



Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

- THE CLUB'S 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 new species for the Hunter (and Australia), a number of Aleutian Terns were found at Farquhar Inlet.

Photo taken by Alwyn Simple on 12 December 2017.



*Aleutian Tern
by Alwyn Simple ©*

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President's Column

Although not formally accepted as yet, there is a very new bird for Australia right here in the Hunter Region, as this edition of our Newsletter goes to print. Last December a Mid North Coast birder took photos of a tern at Farquhar Inlet that he was not able to recognise, but he didn't revisit the photos until processing images this last October. He sent the images to an internet forum to see if he could establish the identity of these strange terns.

It turns out that the two birds he saw on 4 December 2016 were Aleutian Terns, a species that breeds in the northern Pacific Ocean that had never been recorded in Australia before, although some were suspected to winter in Australasia from records in the Philippines and Hong Kong. Importantly, 13 birds were sighted on 11 December 2017 at the same site. What's important about these sightings is, if these birds have been visiting the Manning coastal region regularly, then the bird watching world has been over-looking them. They are superficially similar to Common Terns, yet with some distinctive differences, nevertheless terns can be tough.

There have been many times throughout the years when I've been wrong about bird identities and I can lay them all at the feet of assumptions. I may have started by relying heavily on scant details or an erroneous opinion on certain features and, without further more critical observation, the bird's true identity remained hidden. Being wrong about a bird's identity

may be embarrassing to an individual, but what about the bird? Well when identified wrongly the real bird doesn't exist, because its identity is masked by another species. Now the bird is not offended of course, but it's perception in the community is damaged, just like the Aleutian Terns. This bird has a number of holes in knowledge about its plumage phases, mortality rates and non-breeding range.

Knowledge about wintering range is foundational to conserving a key component of their lifecycle, such as wintering habitats. So incognito Aleutian Terns could not be subject to protective measures. But what about false positives, those times when a rare species is identified, but it doesn't exist. This is also seriously detrimental to rare birds, since their status appears to be more secure than it really is. Erecting bird lists, may be an enjoyable pastime, but if they incorrectly report or infer the distribution of species then those species are threatened by our erroneous data sets. As a consequence, I've become more and more careful about identifying the birds I encounter, for their future depends upon it. Seeing an Aleutian Tern or not seeing it, if wrong, has not done it any favours.

Happy and reliable birding over the Christmas period and into the New Year

Allan Richardson

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Harry and Jannarelle Battam of Engadine
Gillian Carter of Hamilton North
Coralie Doyle of Fennell Bay
Louise Duff of Glenelg, SA
Steven and Fiona Harris of East Maitland

Felicity Harvie, Liam Gray and family of Maryville
Curtis Hayne of New Lambton
Pip Linnell and Harry Moonen of Nelson Bay
Ian McAllen of TBC
Katherine and Ross Zimmerman of Cardiff

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.

Ruddy Turnstone "WMA"

A Ruddy Turnstone with orange flag inscribed WMA was first seen at Newcastle Baths by Judi Thomas on 23 October 2015 and then regularly in company with the local Ruddy Turnstone population at both Newcastle Baths and Stoney Point (Nobbys Breakwall) through until 17 February 2016. It returned here in November 2016 and was again seen regularly between November 5 and November 24. Its presence here was reported to the Victorian Wader Study Group and it was subsequently recaptured by them on King Island in March 2017.

'WMA' had been flagged and fitted with a geolocator on King Island in February 2015 and analysis of the data from this device by Ken Gosbell of VWSG indicated the following history:

2015

19 April – Departs King Island – 7500 km direct flight to Hainan in six days then moves to Taiwan.

24 May – departs Taiwan over the Yellow Sea to Sakhalin Island (Japan).

31 May – departs for breeding grounds.

1 August – back at Sakhalin Island over the Sea of Okhotsk.

2 to 29 August – in Japan (Sakhalin Island?).

2 September – arrives Bougainville Island after 5300 km flight.

20 October – departs Bougainville – 3500 km flight to Newcastle.

23 October – first sighting in Newcastle by Judi Thomas.

2016

17 February – final sighting on this visit in Newcastle.

12 April – leaves Newcastle region and flies directly back to Taiwan.

6 July – Geolocator fails.

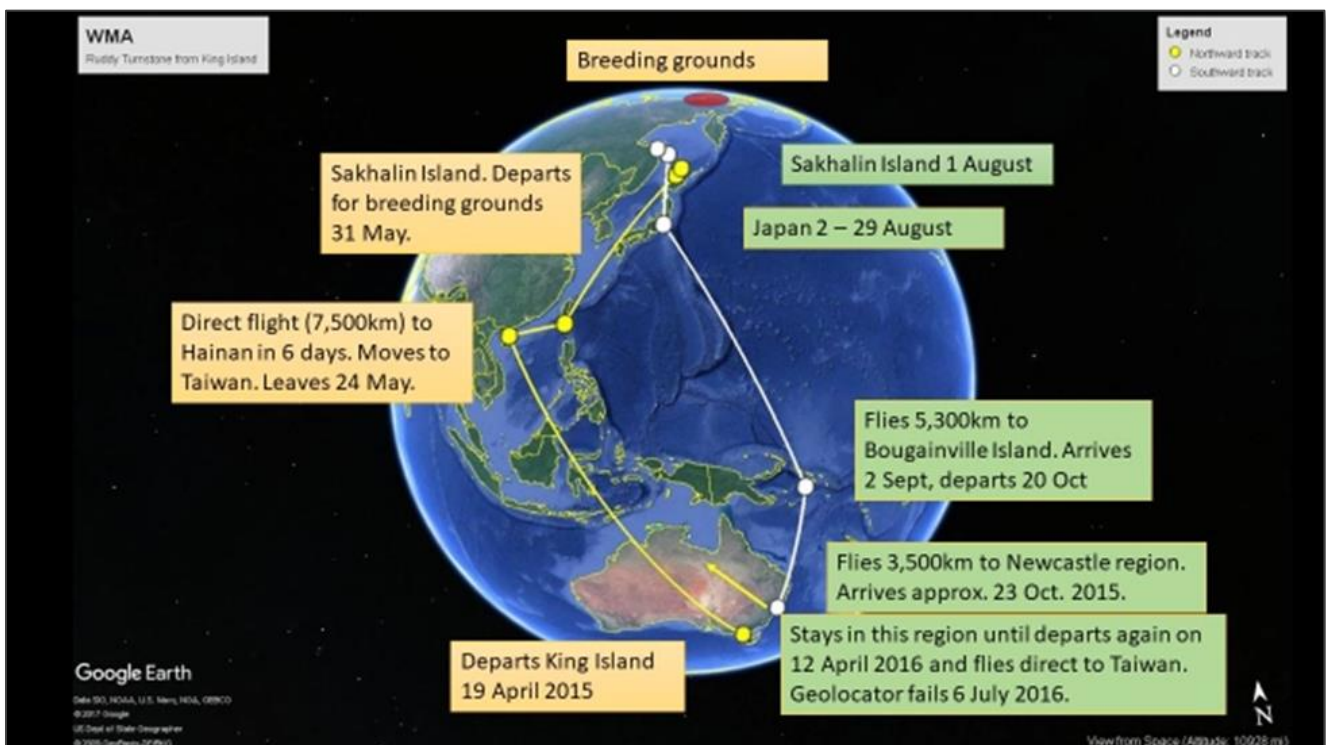
5 to 24 November – seen regularly back at Newcastle Baths and Stoney Point.

2017

March – recaptured on King Island and fitted with a new geolocator.

27 October – spotted once again at Newcastle Baths a month or so after the local population had returned from their northern migration.

Richard Nicholas



HBOC Bird of the Month

The “Bird of the Month” is a regular feature on the HBOC Facebook Page. If you’re already on Facebook and not following the Club’s official page, then why not?!

October – Eastern Yellow Robin

This gorgeous and often very confiding bird is a very common resident of the Hunter Region. Pairs have their territories in any decent sized patch of rainforest or woodland, at altitudes from sea level (for example, at Harrington and Seal Rocks) to places like the Gloucester Tops and the Barrington Tops, which are at 1200-1400m above sea level. It is usually one of the first birds heard when the dawn chorus starts up, and often is one of the last to call at night. They build a delicate cup-shaped nest at the fork of a branch, adorning it with lichen and moss.



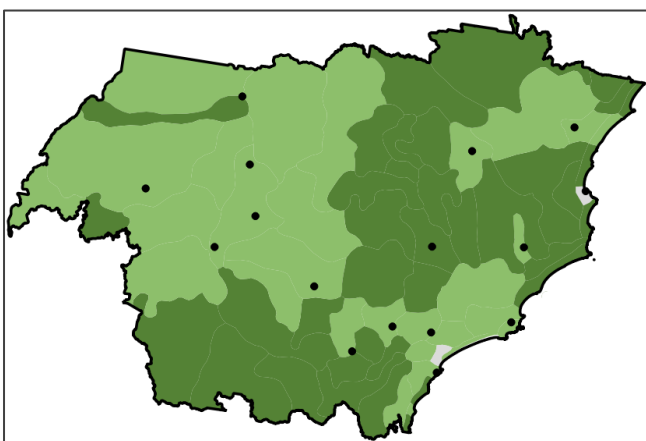
Eastern Yellow Robin by Jim Smart

November – Brown Quail

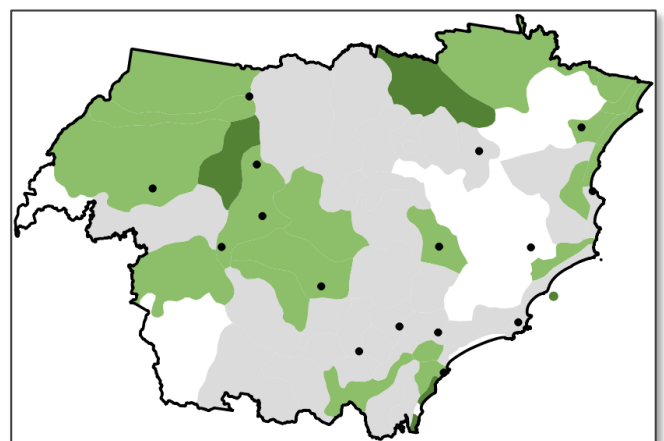
Usually it’s hard to get a good look at one of these. Although they are quite common in the Hunter Region they mostly are skulkers, which suddenly explode from near one’s feet in a whirr of wings. More often than not we only know they are present through hearing them call; it’s a very distinctive whistle-like call. This bird was photographed on Broughton Island, where Brown Quail have become quite common since feral animals (rats and rabbits) finally were eliminated in 2009.



Brown Quail by Alan Stuart



HBOC Eastern Yellow Robin Distribution Map



HBOC Brown Quail Distribution Map

Club Activity Reports

Dungog Common

7 November 2017

It was a pleasant spring morning as 23 of us assembled at Dungog Common for a walk led by our local expert, Dick Jenkin. Before we set out we watched a Grey Goshawk sitting on a telegraph pole being harassed by a Willie Wagtail. The Wagtail won and the Goshawk left.

We walked down the creek line and then through the woodland area and encountered quite a few of the smaller passerines such as both Buff-rumped and Striated Thornbills and Spotted and Striated Pardalotes. We also spotted three Jacky Winters, one of which was a juvenile and one sitting on a nest. At the other end of the size scale, two Wedge-tailed Eagles soared overhead and a Peregrine Falcon flew by. In all 47 species were either seen or heard.



So popular was the outing, two buses were required!

After morning tea some of us moved on to the small park by the railway line, where several different species were seen, including Rainbow Bee-eaters, Noisy Friarbirds and a White-headed Pigeon, but the highlight in this area was when Michael Hatfield nearly trod on what turned out to be a Stubble Quail. This was clearly seen by the others in the group for a couple of minutes.

Dungog is certainly an area worth bird watching in, and our thanks to Dick Jenkin for showing us over some of its treasures.

Margaret Stewart

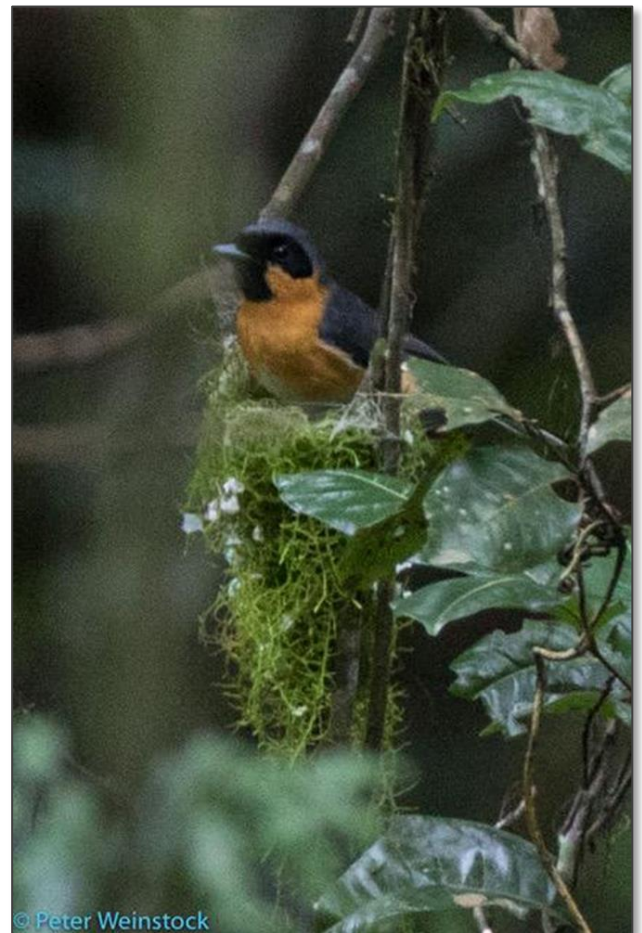
Upper Allyn

19 November 2017

Twelve intrepid HBOC members met in Paterson to follow Lorna to the Upper Allyn rainforest. The rain held off and we made the trek up the hills, stopping at a

couple of points to check out the wildlife. Lorna knew her stuff and we picked up a total of 48 species.

The highlight of the day was a pair of Spectacled Monarchs on a beautiful ferny-green nest. The area around the nest was thick with Rufous Fantails and Black-faced Monarchs were calling from the bush. The Noisy Pitta was very vocal but unfortunately remained invisible. Several White-headed Pigeons were found quietly munching on figs high up in the canopy.



Spectacled Monarch by Peter Weinstock

We stopped for lunch and some took the time to remove their newly attached leaches. The rain poured down as we listened to a variety of birds including several Rose Robins that we were never able to see. After lunch we walked along the creek as the rain had died back to a drizzle, but little was visible other than some Brown Gerygones. We had to add a Darter to the list that decided to fly over, but no Needletails.

Everyone then went home but I stayed. In the quiet and a lull in the rain I found a couple of Rufous Fantails

Club Activity Reports

dancing around the bar-b-que area at the Williams River Day Area and a Lyrebird that was turning over the leaf litter behind the shelter at which we had had our lunch. There was a young Brush-turkey that cleaned up the bread crumbs and pestered me as I was trying to photograph the Lyrebird.



Superb Lyrebird by Peter Weinstock

Thanks go to Lorna for a great day.

Peter Weinstock

Tilligerry Habitat

5 December 2017

The sky was overcast but no rain fell as we made our way around Tilligerry Habitat on our last outing for the year. The first bird encountered was a little Yellow Robin sitting on a nest in a burnt-out patch of bush. Our leader, Pam Hill, told us that the bird had been seen on the nest before the deliberately lit fire and it returned as soon as the fire was put out. This was the first of several observations of breeding activity, with both male and female Leaden Flycatchers feeding two young in a nest, a female Satin Bowerbird sitting on a nest, a Noisy Friarbird flying into a nest, Yellow Thornbill feeding young, Yellow-faced Honeyeater carrying food and a Scaly-breasted Lorikeet going into a nest hollow.



Leaden Flycatcher feeding young by Peter Weinstock

As well as bush birds we sighted several species of waterbirds on the bay. The most interesting observation was a small flock of Silver Gulls sitting on the water under a tree and catching and eating cicadas as they fell into the water, or flying up and catching them as they flew down.



Silver Gull dining on Cicada by Peter Weinstock

We moved on to the eastern side of the habitat at Mallabula for morning tea but the tide was too high to walk there, but we did spy three Tawny Frogmouths. Our total species seen or heard in the Habitat was 59 with two heard.

We had a brief look on the shore at Lemon Tree Passage where we spotted the Grey-tailed Tattlers and a lone Pacific Golden Plover, before adjourning for lunch at Lemon Tree Passage Bowling Club.



The mid-weekers enjoying their Tilligerry excursion

Our thanks to Pam for organising the outing and the lunch (in our very own private room). A very enjoyable ending for the midweek group. Thanks to everyone who contributed to another very successful year.

Robert and Margaret Stewart

A Day for Diversity

Diversity was the theme on Thursday 28 September when Hunter Bird Observers Club members volunteered to man a stall on Biodiversity Day at Blue Gum Hills Regional Park.



Children, their families and carers eagerly visited the stalls to gather information, complete activities and have their passports stamped. Volunteers were kept busy answering questions and encouraging visitors to learn about the birds in the park.

Our photographic display aimed at emphasising and building an understanding of the diversity of birdlife by illustrating their colours, sizes and diet. A hands-on activity set many minds buzzing as they compared the weight of a Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo and a Yellow Thornbill. Each child recorded the names of three different birds that might be found in the park. Volunteers were at times surprised by the knowledge and interest of the children, adults too were eager to ask questions about sightings they may have had. We were

pleased to share our enthusiasm and invite potential new members to join HBOC.



The guided walks were a great success with participants hearing and seeing Scarlet Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebills and White-faced Honeyeaters as well as some common birds they already recognised like Magpies.

Andrzej Karpel

Future Club Activities

Long Weekend Camp

26 to 28 January 2018

Next year's Australia Day long weekend camp will be held at Myall View, a property on Violet Hill Road adjoining Myall Lakes National Park. This is a popular camping location that has been used by the Club before. In order to reach the property, travel north from Buladelah along the Pacific Highway for some 4 km and

then take the right-hand exit onto The Lakes Way. After approximately 6 km take a right turn onto Violet Hill Road. Myall View is located on the left after some 3.4 km.

HBOC in 2017

Once again, we've had a very busy and successful year, with our membership reaching new record levels and our website and Facebook pages both being highly popular resources for our members and for the general community. Highlights for the year included hosting a Birddata workshop in which the 45 attendees honed their skills in using the new portal, and securing a grant from the Commonwealth's Threatened Species Recovery Fund to restore salt marsh habitat in the Hunter Estuary. Since the workshop we've seen about a 50% increase in the number of Birddata surveys being submitted, and salt marsh is now being re-established on Smith and Sandy Islands which are at the mouth of the main shorebird feeding area in Fullerton Cove.

New editions of our Hunter Region annual bird report and our journal *The Whistler* were released in 2017 with copies provided to major national and international libraries and conservation-minded organisations as well

as to our members and regional stakeholders. To help spread the word about birds, we participated in numerous community engagement opportunities, including the Total Field Days, Biodiversity Day, Welcome to Shorebirds, the Australian Bird Fair and several others including school visits. With the same aim, we also maintained our active media presence – using a combination of regular and ad hoc opportunities.

As well as having a busy social program of meetings, outings and camps in 2017, our members also were heavily involved in field work to support BLA projects (e.g. Shorebirds 2020 and Regent Honeyeater / Swift Parrot surveys) and the various regional field studies that we coordinate. We also continued to be active in our lobbying for improved conservation outcomes for birds.

Alan Stuart

Library Update

Recent acquisitions

- An Uncertain Future: Australian Birdlife in Danger by Geoffrey Maslen, 2017;
- Backyard Bird Sounds (+CD) by Fred van Gessel, 2015;
- Unique Australian Bird Sounds (+CD) by Fred van Gessel;
- Field Guide to Birds of Western Australia, 1985 donated by Judi Thomas;
- Bowerbirds by CB Frith, 2001 donated by Dorothy Raine;
- Field Guide to the Birds of China, 2000;
- Robins and Flycatchers of Australia, National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife, donated (our copy has been missing for some time).

Margaret Stewart

BirdLife Australia 2017 National Twitchathon

Just a quick thank you for people's continued support of the "Twitch", despite it's recent continuing upheaval. This year the format of the Main Race was altered, following the changing of the Champagne Race format last year, with the former being extended to a 30-hour format in the name of OH&S. The new format certainly presented a new challenge to the established order.

As always, the Hunter was well represented in terms of team entries, victors (including all three podium positions for the NSW Main Race and National "Big Weekend") and sponsorship.

Expect further changes next year, including a change in the online sponsorship system. Your perseverance through this period of turbulence is much appreciated!

Recent Observations

Hunterbirding is an email group set up by HBOC that is run through the Google 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. The home page of the Hunterbirding group is located at <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/hunterbirding> Instructions for joining a Google Group to sign up for Hunterbirding and take part in these discussions and benefit from up-to-date birding news in the region, can be found at <https://support.google.com/groups/answer/1067205?hl=en> and follow the on-site instructions 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:

- Two male and one probable female King Quail spotted at Hexham Swamp on 10 October;
- A Soft-plumaged Petrel seen from the Port Stephens Pelagic on 15 October, plus Buller's Shearwater, Black Petrel and at least eight Black-bellied Storm-petrels;
- Six Rose-crowned Fruit-doves present at Mungo Brush from 16 October for several weeks;
- A Forest Kingfisher photographed at Tomago on 17 October;
- An Eastern Grass Owl flushed at Hexham Swamp on 26 October;
- A Kelp Gull seen at Birubi and various other locations along Stockton Beach on 28 October;
- A Ruff recorded at Cattai Bridge Wetland on 31 October;
- A Rose-crowned Fruit-dove photographed at Cattai Wetlands on 4 November;
- Several Mottled Petrels seen from the Port Stephens Pelagic on 12 November and (again on 13 November), plus two Black Petrel, seven Gould's Petrel and a Little Shearwater; and
- At least 15 Aleutian Terns found and photographed at Farquhar Inlet, initially on 11 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
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	9/09/2017	Speers Point	S. Hamonet
Common Blackbird	1	2/09/2017	East Maitland	R. Waymark
Crescent Honeyeater	2	22/08/2017	Gloucester Tops	T. Kendall et al
Lewins Rail	2+3dy	early Oct	Hexham Swamp	G. O'Connor
Masked Woodswallow	4	5/09/2017	Medhurst Bridge	T. Kendall et al
Paradise Riflebird	1	25/07/2017	Monkerai NR	T. Kendall et al
Red-browed Treecreeper	2	22/08/2017	Gloucester Tops	T. Kendall et al
White-backed Swallow	2	5/09/2017	Bureen Road	T. Kendall et al
White-browed Woodswallow	22	5/09/2017	Medhurst Bridge	T. Kendall et al
White-winged Triller	1	5/09/2017	Medhurst Bridge	T. Kendall et al

Club Activities January to February 2018

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
JANUARY 2018			
Saturday 13 January	Hunter Wader Survey	6.30 am Ash Island and Tomago 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 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
Tuesday 16 January	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Please ring to confirm
Fri – Sun 19 – 21 January	Broughton Island Bird Banding	Nelson Bay NPWS TBA Fit only, numbers very limited: contact Alan for waiting list	Greg Little 0414 562 169 Alan Stuart 0409 978 171
Fri – Sun 26 – 28 January	Long weekend camp – Myall View	Myall View, 337 Violet Hill Road, Myall Lakes via Bulahdelah	Lorna Mee 0499 015 500 Andrzej and Lyn Karpiel 4952 3458 / 0427 483 663
FEBRUARY 2018			
Tuesday 6 February	Mid-week Outing – Bush Haven	7.30 am 393 Italia Road Seaham	Robert & Margaret Stewart 4963 2029 / 0401 283 305
Wednesday 7 February	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Allan Richardson 0459 806 176 All members welcome
Wednesday 13 February	AGM and Club Night	7.00 pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Guest Speaker: - Walter Boles “Australian Museum Bird Collection”



Bird & Nature Photography Tours

Amazing Destinations!

- *South Africa-Kruger Safari.
- *Darwin, Kakadu, Katherine.
- *Cairns, Daintree, Atherton.
- *Flinders Ranges & Gluepot.
- *Hunter Valley.
- *Riverwood Downs Weekends.

Contact: Dick Jenkin 0407 267207

E: richardnjenkin@bigpond.com

W: www.jenkinphotography.com.au