



Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Issue No. 6/15 December 2015

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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

A Grey Plover at Stockton Sandspit on 31st October was one of a number of interesting Wader sightings in the Hunter over the past two months.

Photo by Chris Herbert



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President's Column

I'm writing this President's Column sitting next to a penguin. I am, really!



They say that "travel broadens the mind". I like to think of it in a different way – that it diminishes ignorance and misconceptions (which are usually preconceptions). I suppose that this is similar to "broadening the mind", but the point is that there's no match for experience and I think that travelling is powerful because it becomes an amalgam of different experiences.

In many ways I think that birding is like travel – not just because we travel to see birds (which we do of course; and birders are generally very well-travelled people) but because it's all about the journey and not the destination. Whether it's building a list, building knowledge and understanding, or building a case for conserving a species or a habitat, it is a continuous journey that we undertake as birders.

Being president of this fabulous club has also been an extremely fulfilling experience, but this part of my birding journey is nearing an end. It is just one chapter however. I will reflect upon the experience in my final President's Column in the next newsletter.

I would like to extend the warmest wishes to the membership and their friends and families for Christmas, New Year and the summer break. Safe travels and enjoyable birding to all.

Mick Roderick

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Crosly Carpenter of Eleebana
Sue Gould of Coomba Park
Mark Jolly of Broke
Ling Lan of Maryville

John Lawson of Belmont North
Evelyn & Bob McDonald of New Lambton
Pravin Nahar of Warners Bay

We hope to see you at club meetings and outings.

Health and Safety Awareness for Activities

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

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

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

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

AGM in February 2016 and Membership Renewal

The Annual General Meeting will be held at the Hunter Wetlands Centre, Shortland, on Wednesday 10 February 2016. 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 3 February 2016.

Also a reminder that with the New Year comes the renewal of Club membership. Membership fees are due on 1st January. Please ensure that you have paid your annual fees by the April Club Meeting, Wednesday 13 April 2016. 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 2015 are not due for renewal until 2017.

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.

November 2015 Celebrations

Seven members of HBOC were invited by Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project to celebrations to mark the 21st anniversary of the signing of the Sister Wetland Relationship between Newcastle, Port Stephens and Kushiro City in Japan.



Locals and visitors alike clearly enjoying themselves!

This important relationship was formed on 7 November 1994 among the communities of Kooragang Wetlands, Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia and Associated Wetlands (near Newcastle and Port Stephens) and Kushiro Marsh, Kiritappu Marsh, Lake Akkeshi and Bekanbeushi Marsh. Latham's Snipe is the critical migratory shorebird that links these wetlands – it breeds in Kushiro Wetlands where it displays on fence posts, unlike its shy and self-concealing habit in Australia.

HBOC members who attended have all been involved in long-term monitoring of shorebirds in the Hunter

Estuary. The re-signing of the sister Wetlands Relationship took place at a morning tea at Newcastle City Hall on 6 November 2015 and in the evening members attended a cocktail party hosted by the Mayor of Kushiro at Crown Plaza. The next day a river cruise to Ash Island to commemorate the event was enjoyed in glorious weather by locals and a contingent of Kushiro citizens who had enjoyed the hospitality of home stays with Port Stephens residents for the past couple of days. Language barriers were negotiated by much pointing and laughing as binoculars were handed around so that visitors could see birds on Stockton Sandspit and Kooragang Dykes. Obliging the Eastern Curlews took to the air and later a Sea-Eagle and Osprey showed themselves.

As if that was not enough, Hunter Wetlands Centre celebrated its 30th anniversary on Saturday 7 November 2015 with a delicious afternoon tea provided by volunteers, and the installation of 48 solar panels which will reduce power bills by \$4,000 p.a. Foundation members Max Maddock, Brian Gilligan and Kevin McDonald were all there, and the Strategic Plan for the next five years was launched. The wetlands looked fabulous in the afternoon sun and speeches were accompanied by the whistles of the Wandering Whistling-Ducks and the honks of the Magpie Geese.

Ann Lindsey

Volunteering at Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary

September 2015, Central Kimberleys

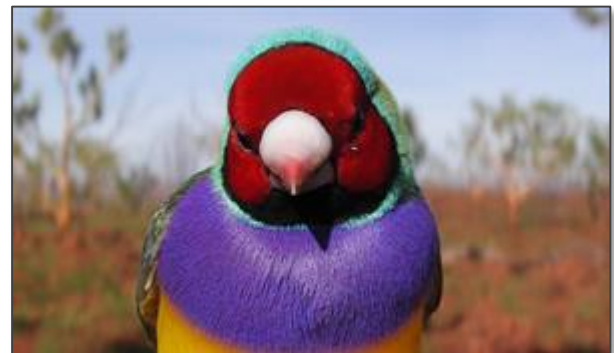
A couple of friends, Ted Nixon from Sydney and Pat Burrows and I from Gloucester, took part in the annual surveys at Mornington for finches, pigeons, parrots and quail over a week in September 2015. This was at the beginning of the build-up when the creeks are drying up, leaving a string of waterholes at which these species come to drink. The surveys shed light on how the effects of annual weather, burning regimes, feral controls and elimination or reduction in grazing are influencing the breeding success of these seed dependent species. So far the results are positive.

We started our trip at the famous Broome Bird Observatory, which gave us a few days to finalise hire of a 4WD with fridge, and purchase of food et cetera needed for two weeks camping, and a chance to see the newly arrived waders and mangrove specials in Roebuck Bay. Always interesting to spend time here, relish the gorgeous ever-changing colours of the beach, cliffs, mud flats and sea in early morning and evening light, visit the local hotspots (sewage works for one), adjust to the different bird species and their calls and get acclimatised. We got rather lost on Roebuck Plains trying to find Lake Eda, ending up at Lake Champion instead, which was fine as we had great views of Wood Sandpipers.

We took our time en route to Mornington, camping a night at Windjana Gorge (superb black and red cliffs of the Leopold Range looming threateningly in the evening light), with a very early morning walk into the gorge to see the birds before the noisy crowds arrived, and admire the large number of Freshwater Crocodiles lined up on the creek sandbars. The next campsite was a smaller and prettier one at Silent Grove, preceded by a midday walk into Lennard River Gorge, down a rocky path to a series of waterholes with a good selection of the local birds, and next day Bell Gorge, a much larger stretch of clear cool water with waterfalls and more of the same birds - and then a busload of tourists.

On the 90k track leading into Mornington from the Gibb River Road, we stopped for lunch at a creek and were delighted to see Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos fly over and, more distant, a Black-breasted Buzzard. Arriving at Mornington HQ we were introduced to a bewildering number of staff, scientists and students, shown where

we could erect our tents and told we could use the staff kitchen block which included a large cold room (very important as the midday temperatures rose to the high 30s), and tourist restaurant and bar, at which we were granted staff prices. As volunteer surveyors, we were given daily breakfasts, a farewell BBQ with Trivia competition and use of laundry. The camp site which ran along Annie's Creek, was lined with pandanus, palms and paperbarks and had resident Buff-sided Robins and Purple-crowned Fairy-wrens, visiting Crimson, Long-tailed and Gouldian finches, and was a delightfully cool spot to spend a hot afternoon sitting in the shade, reading or having a dip in the water while keeping an eye on the birds.



Gouldian Finch – one of the star attractions

Our volunteering consisted solely of six early morning two hour survey sessions. Sounds easy? However, it meant getting up at any time between 3.30am and 4am in the pitchy black. This was because some of the sites were quite a distance from head office and all the volunteers had to be delivered to their designated sites and settled in by 5.15am latest. We were loaded into an Australian made retired armoured army vehicle or, if you were lucky, a 4WD in reasonable condition, and driven off in the dark to somewhere out there then off-loaded in twos or threes and told to follow the pink ribbons to your site, in the dark, each person having a different waterhole along a creek line. Here you made yourself comfortable with a view onto the patch where you guessed most birds would come to drink and where you would be reasonably unobtrusive. You had to record the number of any of the four above mentioned species that actually drank at the waterhole, not those that just landed, stood around and then flew off. It was assumed that if they didn't drink there, they would at another

Volunteering at Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary waterhole and counting them would increase the chance of double counting.

By this time, maybe 5am, there would be a glimmer of light on the horizon, it would be a bit chilly but warming up once the sun penetrated the creek side after 6am (why one needed a warm jacket despite midday temperatures over 30) and birds would be starting to call. Blue-winged Kookaburras, Double-barred, Long-tailed and Crimson Finches, Willie Wagtails, fairy-wrens and a variety of honeyeaters were the early birds. All the different species made their presence known, calling and singing. Time went surprisingly fast once the birds were active. I hoped for Gouldian Finches or Purple-crowned Fairy-wrens but usually got displays of hawking Brown and Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters, a few more common finches and pigeons and a fly-over of Red-winged Parrots, Northern Rosellas or Variegated Lorikeets. Paperbark Flycatchers called incessantly. At one site, an Azure Kingfisher caught a fish almost at my feet! At another, small family parties of Brown Quail snuck down to the water, drank a bit and then sat in a friendly huddle before retreating. A sudden stillness and silence indicated the presence of a Brown Goshawk or other raptor; then slowly life would return to normal and the birds to the important business of finding breakfast.

At 7.30am we followed our pink tapes back to the track and waited with others for pick-up and return to HQ for breakfast. This was a great selection of cereals, muesli, fruit, bread and accompaniments. We were once greeted with bacon and eggs, and another time with pancakes, but since eggs were limited by the ability of the local chickens to produce them, and it was getting too hot for the chooks to lay, we usually didn't bother with cooked breakfasts. After that we were free to do whatever we liked.

Most evenings there were talks given by specialists on the scientific work being conducted, the burning programs, results of studies to date and future plans, not only at Mornington but at other properties owned or managed by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. A recent acquisition includes management of Charnley River/Artesian Range Wildlife Sanctuary, on the northern side of the Gibb River Road, a vast area that finishes at the north-west Australian coast and protects rare species such as the Black Grasswren, Golden-backed Tree-rat and Northern Quoll. Co-operation is conducted with neighbouring properties on burn-off programs in the early dry season, very necessary to reduce the danger of vast damaging wild fires in the late dry season.

We visited the various gorges within Mornington on the Fitzroy River, still a free flowing river lined with trees and nicely birdie – at Cadjeput Lagoon, a Merten's Sand Monitor quite happily sunned itself a meter from me; a trip with the students and staff to Lake Gladstone on the savannah grasslands gave views from the bird hide of a large group of Brolga and all the usual waterbirds, and was a welcome stretch of water in this very dry landscape. At Sir John Gorge we had super views of three White-quilled Rock Pigeons. Our final survey was on the Hann River where I had a single Black-fronted Dotterel at my site, but the others 50 to 100 meters away got all the interesting species such as Bustards, Pictorella Finches and Budgerigars.



The tropical savannah habitat of the Mornington Sanctuary

Then it was farewell Mornington and off to the Mt Barnett Roadhouse for essential supplies for our final days camping. The Imintji Store at which we had been advised we could fill up with diesel, was closed and had been closed for several years, so Mt. Barnett was the nearest fuel stop, the next being Derby. They sold good coffee, hot food, ice creams and excellent fruit, so after refreshments there we headed to Charnley River, camping one night and visiting the waterholes. Ted put up a Spotted Nightjar and an immature Pallid Cuckoo and there were Peacocks at the homestead.

A road kill Northern Nailtail Wallaby on the Gibb River Road was lunch for a Wedge-tailed Eagle. We had seen this squashed wallaby on our way to Mornington seven days previously and here was the eagle tucking into it quite happily. We got close-up photos as it reluctantly moved to one side.

Club Activity Reports

At Derby we had a very welcome lunch at the Jetty Cafe (the only place open on a Sunday) followed by a successful twitch in the mangroves, finding all the mangrove 'specials' within twenty minutes. A quick look at the Derby Wetlands at 2pm was unexciting owing to time of day, and then back to the BBO for two nights. The next day at high tide we 'wader watched' and saw over 4,000 waders roosting below us on a rocky sandy point, amongst which were Eastern Curlews, Terrick, Curlew and Broad-billed sandpipers, many Red and Great knots and Greater Sandpipers, and a single Little Curlew. Brahminy and Whistling Kites put the waders up from time to time but they all settled again in much the same order as before.

We made another attempt to get to Lake Eda, this time successfully. Here were hundreds of Brolga, along the edge of the lake and scattered over the savannah

grassland, a single Swinhoe's Snipe busily fed along the edge of the water 15 meters from us, one Australian Pratincole posed for photographs and, always nice to see, a small flock of Varied Sittellas foraged in the paperbarks.

Our final night was spent at the Kimberley Klub Backpackers in Broome (very efficiently run, economical and at this period in the tourist season, quiet) as we had an early morning departure the next day. A quick trip to Broome Port to see some Brown Boobies and then a delicious dinner at 18 Degrees (the restaurant highly recommended by BBO people) and were very happy to find next day that MacDonalds was open at 6am for coffee.

Penny Drake-Brockman

Photographs courtesy of www.australianwildlife.org

Club Activity Reports

Kurri Kurri Woodlands

18 October 2015

A 7am start had us at Kurri Maccas, with many sensible folk fortifying themselves with a coffee. It gets you out early for a 7am start but it's worth it once you can drag the bones out of bed...

All up 23 people were present and willing, although unfortunately someone wound up at the wrong Maccas. We started with an overcast morning and these conditions prevailed for a few hours, with small showers throughout most of the morning – not drenching rain, but a nuisance, as visibility was low.

The "cul-de-sac" was productive at this hour with Peaceful Dove and Pallid Cuckoo both close by. The visit was rounded out with a nice fly past of three Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos.

"Button-quail junction" was productive but we probably had a few too many people for Button-quails to saunter out! It didn't help that a few recreational motor bike riders drove through as we arrived either – any self-respecting Button-quail would have stayed in the bush... Brown Treecreepers were active however and gave us great sightings – not a common bird for the Lower Hunter.

A Black-chinned Honeyeater called once or twice, but any chance sighting of the bird was missed by most. This was one of a total of 14 species of Honeyeater that were recorded on the day. Other highlights of the trip included:

- Little Lorikeets were prominent all day, as were Mistletoebird;
- Four different species of Cuckoo recorded; and
- Six species of nesting birds – either with dependent young or seen on the nest.



Nesting Dusky Woodswallow by Margaret Clarke

A total of 72 species was recorded for the day. Despite the drive in convoy all around HEZ (definitely a Cooks tour of HEZ with the many tracks), we did not lose anyone. I suggest we car pool even more – there are

Club Activity Reports

places for four people in each car. How about it folks?

We could take it in turns...



Brown Treecreepers by George Voss

Lunch was had at the dam with nesting Little Pied Cormorants giving us a treat.

Lorna Mee

Woods Point Morisset

3 November 2015

On a very grey morning 22 birders met at the entrance to Lake Macquarie Conservation Area to walk along the track to Woods Point (this area was previously part of the hospital grounds).

Very soon we saw Mistletoebirds in the She-oaks which line the edge of Pourmalong Creek. A male Satin Bowerbird flew across the track, then we were pleased to see three Superb Fairy-wren chicks sitting together on a low branch, being fed by their parents. We were also able to observe the Ospreys nest (up on the nearby hill) and to see an Osprey perched on a nearby branch.

We continued along the track towards the lake and other birds seen included Brown Cuckoo-dove, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorikeet, Eastern Rosella, Eastern Yellow Robin, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird, Yellow and Brown Thornbills,

Lewin's and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Australasian Figbird, Striated Heron, White-faced Heron, Australian White Ibis, Pacific Baza, White-bellied Sea-Eagle and Crested Tern.

For our outing in this area we recorded 52 species seen and an additional 12 heard. After a late morning tea some of the group continued on to Dora Creek.

Val and Don Moon

Green Wattle Creek

15 November 2015

Birds love getting out and about after a bout of heavy rain, and so do birdwatchers. A small gap in the heavy early morning clouds above the Raymond Terrace McDonalds revealed up to 25 club members.

After explaining the directions to Green Wattle Creek, the convoy of vehicles soon departed for the scenic country drive north-west to Butterwick, on the slopes at the edge of the lower Paterson Valley floodplain. A Peregrine Falcon seen on the power lines on the bridge over the Williams River indicated a good day to come.

The Crown Reserve at Green Wattle Creek has a Pony Club surrounded by woodland. The Club site is often the best location for Jacky Winters and Speckled Warblers. It was a quiet start apart from the resident Fuscous Honeyeaters, but a distant calling Cicadabird and Wonga Pigeons promised a productive morning, so the group set off on the walk towards the paddocks in the south west corner of the site, where the leader had promised the best woodland birds.

Eastern Koels, Sacred Kingfishers and Leaden Flycatchers made their presence known on the forest walk as well as Fuscous, Yellow-faced and Scarlet Honeyeaters. On reaching the paddocks, Speckled Warblers and Jacky Winters provided good sightings for everyone, with White-throated Gerygones also passing by.

On the return circuit walk back through the forest calling Brush Cuckoos made for challenging spotting. Although not much more than a grey outline in the treetops, it was instructive to hear their calls.

After morning tea the group walked alongside the creek. The walk has been made possible by the flood earlier this year that washed away the thick undergrowth. There were terrific close sightings of colourful tree canopy species including Scarlet and White-naped Honeyeaters, as well as scrub species such as Black-

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2015

faced Monarchs and Brown Gerygones. Meanwhile, patient viewing back at the Pony Club revealed an active Yellow-faced Honeyeater nest.

Philip Slack

Hunter Wetlands Centre, Shortland

1 December 2015

A hot day was forecast when 34 members and one visitor from Port Macquarie attended the outing to Shortland Wetlands Centre. Before we even went through the gates Tony Iveson spotted a family of three Tawny Frogmouths in the car park, and another family of four was later spotted near the egret colony. Waterbirds were in abundance with 50 Wandering Whistling-Ducks and two Pink-eared Ducks, as well as many of the usual suspects. One lone Black-winged Stilt was on the Water Ribbon Pond and a single Latham's Snipe was flushed.

There was plenty of activity at the egret colony, with 35 Great, 10 Intermediate, 8 Little and countless Cattle Egrets busy at their nests. The Australian White Ibis were equally busy, and were joined by a single Straw-necked.

The raptors were circling overhead, with four Whistling Kites, a Little Eagle, a Swamp Harrier and an Eastern Osprey.



HBOC Mid-weekers out in full force, and full sun!

Bush birds were not so easy to find however and were only in small numbers, but with all those eyes spotting we managed to see 73 species, and hear seven more.

We finished the day with lunch on the verandah, where we were able to watch the Royal Spoonbills flying in one-by-one to a total of 48. It was an enjoyable end of year for the mid-year group.

Margaret Stewart

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2015

31 October – 1 November 2015

The information that I have to hand suggests that 32 teams (104 participants) took part in the Great Race. This field of 13 Champagne, 11 Main Race and 6 Children's Teams has once again come up with some spectacular results given that many teams were thunder-storm challenged either in the first or second day of the Twitch, depending on where they were competing. The preliminary results suggest that about \$15,500 is known to be expected to be raised, however we shall wait and see once the sponsorship funds are finalised.

It is not until I receive the species lists and have them checked that it will be possible for me to say who are the confirmed winners. However the provisional winners and second place getters in the Main Race were the Dodgy Drongos and Hunter Home Brewers (again!!!!), and the Fly By Nightjars and the Back o'Bouke Buzzards shared Third Prize. In the Champagne race, the winners

are the Raven On, the Lousy Jacks and the Night Poirots. Provisionally the prize for the team in the Main Race that saw the highest ratio of birds per km travelled other than the 1st to 3rd prize-winners, is the Black-necked Stalkers, while the similar prize in the Champagne Race is the Which is it? In the Children's teams, the Cantankerous Kites won the Little Curlews Race, while Fantastic Fledglings have won the Dollarbirds Section. The Rare Bird prize, the Lucky Twitchers Prize & the Biggest Dip Prize are yet to be determined.

On behalf of the Twitchathon Team

Alan Morris, Twitchathon Co-ordinator

Dodgy Drongos Report

After winning last year's race on our home turf, the Drongos felt like a change of scenery so decided to hit the books (googlemaps) and search for an alternative western run. Several criteria needed to be met and

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2015

eventually we decided that the #S&+@ area ticked the most boxes as it contained more 'western' species, contained several habitat types, had a sewage treatment works and was within striking distance of the rainforest.

On the Thursday morning Maxie and the Co-pilot joined Robbie and me for the drive west, talking strategy, oiling and worrying scenarios as we went. The afternoon and all day Friday was spent oiling and whilst the birding was good the birds just didn't seem reliable enough to give us any confidence.....and then came the rain! We awoke on race morning to find heavy rain and gusty winds. This went on for hours and the mood had reached the 'should we head to Borah?' point. But with great relief come 1pm the dark clouds had mostly cleared and the sun began to shine.

As 4pm approached we staked out the key species and as the alarm chimed we quickly ticked off Hooded Robin, Willie Wagtail and Wedge-tailed Eagle. Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Singing Honeyeater, Southern Whiteface, White-winged Triller, Jacky, Blue Bonnet, Crimson Chat, Pallid Cuckoo and Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo soon followed. We raced back to the car in record time and set off south. Emu and Yellow-throated Miner were the next to fall and a quick stop at the T junction resulted in Little Eagle and a Painted Honeyeater flyby. The treeless paddocks gave us our best birds for the afternoon with Australian Pratincole, Brown Songlark, Horsfield's Bushlark and two Plum-headed Finches seen.

As we continued south the list kept growing...Black-fronted Dotterel, Peaceful Dove, Australian Ringneck, Apostlebird, Masked and White-browed Woodswallow, Little Friarbird, Brown Falcon, Black Kite, Crested Bellbird, Brown Treecreeper, Zebra Finch and Diamond Firetail. The billabong produced Yellow-billed Spoonie,



There's nothing like observing elite athletes in action!

Restless Flycatcher, Rainbow Bee-eater, Cockatiel and Spotted Bowerbird, but the sewage works was very disappointing with only the common ducks and Pink-ears making an appearance. We bypassed the town and headed straight for the state forest where we managed to see all our targeted small passerines: Weebill, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Western Gerygone, Red-capped Robin, White-browed Babbler, Splendid Fairy-wren and Brown-headed Honeyeater. Our timing had been so good that we were able to waste 30min trying (successfully) to see an Inland Thornbill!! Spotted Harrier was seen cruising the paddock opposite. We headed back into town adding Blackbird and Brown Honeyeater and then we started our long drive east. At this point we were sitting on 98 species, our lowest Saturday score in years!

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, White Ibis, Barking and Barn Owl and Tawny Frogmouth were all spotlighted on the way to the rainforest but unfortunately due to time restraints we didn't search for Owlet-nightjar or Boobook. Even more frustrating was dipping on Sooty Owl as only two in the team heard the early morning bomb.

Once again the rainforest dawn chorus was amazing! The first bird of course was Yellow Robin but the Bassian Thrush and Spectacled Monarch weren't far behind. Without leaving our sleeping bags we added Noisy Pitta, Catbird, White-headed Pigeon, Russet-tailed Thrush and Fan-tailed Cuckoo. Yellow-throated, White-browed and Large-billed Scrubwren, Black-faced Monarch, Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo, Cuckoo-dove, Wonga Pigeon and Logrunner were all seen around the camping ground. As we headed up the hill to the ridge we flushed an Emerald Dove off the road which landed a little further up and allowed excellent views. Riflebird, Crimson Rosella, King Parrot and Satin Bowerbird were on the ridge and a lonely Brush Turkey was seen at the guest house.

We left the rainforest very happy and with a decent score under our belts. Along the road south we got the typical 'northern' species: Koel, Channel-bill, Coucal, Needle-tail, Leaden Flycatcher, Torresian Crow and best of all, a male Red-backed Fairy-wren!! Speckled Warbler, Buff-rumped Thornbill and White-throated Gerygone were also added. Clarence Town had Grey Goshawk and Regent Bowerbird, whilst Seaham finished our trifecta of Babbler, Night Heron, Little Wattlebird and Scaly-breasted Lorikeet. Green Wattle Creek had some of our

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2015

missing 'Borah' birds like Fuscous and White-naped Honeyeater and Little Lorikeet.

Next we headed to the Maitland floodplain and easily found the well-oiled Stubble Quail and Banded Lapwings. The Co-pilot's brilliance resulted in us adding Red-kneed Dotterel, Latham's Snipe and Goldfinch in quick succession and we left Maitland very happy indeed.

After dipping on my dead set cert Baza (inside drongo joke) we headed for what we were hoping would bag us the rest of our 'western' birds but sadly HEZ let us down a little. We still added White-cheeked Honeyeater, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Dusky Woodswallow, Shrike-tit and Brush Cuckoo and as we left the scorecard was totaled...200!

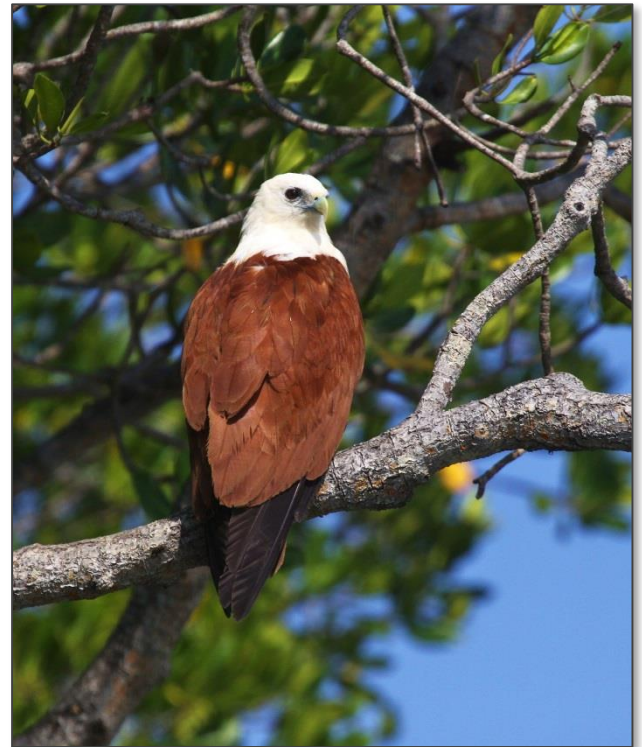
The Hunter Expressway saw us at Lenaghans in record time but once again the birding had started to slow with the only decent birds being Intermediate Egret, Little Grassbird and Swamp Harrier. We did a quick trip to Bunnings for Mallard and scored Wandering Whistlers in the process. The geese were ticked at Shortland and then it was off to Hexham where we met some hoons with binoculars, Tawny Grassbird, Chat, Sharpies, Little Egret, Caspian Tern, Hobby, Collared Sparrowhawk and finally, Black-winged Stilt. As we were leaving the swamp the Co-pilot had another moment...spotting the Australasian Bittern that had flushed from the reeds! What a cracker!!!

Robbie Drongo got our heart rates going when he spotted a Brahminy Kite cruising up the river as we crossed Hexham Bridge. Grahamstown Dam had the usual Musk Duck and Great-crested Grebe but the award for best bird goes to the Cicadabird that Maxie Drongo heard over the Richardson Road traffic! We made a mad dash across the road and through the sporting complex and eventually located the pair which was a lifer for Robbie and a fantastic addition to the list.

Next stop was the foreshore where some good luck saw us in and out in record speed. Sooty Oystercatcher, Turnstone and three species of Tern were on the rocks and many Wedge-tailed Shearwaters passed by out at sea.

Time for the sand spit and the lagoon was full of birds.....and the mound full of birders! All the usual suspects were there but we needed the scope to spot

the Pied Oystercatchers on the dykes opposite. Mangrove Gerygone called and in the mangroves towards Fern Bay we saw Whimbrel, Tereks and Tattler. Golden Plover and Stint were roosting on the rocks along the Stockton foreshore and another stroke of Co-pilot brilliance saw us return to the sand spit to see our last bird for the race, three Double-barred Finches.



Brahminy Kite "cruising up the river"...

Off to Blackbutt with the boys in the back reviewing our list and when the total was announced the Co-pilot demanded a recount! 248 species in 24 hours! We had smashed our previous PB by 13 species. However, we weren't getting cocky as the Lake Cargelligo boys were bound to come in strong. It was an absolute shock to find we had pipped the Brewers by one bird again!! Everyone loves a close competition but this is getting ridiculous! The Drongos are still in shock. Is this the pinnacle? We'll see what next year brings.

Well done to everyone involved in coordinating the race and an even bigger well done to my fellow Drongos for their patience and enthusiasm. Until next year.....UP THE DRONGOS!

Grant Brosie

Future Club Activities

Snipe Survey

20 December 2015

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 Greg Little for advice or meet at the Minmi Pub at 8:00 am to help with the count at Pambalong Nature Reserve. However, given the deterioration of this site over the years and the lack of suitable Snipe habitat, it is likely that alternative sites will be visited.



Latham's Snipe by John Cockerell

Harrington Camp

23 to 26 January 2016

Next year's Australia Day weekend camp is to the far north of the Region, at Harrington in the Manning Valley. There will be no formal booking of sites for this camp – it is a case of "sort yourself out". The advised approach is to book into the Big 4 site in Harrington. There should be no problem getting vans and/or tents booked in, but those wishing to book a cabin may want to get something sorted out sooner rather than later.

Alternatively, people can seek out accommodation options other than the Big 4. However, being close by would be advantageous. The format of the camp will be to have a number of organised trips to sites in and around the area, such as Cattai Wetlands. Also, as always, people are more than welcome to do their own thing. Please see Alan Stuart if you require any further information.

Nesting Black Kites – a First for the Hunter Region

A series of events recently led to the discovery and final confirmation of the first ever Black Kite nesting record for the Hunter Valley.

While checking out bird life from the H.H. White Bridge over the Goulburn River near Martindale on the 13th October, Bruce Watts found a raptor nest. Bruce could see a downy nestling in the nest and adult Black Kites were roosting and flying around in the area. However during the time Bruce observed the birds neither adult visited the nest. As no other raptor that could have been the owners of the nest came into the area during his stay, it seemed very likely that the nest did in fact belong to the Black Kites.

Bruce mentioned his findings to Mick Roderick and on the 27th October Mick, Craig Anderson and Joel Stibbard

stopped at the nest site to see if they would have better luck in discovering who the nest belonged to. Frustratingly, once again, although a pair of Black Kites were in the vicinity, neither visited the nest leaving Mick, Craig and Joel with very strong evidence as to who the nestlings parents were, but not a one hundred percent confirmation.

By coincidence I found out about the nest on the same day whilst out birding with Bruce. After contacting Mick and hearing about their findings I decided to take a look myself. So on the 29th October I set myself up with a telescope aimed on the nest and binoculars in hand, at the best vantage point I could find – on the bridge. The following are the notes I made of my observations as they happened:

Nesting Black Kites – a First for the Hunter Region

- 7.10am. Chick – can barely see top of head & back. 1 Adult perched in tree 100 mtr W of nest.
- 8.45am. 2 Adults flew in from SE. Flew/Soared around for a minute or so then flew away. No reaction from either Chick in nest or perched Adult.



- 9.00am. Single bird returned. Bird in tree took off. Both soared around for 10mins. 1 bird gained height and soared away. Other bird still soaring around nest area.
- 9.20am. Remaining bird landed in tree 150mtrs W of nest.
- 10.15am. Bird takes off and soars around locally at just above tree top height.
- 10.26am. Another adult arrives. Bird does mock stoop on bird already present. Both soar around the area in close proximity to each other.
- 10.35am. Only 1 adult soaring. Other gone again.
- 10.40am. Bird returns.
- 10.43am. 1 bird lands in tree away from nest. 2nd bird still soaring.
- 10.51am. Nestling watching adult as it soars near nest.
- 11.00am to 11.10am. Both birds hunting low over riverbanks. 1 lands in tree away from nest. The other catches something and lands in a tree. 1 min later it takes off and flew over nest

with prey. Bird eats the prey itself while on the wing and drops what it didn't want.

- 11.20am. 1 bird perched. 2nd gone again.
- 11.41am. 2nd bird back. Lands in same tree as other bird. They call to each other. (Not loudly).
- 11.45am. 2nd bird takes off and lands on nest. Stays approx 20secs. As it takes off another chick seen in nest, so there are 2 nestlings.
- 11.50am. Both chicks seen eating. Parents perched in separate trees.
- 12.08pm. Both chicks settled down. Both adults soaring around nest site/area.

As you can see, it took a while but I did manage to achieve my objective and walk away a very happy chappie.

Later news on the nesting Kites followed when Dan Williams and Stew Betts, on 15th November, discovered the young had fledged and the nest was empty.

Another interesting side to the Black Kite nest is that Zebra Finches had taken up residence. Several birds were observed around the nest and from my vantage point I could see two pairs going in and out on a regular basis, which suggested they were feeding young.



Peter Alexander

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@yahogroups.com.au . You can choose either to receive individual emails or a single daily digest. Alternatively, email me at scythrops@yahoo.com.au and I'll sort it out for you – what could be easier?! 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:

- The appearance of a Beach Stone-curlew at Stockton Sand Spit on 1st October, staying for several weeks;
- A Western Gerygone observed at the Singleton Training Area on 2nd October;
- Painted Honeyeater at Medhurst Bridge reported throughout much of the period;
- Mixed flock of White-browed and Masked Woodswallows observed over North Lambton on 4th October;
- Two Rose-crowned Fruit-doves present at Mungo Brush on 4th October, present until at least 18th (5 birds on 16th);
- A sighting of the Radjah Shelduck at Bulahdelah on 8th October;
- A Little Friarbird observed at Bunnan on 14th October;
- A Blue-billed Duck seen at Walka Water Works on 16th October (found to be a pair, present for the duration);
- A Kelp Gull reported at Stockton Beach on 17th October and at Old Bar on 13th November;
- A Wood Sandpiper present on Ash Island for over a week, first observed on 23rd October;
- A Grey Plover recorded at Stockton Sandspit on 31st October;
- A Pectoral Sandpiper present at Stockton Sandspit on 12th November;
- A Brolga observed in the Martindale Valley on 15th November, with Plum-headed Finch also present nearby;
- Two Crimson Chats (male and female) seen at Bengalla on 16th November; and
- Fifteen Gang-gang Cockatoos in Cessnock on 22nd November.

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 |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Cicadabird | 1 | 11/11/2015 | Bishops Bridge | T. Kendall |
| Fairy Penguin | 1 | 10/11/2015 | Shoal Bay | N. Fraser |
| Grey Goshawk | 1 | 26/10/2015 | Rankin Park | T. Kendall |
| Grey Goshawk | 1 | 6/11/2015 | Rankin Park | T. Kendall |
| Leaden Flycatcher | pr. on nest | 11/11/2015 | Bishops Bridge | T. Kendall |
| Noisy Pitta | 1 | 9/11/2015 | Green Point | G. Tong |
| Eastern Osprey | fledged | Oct-Nov 2015 | Speers Point | A. Gooden |
| Southern Boobook | 1 | 5-6/11/2015 | Rankin Park | T. Kendall |
| Topknot Pigeon | c.100 | 8/11/2015 | Bretti | N. Fraser |
| White-fronted Tern | 1 | 10/11/2015 | Newcastle Baths | A. Richardson |

Club Activities December 2015 to February 2016

| DATE | EVENT | MEETING PLACE & TIME | CONTACT |
|--|---|--|--|
| DECEMBER 2015 | | | |
| Saturday 12 December | Hunter Wader Survey | 9.00 am Ash Island 9.30 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 15 December | Tomago Wetland Survey | 7.30am Entry to Tomago House | Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm |
| Sunday 20 December | Latham’s Snipe survey at Pambalong NR and other locations | 8.00 am Minmi Pub | Greg Little 0414 562 169 |
| JANUARY 2016 | | | |
| Saturday 9 January | Hunter Wader Survey | 9.00 am Ash Island 9:30 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 Please ring to confirm |
| Australia Day Long Weekend 23-26 January | Long Weekend Camp | Camp at Harrington, please arrange your own accommodation, e.g. Big 4 | Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 |
| FEBRUARY 2016 | | | |
| Tuesday 2 February | Mid-week Outing – Ash Island | 7.30am at the car park on the left over the bridge | Robert and Margaret Stewart 4963 2029 |
| Wednesday 3 February | Management Committee Meeting | 6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School | Mick Roderick 0421761237 All members welcome |
| Wednesday 10 February | AGM & Club Night | 7.30pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland | Guest Speaker: Alan Morris |
| Tuesday 16 February | Tomago Wetland Survey | 7.30am Entry to Tomago House | Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm |
| Friday 19 February | Port Stephens Waterbird Survey | Various locations as directed. Numbers strictly limited. | Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 almarosa@bigpond.com |
| Saturday 20 February | Hunter Wader Survey | 8.00 am Ash Island 8.30 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 February | Field Outing – Old Brush | 7.00 am at Old Brush, end of Liebert’s Lane, Brunkerville. Phone Rob for assistance with directions or if arriving later (which is an option). | Robert McDonald 0408 877 827 |