



# Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Issue No. 6/14 December 2014

*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 Long-toed Stint at Kooragang Dykes on 22<sup>nd</sup> November was one of a number of recent rare sightings in the Hunter. Photo by Dan Williams.



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Deadline for the next edition – 1 February 2015

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## President's Column

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December and hence summer is upon us once again, and a flurry of birding events that come along with the spring time are now behind us. Time to take a breather, relax a bit and enjoy the holiday season. Oh, and maybe relish in the promise of another exciting season out on "the new Ash Island" – Hexham Swamp. Even before summer had arrived we'd seen a female Orange Chat and up to six Little Curlews, accompanying the 1000's of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, >200 Curlew Sandpipers and >100 Marsh Sandpipers. The adult Black-necked Storks have also been showing. It is shaping up to be another "hot summer" on Hexham Swamp and we're likely to have many visiting birders arriving to see the birds there, and elsewhere in the estuary as well.

In terms of events, the next big one on the HBOC horizon is the BirdLife Australia Photography Group's biennial conference, being held in the Hunter in February/March. As I've explained in the past, the Hunter out-muscled some pretty serious competition to be the host for the conference, and ultimately it was the reputation of HBOC that made the difference in the final

decision to hold it here. We are looking for support/assistance from Club members – see the article later in the newsletter for details.

As I reported in the last Newsletter, we had some vacancies arise in some key roles due to some travelling birders spreading their wings next year. I'm pleased to report that we've found a new Editor for the Newsletter (who will be editing this very President's Column!) – Dan Williams. I understand that he will be ably assisted in the role by his close associate Miyagi Buzzard. We also have had some advanced interest in the Club's Secretary role, with Grahame Feletti attending the November and December committee meetings to see how it all works behind the scenes. We hope to officially welcome Grahame on board in the New Year.

Here's to a safe and prosperous Christmas and New Year to all HBOC members and their families.

**Mick Roderick**

## New Members

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

Richard Parke of Rankin Park  
Glenn Hirst & Janine Clark of Seaham  
Christine Gray of Adamstown Heights  
Donna Gillies of Hamilton South

Bill Kinsey of Gillieston Heights  
George Voss of Kotara South  
Cameron Ward of Thornleigh  
Bruce Watts of Seaham

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

## Health and Safety Awareness for Activities

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

Please sign the attendance register at field outings and also at meetings.

If you leave an outing early, please let the leader know before you go.

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

## AGM in February 2015 and Membership Renewal

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The Annual General Meeting will be held at the Hunter Wetlands Centre, Shortland, on Wednesday 11 February 2015. Notices relevant to the AGM are available on the website and will be mailed to those who receive their Newsletter by post. Forms for nomination of Committee positions are included and must be submitted to the Committee by Wednesday 4 February 2015.

Also a reminder that with the New Year comes the renewal of Club membership. Membership fees are due on 1<sup>st</sup> January. Please ensure that you have paid your annual fees by the April Club Meeting, Wednesday 8 April 2015. Any members who have not paid their fees

by then will be regarded as un-financial and will not receive any further newsletters or mail-outs until they become financial again. New members that joined from September 2014 are not due for renewal until 2016.

Fees are currently set at \$35 single, \$40 family and \$5 for junior (under 16 years old) members. Fees can be paid in person to the Treasurer at any club night (noting that there is no club night in January) or by direct bank transfer – please see the Club website for details.

## Comings and Goings at the Sandspit

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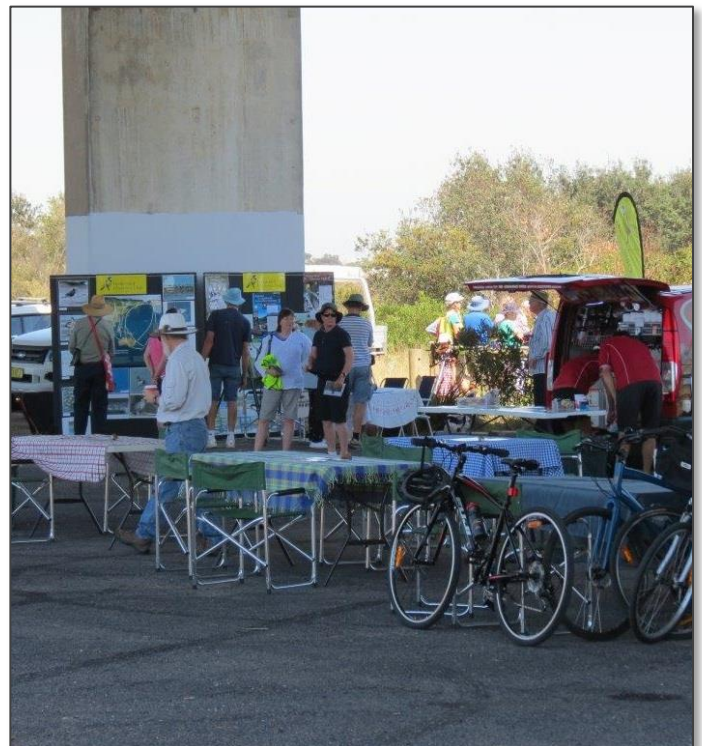
Stockton Sandspit is no stranger to visiting birders. However, November 2014 saw many more visitors than usual. Early in the month birders gathered to herald the arrival of our migratory friends at the “Welcome the Shorebirds” event, which is held annually to help educate the community about the fantastic wildlife that exists right there on their doorstep. This year’s event on 9<sup>th</sup> November was particularly successful, with around 200 people coming along to see what all the fuss is about. They were ably informed and educated by around two dozen of our dedicated membership – well done!

the journey of a lifetime, emulating their feathered cousins by migrating up and down the Aussie coast. They set sail shortly for Tasmania on their new boat/home, where they will spend the warmer months before heading north to PNG. Around 60 to 70 Club members gathered on 30<sup>th</sup> November to thank Chris and Liz for their mammoth efforts over the years and to wish them well for the future, whatever it may hold. You’ll be missed!



*Attendees of the Welcome the Shorebirds event by Lorna Mee*

There was another large gathering “under the bridge” at the end of the month, but this time it was to say farewell (or, more technically, Bon Voyage) to two of the Spit’s most prolific human visitors. As many of you will be aware Liz Crawford and Chris Herbert are embarking on



*HBOC Display at Welcome the Shorebirds event by Liz Crawford*

## It's a Long Way to the Top



*Chris and Liz having a good time at their farewell and a section of those that had come to see them off, both by Ann Lindsey*

## It's a Long Way to the Top

It takes a keen interest to see 300 species in the Hunter Region, serious dedication to claim 350 and it becomes difficult to hold down a job or relationship if you want to reach 400. However, this month our President Mick Roderick managed just that, and he still had a job and relationship last time I checked.

It's been a solid year for rarities in the Hunter, kicked off in style with a great summer in the estuary – Mick grabbing King Quail on Ash Island, Buff-breasted Sandpiper on Hexham Swamp and Oriental Plover at Phoenix Park. These were followed up by a much unexpected sighting of a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross on the March pelagic from Port Stephens, with Rose-crowned Fruit Dove being added later in the year at Mungo Brush.

became a regular companion of Mick's as excursions to see Long-toed Stint and Orange Chat failed to deliver the goods. However, it was a case of third time lucky on the recent Swansea pelagic and the cork finally saw the light of day. Mick has only missed one pelagic in the five years he has been organising them and in doing so had been gripped off by a Cook's Petrel. It was therefore poetic justice maybe that this was to be his 400<sup>th</sup> bird, as he clawed it back at last. Just reward for his sterling efforts in organising the trips we all benefit from and enjoy.

Mick joins Ann Lindsey as the only member of the HBOC 400 Club (pending record acceptance formalities), but it looks like the floodgates are about to open, so they won't be lonely for long...



*Let the celebrations begin!*

Fittingly it was two pelagic species that got him to the landmark. The November pelagic out of Port Stephens saw White-chinned Petrel bring him up to 399. A chilled bottle of bubbly then



*The bird that did it – Cooks Petrel, photos by Dan Williams*

## Club Activity Reports

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### **Bush Haven, Italia Road, Seaham**

**19 October 2014**

Seven people met at Seaham Swamp where 15 bird species were soon spotted. It is always nice to see what is being seen at the Bird Hide, although I do believe the swamp has reduced in quality, as birds are reduced in species numbers.

It was then on to the Musika's at Bush Haven on Italia Road. Jenny, in her great enthusiasm, showed us a well-made map, then onward to find her beloved birds. The log crossing was avoided by going across the paddock, as there had been no recent rain to make it boggy.

Jenny does a daily record of any wildlife she sees on her property and includes rainfall and temperature measurements.

The day was noted for its large numbers of Scarlet Honeyeaters – both seen and heard. A Pacific Baza also treated us to a flyby. It truly is a delightful bird location, thanks Jenny.



*Pacific Baza by Steve Merrett*

After the morning of great birding and finding nests, we adjourned to Seaham Park for lunch – hoping for a Latham's Snipe, which is a regular visitor here. No such luck. By then many people had done six hours and so we all departed for home. The total species list for the day was 58.

Lorna Mee

### **Ash Island**

**4 November 2014**

Melbourne Cup day again and we are already winners – out birding on a beautiful, sunny but not too hot day and saving our money! Mind you, with Nev as leader of 25 keen birders, we were racing around the place.

He was also expecting a Canadian couple (who had looked at our website), but they hadn't arrived by the time we started at the rainforest boardwalk. Nev had earlier gone to have a look and had put up 20 Latham's Snipe. So straight there and the intrepid Nev went into the marsh to try and flush them. We got to see three and, as Mick H. remarked, they looked like they were operated by remote control – like the model planes across the paddock. They came flying out, did a big circle and flew off again.

There were other water birds – Australian White Ibis, Great Egret, a Royal Spoonbill in full breeding plumage and a White-necked Heron feeding with a White-faced Heron (good to get comparative sizes). Beside the walkway we also had a great view of a family of Striped Honeyeaters – two adults constantly feeding two newly fledged chicks.

Off to the Radar Hut and a walk down to Nev's Nook. It is a beautiful area and has really filled out – with Nev's nurturing. It was a bit quiet but we had good views of Rufous Whistlers, a juvenile Brush Cuckoo, a Fan-tailed Cuckoo and yellow Thornbills. On Milham's Pond, not much but the Cattle Egret were in full breeding colour. Then, on Phoenix Flats, we had 30 Pacific Golden Plovers and a few Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

A quick(ish) morning tea then down to a very depressing Swan Pond – much industrial work being undertaken on the edge of the pond. We had several hundred Black-winged Stilt and Red-necked Avocet. There was a small group of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and we all had close views of a Marsh Sandpiper feeding with some Stilt. There were also a big flock of Grey Teal, and later we had a family of Chestnut Teal – two very attentive and guarding adults and four ducklings.

## Club Activity Reports

At both our main sites, we had flocks of Fairy Martins flying with Welcome Swallows and a few White-breasted Woodswallows.

Raptors were fairly quiet on the day but we did see a White-bellied Sea-eagle, a Swamp Harrier, a Whistling Kite and, later, a Nankeen Kestrel.

While we were having our lunch and offering congrats to new Gran Ann, the Canadian couple arrived. They had been misdirected by their GPS and then got caught in morning traffic. Nev and I later took them to Swan Pond and to the rainforest boardwalk. They were impressed with both the birds and the general environment – and especially the Button Orchid.

All in all, a quietish day but we did have 62 seen and six heard birds. A good mix of birds and (as usual) some special sightings.

**Anthony Gooden**

## Cessnock TSRs

**16 November 2014**

Eight people met at 7am at the Cessnock Tourist Information Centre on Wine Country Drive, before heading out on a tour of the local Travelling Stock Routes (TSRs)

The first port of call was the Lovedale TSR, where a good one and a half hours was spent. Some highlights at this location included Leaden Flycatcher, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Striped Honeyeater and Australian Owlet-Nightjar. A number of nesting species were also observed including Grey Butcherbird, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, White-winged Chough and White-plumed Honeyeaters feeding young.

The next stop at Sawyers Gully TSR was cut short by the onset of rain, but several species were still observed including White-throated Gerygone and Brown Goshawk. The next hour was spent in comfort within the café on Lovedale Road for morning tea, whilst waiting for the rain to pass.

Onwards again and by 11 o'clock we were at our next destination – Cessnock TSR and surrounds, where we were joined by another member who had managed to locate us. Unfortunately we failed to see the Speckled Warblers that I had seen on my last two visits here. However, a host of common species were observed, including some less regular ones. These included Weebill, Varied Sittella, Brown-headed Honeyeater,

Grey-crowned Babbler and a brief glimpse of a Quail species.



*Grey-crowned Babbler by Alwyn Simple*

Four then left the group, leaving five of us to enjoy our lunch at the Tourist Information Centre, before heading off to the fourth and final site at Millfield TSR. Unfortunately the birding at this site was marred by strong winds and we dipped on the Superb Lyrebird and Crested Shrike-Tits that I had seen there only three days earlier. Some good birds were still had though including Bar-shouldered Dove and Noisy Friarbird.

All in all a good time birdwatching, and many thanks to those who came and helped out, finding some new species for these sites. This will help with making up the brochures for these birding sites.

**John Goswell**

## Awabakal NR

**2 December 2014**

Awabakal Nature Reserve was created in 1978 on lands traditionally belonging to the Awabakal People, known as the Lake Macquarie People.

The oval on top of the hill was the site of the Dudley Colliery, one of the bigger of the countless coal mines in the Newcastle area. Dudley is still remembered for the enormous explosion in the mine in 1898. This disaster took the lives of fifteen miners who were below with three horses at the time of the explosion. Significant improvements in mine safety followed the inquest.

Awabakal is one of the largest remaining coastal heath communities and has a variety of habitats: coastal heath, perched lagoon, swamp, dry and wet sclerophyll forest

Australasian Bird Fair 2014 and remnant rainforest. It is a most varied and interesting area for birdwatchers.

The bushfires of 2013 ravaged the western side of the reserve. We were interested to see the evidence of recovery. The area has come back remarkably well and one has to look to see signs of the devastation of a year or so ago. Native birds have recovered well, as our count of over 60 species for the day attests.



*Olive-backed Oriole by Bruce Watts*

## Australasian Bird Fair 2014

### 25-26 October 2014

Thirteen HBOC members helped out at the Club stall at the inaugural Australasian Bird Fair held at Newington Armoury in the Sydney Olympic Park over the last weekend in October. Full credit must be given to Liz Crawford and Chris Herbert for their work organising and setting up the HBOC display. We shared a large tent with the Cumberland BOC, Blue Mountains BOC and Birding NSW.



*Liz Crawford and the HBOC Display by Jim Smart*

Highlights were Australian Wood Duck, including a family with young, Masked Lapwing in numbers, good views of Eastern Whipbird, Eastern Rosella, four Sacred Kingfishers at one site with nest, Olive-backed Oriole with two abandoned nests, Latham's Snipe, Spangled Drongo (out of season), Brown Gerygone and White-throated Needletail in numbers.

The usual walk is from the field centre to Dudley Bluff. On this occasion we chose to leave the track at the eastern end of Redhead Lagoon and follow the lagoon foreshore track to the Ivy Street entrance, returning to our vehicles at Awabakal field Centre by way of the oval for morning tea.

The last meeting for the year had about 25 of us adjourn to the Ocean View Hotel for the traditional annual Christmas lunch.

Merry Christmas, and goodwill to all. Till we meet again in February.

**Max Blanch**

Bird Fairs are a big thing in Britain, with the main one being at Rutland Water. Last year this attracted 22,000 visitors to see displays by 350 companies and organisations. Phil Straw has modelled the Sydney Fair on the British model. If the Brits can attract 22,000 people we should be able to attract around a third of that, say 7,000. I was told that around 1,000 people came last weekend, so that can be considered a good start. Nikon and Swarovski were represented but Canon and Leica were missing from the Optics Displays. Also missing were some of the big names in Bird Tourism. Hopefully there will be another Australasian Bird Fair next year and they will be there.

Many people I spoke to at the HBOC display expressed a new interest in going to the Hunter Region for some birdwatching. We will not recover the cost of putting up the display in new member numbers but we will have contributed positively to raising interest in recreational birding and bird conservation in Australia generally.

Congratulations to the HBOC committee for going ahead with this Bird Fair display.

**Jim Smart**

## NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

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### 25-26 October 2014

The NSW & ACT Twitchathon 2014 was held this year in very hot and dry conditions. Some of those teams that started in western NSW had to put up with thunderstorms and dust storms not long after the Twitch commence, while those on the coast had to contend with thunderstorms, hail and strong winds, and all had very hot temperatures (some with 41°C). The number of teams was the same as last year, but the money potentially raised is somewhat down on last year (it was estimated by the participants when they reported in after the race last year that they expected to have raised \$23,000 but in the end we raised \$28,600). So far our teams have said they expect to raise a minimum of \$17,000 but they and we the organizers expect it to be well over \$20,000.

So this year 37 teams and 120 participants took part in 13 Main Race Teams, 18 Champagne Teams and 6 Children's Teams (Dollarbirds and Little Curlews). It is possible that our numbers are down on previous years and the money raised may be down due to the holding of both the First Bird fair at Sydney Olympic Park and the Twitch on the same weekend. Certainly I know that many of our participants would have wanted to attend the Birdfair! I will be discussing in the next few days with the Birdfair organizers to see how we can make each event complement the other.

This year the top team, the Dodgy Drongos, seen & heard 235 species, winning the Twitchathon for the first time and beating the previous winners Hunter Home Brewers by one species. Congratulations too to the Fly by Nightjars and the Feathered Rufflers, two new teams who did very well, coming equal third in the Main Race. Note that the Dry-throated Buzzards cycled the whole event and saw 173 species, the Rampaging Raptors ran 63 km and drove another 33 kms to sites and saw 169 species, and members of the Red-faced Parrots at the Fair Team walked their 3 kms and saw 54 species. Well done!

### Alan Morris, Twitchathon Co-ordinator

A big congrats to the Dodgy Drongo's in achieving their first victory. Well done Grant, Nick and Max! Several

Hunter-based teams finished at Blackbutt Reserve on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> October, where we had a great turn out.

### Mick Roderick

## Dodgy Drongos Report

Friday morning saw Maxie Drongo and I leaving Robbie Drongo at home and heading up to Manilla to join the co-pilot for some last minute oiling. We started off in warm, overcast and still conditions finding such sought after species as Painted and Singing Honeyeater, White-browed Woodswallow and Black Falcon. However the weather quickly changed as the temperature soared to a stifling 36 degrees. The birding slowed considerably and we struggled to find any birds in the grassy woodlands. Morale started to wane and hit a record low when we attempted to visit our former stomping ground, Leard State Forest. We found this beautiful spot completely locked up. The miners had won. We drove the newly constructed bypass road and we were horrified to find the dam that last year had Plum-headed Finches and Diamond Dove now had a road within metres of it. Heartbreaking.



*Singing Honeyeater by Alwyn Simple*

Saturday morning we headed along the Kelvin Road in a hope of nailing down some much needed birds which we did before heading to Borah TSR for lunch, a rest and more oiling. The area was very dry and over grazed with an almost manicured parkland feel to the place. Luckily birds were everywhere and as the clock ticked over to 4pm we starting racing with a well watched Wedge-tailed Eagle. A plethora of honeyeaters fell with White-



## NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

plumed, Fuscous, White-naped, Brown-headed and Noisy Friarbird. In the sky above we saw Tree Martins, White-browed and Dusky Woodswallows, Bee-eater and Collared Sparrowhawk. Cuckoos were represented by Brush, Fan-tailed and Horsfield's Bronze. A few species were proving very hard to find but luckily we finally found Diamond Firetail, Little Friarbird, Black-chinned Honeyeater and Painted Button-quail. Sadly the previously seen Turquoise Parrot and White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike failed to show.

We left Borah and headed south ticking up a load of common species and some well-timed calling Little Ravens. Further along the road our well-oiled road stops produced the goods; Masked Woodswallow, White-backed Swallow, Southern Whiteface, Yellow-throated Miner, Pallid Cuckoo and Hooded Robin. Painted and Singing Honeyeater were at the usual spot and Horsfield's Bushlark, "Zebbies" and White-winged Fairy-Wrens were still glued to their perches. Red-winged Parrot and Cockatiel made much needed flybys. As we entered our new western woodland patch the sun was starting to sink and the birds were starting to quieten. Western Gerygone, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Weebill, Varied Sittella and Common Bronzewing were added to the list.



*Southern Whiteface by Alwyn Simple*

Our final stop for the arvo was at the Gunners STW. Musk Lorikeet and Blackbird were calling in the suburbs and Black Kites were feeding on some unfortunate (or fortunate?) road kill. In the fading light we got our four western ducks....Pink-eared, Blue-billed, Freckled and Shoveler. Our final "western run" bird was a Barn Owl on the Breeza Plain. Maxie Drongo tallied up the list and we were delighted to find we had recorded 114 species, a personal best!

The drive up to Allyn produced several Frogmouths and a very obliging Boobook. After a very short, uncomfortable sleep on the rainforest floor we awoke to an amazing dawn chorus. Noisy Pitta, Channel-billed and Fan-tailed Cuckoo started calling before dawn, soon followed by Russet-tailed and Bassian Thrush, Black-faced and Spectacled Monarch, Rose Robin, Shrike-tit, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Green Catbird, Brown Thornbill, Spinebill, Silvereye, Rufous Fantail and Superb Lyrebird. Pigeons proved to be not as easy and it took a while to find Cuckoo-dove, Wonga and Topknots. Seeing numerous Regent and Satin Bowerbirds was a nice highlight. An unusual sighting was the numerous New Holland Honeyeaters feeding in the flowering trees around Barrington House.

We were heading down the valley ticking up the usual suspects... Coucal, White-headed Pigeon and Torresian Crow. Maxie found a cracking little spot by the river where we found Buff-rumped Thornbill and Shining Bronze-cuckoo. After a fruitless stop at Clarence Town we headed to Seaham ticking Hobby and Long-billed Corella along the way. Bar-shouldered Dove, Chestnut Teal and Night Heron were seen at the wetlands.

Next stop Maitland. We managed to dip on the well-oiled Brown Songlark near Largs but did score a calling Stubble Quail. Banded Lapwing and European Goldfinch were seen nearby. The Kurri woodlands were next and thanks to some inside knowledge and oiling we saw all our needed species, White-cheeked and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Variegated Fairy-wren and Little Eagle.

Brown Honeyeater, White-breasted Woodswallow, Musk Duck and Great Crested Grebe were all seen on the way to the Sand Spit, where on realising how high the tide was, decided to visit the Fern Bay mangroves where we bagged our 200th species, Whimbrel. We decided to revisit the Sandspit when the tide was lower so headed to Hexham and Ash Island via the Wetlands Centre. Chats, Little Egret, Curlew, Marsh and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and a magnificent Black Falcon were all ticked up. Back to the spit and there were the waders!! Both Godwits, both Knots, Stint, Pied Oystercatcher and three species of Tern.

We still needed to visit the foreshore but decided to swing via Lenaghans first. As we arrived at the lookout the air was filled with raptors, Sea-eagles, Whistling and Black Kites and another Black Falcon. Whiskered Terns were scoped in the distance and on the flats a large group of Glossy Ibis and four Snipe were seen.

## NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

The traffic was horrendous as we made our way to the baths. I reckon we got every red light in Newcastle. After a pretty dodgy parking job we raced through the half-naked crowd of people and added Turnstone, Great Cormorant and Gannet. Off we raced again through the traffic, finally arriving at Blackbutt with minutes to spare. Where is it? It's usually here? It's always in the leaf litter!... there!!!! Our final bird for the race...Brush Turkey.



*Australian Brush-Turkey by Steve Merrett*

After four years of disappointing results the Drongos finally managed a personal best.....235! Luckily for us, after 11 years in the wilderness, our personal best was also a winning total. The Drongos were in shock and I still am.....

Many thanks to everyone involved in organising yet another successful Twitchathon. A huge thanks to the Brewers and Buzzards for their help and advice over the years, and a massive thanks to the Co-pilot and Maxie for their solid effort this year!

## Head Drongo

### Dry-throated Buzzards Report

The BASNA Twitchathon 2013 had seen the Buzzards finally achieve their long-term goal of 180 species to take home the coveted "eco prize". Feeling the strain of the building expectation of the last four years, and at last succeeding, they felt in the immediate aftermath of the Twitch that they no longer had the desire to repeat the feat again this year. A number of options were tabled (including one particularly audacious plan) but ultimately it was decided that maybe doing the same thing another time around wasn't such a bad option, and so a typical plan was formed...

The tide times meant that the route would finish with the Sand Spit and Baths, before heading to the finish line at the new location of Blackbutt Reserve. The wetlands fit in logistically before this home stretch, leaving the morning free for birding west of the Loaf. This would begin with the dawn chorus at Old Brush, followed by a few old favourites for "mopping". Saturday afternoon was therefore free to concentrate on the Lower Hunter woodlands – essentially a miniature version of the quintessential Main Race Twitch teams. As reasonable a plan as this was, it couldn't help but feel a little uninspiring.

In the lead up to the event it became clear that the wetlands and woodlands weren't as in-form as the previous year. This inspired the resurrection of a previously dismissed plan that centred on starting near Maitland. The idea had initially been shelved, because it was too difficult to fit the woodlands into a route that incorporated the Flats (Hunter River floodplain) – there was not enough time to work them and the woodlands on Saturday and not enough time to do the woodlands and wetlands justice on Sunday. The total riding distance would creep uncomfortably high too, and it had been decided after the 2011 effort that this was counter-productive and never to be attempted again. Should the Buzzards play it safe and risk limiting their potential score, or go for the big total and risk not making it to all of the required sites (or finishing the race at all)? This conundrum plagued Miyagi for the two weeks prior to kick-off, and those closest to him had to put up with him changing his mind on a daily (and occasionally sub-daily) basis.

As the event drew nearer, the pre-Twitch oiling efforts intensified and more oil was being traded between Twitch teams than between the OPEC countries and the USA. From this information a clear picture was beginning to form – the woodlands were fairly quiet, the wetlands only held a smattering of scattered good ticks, and the Flats were on song. If the Buzzards were to surpass their 2013 score of 180 then they needed to branch out and try something new. This needed full commitment from each and every Buzzard, as it was going to require a big effort. The others signed up and it was game on. The plan would now be to start at Walka Water Works, before commencing a circuit of the Flats to pick up the available goodies. The remaining time on Saturday would be spent cycling to the overnight location at Old Brush, via a few select sites that were previously scheduled for mopping up on Sunday. Sunday would now progress from Old Brush to HEZ, and then finish

## NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

with the wetlands – Sand Spit – Baths run in. The route planning had this pegged at around a 40km ride on Saturday followed by a further 90km on Sunday. No use of any automobile assistance this year – keeping it “pure”.

Preparation is crucial to the success of top athletes and the Buzzards are no different. With this in mind they caught the train out to Maitland a few hours prior to the race, to settle in at the Belmore Hotel. Over the space of the next two hours the Buzzards consumed three chicken schnitzel burgers and the lion’s share of six litres of German beer between them – plenty of carbs to burn. It was then time for a leisurely amble out to Walka to await the most significant passing of the hour in the annual calendar. After a few team photos and last minute preparations it was time to locate the target birds. There had been no sound from the White-winged Triller yet and after a casual scan of the lake Miyagi was becoming quite concerned about the obvious absence of the required Hoary-headed and Great Crested Grebes. If they weren’t here then there was no point in being here. Two options remained – either they were in the very near corner or at the top of the far left arm. The first drew a blank and so out came the scope. Thankfully both were located at distance and the wait for the starting pistol began.



*The Buzzards’ pre-race publicity shot by Craig Bagnall*

Racing! The two Grebes were instantaneously added to the list before a Whistling Kite generously flew past. A short time had been allotted to rack up some common species before heading off, during which the Triller eventually made its presence known – get there! With all three targets in the bag it was time to move on. Two Blackbirds had been heard singing on the ride out and they were gratefully just as obliging on the return

journey. Oh, I should point out (in case any of you were wondering) that any effects of the beer were now completely absent. The mid-thirties sun must have extracted it through evapotranspiration, and it was as if they had never been consumed.

The next leg of the trip involved a circuit around the western portion of the Flats, along Glenarvon Road and Flat Road. First stop was at a property where Miyagi had located (thanks to some Drongo oil) Goldfinch on Friday. After only a minute or so a bird was heard, before a couple flew up on to the wires for us – too easy. Onwards and upwards. No sight or sound of White-plumed Honeyeater, but the Zebra Finch were still present. The first of a number of Rufous Songlark territories was then reached and Yellow-rumped Thornbill soon fell too. A brief stop to listen for Friday’s Stubble Quail yielded no result, nor did a detour to try for the Brewer’s oiled Brown Songlark. Nankeen Kestrel, Black-shouldered Kite, Australian Hobby and Swamp Harrier were all ticked up though. The second stop to scan for Banded Lapwing amongst the turf farms proved fruitful, with a single bird located resting within a shallow depression. The final stop was at Hands Lagoon for the Pink-eared Ducks that had been present for some time.

The Buzzards were bang on schedule, departing at about 17:30. A stretch of almost 20km now lay between them and their next designated stop. The scenic route of Louth Park Road was opted for in favour of the main road and it proved an enjoyable ride, the Buzzards merrily conversing and occasionally adding to their score. Both Little and Long-billed Corellas were snagged and another Goldfinch was seen flying across the road. Things were progressing nicely until Bagsy snapped his chain, cursing his predicament of having had to completely refit his bike’s engine room the previous night. Fortunately this occurred at the wetland along Buchanan Road, where White-necked Heron, White-throated Gerygone and a pesky Bee-eater, that could be heard but not seen, were added to the list. After 15 mins or so downtime it was back on the move and the Bee-eater was finally spotted.

Next on the menu was Grey-crowned Babbler. The plan was simple – ride along the driveway of Pace Farm and back, and hope to luck in. As the Buzzards turned off the road Miyagi noticed some movement in a shrub on the left. Ticking! A quick turnaround and it was up the road to their known Chough territory. No sooner had they pulled up than one was seen flying over the road. Things

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aren't supposed to run this smoothly are they?! White-bellied Sea Eagle and Darter were the only additions at Poor Man's, and as the ride progressed into Mulbring at almost 19:30 things were quietening down. Water bottles were replenished with Staminade and Cliffy keenly spotted a Red-rumped Parrot perched in a tree. So concluded the daytime birding, and it was time to gear up for the ride along the main road in the dark – reflective vests and bright lights. Unfortunately they weren't the only bright lights on display as arcs of lighting were dramatically lighting up the sky over the Watagans. The wind was picking up too. The Buzzards rode on apprehensively to Old Brush, anticipating the oncoming deluge but fortunately it never eventuated.

Arriving at their point of rest by 20:30 was a new and welcome experience. Almost 11 hours would pass before departure beckoned. Sheltering from the potential downpour under the roof of their veranda the Buzzards kicked back and enjoyed a hard-earned beer, after all it had been almost six hours since their last. The total riding distance since 16:00 was 50km – 10km up from Miyagi's estimate. A longer distance on the flats and a few doglegs here and there were probably to blame. Cliffy cooked up a hearty feed of sausage sangers, followed by another hearty feed of steak and egg sangers – man food. In total another 4.5 litres of beer was consumed whilst chewing the fat (conversing, not the steak sangers), before hitting the sack at 23:00.

The calls of a Southern Boobook were heard for some time following the passing of the non-eventuating storm, but unfortunately they were not accompanied by either Powerful or Sooty Owls. The day's tally stood at 87, which was a little underwhelming. Over the previous years the Buzzards' final score was typically double that of Saturday's efforts. This would mean a mid-170s finish. Things would have to pick up tomorrow if 180 was to be on the cards again. Still, some good birds had been collected so there remained a degree of optimism.

After a good six hours kip it was time to rouse, get packed and sorted, ready to depart when required. Bagsy got the bacon and egg sangers on the go whilst Miyagi and Cliffy wandered down the hill to listen for new ticks. Before anyone gets any ideas, yes we were still within ear-shot (if someone let out a blood-curdling scream at least). In addition to numerous commoner species Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Black-faced Monarch, Bassian Thrush and Brush Cuckoo were racked up. A pair of Crimson Rosellas also gave an unexpected flyby – not a guaranteed species here. Brekkie was up and eagerly

devoured, along with another five litres of beer (OK, I'm joking this time but that last remaining bottle of Coopers Stout would have gone down a treat).

Time for a walk through the rainforest. Poor man's with a few specials? TIU! (this is aimed at one particular individual, so if you don't understand what I'm on about then it's not you). It's not really feasible to write well-structured sentences interspersed with ticks here, so I'll just list. White-headed Pigeon, Wonga Pigeon, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Yellow-throated Scubwren, Large-billed Scubwren, Green Catbird, Superb Lyrebird, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Noisy Pitta and other Buzzard fodder were knocked off. Frustratingly the reliable Rose Robin was a letdown and amazingly Crested Shrike-Tit had not been heard. A painful wait was therefore required at the end of the walk, as Miyagi occasionally heard a distant bird calling but couldn't get Cliffy to pick it up. Finally a clearer call was heard and it made the list. Upon departing (15 mins late) at 7:15 there was no sign of the Brush Turkey. Embarking on the ride out, Miyagi suddenly remembered that Red-browed Finch was a gimmee at the studio feeder, but decided not to turn back. Time was of the essence and it'd be picked up somewhere. It wasn't and turned out to be the Buzzards' biggest dip.



*The Buzzards stalking their rainforest quarry by Craig Bagnall*

Having already collected Corella, Babbler and Grass Parrot, and knowing that the oil on the Crow was bad, Mulbring proved to be a mere whistle-stop. Blue-faced Honeyeater was soon heard, bottles were replenished from the tap above the urinal and it was back in the saddle. Five of the lost minutes had been clawed back. The ride up to HEZ was largely uneventful, until passing a wetland in the final approaches. Miyagi heard a Pallid

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Cuckoo and whacked on the anchors, much to the annoyance of Cliffy who nearly wound up in the back of him. Miyagi needn't have panicked as Cliffy had also heard it.

The arrival at HEZ heralded another five minute reclamation and the addition of woodland species to the list began. Leaden Flycatcher was heard calling but Speckled Warbler couldn't be enticed out by persistent "pishing". It was then time to leave the road and head bush, taking a shortcut to the cul-de-sac. But wait, what was this calling? Weebill! An unexpected and exciting encounter, as this species is thin on the ground this far east. Having not ridden the track in this direction, it took Miyagi a couple of attempts to find the right way. A ten minute stop at the cul-de-sac secured Jacky Winter and White-cheeked Honeyeater.

Time to go bush again. Riding along the Kurri Sands is always a fun experience, often involving slipping and sliding in the loose dirt, struggling to remain saddled. The birding was not so fun though, as the woodlands were unnervingly quiet. Upon arriving at their gun woodland spot the Buzzards had to wait some time for even Fuscous Honeyeater to call. A single Dusky Woodswallow and a Common Bronzewing flushed from the track were the only other decent additions to the list. Good views of a Crested Shrike-Tit were enjoyable though. After ten minutes the Buzzards had to head back out to Kurri, as they were now back to 15 mins behind schedule. It was painful to hear in the post-Twitch banter that two teams who arrived here around one and two hours later (we were there at 9:00) had both White-browed and Masked Woodswallows, and much more. Since when did the late bird catch the worm?!

It was now time to cross over the Sugarloaves to the next scheduled stop some 20km away. Since the last Twitchathon the Hunter Expressway had been completed, and offered a more appealing route than had been available previously. The gentle and consistent grades of this well-engineered road allowed the Buzzards to regain their lost 15 minutes, as they carved their way through the range like a hot knife through butter. This allowed a ten minute rest at Minmi to replenish the fluid reserves (the temperature was again up in the mid-thirties) from a shrewdly located tap, and to take on some high energy snacks. Lenaghans Flat added Wedge-tailed Eagle, Striped Honeyeater, Whiskered Tern and Straw-necked Ibis to the list. Another 15km of highway cycling now beckoned. Yellow

Thornbill and Brown Honeyeater were the only additions en-route.

As the Buzzards pulled up to the Golden Arches at Hexham the railway was clear of rolling stock and so they took the opportunity to cross – the junk food fix would have to wait. Fairy Martin was soon collected, followed by Little Grassbird. A quick look for the Buff-banded Rail and Spotted Crake that were oiled on Friday provided no return, so it was on to the pipeline track. At the southern end of the mangroves a flock of roosting Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Red-necked Stints was located. White-fronted Chat was seen perching on a dead tree and a pair of White-breasted Woodswallows circled overhead.

The ride out of the swamp was only halted for another brief search for crakes and rails. Just as he was about to give up Miyagi spotted a Buff-banded Rail skulking under a tussock and soon got the other Buzzards on to it. Great stuff. A quick refuel at Maccas enabled the list to be updated for the first time since Saturday night. 143 was the current score. It wasn't looking good for 180, although there were a large number of ticks still to come. Some good birds had been bagged, but it just felt like there were too many that had been missed. Such is the problem with cycling so far – there's not enough time available to give each site the time it warrants. Thoroughly drained from the baking heat on the swamp, the Buzzards just wanted to finish the race. It felt like the final score was just secondary to this now.



*The Buzzards cycling through the swamp by Craig Bagnall*

Next was a relatively short ride round to Shortland where a collection of decent targets awaited. First stop was at the Newcastle Wetlands Reserve where Freckled

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Ducks had been a long-term resident, but couldn't be located on the Friday oiling mission. It looked like they were going to be absent again until a couple of birds swam out from under the cover of some nearby vegetation, before disappearing once more. The Buzzards had been discussing the lack of an obvious contender for their best bird nomination. This was now clearly it, despite their known presence. Tawny Grassbird was now added to the list of official dips though. Next on the agenda was a ride round to the back of the Wetlands Centre where a roosting Nankeen Night-Heron was soon picked out, followed by the well-oiled nesting Tawny Frogmouth, complete with fluffy white chick. Things were moving along nicely and were now ahead of schedule for the first time during the race.

Upon departing from Shortland Miyagi felt very peculiar all of a sudden. Despite the baking heat he felt chilled and tingly. He had goose bumps and the hairs on his arms were standing on end. He was starting to feel ill and finding it difficult to concentrate. Hopefully it would soon pass. As the Buzzards were leaving Shortland Miyagi had a sudden wave of panic – he'd forgotten about two sitters that should have already been grabbed. Thankfully they would be passing the site a second time, and so a quick detour off Sandgate Road was made to snag Wandering Whistling-Duck and Magpie Goose. Miyagi wasn't feeling any better yet, in fact maybe a little worse.

Riding along Industrial Drive Miyagi pulled up alongside Bagsy, visibly struggling. Bagsy enquired as to what was up and upon explaining his condition it was decided to pull over in the shade – Miyagi was showing signs of heat stress. Off came the helmet and shoes. Water was poured over his head and the coldest fluid available was consumed, in an effort to reduce his body temperature. Around 15 mins were spent lying in the shade resting. This eradicated all of the extra time that the Buzzards had gained on the wetlands leg, but Miyagi was now feeling much closer to normality. They pressed on to Stockton Sand Spit, arriving exactly at the scheduled time of 14:00.

The water levels at the Spit were already lower than comfortable and so the Buzzards pressed on to the beach to begin sifting through the flocks of birds, in an effort to clock up their target species. Immediately after dismounting a bird was seen flying over the water that could have been a candidate Striated Heron. Unfortunately it was too big and was written off as a White-faced Heron. It turned out at the results

announcement that it had been seen by the team that was already in position at the beach, and was in fact an Eastern Reef Egret. Gripped! Pied Oystercatcher was soon spotted, along with Eastern Curlew and Little Tern. On the beach Black-winged Stilt and Red-necked Avocet were present and Mangrove Gerygone was heard calling. Both Godwits then fell, as too did Red Knot and Red-capped Plover. A Gull-billed Tern was then picked out and a few Curlew Sandpipers were spotted amongst the Knot. Cliffy spied a distant Caspian Tern flying up the river and finally a couple of Whimbrel flew in, calling.



*So close but yet so far... Eastern Reef Egret by Steve Merrett*

With no sign of any Grey-tailed Tattlers it was time to move round to the roost site, where a flock was located on the oyster leases. Unfortunately no Terek Sandpipers could be located amongst them. It was now 14:40 and time to be departing, in order to catch the 15:00 ferry from Stockton to Newcastle. The ride normally takes around 15 mins, giving a spare 5 mins safety margin, during which another replenishment of fluid stocks could be undertaken. However, as soon as the Buzzards had mounted their steeds it became clear to Miyagi that something was awry. Looking down he saw he had a flat tyre, probably caused by some three-corned jacks, which had been picked up crossing the grass to reach the Stockton Bridge steps. There was no time to replace the inner tube if the Buzzards were to make the ferry and complete the race, and so Bagsy dug out his space-age pump and the tyre was inflated. The pressure was now mounting to make the ferry and a big riding effort was required. It wasn't looking good.

After making it about halfway to the ferry the tyre had fully deflated again and couldn't be ridden on any further. Another inflation was required and so out came the pump again. There wasn't the time or energy available to fill the tyre as much as would be liked, and

## NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

so the Buzzards set off again hoping that it would be just enough to get them over the line. On the final approaches to the ferry terminal it was becoming apparent that the tyre was close to becoming unrideable. Miyagi stood up out of his saddle to relieve the pressure on the rear wheel and peddled as hard as he could. He was struggling with the pain of riding on a tyre with no pressure and the effort of pedalling whilst standing. Despite this the birding didn't stop and Cliff pointed out a Common Tern hawking over the river, which Miyagi dutifully glanced up for. Cliff and Bagsy rode on ahead to make the ferry and try to grab some precious extra seconds. At last an exhausted Miyagi reached the ferry with no time to spare. No sooner was he on board than the gang plank was hauled in and the horn sounded for departure. Miyagi collapsed into a chair as his mates generously pumped up the forlorn tyre.

The brief crossing was soon over and it was time to saddle up again, this time to reach Nobbys breakwater to look for Ruddy Turnstone. None could be located as the tide was most likely too low for them to still be roosting here. Another inflation of the defunct tyre and on to Newcastle Ocean Baths where at last it would be possible to stop and replace the punctured inner tube. Upon arriving Miyagi and Bagsy set to the task of replacing the tube and the birding duties were left to Cliffy. Unfortunately there weren't really any birds to be seen. No apparent sign of Sooty Oystercatcher or Ruddy Turnstone, and no seabird activity either. Bagsy noticed a fishing trawler coming in and so he finished off the tyre inflation whilst Miyagi erected the scope. There were a number of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters following behind the boat, much to the envy of other teams after the race, who had been greeted with nothing but an empty ocean.



*Wedge-tailed Shearwater by Dick Jenkin*

After 10 mins the flat tyre had been fixed and with only half an hour left until 16:00 things were becoming extremely tight to make the finish line in time. After a quick refill of bottles from the available tap, it was time for Bagsy to shine. He has an unsurpassed knowledge of the streets of Newcastle and we left it up to him to lead the way. He guided the Buzzards through the back streets, avoiding both traffic and traffic lights, pulling the others along at the front of the bike train they had formed. As they raced along at 25 to 30 km/h turning left and then right, the Buzzards were using up what little reserves of energy they had remaining. That didn't stop them grabbing a couple of ticks along the way though, as both Little Wattlebird and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo flew across the road and called (not at the same time). As they heaved their way up and over their final climb, and into the car park at Blackbutt Reserve, there was only around 90 seconds left on the clock. Just enough time to do a quick circuit around the picnic area, tick up Brush Turkey and reach the finish line. Mission accomplished.

As they began the process of recovery and the other teams handed in their lists, the Buzzards were given some grace to finalise their list and tally up their score. 173. As expected, short of the required 180 and almost exactly double the 87 from Saturday night. Nevertheless they were thoroughly pleased with their efforts. They'd taken in a new locality to their core sites, and in doing so had accumulated a total of 11 maiden birds to their bike-Twitch efforts, taking their grand total to 228 species over the five years. They are also set to raise over \$1,000 for the fourth year running, which would take their total raised to over \$6,000 (most of which has been pledged by BMT WBM and its employees, who sit outside of the birding fraternity). The distance ridden on Sunday turned out to be a staggering 107km, making the total ride in the 24 hours some 157km (some 20km longer than the previous highest of around 135km in 2011). This takes the total distance covered over five years to 640km, the best part of 100km of which has been on unsealed roads and tracks.

The 2014 Twitchathon proved to be a huge test of endurance for the Buzzards, covering much more distance than they had done in previous years, and indeed had planned to do this year. Much of the 157km was undertaken in 35°C heat – definitely not ideal riding conditions! In a period of 30 hours (including the three hours prior to and after the race) the Buzzards consumed a total of around 40 litres of fluid, around 15 of which was beer and another 15 was Staminade. They

## Future Club Activities

each only went to the toilet maybe three times during that period. That's an awful lot of sweat! So to the future...

Having really enjoyed branching out and doing something different (within the context of cycling the Twitch) the current consensus amongst the Buzzards is to stick with the bikes but try out a completely new

route to freshen things up. This could come at the cost of beating their personal best score, but will maintain the passion for cycling the Twitch, and hopefully add further to their total list of species seen whilst competing on bikes. However, given the change of heart this year it might be a case of watch this space...

## Miyagi Buzzard

# Future Club Activities

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## Snipe Survey

**21 December 2014**

It's that time of year again – time to get your gum boots on and stomp around your local swamp looking for Snipe. Alternatively, if you don't have a local swamp to count Snipe on then please see Ann Lindsey for advice or meet at the Minmi Pub at 8:00 am to help with the count at Pambalong Nature Reserve.



*Latham's Snipe by John Cockerell*

## Smith's Lake Camp

**23 to 26 January 2015**

Next year's Australia Day weekend camp is to Smith's Lake UNSW Field Station, which comes complete with shower facilities. Directions are as follows:

From Buladelah take the Lakes Way which leaves the Pacific Highway a few Kilometres north of town. At Bungwahl turn right into Seal Rocks Road and proceed towards Seal Rocks for 23km. Turn left at Horse Point Road (a dirt road opposite the Fish Co-op) and proceed straight ahead for 1.6km until you reach the field station.

We have access to a 20 bed dormitory and you may also camp. Cost is \$16 per head per night whether you are

camping or not. It is important to conserve water – taps and showers in the ablution block are on a timer. Drinking and cooking water is supplied at various points. Tanks supply drinking and cooking water at the eastern end of the kitchen building. Do not drink the water from the ablutions block unless boiled for at least 3 minutes.

There is a well-supplied communal kitchen. Users are expected to leave it in a clean and tidy condition when they depart, taking all rubbish with you and cleaning the ablutions block. Beds are double bunk style with a mattress. Bedding and pillows are not supplied.

Canoes are available for use with paddles and life vests. Beware these are large, heavy and cumbersome.

Toilet paper is supplied.

Insect repellent is essential as there are sand flies, mosquitos and ticks. My contact is 0499 015 500 or 4987 2913.

**Lorna Mee (HBOC activities officer)**

## BirdLife Australia Photography Conference

**26 February to 3 March 2015**

**Hunter Wetlands Centre NSW**

HBOC has been selected by BirdLife Photography to hold their conference here in the Hunter, because we have a reputation for being well organised.

On the days of the conference we will be required to take people out from 6:30 until 9:30 on Saturday and Sunday, and again in the afternoon after the business end of the conference.

The pre and post outings are listed for Thursday Feb 26th, Monday March 2nd and Tuesday March 3rd. That includes a pelagic outing on the Thursday & Tuesday.



BirdLife are suggesting we could be expecting 80 people.

The speakers program is simply wonderful if you are interested in nature photography. Cost to Birdlife members is \$120, BirdLife Photography member \$80. By the time you read this in the newsletter it will be too late to register to attend the conference. However, you may attend some of the lectures without paying by offering to help out with the field sessions.



*Lorna getting ready for action by Jim Smart*

We are requiring members with local knowledge to take some photography people to your favourite patch, for

## IBAs in Danger

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On 17<sup>th</sup> November 2014 at the World Parks Congress in Sydney, the Australian Government's Threatened Species Commissioner launched a report detailing the plight of five of Australia's most threatened Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs). These five sites are among 356 IBAs identified around the world as being at high risk of being lost forever according to a global review carried out by BirdLife International.

Unfortunately for us locally, one of those five IBAs in Danger is in the Hunter Region. It's the Lower Hunter Valley IBA, which provides an important refuge for threatened woodland birds, including the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater and the Endangered Swift Parrot. The most important single site within this IBA (the Tomalpin Woodlands) is threatened by industrial development for the Hunter Economic Zone. Recent analysis demonstrates that this may be catastrophic to the Regent Honeyeater, whose numbers have dwindled to less than 400 adults.

one or two outings or more if you wish. Sites within a half hour travel time of Newcastle are preferred, although this can be optional. Some of the people attending will not know a single thing about the Hunter birding sites.

As at today we have 19 volunteers from our HBOC membership to take visiting photographers out to birding locations, to enable them to do some photography. I will be collating a roster of days and people. I am hoping we will have enough volunteers to take out small groups.

For those that have put their names down, thank you so much. I will keep you updated. It should be a very exciting time and I am sure we will be able to show off our very best we have in the Hunter.

Contact me, Jim Smart or Al Richardson (photography conference sub-committee) if you wish to help. Alternatively there is more information on the Birdlife website.

**Lorna Mee**

BirdLife Australia has called on Cessnock Council and the NSW and Federal Governments to urgently protect this important habitat. Let's hope they listen! Also there is a court case currently underway in the Land and Environment Court from which we hope the "right" verdict is reached. Our best wishes go to Mick Roderick who is very much involved in that court case.

What can we do to help? There's a lot been tried already so it's difficult to know what else to suggest. Perhaps if you live in the Cessnock area you could ring up your local MP (state & Federal) and also your local councillor and tell them what you think about the situation.

HBOC recently submitted reports on three IBAs (Hunter Estuary, Lower Hunter Valley and the Barrington Tops & Gloucester Tops) to BirdLife Australia.

**Alan Stuart**

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

- Further observations of Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves at Mungo Brush in early October;
- A Regent Honeyeater present at Galgabba on 11<sup>th</sup> October;
- Breeding activity from White-browed Woodswallows in HEZ on 5<sup>th</sup> November;
- A White-chinned Petrel from the Port Stephens pelagic on 16<sup>th</sup> November;
- A Lesser Sand Plover at Swan Bay on 22<sup>nd</sup> November;
- A Long-toed Stint on Kooragang Dykes on 22<sup>nd</sup> November;
- A White-winged Black Tern at Nobbys Head on 28<sup>th</sup> November;
- A female Orange Chat at Hexham Swamp on 29<sup>th</sup> November;
- Up to six Little Curlews at Hexham Swamp on 30<sup>th</sup> November; and
- A Cook's Petrel seen from the Swansea pelagic on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

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
Australian Wood Duck	2+4dy	21/10-9/11/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Chestnut Teal	2+5dy	8/10/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Galah	10+2dy	11/11/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	3	4/11/2014	Bulahdelah	D. Atkinson
Golden-headed Cisticola	2ny	26/10/2014	Hexham Swamp	C. & R. Goodenough
Grey Butcherbird	2+3dy	29/10-12/11/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Little Wattlebird	2+2dy	1/10/2014	Hamilton	C. & R. Goodenough
Noisy Miner	4+1dy	7/11/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Northern Mallard	1	12/11/2014	Throsby Creek	T. Clarke
Olive-backed Oriole	nest+eggs	10/10/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Red-kneed Dotterel	3+3dy	28/10/2014	Tomago	A. Gooden
Southern Emu-Wren	1+3dy	28/10/2014	Tomago	A. Gooden
Willie Wagtail	2+2dy	28/10/2014	Tomago	A. Gooden
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	50	12/09/2014	Cardiff	R. Smith

## Club Activities December 2014 to February 2015

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
<b>DECEMBER 2014</b>			
Tuesday 16 December	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Saturday 20 December	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30 am Ash Island 8.00 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago
Sunday 21 December	Latham’s Snipe survey at Pambalong NR and other locations	8.00 am Minmi Pub	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
<b>JANUARY 2015</b>			
Saturday 17 January	Hunter Wader Survey	6.30 am Ash Island 7:00 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago
Tuesday 20 January	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Australia Day Long Wkend 24-26 January	Long Weekend Camp	Camp at Smiths Lake - Uni of NSW Field Study Station	Lorna Mee 4987 2913 mobile 0499 015 500
<b>FEBRUARY 2015</b>			
Tuesday 3 February	Mid-week Outing – Stockton Sandspit	7.30am Under the bridge	Judi Thomas 4952 2960
Wednesday 4 February	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Mick Roderick 0421761237 All members welcome
Wednesday 11 February	<b>CBOC (Pat Thorn) outing to SSS/HWC</b>		Assistance from HBOC members would be appreciated
<b>Wednesday 11 February</b>	<b>AGM &amp; Club Night</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland</b>	<b>Guest Speaker: Laura Rayner</b> <b>“Conserving woodland birds: the need for population data in evidence-based planning”</b>
Sunday 15 February	Field Outing – Allyn River	For details of meeting time and location contact the program leader or check HBOC’s website	Rowley Smith 4964 1389
Tuesday 17 February	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Friday 20 February	Port Stephens Waterbird Survey	Various locations as directed. Numbers strictly limited.	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 <a href="mailto:almarosa@bigpond.com">almarosa@bigpond.com</a>
Saturday 21 February	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30 am Ash Island 10.00 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago
Sat 28 Feb – Sun 1 Mar	Birdlife Australia Photography Group conference	Hunter Wetlands Centre. Contact conference sub-committee for details	Lorna Mee 4987 2913 / 0499 015 500 Jim Smart 4933 7761 Allan Richardson 4977 2508