



NEWSLETTER

Issue 6/09 December 2009 - January 2010

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc

affiliated with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia

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The aims of the club are:

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



The third edition of The Whistler is now ready for distribution and will be provided free to members. Additional copies are available for sale from HBOC. The Whistler is also available via our website: www.hboc.org.au

President's Column

It is hard to believe that yet another year has flown by so quickly and that the Christmas season is nearly upon us. While thinking about the content for this column my thoughts turned to the birds often associated with the Christmas season, and not surprisingly, the birds that first came to mind were the Partridge (in a pear tree) and the Turkey so popular for Christmas dinner in various parts of the world. How sad! Why not an Australian bird? The Plains Turkey, perhaps? No? Yes? *No!* Definitely not for Christmas dinner. *Yes!* As a symbolic, thought-provoking reminder of “boom and bust”. Just like the hot, dry, open country habitat of the Plains Turkey (Australian Bustard), the often hot, dry Australian Christmas season may also be a time of abundance for some people and a time of scarcity for others.

My first sighting of the stately and striking Plains Turkey occurred whilst satisfying an inherited “nomadic” urge on the way to Cunnamulla and it was certainly the high point of my birding year. Nomadic tendencies seem to be common amongst the birding fraternity but nomadism for the Plains Turkey, as for many Australian birds, is a way of surviving the “boom and bust” nature of this continent’s environment. However, it appears that this once common bird has not fared so well in response to increasing human pressures as, according to Pizzey, it is now “mostly extinct in settled districts of s., se. Aust. and sw”.

Enough doom and gloom, back to “Boom & Bust”. The book with that title, published by the CSIRO (see reference below), would make a great Christmas gift for any person interested in Australian birds and their responses to environmental variability and stress. It is easy to read and as noted in the book’s foreword it is a work that “will have appeal to bird lovers, and also to all who are concerned about how people can adapt to changing environments everywhere”.

One business matter, your attention is drawn to the notice for the 2010 Annual General Meeting to be held in February and the need for nominations for the elected positions to be lodged with the Secretary.

I wish to thank the many people who have translated their commitment to birds into practical ways of helping members, assisting the Club and the community and most importantly, improving the “lot” of our birds. Your efforts and contributions are greatly appreciated. On behalf of the Club I wish you all a safe, happy and peaceful Christmas followed by a wonderful year of birding in 2010.

Good Birding! Keep looking!

Paul Baird



Australian Bustard in full breeding display - Chris Herbert

Book Reference: Robin, L., Heinsohn, R. and Joseph, L. (Eds). (2009) ‘Boom & Bust – Bird Stories for a Dry Country’. CSIRO Publishing.

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to new members:

Jerry Bullent of Raworth
David, Robbie, Betsie and Samuel Shaw of Elermore Vale
Allan and Dorothy Wright of Adamstown Heights
Dennis Hirst of North Arm Cove

We hope to meet you at Club outings & meetings.

Trip Reports

Rural Property at Seaham

Mid-week outing 6 October 2009

We had a very enjoyable walk around Pam and Norol Hill's property at Seaham. There were many nesting birds which included White-naped Honeyeater, Varied Sittella, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Eastern Yellow Robin and Bar-shouldered Dove. At morning tea we were joined by a family of Eastern Yellow Robins.

Some of the other species seen were Superb and Variegated Fairy-wrens, White-browed Scrubwren, Lewin's, Yellow-faced and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Golden and Rufous Whistlers, Grey Shrike-thrush, Olive-backed Oriole, Rufous Fantail, Leaden Flycatcher, Black-faced Monarch, White-headed Pigeon, Satin Bowerbird, Jacky Winter, King Parrot, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Mistletoebird – making a total of 53 seen and 4 heard.

Thanks Pam and Norol for letting us visit your property – we all had a great time.

Don Moon

Kilaben Bay

Mid-week outing 3 November 2009

Our leader Garth Cooksey guided us along the walking tracks through woodland at the western end of Kilaben Bay. At morning tea time we drove a short distance to the nearby Catholic school where Garth had gained permission for us to walk around the edge of their property, which is at the end of the bay.

During the morning we had good views of Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Dollarbird, Yellow and Brown Thornbills, Lewin's and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebill, Eastern Whipbird, Golden and Rufous Whistlers, Eastern Yellow Robin feeding young, Silvereye, Azure Kingfisher, Olive-backed Oriole, Rainbow Lorikeet and Eastern Rosella.

In the bay we saw Darter, Intermediate Egret, Striated Heron, White-faced Heron, Little Black Cormorant, Great Cormorant and a Royal Spoonbill. A total of 56 species seen and 6 heard.

With the temperature being in the 30s, some people decided to leave earlier than usual; the rest continued to Blackalls Park. Thanks for all your organizing Garth, we had a good morning's outing.

Val Moon

Mogo

Sunday outing 22 November 2009

The 8am start at Cessnock McDonalds revealed no other participants but the leader and her spouse, no doubt due to the predicted very hot conditions. A 7am start could have been better.

On our arrival at Mogo camp ground we noticed four Spotted Quail-thrush loafing on the green grassy patches near the water tank, accompanied by three Common Bronzewing.

Within 20 metres up the track by the camp ground we had a large number of Yellow-tufted, Brown-headed, Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters virtually at our feet, making great photographic opportunities.

More Spotted Quail-thrush appeared as we walked on, no further than 100metres along the track towards the heath.

A total of 30 species was recorded here including Painted Button-quail, numerous Common Bronzewing and a single White-headed Pigeon which was flushed off the road.

A short drive to Mogo Creek, birding along the road parallel to the creek, added a few more species to the list including a pair of Rock Warblers bouncing under a sandstone ledge in the gloom. By 11am a wind arrived which cooled the conditions considerably.

Notable by their absence on the day were parrots, raptors and HBOC members.

Lorna Mee



Brown-headed Honeyeater feeding on *Lambertia formosa*
- Lorna Mee

Notes on Australian Pied Oystercatcher breeding behaviour

by Mike Newman

These notes have been put together to help people identify breeding pairs and monitor breeding activity.

Territorial Pairs

The breeding success of an oystercatcher population needs to be assessed on the number of territorial pairs. For some of these pairs, a nest with eggs, runners or fledged young may not be found and the birds are judged territorial based on their behaviour.

During the breeding season territorial pairs remain in the territory both when foraging at low tide and roosting at high tide. Both adults are usually close together. There is often difficulty in identifying territorial pairs when breeding is not proven, when immature birds are also present or when several pairs are breeding in close proximity.

Breeding adults can be distinguished from immature birds by the brighter colour of their legs, bills and eye rings. Careful comparison of the bills will allow identification of the male by its slightly smaller size and shorter bill which has a blunter tip. The larger bodied female has a longer more pointed bill which is more orange in colour. Hence the first point is to confirm that you have a pair of mature birds.

However mature non-breeding birds also have similar features and it may be necessary to separate them from the breeding pairs by differences in behaviour.

Territorial pairs, in the presence of other pairs, will often repel intruders by charging side by side with their bills pointed down making a piping noise (the piping display). This may lead to fighting. Territorial birds have the advantage of ownership and often eject intruders from their territory except when they are resting at high tide roosts.

During the breeding season pairs seldom move far from their territories because acquiring and maintaining a territory is crucial to their reproductive success.

When two pairs are nesting close together, they eventually establish a degree of accommodation and may roost in close proximity but, almost invariably, they stand on their side of the territory and when disturbed either walk off or fly in the direction of their territory. Hence a spit at a creek entrance where two pairs can roost at high tide may become a territory boundary.

Before the eggs are laid, territorial birds are best identified

by visits at high tide. Ideally repeat visits are made to check that a pair is consistently present at locations which are identified by GPS coordinates.

Territorial pairs often make a number of trial scrapes before eggs are laid.

Birds Incubating a Clutch

Incubating pairs are best identified and nests located by visits at high tide.

Where pairs are nesting on the beach near the high tide mark, one bird incubates (the female spends more time incubating than the male) and the other bird stands sentinel nearby. In most instances you are spotted before you see the incubating bird which is first observed walking away from the nest. Both birds then lead you away from the nest walking up the beach. Eventually they will fly off over the water and back behind you landing back on the beach in the vicinity of the nest.

Incubating birds are usually silent in marked contrast to birds with runners, as discussed below.

Nests on and adjacent to the beach front can often be easily located by tracking footsteps leading to the nest. Birds only fly off the nest when panicked.

The situation is more difficult when birds are nesting behind the beach. In situations where birds are nesting in short grass, look for single oystercatchers standing in a paddock when the tide is high and then look for the incubating bird. At low tide the situation is more difficult because, when one bird is feeding, the other is incubating and is difficult to spot unless you already know there is a territory. However, on changeover the feeding adult flies from the mudflat to the paddock which is a good indication of breeding activity.

In coastal dune situations the birds may breed well back from the shoreline (e.g. up to 0.5 km) to avoid disturbance from recreational activities and to decrease the risk of nest inundation by king tides. The presence of single or pairs of mature oystercatchers in the dunes is a good indication of breeding activity. The birds will be watching you and often take position on a prominent viewing platform to achieve this. In addition, a single mature oystercatcher on the beach either at the high tide mark or feeding is a good indication that there may be an incubating bird back in the dunes. As you go into the dune system try and spot the incubating bird as it leaves the nest. Again it is often possible to locate the nest by tracking the footprints of the

birds to the nest.

Oystercatchers need to maintain their egg temperatures. To achieve this, they have two problems, one of which is to prevent the eggs cooling. This is a problem in southern Australia particularly at night. In northern Australia the opposite situation prevails and it is necessary to keep the eggs cool by providing shade. Under extremes of ambient temperature it is important to minimise disturbance to incubating birds.

Consequently, if you suspect a bird has a nest it may be best to make a return visit when the incubating bird has returned to its eggs. It will do this rapidly if you completely disappear.

When eggs are laid in sand the nest is often adjacent to a marker such as a piece of rubbish or drift wood.

The incubation period is typically 28 to 30 days. When a clutch is lost it is rapidly replaced, usually within two to three weeks. Three clutches are possible in one season.

Birds with Runners

Shortly after the eggs hatch the adults' behaviour changes. From being unobtrusive and quiet birds, they suddenly become noisy and aggressive. They take to the air and circle making loud alarm calls and dive at intruders. They sometimes land near you and try to draw you away with broken-wing displays, which involve crawling across the ground with both wings being rotated in a rowing action. The extent to which these alarms and displays are used is variable and probably depends on the extent to which they consider the young to be threatened.

For birds nesting at the beach front, at high tide runners are hidden either in the vegetation behind the high tide mark, in creek entrances or among rocks at headlands. Adults remain in the vicinity of the chicks and give low calls of warning when potential predators approach.

Ideally the adults take the runners out to feed at the water's edge. However they often wait until the tide is well out before calling the runners from cover. During this period one adult remains on the beach near the high tide mark in the vicinity of the young while the other bird feeds.

When the young are called out and fed they are often hidden on the mud flat if there is shelter or they crouch by an object, which breaks up their profile. Adults carry food

to the young and drop it for them to eat. As the runners get near fledging they follow their parents as they forage and tend to run for cover rather than freezing on the beach which is the characteristic response of very young birds.

Fledging takes about 7 weeks. Birds approaching this age are very good swimmers and will flee to the water when chased, diving when approached closely. An adult bird will often land on the water near the swimming runner.

Birds breeding away from the beach front, both in paddocks and in dune systems, may be forced to fly food in to their young, especially when they are young. This is an inferior strategy to taking the runners out to the foraging area at low tide but may be forced on the birds if there is extreme disturbance on the beach.

Birds with Fledged Young

Fledged young remain with their adults on territory for a few weeks after fledging. The young are easily identified by their smaller size, bills with black tips, pale legs and lack of a red eye ring. They follow the adults and beg for food.

It is uncertain how long fledged young remain on territory. However, timing visits to coincide with the presence of fledged young is a good way of determining breeding success rate.



Pied Oystercatcher nest on Stockton Beach, September 2009 - photo courtesy NPWS.

What's in a Name?

For the first 4 to 5 years of its life, this Newsletter was called the Novocastrian Warbler. It seems like a good idea to have a more interesting name than "Newsletter" so the Committee is looking for suggestions from you! You will be aware that our logo is the Golden Whistler and our occasional publication is called 'The Whistler'. What could the Newsletter be called? Please email your suggestions to Liz Crawford on: chrisliz@tpg.com.au

Observations

Back-yard Galahs

We live in suburban Tamworth on an average-sized block. We had a palm tree, which we no longer wanted. Barry poisoned it and we were left with a stump about 4 metres high. To our amazement Mum and Dad galah decided to nest in the open stump, just above our pool and clothesline. They worked tirelessly to build their nest, scratching out the centre fibre and bringing in so many twigs and greenery to ensure all was prepared for their little ones.

When Mum and Dad galah were away, Barry climbed up to see if there were any eggs. There were three! From then on we had constant entertainment. It was a delight to have them in such close proximity so as to observe them tending their eggs without disturbing them. In fact they became quite cheeky and certainly didn't feel threatened when we were in the/their back yard. Oh yes, it was their back yard and they became so protective of it. The Indian Mynas gave them such a time, but they stood their ground and many battles were fought. They were so noisy and yet so proud.

Then one day we heard little squeaks from the nest. We couldn't contain ourselves. Again Barry climbed up, in the absence of Mum and Dad, and there were 3 little babies. It was certainly challenging for them to feed themselves, their little babies and to defend them as well. It's amazing how predatory some birds are, and the galahs weren't giving in. No way, they had three little babies and nothing was going to get them! However we could move about under their nest and they didn't care. All they did was sit on top of the tree and look at us as they craned their necks to ensure they monitored our every movement.

When the little ones emerged from the nest, they climbed to the top of the cavity in the palm tree and told the world they had arrived (see photo). What a beautiful experience for us to enjoy and to have witnessed in our very own yard.

Since the babies have flown the nest the adults have been back every morning and evening to seemingly protect their nest. They still sit there and play vigilante whilst nothing is allowed to come anywhere near their nest.

Also they have been destroying their nest, picking out all the twigs etc and tossing them on the ground below.

Jenny Pollock - per Melva Fisher



Galah nestlings in a palm tree stump - Barry Pollock

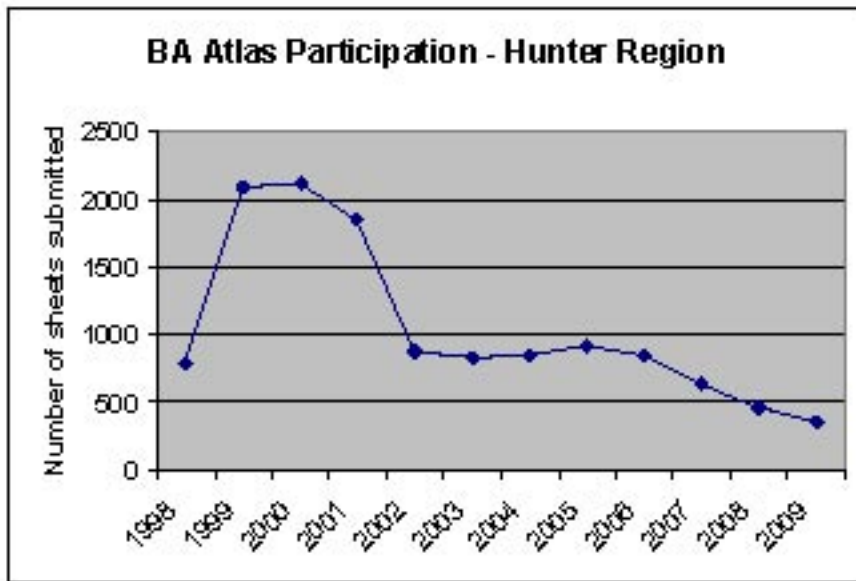


Three young Galahs emerging from their palm tree nest - Jenny Pollock

Birds Australia Atlas

We have recently acquired a summary of the Atlas data for the Hunter Region from Birds Australia. Hopefully it will be possible to use this information in the HBOC Annual Bird Report. However, for this to be successful, we need to reinvigorate interest in the Atlas which has been falling off as shown in the following chart.

The ability to get information of this type from Birds Australia makes the Atlas more useful to HBOC. For instance it may identify possible long-term trends in the birds of the Hunter Region. In addition we are hopeful that we can use the information to identify holes in our knowledge of the distribution of species and plan field trips to address these deficiencies.



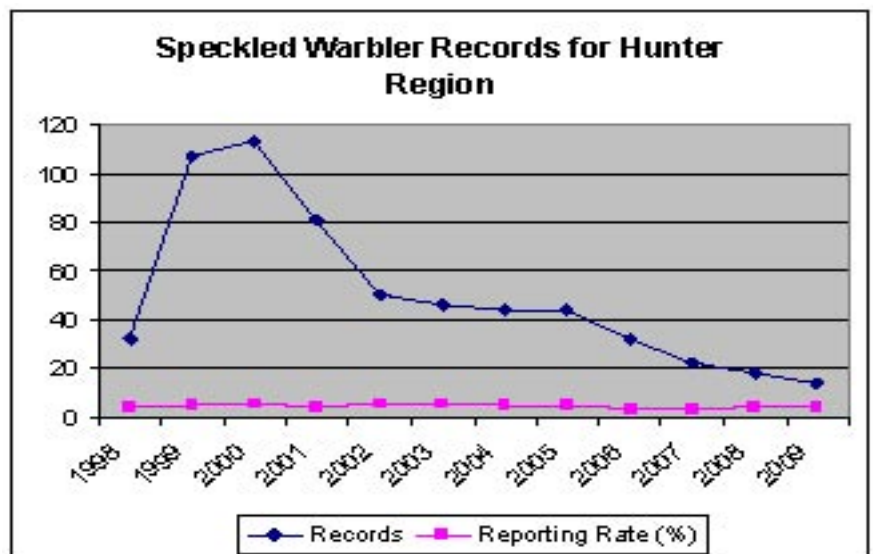
It has been difficult to promote the Atlas recently because although Birds Australia has demonstrated the effective use of the Atlas data in publications like the *State of Australia's Birds* (SOAB) and *Wingspan* the examples have seldom been specific to the Hunter Region. We ask you to get involved in the Birds Australia Atlas now that we can use it as a Hunter Region database as well. As a first step we need to submit the backlog of data.

For further information contact Ann Lindsey ann.lindsey@bigpond.com or myself omgnewman@bigpond.com.

Peak activity involved around 2000 sheets/annum between 1999 and 2001, when the New Atlas was in full swing, culminating in the production of the *New Atlas of Australian Birds* in 2003. The subsequent Ongoing Atlas phase generated 800 sheets/annum during the 2002 and 2006 period. Since then the rate has fallen to less than 500 sheets/annum. However there are a number of sheets waiting to be submitted (a personal confession of around 125 sheets/annum for the last two years).

Mike Newman

Even at these lower participation rates the database provides useful information as shown for the Speckled Warbler, a species listed as vulnerable under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act. In the chart it can be seen that despite a fall off in Atlasing the reporting rate for the Speckled Warbler has remained remarkably constant, being recorded on about 4% of the survey sheets submitted.



Hunter Home Brewers' Twitchathon 2009 – Returning to One's Routes

After threatening to change their plans for the past few years, the Hunter Home Brewers finally prised themselves away from their winning formula of combining the Liverpool Plains with the Hunter Valley. Instead, they took on a different mission – aiming to beat 220 species within the Hunter Valley alone, thus becoming the first team to record this many species within the catchment of a single river system. Never did they think there was a possibility to win the thing, but it was to be a year full of surprises.

As they were essentially racing against themselves, little regard was given to “what other teams might be doing”, but it was interesting to note that the other *Chasing Birds* hams (Whacked-Out Woodswallows and Hunter Thickheads) were dipping on this year's run (although parts thereof were competing under different guises). The lack of Thickheads also meant that someone had to take on the challenge of being a competitive, purely Hunter-based main-race team. The decision to stay east of the divide was only made a few weeks before the event, so the lead-up planning was frenetic. This franticness was complicated by the sudden migration of Grena Brew to ideal surfing conditions in South-east Asia (just after having recently acquired his breeding plumage too).

The failure for the remaining 3 Brewers (Mick, Steve and Ando Brew) to attend Cracker's Disco meant that the trio were fresh and ready for the hunt(er). Mick had previously been trying to convince Steve that 220 was possible within the confines of the Hunter (the previous best being 214 by their mentors, the Hunter Thickheads). Steve had been turning him up, but the pre-twitch oiling on the way to their starting point certainly made him far more confident as a string of Hunter cripplers were found, including Black Honeyeater, Red-winged Parrot and Black-eared Cuckoo. Alas, none of these 3 birds were to be found on the actual twitch, but it did have the boys rounding out their Hunter lists very nicely.

Further afield, and right at the top of the Hunter Valley catchment, they had settled on a starting point. The presence of Painted, Black-chinned, Fuscous, Striped, Yellow-tufted and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters was worthy for this particular spot to serve as the site for the adrenaline-charged countdown to 4pm. Again as 4pm struck, the Twitch Tab bookies laughed all the way to the bank – no one had picked Mistletoebird as the first bird (though it often features at Brewers' starting points – a strong correlation with Painted Honeyeaters one assumes). After cleaning up the various Honeyeaters and a few sundry birds it was off to the serious stuff – looking for Blue-faced Honeyeaters! Every team has their bogey birds and for the Brewers, this must be it (along with Pallid Cuckoo). And true to form, the township that had been awash with the squawks of

Entomyzon cyanotis just 30 minutes earlier was now bereft of them – “a conspiracy!” they proclaimed.

Mick Brew's logic in gaining 220 was to make up for species they couldn't get on their Liv Plains route. These “trade-offs” were bagged in Goulburn River NP – Emu, White-browed Babbler, Rock Warbler and Chestnut-rumped Heathwren (the latter 2 being maiden birds for the team). They could then afford only a handful of dips from their western run. There were several birds they had no chance of getting, but some very handy “western standards” were mopped in the national park, such as Hooded / Red-capped Robin, Diamond Firetail, Western Gerygone, Shrike-tit and ‘Woob-cus’ (come on – you know what that is). Plum-heads never go astray on a Twitchathon either, particularly when they're accompanied by Zebs.

The only real decision they had to make was whether or not to forgo time in the national park in an effort to try and get to the Black Honeyeaters at Sandy Hollow. The lure of this crippler was too much, and they made a bee-line for the town, picking up Blackbird in Merriwa en-route and leaving a special message for the Double Dubbo Dippers at Battery Rock. The sun was getting low as they pulled into Sandy Hollow, but it was still above the escarpment; and so they were confident. After 5 minutes of staring forlornly at the Jacaranda and Kurrajong that had been host to at least 5 Blacks that morning, they decided to extend their search. Ironically, they stumbled on some flowering *Eremophila* in a car park nearby, but alas no Black Honeyeater for the Brewers this year. But, as if the birding gods had taken pity on them, Steve noticed a bird in a nearby Silky Oak which the others soon got onto – it was nearly as good as a Black – a Blue-faced!

Dusk fell at Denman where two twilight Falcons were seen in succession – Peregrine and Hobby. It was only the second time in 11 years that they had managed both these species on a Twitch and they fell consecutively! They decided to commence their night run in the Martindale Valley and in near darkness they had calling Brown and Stubble Quail. Once inside the depths of the valley they about-faced and picked up Frogmouth and Barn Owl on the way out. It only took a couple more stops before Jerrys Plains to hear Boobook and Owlet Nightjars calling, and so they agreed it was efficient brewing and set off onwards to the night camp with 105 species to their name. The Masked Owl that had been in the same tree for the past 2 twitches denied them the hat-trick and they had to be content with 105 at camp. This was about 20 species down on the previous 3 years' Saturday tallies, but importantly, they had not visited any wetlands or dams, so they figured there was plenty of stuff ‘in the bank’.

Hunter Home Brewers' Twitchathon 2009 continued

The brew crew had arrived at camp in record time – arriving just after midnight – and giving them the opportunity to... well... sleep! Through the din of Yellow Robins in the dawn chorus there was a decent diversity of species heard. For the first time at this spot, they had both Thrushes calling, plus the range of “usual suspects”, including the (slightly better than “usual”) Paradise Riflebird. After waiting for the Spectacled Monarch to call (always last), they moved out of the rainforest – and with a purpose – the tide was to be high at Stockton at 8:20am and their run had to coincide with the fall of this tide. They had enough time to work their rainforest “mop sites” which never seem to fail with birds like Regent Bowerbird, Topknot, Wompoo, White-headed Pigeon and Coucal. It was then onto the now-famous Green Wattle Creek site, and just as had happened in *Chasing Birds*, 3 teams converged at this site. Promptly, the Crested Shrike-tits and Dodgy Drongoes were treated to Brewer's Flashes and it was onwards to Seaham to clean up another bogey bird – the Scaly-breasted Lorikeet.

The decision to head to Stockton without dawdling paid off. There was a huge assemblage of birds awaiting them, mostly Red-necked Avocets, but with other niceties mixed amongst them. Both Caspo and Gull-billed Terns accompanied a good variety of waders, including Red-necked Stint, Red-capped Plover, both Godwits and both Knots. Two Striated Herons nearby were keenly spotted and struck off the list. They left the estuary with a good mixed bag, missing only Curlew Sands and Golden Plovers. The Great Egret seen on “Long Pond” on the way towards Hexham was their 200th bird, and at 10:43am there was still much brewing to be done. 220 was looking shaky indeed.

With the ‘Promised Land’ (Ash Island) out-of-bounds, the boys made their way to Hexham Swamp, which had recently been the scene of some phenomenal birding. Although it was very lacklustre on the day, they still picked up key birds like White-fronted Chat, both Grassbirds, Black-tailed Native Hen and Spotted Crake, the 3rd maiden bird for 2009. The only migratory waders present were Sharpies; so both Marshy and Greenshank would go begging this year.

It was then on to Maitland to look for the claustrophobes. First of these was Banded Lapwing (which was ticked while still in 3rd gear), followed by Brown Songlark and Horsfield's Bushlark. Walka Water Works was a grebe and duck fest, including Blue-billed and Pink-eared Ducks (one Pink-ear anyway). Funnily enough, as they were looking at these ducks, another Native Hen walked through the rear view of the scope. They left WWW with 218 at the significant timeslot of ten-to-one. The well-oiled New Holland Honeyeater was the next to fall, quickly followed by Little Lorikeet and Brown-headed / White-cheeked Honeyeaters. And there went 220.

Now that mopping efforts had finished, it was time to head back to the coast. En-route to Newcastle a rapid detour was made to Poor Man's Kakadu where a very obliging Jacana was duly ticked. A quick-fire double at Leneghans Flat (Whiskered Tern and Glossy Ibis) took them to 225, ironically at exactly 2:25! For the first time, the team felt as if they could win the thing – and all from within the Hunter. Who'd a thunk it?

The traffic in Newcastle was abominable. Events were running, the mercury was up, the surf was great... which all made for heavy going for antsy twitchers keen to get a park with a vantage over the ocean and rock platform. They managed to bustle in to Fort Drive at Nobby's, and this was to be a great site for them, as they picked up 8 species, the first being Great Cormorant that had eluded them until now. 3 Shearwater species were easily seen (Short-tailed, Wedge-tailed and Fluttering), along with Crested and Common Terns and the always-nervous (for both parties involved) Ruddy Turnstones. At the dying end of the seawatch a lone immature Gannet flew in front of the baths. Fanatical rejoicing ensued – 233, things were getting serious.

The mission now was to get out of town, which was no formality. A slow crawl down the main drag made for a 25-minute return to the Wetlands Centre. They still needed to pick up Little Wattlebird, which they figured would be calling in the car park there. By the time they'd gotten to the centre there wasn't a lot of time left on the clock. They picked up the no-brainer Maggie Goose, but couldn't for the life of them find a Little Wattlebird, which was to be a rather large dip for them.

Still, with 234 birds under their belts, the Brewers felt tremendously satisfied with their efforts – exceeding their expectations. But as it turned out, it wasn't going to be enough, nor even close to enough. The Menacing Monarchs had come in with 247, blitzing the field and the Brewer's record of 238 in the process.

Nonetheless, the Hunter Home Brewers had stayed true to their name and had not left the Hunter at any stage during the race, proving that highly competitive scores are attainable without crossing the Great Divide. Despite being beaten in the end, the boys felt as if they had come away with a victory of their own, even if it was a purely biogeographical one! They reflected on how they had virtually re-traced the steps of their first ever Twitchathon in 1999 (albeit with an extra hour on Saturday afternoon) and had improved their score by over 50 birds. The Brewers had returned to their “birding routes” and surprised even themselves with what was achievable.

Jacqueline Winter

Surveys

Australian Painted Snipe Survey

24-25 October 2009

The Birds Australia Threatened Bird Network called for volunteers to conduct the spring surveys for the national Australian Painted Snipe Project on the weekend of October 24-25 2009. One of the goals of the APS project is to compile a central database of all Painted Snipe records in Australia. The sources of this data include Birds Australia's Atlas of Australian Birds database, historical records found through literature reviews and the data collected by our dedicated volunteers during national biannual counts. Information collated in this database has proven extremely valuable in helping piece together the puzzle of the ecology, behaviour and distribution of the Australian Painted Snipe. Eleven HBOC members answered the call. We slogged through much mud and water but alas, failed to find this elusive species. We targeted known sites at Ash Island, Hexham Swamp and the Lenaghans Drive Swamps at Minmi. Highlights of the day were over 400 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers including many immature birds, Curlew Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, 14 Latham's Snipe, 6 Australian Spotted Crakes, 6 Black-tailed Native-hens, 28 Glossy Ibis and many other more common waterbirds. The wetland passerines were in fine voice and male Golden-headed Cisticolas displayed from every perch. Many thanks to Hayley Boyce, Denise and John Lombard, Ray McLean, Lorna Mee, Ian Martin, Toni Marsh, Peter Struik, Mike Newman and Neville McNaughton.

Ann Lindsey

Cicada Champagne

Letter to the Editor S.M.H. 7 January 1995 from Dr Garry-Garnet Simpson, Narrabeen

It was 40 degrees in the shade of our large liquid-amber tree. I was standing beneath it wearing "quick-dries" and a newly acquired pair of ear-muffs because of the high-decibel drumming of the male cicadas. Their mating call was reaching fever pitch when I became aware I was being cooled by a fine continuous misty "rain". The sky was cloudless, I noted. I looked over the fence for a sprinkler. No, the "rain" was actually coming from the cicadas. I was bathing in "the urine of the Black Princes". I opened my mouth aghast, only to savour the full-bodied flavour of a squirt of insect excreta. What a taste surprise. It was...identical to Moet. The little devils were converting sap to champagne! What a Christmas delight. Fresh from this uplifting experience, I proceeded to the pool. I didn't even need to crack a tinny.

Is this how all scientific discoveries are made?

Sue Hamonet

Field Studies Day – Columbey Revisited

On 27 November 2009 we returned to Columbey National Park to survey for Buff-rumped Thornbills and Speckled Warblers. This time we used fifteen 2ha 20min surveys, Birds Australia's preferred method, instead of the 250m radius searches used on our original visit. All things being equal Buff-rumped Thornbills were expected to be found on 5 of the 15 x 2ha surveys.

As the initial results came in the tally mounted; 6-0 in favour of Buff-rumped Thornbill-free sites. Numerous explanations were proposed. However at the end of the day Buff-rumped Thornbills were found during 5 surveys, exactly as predicted. We also confirmed our other previous result: namely the absence of Speckled Warblers.

52 species were recorded during the 15 surveys, plus a further two species along Wallaroo Creek later in the day, a surprisingly large total considering the apparent uniformity of this area of dry woodland, the scarcity of birds (just over ten species/survey), and the 35 degree temperature.

Thanks to the 10 people who took part which included 5 from our previous visits. The surveys were conducted in pairs, matching an experienced person with someone learning survey techniques. We will be returning in the autumn to test our expectation that the thornbills will be more mobile members of mixed foraging flocks. Hopefully the temperature will be much lower.

Mike Newman

See previous Newsletter for report on initial survey of Columbey National Park on 29 September 2009

HBOC Membership Fees for 2010

Membership Fees for 2010 are \$30.00 Single and Family, \$5.00 Junior

Membership forms can be obtained at Club Night or by downloading from the website:

www.hboc.org.au

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

Telephone: (02) 4958 5942

Observations

An unusual Swamp Harrier

During the Australian Painted Snipe survey in October a number of people saw a very unusual looking Harrier on the eastern side of the Hexham Swamp. Several photographs were taken but the day was overcast and light conditions were very poor. The same bird has been seen subsequently on two occasions including Sunday 22 November 2009 when the light conditions were excellent. One of us was able to take several digital photographs which were more informative than those taken during the original sighting.

Key features are the prominent white rump and white flanks. These two features stand out under all light conditions. The rump contrasts with the bird's dark back and grey tail, which has brown wash in the centre. The upper wing pattern is most distinctive with black "fingertips" and dark brown secondary coverts which, together with the dark back, contrast with large pale grey panels on the outer wings. The underwings are mostly white and very light brown with narrow black trailing edges, which are more prominent on the inner wings and extend to the tips of the primaries. The head is dark coloured, giving the impression of a grey hood. Brown streaking on the neck extends on to the sides of the breast, but the underparts otherwise appear white.

This very distinctive bird has been seen on both the eastern and the western sides of the Hexham Swamp and clearly has an extended foraging range. There are several other apparently adult Swamp Harriers on the Hexham Swamp, which are all much darker brown with distinct, but less white rumps, partially brown underwings and lacking the grey panels and black tips on the upper wing. Inspection of the literature suggests the bird is a pale phase adult male Swamp Harrier which is very similar to the adult male Eastern Marsh Harrier from which our species was split. It is worth looking out for this beautiful bird.

Mike Newman and Ann Lindsey



Nectar-feeding birds and Jacarandas

Maitland has an abundance of Jacaranda trees, including four in my garden at Bolwarra and around fifty on my evening walk. While I have had Willie Wagtails nesting in two of them (as they used to in the Main Quad Jacaranda at the University of Sydney), I had not considered these trees as an important resource for nectar-feeding birds. It is a South American native, and something that an Australian bird would have to adapt to using. My feelings were backed up by the location of two separate web-sites where the lack of birds in Jacarandas was commented on. Yet several of our members saw Black Honeyeaters in a Jacaranda in a Sandy Hollow garden this November, while Eastern Spinebills, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, and Noisy Friarbirds were also observed feeding in the same tree. It is easy to imagine that a lack of nectar in the dry scrubby hillsides had forced the birds into the town, but there were many other sources of nectar there, including Silky Oaks, other smaller Grevilleas, and Weeping Bottlebrushes. Even so the Black Honeyeaters seem to have been particularly loyal to one Jacaranda in particular.

I therefore took the trouble to note what was feeding on Jacarandas in my garden and elsewhere in the Maitland area. In my garden, with gum-flower in good supply, there were no nectar-feeders using this species at all, though four species of honeyeater and two of lorikeet were regularly present. In Maitland Park I found many lorikeets using a Norfolk Island Hibiscus, next to a flowering Jacaranda. Up to four Rainbow Lorikeets for a time left the Norfolk Island Hibiscus, and were witnessed feeding from the Jacaranda flowers. The same tree meanwhile attracted a Red Wattlebird and three Musk Lorikeets, but none of these birds was observed feeding there. At Walka Water Works a small number of Noisy Friarbirds were located actively feeding in Jacarandas. Closer inspection of a bird that remained feeding in the tree, revealed a Blue-faced Honeyeater. On another walk a dimly recognised but very bright call was found coming from Jacarandas in Regent Street (my favourite location for Goldfinches and Blackbirds!), and this proved to be a Brown Honeyeater, in our region usually only found at sites close to the coast.

Overall this amounted to four species in the Maitland area feeding from Jacaranda flowers: Rainbow Lorikeet, Noisy Friarbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater and Brown Honeyeater. To these may be added the Black Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill and Yellow-faced Honeyeater seen at Sandy Hollow. That makes seven Hunter species able to use this blossom. However, the

Birds in Jacarandas continued

Brown Honeyeater and the Black Honeyeater are the species that seemed to be feeding most keenly, both, like the Eastern Spinebill, rather small honeyeaters with a particularly long beak. This might enable them to access a small but satisfying amount of nectar relatively easily, for the bird's tongue would need to reach about 17mm into the flower to reach the bulk of the nectar. Scarlet Honeyeaters, which are of similar build, were scarce in the Maitland area at the time, but Liz Crawford mentions to me that she had observed them feeding hungrily on a Jacaranda at Wingham. The long beaks and slim heads of the Friarbirds would also make them able to access the nectar, but this might not provide quite the same sustenance for a bird of their size.

One individual cannot cover much of the Hunter in one Jacaranda season, so I should be very glad to receive reports of these and other species feeding on nectar from Hunter Jacarandas. This information might help to build up a clearer picture of how our native birds can adapt to an introduced plant species. It is lucky for them that they are so versatile. Please send any records to: proclus@bigpond.com

Harold Tarrant

AWSG 7th Shorebird Conference

Hobart, Tasmania 4-6 September 2009

The Australian Shorebird Conference, held every two years by the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG), took place at the University of Tasmania. Two keynote addresses and 24 talks were presented to an audience of 85 people from Australia and New Zealand. A diverse range of talks reported on shorebird and coastal issues from Australia and East Asia, and provided grim news for the future of migratory shorebirds in much of the region. Loss of feeding habitat, in particular due to the destruction of intertidal feeding areas, has seen rapid and significant decreases in many species. Studies around Australia showed that it is possible to conserve and manage our resident shorebirds and terns, but with considerable intervention. As always, pro-active efforts are easier and cheaper than reactive, trying to undo damage done!

At the previous AWSG conference in 2007, which was held in Newcastle, it was disappointing that the resident shorebirds received little mention. This deficiency was addressed at the Hobart conference. The extent of work going on in this area is exciting. It was terrific seeing local councils both represented and making presentations.

Adapted from *Yellow Throat*, the Newsletter of Birds Tasmania, No. 48, October 2009

Hunterbirding

Hunterbirding is a Yahoo Group which was established by HBOC in 2009 to facilitate knowledge sharing within the birding community of the [Hunter Region](#). It is primarily a mailing list through which members can email each other for discussion on the following subjects:

- Bird sightings within the Hunter Region;
- Birding sites within the Hunter Region;
- Bird identification;
- Bird conservation;
- Any other relevant topic.

To sign up for hunterbirding and take part in these discussions and benefit from up-to-date birding news in the region, visit hunterbirding at <http://au.groups.yahoo.com/group/hunterbirding/> and follow the on-site instructions.

Alternatively you can sign up for hunterbirding by sending a blank email to:

hunterbirding-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.au. You will then receive an email asking for verification that you wish to become a member of hunterbirding. Simply reply to this email with another blank email and await your membership acceptance from the moderator.

If this doesn't work, try emailing the moderator on: dwilliams@wbmpl.com.au

Members of hunterbirding may choose to receive individual emails or a daily summary of the emails. Join hunterbirding today and benefit from communicating with other birders in the region.

Dan Williams

Observations from Club Nights October - November 2009

These reports are not authenticated records: researchers are advised to check with the observers before citing.

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Australian Brush-turkey	1	Oct	New Lambton Heights	P. Lightfoot
Australian Hobby	1	28/9/09	King Edward Park	R. Nicholas
Baillon's Crake	5	10/10/09	Pambalong N.R.	D. Allen
Baillon's Crake	several	1/10/09	Ash Island	D. Luck
Baillon's Crake	2	19/10/09	Ash Island	N. McNaughton
Baillon's Crake	4	16/10/09	Ash Island	R. McDonald
Baillon's Crake	1	8/11/09	Ash Island	N. McNaughton
Black Bittern	1	19/10/09	Lennoxton Billabong	H. Tarrant
Black Falcon	1	17/10/09	Bolwarra Flats	M. Roderick
Black Honeyeater	5	31/10/09	Sandy Hollow	M. Roderick <i>et al.</i>
Black-eared Cuckoo	1	31/10/09	Goulburn River N.P.	M. Roderick <i>et al.</i>
Black-faced Monarch	1	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Black-fronted Dotterel	2+3dy	1/9/09	Hexham Swamp	A. Lindsey
Black-fronted Dotterel	Pr+2dy	17/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Black-fronted Dotterel	10	16/10/09	Newline Road Swamp	R. McDonald
Black-necked Stork	1	29/10/09	Ash Island	N. McNaughton
Black-tailed Native-hen	1	30/9/09	Ash Island	N. McNaughton
Black-tailed Native-hen	>2	5/10/09	Hexham Swamp	D. Williams
Black-tailed Native-hen	1	11/10/09	HWCA	D. Williams
Black-tailed Native-hen	1	25/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Black-tailed Native-hen	1	16/10/09	Ash Island	R. McDonald
Black-tailed Native-hen	6	16/10/09	Hexham Swamp	M. Roderick
Black-tailed Native-hen	1	31/10/09	Walka Water Works	M. Roderick <i>et al.</i>
Black-winged Stilt	7	18/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Brahminy Kite	2	14/10/09	Stockton	D. Luck
Brown Goshawk	1	12/10/09	Wingen [garden]	G. Newling
Brown Quail	1	19/9/09	Awabakal N.R.	M. Evans
Brush Bronzewing	2	10/10/09	Belmont Lagoon	D. Allen
Buff-banded Rail	2	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Buff-banded Rail	2+2dy	18/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Buff-banded Rail	1	8/11/09	Ash Island	N. McNaughton
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	12/9/09	Wollombi	J. & B. Greig
Collared Sparrowhawk	1	16/10/09	Newline Road Swamp	R. McDonald
Common Bronzewing	1	19/9/09	Awabakal N.R.	M. Evans
Common Bronzewing	5	13/10/09	Wingen [stock route]	G. Newling
Common Tern	300+	25/10/09	Newcastle Ocean Baths	M. Roderick
Diamond Firetail	1	5/11/09	Martindale	H. Tarrant
Diamond Firetail	2	5/11/09	King's Gap	H. Tarrant
Dollarbird	2	12/10/09	Wingen [garden]	G. Newling
Dollarbird	6	21/11/09	Kilaben Bay	A. Woollett [per P.L.]
Dusky Woodswallow	2	18/9/09	Awabakal N.R.	M. Evans
Eastern Grass Owl	1	8/11/09	Ash Island	N. McNaughton
Eastern Koel	1	15/9/09	Salamander Bay [Mambo]	T. Clarke
Eastern Koel	1	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Eastern Osprey	Pr nest	4/10/09	Morisset	D. Allen
Eastern Reef Egret	1	20/9/09	Bar Beach [Rock Shelf]	R. Nicholas
Eastern Reef Egret	1	15/10/09	Newcastle Ocean Baths	R. McDonald
Eastern Yellow Robin	2	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Emu	1m+5juv	23/10/09	Goulburn River N.P.	M. Roderick
Fluttering Shearwater	500	10/11/09	off Nobbys	M. Roderick
Grey Goshawk	1	28/11/09	Speers Point [Fairfax Rd]	R. Walker
Grey-crowned Babbler	1	28/9/09	Raymond Terrace	F. Humphreys
Hoary-headed Grebe	~50	9/10/09	Walka Water Works	H. Tarrant
Latham's Snipe	1	14/10/09	Stockton	D. Luck
Latham's Snipe	5	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Latham's Snipe	3	18/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Latham's Snipe	1	25/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Latham's Snipe	1	16/10/09	Salamander Bay	T. Clarke

Club Night Observations continued

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Leaden Flycatcher	Pr	13/10/09	Wingen [stock route]	G. Newling
Little Corella	~80	29/9/09	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Long-billed Corella	5	9/10/09	Morisset	C. & R. Goodenough
Masked Woodswallow	20+	16/10/09	Seaham	R. McDonald
Masked Woodswallow	20	16/10/09	Hexham Swamp	M. Roderick
Musk Lorikeet [roosting]	~200	Oct/Nov	Lambton Bowling Club	M. Roderick
Nankeen Night-Heron	7prs on	8/10/09	HWCA [Middleton Swamp]	A. Lindsey
Noisy Pitta	4	16/10/09	Barrington House	M. Roderick
Olive Whistler	1	19/9/09	Gloucester Tops	P. Hansbro
Pacific Baza	Pr+ 1dy	15/9/09	Freemans Waterhole	F. Cosgrove
Pacific Baza	1	20/10/09	Eleebana	A. Gooden
Pacific Baza	1	16/10/09	Seaham	R. McDonald
Painted Button-quail	1m	10/10/09	HWCA	A. Lindsey
Painted Honeyeater	~5	5/11/09	Martindale	H. Tarrant
Painted Honeyeater	~5	31/10/09	Goulburn River N.P.	M. Roderick <i>et al.</i>
Painted Honeyeater	2	5/11/09	Kings Gap	H. Tarrant
Peregrine Falcon	1	12/10/09	Wingen [garden]	G. Newling
Pheasant Coucal	1	18/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Pheasant Coucal	1	28/11/09	Tocal College	R. Walker
Plum-headed Finch	10	13/10/09	Jerrys Plains	A. Richardson
Plum-headed Finch	Pr	23/10/09	Goulburn River N.P.	M. Roderick
Powerful Owl	2	12/10/09	Rankin Park [McGregor Park]	N. Livanos
Rainbow Bee-eater	4	11/9/09	Wollombi	J. & B. Greig
Red-chested Button-Quail	2	12/10/09	Wollombi	J. & B. Greig
Red-kneed Dotterel	45	30/9/09	Ash Island	N. McNaughton
Red-kneed Dotterel	47	21/9/09	Ash Island [Phoenix Flats]	T. Clarke
Red-kneed Dotterel	4	16/10/09	Newline Road Swamp	R. McDonald
Red-kneed Dotterel	52+	19/10/09	Ash Island [Milham Pond]	T. Clarke
Red-kneed Dotterel	68	12/10/09	Ash Island [Milham Pond]	T. Clarke
Red-winged Parrot	1	31/10/09	Goulburn River N.P.	M. Roderick <i>et al.</i>
Rufous Fantail	1	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Sacred Kingfisher	Pr ny	28/11/09	Speers Point [Lakelands Estate]	R. Walker
Scarlet Honeyeater	1	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	30+	19/10/09	Ash Island	T. Clarke
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	1	12/10/09	Ash Island [Milham Pond]	T. Clarke
Short-tailed Shearwater [wreck]	103	1/11/09	Stockton Beach	T. Iveson
Short-tailed Shearwater [wreck]	449	6/11/09	Stockton Beach	T. Iveson
Short-tailed Shearwater	>2500	25/10/09	off Nobbys	M. Roderick
Sooty Oystercatcher	4	16/9/09	Fingal Head	T. Clarke
Sooty Oystercatcher	1	12/10/09	Newcastle Foreshore	C. & R. Goodenough
Spangled Drongo	5	24/9/09	Anna Bay [Tomaree N.P.]	C. Anderson
Spangled Drongo	2	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	not noted	25/10/09	Hunter Valley Gardens	P. Hansbro
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	several	23/10/09	Goulburn River N.P.	M. Roderick
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	1	23/10/09	Jerrys Plains [Jones Res. Rd]	M. Roderick
Spotless Crake	1	11/10/09	Kooragang Is. [Long Pond]	D. Luck
Spotless Crake	1	10/10/09	Warners Bay [Esplanade]	C. Mann
Spotless Crake	several	1/10/09	Ash Island	D. Luck
Spotless Crake	1	16/10/09	Ash Island	R. McDonald
Spotless Crake	1	15/10/09	Walka Water Works	M. Roderick
Spotted Pardalote	1+ dy	12/10/09	Blackbutt Reserve	P. Lightfoot
Striated Heron	1	21/9/09	Ash Island [Milham Pond]	T. Clarke
Tawny Frogmouth	1+ 1dy	5/10/09	Dudley	J. Powers
Tawny Frogmouth	1	12/10/09	Blackbutt Reserve	P. Lightfoot
Tawny Frogmouth	Pr+ 2dy	23/10/09	Waratah	D. Allen
Tawny Grassbird	4	11/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	2	19/9/09	Awabakal N.R.	M. Evans
Topknot Pigeon	5	15/10/09	Pambalong N.R.	R. McDonald
Wandering Whistling-Duck	27	18/10/09	HWCA	P. Lightfoot
Whiskered Tern	200	18/10/09	Hexham Swamp	M. Roderick

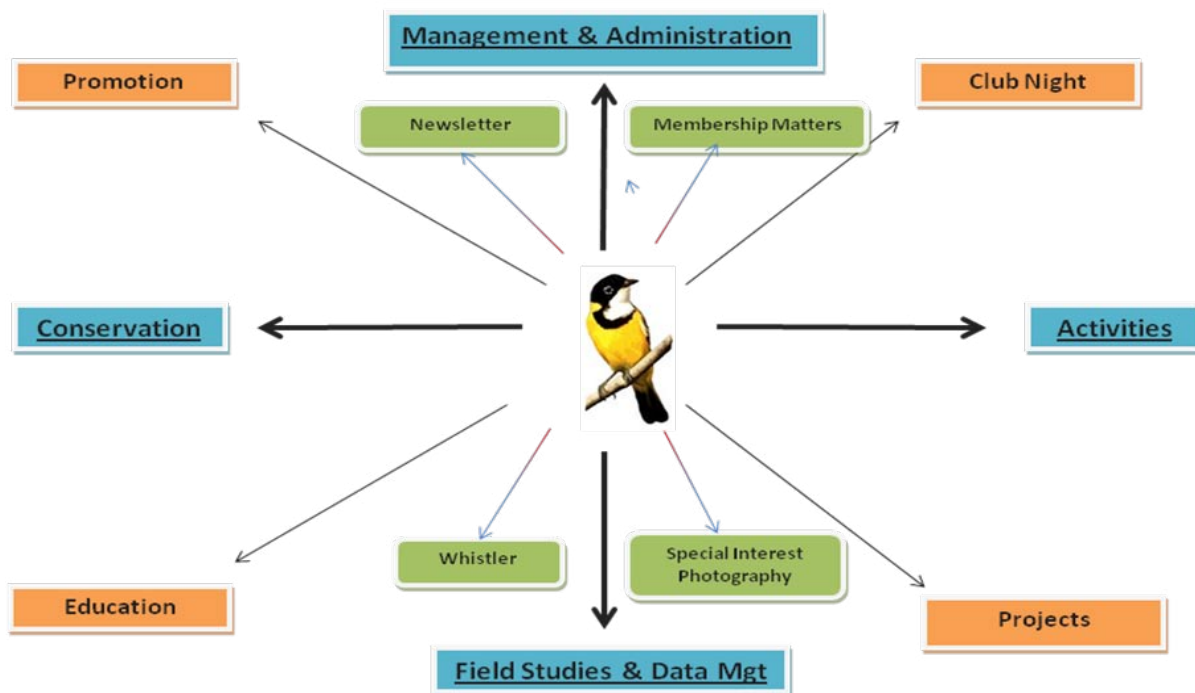
Club Night Observations continued

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	1	13/10/09	Wollombi	J.& B. Greig
White-browed Babbler	~10	31/10/09	Sandy Hollow	M. Roderick <i>et al.</i>
White-browed Woodswallow	100+	16/10/09	Seaham	R. McDonald
White-headed Pigeon	Pr	10/10/09	Speers Point	C. Mann
White-headed Pigeon	2	8/10/09	Bolwarra	H. Tarrant
White-throated Gerygone	1	2/9/09	Corlette Point	T. Clarke
White-winged Triller	5	16/10/09	Hexham Swamp	M. Roderick
White-winged Triller	1	5/11/09	Kings Gap	H. Tarrant

Revised Structure for HBOC

Following on from the talk given at the November Club Meeting, members are encouraged to consider taking up any of the chances outlined in the presentation to be involved in the Club. The graphic used to summarise the different areas of involvement is shown below, the details of which were sent out to members prior to the November meeting.

EXISTING & POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT



Some interest has already been generated, but please, feel free to put your name forward if you are interested. There are plenty of opportunities and your suggestions, feedback and expressions of interest are very welcome.

Paul Baird

Phone 02 4938 5039 or email: pbaird@exemail.com.au

Walk Against Warming - Newcastle

About the event:

This annual global event is Australia's largest community day of action against Climate Change. It is a peaceful demonstration that allows individuals to send a message to the leaders of the globe and the nation. It is appropriate for all ages to attend – from Grandparents to tiny tots. This year, Walk Against Warming will take place in locations across Australia and the world to coincide with the midpoint of the Copenhagen Climate Summit on 12 December 2009.

The effects of Global Warming on birds are already being seen worldwide, with shifts in distributions and declining populations of many species. This year, Birds Australia is encouraging all its members and contributors to take part in the annual global community day of action against climate change, **Walk Against Warming** and asking them to **walk for birds**.

Why walk for birds?

Birds are Indicators of the planet's quality of life – their presence, absence and abundance tells us a great deal about the health of the world's ecosystems and the life-supporting services that they provide. The following quote from Birdlife International shows clearly just how impoverished the state of birds and the state of the environment is becoming:

“The natural rate of bird extinction is one bird per century. In the last thirty years alone, 21 bird species have become extinct. At present, [192 are classified globally as Critically Endangered](#) that is, on the very edge of extinction. Without immediate action, many will not be here in ten years' time.” (Birdlife International: <http://www.birdlife.org/extinction>).

In Australia we have already lost 23 species since European occupation with another 6 on the Critically Endangered list. But in reality, species that are currently listed as Endangered (41) and Vulnerable (61) may well be much more critically endangered than we know. (For definitions and criteria of threatened categories see http://www.iucnredlist.org/static/categories_criteria_3_1#categories)

Dramatic declines are already being seen in Australian bird numbers – as reported on the ABC 7.30 Report on Wednesday 21 October, repeated in NSW on the 23 October and based on recently published research, there has been a documented **40% decline in (woodland) birds present over a twelve year period**. In the areas monitored this loss was estimated to represent about 150,000 individual birds. (ABC <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/vodcast.htm> Native Birds declining rapidly)

When:

1pm on 12 December, 2009 - to coincide with the midpoint of the Copenhagen Climate Summit

Where:

Wheeler Place at 1pm then march to Customs House Plaza/Park

Bring:

Your friends, family, colleagues and banners, signs, instruments and your voices! (and if you like, wear blue shoelaces in collaboration with the national walks)

HBOC will be represented by several members who will be carrying our banner.

For more information, contact Tom Clarke 4951 3872.

BASNA Annual General Meeting and Seminar on 20 March 2010

The Birds Australia Southern NSW and ACT (BASNA) branch of Birds Australia will be holding its Annual General Meeting in Newcastle on 20 March next year. HBOC will host a seminar prior to the AGM featuring talks on birds of the Hunter Region. The venue will be the Wetlands Centre and you are invited to come along! More details will be available in the February 2010 Newsletter.

Digital Photography in the Bush 2010 - PhotoBOCA

29 October – 2 November 2010 - Gunbower Island Victoria

PhotoBOCA, in conjunction with the Echuca branch of BOCA and the National Education Committee, is arranging a 4-day seminar at Gunbower Island. This event will be conducted along similar lines to the very successful Digital Photography in the Bush at Little Desert which was held in 2006.

Accommodation will be at the Gunbower Caravan Park (powered caravan sites, camping sites, and 2, 4, & 6 person cabins) or at the Gunbower Hotel (5 double rooms in the Hotel and 4 twin and 1 double room in the “cottage” downstairs).

A mix of theoretical sessions and field trips for both photographers and bird watchers is being planned and will cater for beginners and advanced groups. Members of the Echuca branch of BOCA have offered their assistance in conducting field trips on Gunbower Island, local swamps and Terrick Terrick National Park. Arrangements are also underway for field trips in search of the Plains Wanderer at Terrick Terrick and possibly into the Riverina district of NSW.

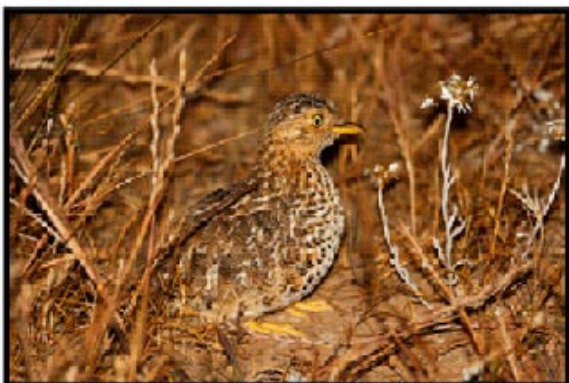
A conference dinner is planned for the Sunday night and the guest speaker will be confirmed in the next few weeks. Local sporting clubs and organisations have offered to arrange BBQs on other evenings. Subject to approval of the local Police, a night walk with spotlights in search of the local owls is planned on the Saturday night following a BBQ on the banks of Gunbower Creek.

The local shopkeepers have offered to host an exhibition of PhotoBOCA member’s images during the 4 days of the seminar. These images may be offered for sale, on a 25% commission basis with the local shopkeeper, if the photographer so wishes. In keeping with our theme for 2010, this exhibition should focus on threatened and endangered species and would need to be A4 – A3 size prints suitable for framing.

The major tourist season for towns along the Murray River runs from the beginning of November until Easter and many sites are fully booked some months in advance. We will need to book our accommodation by the beginning of March 2010. Further details will be provided in the next few weeks when details of costs and the program are completed.

All members of PhotoBOCA, BOCA and the affiliated groups are invited to attend. There will be a limit of 75 people.

Accommodation enquiries should be made with the Caravan Park (kimmareenelson@bigpond.com – (03) 5487 1412) or Gunbower Hotel (gunbowerhotel@skyoptic.com.au – (03) 5487 1214). All other enquiries to Bob Young photoboca@boca.org.au



Our Signature Bird - The Plains Wanderer
Photo Damian Kelly © 2009

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
Wednesday 9 December	Xmas Club Night	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Members' Night - bring your slides, anecdotes, videos and a plate to share the festive spirit
Sunday 13 December	Annual Latham's Snipe Count, Pambalong Nature Reserve & other wetlands	8.00 am Minmi Pub	Liz Crawford 4959 3663 Come along to Minmi Pub to join in the Pambalong Snipe Count or survey your favourite wetland.
Tuesday 15 December	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Saturday 19 December	Hunter Wader Survey	10.00 am Ash Island 10.30 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Is Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 - Swansea
Saturday 16 January 2010	Hunter Wader Survey	9.00am Ash Island 9.30am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Jack Adams 4971 5334 - Swansea
Tuesday 19 January	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Weekend + Australia Day 23 - 26 January	Camp on private property near Coolah Tops	“Oaklands”, west of Merriwa, off the Golden Highway	For directions, please contact Lorna Mee 4988 6579
Tuesday 2 February	Mid-week Outing Newcastle Foreshore	7.30am Car park Nobbys Beach	Leader: Judi Thomas 4952 2960 Bring your own lunch to celebrate 15 years of Tuesday outings. All welcome.
Wednesday 3 February	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	All members welcome
Wednesday 10 February	Club Meeting Annual General Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Jack Adams – East Lake Macquarie Shorebirds

LATHAMS SNIPE COUNT 2009 (Contacts)

Pambalong Nature Reserve [18 snipe in 2008] (2009 - Liz Crawford 4959 3663)
Newcastle Wetlands Reserve [19 snipe in 2008] (2009 - Tom Clarke 4951 3872 and Robert McDonald)
Teal Waters, Ash Island [7 snipe in 2008] (2009 - Neville McNaughton 4951 1265)
Hands Lagoon, Bolwarra [4 snipe in 2008]
Woodville [2 snipe in 2008]
Walka Waterworks, Maitland [5 snipe in 2008] (2009 - Grant Brosie 4934 7383)
Pacific Dunes Golf Course, Medowie [34 in 2008] (2009 - Darryl Luck 4982 9248)
Soldiers Point, Port Stephens [2 in 2008]
Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia [not counted 2008] (2009 - Ann Lindsey 4951 2008)

It would be great to have all these wetlands surveyed again this year, plus Seaham Swamp, Irrawang Swamp and Hexham Swamp, to name a few - no doubt there are others! Please contact any of the listed people if you would like to assist and please report your results to Liz Crawford so that they can be collated.