



Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Issue No. 1/15 February 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 Great Frigatebird present around Newcastle Harbour from 5th to 9th January was the first recorded within the Hunter Region. Photo by Allan Richardson.



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President's Column

In the last newsletter I spoke about the festive period being a time to take a breather and relax. I was able to do that this holiday season and it was a break that I enjoyed very much. It is definitely action-stations again now though as a new year is upon us and with it a full agenda of activities and other events. As I pen this column I am in the process of finalising the Annual Report for the Club, which as always leaves me astounded at how busy and well-respected this Club of ours really is. I feel privileged to be president of the Club and to be able to report on our achievements over the past 12 months.

The BirdLife Australia Photography Group's biennial conference is now only a few weeks away (about a fortnight by the time you read this). This will be a great opportunity for the Club and the Region to shine on a national stage, as bird photographers from all over Australia will be converging on the Hunter to both

partake in photography forays and attend workshops, dinners and other formalities. We have a list of people that have volunteered to show the delegates around to some key sites, which is fantastic. Great thanks to those people and even greater thanks to Lorna Mee for coordinating their involvement. I'm sure there will be other ways for people to help out over the weekend (Feb 28/Mar 1), so if you'd like to be involved contact me or a committee member.

We also now have a new look website thanks to the efforts of Rob Kyte and Alan Stuart in particular. Check it out – there are some new pages and ideas being rolled out. Let us know if you have any comments or suggestions on how it might be improved.

Here's to a great year for birds and birding in the Hunter.

Mick Roderick

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Ted Giblin

Anthony Gleeson

Brian Laut of Nulkaba

Lizie MacDonald of Medowie

Feach Moyle of Eleebana

Graeme Stevens of Salamander Bay

Joanne Thomas of New Lambton

Paul Van Gaal of Highfields

Barry & Vivien Wilson of Green Point

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.

HBOC's Website Revamped

In late 2014, the long-term host of HBOC's website went belly-up, which left us in a considerable lurch for a while. But it also provided us with an opportunity, which we took, to reconsider the structure and content of what we had, and in effect to design a new website. The first challenge though was to engage a new host for the website. Until that was sorted out we were unable to update the really important parts of the website such as Activities – everyone always wants to know what's on the coming program!

Rob Kyte took the lead on this on behalf of the Management Committee and arranged a contract with a company called NetRegistry to recreate and host our site. After that was done, Rob and I could then set about

implementing our planned revamp, which has some new sections and also some of the content relocated into what we think are more logical places. We've done what we had in mind, but we'd be delighted to have your suggestions as to what other material could be added or changed.

The website address is the same as before: www.hboc.org.au. However, you may need to delete the address from your computer and then reinstall it, otherwise your computer may try to take you to the now non-existent old website.

Alan Stuart

New Song Meters™ Have Rufous Scrub-birds On Song

Since 2010 a major component of HBOC's field studies program has involved surveying in the Barrington Tops and Gloucester Tops IBA, with the main focus of that effort being to monitor the Rufous Scrub-bird population in the Gloucester Tops. Many Club members have been involved in those surveys and lots more of you will be familiar with the outcomes, from articles which have appeared in The Whistler and elsewhere (if you are interested to see copies of the various articles and reports about the Rufous Scrub-bird project, visit HBOC's recently revamped website).



The two new Song Meter™ units

About three years ago the Club purchased a remote recording device, known as a Song Meter™, and all the necessary associated paraphernalia. We used the Song Meter™ to study the calling behaviour of one particular

scrub-bird at its territory, as the first steps in learning more about when scrub-birds call, what types of calls they make, etc. We were making good headway on this non-invasive study when our Song Meter™ failed (due to corrosion of its circuit board following some spells of very wet weather). Although our Management Committee decided to replace it, that turned out not to be necessary – because of the generosity of BirdLife Australia's Southern NSW Branch. The Branch had some unspent funds for IBA Monitoring, which had been raised in a Twitchathon from a few years back, and so they decided to buy two Song Meters™ for us to use in the Gloucester Tops. The value of the two units is approximately \$3,000.



A Song Meter™ unit installed in the field

We took delivery of the two new units in late December, and then with the generous help of Graeme O'Connor we built protective security cages for them, so that we can leave them in the field unattended for long periods of time. Now the Song Meters™ are

Club Activity Reports

in place at two Rufous Scrub-bird territories in the Tops, and we are embarked on a comparison of the calling patterns of the two males, under what will be virtually identical weather conditions. We anticipate we will

know a lot more about Scrub-bird calling behaviour as this study progresses.

Alan Stuart

Club Activity Reports

Smiths Lake Camp

24 to 26 January 2015

It had been such a long time since last we (HBOC) visited this place I could not properly remember when it was. Searching back through my bird journals I discovered it was the June Long Weekend of 1997; nearly eighteen years! Good thing I wrote a few pages of bird notes at the time to record the experience.

My fuzzy memory of a wonderfully birdy place was confirmed with the reading of my journal that expressed joy and excitement over multitudes of honeyeaters fighting over the blossom of Swamp Mahogany. Well that was then and this is now; still a great place to go and look for birds, the Field Station at Smiths Lake held interest in different ways this time around.

Days were mostly warm to hot and by late morning much of the birdwatching activities were ditched for swimming and general lounging about in the lake. Despite that, our group of 27 people did manage to enjoy more than 90 species of the local birds. Most of these sightings were basically around the camp site or within the riparian zone of the nearby creek.

The Field Station is at the south-west corner of Smiths Lake and features a long strip of excellent coastal habitat. The shoreline is backed by a broad band of swampy land full of melaleuca and sedges, giving way to a thin line of swamp mahogany, then onto a wide open swampy heath. This wetland falls to the lake via two creeks and one is adjacent to the camp. This particular drainage line has many rainforest features. Beyond the creek and heading back towards the main road, the ground rises and the habitat changes to dry coastal forest. With such a mix is it any wonder that birds just love the place?

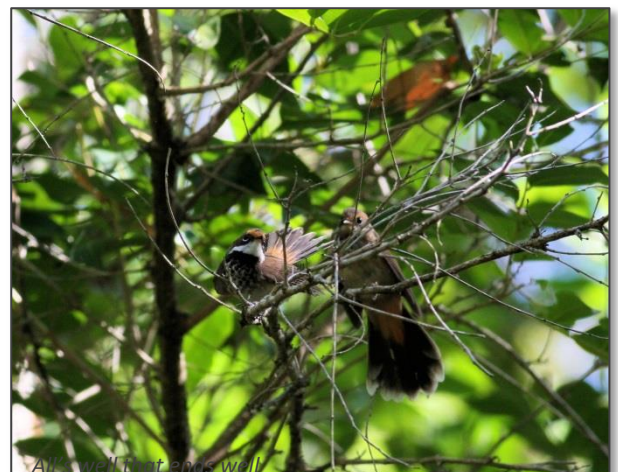
Probably the pick of the habitats was the creek next to the camp which surprised with such delightful sightings as Emerald Dove, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Regent Bowerbird, Brown Gerygone, Rufous Fantail and Azure Kingfisher. A favourite spot to sit and watch the birds

here was a veranda built on the creek side of the boat shed and a lazy Sunday afternoon, sitting on fold-up chairs sipping red wine was just the perfect way to go.



The happy campers

The story of the camp that needs to be re-counted here is about a young Rufous Fantail that had the misfortune of getting caught up in a spider's web that stretched over the creek. Much to the concern of two birdwatchers that discovered it, the bird was unable to free itself. Calling upon another more intrepid type that happened along to do something, the bird was freed from its predicament after some bush bashing plus a little ingenuity. At the time it was not properly established however that the freed youngster had been reunited with its parent. The good news came the next day when a youngster was found to be in company with an adult and some marvellous photographic proof put it beyond doubt. So well done to all concerned, I say.



Always get your well

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

But not all the birds were flying by the camp. A walk to the wet heath during the cooler hours was needed to catch a glimpse of Southern Emu-wren or further on to the dense grassy area to flush Brown Quail. Up the rise and into the forest was where you needed to be to hear the Black-faced Monarch or encounter the Variegated Fairy-wrens. So it was worth the occasional stroll out of ear-shot of the splashing and cavorting that was happening in the lake.

Tom Clarke

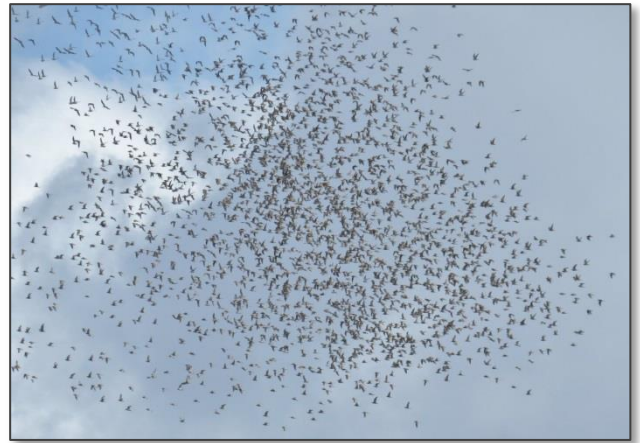
Stockton Sandspit

3 February 2015

Our first Tuesday Field Outing this year was well attended. Thirty-four members, including two new members, met under Stockton Bridge to observe the Waders as the tide changed. Many people brought their telescopes and were very willing to share them. It gave everyone a chance to have a really good look at the Stockton Sandspit birds and improve their identification skills. We spent the morning on that site rather than move to any nearby bush areas.

We began our observations about one and a half hours before high tide. Lots of waders were roosting on the bank and a lot well spread in the water of the lagoon. This meant it was easy to pick out different species and look at their characteristics. As the water rose to high tide more birds flew in from the dykes and most moved onto the saltmarsh area and huddled closely, so it became a mass of birds not so easily distinguishable. When an Australian Hobby flew over and later a Sea

Eagle the birds flew around spectacularly, mainly in flocks with their own species.



Wader spectacular

The predominant species were Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (2,000+), Black-winged Stilt, Red-necked Avocet, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pacific Golden Plover, Eastern Curlew and Curlew Sandpipers. Walking along the bank at Fern Bay we found 45 Grey-tailed Tattlers, 6 Terek Sandpipers and 6 Whimbrel. As the tide receded 20 Red-necked Stints, Red-capped Plover and 20 Little Tern were seen on the shore. The total species count for the morning was 46, which was a good count on this one location.

Other birds included Double-barred Finches and two Brown Quail (recently seen with three young, although we didn't see the young on Tuesday).

Judi Thomas

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

Hunter Home Brewers Report

Argy Bargy Cargy – the ABC of the Twitchathon

Anticipation. That's what the lead-up to a Twitchathon is all about. And the anticipation for the Hunter Home Brewers in 2014 included defending a record tally set the previous year.

With news that the Mount Hope pub was full, it was decided to head further west for the first night of the warm-up session. There was a dry, flat patch of country that was calling the Brewers loud and clear – Willandra National Park. The real beacon here was the Inland Dotterel; a lifer for three quarters of the team and something that could be targeted at night after a long

drive in from the coast. That drive was indeed a long one – and a hot one. Conditions were obviously dry, but regardless of the Twitchathon, such conditions should actually favour things like Inland Dotterels, so the biggest anticipation was probably felt around what they might find on their first night away.

As they drove west out of Condobolin, the country seemed very different to the previous year. Not only was it dry, but there weren't any birds on the fence posts. There weren't Spotted Harriers around, nor flocks of Woodswallows or groups of finches flushing off the roadsides. The country had a different feel to it – and it wasn't a 'birdy' one.

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

When they eventually reached the dusty plains at Willandra, their spirits were lifted by the sheer anticipation of the possibility of Inland Dotterels being on the menu for the evening. Eric the Esky provided amberoid refreshments in an attempt to quell the excitement. Alas, the afternoon and evening sessions failed to produce any birds at all on the Willandra Plains except for a group of 4 Banded Lapwing that got their hearts started.

The next day they made their way back to the mallee and surrounding woodlands and completed their main morning mission, which was to find some of the honeyeaters that had been missing from recent trip reports from the area. As is customary, a Dummy Run of the afternoon session was completed on Friday arvo (that included a run-in with another team; one with a lot of C's in their name). Despite the fact that the all-important Cargy Poo Ponds were in reasonable form, it was obvious that 2014 wasn't going to be like 2013. The almost complete absence of White-browed/Masked Woodswallows provided a reasonable indication that conditions were either bad here, or much better elsewhere. In exchanging messages with the Dodgy Drogos, up north on the Liverpool Plains, it was revealed that conditions up there were spot-on. Any room for complacency immediately dissolved.



Nice wheels, but not enough esky space for Twitch use

On Saturday, again as is customary, the Brewers found themselves whiling away the final couple of hours til kick-off. In contrast to other teams that start in the mallee region, the Brewers commence their run in the wooded habitat and end their Saturday at the Cargy Poo Ponds. The searing heat and lack of wind in the woodlands made this a rather unpleasant experience, but Eric ensured there was a treasure trove of refreshments on-hand to see them through (2014 was a

Springvale year, not a Polish Hill one). It was also very obvious from the messages filtering through from Miyagi Buzzard that they weren't the only ones enjoying some refreshments in the heat! Storm clouds started to build close to 3:30 but the worst of it appeared to be to the west and south. But with the change came a welcome breeze and the sky was almost overcast. This benefited the boys, as birds began to vocalise in their hybrid mallee/woodland starting point, known as 'Grosset Gate'.

Sitting tight on a calling Red-capped Robin, 4 o'clock arrived and Grena Brew's blue pen went into action as a flurry of quality western birds were recorded, including some mallee specialists like Southern Scrub-Robin and Shy Heathwren. White-fronted, Grey-fronted and Yellow-plumed were the important Honeyeaters here and were joined by White-eared, Striped and Spiny-cheeks. A lone Masked Woodswallow that flew low over the woodland had their heads shaking in amazement but gleefully added to the tally. 19 minutes for 19 birds and it was into the car for the drive to Whooley Tank. En-route, a perched male Hooded Robin gave rise to some enthusiastic excitement; their first since 2010.

The Tanks provided a litany of bread-and-butter western species, nonetheless important on a Twitch. Over to the Wheat Paddock just as the first hour clocked over, providing only a single species, but a good one, in Gilbert's Whistler. Continuing south, the Chestnut-rumped Thornbills at the railway tracks seen on the Dummy Run failed to show and insult was added to injury when 2 out of the 4 Brewers saw a flock at the next stop, with no 3rd person on the scene quick enough. The same went for a calling Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo that only 2 birders got onto – both species to be dips in 2014.

After picking up a few of the 'expecteds' at Booberoi Creek (and coming face-to-face with the uniformed Feather Rufflers), the lads picked up Banded Lapwings quite close to a paddock fence, nicely spied with some backseat spotting from Ando Brew. Chat Alley provided some distant Emus but little else, despite there having been numerous Brown Songlarks in the area on the dummy run. It was onwards to Cargy township and the promise of the perennially productive poo ponds. Steve Brew called a Black Kite on the way into town but the patrol was not turned around for confirmation, thinking that they'd pick one up in town or at the ponds, or even at Hexham the next day.

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

Cargy town provided the plastic trio of Spadgers, Rock Doves and Blackbirds before they headed for the final big roll of the dice for their Saturday arvo component. With 71 species on the scoreboard they entered the feathered faecal fray and Grena Brew went into scribing overdrive. Plum-headed Finch was the first bird seen – a very good start. Crakes, ducks and shorebirds were the order of the day, with 21 species of these birds recorded alone. No sign of the White-winged Black Tern that had been present on the front ponds the day before though. Futile scanning of the area for a Black Kite frustrated the team, though a pair of sparrowhawks was a nice consolation. As the light started to fail, birds became far harder to pick out and despite Steve Brew getting some Aussie Shovelers into the scope, by the time the others arrived to confirm they'd swum out of view. Another frustrating dip on a bird present and open for the taking. Fortunately though, on that back pond was the White-winged Black Tern perched atop an old post in the middle of the water.



Honeyeaters were hard to come by in the Mallee this year

By the time their work was done it was too late to try and peg back the Black Kite on the other side of town and valuable kms needed to be chewed up if they were to make it to their 'camp' in time for their strategic rest stop. And so with 112 species on the list, into the patrol the Brewers piled and into the esky they delved, leaving Cargy in their wake, headed hurriedly in a generally north and easterly direction. With concerns about timeframes and with efficiency being the key to ultimate success, the decision was made to forgo a food stop and it was leftover lunch and potato chip sandwiches all round. Only two stops were made on the long haul back into the top of the Hunter Valley; one for a refuel / windscreen clean / driver-swap, the other being for the ever-so-exceptionally reliable Rup-Ruppers at the cost of barely 10 minutes total; a ruthlessly economical detour for a quality tick.

Nocturnal birds were very thin at their 'rest stop', just inside the Hunter Valley, with just Owlet-Nightjar added to their Saturday tally. At 1:15am they officially commenced their 3-hour break and at 4:15am on the dot they dragged themselves back into the vehicle, maintaining a course for the Lower Hunter. With no fruits on the figs at their Dungog rainforest mop sites, the decision had been made to completely forgo the wet forests north of the river and instead put all rainforest eggs into the Old Brush basket.

En-route to the Cessnock sites, a couple of brief stops were made to take in the dawn chorus along Jones Reserve Road on the northern footslopes of the Wollemi massif. Although birds were plentiful at both stops, nothing new was added. Although not critical, this was a minor setback to a strategy that Mick Brew had placed confidence in (thinking that Stubble Quails at least would be calling). The pressure was now on Old Brush and the Cessnock forests to produce. And produce they did.

Old Brush delivered every target species, as well as bonuses such as Brush Cuckoo, Brush Turkey and Little Lorikeet. The only birds realistically missing from a Dungog run were Topknot Pigeon, Regent Bowerbird and potentially Pheasant Coucal. Despite not recording these birds at all in 2014, the time "bought back" from not making the epic deviation to Dungog would come in handy elsewhere closer to the coast, though as it turned out, this advantage was eventually squandered by some poor decision-making late in the day. They headed for the Brewers' lynchpin site, HEZ, with a quick look at Orchid Road which resulted in a very useful Cicadabird tick.

HEZ was on fire, though not literally like it would be just a week after the Twitchathon, but full of calling birds. They mopped up on Buff-rumped Thornbill, Dusky Woodswallow, Yellow-tufted, Fuscous and Black-chinned Honeyeaters, as well as the oft-dipped White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike. But the greatest mop was when the familiar 'chip chip' of White-browed Woodswallows was heard from the skies at Buttonquail Junction. They could barely believe their eyes and ears, after spending the past 3 days in the mallee country, here in HEZ was a mixed flock of White-browed and Masked Woodswallows. Although the latter wasn't a tick for the Twitch, just the excitement of seeing these birds once again in HEZ (on a Twitchathon at that) added great spice to the moment.

NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

Walka Waterworks produced only one bird of consequence and only just. It took more than 10 minutes to find a Great Crested Grebe and it was with great vested relief that it was eventually found! It was also their 200th bird, which at 10:30am wasn't as early as some previous years' double-tons, but still very promising. It was then over the Belmore Bridge and onto the Maitland Flats for the only part of the Brewers' entire Twitchathon north of the Hunter River. This yielded cisticola, bushlark and Rufous Songlark before it was time to hit the estuary.

It was also at this time that the wheels fell off on the Brewers' 2014 Twitch. Perceived time constraints had them forgoing Kite Bluff and other sites on the west side of Hexham Swamp, which in the end cost them the Black Kite that they still needed. On their way to the first estuary site they also neglected to notice that Black-fronted Dotterel was still missing from their list. A ten-second stop at Bunnings Swamp would have dealt with that situation, but not realising it was missing they drove straight past it in both directions without stopping. The birds could almost have been seen through the windows whilst driving. Ouch.

Shortland oil produced some fledgling Tawny Frogmouths and neighbouring Night Herons, Maggie Geese and Wandering Whistling Ducks. With 215 species on the board it was into Fort Drive where 3 species of tern fell relatively easily as did Pied Cormorant. Two birds considered as bonuses-of-sorts (Sooty Oycs and Aussie Gannet) were also added. For the first time in 16 years of Twitchathons, they could not find a single Wedge-tailed Shearwater; nominated as their Biggest Dip.

Being on 221 species arriving at Stockton Sandspit at just after 1pm on the Sunday, any team would be thinking that 240+ would be a reasonable target, with 250 an outside chance. And to some extent, the addition of 11 new species from Stockton upheld these expectations. They could not have done any better than they did with birds at the sandspit, with Great Knot being the only dip (and there were 2 there as they were later to learn). But at 2pm with 232 species notched, then began another 'Little Wattlebird debacle' with the streets of Fern Bay and even the Bayway Village caravan park scoured for any sign of this thorn-in-the-side bird for the Brewers. They'd missed this bird in 2009 when they set their best ever Twitchathon score from a Hunter catchment run and vowed to never let it happen again. Ironically they

would finish on that same score as 2009 and without that Little Wattlebird again!

Leaving Stockton, they decided to target their only 'gimme' – Australasian Pipit. The sites where they had in mind held numerous other possible new birds for them, such as White-fronted Chat, Little Egret, Black-necked Stork, Horsfield's Cuckoo etc. They arrived at Hexham Swamp and soon bagged the pipit, but for the first time in many visits, not a single chat could be found. In frustration they were lured to the "Twitchathon Trap" of Ash Island. This place is considered a trap because it lures birders at a late stage of a Twitchathon when they're clearly tired and the adrenalin is starting to wane. The return dividends from a visit to Ash Island in terms of time expended at this part of a Twitchathon are normally very low, but so too would the returns be from other sites. It is the time wasted getting around Ash Island that hurts so much and today was to be no exception – more than half an hour invested for not a single new bird.



Game faces were on as the competition approached

Talk of pegging back the dotterel at Bunnings Swamp or heading to Merewether for the wattlebird and New Holland Honeyeater were thwarted by delusions of a fast-ticking clock in a city choked with busy Sunday afternoon traffic, neither of which were a reality. Instead they played it safe and headed to Blackbutt Reserve, the new finishing point in 2014. The only post-Stockton tick of the Twitchathon other than the pipit (Scaly-breasted Lorikeet) was added en-route to Blackbutt. Two hours for two birds...it was a disappointing run home and the lads had to settle for 234, the same score as the 2009 Hunter run.

Numerous other teams gathered at Blackbutt, including the Feather Rufflers, who had also come in from the mallee. They looked relatively fresh in comparison to



The Brewers, in good spirits despite throwing away the title

other teams that had braved the heat to walk, run or ride the Twitchathon! They noticed that the Dodgy Drongos added Brush Turkey in excitement to their list as they literally walked in the gate. This was a very important bird for them, as it nudged them off 234 and onto 235, giving them the mantle of 2014 NSW Twitchathon winners, beating the Brewers by just one species. The Brewers were pleased to see the Drongos get up and see the Liverpool Plains represented on the podium once again – they have been working hard out there for a long time now. From the sounds that have been emanating from the Brewers think-tank, they will have to work even harder in 2015.

Jacqueline Winter

Future Club Activities

BirdLife Australia Photography Conference

26 February to 3 March 2015

Hunter Wetlands Centre NSW

As was mentioned in the previous newsletter, the Photography Conference is being held within the Hunter this year and is almost upon us. It is the biennial conference and AGM for the BirdLife Australia Photography Group.

An expected 90 delegates will be gathering in the Region to attend the conference over the weekend of 8th February to 1st March. However, HBOC is facilitating activities from 26th February through 3rd March.

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

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

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

Durridgere SCA Camp

3 to 6 April 2015

To get to the campsite at Durridgere SCA you need to get onto Ulan Road. There are two ways of getting there from the direction of Newcastle - either by taking the Golden Highway and taking the turn-off to the left about 7km west of Cassilis, or by going the scenic route, via the Bylong Valley Way and then following the signs to Ulan once in Wollar, then going right onto Ulan Road.

Along Ulan Road, you need to find "Summerhill Road", which is about 5km south of the turn-off from the Golden Hwy along Ulan Road, or about 30km north of Ulan. Take Summerhill Road (there should be paddocks to your left and bush to your right once you are on it) and drive along it for 4.5km. Along the way, you will go round a sweeping left bend, followed by a sweeping right bend. About 1km on from that sweeping right bend, another sweeping left bend appears in front of you. You will notice that there is an entry into the forest on this left bend. There is a sign saying 'Durridgere Central Trail Only' and some mail boxes. You need to take this access into the bush. You can actually get directions to this very point by typing "Durridgere State Forest, Turill, New South Wales" into Google Maps, which is probably a good thing to do.

You then follow the forest track (which initially heads west, then south) for about 3.3km to some wonderful woodland 'til you get to a fork in the road. At this point, you need to veer left, and follow the track to the campsite (the old homestead site) which is just under

Access to Hexham Swamp
another 1km further on. The track is suitable for towing.
Note that these roads are dry weather only, so check
conditions closer to the date. We will have an alternative

location for the camp if wet weather prevents access to
Durridgere.

Access to Hexham Swamp

Effective immediately, Woodlands Close is no longer the
access point to Hexham Swamp. If people try to enter
via Woodlands Close they may strike locked gates
and/or 'no access' signs. Instead, visitors to Hexham
Swamp should enter the Tarro Interchange from which
there is a new access road leading to a construction
gate. This gate will be either manned (during work
times) or left unlocked (outside of work times).

There is a sign saying "Residents Only" just beyond the
gate. It has been agreed with the landowner (Aurizon)
that HBOC members are able to use the "Residents
Only" access route. This route takes people to the

Pipeline Track from where the normal (pre-existing)
access to Hexham Swamp is obtained by driving to the
south.

To exit, retrace the route back to the Tarro Interchange.
Here however, it is only possible to make a left-hand
turn. For people who want to be heading east, towards
Newcastle etc, the nearest U-turn bay is just on the
other side of the John Renshaw Drive overpass when
driving towards Maitland.



Map of the northern section of Hexham Swamp with the current access route marked in orange and u turn bay location in blue.

Threatened Birds of the Lower Hunter Woodland

We are very fortunate in the Hunter to have the most significant woodland habitat east of the Divide on our doorstep. The Lower Hunter woodlands provide habitat for many threatened species and this is recognised as its status as an IBA. BirdLife Australia are organising an event to educate people as to the importance of this habitat and the birds that utilise it.

The Lower Hunter Valley is a globally important area for bird and biodiversity conservation. It provides one of the last remaining refuges for woodland birds including the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater and Endangered Swift Parrot. Please join this free event to learn more

about the Hunter Region's amazing birds and how you can help ensure they have a bright future. The day's schedule will include a guided woodland bird walk along the South Kearsley Fire Trail with a wildlife expert, morning tea at Poppet Head Dam and the opportunity to learn about BirdLife Australia's work to save one of our most threatened birds – the Regent Honeyeater.

The event is taking place on Saturday 21st February, meeting at 8.30am at Kitchener Poppethead Reserve, Quorrobolong Road, Kitchener. To register interest please RSVP at tinyurl.com/HunterBirdWalk or by emailing jane.lambert@birdlife.org.au

Beach Stone-curlews Soldier On

In a good news story to emerge recently it was confirmed that the regular observations of the Beach Stone-curlew family at Soldier's Point continued into their fourth consecutive year. On 7th February Trevor Murray (who keeps a watchful eye on things at this location) photographed two adult birds with a youngster – indicating a fourth year of successful breeding for this species in Port Stephens (the most southerly location in NSW that this is known to occur).

The location that these birds frequent has been threatened by potential development and the monitoring of this family will hopefully prevent potentially damaging activities from being approved.



Happy family – Beach Stone-curlews by Trevor Murray

A Visitor from Afar

The arrival of an unexpected visitor to Newcastle Harbour caused a ripple of excitement within the Region's birding community last month. On Wednesday 7th January news emerged of a sighting of a Frigatebird in the Carrington Basin and was broadcast via the local birding email group Hunterbirding. It was almost certainly going to be a Lesser Frigatebird – a bird which many had seen in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Oswald in January 2013, which uprooted large numbers from their tropical island homes and resulted in numerous sightings along the NSW coast (at least ten within the Hunter Region).

A few keen birders who could readily visit the site from their places of work ventured out in order to confirm an identification. These early observations, although distant, suggested that the bird might actually be the much rarer cousin of the Lesser Frigatebird – the Great Frigatebird. As this news filtered through Hunterbirding to the eager twitchers amongst us plans were quickly hatched as to how and when we could get down to the Harbour to tick up.

After spending most of the afternoon around Carrington and Honeysuckle, the bird eventually relocated to Nobbys Head, where it remained largely faithful for the

A Visitor from Afar

remainder of its stay. A number of Hunter birders managed to connect with the bird that afternoon or the following morning, before it disappeared on the Friday morning. Discussions with local residents revealed that it had been present since Monday 5th when there were actually two Frigatebirds present. There had only been the single bird from the Tuesday onwards though.

Good photographs of the bird were acquired from Nobbys breakwater and had confirmed the identification as an adult female Great Frigatebird. This was assumed

to be from the Coral Sea – the southern limit of the Barrier Reef being the closest location in which these birds usually reside. However, experts on Frigatebird identification noted that with a pink bill and red eye-ring this individual was not from the Coral Sea (whose bill and eye-rings are blue). The bird had actually originated from the north Pacific (possibly Hawaii), most likely assisted by the major easterly trade wind that had persisted in the week prior to its arrival. A most exciting discovery indeed!



Great Frigatebird by Allan Richardson

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:

- A White-winged Black Tern at Newcastle Baths on 3rd December;
- A Singing Honeyeater at Lake Liddell on 16th December;
- A few White-browed Woodswallows still present at HEZ on 18th December;
- A Lewin's Rail heard behind the Hunter Wetlands Centre on 23rd December;
- A Great Frigatebird photographed at Nobbys Head on 7th January;
- A Black Bittern photographed at Dora Creek on 9th January;
- A count of 53 Latham's Snipe at Wallsend on 15th January;
- A Common Noddy seen from Fort Drive on 20th January;
- Two Sooty Terns observed from Fort Drive on 20th and 28th January;
- Two Little Friarbirds at Bunnan on 21st January;
- Around 200 Pink-eared Ducks present at Muswellbrook STP on 21st January;
- A Lesser Sand Plover at Stockton Sandspit on 24th January; and
- Two Wood Sandpipers photographed on Hexham Swamp on 30th January.

Bird records are obtained by the club through a variety of means, In addition to bird records communicated via Hunterbirding others are received through the BA atlas database, club outing sighting sheets, the club night observations forum and direct communications with the record officers. Of particular interest to the club are those records of regional significance, including sightings of the more unusual species, observations of breeding activity, early and late records of migratory birds and significantly large counts. A selection of records of this nature reported at the club nights and through direct communications is provided below. Unfortunately, space limitations do not enable all of the records to be reproduced here. However, the club is appreciative of all records that are received and all contributors are acknowledged in the Annual Bird Report.

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Australian Raven	2+1dy	22/11/2014	Wallsend	C. & R. Goodenough
Buff-banded Rail	2+3dy	7/12/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Dusky Moorhen	10+3dy	19-26/11/14	Weston	C. & R. Goodenough
Freckled Duck	2	13/01/2014	Grahamstown	R. McDonnell et al
Galah	8+3dy	2-6/12/14	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Grey Butcherbird	2+3dy	15/11/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Grey Goshawk (white)	1	21/11/2014	Ryhope	C. & R. Goodenough
Latham's Snipe	12	2/12/2014	Wallsend	J. Adams
Olive-backed Oriole	2+1dy	17/11/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Painted Button-quail	2	26/11/2014	Kurri Hospital	C. & R. Goodenough
Rainbow Lorikeet	5+1dy	28/11-10/12/14	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough

Club Activities February to April 2015

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
FEBRUARY 2015			
Sunday 15 February	Field Outing – Allyn River	7.00am Tucker Park Paterson	Rowley Smith 4964 1389
Tuesday 17 February	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Friday 20 February	Port Stephens Waterbird Survey	Various locations as directed. Boats are now full.	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 almarosa@bigpond.com
Saturday 21 February	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30 am Ash Island 10.00 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago
Sat 28 Feb – Sun 1 Mar	Birdlife Australia Photography Group conference	Hunter Wetlands Centre. Contact conference sub-committee for details	Lorna Mee 4987 2913 / 0499 015 500 Jim Smart 4933 7761 Allan Richardson 4977 2508
MARCH 2015			
Sunday 1 March	Clean Up Australia Day	8am - 12noon Stockton Sandspit	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Tuesday 3 March	Mid-week Outing – Hexham Swamp	7.30am Hexham McDonald's	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Wednesday 4 March	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Mick Roderick 0421761237 All members welcome
Wednesday 11 March	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Speaker: Grahame Feletti - Is the local golf course a useful site for bird studies?
Sunday 15 March	Field Outing - Ash Island and Stockton Sandspit	7.30am Stockton Sandspit	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Tuesday 17 March	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Saturday 21 March	Hunter Wader Survey	9.00am Ash Island 9.30am Various 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
APRIL 2015			
Wednesday 1 April	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Mick Roderick 0421761237 All members welcome
Friday 3 – Monday 6 April	Easter Camp at Durridgeree Conservation Area	Contact the leader	Lorna Mee 4987 2913 / 0499 015 500
Tuesday 7 April	Mid-week Outing – Belmont Lagoon and Green Point	7.30am Belmont South Lake Foreshore Park (just past Cold Tea Ck)	John and Beth Cockerell 4945 3008
Wednesday 8 April	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: John Weigel - 2014 was a very big year