



Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Issue No. 4/14 August 2014

- 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



Lewin's Rail at Hexham Swamp - Chris Herbert

Hexham Swamp provides a wonderful opportunity for bird-watching and bird photography with easy access via Woodlands Close, Tarro (see article on page 6). Following opening of the floodgates on Ironbark Creek, a tributary of the Hunter River, tidal inundation of the swamp continues to change the formerly freshwater-dominated vegetation. Vistas of open water have been revealed close to the track. In July, on the muddy margins of one of the leads, four species of crakes and rails were observed foraging together. In June and July, an Eastern Yellow Wagtail was seen - a rare sighting in the winter months. Over-wintering shorebirds, including 35 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, were recorded at Hexham. And then to top it all off, a pair of Black-necked Storks have been observed nest-building on top of an isolated stand of casuarinas, well out in the swamp! It is fantastic to see such diverse bird habitat regenerating in the Hunter Estuary.

CONTENTS

President's Column	2
New Members	2
Health & Safety Awareness for Activities	2
Meeting Highlight	
Common Hoopoe	3
Club Activity Reports	
<i>Windy Station Camp</i>	4
New Members Day	5
Black Hill & Minmi	5
Horseshoe Beach, Nobbys, Ocean Baths	5
Future Activity	
HBOC Mid-week Camp at Old Bar	6
Access to Hexham Swamp	6

Birding Features

BirdLife Australia Bathing Birds Survey	7
Future Activity - Mudgee-Wollar IBA Survey	7
Conservation Issues	
Tomago Wetland to benefit from Orica fine	8
Soldiers Point Marina extension rejected	9
Large forest owls in Lake Macquarie	10
Members	
Tom Clarke honoured in Parliament	10
Member Profile - Jim Smart	10
BirdLife Supporter Network	11
Hunterbirding Observations Summary	12
Australasian Bird Fair	13
Club Activities August to October	14

President's Column

Busy times...

I wrote in my last President's Column about the possibility of the BirdLife Australia Photography Group holding their biennial conference in the Hunter. Well, in the meantime this possibility has become a reality and HBOC is to be the "host organisation" for the conference which will attract up to 100 camera-toting birders from all over Australia. The event will be held on the weekend of 28 February / 1 March 2015, though delegates will be eager to partake in birding activities in the lead-up and days following the formal side of things. There will be many ways for members to get involved, but mostly we will be looking for people to simply lead the photography groups to some "key sites" (all within about 30 minutes of the Wetlands Centre, where the event will be based). Stay tuned for more info...

The inaugural Australasian Bird Fair will be held in Sydney on the last weekend in October, aimed at promoting birdwatching and bird conservation (right in line with HBOC's stated aims). The organisers envisage that large numbers of visitors will be attracted to the Fair and are very keen to showcase regional groups at the event. As one of the largest birding clubs in NSW, HBOC will be represented. You can read more about the Bird Fair and how to get involved on page 13 of this Newsletter.

On the conservation front there is another big "event" for HBOC on the horizon. There will be a public hearing

held by the NSW Planning Assessment Commission about the proposed T4 project on Kooragang Island. As you would be aware, this project threatens some of the most important shorebird / waterbird habitat in the Hunter Estuary and will directly affect some of the best-known birdwatching sites in NSW (on Ash Island). HBOC has been instrumental in the organised opposition to the project and will be represented at the public hearing, to be held at Newcastle Panthers on Tuesday 26 August (and thanks go to Ann Lindsey for coordinating HBOC's involvement thus far). This follows a "conservation win" at Port Stephens where recently the Joint Regional Planning Panel determined to refuse an application for expansion of the Soldiers Point Marina. This is an important part of Port Stephens for shorebirds, but most notably as the breeding location for Australia's southernmost (and highly endangered) Beach Stone-curlews. Thanks to Trevor Murray for representing HBOC so well on this issue.

Oh...and there are plenty of birds around too! As I write this we have a Regent Honeyeater at Belmont Lagoon that is doing superb mimicry of Little Wattlebird calls and some early-returning White-breasted Woodswallows at the same site. Migratory shorebirds are returning to the estuary from the northern breeding grounds and there are many instances of early breeding activity too – dare I say it...*spring is in the air!*
Happy birding all.

Mick Roderick

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Lyle Harding of Jindera
Phil Straw of Brighton-le-Sands
Shelly Zvingulis of Tanilba Bay

We hope to see you at Club meetings and outings.

Right: Australian Spotted Crake at Hexham Swamp - Alwyn Simple



Health and Safety Awareness for Activities

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.

Meeting Highlight - Common Hoopoe - *Upupa epops*

I had my first introduction to the Hoopoe bird in central Thailand in February when I heard it calling from a tree behind my hotel. What a delight to discover such a stunning bird!

The Common Hoopoe is highly distinctive with a long, thin tapering bill that is black with a fawn base. Its body is rufous-buff, with wings and tail black with white stripes. Its crest consists of rufous feathers with black tips. The crest is usually compressed but is raised after landing or when excited. The bird is approx. 35cm long with a 50cm wingspan and weighs about 90g.



The Hoopoe has a characteristic undulating flight caused by the wings half closing at the end of each beat or short sequence of beats. It has been likened to a butterfly in flight as its wings dip.

The sexes are very similar, with females slightly smaller. The male call is a soft, musical, penetrating *hoo-po* or *hoo-po-po*, repeated in runs, often for up to 10 minutes.

Hoopoes prefer open landscapes with little or no vegetation e.g. farmland, parks, gardens and lawns in towns and villages. They feed almost entirely on large insects, larvae and pupae, as well as spiders, slugs, and small vertebrates. They usually forage on the ground and pull up prey with their long decurved bill. The strengthened musculature of the head allows the bill to be opened when probing inside the soil.

The sudden appearance of a bird of prey, when a safe refuge is not possible, will see the Hoopoe go into a camouflage position, lying with wide-spread wings and tail flat on the ground, and neck, head and beak held steeply upward.

Hoopoes are cavity nesters, using a hole in a tree, building or rocks and, sometimes, holes in the ground. They use little or no nest material. A typical brood can have 3-12 round, pale, milky blue eggs and incubation is about 15 days. After hatching the chicks are fed by both parents for 25-29 days until they leave the nest. They have a reputation for coating their nest and plumage with a fluid which is apparently produced by the female and smells like rotting meat.

The breeding range stretches from SW Europe and NW Africa to the east across W Asia, Arabia, Sri Lanka to Sumatra, from the Baltic Sea in the north to south of the Sahara and Madagascar. Until the 19th century, the Hoopoe was a common breeding species throughout central Europe and bred regularly in Denmark and southern Sweden.

The global Hoopoe population is estimated at 5-10 million and the Hoopoe was declared the national bird of Israel in 2008. They feature in art and legends surrounding King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, as well as being one of the sacred birds of Egypt, where it was believed that Hoopoes could detect water and indicate where to dig a well. The Arabs also believed it had wonderful medicinal powers and called it 'The Doctor Bird', while to the ancient Canaanites it was clever, because Baal had given the bird an evil smell and then hidden rare jewels in its nest, and the smell kept the thieves away! In Yemen the bird is associated with the awaited spring and rains, with its presence a sign for the farmers to begin ploughing.

I was fascinated to discover that the Hoopoe has been seen on Australian shores. In November 2011 a single Hoopoe strayed some 4000km off course and was seen by some birdos at the Roebuck Plains Roadhouse, about 30km south of Broome, where it stayed for about a week, to the delight of twitchers around the country. And on my return from Thailand I discovered an entry on Birdline of a Hoopoe on Elcho Island from 6-8 February 2014.

So keep your eyes open when travelling in the north of Australia... you might just have the opportunity to see one for yourself!

Eula McKane

Activity Reports

Windy Station Camp

7 – 9 June 2014

To celebrate the Queen's birthday, the cream of HBOC descended on *Windy Station* for a glorious weekend of bird watching and relaxation. Early birds arrived on the Friday and by Sunday a total of 10 had set up camp amongst the *Callitris*.

Windy Station is owned by the Romani Pastoral Company and covers around 50,000 acres near Quirindi, at the extreme edge of the Hunter Region - indeed the fence line that marked the boundary of the Hunter Region was only a short walk from the camp. The station has a mixed crop/pastureland use with nearly 12,000 head of cattle and crops including sorghum, sunflowers and maize grown in rotation in amazingly black soil that could be up to 8 feet deep.

The woodland uphill from the camp supported abundant White-throated and Brown Treecreepers, Superb Fairywrens, Speckled Warblers, Western Gerygone and Inland Thornbills. Over 15 White-winged Choughs were seen foraging along a footpath and the stunning Red-capped Robin was spotted by most. In the open pasture Galahs, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Eastern Rosellas and Red-rumped Parrots were the common species along with Crested Pigeons and Australian Ravens.

Property manager Keith kindly allowed us access to the historic wool shed, where Ray got himself a new hair piece, and gave us a short tour of the property by vehicle where some of us got good close-ups of the Brown Falcon, Hobby and Cockatiel. Flocks of Little Corellas and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos hung around the homestead and feed lots.

Our evenings were spent around the camp fire, expertly constructed by Ray, for the bird count, happy hour, and a bit of social intercourse over a glass of wine or two. Lorna even baked some apples with cinamon on the campfire much to everyone's delight.



Jacky Winter - Lorna Mee

Alan, Ray and Anthony went for a drive after dark to check for owls and were horrified to spot no less than 10 foxes and a cat along the 4km stretch of road. It was a real shock to us all and certainly brings home the enormity of the feral animal problem facing Australia. The foxes may well account for the lack of Painted Button-quail seen on the property.

In total 72 species were recorded, 67 within walking distance of the camp and five others seen around the feed lots during our outing to the woolshed, so not bad for a winter camp.



Forest at *Windy Station* - Lorna Mee

All in all a most enjoyable weekend, fantastic weather and great company. I also picked up a few more camping tips along the way and will certainly remember to check where my car keys are before I pack all my camping gear away in the car!

One last thing, if you ever find yourself in the situation where you are the front-seat passenger of a vehicle travelling around a rural property, the standard etiquette is for you to do the opening and closing of the farm gates, not the driver. So please make note as I made this mistake once but think I got away with it – just!

Jerry Bullent



Evening fire - Lorna Mee

Activity Reports cont.

New Members Day

15 June 2014

All were gathered at the Hunter Wetlands Centre for what looked like being another successful New Members' Day. After a quick President's speech we set off birding, counting the Magpie Goose and knocking off Hardhead, both types of teal and Purple Swampphen. We then proceeded to the Outdoor Chapel getting a rare glimpse of Hoary-headed and Australasian Grebe side-by-side. It was then onto the Freckled Duck Enclosure giving the New Members a look at these most elusive of birds. After that, we continued onto the pond behind the Egret Tower spying a Whistling Kite along the way. We set our scopes to scan the flocks of waterbirds managing to glimpse a few Australasian Shovelers among the ever-moving mass of bodies. It was then onto the Bird Hide where we located some Black Swans, Dusky Moorhens and a Swamp Harrier. We then returned to the BBQ Area via the Canoe Trail where we came upon our first two decent bush birds, Golden Whistler and Silvereye. Once we were back at the BBQ, we enjoyed a very scrumptious lunch while the rain was pounding down outside. It was then time for the bird call and just as the first names were being read out, the bush birds decided to come out to play. White-cheeked Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill and Grey Fantail were all added to our list at the last minute. All in all, I'm sure everyone would agree it was a very successful outing.

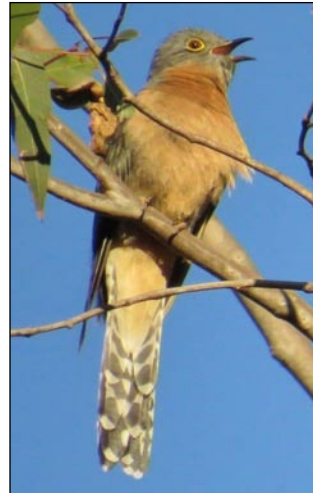
Krishna Nagarajan

Black Hill and Minmi

1 July 2014

A very successful outing began at a new site for the Mid-Weekers, in a small area of bushland off Phoenix Road, Black Hill. This area adjoins "Raptor Bluff" on Leneghans Drive on one side, and overlooks Hexham Swamp with a view to Maryland on the other. Twenty-three members arrived on the cold but sunny morning. The wind from the previous weekend had largely abated so birds were very lively and prevalent.

While raptors were not present in the large numbers of last year, we found Black Falcon, White-bellied Sea-Eagles, Black Kite, Whistling Kites, and later at Pambalong Nature Reserve, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Swamp Harrier. In the Black Hill bushland everyone was able to see male and female Rose Robin, a Scarlet Robin, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, a large flock of Tasmanian Silvereyes, Yellow-rumped Thornbills, and Double-barred Finches. Both male and female Golden Whistlers and a female Rufous Whistler were also present. Amongst honeyeaters seen were Red Wattlebird, White-naped, Fuscous and White-plumed. An active flock of Welcome Swallows and Tree Martins added to the scene.



Clockwise from top right: Rose Robin, Variegated Fairy-wren, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Rufous Whistler at Black Hill - Richard Nicholas

We were so well occupied in this area we got behind in our schedule so those eager for morning tea left for Blue Gum Hills Park on Minmi Road, while a few diehards lagged behind and stopped at two spots on Leneghans Drive which overlook Hexham Swamp. Here the special additions were Yellow-billed Spoonbills and 20 Glossy Ibis. The total bird species observed to this point were 61 plus 3 heard. Later, after morning tea and birdcall, we had a quick look in the Park and then seven members continued on to Pambalong for lunch and another walk. We added 12 species which were not in the original birdcall, making an outing total of 73 plus 3 heard.

Judi Thomas

Horseshoe Beach, Nobbys and Ocean Baths

20 July 2014

Light rain, strong winds from SW and high seas made a cancellation possible for our July Sunday group outing. However, 12 well-rugged people arrived by 8am, so we decided at least a brisk walk would be possible.

We started our walks on Nobbys breakwall and in the Landcare area found Yellow and Brown Thornbills, Silvereyes, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, and the resident Eastern Whipbird. First ocean sightings were 3 species of Tern, White-fronted, Gull-billed and Crested, 2 Sooty Oystercatchers and several Gannets flying over towards Stockton. Then to the Pilots Wharf on the harbour, where we found Australasian Darter, Pied and Little Pied Cormorants, Little Black and Great Cormorants, Silver Gulls, 15 Australian Pelicans, and Masked Lapwing all vying for a spot out of the wind.

Activity Reports cont.

We stopped at Nobbys pavilion for coffee and chips to warm us, before continuing to the Ocean Baths in the hope of seeing two overwintering Ruddy Turnstone at the Cowrie Hole. We missed these but I was able to see them as I left for home, an hour later.

Two raptors were seen, White-bellied Sea-Eagle and a Nankeen Kestrel. We walked through the recently re-

painted tunnel from Newcastle pavilion, through Pacific Park and back along the harbour before stopping for morning tea and bird call in Horseshoe Beach park.

An invigorating morning. Surprisingly, we did manage 36 species by 11.15 am when we finished for the day.

Judi Thomas

Future Activities - HBOC Midweek Camp Old Bar

Monday 15 to Wednesday 17 September 2014

We will be staying at *Lani's on the Beach* right on the beach. Please book your own cabin or campsite, ph 6553 7274 or check their web site www.lanisonthebeach.com.au. When booking check what linen and bedding is supplied. The caravan park is fairly bare but there is some birding across the road.

We plan to go to Saltwater National Park on Monday morning and Mudbishops Point on Monday afternoon. We have made arrangements to visit Cattai Wetlands on Tuesday. Bring morning tea and it could be worth bringing lunch to make the most of this fascinating birding site. Alan Stuart has prepared an excellent *Cattai Wetlands Bird Route* brochure which is available on the HBOC website. On Tuesday evening for those

interested we could have dinner at *Club Old Bar* (i.e. the newly renovated bowling club).

On Wednesday morning we will do a short walk at Manning Point. After morning tea, you can head for home, go back to camp or venture further afield. Other possible birding sites near and far are: roadside birding on side roads south of Old Bar Road, Harrington, Wingham, Khappinghat Nature Reserve and Hallidays Point. Manning Valley Birdwatchers have produced a brochure, *Birding Locations of the Lower Mid North Coast*. You may need the help of other maps, e.g. Cartoscope Manning Valley and Great Lakes maps to find some of these sites.

For further information contact Robert and Margaret Stewart, ph 4963 2029.

Access to Hexham Wetland (Swamp) via Woodlands Close

As most of you are aware, earthworks are taking place out on the north-eastern side of Hexham Wetland where fifteen rail tracks (two companies involved) and other train support infrastructure will replace healthy, ephemeral wetlands where I have seen 500 Black Swans swimming around together during the big wet of 2012. However, this note is not to complain about what is now a fact of life, but to praise the men and women who attend the locked gate on Woodlands Close and the security drivers who escort residents and visitors through the works area. This can be quite daunting during the week when cranes and trucks are all wanting their turn to use the muddy road. I would not like to tackle that road by myself, I must say. These employees are just so pleasant and polite that I quite look forward to seeing them and having a bit of a chat. The weekend men are exceptionally polite even at 6 o'clock in the morning and they are very curious about where I am going and why I am there. Needless to say, I chat on (not too much) about birds and the bird club and the work we do to try to give our avian friends a fair go in this very unfair environment.

Last summer Hexham Wetland exploded into life with thousands of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and other shorebirds joining the regulars and I can't wait to see what will happen this coming summer. I challenge

you all to visit Hexham at least once, count the birds of course and tell someone about it. Don't just leave data in your notebook as that won't help!

I would encourage you to use the Woodlands Close, Tarro access as it is safe and easy. Woodlands Close runs left off the New England Highway when travelling towards Maitland, just over the railway bridge and just short of the Tarro overpass near Tarro.

Ann Lindsey



Golden-headed Cisticola at Hexham Swamp - Alwyn Simple

BirdLife Australia Bathing Birds Survey

The Bathing Birds Survey took place from 27 June to 27 July 2014, guided by a partnership of Birds in Backyards, National Parks Association of NSW and the University of Sydney. This citizen science project looked at what birds were using bird baths. The second phase of this project will take place in January 2015. If you would like to take part, register your interest on the Birds In Backyards website: <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/> or try <http://root.ala.org.au/bdrs-core/npsnw/home.htm>

Here is a summary of Greg Newling's observations at his bird bath in Wingen, north of Scone.

When I signed up to do the Bathing Birds Survey, I was somewhat concerned that all I would record would be Pied Currawongs, because, from mid-autumn to mid-winter, they invade our yard and fill the bird baths with regurgitated berries. However, while the Currawongs were dominant for the first week, their numbers fell away from then on. In the first two weeks, most visitors were larger birds: Currawongs, Crested Pigeons, Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, King Parrots and Satin Bowerbirds. Then, I started to notice more small birds; they usually arrived between about 9.30 am and 11 am, a good excuse to make a cup of coffee and sit and watch! It was interesting to see that once a couple of birds arrived, within a minute or two, more would arrive en masse. It was usually Silvereyes that started the rush, followed by Double-barred Finches, Yellow Thornbills, Superb Fairy-wrens and a lone Grey Fantail. These were the regulars, but occasionally, there were "one-timers", like Brown Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Eastern Spinebill, Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Striated Pardalote. It seems that, when one species decides it's time for a bath, the others follow. Maybe they feel safer in numbers. Larger birds seem to arrive in ones and twos, and mostly just to drink. The most entertaining are the Bowerbirds, who get in and have a good old splash around, and just about empty the bird bath. It's been an interesting exercise; while I've



Olive-backed Orioles on backyard bird baths at Wingen - Greg Newling

always kept an eye out to see who was using the bird baths, it's only when you take part in a survey that you see what's really happening. What's also interesting is those who don't use the bird baths, such as the resident Willie Wagtails, and the female Golden Whistler who arrives every morning, but doesn't use the baths, or Magpies and Magpie-larks who are also residents. A bit later in the year, the White-throated Treecreepers will be back, they're "bath emptiers" too, and like to sing in the bath!

Greg Newling



White-cheeked Honeyeaters massing at a bird bath in Soldiers Point, Port Stephens - Trevor Murray

BirdLife Australia Southern NSW - Future Activity

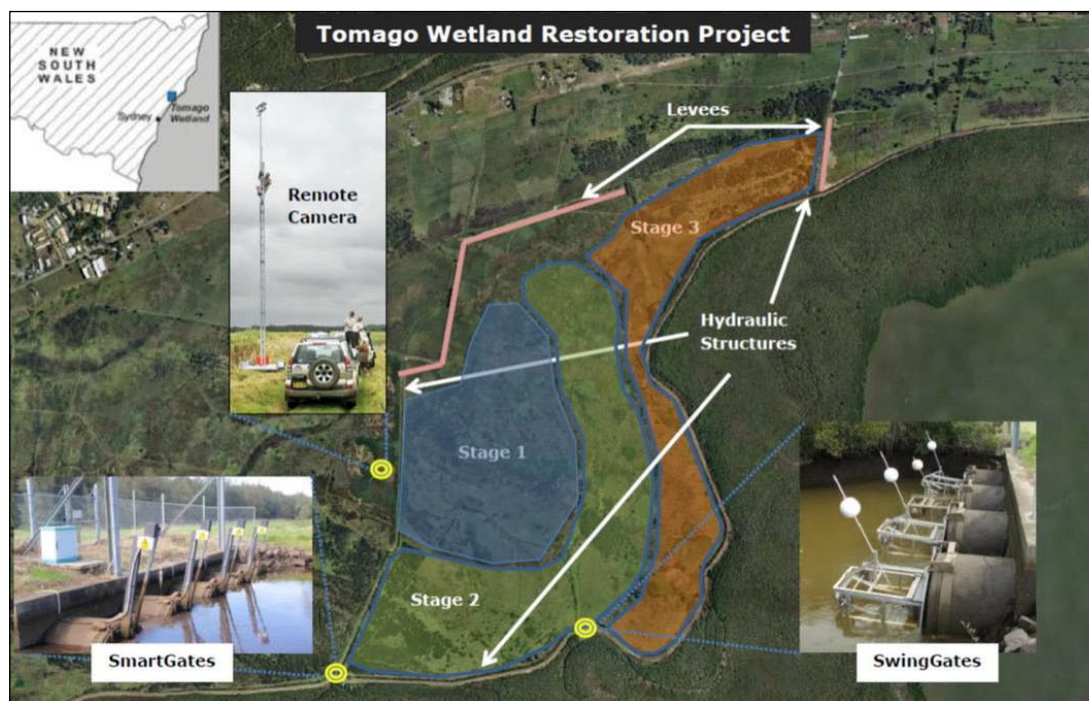
The Mudgee-Wollar Important Bird Area (IBA) Survey

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) program run by BirdLife Australia in partnership with BirdLife International is designed to highlight the plight of birds by recognising important sites for key species and monitoring how those key species are coping in the nominated areas. Annual surveying is required. The BirdLife Southern NSW committee invites members and their friends to survey established sites in the Mudgee-Wollar IBA on **Saturday 4 to Monday 6 October 2014** (long weekend). Key species in this IBA are Regent Honeyeater, Rockwarbler and Diamond Firetail.

Where: Camping at Honeyeater Flat, Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve. There is a drop toilet and a number of fireplaces at the campsite but no water. **All campers will need to bring all the water they will need for the weekend.** Accommodation might also be available in Mudgee: <http://www.visitmudgeeregion.com.au/j/index.php/Where-to-Stay.html>

For more information or to join in the surveys please contact: **Rod Kavanagh** on 0428 637 960 or **Andrew** on 0404 836 210 or southernmsw@birdlife.org.au

Conservation - Tomago Wetland to benefit from Orica fine



Editor's Note: Neville McNaughton surveys Tomago Wetland on the third Tuesday of each month and Steven Cox coordinates the monthly wader surveys of Tomago Wetland - two opportunities for you to see the bird activity on this rehabilitated wetland. Check the Activities List for dates and times.



One of the state's most significant wetland rehabilitation projects is among the beneficiaries from the \$768,250 fine handed to Orica for a series of toxic spills. The chemical giant will pay \$175,000 from the sum to the National Parks and Wildlife Service to help restore the internationally-recognised Tomago Wetland area. The money will allow 39 hectares of wetland to be rehabilitated as part of stage three of the project.

The first two stages, which have resulted in the rehabilitation of 88 hectares, have demonstrated the benefits for migratory waders at a global scale. Fifteen species of migratory waders visited the site after the opening of the stage two flood gates last year.

"The area is the most significant migratory wader site in NSW with international tourism among the potential benefits to the Hunter area," a National Parks and Wildlife spokesman said. "The additional funding [received from the Orica prosecution] will allow the construction of infrastructure that will allow for controlled water management within the area." Work is expected to start

before the end of the year.

Project technical advisor William Glamore said the project, which began more than 10 years ago, was an outstanding example of wetland rehabilitation. "The area was drained in the 1960s with the intention of creating new farmland. It's been a long road back," he said. "This money represents something positive coming back into the local environment from something that was bad for the environment."

Projects to Receive Funding from the Orica Prosecution

Tomago Wetland Rehabilitation Project- Stage 3 – \$175,000:

The Tomago Wetland Rehabilitation Project to be managed by the Office of Environment and Heritage will involve the rehabilitation of the Tomago Wetland located within the Hunter Wetlands National Park.

Restoration of Kooragang Dykes – Stage 2 – \$211,750:

The project to be managed by the Office of Environment and Heritage will restore and stabilise the Kooragang Dykes, located within the Hunter Wetlands National Park.

The Hunter River Health Monitoring Program – \$101,500:

The project will involve an environmental monitoring program to be undertaken by the Office of Environment and Heritage in the Hunter River near the heavy industry precinct.

The results from the study will determine if the cluster of heavy industries is having an impact on the health of

Conservation - Tomago Wetland to benefit from Orica fine cont.

the Hunter River.

The Lower Hunter Particle Characterisation Study – \$122,500:

This study will involve the collection of data on the composition of PM10 and PM2.5 air particles in the Newcastle and Ports area to assist in identifying the major sources of the particles and their relative contribution to pollution in the area. The Program will be managed by the Office of Environment and Heritage.

The Stockton Cycleway Revegetation Works – \$87,500:

This program will be managed by the Newcastle City Council and will involve the revegetation, including planting of riparian native plants along western foreshore of Stockton and planting of trees along the Stockton cycleway.

The Pitt Street Reserve Public Domain Enhancement (Sydney) – \$35,000:

This project will enhance the Pitt Street Reserve Public Domain and will involve the establishment of coastal

native vegetation, advanced tree plantings, installation of bollards to protect vegetation and improved landscaping. This program will be managed Newcastle City Council.

The Bush Regeneration Project for Sir Joseph Banks Reserve (Sydney) – \$35,000:

The Bush Regeneration Project for Sir Joseph Banks Reserve located at Botany Bay will involve the removal of weeds and the regeneration of native vegetation within the 28 hectare reserve. The project will be managed by City of Botany Bay Council.

More background information [here](#) on the Tomago Wetlands

Matthew Kelly

29 July 2014

Sourced from:

<http://www.theherald.com.au/story/2451044/wetlands-to-benefit-from-origa-fine/?cs=305>

Conservation - Soldiers Point Marina Extension Rejected

For about 3 years individuals and community groups including Hunter Bird Observers Club have campaigned against a development application (DA) to extend the Soldiers Point marina in Port Stephens westward across what is currently public waterway toward Dowardee Island. The local opposition has been coordinated by the Soldiers Point Community Group, who from the outset opposed this development on social, economic and environmental grounds. Never before in the history of Port Stephens Council has a DA generated so many submissions, the vast majority being in opposition.

From a birder's perspective this development posed a threat to intertidal foraging habitat in the area and more particularly the relative isolation of Dowardee Island as a bird roosting and breeding site. A very strong anecdotal case can be made for Dowardee Island (or Oakee Island as it is known to the local Worimi people) being the site of three years of successful breeding for the local pair of Beach Stone-curlews. This bird's status as critically endangered in NSW played a significant role in the Council requesting the developer to provide a Species Impact Statement.

This development application was assessed by Port Stephens Council, their recommendation was then put to the Joint Regional Planning Panel (JRPP) which was the decision-making body. The JRPP convened on 12 June 2014 to hear oral submissions from both sides and then make a decision. I made a presentation on behalf of HBOC. The panel of 5 members included 2 Port Stephens councilors who would be considered pro-development. On the strength of the case presented by those opposing

this development the panel voted unanimously to reject this proposal. One of the councilors even commented on the quality and passion of the argument presented by those in opposition.

A couple of personal thoughts from this process:

- i) I would encourage members of HBOC not to diminish the value of good bird photography as an asset in presenting conservation arguments to the wider population. Photographs provided by myself and others during this campaign converted this bird from being 16 letters of text on a page into something with a face, eyes, colour, and even personality. Photos of this bird and the debate even featured on the ABC TV 7:30 Report.
- ii) Don't think that you are unable to become active in conservation causes such as this. You learn a fair bit along the way, and you are working toward good environmental outcomes for creatures that can't speak for themselves.

So the status of this DA is now unanimously rejected, however the applicant has until December I believe to lodge an appeal. Hopefully this will not happen, but if it does a practiced and experienced structure is in place to mount a counter argument.

Trevor Murray

Conservation - large forest owls in Lake Macquarie

Draft Interim Lake Macquarie Large Forest Owl Planning and Management Guidelines 2014 are on exhibition until **24 August 2014**. The new plan proposes to protect four types of threatened large forest owls that occur within Lake Macquarie: Powerful, Masked, Sooty and Barking Owls. The guidelines provide a framework for future conservation and urban planning, as well as identifying future scientific research priorities. This is expected to lead to long-term conservation benefits and help protect the species from local extinction as these large forest owls are listed as threatened (vulnerable) under NSW legislation.

A version of the exhibition material is available at:
<http://www.lakemac.com.au/page.aspx?&pid=101&vid=10&apt=detail&aid=1505>

Comments on the guidelines are welcome and should be forwarded to Environmental Planner - Sarah Warner 4921 0028 - swarner@lakemac.nsw.gov.au.

Tom Clarke honoured in Parliament

On 20 March 2014 in the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales, Ms Sonia Hornery, Member for Wallsend, recorded a Community Recognition Statement for **Hunter Bird Observers Club and Tom Clarke**. The statement reads:

“Members of the Wallsend electorate appreciate the efforts made last year by Tom Clarke, a dedicated long-term member of the Hunter Bird Observers Club, for observing, identifying, reporting and recording 89 species and 38 bird families. More specifically, 24 species have come to the area since 1993, which indicates an important response to environmental improvements that have been made around Throsby Creek.”

Congratulations Tom!

Member Profile - Jim Smart



Bird Expert: Jim Smart is a bird enthusiast and photographer. Pictures by Stuart Scott

On the wall is a watercolour painting of a Princess Parrot – “very rare” – next to a picture of some fairy wrens. Spread out on the floor are a dozen A3 sized photographs of birds taken from bushland around Kurri, that will be presented at the next meeting of the Hunter Bird Observers Club. The book shelves sag under the weight. No, there’s no sign of John Grisham or Ken Follett or Tim Winton here, but reference books of birds – mostly Australian bird books, but sprinkled in among them are books on birds from New Zealand, South Africa, Indonesia, India and England.

Welcome to the East Maitland home of Jim Smart,

retired science teacher and, as you’ve probably worked out already, bird lover.

The *Mercury* first learned of Smart when our wildlife photographer Jim Thomson mentioned his name as the man he goes to when he is unable to identify a bird whose picture he had taken. He takes the image to Smart who will invariably identify it for him.

“Oh, he’s a gun,” Thomson says in his broad Scottish brogue.

So we decided to pay Jim Smart a visit.

“It’s number 41,” Smart said.

“The house with the trees.”

Surprise, surprise.

The story of Jim Smart and birds stems from growing up as the son of a wheat farmer at Dubbo. While his dad wasn’t especially knowledgeable about birds he was “kind to birds”. From there it was a natural progression.

“Bird watching encapsulated all the things I like to do ... travelling, the outdoors, the environment and science,” he explains. “In any one place birds are affected by food, animals, soil, climate, rocks. There’s so much science in it.”

I should point out that among those books on his shelves are small notebooks that list every bird he has seen in

Member Profile - Jim Smart cont.

the past 24 years or so, and the number spotted. I pick one up and flick through it.

It's from a trip to Cooper Creek which, I'm told, is near Innamincka in north-east South Australia. There are 28 birds listed, some with ticks beside them, in a shorthand only a knowledgeable bird watcher could decipher.

"What is an M Parrott?" I ask.

"Mulga," he replies, matter of fact.

"P Duck?" I ask again.

"Pacific."

You get the idea.

Smart is one of the hard core members of the Hunter Bird Observers Club which has 300 members ranging from Newcastle to as far north as Scone and Taree. Due probably in equal parts to the passion and dedication of the members, and the depth of their data – in other words, the input of sightings by members – they're one of the state's most highly respected bird groups. Smart, for instance, along with a handful of other members, has spent the past 11 years documenting the number and variety of birds that visit Walka Water Works each year.

"Did you know that Walka Water Works is one of the major drought refuges for birds of the western plains," he said, barely able to mask his enthusiasm.

"How do birds in the central parts of the state know it's there, then go back?"

"However they do it, they've got far better broadband than we do."

The information from the Hunter club is passed up the line to the *NSW Bird Atlassers* and also BirdLife Australia to help with their documentation.

Have you got a favourite bird, I ask?

He points to the fairy wrens on the wall. "I like them, they're common but lovely birds. And the water colour of the Princess Parrot holds a special place too. It was painted by my auntie and it's a very rare bird." To someone like Jim Smart, whose bird-spotting expeditions have taken him to 4200 metres up the Himalayan mountains and the islands of Indonesia, that must have been a challenge he couldn't refuse. So, has he ever seen one? "Yes, one. Four hundred kilometres west of Alice Springs." Just another day at the office.

The itch Smart has at the moment, one that he is clearly wrestling with, is to travel to Antarctica to see the birdlife there. "It's a long way to go to get seasick, and it's certainly expensive," he says. "But the birds down there ... well, they would be great to see."



Which seemed to lead to my final question: is there a holy grail for bird watchers?

"The Night Parrot," he said immediately. "It wasn't seen for the best part of 100 years and was thought extinct. But then one was spotted in a remote part of south-west Queensland. The person who saw it happened to get it on video, so there's no mistake." A bird spotted once in a hundred years – to a man like Jim Smart, that must sound mighty tempting.

Tell me a fact about local birds, I said as we walked out to the backyard to see if the rosellas have moved in to take advantage of the nesting boxes he has in the gum trees of his backyard. "Well, the Hunter has always been home to the Australian Raven, but just recently the Torresian Crow has moved in and taken over," Smart said. "They're a more aggressive bird even though they're about the same size, and they've essentially kicked the raven out. In the past the Torresian Crow has always been located farther north. That's global warming in action, right there?"

Just then, sure enough, the rosellas came in.

Rick Allen

5 July 2014

Journalist, *The Maitland Mercury*

Sourced from:

<http://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/2396279/jim-smarts-feathered-friends/?cs=171>

BirdLife Australia Supporter Network

Membership of BirdLife Australia can be very rewarding but if the annual fees are inhibiting your support of BirdLife Australia, why not become a Supporter for free? Join the BirdLife Australia Supporter Network and receive free monthly e-News featuring the latest in bird conservation news, events and activities in our Network, competitions and a bit of bird-related culture. Register at: <http://birdlife.org.au/support-us>

Hunterbirding observations summary June - July 2014

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 scythrops@yahoo.com.au and I'll sort it out for you – what could be easier?!

Some of the Hunterbirding highlights from the last couple of months include:

- Sightings of an Eastern Yellow Wagtail on Hexham Swamp, possibly indicating an overwintering bird. This species is rarely seen in winter in Australia;
- Swift Parrot records from around the region;
- A Regent Honeyeater at Tanilba Bay, accompanied by a Spangled Drongo that was quite adept at catching (and eating) honeyeaters;
- Two beach-washed Albatross on Stockton Beach that appear to be Grey-headed – a new bird for the Hunter Region;
- Eastern Osprey nesting activity around Lake Macquarie and at Port Stephens – these birds appear to be on the up;

- Continued reports of Striated Pardalote subspecies for Peter Alexander's Pardalote Project, confirming the presence of *ornatus*, *striatus* and *substriatus* within the region;
- Excellent water level conditions on Hexham Swamp provided a bonanza of crake and rail sightings. An Australasian Shelduck was also observed out there; and
- Observations of probable nesting behaviour from the resident pair of Black-necked Storks that frequent Hexham Swamp and the surrounding wetlands.

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 BirdLife Australia 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.

A selection of interesting observations:

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Southern Emu-wren	2	9/07/2014	Maryland	L. Crawford & C. Herbert
Pink-eared Duck	24	23/06/2014	Morpeth WWTW	T. Kendall
Freckled Duck	20+	23/06/2014	Morpeth WWTW	T. Kendall
Rainbow Lorikeet	8+1dy	7-9/07/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Australasian Shoveler	120+	22/05/2014	Morpeth WWTW	T. Kendall
Northern Giant Petrel	1	2/06/2014	Tea Gardens	J. Deane
Rock Dove	110	23/03/2014	Nelsons Plains	P. Slack
Rock Dove	180	23/03/2014	Bolwarra	P. Slack
Rock Dove	70	23/03/2014	Duckenfield	P. Slack
Square-tailed Kite	1	9/05/2014	Raymond Terrace	P. Slack
Black Bittern	1	30/04/2014	Toronto West	P. Durie
Rainbow Lorikeet	17+ny	4/06/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Rainbow Lorikeet	10+dy	9/06/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough

Dan Williams

Australasian Bird Fair - volunteers needed for HBOC stall

The Australasian Bird Fair (ABF) will be held at Newington Armory, Sydney Olympic Park on 25-26 October this year. The event aims to raise public awareness about the plight of many of our wild birds and the need for their protection, from backyard birds to critically endangered species. All profits will go towards endangered species recovery programs in line with BirdLife Australia's *Preventing Extinctions Program*.

Presence of local bird groups

Although we have a large national bird conservation body in BirdLife Australia, it is the independent bird clubs that are essential to the success of the outcomes of the ABF. Each bird club is unique in its approach and the circumstances in which it operates. Each club will have its own stories to tell. This is what will help to make the Australasian Bird Fair an interesting place to visit, especially to the layperson.

HBOC will hire a 3mx3m space within a 6mx6m marquee, probably sharing a large marquee with other bird clubs. We will have our display boards with appropriate bird photos and posters on display. As at the Tocal Field Days, we will have bird calls playing - a great way to attract people in for a chat.

We will need at least 3 volunteers each day to man the stall (the more the merrier). Volunteers will have free access to the site and will be issued with a high-visibility vest branded '2014 Australasian Bird Fair' as well as an ID badge, plus a free lunch voucher.

Program of Events

Well-known celebrity speakers, scientists and researchers from Australia, New Zealand and across the globe have been enlisted to make the Australasian Bird Fair a place of discovery, fascination and engagement. Presentations will include high-quality audio-visually featuring the region's most endangered species and what is being done to prevent them from going extinct.

You will learn about the amazing migration along the world's most threatened Flyway, following the travels of the world's greatest long-distance migrant as it flies from one side of the world to the other non-stop, as well as the hazards that this and other birds have to face to survive.

One lecture theatre will be largely devoted to travelogues of birding destinations with tour operators who are keen to show the reasons why increasing numbers of people choose wildlife experiences for their holidays.

The demands of the modern-day wildlife explorer include high quality, rugged optical equipment and a desire to see and record birds and other wildlife in eye-popping resolution. The Australasian Bird Fair will have some of the top wildlife photographers and optical experts from Australia and around the world, all of whom are keen to share their expertise and tips for capturing amazing wildlife images. In addition, optics experts will demonstrate and explain the best optical and photographic equipment.

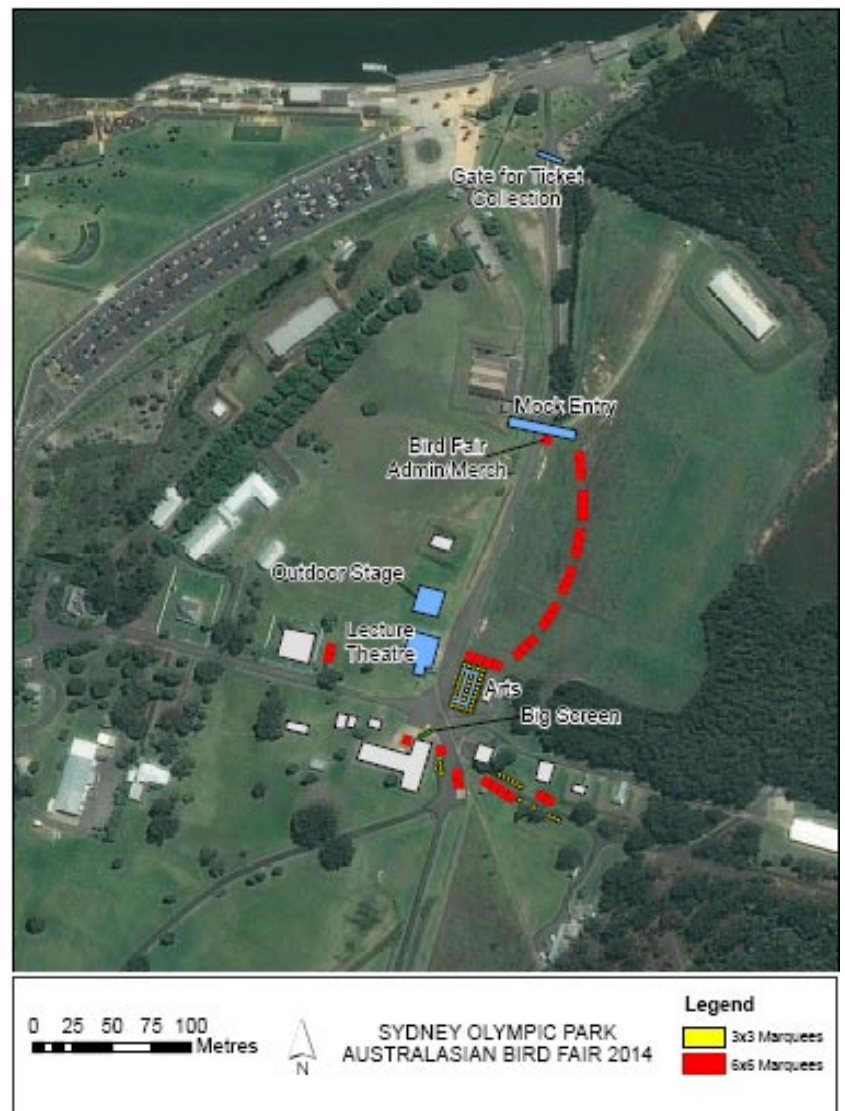
Bird artists will also have their works on display.

Let's make sure we have a greater presence and voice than the hunters' associations!

If you would like to help out on HBOC's stall, please contact **Liz Crawford** on 041 722 644 or email: chrisliz@internode.on.net

Further information is available on-line at: <http://www.birdfair.com.au/about-the-bird-fair/>

Below: Australasian Bird Fair layout of marquees at the Newington Armory site in Sydney Olympic Park - access via Jamieson Street off Holker Street, Newington.



Club Activities August to October 2014

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
Wednesday 13 August	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Chris Herbert - <i>Birding the Bahamas</i> Bird of the Evening: Greg Little
Sunday 17 August	Field Outing to: <i>Iomar</i> at Quorrobolong	8.00am Corner of Sandy Creek Road and Heaton Road, Quorrobolong	Kristy Peters 0438 328 049 Note: Sandy Creek Road blocked by bridge repairs at Wallis Creek - access meeting place via Cessnock and Quorrobolong Road
Saturday - Sunday 16-17 August	Regent Honeyeater Tree Planting	Capertee	BirdLife Southern NSW southernnsw@birdlife.org.au
Tuesday 19 August	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
SEPTEMBER 2014			
Tuesday 2 September	Mid-Week Outing – Blackbutt Reserve	8.00am Lookout Road, Lower Carpark, New Lambton	Joy Nicholls 4957 3612
Wednesday 3 September	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Mick Roderick 0421761237 All members welcome
Wednesday 10 September	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Andrew Ley - <i>Birds of Diamantina National Park</i> Bird of the Evening: Liz Crawford
Saturday 13 September	Hunter Wader Survey	10.30 am Ash Island 11.00 am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 0412 722 644 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago
Monday- Wednesday 15-17 September	Mid-Week Camp – Old Bar	Camp Ground at Old Bar - <i>Lani's on the Beach</i> Phone 02 6553 7274	Robert and Margaret Stewart 02 4963 2029 See this Newsletter for details.
Monday- Wednesday 15-17 September	Rufous Scrub-bird Monitoring, Gloucester Tops IBA	Camp at Sharpes Creek	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171
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: Grahamstown Dam area	7.00am Finnan Park, Grahamstown	Kristy Peters 0438 328 049
OCTOBER 2014			
Wednesday 1 October	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Venue TBA	Mick Roderick 0421761237 All members welcome
Saturday - Monday 4 - 6 October	Widden Valley	Directions TBA	Mick Roderick 0421761237
Tuesday 7 October	Mid-Week Outing – Seaham Wetland & <i>Wattlewood</i>	7.30am Seaham Wetland, cnr Seaham and East Seaham Roads	Pam Hill 4984 5270
Wednesday 8 October	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Holly Parsons - <i>Birds in Backyards - recent and future projects</i> Bird of the Evening: Alan Stuart