the birds are not disturbed. In addition there are signs encouraging a quiet approach. In the hides posters provide identification aids and there are lists of birds recently observed with provision for the visitor to add their records. Amazingly the swarms of midges along the paths know better than to enter the hides (if only mosquitoes were so well behaved).

Before leaving Rutland Water I went into the visitor centre where there is a list of recent “specials” to register my appreciation of the reserve, its hides and the successful conservation effort. Taking a last look out through the window using their telescope provided for visitors there was that very distinctive Ruff who had followed me round.

Congratulations to the RSPB from whom we can learn a lot in the effective establishment of bird hides. Perhaps the impact of seeing inspiring birds at close quarters is an important catalyst to the popularity of bird watching in the UK.

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2008

Proceeds to go jointly to the Gosford LGA Friends of the Bush Stone-curlew Group and the Hunter Bird Observers Club Mangrove Removal Programme at Milhams Pond, Ash Island.

This year there will be two recipients of our fund raising conservation efforts. For the past two years Gosford City Council in conjunction with the Friends of Bush Stone-curlews, has been surveying and monitoring the 8-9 resident pairs of Bush Stone-curlews in the Brisbane Water Area and a small amount of funds are made available annually for this purpose.

The Friends Group have sought additional funding to supplement Council’s funding for radio-tracking of fledgling and resident birds, provide equipment for on-site management of breeding habitat in the form of shade cloths, fencing, infra-red cameras, petrol and colour-leg bands, and funds to increase the number of community play-back surveys. Gosford City Council has agreed to manage the Funds. In kind support will come from NPWS, Gosford & Pittwater Councils as well as the consultant for the project, who will provide his services free of charge.

The HBOC Mangrove Removal programme will be centred on Milhams Pond, Ash Island because mangrove encroachment is destroying foraging habitat for shorebirds. The Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP) has a permit from NSW Fisheries to remove mangroves from this area. HBOC & KWRP have received grants to remove mangroves from the shorebird habitat on Ash Island and have successfully cleared mangroves from Swan & Wader ponds and half of Milhams Pond. They are seeking additional funds to complete the removal of mangroves from Milhams Pond and install a mangrove propagule exclusion device on the feeder creek during the period of seed dispersal. It is estimated that between \$20-30,000 is required to complete the removal of mangroves from Milhams Pond and install the exclusion device. Our funds will contribute to this cost.

This Twitchathon Project aims to raise about \$8,000 for each project, \$16000 altogether.

How to join the Twitchathon 25-26 October 2008

1. Contact Alan Morris for your 2008 Twitchathon Kit
2. Form a team with one or even a dozen friends and family and go birdwatching over this October weekend. You can travel anywhere in NSW and/or the ACT. See how many species of birds your team can find from 4 pm Saturday 25 October to 4 pm Sunday 26 October 2008. Note the starting and finishing times have changed because Daylight Saving has been extend in NSW and will commence earlier than previously.
3. Get sponsors. In the weeks before this event, persuade family and friends to sponsor you so many cents or even dollars for each species your team sees. You just need either lots of little sponsorships or a few big ones!

There are prizes for the most species seen by two winning teams in each section, as well as prizes for the most money raised, the rarest bird seen by an individual, a prize for the team that sees the most birds in the shortest distanced travelled in the Main Race & Champagne Race Sections and prizes for children. The prizes include Trophies, a weekend in a motel at Leeton with a personal guided tour of the Ramsar Internationally famous Fivebough Swamp Wetlands (sponsored by the Fivebough & Tuckerbil Wetland Trust), accommodation prizes at beautiful locations in NSW, a pair of Helios 8x40 wide angle binoculars, books, book vouchers, champagne, wine, special "T" shirts and other prizes to go to the winners in the various categories of the Twitchathon. Contact Alan for a full list.

This year we have introduced a new innovation whereas instead of offering 3rd prizes in the two main classes, we have tried to make people more environmentally conscious by offering prizes to the team that sees the most birds in the shortest distance travelled, providing that they see over 180 species in the Main Race and 130 species in the Champagne Race. Participants in the two events are invited to record the distance travelled

from the time they start at 4pm to their finish at 4pm on the Sunday.

So don't think that you have to be an A class birdwatcher to take part. Whichever method you chose for your Twitchathon – the laid back (ie the Champagne Race), the deadly serious, or the donor only version, remember it is all about educating others into the importance of nature conservation, particularly the conservation of Australian birds.

Last year we raised \$16000, and the two years before \$17 000 & \$14000 respectively! In the past five years we have raised over \$70,000. This is a great achievement and we have been able to make a significant difference for the birds in the Capertee Valley, the Cowra District, the Education Unit at Gluepot Reserve, the Australian Bird Study Associations Research Fund and provide educational equipment at the new Birds Australia Discovery centre at Sydney Olympic Park..

I know that you will join me in making a fantastic contribution one way or another. So, do ask Alan for your Twitchathon Kit **TODAY** or sponsor a Twitchathon team in your bird club or group! I can put you in touch with a team if you do not know of one in your area!

Alan Morris

Twitchathon Co-ordinator
(For Birds Australia, Southern NSW & ACT)
Tel: 02 9647 1033
Fax: 02 9647 2030
Mobile 0418 269482
Email Birds Australia - Sydney
E-mail: basna@birdsaustralia.com.au

(Mike Roderick -0412 761 237
has volunteered to be the local contact)

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT JUN/JUL 2008

2008				
Apr 17	White-headed Pigeon	Pr+ 3imm	Chichester Dam	M.Fisher
May 8	Eastern Osprey	2	Soldiers Point	T.Clarke
May 20	Grey Goshawk	1	Glenrock SRA [Scenic Drive]	“
	Spangled Drongo	1	“	“
May 15	Pied Oystercatcher	25	Oyster Cove	M.Blanch
	Striped Honeyeater	5	“	“
	Rainbow Lorikeet	50+	“	“
May 31	Eastern Osprey nest building	2	Woods Point	V. Moon
	Rose Robin	1	“	“
	Pied Oystercatcher	4	Dora Creek	“
	Royal Spoonbill	5	“	“
May 31	Australasian Gannet	154		
May 23	Sooty Oystercatcher	11	Stockton Sandspit	T.Clarke
May 29	Eastern Osprey	3	Karuah	“
Jun 1	Hoary-headed Grebe	2	Hexham Swamp	“
Jun 10	Eastern Osprey	1	Fingal Head	“
May 22	Aust. King Parrot	1	Edgeworth [garden]	R.Boyce
May 23	Blue-faced Honeyeater	1	“	“
May 24	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2	“	“
Jun 4	Pied Currawong	2	“	“
Jun 9	Scaly-breasted Lorikeetq3	3	“	“
Jun 3	Swift Parrot	8	Widden Valley	J.Adams
Jun 9	Diamond Firetail	30	TSR 28k. North of Gundy	L.Crawford
	Brown Treecreeper	10+		“
	Hooded Robin	2	“	“
	Musk Lorikeet	3	“	“
	Little Lorikeet	20+	“	“
	Striated Pardalote	20+	“	“
	Rufous Songlark	2	“	“
	Jacky Winter	2	“	“
	Brown Quail	4	“	“
	Brown-headed Honeyeater	1	“	“
Jun 11	White-headed Pigeon	7	Dora Creek	C.Goodenough
Jun 7	Pheasant Coucal	1	Bonnell's Bay	“
Jun 1	Eastern Osprey	1	Sunshine	“
May 20	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2+1dy	Wingen	G.Newling
May 23	Spotted Harrier	1	Mt. Arthur mine site	“
Jun 14	Wandering Whistling Duck	41	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
	Golden Whistler	Pr	“	“
	White-throated Gerygone	1	“	“

	Grey Teal	200+	“	“
	Olive-backed Oriole	1	“	“
	White-bellied Sea-eagle	1	“	“
	Bar-shouldered Dove	1	“	“
	Nankeen Night Heron	3	“	“
	Australasian Shoveler	4	‘	“
Jun 27	Royal Spoonbill	14	Testers Hollow	D.Johnson
	Black-fronted Dotterel	2	“	“
	Magpie-lark	12	“	“
	Black-shouldered Kite	1	“	“
	Australasian Shoveler	2	“	“
	Cattle Egret	17	‘	“
	Great Egret	1	“	“
	Masked Lapwing	2	‘	“
May 28	Spangled Drongo	1	T.W.C.	M.Roderick
Jun 5	Black-browed Albatross	2	Off Fort Scratchley	“
Jun 11	Red-rumped Parrot	1	Newcastle [#1 sportsground]	“
	“ “ “	18	Broadmeadow	“
Jun 13	Rose-ringed Parakeet	1	Parry St. Newcastle	M.Roderick
Jun 18	Cockatiel	1	Cooks Hill	“
Jun 29	Yellow-nosed Albatross	2	Off Nobby’s Beach	M.Kibby
Jun 18	Eastern Reef Egret	1	Tomaree N.P. [Big Rocky]	T.Clarke
	Common Bronzewing	3	“	“
Jun 27	Brahminy Kite	1	Bagnall’s Beach	“
Jun 15	Red-capped Plover	40+	Stockton Sandspit	“
Jun 16	Sooty Oystercatcher	2	Tomaree N.P. [Big Rocky]	“
Jun 18	Peregrine Falcon	1	“	“
Jun 15	Double-banded Plover	1	Stockton Sandspit	“
	Brahminy Kite	1	“	“
	Osprey	1	“	.”
Jun 22	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	18	Shortland	H.Boyce
Jun 24	“ “ “ “	22	“	“
Jul 9	“ “ “ “	26	“	“
Jul 5	Azure Kingfisher	1	H.W.C.	“
	Red-browed Finch	6	“	“
Jun 24	Azure Kingfisher	1	Cold Tea Creek	V.Moon
	Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	Pelican	“
Jul 1	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	1	Munmorah S.R.A.	“
Jul 9	Australian Pelican	87	Walka Water Works	L.Mee/P.Baird
Jul 19	Peregrine Falco	1	Mt. Arthur Mine Site	G.Newling
Jul 2	Scarlet Honeyeater	B	Paradise Park – Murrurundi	“
	Brown Cuckoo-dove	1	“	“

HBOC ACTIVITIES PROGRAM 2008

DATE	EVENT	MEETING TIME & PLACE	CONTACT(S)
Thursday 14 August	Mangrove Removal Day	8.00am The Schoolhouse, Ash Is	Robert McDonald 4952 2941
Saturday 16 August	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30am Ash Island 8.00 am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Mick Roderick 0421 761 237 Jack Adams 4971 5334
Sunday 17 August	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to noon Sandspit car park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 19 August	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Sunday 24 August	Field Outing Galgabba, Swansea	8.00am Swansea McDonalds	Jack Adams 0408 370 861
Sunday 31 August	Hunter Seawatch	2pm – 4pm Fort Drive, Nobbys	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237
Tuesday 2 September	Mid-Week Outing Tilligerry Habitat	7.30am Information Centre Tanilba Bay	Pam Hill 4984 5270
Wednesday 3 September	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm – 10pm Garden Suburbs School	All members welcome
Wednesday 10 September	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Ann Lindsey – The Penguin Show
Thursday 11 September	Mangrove Removal Day	8.00am The Schoolhouse, Ash Is	Robert McDonald 4952 2941
Saturday 13 September	Hunter Wader Survey	7.00am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Mick Roderick 0421 761 237 Jack Adams 4971 5334
Sunday 14 September	Atlas Day Giants Creek Road	7am Maitland Railway Station	Please contact to confirm: Robert McDonald 4952 2941
Sunday 14 September	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to noon Sandspit car park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Monday to Wednesday 15-17 September	Mid-Week Camp Lake Glenbawn	Lake Glenbawn State Park	Max Blanch 4961 1655
Tuesday 16 September	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Sunday 21 September	Field Outing 'Greswick Angus' East Seaham	7.00am Seaham Swamp Bird Hide	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Wednesday 1 October	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm – 10pm Garden Suburbs School	All members welcome
Saturday - Monday 4 -6 October	Camp at White Box Camp	Goulburn River National Park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 7 October	Midweek outing: Green Point	7.30 am End of Dilkeria Avenue, Valentine	Wyn Warner 4946 8451
Wednesday 8 October	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: tba