



Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Issue No. 1/17 February 2017

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

Glossy Ibis have been a regular sighting along the Pipeline Track at Hexham Swamp recently, captured here by Alwyn Simple on 6th January.



Alwyn Simple ©

CONTENTS

President's Column	2	Seaham and Raymond Terrace	4
New Members	2	Australia Day Weekend Camp to Smiths Lake	4
Health & Safety Awareness for Activities	2	Hexham Swamp	5
Max had a Dream	3	Brush Bronzewing <i>Phaps elegans</i>	6
Membership Publication Distribution	3	Hunter Region Species Mapping	7
Club Activity Reports		Recent Observations	8
		Club Activities February to April 2017	9

President's Column

Please send Newsletter articles direct to the Editor,
 Dan Williams at scythrops@yahoo.com.au
 Deadline for the next edition – 9 April 2017

HBOC postal address:
 PO Box 24 New Lambton NSW 2305
 Website: www.hboc.org.au

Rarity

Rarity and exclusivity are interesting concepts in regard to our responses to them. Rarity makes diamonds worth much in terms of monetary value, as with all precious stones, and it is only an exclusive few that can afford to be adorned by them in numbers. As soon as something is rare it acquires a distinct attraction, which is hard to ignore.

The same goes for birds. Those rare species, which are difficult to see or only occur in very small numbers take on an almost iconic value if rare enough. Take our very own Night Parrot for instance. There are very few avian devotees who have never pondered the discovery of this arid country ghost. Rumour-like observations would emerge to get avian minds turning in its direction every now and then, but despite a firm belief by many that it was out there, most of us realised the incredible amount of field investigations in outback contexts that might be expended before a glimpse could possibly be procured.

Most of us don't like those odds. Yet one man took on the challenge with persistence. John Young spent 15 years on-and-off searching for evidence of the Night Parrot before he was rewarded with views, photos and video footage that have now become a historic milestone in the Night Parrot's recorded history. The key to John finding the Night Parrot was his well-earned procurement of its call. Armed with this he was able to

determine areas of habitat use, which ultimately led to the bird's sighting.

Of course, many birders would love to have locational information about the bird, but most of us realise the danger in such information becoming public. It would be impossible to accommodate everyone who would like to see the bird without impacts upon this rare creature we know very little about. There are those whose interest may be more sinister than observation, as there are those who desire to own something of such a rare nature. Yet there has been a call by many in the birding community for the Night Parrot's calls to be shared widely, so that others might investigate its possible presence in other areas.

For a long time, most of the information relating the bird's location and calls have been kept tightly under wraps. Now though, inexplicably, the calls have become available to the general public. There will be those that applaud such a move, and perhaps as many others that believe it could lead to interest by those who are less worried about the bird's safety than their own ends. Should such a move have been taken, knowing the possible dangers it may place on all other Night Parrot populations? I'll leave it up to you to decide.

Allan Richardson

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Phillip Congdon of Macquarie Hills
Telesha Ferguson of Raymond Terrace
Anne Fredericks of Gosford
Fiona Hawke of Coal Point
Helen Hopkins of Valentine

Linda Johnson of Maryland
Susan Knowles of Corlette
Jim Stone of Redhead
Antoria Wilson of Medowie

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.

Max had a Dream

More correctly, Max had a vision. He saw the possibility of making something rewarding and valuable from something run-down and abused.



His was the vision, and his was the driving force that propelled the dream with dogged determination till it became our beloved Shortland Wetlands Centre – a lasting memorial to Max and the dedicated team of volunteers he drew about him in pursuit of this goal.

How fitting, therefore, that a recent gathering was held at the Centre where a plaque was unveiled by Max's wife Heather, and daughter Michelle, and the Visitors Centre was named in his honour – The Max Maddock Visitors Centre.

We can easily take things somewhat for granted, but next time you find yourself in that area, perhaps a quiet nod to the man whose untiring hard work and relentless pressure applied in the right places, made the dream come true.



Membership Publication Distribution

November 2016 saw the delivery of HBOC's Whistler 10 and the 2015 Annual Bird Report.

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

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

If you are not able to attend a Club Night and would like to receive a copy of each publication, please let me know by 28 February and HBOC will post copies to you.

Contact Rob Kyte at robhboc@bigpond.com or 0420 821 460.



Club Activity Reports

Seaham and Raymond Terrace

18 December 2016

A total of nine people ventured out for the December outing, which started at Seaham Swamp. A lovely cool morning and overcast day gave us a joy to get out. The hide viewpoint of the swamp was obscured by trees. Still, just standing there we had 25 species. A visit to Seaham Park coincided with morning tea, where we determined that we had a total of 63 species. Of note here were Long-billed Corellas and a family of 10 Grey-crowned Babblers.

We then stopped at Irrawang Swamp on the side of the road and finished at Ross Walbridge Reserve in Raymond Terrace, where we added 20 additional species. Of note here was a mother Dusky Moorhen trying to entice eight very small chicks to get into the water. We also had three Latham's Snipes at Irrawang Swamp, with a further two at Ross Walbridge Reserve. A Striped Honeyeater seen at the latter was a new species for John. There were also five Black-fronted Dotterels present at Irrawang Swamp.



Latham's Snipe by Alwyn Simple

All up a total of 83 species were encountered during a very pleasant morning. Thank you to those that attended.

Lorna Mee

Australia Day Weekend Camp to Smiths Lake

26 to 30 January 2017

The long weekend kicked off with a wet start, as people began arriving in the mid-morning rain on 26th. The initial arrivals totalled some 20 people, which had grown by the end of the day to 30. By the end of the following day the numbers had swelled even further to 42. One last member joined us on his motorbike for the Sunday – good on you Ray.



Part of the camp rabble on a ramble through the bush

The weather soon cleared and we had some hot days, but manageable temperatures. The walks up and down the tracks had us finding birds feeding young all over the place, including Black-faced Monarch, Lewin's Honeyeater, Olive-backed Oriole, Golden Whistler, Eastern Spinebill, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Variegated Fairy-wren, Silveryeye and some strange coloured Eastern Yellow Robin juveniles being fed.



The strange-coloured Eastern Yellow Robin by Rob Palazzi

Some trip highlights included very enthusiastic new birders plus sightings of Southern Emu-wren, Lewin's

Club Activity Reports

Rail, Azure Kingfisher and Regent Bowerbird. All of the bird species were a highlight for me. The communal area was very nice as a meeting place for all. A well-equipped kitchen meant that we had cold water, beer, wine and fresh food – I even had a gourmet Frittata cooked for me (thanks Lyn). We successfully cooked sausages for everybody that wanted it on a wood-burning barbecue – there is something good about the taste of food cooked on a wood fire.



Dingo by Rob Palazzi

A total of 94 species were seen on the camp. Thank you to everyone who pitched in and helped with cooking and importantly, the clean-up at the end. After all, our reputation will follow us for future visits...

Lorna Mee

Hexham Swamp

7 February 2017

On one of the less hot days this summer 24 of us, including two visitors from the Manning Great Lakes Club, set off to explore Hexham Swamp. Our first stop was near the gate, where our guide, Ann Lindsey, unsuccessfully tried to induce an Australasian Bittern to appear. We were however, able to see Golden-headed Cisticolas and Tawny Grassbirds in the reeds and also heard Little Grassbirds.

We drove along a bit further and stopped to look over the water. Several small flocks of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and White-fronted Chats were spotted on both sides of the track, and Masked Lapwings, White-faced Herons and White Ibis were everywhere. Great flocks of Swallows were swooping over the water, with a few Fairy Martins among them.



The lion's share of 24 keen birdos

Bush birds were few and far between but we did see six raptors – Swamp Harrier, Collared Sparrowhawk, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Whistling Kite, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Black-shouldered Kite.



A smorgasbord of avian offerings at the end of the track

When we reached the end of the track we were rewarded with the sight of about 2,000 teal, most of which were Chestnut. Also visible were nine Greenshanks and two Black-winged Stilts. In all 46 species were seen. Our thanks to Ann Lindsey, for leading the group and explaining the changes that have taken place on Hexham Swamp over the years.

Margaret Stewart

Brush Bronzewing *Phaps elegans*

Status: Uncommon resident in the Hunter; a species of special interest. Birdlife Australia's *Birdata* cites only 7814 records (0.7%) nationwide for this species. It was reported in Western Australia in 1629, in Tasmania in 1772, and on the east coast by John Hunter in 1790; all well before Temminck's (1810) records. Although this species has a long and interesting history in all states (except NT), current distribution maps are vague on where and when we may see this endemic species. There are also no data on its numbers or movements. Some questions are obvious.

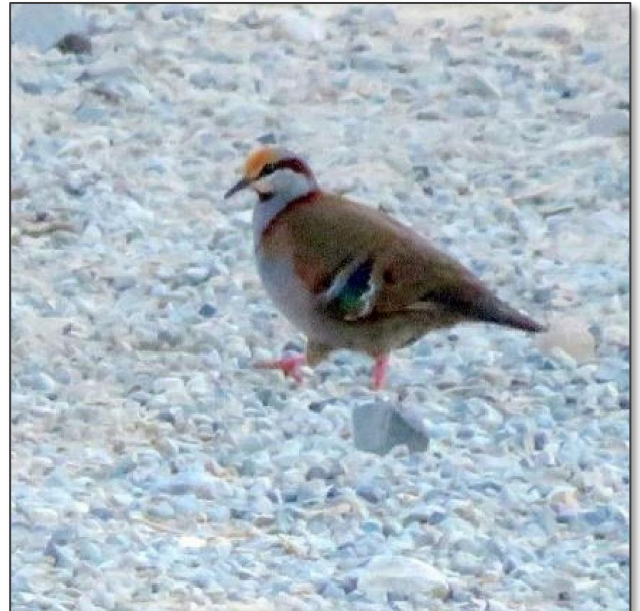
How can this rarely reported species be rated "Of Least Concern" across the nation? Some insights from the Hunter Region may be useful. A quick survey of hands at our December club night showed only 10% of members present have ever seen this species. In the Hunter Bird Observers Club's (HBOC) Annual Bird Report (2015, p.20) this species has only been reported in two locations in the Hunter region; coastal Lake Macquarie is one of interest here. Recently, some HBOC committee members described seeing birds in spring/summer along the Fernleigh Track near Belmont. 20 years earlier (1997-99) Keith Laverick's study detected this species at Belmont Swamp (now Belmont Wetlands State Park, or BWSP); and 25 years before that (1983), Fred van Gessel made the first official NSW breeding record, at Dudley.



Typical habitat at BWSP

The species is a ground pigeon, but several behavioural features enhance its survival. It is secretive or wary, especially during its breeding period. Apparently, it roosts and nests near ground level. The pigeon will stop

calling and is elusive if disturbed in dense brush, preferring to run quickly and quietly. In WA, its diet also includes some native plant seeds toxic to non-native mammals (foxes, feral cats, and farmers' dogs).



An adult male Brush Bronzewing

However, in those places of dense coastal scrub where the Brush Bronzewing is found, its distinctive call offers a useful alternative way of estimating its prevalence. It seems the male (also identifiable by its chestnut cap) is somewhat territorial; males space themselves at least 50-100 m apart. This has enabled (GF) to identify individuals in recent surveys of two adjacent areas: Belmont Lagoon (BL) and BWSP – in consecutive periods from Sep 2015 to Feb 2016, and Sep 2016-Jan 2017. Comparisons of the species' distributions between seasons, and locations, is yielding interesting results – suggesting stable local numbers. Ironically, no further breeding records have been made at these two locations.

This study would clearly benefit from more "observations". If readers would like to share their sightings of Brush Bronzewings in the Hunter Region, or receive further (research) information on this species, please contact me on 0429 455 243 or by email at gfeletti@bigpond.com.

Grahame Feletti

Hunter Region Species Mapping

If you've opened up a copy of the HBOC 2015 ABR then you will have noticed the addition of distribution / abundance mapping for many of our more regularly recorded species.

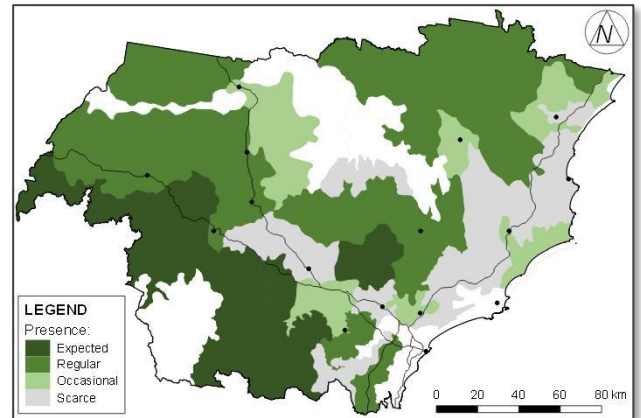
The mapping has been based on the BirdLife Australia Birddata Atlas data and is not a static product. It is expected that the mapping will evolve through time to reflect our improved understanding of Hunter Region bird species. Since production of the ABR the mapping has been reviewed and updated to improve the way that different survey types (incidental, 2ha and area searches) are handled and to better reflect expected species occurrence in some of the more remote areas of the Region.

Each year the Club will receive updated data, enabling us to re-map species occurrence with an extra year's worth of Atlas records. As the dataset continues to grow the accuracy of the mapping should hopefully improve. It may even become possible to map meaningful changes in species distribution over time, given sufficient data. Changes in seasonal distribution have already been mapped with some success too.

Firstly, it is encouraged to enter your bird records into Birddata – not only to assist with our understanding of birds at a national level, but also to enable us to gain a better understanding of the status of our local birds.

Finally, individual species mapping can be produced to assist club members in the production of material such as Whistler articles, where such supporting information is required, e.g. for articles on individual species status. Please contact me if you have any requirements of this nature.

Dan Williams



Sample species mapping for Jacky Winter



Bird & Nature Photography Tours

Amazing Destinations!

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

Contact: Dick Jenkin [0407 267207](tel:0407267207)

E: richardnjenkin@bigpond.com

W: www.jenkinphotography.com.au

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:

- A Diamond Dove photographed at Durrigere Road on 6 December;
- A single Fork-tailed Swift seen at Girvan on 7 December;
- A Brown Songlark and around 30 White-browed Woodswallows reported at Durrigere Road on 9 December;
- Several Regent Honeyeater sightings including nesting activity, plus two Plum-headed Finch at Goulburn River NP on 9 December;
- Red-winged Parrot reported at Cassillis Rest Area on 16 December;
- A flock of 25 of Fork-tailed Swifts seen at Swansea on 25 December;
- Three Grey Currawongs reported at Mount Corricudgy on 28 December;
- Two Plum-headed Finch seen at Durrigere Road on 4 January, with a Black Falcon seen at Martindale Road;
- A Wood Sandpiper photographed at Hexham Swamp on 7 January and present until at least 13 January;
- A single Regent Honeyeater reported at Milbrodale on 15 January;
- Black Bittern seen at Stockton Creek Morisset on 17 January;
- Two Greater Sand Plovers and 19 Sanderlings present at Old Bar on 20 January;
- A possible sighting of a King Quail, flushed at Louth Park on 21 January;
- Two Gould's Petrels recorded from the Port Stephens Pelagic on 22 January;
- Around 10 Satin Flycatchers reported at Gloucester Tops on 25 January; and
- A Common Sandpiper photographed at Carrington (Port Stephens on 31 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
Red Knot	1	6/12/2016	Catherine Hill Bay	J. Adams
Red-necked Stint	3	6/12/2016	Catherine Hill Bay	J. Adams
Ruddy Turnstone	19	6/12/2016	Catherine Hill Bay	J. Adams
Spangled Drongo	1	13/12/2016	Seaham	T. Kendall
Varied Sittella	5	14/12/2016	Galgabba Point	J. Adams
White-throated Needletail	61	14/12/2016	Galgabba Point	J. Adams
White-throated Needletail	60	12/12/2016	Belmont	G. Feletti

Club Activities February to April 2017

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
FEBRUARY 2017			
Friday 10 February	Port Stephens Waterbird Survey	Various locations as directed. Numbers strictly limited.	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 almarosa@bigpond.com
Saturday 11 February	Hunter Wader Survey	9.00 am Ash Island 9.30 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
Sunday 19 February	Field outing – Boys Walk	7.30 am Cooranbong Park just north of the Martinsville Rd turn off	Lene Parashou 0406 410 864
Tuesday 21 February	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Please ring to confirm
Sunday 26 February	HBOC Family Picnic	9.30 am The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Robert McDonald 0408 877 827
MARCH 2017			
Wednesday 1 March	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Allan Richardson 0459 806 176 All members welcome
Sunday 5 March	Clean Up Australia Day	8.00 am – 12.00 noon Stockton Sand Spit	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Tuesday 7 March	Mid-week Outing – Tahlee (N. Port Stephens)	7.30 am “The Rock” Service Centre, right-hand side of Pacific Hwy, 9 km N of 2 nd Karuah exit.	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 almarosa@bigpond.com
Wednesday 8 March	Club Meeting	7.00 pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Speaker: Keith Eastwood “Birding in South Africa”
Saturday 11 March	Hunter Wader Survey	8.00 am Ash Island 8.30 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
Sunday 19 March	Field outing – Tabbil Forest (Bingleburra)	7.30am Dungog Tourist Information Centre (cnr. Dowling / Brown Streets)	David Stuart 4992 1899
Tuesday 21 March	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Please ring to confirm
APRIL 2017			
Tuesday 4 April	Mid-week Outing – Ourimbah	7.30am Ourimbah rest stop, off M1.	Rob McDonell 4962 4258 / 0407 412 847
Wednesday 5 April	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Allan Richardson 0459 806 176 All members welcome
Wednesday 12 April	Club Meeting	7.00 pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Speaker: Simon Griffith “House Sparrows”