



Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Issue No. 4/15 August 2015

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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

A Varied Sittella extracting a spider snack from an Ironbark trunk at Singleton Training Area on 4th August. Photo by Mick Roderick.



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President's Column

As I write this President's Column I'm in preparation for a medical procedure and feel like labelling this one the "President's Colon"!

There have been quite a few bird-related stories in the media recently. I have been involved with some of it, mostly pertaining to BirdLife Australia's State of Australia's Birds 'headline report' that was released in July, as well as recent news on the Regent Honeyeater front. The latter included the Regent's 'uplifting' to Critically Endangered nationally, mixed with good news such as funding commitments to run the recovery program from the NSW government. One of the more fascinating stories though, from several perspectives, has been on the enigmatic Night Parrot.

It is always exciting to watch scientific discoveries unfold, but the story of the Night Parrot is different in a

way because there has always just been enough evidence to keep the intrigue alive. Any potential scepticism about its existence was dealt a blow by the images taken by John Young in 2013. There is no room for any scepticism now, as there has just been on national television footage of a bird being held in the hand and then let go, released onto the floor of the spinifex country somewhere in Central-West Queensland. It was breathtaking to see – exhilarating really.

It makes me wonder if there might be Ground Parrots holding on in the Hunter; in Myall Lakes National Park perhaps? The intrigue of this possibility excites me. The age of discovery (or rediscovery) is well and truly alive!

Mick Roderick

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Colin and Laraine Bunt of Hamilton

Stuart Fleming of Tahlee

Joel Stibbard of Mayfield

We hope to see you at club meetings and outings.

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.

Innovative Thinking to Keep Birds at Bay

Whether they use colour, water, movement or noise, fishers are working to develop new options to keep seabirds at a safe distance from their vessels.

There's a gentle shower falling on the water astern the Lakes Entrance-based trawler *Lady Miriam*, but it is not falling from the skies; it is being generated by the trawler's own rain-maker as part of an industry-initiated research trial.

To the vessel's Victorian owner Tony Guarnaccia, the device is a bird sprayer, rather than a rain-maker. Its purpose is to prevent seabirds from becoming entangled in the wires that attach the trawl gear to the back of the boat.

The invention is one of two designed by fishers that are being trialled as alternatives to 'pinkies' – the large, round, bright-pink buoys. Pinkies are, so far, the only authorised bird-deterrent device for vessels in the southern Commonwealth trawl fisheries. All trawlers in these fisheries are required to use pinkies to reduce bird entanglements as part of their licence conditions.

Safety Focus

Although the pinkies have been successful in keeping birds away, local fishers have been working on alternatives because, depending on the configuration of the trawler, pinkies can pose some operational hazards for the crew.

The buoys hang off the trawl gear warp wires, but sometimes need to be untangled or adjusted during fishing operations. For Tony Guarnaccia, this is a real problem. "In winds of 40 knots, seven-metre seas and at night it is so dangerous for the crew. The last thing I want is to lose a crew member," he says.

So he and fellow trawler owner Sot Sotirakis have come up with the 'bird sprayer'. It looks something like an old-fashioned television aerial hanging off the back of the trawler. Stored vertically when not in use, it is lowered into place once fishing begins. When the sprayer is turned on, water is pumped through hoses into the spray arms to create a relatively gentle shower over the 'danger zone' – the warp wires behind the boat. Whether it is the sound or the sensation of the 'rain' the birds do not like, it is enough to keep them away, Tony



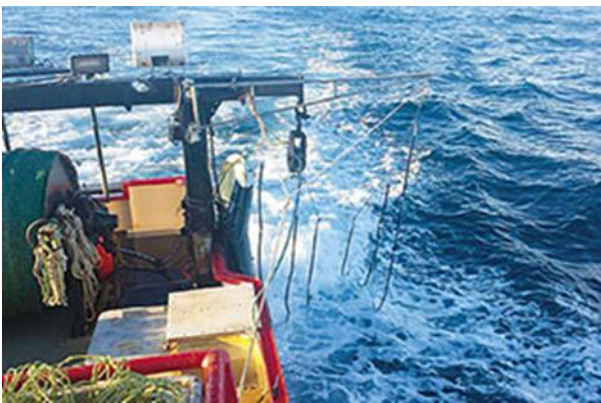
Innovative Thinking to Keep Birds at Bay
Guarnaccia says.

The sprayer is an advance on their first idea – using a deck hose directed at the warp wires to deter the birds. "But that wasn't really a safe idea for the crew," Tony Guarnaccia says. Now they have a boom they can "set and forget", keeping the crew drier and free to continue with fishing operations.

Developing the bird-sprayer design is part of the South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association (SETFIA) project 'Mitigation of seabird interactions in the trawl sectors of the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery (SESSF)', funded through a National Landcare Programme Innovation Grant.

Revised Design

Recent revisions to the design include increasing the spray coverage across the warp wires from 1.5 metres up to four metres. The two spray arms are offset to increase coverage, and also swivel 180 degrees, to ensure the spray will cover the wires when wind and currents result in the nets drawing in at an angle to the stern. So far only one sprayer has been manufactured. It is fixed to the starboard side of Lady Miriam for preliminary trials. The intention is to fit sprayers to both sides of the vessel.



The trawler generally fishes off the Victorian and Tasmanian coasts, targeting flathead in shallower water, and Pink Ling (*Genypterus blacodes*) and Blue Grenadier (*Macrurus novaezelandiae*) in deeper water. Tony Guarnaccia has been fishing in the South East Trawl Fishery for more than 45 years – 30 of those aboard his own vessel. For the past 15 years, he has left the fishing to his crew, but is still closely involved in overseeing operations.

"I'm always happy to jump into projects that are going to improve what we're doing," he says. "So far we've directly invested about \$7000 in the project, along with

local engineering company J&S Engineering, plus our time and that of our vessel.

"We're here for the long haul, and we have to protect our industry by making sure we're doing the right thing," he says. "We want a sustainable future as fishers. I don't begrudge the birds a feed, but we don't want them getting caught on our lines either."

To gain approval from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) as an authorised bird deterrent, new devices must be as effective or more effective than pinkies. AFMA's recently released evaluation of pinkies found that these have reduced seabird interactions by 75 per cent since they were introduced.

SETFIA executive officer Simon Boag says SETFIA will use the same methodology as AFMA's pinkie evaluation to test the effectiveness of the bird sprayer. "I'm confident we can actually reduce bird interactions by more than 90 per cent," he says.

A second design being developed by fishers based at Eden, New South Wales, is known as a 'baffler'. A boom fixed out over the back of a trawler is fitted with heavy, relatively rigid rubber strips that slap against the surface of the water as the vessel moves.

Simon Boag says the most commonly encountered seabird in the South Eastern Trawl Fishery is the Shy Albatross, which is often anything but shy.

New Zealand Tour

"We are fortunate we don't interact with as many different bird species as the New Zealand trawlers do. They have a much larger commercial fleet than we do, and they also have much larger bird populations in the areas where they are fishing."

Simon Boag was among a small Australian contingent to tour New Zealand earlier this year as part of research into potential seabird mitigation options, funded by the Australian Government. The contingent also included fishers, a marine scientist and representatives from AFMA and the Great Australian Bight Fishing Industry Association.

The group attended the New Zealand Federation of Commercial Fishermen's Conference in Invercargill and met with representatives from the Deepwater Group – the industry association for New Zealand's deep-water fisheries – travelling from port to port meeting with

Club Activity Reports

fishers and New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries staff. They also visited fishing vessels, seafood processors, net makers and mitigation device distributors.

Simon Boag says exposure to such diverse operations enabled the tour group to put management of seabird interactions in their own fisheries into perspective. During a final debriefing session, the group put forward mitigation devices they thought might work in the southern Commonwealth fisheries, including their own ideas. The bird sprayer and the baffler were the designs chosen for further trials.

Club Activity Reports

New Members Day

21 June 2015

9:30 on a sunny winter morning in June saw a gathering of 58 HBOC members (both new and old) at The Hunter Wetlands Centre. Over the next few hours the congregation would witness the best of what 'The Wetlands' has to offer.

Raptors were aplenty, with great views of 2 Grey Goshawks, 2 Swamp Harriers and a lone Pacific Baza being noted. On the water there were large counts of both Pink-eared Duck (347) and Wandering Whistling-Duck (124), with good views of Hoary-headed and Australasian Grebes being had as well (very handy for identification purposes).



The Motley Crew, with the scent of lunch in their nostrils

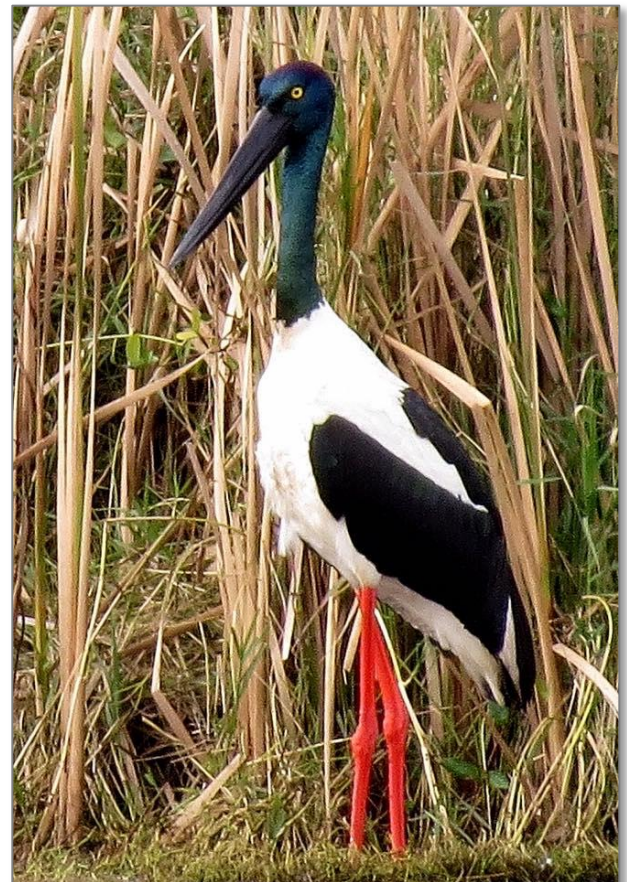
Right on cue a Black-necked Stork joined the party, just after Mick had said he wouldn't be surprised if we saw one. Bush-birds weren't afraid to show themselves

"If we can give fishers a range of options to choose from, it will improve safety and compliance, and will ultimately reduce seabird interactions even more," Simon Boag says.

Catherine Norwood

Original article taken from FISH – the official newsletter of the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation: http://frdc.com.au/knowledge/publications/fish/Pages/22-4_articles/16_Innovative-thinking-to-keep-birds-at-bay.aspx

either, with various thornbills, honeyeaters and wrens being sighted. A very obliging Spangled Drongo and Olive-backed Oriole gave many of the new members a first-time tick on their lists, with the regular menagerie of parrots (rosellas, galahs, lorikeets etc.) also putting in an appearance.



Isn't she a beauty? The well-received Black-necked Stork (photo by Lene Parashou)

Club Activity Reports

To top off a brilliant day's birding an equally brilliant BBQ lunch was had, courtesy of Rowley and his fellow food connoisseurs. A thanks should also go out to Greg and Judy Little, who managed to organise this event without Lorna (a very impressive feat indeed)! All in all the New Members' Day for 2015 was a raging success, with 72 birds being recorded and an ever increasing number of new members attending.

Krishna Nagarajan

Walka Water Works

7 July 2015

The Midweek Birders (or Silver Car subgroup of HBOC) met at Maitland's Walka Water Works on a cold but clear, sunny morning in July and wandered around the lake. Generally, there were fewer numbers of ducks than usual with only Hardheads in abundance, and on the farm dam on the southern boundary were over 100 Pink-eared Ducks. Most of the usual waterfowl were present with the exception of the Great Crested Grebe which was nowhere to be found.

As the morning warmed up bush birds were in abundance including Golden Whistler, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Olive-backed Oriole, Grey Fantail, Red-browed Finches, lots of Superb Fairy-wrens, Brown and Yellow Thornbills, Silveryeyes and even one (or two) Blackbirds. Grevilleas and callistemons were flowering but there were few honeyeaters – only Yellow-faced and White-cheeked.

It was disappointing that the Freckled Ducks were no longer camping out in the reeds, but the water level was higher so this might have made it less desirable for them. A lone Fairy Martin was hawking for insects with a small flock of Welcome Swallows in the same area.



Master of ceremonies Alan Stuart awarding Rob McDonnell his "bronze medal"

A total of 61 bird species were observed and another 6 were heard. At morning tea a large flock of Straw-necked Ibis wheeled overhead and Rob McDonnell was presented with his 300 Club badge by Alan Stuart. Congratulations Rob!

Dinah Stehr

Galgabba Point & Murrays Beach

19 July 2015

It was Sunday morning, an 8am start, and 14 keen birdos were willing to take on the cold and drizzly weather – the first arrivals of whom were able to view the nesting Osprey.

It became apparent early on that the birds were not as keen as we were, however. Highlights included viewing nesting White-bellied Sea Eagle doing renovations to the nest, recording eight species of Honeyeaters, a number of Golden Whistlers and a Spangled Drongo – looking sick or part frozen as the 14 birdos walked past it still sat on the branch.

Other notable observations included Yellow and Brown Thornbills, Superb and Variegated Fairy-wrens (some showing colouring with spring not far away), viewing a Satin Bowerbird's bower with fresh blue plastic tops, and the local Swamp Wallabies also put in an appearance. The Rose Robin was a no show, despite after I had seen it the previous Wednesday.

We returned at 11.30 just as the sun came out we were able to have morning tea in the sun. We ended up with a credible 45 species for the morning for our efforts in braving the elements.

Jack Adams

Werakata NP at Kitchener

4 August 2015

We started the morning along the Kearsley South Fire Trail in Werakata National Park. At the start, the predominant bird was the Noisy Miner, but further along there were good sightings of other honeyeaters, including White-naped, Brown-headed, Yellow-tufted, Yellow-faced and Noisy Friarbirds.

The adjoining farmland yielded waterbirds on the dam, including both a White-necked and a White-faced Heron. A couple of Fairy Martins were spotted among the many Welcome Swallows flying about, but perhaps the best sightings over the fence were two male Scarlet Robins

Future Club Activities

and two Jacky Winters, which stayed around for everyone to see. On the way back along the track we enjoyed watching a Spotted Pardalote as it carefully examined a hole in the bank. Before we left this area Bruce led us to two Tawny Frogmouths that he had spotted earlier, being harassed by Noisy Miners.



Cracking bird – Blue-faced Honeyeater by Alan Stuart

Those who arrived back early to Poppethead Park in Kitchener for morning tea were lucky to see five Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos feeding in the area. After morning tea we walked around the former mine dam, where many Eurasian Coots, Dusky Moorhens and other waterbirds were swimming around. Several more bush birds were also added to our species count for the day, which totalled 58 seen and 3 heard. This is a great area to visit, and was much appreciated by those who hadn't been there before.

Margaret Stewart

Future Club Activities

Mid-week Camp

14 to 16 September 2015

This year's mid-week camp will be to the Riverwood Downs Mountain Valley Resort. The website has full information, so use it: www.riverwooddowns.com.au. The resort is located at 311 Upper Monkerai Rd, Monkerai and can be contacted on 1800 809 772 or 4994 7112.

Riverwood Downs is about 100 km and two and a half hours drive north of Newcastle. Follow Pacific Highway, about 20 km north of Raymond Terrace turn left onto Buckets Way (to Stroud and Gloucester). About 17 km north of Stroud turn left from Buckets Way onto Monkerai Rd. The turn off comes up quickly at highway speeds. The last few km are country road, gravel – all weather but narrow and twisting, so care is needed.

Accommodation is in the resort or cabins or camping. Make your own bookings and mention HBOC. The resort and the spa cabins are pricey and rather rustic. Park cabins and camping seem good. Cabins are best priced for two nights, Monday and Tuesday. If you wish to stay one night only, ask Max about the options. Book online if you prefer.



Visit 'Tops' Country...

There is a doggie group booked into the bunkhouse, which will hopefully not be a problem.

Prices

Cabins: \$137 one night, \$194 two nights (discount \$80 for second night) or \$331 three nights. HBOC may get three nights for \$251 online or if you ask for it.

Camping: Unpowered \$12, powered \$15 – pay two nights, stay three.

Program

Monday 2pm: Meet at cabins for local survey. Bird count in the evening. Riverwood Downs is situated in a

bend of the Karuah River. Morning arrivals will find good birding on the property.

Tuesday 8am : Meet at cabins for morning visit to Hildegard's acreage at 1161 Monkerai Road and lunch. After lunch exploring the area.

Wednesday: Home. For those with time to spare, meet at 8am to travel home by way of Dungog, perhaps lunch on the way. See the HBOC website for the Dungog Area Birding Route.

Facilities include kiosk, BBQ, meeting place, café and restaurant (booking required). For further details please contact Max on 4962 1793 or 0425 300 389.

Max Blanch

Rufous Scrub-bird Surveys

28 to 29 September

After a period of absence it is time again to head up the tops to continue the Rufous Scrub-bird monitoring surveys under their reduced frequency format.

Volunteers are required to help monitor the territorial calling of known Scrub-bird locations, and locate new ones if found. The trip is bound to include some great birding and comradery in this unique environment. You might even be lucky enough to glimpse the elusive Scrub-bird... (but no promises).



The subject matter, rarely seen this well. Photo by "El Presidente"

To declare your interest please speak to Alan Stuart
0409 978 171

Long Weekend Camp, Yengo NP

3 to 5 October



"Big Yengo" photo by John Spencer, courtesy of visitnsw.com

This year's October long weekend camp is scheduled to be held in the majestic wilderness of Yengo National Park. The hope is to camp at the Big Yengo Homestead, but this cannot be booked prior to a month in advance, so it's going to be a case of watch this space, so please be patient and await further details.

Yengo National Park is accessed by taking the Yango Creek Road west from Laguna and continuing via the Finchley Track and Yango Track – four wheel drive country. Details will be posted on the website and provided at club night nearer the time, i.e. the September meeting.

Recent Observations

Hunterbirding is an email group set up by HBOC that is run through the Yahoo Groups. It is a great way to keep in touch with the latest goings-on in Hunter Region birding. Members are able to report sightings, post questions to the group and get involved with group discussions on bird related issues. If you are interested in joining the group then the easiest way is to send an email to hunterbirding-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. You can choose either to receive individual emails or a single daily digest. Alternatively, email me at scythrops@yahoo.com and I'll sort it out for you – what could be easier?! In addition to being a forum for interesting discussions on issues such as bird identification and behaviour it is also a great place to report your observations. Some of the Hunterbirding observation highlights from the last couple of months include:

- A count of 50-60 Freckled Ducks at Walka Water Works on 2nd June;
- Two Red-winged Parrots observed at Cassillis township on 3rd June;
- A Black-necked Stork seen at Thornton on 11th June;
- A flyby Turquoise Parrot recorded at Paxton on 12th June;
- A record of the yet to be described to science “New Caledonian” Storm-petrel from the Port Stephens Pelagic on 14th June;
- A report of a Barking Owl from North Valentine in early June;
- A count of c.350 Pink-eared Duck at the Wetlands Centre on 21st June, followed by another 323 four days later at Morpeth WWTW;
- An observation of a pair of nesting Wedge-tailed Eagles at Broke on 3rd July;
- A Flame Robin recorded at Medhurst Bridge on 7th July, along with 100+ Double-barred Finch;
- A presumed leucistic (nankeen plumage being grey) Nankeen Kestrel photographed at Bureen on 8th July;
- Two Glossy Black-cockatoos seen at the Cassillis rest area on 15th July; and
- A count of 941 Pink-eared Ducks at Morpeth WWTW on 30th July.

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

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	3/06/2015	Maitland Golf Club	D. Stehr
Gang-gang Cockatoo	2	8/06/2015	Laguna	D. Stehr
Grey-crowned Babbler	2	3/06/2015	Maitland Golf Club	D. Stehr
Little Black Cormorant	c.90	3/06/2015	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Little Lorikeet	4	3/06/2015	Maitland Golf Club	D. Stehr
Noisy Miner	nest	8/06/2015	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Rainbow Lorikeet	2+2dy	16/06/2015	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Superb Lyrebird	1	8/06/2015	Laguna	D. Stehr
White-headed Pigeon	8	28/05/2015	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
White-naped Honeyeater	6	8/06/2015	Laguna	D. Stehr

Club Activities August to October 2015

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
AUGUST 2015			
Saturday 15 August	Hunter Wader Survey	8.30am Ash Island 9.00am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390 – Tomago
Sunday 16 August	Field Outing – Cessnock TSRs Mk II	7.30am Cessnock Airport (café)	John Goswell 0411 888 450 Note change of number
Tuesday 18 August	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Wednesday 19 August	Special Outing to Ellalong Lagoon and surrounding bushland	7.30am Paxton Hotel	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237 mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au You must register to attend
SEPTEMBER 2015			
Tuesday 1 September	Mid-week Outing – Galgabba Point	8.00am Marks Street Swansea	Rob McDonell 4962 4258
Wednesday 2 September	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237 All members welcome
Tuesday 7 July	Mid-week Outing – Walka Water Works	8.00am Meet inside the gate	Dinah Stehr 4933 2134
Saturday/ Sunday 5/6 September	BIGnet Meeting	Pioneer Dairy Tuggerah (incl. outing Sunday morning)	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237 Lorna Mee 0499 015 500 You must register to attend
Wednesday 9 September	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Speaker: Phil Hansbro 'Birding in Ethiopia'
Saturday 12 September	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30am Ash Island 8.00am Various locations	See August
Monday – Wednesday 14 – 16 September	Midweek camp	Riverwood Downs	Robert and Margaret Stewart 4963 2029 See Newsletter for details.
Tuesday 15 September	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Sunday 20 September	Field Outing – Giants Creek & Manobolai	8.00am Sandy Hollow Servo (some people may camp at Sandy Hollow)	Lucas Grenadier 0401 945 761 <i>Who for camping?</i>
Sunday 27 September	"Photo Twitch" (photography comp)	Any 8 hours anywhere to photograph as many species as possible	Robert McDonald 0408 877 827
Monday/ Tuesday 28/29 September	Rufous Scrub-bird Monitoring, Gloucester Tops IBA	Camp at Sharpes Creek	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171
OCTOBER 2015			
Saturday - Monday 3 – 5 October	Camp at Yengo National Park	Directions to be provided nearer the time	Alan Stuart & Lorna Mee 4987 2913
Tuesday 6 October	Mid-week Outing – Tilligerry Habitat	7.30am King Albert Ave, Tanilba Bay	Pam Hill 4984 5270
Wednesday 7 October	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237 All members welcome
Saturday 10 October	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30am Ash Island 8.00am Various locations	See August
Wednesday 14 October	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Mike Fidler - 'Gouldian Finch Project'