



Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Issue No. 1/16 February 2016

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

Plumed Whistling-Ducks at Doughboy Hollow, Whittingham on 2 February.
Photo by Alan Stuart



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President's Column

My final President's Column inevitably comes with some reflection. It is the beginning of a year where there might also be some reflection from Club members, as we celebrate 40 years of HBOC. We are planning on marking the occasion with a 'special' club night in May (which will be held virtually 40 years to the day that the Club held its inaugural meeting) as well as an 'event' in the same month – Sunday 22nd May 2016 – for now, save the date.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as President of HBOC and there are certainly things about being President that I will miss, but I do believe that my time to step aside has come. It has been a great learning experience for me in so many ways and I feel like I am taking away as much as I gave during my term. In hindsight, even as a committee member in the past I underestimated just how much work goes on behind the scenes within this Club.

I know I have said it before, but HBOC really goes that 'extra step' on virtually every front and there are many examples. I mean, how many other clubs produce range

maps for a bird report each year? Actually, how many other clubs even produce a bird report each year!?

Time after time as I move around in birding circles I hear comments about HBOC being 'a model club' or 'setting the standards' for what a great bird-interest group should look and run like. We ought to be very proud of the standing that HBOC has within the birding and broader communities. This has only come about because of the collective effort of members that contribute in some form or another.

What I can't stress enough in my 'concluding column' is that the Club is always looking for more people to get involved behind the scenes – there are so many ways to help out and I can tell you that it is a very rewarding and edifying experience to become part of the team that steers this great Club.

Come along to a committee meeting and find out...

Mick Roderick

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Aidan Foy of New Lambton
Paul Giddins of Lochinvar
Helen Horn of Glen Martin
Sarah Kendell of East Maitland

Jessica Miller of Kotara
Emma Stothard of Waratah West
Andy Thomas of Salamander Bay

We hope to see you at club meetings and outings.

Health and Safety Awareness for Activities

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

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

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

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

New HBOC Record Sheet

A copy of the newly revised HBOC record sheet is now on the Club website. Those of you who use the record sheets, please start to use this new one now.

The new record sheet is a consequence of the revised approach that we are adopting for preparing the annual bird reports. There is an article in the October newsletter if you want to know more. Basically though, for the bird reports we will no longer be routinely tracking records of the more common species (which we will refer to from now on as “Category 1 species”). Therefore, we have reclassified some species into Category 2, to indicate that records of them will continue to be tracked. The new record sheet shows the Category 2 species which are more likely to be encountered during a normal day’s birding (and the NSW threatened species are also highlighted on the record sheet).

The record sheet is mostly used for preparing a bird list from an HBOC outing or camp, where many people have been involved; however, individuals are welcome to use them. It’s also worth emphasising here that what HBOC prefers for reporting of records by individuals is that:

- A complete list of the sightings for each location visited is submitted to BirdLife Australia Atlas; and
- The highlights are reported to hunterbirding.

Queen of the Sky

The wind whistled by. Beady eyes stared at their target as she swooped, her claws extended like the sharpest of knives. The bells tied to her ankles rang, piercing the silence. I stepped back, my heart beating wildly, as I swung the bait out of her way. At the speed of light she turned and dove like a plane, determination brightening her eyes. My mouth went dry and I froze in place. At the last minute I moved the bait as she spun by. There was a mad glint in her eyes as she wheeled away from the tree looming in her path. Before I could fully register her flight I felt the line tug and suddenly her form was silhouetted by the bright green grass, panting from her exertion.

That way, everybody gets to know about current records of interesting species, and we (HBOC) get an annual export of the Atlas database, which allows us to track what’s happening with all of our local species and particularly the common ones.

An alternative which some people use is to submit records to the NSW Field Atlassers – we don’t see the raw data from that, but they produce very good composite analyses covering all of NSW.

Sometimes people ask me what they should be reporting to hunterbirding (or at club nights). My usual answer is: “anything which has interested you”. For somewhat more specific guidelines, I would suggest that any Category 2 species should be reported through such forums, as should every species that does not appear on the record sheet (mostly these will be Category 3 species, for which an URRF will be requested; however, some relatively common seabirds etc. do not appear on the record sheet because they are rarely reported in that way).

Unusually high numbers of anything should also be reported to hunterbirding and/or club nights, records of NSW threatened species and records of species well outside of their normal range.

Alan Stuart



Flight of the Falcon

Club Activity Reports

She stood tall over her prize hissing as I took a step towards her, the grass crunching under my feet. My knees popped as I knelt to her level and I winced as her head snapped back towards me like a spring. I outstretched my hand with a quail leg to distract her, the putrid smell of raw meet wafted towards me and upset my stomach. I had her attention now and I almost jerked away when she grabbed the meat in my hand, hopping up onto the leather glove to eat it. I grabbed the bait that she had lost interest in and hid it behind my back, the slimy feeling making me want to drop it. Her claws dug into my arms like small daggers and she tore at the leg, a lioness at her prey.

She shook her body, the rustic coloured feathers floating up towards me. Their dusty taste settled on my tongue and made me want to sneeze. Her keeper began to walk towards me with his hat bobbing up and down and my heart fell. I had formed a strange bond with this beautiful creature and I did not want this experience to end. He called to her and one final time she spread her magnificent wings and flew powerfully away.

Alexandra Lightfoot

Club Activity Reports

Australia Day Camp, Harrington

23 to 26 January 2016

Australia Day fell on a Tuesday this year, offering a 4-day birding opportunity for those whose boss was likely to believe in a Monday sickie. We went to Harrington – an area which the club has not visited very often, especially in recent years. With the school holidays still underway and Harrington being a popular holiday destination, we organised a program of activities and suggested that people sort out their own accommodation. That seemed to be a popular approach, as we had 35 attendees, smashing (by heaps) the numbers for our January camps. Most people camped, while some opted for a cabin or a motel. Since we were in the heart of the Manning Valley – Great Lakes Birdwatchers patch, we invited members of that club to join us, and were pleased to welcome six visitors to our Sunday program.

The weather threatened at times, and it delivered on the threat on Friday night and again on Saturday afternoon – very heavy rain. Our Saturday afternoon birding was short-lived, but not before we'd all had long looks at a Buff-banded Rail at Crowdy Head. It didn't seem to mind the rain at all, and continued foraging out in the open throughout the downpour. The following days had excellent conditions for birding. We made several visits to the Harrington rainforest, finding many good birds – only a few during each pass, but we made many passes! There were several pairs of Spectacled Monarch, one pair with a dependent young. Also seen there were Varied Triller (not a very cooperative bird), Black-faced Monarch with dependent young and Eastern Yellow Robin ditto, Crested Shrike-tit, and much more.

The two other main spots we visited around Harrington were the estuary and the woodlands near the sewage works. At the latter, we had great views of some Brown Quail, a White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, perching Tree Martins, Striped Honeyeater, etc. Our walk around the estuary included a long stop in front of a Striated Heron, totally focussed on fishing (and with many cameras totally focussed on it!). Most of us ventured out onto the sandbank, where we saw many shorebirds up close. The Sanderlings were a tick for many people (as was the solitary Double-banded Plover). Our count of Pacific Golden Plovers was 94 birds – very good numbers for the Harrington section of the estuary. At the far end of the sandbank, we found the terns – more than 700 of them, including about 450 Little Terns and c.200 Common Terns. On our way back to the mainland, we had a very close look at one Common Tern – it was a hand-held bird, on its way to a release after having spent some time in care.



"I said, let me go already!"

Club Activity Reports

On the Monday, we ventured to some further-flung sites, starting with Cattai Wetlands. Our scheduled two-hour visit there blew out to four hours, with highlights galore that had people totally absorbed. We had long looks at a male Red-backed Fairy-wren, and an Emu-wren was also seen. Our first sighting of a Jacana was a far-off bird, which proved to be a test of people's skills with a telescope. However, later we had closer views of several, including a couple of young birds staying close to a parent – probably this is another breeding record for Jacanas at Cattai. We saw three kingfisher species, but alas Forest Kingfisher was not amongst them. Reports of Forest Kingfisher at Cattai have become infrequent in recent years.



Meanwhile, back at Yellow Water Billabong...

We called in at the wetlands at Cooperook Corner, planning only a short stop, but Lorna's keen eye turned up a Wood Sandpiper, and the clock was stopped! Also found here were Red-kneed and Black-fronted Dotterel, and Latham's Snipe. After next checking out the Square-tailed Kite nest in Cooperook State Forest, we eventually arrived at Wingham for a very late lunch alongside the river. Then, into the Wingham Brush. The flying-fox colony was widespread, making it hard to hear bird calls. We felt a bit frustrated at first, but emerged full of smiles, having seen some cooperative Bassian Thrush and countless Brush-turkeys, many of which were attending mounds. Our final stops were at Cundletown, where the Fairy Martin and waterbird colonies were active. The latter had huge numbers of Cattle Egret, and also Little Pied Cormorant and Intermediate Egret were confirmed to be breeding.

On the Sunday night we tried to find an Eastern Grass Owl in Crowdy Bay NP – there was one brief sighting of a large white bird, but a positive ID was not able to be

made. Despite this omission, our total bird list was just over 150 species. And people out birding by themselves also picked up Black-necked Stork at a couple of spots, and an Eastern Reef Egret at Crowdy Head. All in all, it was a productive and fun time for everybody during our Harrington adventures!

Alan Stuart

Ash Island

2 February 2016

A group of 18 turned out on a very pleasant summer day – quite different from the heat waves and downpours of January. We walked along to the boardwalk towards Scotts Point. There were not a lot of waterbirds present, but the little bush birds made up for this, with Silvereyes, Red-browed Finches, Yellow Thornbills and a male Golden Whistler flitting about. A walk out to Scotts Point yielded Golden-headed Cisticolas and Reed Warblers. Some of the group left after this to go to the World Wetlands Day seminar at the Wetlands Centre.

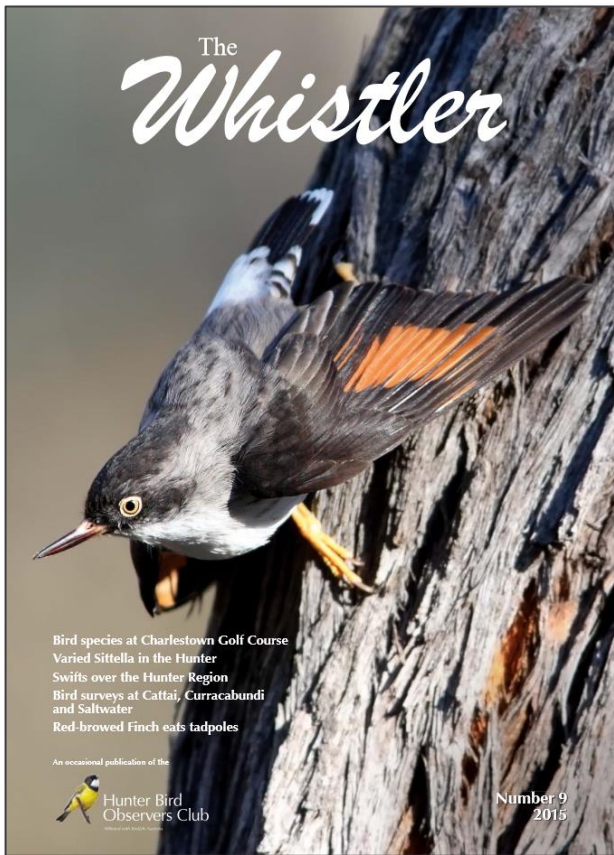


Come on guys, smoko's over – back to work!

The rest of us pressed on to Nev's Nook for morning tea, spotting Eastern Curlews on Milhams Pond on the way. We were welcomed by a hovering Black-shouldered Kite at the radar huts. Ann then led a group out to Phoenix Flat to look for Pacific Golden Plovers. Thirty were spotted through the scope, hunkered down in the grass. As we were about to leave, Lorna Mee and Greg Little turned up to check on the plovers, and were able to add two Sharp-tailed Sandpipers to our list. In all we had a tally of 54 species seen and one heard.

Margaret Stewart

Whistler 9 Now Available



Late 2015 saw the delivery of the HBOC's latest publication – Whistler 9.

Copies are usually handed out to members at Club Night, on the second Wednesday of each month.

Many members have already collected their copy but there are still some who have not yet taken theirs.

If you would like to receive a copy, and will not be able to attend a club night, please let me know by 29 February and the Club will post a copy to you.

Contact - robhboc@bigpond.com or 0420 821 460

Rob Kyte

Future Club Activities

Easter Camp

25 to 28 March 2016

This year's Easter Camp is to the far western reaches of the Hunter Valley (which is actually outside of the HBOC region) to Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve. The Honeyeater Flat camping area provides an attractive camping area for tents and caravans. It has a drop toilet and a number of fireplaces. There is no water supply at the site and campers need to bring with them all of the water they will require.

From Merriwa take the Golden Highway west for 50km and then turn left onto Ulan Road. After driving for another 30km, before reaching Ulan, turn left onto the Ulan-Wollar Road. Upon arriving in Wollar, after around 23km, turn right onto Wollar Road. The entrance to the camp is a dirt track on the left after around 13km, marked "Honeyeater Flat Field Study Area".

An alternative scenic and birdy route is to go instead via Goulburn River National Park. After leaving Merriwa you instead take a left onto Ringwood Road after around 8km. This road traverses the National Park and after around 37km connects with Wollar Road around 11km east of Wollar. Turn right and follow the road into and then through Wollar for another 13km to the camp entrance. Travellers should be aware that Goulburn River National Park has an unsealed road that can be in poor condition following rain. Be sure that you are OK to drive this route if deciding to go that way.

Following the Munghorn Gap camp there is an informal opportunity to tag along and head out further west for an additional stay in Lake Cargelligo, on the edge of the Mallee in central NSW. People wishing to partake in this extended trip are required to arrange their own accommodation and should contact Robert McDonald – see details in the Club Activities section.

Photo Twitch

9 to 10 April 2016

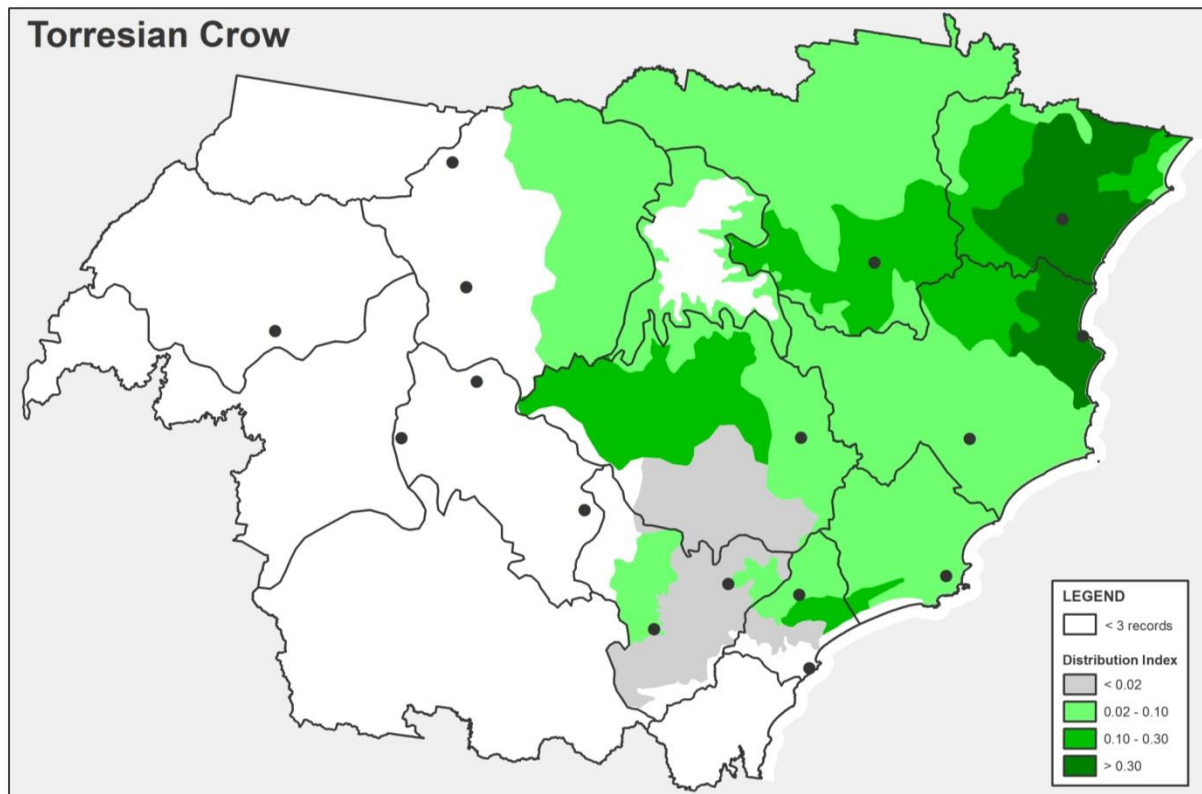
The “Photo Twitch” is being held again this year. This is a fun event where participants are invited to spend any

eight-hour period over the weekend to venture out and attempt to photograph as many species as possible, so get those trigger fingers ready! For further details, contact Robert McDonald – see details in the Club Activities section.

HBOC Species Distribution Mapping

Over the last six months Alan Stuart and I have been working on producing a set of species maps for birds

different colours for each polygon that intend to give the user an understanding of the relative distribution of a



that occur within the Hunter Region. The primary objective of this exercise was for education purposes – informing members and the broader community as to the relative spatial occurrence of our avifauna.

The mapping has been undertaken using the Birdlife Australia Atlas data to colour areas of our region in which each bird species occurs. This is a “living” product and so will continue to evolve as more data becomes available and/or improved techniques for interpreting and mapping the data are developed. It is currently based on a set of polygons which define contiguous areas of broadly similar landscape and habitat.

The number of atlas records for each species in each polygon is then compared to the number of atlas surveys/records in each polygon to derive a relative frequency of observation, which we have termed a “Distribution Index”. This index has been used to map

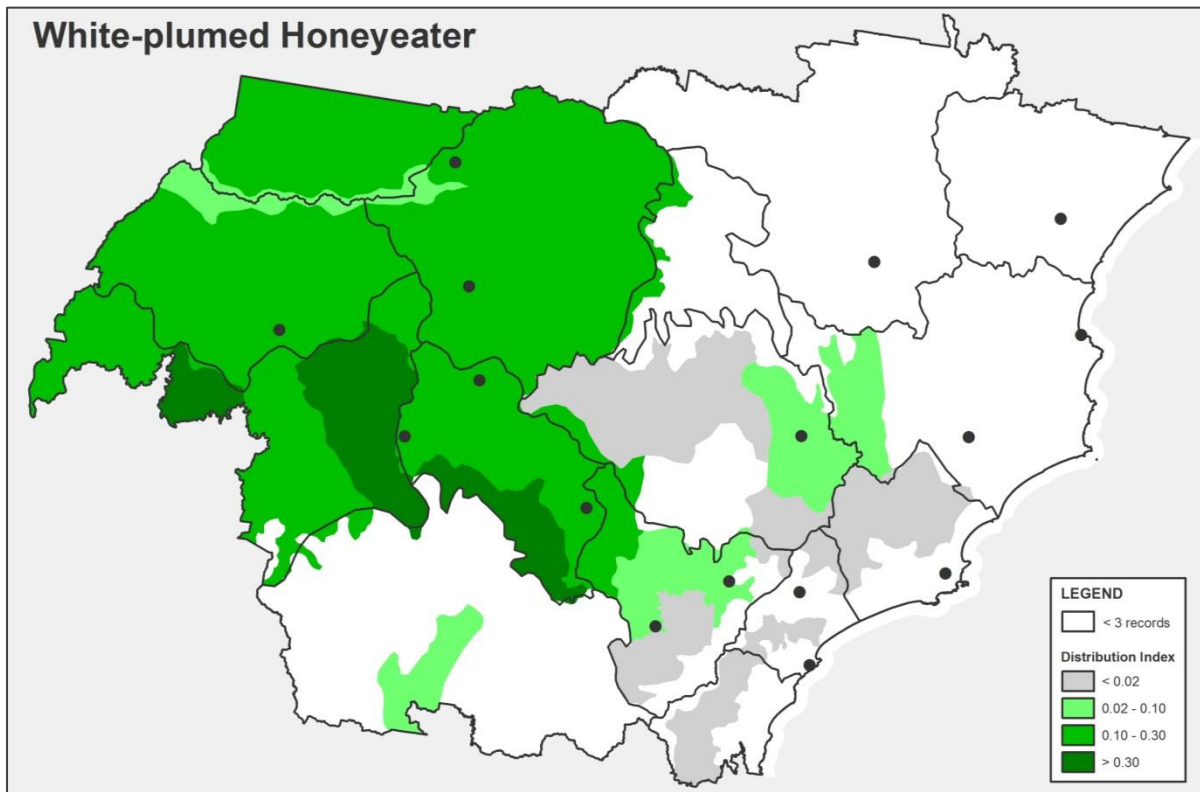
species across the Region and the likelihood of encountering it at any particular location.

It is intended to use these maps in the next Annual Bird Report to more effectively describe the distribution of our more common bird species. The maps will eventually provide an online resource that can be accessed for general interest or to assist with the presentation of “Bird of the Evening” talks and/or Whistler articles, etc.

The map for Torresian Crow shows it to be commonest in the north-east of the Region, reducing in frequency of occurrence both to the south and west.

The map for White-plumed Honeyeater shows it to be commonest in the west of the Region, being largely absent from coastal areas.

Dan Williams



Vale Glenn Holmes

1951 to 2016

It was sad to read of the recent passing of Glenn Holmes, a most enthusiastic birding identity from way back. He was a Newcastle lad, born, I believe in 1951, and by 1963 had “discovered” the erstwhile unknown avian richness of Kooragang Island. Back in those days the shorebirds numbered in their tens of thousands, and even by 1976 when I first was introduced to these delights, we were regularly seeing many hundreds of species such as Broad-billed, Terek and Curlew Sandpipers.

I did not know Glenn personally, but my first contact with him came when he addressed our then fledgling Hunter Bird Club on occasions in the late 1970s. At that time, we were an offshoot from the Hunter Natural History Society and Glenn contributed articles for their magazine, so his reputation was very well established by then. At that time, he seemed scarcely more than a schoolboy to me, and yet with such wide experience, and his deep and abiding passion for birds was clearly evident, and his enthusiasm quite infectious.

Seabirds were the subject for a PhD thesis he undertook, and he made regular trips on local fishing trawlers, where he recorded many species which up till that time

were unrecorded for this locality. In pursuit of his doctorate Glenn used a quad bike to clock up some 500 miles collecting wrecked birds to support his records.

In 1982 he published a book, “The Heritage of Australian Birds” a monograph with text by Glenn and illustrations by Robert Edden.

It could be safely said that Glenn was a pioneer birder and a pathfinder in many ways. His commitments in later years took him northwards and away from Newcastle but I don’t imagine that his passion grew any less for the rest of his days. His life must have been deeply enriched by the wonderful experiences his interest in birds brought to him.

His is a very sad passing, and he will be remembered fondly by those who came into contact with him. He leaves a wife, Jenny, and two daughters, and to them we offer our deep and understanding condolences.

Sue Hamonet

Recent Observations

Hunterbirding is an email group set up by HBOC that is run through the Yahoo Groups. It is a great way to keep in touch with the latest goings-on in Hunter Region birding. Members are able to report sightings, post questions to the group and get involved with group discussions on bird related issues. If you are interested in joining the group then the easiest way is to send an email to hunterbirding-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.au . 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:

- One adult and two juvenile Black-necked Storks at Hexham Swamp on 4th and 6th December;
- A Brown Songlark seen at Hexham Swamp on 11th December;
- A White-winged Black Tern seen briefly at Newcastle Ocean Baths on 17th December;
- At least two and probably three Common Sandpiper seen at Kooragang Dykes on 21st December;
- Three Glossy Black-Cockatoos below Heaton Gap Lookout, Watagans NP on 23rd December;
- Two adult and two juvenile Black-necked Storks at Hexham Swamp 28th December and 25th January;
- A male Common Blackbird observed in North Lambton on 28th December;
- A single Emu seen at Goulburn River NP on 2nd January and c.30 Little Ravens nearby on Ringwood Road;
- A Brolga seen in flight reported from Thornton on 8th January;
- A pale Kermadec Petrel seen from the Port Stephens Pelagic on 10th January and four Gould's Petrel also;
- Four Painted Button-quail seen on Hebburn Road, Tomalpin Woodlands (HEZ) on 11th January;
- A nest containing two White-browed Woodswallow chicks at Ridglands Road on 12th January;
- A pair of Blue-billed Ducks present on a dam along Hebden Road, nr. Lake Liddell on 12th January;
- A Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater reported in Lambton on 12th January;
- Five Latham's Snipe seen at Swimming Pool Swamp, Wallsend on 14th January;
- A pair of Wandering Whistling-Ducks with eight chicks at Buladelah on 16th January, with Musk Duck also;
- Two Gang-gang Cockatoos seen at Abernethy on 16th January;
- A Red-capped Robin seen on Jones Reserve Road on 17th January;
- Two Baillon's Crakes seen at Hexham Swamp on 18th January;
- Three Glossy Black-Cockatoos at Sugarloaf SCA on 21st January;
- An Emerald Dove seen on Thunderbolt's Way at Brett NR on 25th January;
- A Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove reported at Boy's Walk, Cooranbong on 30th January;
- A single Black-eared Cuckoo seen on Giant's Creek Road on 1st February and 6th February;
- A Red-winged Parrot at Cassilis Rest Area on 1st February;
- Two Singing Honeyeaters present on Durrigere Road on 1st February;
- Two Greater Sand Plovers present at Stockton Sandspit on 6th February and 9th February; and
- Two Red-tailed Tropicbirds seen from the Port Stephens Pelagic on 7th February.

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.

Club Activities February to April 2016

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
FEBRUARY 2016			
Tuesday 16 February	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Friday 19 February	Port Stephens Waterbird Survey	Various locations as directed. Numbers strictly limited.	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 almarosa@bigpond.com
Saturday 20 February	Hunter Wader Survey	7.00 am Ash Island 7.30 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
Sunday 21 February	Field Outing – Old Brush (Brunkerville)	7:30am Mulbring (tennis courts)	Robert McDonald 4964 1389
MARCH 2016			
Tuesday 1 March	Mid-week Outing – Tahlee (N Port Stephens)	7.30 am The Rock Service Centre, RHS of Hwy 9 km N of 2 nd exit to Karuah.	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 almarosa@bigpond.com
Wednesday 2 March	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Allan Richardson 0421761237 All members welcome
Sunday 6 March	Clean Up Australia Day	8am - 12noon Stockton Sandspit	Tom Clarke 0418 411785
Wednesday 11 March	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Guest Speaker: Tom Clarke “Shorebird Surveys in China”
Tuesday 15 March	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Saturday 19 March	Hunter Wader Survey	6.00 am Ash Island 6:30 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
Sunday 20 March	Field Outing – Ash Island and Stockton Sandspit	7.00am Stockton Sandspit	Lorna Mee 0499 015 500
Easter Friday-Monday 25-28 March	Easter Camp	Munghorn Gap NR (Honeyeater Flat) 'Tag-along' to Lake Cargelligo after (arrange own accomm.)	Robert McDonald 4964 1389
APRIL 2016			
Tuesday 5 April	Mid-week Outing – Old Brush (Brunkerville)	7.30 am Cnr Leggets Dr (B82) & Lieberts Lane, Brunkerville, 5.2 km S Mulbring, 5.2 km N Freemans Waterhole	Rob McDonnell - 4962 4258 0407 412847
Wednesday 6 April	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Allan Richardson 0421761237 All members welcome
Saturday 9 April	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 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
Sat-Sun 9-10 April	“Photo Twitch” (photography comp)	Any 8 hours anywhere to snap as many species as possible	Robert McDonald 4964 1389
Wednesday 13 April	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Guest Speaker: Hollis Taylor “Pied Butcherbird Song”