



Hunter Bird Observers Club

**NEWSLETTER**

Issue 6/07

December 2007/January 2008

Newsletter articles welcome – contact Newsletter Editor Peter Phillips.  
34 McIntyre St, Cardiff 2285  
Tel: (02) 4956 9090  
Fax (02) 4954 7118  
Email:  
juniper@hunterlink.net.au

**Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.**  
(affiliated with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia)

**P.O. Box 24, New Lambton, NSW 2305**

**Telephone: (02) 4958 5942**  
Website: www.hboc.org.au

**Committee**

**President:** Liz Crawford  
**Vice-president:** Alan Stuart  
**Secretary:** Tom Clarke  
**Treasurer:** Rowley Smith

**Committee Members:**

Chris Herbert  
Ann Lindsey  
Robert MacDonald  
Michael Kearns  
Lorna Mee

**Conservation Officer**  
Ann Lindsey

**Life Members**  
Wilma Barden  
Sue Hamonet  
Ed Hamonet (dec)

*The aims of the club are:*

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

We welcome the following new members:

Emma Graham of Wallsend  
Mark Evans of The Junction  
Candace McDonald of Paxton  
Christine McGilvray of Fennell Bay  
Julie Maidment of Merewether

**NEWSLETTER DEADLINES FOR 2008**

<b>Edition</b>	<b>Copy Deadline</b>
February/March	3 February
April/May	30 March
June/July	1 June
August/September	3 August
October/November	28 September
December 2008/January 2009	30 November

Membership Fees for 2008 are due now.  
\$30 per family or single.

## President's Column

In 1994, a sister wetlands relationship was established between Kushiro Wetlands in Hokkaido, Japan and the Hunter Estuary Wetlands, based on Latham's Snipe which link the two areas. Latham's Snipe breeds in Kushiro Wetlands and migrates to the Hunter Wetlands for the spring and summer months. A sister schools relationship was also established between Kushiro Nishi High School (now Kushiro Meiki HS) and Jesmond High School (now Callaghan College). Various official and unofficial visits of individuals and groups between Kushiro and Newcastle/ Port Stephens/ Hunter Estuary have occurred since 1994. In November this year, a delegation of 88 people from Kushiro visited the Newcastle /Port Stephens area, visiting Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Project and the Hunter Wetlands Centre. HBOC was represented at the Kooragang Wetlands visit and at a party hosted by the Mayor of Kushiro to celebrate the sister wetlands relationship.

The main aims of the relationship are to:

- Strive for exchanging of experiences, knowledge and skills for the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
- Strive for exchanging the results of survey and research activities and information on both wetlands;
- Exchange delegates for visiting each wetland at regular intervals;
- Exchange researchers and trainees studying wetlands;
- Promote co-research on migratory birds between Australia and Japan including both the wetlands;
- Develop mutual exchange between Kushiro International Wetlands Centre and Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia which is located in Newcastle; and
- Co-operate to promote activities of enlightenment for the Ramsar Convention.

Our Annual Latham's Snipe Count contributes to the knowledge about these migratory birds and their use of the Hunter Estuary Wetlands. I intend to organize a trip to Kushiro Wetlands in 2009 for birdwatchers interested in seeing Latham's Snipe in their breeding grounds at Kushiro. It would be a wonderful opportunity to extend our understanding of the life cycles of these beautiful travelers. If you are interested in such a trip, please let me know!

On the local front, lots of breeding has been happening at the Stockton Sandspit – a Pied Oystercatcher has successfully raised a youngster and several pairs of Red-capped Plovers are raising multiple chicks. Tom Clarke's persistent efforts to establish and maintain appropriate shorebird habitat at the Sandspit have greatly assisted these breeding birds. Fortunately foxes have not been a problem for the birds this season. Periodic baiting by National Parks and Wildlife Service helps to control these predators.

Lorna Mee, Graeme Mee and Jim Smart attended an Enviro Fair at Wirreanda Public School in December, giving informative talks about birds to three classes of schoolchildren. Lorna also coordinated the Club's display at Catchment Day at the Hunter Wetlands Centre in October, when a steady stream of families were exposed to the joys of birdwatching along with other environmentally friendly behaviours.

Alan Stuart has compiled and edited the fourteenth Annual Bird Report for the Hunter Region, using Club and members' observations to document the distribution and abundance of some 355 species for 2006. Although the list of species keeps growing (the official Hunter Region list now stands at 422 species), the number of birds of many species has tended to decline. As noted by Sue Hamonet in the foreword to the Annual Bird Report, "there can be no doubt that this is a flow-on effect from the greatest of our concerns – destruction of habitat." We must continue our efforts for conservation and restoration of habitat and keep reporting our observations.

My very best wishes to you all for a happy festive season and a peaceful, bird-filled New Year.

Liz Crawford

## **MID-WEEK CAMP: Harrington**

Monday to Wednesday 17-19 September 2007

Report from Don & Val Moon

The third mid-week camp held this year at Harrington was a great success with 34 members attending.

We started our activities on Monday afternoon by looking around the caravan park boundaries where many birds were seen and then walked to the nearby rainforest. Some of the species seen in this general area during the whole time of the camp included Rose-crowned Fruit-dove, White-headed Pigeon, Brown Cuckoo-dove, Emerald Dove, Wonga Pigeon, Southern Emu-wren, Striped, Blue-faced and White-cheeked Honeyeaters, Golden Whistler Spectacled Monarch, Spangled Drongo, Varied Triller, Olive-backed Oriole, Figbird and Regent Bowerbird.

We then proceeded along by the lagoon (behind the park) up to the breakwalls where Pied Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Sanderlings and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were seen plus, flying over, Brahminy Kite, Sea Eagle and Osprey.

On Tuesday we spent the day in the Crowdy Bay National Park starting first at the Crowdy Gap Cultural Camp where we walked along the track to the ocean – we saw White-faced Honeyeater, Red and Little Wattlebird, Eastern Spinebill, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Australian Gannet.

We then drove up to Indian Head camping area and after morning tea we walked along the headland track – while we did not see or hear many birds we enjoyed looking at the many different wildflowers. Back at the camp we were fortunate to have good views of Regent Bowerbirds.

Our next stop was Kylies Beach camping area where we had great views of two Square-tailed Kites which were flying very low overhead and stayed around the whole time we were having our lunch – other birds seen were Rufous Whistler, Spectacled Monarch, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater and a White-browed Scrubwren feeding young in a nest.

We continued back south stopping for a short walk along Bakers Road before finishing our day at the Crowdy Bay Lighthouse.

Another enjoyable evening was had back at the BBQ area.

Later in the night eight enthusiastic people went back to the National Park to look for Grass Owls but unfortunately were unsuccessful.

On Wednesday morning we proceeded to the industrial area where the Ospreys have nested on top of the Telecom tower. We had good views of the bird flying around and landing back on the nest. We were joined here by Bob Langdown from Cundletown (and Manning Birdwatchers) who directed us down beside the sewerage works where we had good sightings which included Pallid Cuckoo and Fan-tailed Cuckoos. We also heard Brush Cuckoo and Shining Bronze-cuckoo. Other sightings at this point included Brown-headed and White-naped Honeyeaters, Rufous Whistler, Leaden Flycatcher and a Yellow Robin on nest.

Our morning tea stop was at a riverside reserve where we were able to walk to see another Osprey nest on a specially-built platform nearby.

Our final stop for the morning was back to the breakwall where we were excited to see the Kelp Gull on the sandspit across on the other side of the river entrance. This single bird was previously sighted by a few people on Monday afternoon but not seen again until Wednesday morning when it stayed around for a long time and most of the group had good views of it.

Another great camp – good company – good scenery and good birding with 141 species sighted in the Harrington area and 78 species at Crowdy Bay National Park – making a total of 150 different species for the whole camp.

**Atlassing Report – Gloucester Tops**  
**22 September 2007**

Report from Lorna Mee

Three HBOC members met at Wallbridge Reserve, in Raymond Terrace, at 6.30am. As expected we arrived at Gloucester to much cooler conditions. We hot-footed straight to Kerrapit Road, whilst listening to the CD with the call of the Rufous Scrub-bird. A quick cuppa on arrival and we donned our jumpers, extra coats and beanies and took a great big Knights umbrella, as the sky was looming dark clouds.

We did the short walk to Munroe's Hut. We wandered for a short time, had a quick look inside the hut, we pished and whistled and waited and we had great sightings of Rose Robin and many Golden Whistlers. On the way out along the track, the target bird called and called and called. We watched; we waited. It called. We had our eyes peeled. Then it stopped calling. It must have spotted us and scuttled away not to be seen or heard again for the day.

We then walked up the link trail, listening and admiring the calls and twitters of the rainforest birds, also listening and watching hard for a Rufous Whistler. We were walking in varying conditions from cold to very cold looking for every potential bird sighting.

Suddenly one great dark shape fell out of a tree. Was it a Pheasant Coucal? No, it was a Greater Glider - in broad daylight! It watched us and we watched it and admired the beauty of the beast, contemplating its appearance. Perhaps it had been disturbed by the Wedge-tailed Eagle that hovered quite close, looking for a Glider meal. We had the bonus of the Crescent Honeyeater calling and eventually spotting it high up, in the foliage. A new bird for one person in our group.

The sky darkened: the temperature dropped.

We walked fast back to the car; the rain started, then the hail (not golf ball size). We returned to the car, frozen and a bit wet for lunch and decided to go straight home. All up we had some enjoyable atlassing and a wonderful destination.

**Marilyn Chegidden** 26/07/1952 – 26/10/2007

Many HBOC members have been saddened to learn of Marilyn's recent untimely death. On behalf of Peter and her family, I would like to thank those who were supportive during her illness and at her memorial service.

Marilyn's interest in bird watching really started during a long trip around Australia in the late 1970s, and over the next twenty years it was a constant hobby and sometimes passion – with which she infected her husband Peter and other friends, leading to many wonderful trips and outings and to her membership of HBOC. Marilyn's natural ability and professional training as a singer gave her both a good ear for call recognition and memorisation, and a useful ability at mimicry.

Bird watching led Marilyn and Peter to the usual birding destinations – Cape York, Iron Range, Newhaven and Gluepot Birds Australia reserves, the HBOC Lord Howe Island trip with Ian Hutton, and southern Western Australia. Three of these trips were with Klaus Uhlenhut, whose skill, energy and unfailing good humour endeared him to Marilyn and whose Black Grasswren trip we were always trying to save up for! Marilyn also undertook the seasonal "Birds on Farms" survey at a friend's property near Binnaway. Marilyn's life list reached 521 – but her meticulous recording of species and races will allow posthumous additions.

Marilyn's professional life was as a dietician and food safety and food service expert – in recent years for DADHC at Stockton and other Hunter residences and previously for Royal Newcastle Hospital where she had been Director of Dietetics and Catering.

As mentioned, one of Marilyn's other interests was music – she was involved as a performer, stage manager and board member for Opera Hunter for some years, as well as other local musical theatre.

Following treatment for her original melanoma in 2000, Marilyn had been well until three months before her death at the Mercy Hospice.

Marilyn is survived by her husband, Peter, his sons Edward and Charles, daughter-in-law Karen, and grandchildren Wesley and Laura as well as her own parents Bill and Evelyn Donne and brother and sister-in-law Geoff and Denise Donne.

## OTHER PROGRAM NOTES

### Camp at Baerami October Long Weekend

A great event. 22 members combined to record 101 species which included Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, Pied Honeyeater and seven species of cuckoo.

Midweek Outing to Blackbutt 2 October – the feature bird was Black-faced Monarch.

Bittern Survey. 18 October. Lorna Mee and one other turned up at 5.30pm “ We heard no Bittern call, we tried two sites on Bellfrog Way, Ash Island, spent two hours and then in disgust went on to the Grass Owl corner and had good views of the Grass Owls”.

Hunter Catchment Day. Hunter Wetlands Centre 21 October. HBOC Members set up and manned our display. There was a Gala day atmosphere as people walked past for various activities eg dip-netting, bushcraft with Jenny Musicka. Hunter Water Corporation was in high profile describing water saving devices and methods with many people leaving clutching brightly coloured Hunter Water Corporation water bottles.

HBOC had a very busy day with a steady stream of people coming in for a chat about birding, taking a look through our binoculars and spotting scopes (set up at various heights) and taking away our literature including the birding routes of the local area information. It was such an exciting time to see the children’s faces of joy and elation when they could see the birds through the scopes in such grand plumage. All up we had a great bird list and a rewarding day. Thanks to all who helped. ( From Lorna Mee)

Club Outing to Caves Beach/Galgabba Point. 6 November. An interesting variety of habitats featured raptor nests and Topknot Pigeons in the Cabbage Palms.

#### Seen any good Pale White-eyes lately?

Greg Little is looking for a few people with flexible time to travel to Cairns, Bamaga, Thursday Island and ultimately Little Tuesday Island where Pale White-eyes have to be beaten off with sticks. He’s got some well worked out ideas to minimise costs. Interested?

Contact Greg Little at [gjlfff@bigpond.net.au](mailto:gjlfff@bigpond.net.au)

## Conservation Update – Celebrating Success

### From Mike Newman on behalf of HBOC Conservation Committee

Successful conservation outcomes are the reward for a lot of hard and protracted effort. Consequently it is important to celebrate victories when they occur. During the last year there have been four significant gains where HBOC has provided expert support to other Groups.

Recently the Green Corridor was established providing a wildlife corridor from the Watagans through the Hunter Wetlands to the coast. Central to this success was lobbying by a coalition of Green Groups which put forward a high profile and compelling case forcing the regulators to convert their platitudes concerning ecologically sustainable planning and development into “concrete” action. Particularly pleasing is the inclusion in the Corridor of the Tank Paddock, which abuts the Hexham Swamp. HBOC members have conducted regular surveys of Tank Paddock demonstrating its importance as bird habitat.

Owls were a feature of the successful opposition to Centennial Coal’s proposal for an open-cut coal mine at Awaba. HBOC provided expert input through Mike Todd who conducted extensive fieldwork on the distribution and ecological requirements of the Masked and Sooty Owls in the low altitude woodlands of the Hunter area. Mike’s ongoing commitment to owl conservation has resulted in his recent move to Tasmania to conduct a PhD study of the Tasmanian sub-species of the Masked Owl.

Recently the NSW Land and Environment Court rejected an appeal by the proponent of an Eco-Tourism Resort at Duns Creek near Paterson. This was the culmination of an eight-year battle by the local residents. The proposal involved establishing a 3000 bed facility on a fire prone ridge including a boutique hotel with a seven star rating, probably based on its planned underground rifle range! The EIS indicated the presence of Sooty Owls on the property; probably the only pair in Port Stephens.

HBOC provided support to Gloucester based opposition to Cluff Resources’ proposed Ruby Mine in the Barrington Tops. Hopefully successful opposition of this development will flow on to increased awareness and protection of the delicate ecosystem of this area.

It is important to be buoyed by these positive outcomes which provide the encouragement necessary to keep striving for outcomes which provide benefits for birds and their habitat. Often the development process seems hopelessly weighted against those seeking to find a balance for the protection of the environment.

The above examples not only give encouragement but clues on how to be successful, namely work with other groups, an increased community profile and being proactive as in the case of the establishment of the vision of the Green Corridor.

## 2007 NSW TWITCHATHON SUPPLEMENT

That's right folks. Its time for those foolish birders in their driving machines, those strange creatures of the 24 hour marathon, the uber twitchers for a good cause -----and the leading scorers were ....

### MAIN RACE

Hunter Home Brewers	238
Whacked-Out Woodswallows	235
Menacing Monarchs	233
Dodgy Drongos	219
Hunter Thickheads	214
Black-necked Stalkers	206
Complete and Utter Bustards	203
Cheerful Drongoes	198

### CHAMPAGNE "RACE"

Crested Shrike Twits	169
Central Coasters plus one	166
Lucky Bustards	149
Lesticum phoradae	144
Happy Wanderers	143

Once again the Hunter dominated with 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> in the Main Race - only the Whacked-Out Woodswallows prevented a complete whitewash.

In the Champagne Event Hunter-based teams finished 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>.

In the competition for most amusing group name the unplaced Wooden Spoonbills and Steaming Chats tied for first with an honourable mention for Complete and Utter Bustards.

Expect to see a prize-giving ceremony at the December Club Night. Rumours are that the Thickheads are scouting out Macquarie Island so that they can win the rarest bird prize next year.

### **BREWING BANTER - 2007 NSW Twitchathon The Hunter Home Brewers story**

It was a very different lead up to the Birds Australia Twitchathon for the Hunter Home Brewers in 2007 with the absence of Mick Brew, who had been busy seeking out future routes in far-flung countries but had arrived back in Australia just in the nick of time, sporting a haircut that would do a Cassowary proud.

With a record score in 2006 and the moniker of 'National Champions' to defend, the Brewers were relatively oil-less in 2007. The first sign of 'good oil' however, came as Steve Brew was organising access to the Gunnedah property that sits on their route. The owner told him "yeah, I saw a Crimson Chat on the fence the other day". There was some scepticism in the camp at the possibility that it was a mis-identified Red-capped Robin that he saw, but any such doubts were drowned in the fervour of Ando Brew, for whom the Chat would be a lifer.

Another factor in the lead-up to 2007 was the fall-out from 2006 and the perceived threat from the Black-necked Stalkers who vowed to head west and finish on the north coast. There was also word-on-the-street about a new team starting out at the Macquarie Marshes. So it wasn't just Whacked-Out Woodswallows they needed to be concerned about.

The only real pre-twitch oiling a few days before the event had revealed some great birds in the Hunter part of their run, including a couple of Regent Honeyeaters at their wild-card woodland site. But it wasn't until they assembled at 3 o'clock, Friday afternoon, for the routine "dummy run" that the pre-twitch juices really started to flow. This undertaking went fairly according to plan, except the combination on the lock to their dam site had been changed!

The best result during the dummy run was seeing a flock of 'small red birds' flying overhead in one of the forest stops. Yep, the cocky was on the money – Crimson Chats! Ando Brew was on the scene quicker than cucumbers at a chilli convention to see a new bird for him.

Saturday afternoon, the newly acquired tradition of donning 'team tees' was done with only a few minutes left until Showtime. As the big hand struck the 12, all Brewers were locked onto a perching Singing Honeyeater, which promptly went down as bird #1, throwing the Twitch Tab into turmoil.

This was quickly followed by Painted and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters and Red-winged Parrot. With barely 3 minutes gone on the Twitch, the Brewers were in the car, heading straight to the well-oiled White-winged Fairy-Wren site, which when perched on the fence with nothing but grassland about, had a very unusual neighbour in the form of a female Red-capped Robin.

Bypassing the lock-out dam, they used the extra time in their main western forest area, picking up some fence-perched Blue Bonnays along the way. The forest was quieter than the previous day, although with more time to spend therein, they had most of the targets under their belt, including 3 species of Woodswallow, Inland Thornbill, Turqs, Hooded Robin plus 2 maiden birds in the Crimson Chats and Little Ravens.

There was a complete lack of Restless Flys that had been calling ubiquitously the day before. En-route to the farm they saw their only Cockatiel, flying solo across the plains, before knocking off Southern Whiteface around the farm house (not literally). The final woodland stop produced only one new bird, but a clanger in the form of Chestnut-rumped Thornbills. More Crimson Chats were present here.

Before arriving at their Azure Kingfisher stakeout they finally locked onto a group of Yellow-throated Miners. The Azure soon did his pass and the ever-present ever-singing Blackbird was happily added to the tally. Rather than spending valuable time before dusk trying to pick out a White-backed Swallow amongst the mass of Tree Martins, they opted instead to head back into Gunnedah and check the local faeces factory for some duck action. They arrived at the perfect time, as a council worker was entering the gate (yes, it was Saturday too!). He was justifiably bemused as four binocularized Brewers headed straight for him.

"Can we go in? We're birdwatchers!" He grinned, but happily shunted the gate, adding, "you won't see much" as they filed in.

One man's "not much" is another man's Blue-billed Duck, of which a pair was floating over the back of the main pond. They were accompanied by Pink-eareds and Shovelers and a number of usual suspects. This took the boys to 116 species at dusk and upon agreement that it was indeed "good brewing", they set off towards their night run with the spectacular backdrop of an orange full moon coming up on the horizon.

As is customary, the standard Boobook, Frogmouth and Barn Owl were spot lit within 10 minutes of firing up the beams. A sorely futile attempt at trying to spotlight one of the very scarce Liverpool Plains Emus was followed by the drive to the scene of the 'Double Bittern-up' in 2005, Old Quipolly Dam.

Along the way they recorded what must certainly be regarded as two of the most 'poetic' ticks in the Twitch history. The full moon was just high enough in the sky by now, that it cast a bright 'stairway' across the larger (new) Quipolly Dam. They stopped the car briefly in a rare moment of 'aesthetic appreciation' (as it was a magnificent sight) and low and behold two birds floated peacefully through the moonshine on the water surface - a Black Swan and the unmistakable outline of a male Musk Duck - a very special pair of ticks.

Alas there were no Bitterns and so upwards and over the range they went, picking up Owlet Nightjar at their standard spot at Murrurundi on their way to the wet forests. It was here that 'Team Tyto' stepped up a gear, firstly picking up a male Masked Owl that they were later to learn had also been seen by Hunter rivals and long-time mentors, the Hunter Thickheads (ironically both teams were to put the same bird down as their rarest!).

But the *piece de resistance* was certainly the treat that they were in for as they pulled into camp in the Chichester State Forest. Minutes earlier, Mick Brew had been commenting on how he had only ever had 'canopy views' of Sooty Owl. Incredibly, as they entered the campsite an individual of the aforesaid species flew up off the ground 20 metres in front of the car and perched on a low branch, enabling near-perfect views. It was a poorly-timed rush of adrenalin as it was only a few hours until dawn, but with the count sitting on 126 species, they were able to rest easy.

The dawn chorus and ensuing 'wet forest tickfest' was bountiful and they left the campsite with 152 birds, including Regent Bowerbird, Russet-tailed Thrush and Green Catbird.

A cruel Noisy Pitta called only once and was not heard by most of the team, so they forged on, picking up some road-running Brush Turkeys along the way. The following hour or so was spent, as always, mopping up wet forest birds at crucial roadside remnants. With a full complement of Lorikeets for the first time, and common "Sunday birds", they were sitting on 169 as they headed for the Lower Hunter.

Another maiden bird, Stubble Quail, was heard at Bolwarra, before they moved on to their lynchpin woodland site near Kurri Kurri. Here they heard their only Pallid Cuckoo for the weekend and added

Brown-headed, White-naped and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters (but no sign of the Regents). They then made the big decision to head into the Hunter Estuary early, as the high tide was set to peak in an hour's time.

Driving alongside the river at Hexham, it was obvious that it was a massive tide. Arriving at the Stockton Dykes car park at 1100, the lads couldn't even get onto the dykes themselves there was so much water. But this played into their hands as the waders were generally flighty and they ticked several species flying over the river. A Caspian Tern and Sea-Eagle were flying over the river further up, whilst a Common Sandpiper was atop a concrete block in front of them.

After finding Tattlers and Tereks on the barely-dry oyster leases and finding a very persistent Golden Plover on the Stockton Foreshore, they went under Stockton Bridge to get a look at the Sandspit. There were literally 1000's of birds present, mostly larger waders and Avocets. Here they added Blackwits and Red-capped Plover whilst tucked away behind the Godwits there were Curlew Sandpipers and both Knots (Great Knot being another maiden bird for the Brewers).

They left Stockton at midday with 221 birds on the count, feeling very pleased with the decision to hit the Hunter on-tide. They then went over to Newcastle baths, but could only see a single tubenose, being Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. There were also Gannets feeding and Ruddy Turnstones on the rockshelf. A distant Sooty Oystercatcher was picked up, way down on South Newcastle rocks.

Brewing on to the "Promised Land" of Ash Island, they briefly made an attempt to find Skylark at its usual haunt, though they dipped. However, an adult Spotted Harrier was a great substitute.

Seven more birds were added on Ash Island, including Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels, Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper and the obligatory White-fronted Chat. Here they saw their first 'team tick', as the Dodgy Drongoes crept along Wagtail Way. A quick "what are you doing here!?" was hurled at Mick Brew as they sidled past.

And so it was, one-thirty in the afternoon, sitting on 231 species and the Brewers had effectively finished

their route. Two and a half hours up the sleeve, it was mop-up time on things they'd missed along the way. At Seaham they got Grey-crowned Babbler and soon after they were looking at Variegated Fairy-Wrens at Green Wattle Road – this bird taking them to equal the record score.

Long-billed Corella and Latham's Snipe were the next to fall before a last-ditch effort to get Black-chinned Honeyeaters and Sitellas that failed. They pulled into the Wetlands Centre and added the dynamic duo of Maggie Geese and White-cheeked Honeyeater before a fruitless effort at finding a Crake. Tireless as always, they found themselves running back to the meeting point, ticking a lone Wandering Whistling Duck along the way, getting them the final tally of 238. Many more "what are you doing here!?"s were hurled at Mick Brew.

The scores were of an incredible calibre this year. The Thickheads had managed an incredible 214 from the Hunter alone, surely placing them as favourites for the 2007 Mike Newman Cup. The Drongoes improved in their second year over the big hill with a well-earned 219. The new kids on the block, the Menacing Monarchs, gave everyone a scare by equalling the previous record of 233 in their first appearance.

But for the 4<sup>th</sup> year running it was down to the Whacked-Out Woodswallows and the brewing likely lads. And for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year Steve Brew announced "Whacked-Out Woodswallows" first, meaning the Brewers had gotten up. They had beaten the record themselves with a remarkable 235 species but the Brewers had piped them again.

It seems that breaking records is not enough to win in NSW now. Following word that the Black-necked Stalkers had come home with 206, it was official that 238 was the highest count.

With 3 teams scoring greater than 230 species this year, it would appear that this figure is the new "200" benchmark of years gone by. This will have implications on NSW teams under the Modified Dolby System for the national competition, as the state average is soaring to dizzy heights. But be assured that the Hunter Home Brewers will be there to try and keep that average as high as they can maintain it!

Jacqueline Winter (as told to Mike Roderick)



## THE DODGY DRONGO SAGA

from Grant Brosie

This year's race had me nervous. Oiling trips out west and up into the rainforest resulted in few birds being found, and with two main race 'virgins' in the side, led to much worry for an already stressed out leader.

Liz Livanos, Liz Huxtable, Nick Livanos and I arrived at our starting point, Borah TSR, and were greeted to an eerily quiet woodland, but as we walked around birds popped up from nowhere. We sat by the creek and watched Plum-heads, Diamond Firetails and Turquoise Parrot drinking whilst White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike and Musk Lorikeet flew overhead. Ideal start you're thinking ..wrong ....it was 2:50pm! Come 3pm everything had gone.

We stumbled around for a while ticking White-browed Woodie, Shrike-tit, Pallid Cuckoo, Little Friarbird and Brown Treecreeper. Eventually the Plum-heads and Diamonds came back and Fuscous Honeyeater called. As we headed back towards the car the cry of 'Turk' had everyone running. Dusky Woodies, Wedgie, Horsfield's Bronze and Double-bar were late arrivals.

We left Borah happy. A few kms down the road we ticked Apostlebird, Hooded Robin, Bee-eater, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Singing Bushlark and more Plum-heads. Our Crimson Chat spot resulted in no chat but a single White-backed Swallow made up for that. Luckily our Painted Honeyeater spot resulted in Painted Honeyeater as well as Brown and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Red-capped Robin and Red-winged Parrot. White-winged Triller and fairy-wren, Brown Songlark, Yellow-throated Miner, Grey-crowned Babbler, Cockatiel, Blue Bonnet and Mallee Ringneck were seen before entering our final stop, Leard SF near Boggabri.

It was getting late and the forest was starting to settle down for the evening. Leaden Flycatcher, Speckled Warbler, Striped Honeyeater, Inland Thornbill and Masked Woodswallow made appearances but White-browed Babbler and White-throated Needletail slipped through the net, just.

As night fell we dipped on Nightjar but saw up to 5 Barn Owls and good spotting by Liz L gave us a

Frogmouth on our way to Tamworth for dinner. Thanks must go to the Maccas staff who served us after we slipped through the locked doors.

A Southern Boobook welcomed us to the rainforest at 4am! The hill at Allyn River must be one of the best rainforest sites in NSW. Spectacled Monarch, Lyrebird, Bassian Thrush, Pitta, Cuckoo-dove, Shining Bronze, Rose Robin, Rufous Fantail, Catbird, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Satin and Regent Bowerbird and Wompoo Fruit-dove were all seen or heard.

Heading over to Barrington House we added Brush Turkey, Bell Miner, Striated Thornbill, Cicadabird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Brush Cuckoo, and our last bird for the rainforest, a Wonga Pigeon on the road.

Channel-billed Cuckoo and Torresian Crow crossed the road as we headed south. Musk Lorikeet screeched past, Scarlet Honeyeater and Bar-shouldered Dove called.

At Seaham we ticked the common waterbirds as well as Yellow-billed Spoonbill (phew!), Blue-faced Honeyeater and Little Lorikeet. White-naped Honeyeater and Variegated Fairy-wren were heard at Green Wattle Creek and Zebra Finch was finally added at Bolwarra. Looking suspicious as we drove the streets of Lorn (suburb of Maitland) paid off with Goldfinch and Blackbird heard.

Walka Water Works had the usual suspects, Great-crested Grebe, Musk Duck and Hoary-headed Grebe. White-bellied Sea-eagle and Marsh Harrier circled overhead.

Next stop was Lenaghan's Drive where Glossy Ibis, Whiskered Tern, White-necked Heron and Whistling Kite were scoped from afar. We welcomed Chestnut-breasted Munia, Golden-headed Cisticola, Little Grassbird, Latham's Snipe, and Brown Quail to the list. Across the road at Pambalong we finally got onto Red-browed Finch! and Brown Goshawk.

Ash Island was unusually great!! Intermediate Egret, Bar and Black-tailed Godwit, Marsh, Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpiper, Greenshank, Stint, Red-capped Plover, Mangrove Gerygone and White-fronted Chat.

After the embarrassing stop at Warabrook for Mallard we hit Stockton at its best. Eastern Curlew, Red-necked Avocet, Red and Great Knot, Pied Oystercatcher and Gull-billed Tern, and, at Fern Bay, Common and Terek Sandpiper, Tattler and Whimbrel.

Time wasn't on our side so we dashed into Newcastle (last place you wanna be on a warm spring afternoon) and saw Wedge-tailed and Fluttering Shearwaters, Common Tern and - after 4 years of trying - the Drongos finally saw a Sooty Oystercatcher!

We stopped for Darter at the Newie Wetlands Reserve then ducked across the road to the Wetlands Centre where we cleaned up on Magpie Geese, Wandering Whistling-duck, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Nankeen Night Heron and the last bird for the day, Little Wattlebird.

The teams gathered to count their totals and hear the results and we were very pleased with our tally of 219 species! Of course we're still well behind the winners and well done to the Hunter Home Brewers on their awesome win!!!

### **BANDED RUDDY TURNSTONE**

On 28 September, Judi Thomas found seven Ruddy Turnstones at Newcastle Baths – one of which was banded on both legs. She took a brilliant photo showing the colour of the bands and emailed Ann Lindsey in the hopes that the bird could be identified. (Ann is in many ways our connection to the banding world) The bird was duly identified as a New Zealand banded bird from the South Island and, at the time of going to press we are waiting a fuller history.

Well done, Judi. Shows it's worth looking carefully at all the birds in a flock.

### **UPPER HUNTER NEWS**

- On 5 November, Greg Newling of Wingen forwarded the following observations via AS
- Black Falcon nesting along Dartbrook Rd, west of Aberdeen; the young have just fledged and still hanging around the nest site
- Lots of Rufous Songlarks around – Greg counted 14 on power lines between Scone and Wingen
- Brown Songlark at Parkville
- Lots of Musk Lorikeet around in Scone, Aberdeen and Muswellbrook with Greg having 40 of them in a tree near his house in Wingen early November.

### **An exaltation of larks!**

#### **A POEM**

By James McAuley

The magpie's mood is never surly;  
Every morning waking early,  
He gargles music in his throat.  
The liquid squabble of his note,

Its silver stridencies of sound,  
The bright confusions and the round  
Bell-cadencies, are pealed  
Over the frosty half ploughed field.

Then swooping down self-confidently  
From the fence-post or the tree,  
He swaggers in pied feather coat  
And slips the fat worms down his throat  
.....

It is not our purpose to be party-political but we feel compelled to report the reoccurrence, after three years absence, of the Latham's Snipe (ED)

## MOTHER'S LITTLE HELPERS

Birds with child-care assistance invest less in eggs.

*This article is based on a press release from University of Cambridge drawn to my attention by Max Blanch*

An Australian bird has been found to produce smaller, less nourishing eggs when it breeds in the presence of other 'helper' birds that provide child-care assistance. This unique adaptation enables the birds to live longer and breed more often than females without helpers. The research, led by a University of Cambridge academic, today made the front cover of *Science* (*Science* 17/8/07).

In many animal species, parents caring for their offspring are assisted by so-called 'helpers', adults that forego reproduction to help others raise young. Although parents decrease the amount of food they provide to offspring when helpers are present, the additional supply provided by the helpers more than compensates for this reduction. As a result, chicks fed by parents and helpers tend to receive more than those raised without helpers.

However, research has shown that these offspring who receive additional food do not appear to gain any advantage as a result. This has raised the question of who really gains from helping behaviour – a question that has baffled scientists until now. Research reported today on a common Australian bird species has provided a novel answer.

Researchers have discovered that in the 'superb fairy-wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) mothers benefit more from helping behaviour than offspring. As helpers provide chicks with a significant amount of additional food, mothers can afford to skimp on nourishing their eggs. Females that are assisted by helpers were found to lay smaller eggs with disproportionately smaller yolks, thereby saving energy during egg laying. As a result, they live longer and breed more often than females with no helpers.

The scientists predict that this phenomenon occurs in other cooperative breeding bird species.

"Helper birds offer mothers a form of child-care," says Rebecca Kilmer from the University of Cambridge's Department of Zoology, one of the leaders of the research team that made this

discovery. "In this species, mothers effectively steal the child-care from their current brood and spend this energy on producing more young in the future".

Superb fairy-wrens sometimes breed in pairs, and sometimes as pairs assisted by between one and four helpers. Helpers are always male and often sons from previous breeding. Females are drab brown in colour, but males moult into a striking blue plumage to breed, hence the species superlative name.

(The research team also included members from ANU, Wollongong and Macquarie Universities.)

*So while it "takes a village to raise a child", a few blokes with time on their hands can come in useful too (Ed)*

## **Migrating birds may "see" Earth's magnetic field**

*Reuter's news release 25 September 2007*

**Migrating birds, it seems can "see" the Earth's magnetic field which they use as a compass to guide them around the globe. Specialised neurons in the eye, sensitive to magnetic direction, have been shown for the first time to connect via a specific brain pathway to an area in the forebrain of birds responsible for vision.**

**Scientists have known for many years, from behavioural experiments, that birds use an internal compass to navigate on their epic journeys. But exactly how the system works has been a mystery. Now work by Dominik Heyers and colleagues at the University of Oldenburg in Germany has started to unravel the mechanism at a neuroanatomical level – and it shows the eye is the key.**

**Magnetic sensing molecules in the eye, known as cryptochromes, appear to stimulate photoreceptors depending on the orientation of the magnetic field. This strongly suggests migratory birds perceive the magnetic field as a visual pattern.**

**"It's a pity we cannot ask them, but what we imagine is that it is like a shadow or a light spot on the normal vision of the bird", Heyers said. The German team based their research on laboratory studies of the garden warbler, a highly migratory bird.**

**OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT OCT/NOV 2007**

Sep 9	Baillon's Crake	1	Hunter Valley Gardens	J. & B. Clark
Sep 29	Black-faced Monarch	6	Awabakal [East of Lagoon]	J. Nicholls
Sep 22	Topknot Pigeon	15	Watagan State Forest	C.Goodenough
Sep 23	Rainbow Lorikeet	Ny	Sunshine	"
Oct 1	Red Wattlebird	2+2dy	Newcastle	"
Oct 3	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo			
Oct 9	Dollarbird	1	Garden Suburb	L.Huxtable
Oct 3	Red-capped Robin	Pr+2dy	Walka Water Works	L.Mee
Oct 10	Blue-billed Duck	Pr	"	"
	White-winged Triller	1	"	"
Oct 2	Rufous Songlark	5	"	"
Oct 8	Buff-banded Rail	2dy	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P.Lightfoot
Oct 1	Australasian Shoveler	8y	"	"
Oct 8	Masked Lapwing	3dy	"	"
	Grey Teal	5ducklings	"	"
	Pacific Black Duck	3ducklings	"	"
Oct 10	Rufous Fantail	2	Blackbutt Reserve	"
Oct 1	Rose-crowned Fruit-dove	1	"Bush Haven". E. Seaham	J. Musicka
Oct 4	Varied Sittella	2+nest	Green Wattle Creek	M.Newman
	Musk Lorikeet	25	"	"
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	2	"	"
Oct 5	Cicadabird	1	"	"
Sep 30	Rose Robin	1	Hunter Botanic Gardens	"
	Black-faced Monarch	1	"	"
	Rufous Fantail	1	"	"
	Leaden Flycatcher	1	"	"
Sep 30	Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo	1	Woodville [garden]	"
Oct 10	Grey-crowned Babbler	10+dy	"	"
Oct 1	Rose Robin	1m	Minmi [S.T.P.]	"
	White-necked Heron	25	Hexham Swamp	"
	Whiskered Tern	40	"	"
Oct 7	Southern Emu-wren	3	Warakeila [nr Eccleston]	"
	Brown Goshawk	Pr	"	"
Oct 4	Black-faced Monarch	2	Wyee Point	V.Moon
Oct 2-6	Glossy Black Cockatoo	5+1dy	"	"
Oct 8	Common Koel	1	Cardiff	R. Goodenough
Oct 7	Pied Oystercatcher	Pr on	Stockton Sandspit	T.Clarke
Oct 3	Glossy Black Cockatoo	3	Fingal Head	"
Oct 2	Osprey	1	Glenrock Lagoon	"
Oct 14	Masked Owl [found dead]	1m	Green Point	W.Warner/G.Cooper
Aug 2	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	1	Wingen [garden]	G.Newling
Oct 19	Rufous Songlark	4m+1f	"	"
	Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo	1	"	"
	Pallid Cuckoo	1	"	"
	Brown Songlark	3m	Mt. Arthur mine site	"
	Brown Songlark	1	4km north of Muswellbrook	"
	White-winged Triller	1	Scone	"
Oct 2	Dollarbird	1	Wingen	"
Oct 2	Common Sandpiper	1	Speers Point [Esplanade]	R.Walker
Oct 26	Spectacled Monarch	1	Ash Island [rainforest reveg]	P.Lightfoot
	Spotted Pardalote	1	"	"
Oct 28	Glossy Ibis	9	Woodberry/Thornton Swamp	L.Marshall
Nov 14	Musk Lorikeet	6-20	Richmond Vale	C.Goodenough
Nov 5	<b>Lewin's Rail</b>	1	Wallsend	"
Nov 1	Little Wattlebird	2+1dy	Newcastle West	"
Nov 2	Musk Lorikeet	~40	Wingen [garden]	G.Newling
Nov 12	Spectacled Monarch	3	White Rock [Chichester SF]	B.Shields
	Black-faced Monarch	2	"	"
	Noisy Pitta	1	"	"
Nov 13	Southern Boobook	2	Butterwick	"

Nov 4-14	Dollarbird	Pr n	Fennell Bay	C. McGilvray
Nov 6	Olive-backed Oriole	Pr	Stoney Creek	P.Durie
Nov 12	Southern Boobook	1	Toronto [garden]	“
Nov 11-14	Blue-billed Duck	Pr	Walka Water Works	J.Smart
	White-bellied Sea-eagle	2	Hunter River, nr Walka	“
Nov	White-bellied Sea-eagle	2	Marmong Point	B.Kibble
Nov 9-11	Nankeen Kestrel	1	Kotara [Westfield]	“
Nov 13	Nankeen Kestrel	1	Kotara [garden]	“
Nov 14	Grey-crowned Babbler	6	Cessnock	J.Nicholls
Oct 20	White-browed Woodswallow	B	Doyles Creek	H.Tarrant
	White-browed Woodswallow	C	Jerrys Plains	“
	Diamond Firetail		Doyles Creek	“
	Diamond Firetail		Medhurst Bridge	“
	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	Medhurst Bridge	“
Oct 28	Buff-banded Rail	1	Ellalong [lagoon area]	“

## Riflebird Crows in Paradise

Outing to Jerusalem Creek  
Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2007

One of my favourite places is Jerusalem Creek, in the wet forests north of Dungog and part of Barrington Tops National Park. To walk the creek itself is an amazing adventure as the waters fall rapidly down rocky gorges that separate quiet deep pools in shady places. All of that is terrific for rock climbing and those with an interest in riparian vegetation but perhaps not so for bird watching types. The cascading water is too noisy for bird calls to be identified and the scrambling over rocks is not that conducive to easy meandering.

Our plan was to walk slowly along the rainforest track between the creek and the forest road; an undulating traverse of various drainage lines that each contain some wonderful hidden treasures. How pleasing it was to dawdle with other like-minded types and take it all in.

By the time we had completed the outwards journey we had made sightings of all three scrubwren species available: Yellow-throated, White-browed and Large-billed. It is always with a sense of achievement that I manage this goal and today was no different. I still consider the Large-bills the most adorable of the three and any close encounter is treasured.

The rainforest continued to deliver many other terrific moments like Noisy Pitta and Pale-yellow Robin but for entertainment value the antics of a male Satin Bowerbird had a few of us giggling quietly to ourselves. Suppressing our laughter was necessary so as not to distract the bird from its work.

We had been admiring the decorations of this particular bower that only contained one blue lolly wrapper. Mostly, the adornments were of natural materials such as snail shells, crofton weed flowers (white), wonga vine flowers (creamy yellow) and some blue feathers (most likely from Crimson Rosella). Then the owner showed up with a bunch of sticks in his bill and trying hard to not get noticed. It was fun to watch this bird hop in tip-toe fashion towards the bower as if it was unaware of the structure at all. I had never considered bowerbirds as comics before but this fellow was the Mr Bean of the forest.

Easily the best bird for the day was that male Paradise Riflebird as it crowed in an exposed position allowing everyone in the group to get excellent and extended views. Previous sightings for myself have been of lurking types more intent on feeding than announcing their presence so this was very exciting stuff. As it turns out, this bird has a special place for another of our group who proudly declared 300 species on their Hunter List. Not a bad way to bring up that milestone but spare a thought for a poor photographer who managed to get only a picture of a bare branch. The new camera was getting a fine work out but failure to snap this most obvious bird must have been frustrating. Better luck next time.

Tom Clarke

## PROGRAM

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	<b>MEETING PLACE &amp; TIME</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>
Sunday 16 December 2007	Annual Lathams Snipe Count. Pambalong NR etc	8.30am Minmi Pub	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Tuesday 18 December 2007	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Tomago House	<b>Please ring to confirm</b> Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Sunday 13 January 2008	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon Sandspit Car Park	Tom Clarke 49513872
Saturday 19 January 2008	Hunter Wader Survey	6.30am Ash Island 7.00am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Chris Herbert 4959 3663
Saturday/Sunday 19/20 January 2008	Painted Snipe Survey	Any wetland near you.	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Sunday 20 January 2008	Field Outing Newcastle Rock Platforms	7.30am Nobbys Headland Car Park	Di Johnson 4975 1777
Friday – Monday 26 – 28 January 2008	Long Weekend Camp at Timor Caves	Private property at Isaacs Creek. \$10 per car camping fee.	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Sunday 3 February 2008	World Wetlands Day	Hunter Wetlands Centre	Tom Clarke 4951 3872 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Tuesday 5 February 2008	Mid-week Outing Ash Island	7.30am Ash Island Car Park	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Wednesday 6 February 2008	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm Garden Suburb School	All members welcome
Saturday 9 February 2008	Atlassing	TBA	<b>Please ring to confirm</b> Nick Livanos 4954 5739 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
<b>Wednesday 13 February 2008</b>	<b>CLUB NIGHT &amp; AGM (refer to separate notice of meeting, election of officers &amp; membership renewal)</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetlands Centre</b>	
Sunday 17 February 2008	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon Stockton Sandspit	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Sunday 17 February 2008	Port Stephens Wader Survey	7.00am. Various locations around Port Stephens, as instructed	Alan Stuart 49528569 <a href="mailto:almarosa@bigpond.com">almarosa@bigpond.com</a> <b>You must ring or email Alan to book a place</b>
Saturday 23 February 2008	Hunter Wader Survey	10.00am Ash Island 10.30am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Chris Herbert 4959 3663
Sunday 24 February 2008	Field Outing Tierneys Lane Martinsville	7.30am Cooranbong Fire Station	Tom Clarke 4951 3872