



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia

NEWSLETTER

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The Club aims to:

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

Birding in Western Australia

At the April Club Night, Chris Herbert gave an illustrated talk on birding between Cape Range and the Nullabor in Western Australia.

Places to see the region's specialities included:

- Cape Range NP - Western Bowerbird (+ Spotted Harrier)
 - Kennedy Range NP - Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush
 - Monkey Mia - Thick-billed Grasswren, Southern Scrub-robin
 - Cape Peron NP - Pied Honeyeater
 - Karroun Hill NR - Rufous Treecreeper
 - Mt Church in Karroun Hill NR - Chestnut Quail-thrush
 - The Pinnacles NP - Rufous Fieldwren
 - Dryandra SF - Western Spinebill, Rufous Treecreeper, Purple-crowned Lorikeet, Numbat
 - Cape Naturaliste - Western Wattlebird
 - Cape Leeuwin - Rock Parrot
 - Gloucester Tree Carpark - Western Rosella
 - Albany, Lake Seppings - Blue-billed Duck
 - Cheynes Beach - Western Whipbird, Western Bristlebird, Noisy Scrub-bird
 - Esperance Golf Course - Cape Barren Goose
 - Cap Le Grand NP - Elegant Parrot
 - Porongorup NP/Stirling Range area - Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo, Baudin's Black-Cockatoo
- The great variety of landscapes and wonderful national parks make birding in Western Australia very attractive!

HBOC's new logo, shown above, has been designed by Rob Kyte of Designbridge graphic design consultants, using an image of the Golden Whistler kindly provided by Wayne Taylor of mitconphotographics.com

Please send Newsletter articles direct to the Editor, Liz Crawford at: chrisliz@tpg.com.au Deadline for the next edition - 31 July 2011.

HBOC postal address: PO Box 24 New Lambton NSW 2305
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A Note from the President

The position of Hon. Secretary has been vacant since the Annual General Meeting held in February this year, but now I am pleased to announce that Robert Kyte has agreed to accept the position. Subsequently, Robert has been appointed by the Committee as Hon. Secretary of the Hunter Bird Observers Club in accordance with the Club's constitution.

On behalf of the membership I wish to thank Robert for his willingness to be involved in the Club by agreeing to be the Secretary. Rob can be contacted through the normal mailing address at PO Box 24 New Lambton or by email at robertkyte@bigpond.com

Paul Baird

HBOC's New Secretary - Profile

Rob Kyte had a keen interest in birds from an early age and first joined the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (Young Ornithologists Club) at the age of 7. He continued as a member of the organisation for 34 years before emigrating to Australia. During that time Rob was involved in bird banding for the British Trust for Ornithology and rare bird protection for local ornithological groups and the RSPB. He has also been actively involved in land management with the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

In 2007 Rob moved to Australia with his Novocastrian wife Karen and daughter Jasmine before starting his graphic design business in Hamilton. Chloe joined the family soon after.

When approached by the Committee to help produce artwork for the Club's logo, Rob was keen to help out. His graphic design skills have greatly enhanced our logo, displayed on the front of this Newsletter.

We are fortunate that Rob has also agreed to become the Honorary Secretary for HBOC.

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Ian Benson of Carrington
Phillip and Diane Bird of Wakefield
Emma Britten of Islington
Karen Bowland of Mayfield West
Lynne and Greg Bull of Killingworth
Janet Grevillea of Wangi Wangi
Sue and Garry Mason of Edgeworth
Lauren Vanderwyk of Erina

We hope to meet you at Club outings and meetings

CMA Workshops to Identify Natural Assets

Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority is currently reviewing its regional Catchment Action Plans, which guide natural resource management (NRM) in the Hunter Region. NRM priorities will be mapped by the CMA according to the best available science and data, consideration of limited resources and recognised community values. Now is your chance to participate in a workshop to help identify and record local natural assets that you value. Workshops will be held on:

15 June at Lake Macquarie (3.30 - 6.00pm)

16 June at Newcastle (5.30 - 8.00pm)

RSVP CMA on 4930 1030 or email hcr@cma.nsw.gov.au

You can nominate assets online at: www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au

On behalf of HBOC, Ann Lindsey, our Conservation Coordinator, has compiled and submitted a list of locations which are considered important for birds. But your input would be valuable too - the more the environmental importance of various natural areas is emphasised, the better the likely outcome for birds and biodiversity.

HBOC Committee for 2011

President	Paul Baird 4938 5039
Vice President	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237
Secretary	Rob Kyte 4961 6211
Treasurer	Joy Nicholls 4957 3612
Committee Members:	Hayley Boyce 0421 175 922 Robert McDonald 0408 877 827 Lorna Mee 4988 6579 Kristy Peters 0438 328 049 Allan Richardson 4977 2508 Dan Williams 0408 023 262
Conservation Coordinator:	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Membership Secretary:	Ian Martin 4943 9256
Records Officer:	Sue Hamonet 4958 1023

Featured Birdwatching Site: Blackbutt Reserve, New Lambton

Blackbutt in summer can be a daunting place for the faint hearted. Man-eating mossies and deafening cicadas make slabs of insect repellent a basic requirement. That said, there is a smorgasbord of summer migrants. Most evident are the Rufous Fantails, who ignore everyone in their own pursuits, Drongos, Figbirds, Dollarbirds, Channel-bills and Koels, some of whom breed in the Reserve. Black-faced Monarchs are most likely to be seen around the Bowerbird Track along with Golden Whistlers, Satin Bowerbirds, Pardalotes and many other bush birds.

The Bowerbird Track entry is from the bottom of Ridgeway Road, New Lambton Heights; away from the usual visitors' beat, it is rarely visited, which is great for birdwatchers. The track leads through dry forest into rainforest and supports a lot of species. Where the track appears to end at Bowerbird Creek, do not be fooled. Cross the creek and explore the other side. There is an underground sewerage pipeline that is maintained regularly and a path will take you past a new Bell Miner colony, all the way to Croudace Road. This is also the area where Powerful Owls bred successfully late last year. Boobooks and Tawny Frogmouths are also present here.

Since the end of March there is a whole new story. In the past month an Emerald Dove has arrived, the first recorded in 13 years and likely to stay for a while. Easily seen, it is happily moving between the bird aviaries where other Emerald Doves are housed and the bat aviaries in the Lookout Picnic Grounds where rehabilitated bats receive supplementary feedings of fruit. A Bassian Thrush has also arrived for the winter and is possibly harder to see as it is mobile around the Reserve. However they are usually close to tracks and picnic grounds and I have had no trouble sighting them in the past.



Emerald Dove (above) and Bassian Thrush (right) at Blackbutt Reserve - Judi Thomas

Even more exotic, a Masked Owl has been heard at night but not seen as yet... any sightings please report to HBOC. Other winter migrants are now returning to the Reserve: these include Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Rose Robins. The best area for seeing Regent Bowerbirds has been along the Rainforest Picnic Ground Track which goes from Lookout Road Picnic Ground past the Flying Fox Colony towards what used to be the Ranger's House (now privately rented). (That said, Paddy Lightfoot has been enjoying Regent Bowerbirds while sitting on his deck, looking out over the Bowerbird Track. Paddy also has a Satin Bowerbird bower in his back garden).

Over the past two years much work has been done on the main ponds in Richley Reserve and at the main picnic area at Carnley Avenue. The ponds have been extended, drainage improved, reeds planted and the habitat made more bird friendly. I am hoping that in the next few years we will be recording crakes, rails and possibly Latham's Snipe in the improved conditions.

For those of you who have not visited the bird aviaries at Blackbutt recently or at all, I recommend you do so. There have been many new additions and it is quite disconcerting to hear Chiming Wedgebills in Blackbutt. Woodswallow calls send your gaze upward, only to discover they are right next to you. There are several desert species including Pied and Black Honeyeaters. Eclectus parrots from Cape York, Gouldian Finches, Apostlebirds as well as many not-frequently-seen Hunter birds... Bush Stone-curlews, Pheasant Coucal and dozens of others. Some of these birds sit a few feet from you. You can also eyeball a Koala. All in all a must to take overseas visitors to.

The other feature of Blackbutt, which even most locals are unaware of, is one of the greatest views over the city to the harbour. This is from the Lookout on Lookout Road (yes! that is where the name comes from) just above the Fruit Bat colony. There is space to park on the busy road right next to the Lookout. The only indication it is there, is a fence made of metal pipes and a break in the trees for the view. Apart from the view it is a great place to observe the bats, particularly at dusk as they take off. And their attendant predators: Grey Goshawk, Hobby, Powerful Owl have all been seen in the area...Dish of the Day: "Takeaway Fruit Bat".

Blackbutt has a bird list currently of 124 species... please..... go and visit.

Joy Nicholls

Club Outing Reports

Capertee Valley Camp

22 – 25 April 2011

The Easter camp for 2011 at Capertee Valley was too good to resist even with the addition to my family that has restrained my bird watching in recent times. The camp was one of the biggest camps in the Club's history with 39 Club members and 2 non members, which meant plenty of eyes out and about to see all the birds around, with a count of over 110 species. The large number of people was probably encouraged by the extra long weekend with Anzac day being combined with the Easter long weekend.

Taking Dominic on his first camp was a very new experience and he seemed to love it. Having an expanding family had me going to a tent with 4 rooms compared to a 2-man tent with no mattress when I started 9 years ago. Birding with a baby is quite an experience with only a couple of chances to get out without Dom. On the smoother tracks taking the pram was ok, but it was best when I strapped him to my back in the baby harness - he could just look around and watch the world. One special moment was when I took Dom for an early morning walk and I came across a group of Diamond Firetails, with Dom in his pram 20m behind me I was trying to get photos of the birds. I turned around to check on the quiet little birder, and he and a Diamond Firetail were watching each other only a metre apart.

Staying on April Mill's property was wonderful as it is an area of tree planting to try and help the Regent Honeyeater rehabilitation program. Although we didn't see any, hopefully one day they will dominate the area once again. Being unable to have a campfire, the Club's ever-inventive former scout master Rowley rigged up his tarp and set it up as a place to conduct our bird call, sit around and have happy hour. The other great thing about this camp was that it was only around the corner from Glen Davis which had a great little museum and in the public camp ground hot showers which we could use.

On the property there were a few areas that were true birding hot spots. Down near the gate you could see Diamond Firetails, Hooded Robins, Restless Flycatchers, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and many honeyeaters. Around the main house also had good birding with Scarlet Robins, Zebra Finches, Fuscous Honeyeaters, Speckled Warblers and Buff-rumped Thornbills. Along the back track and up the hill were Rock Warblers, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Chestnut-rumped Heathwrens, Dusky Woodswallows and Brown Treecreepers.

Robert McDonald



Scarlet Robin, Happy-Hour Tarp, Jacky Winter and Dominic, the youngest birdwatcher, comfortably watching the watchers - Robert McDonald

Club Outing Reports cont.

Field outing to Broke / Bulga 22 May 2011

A dozen cars and about 20 keen birding folk met at the Broke Fire Station at 7:30am. After everyone was assembled there was a call to see a family group of Blue-faced Honeyeaters flying overhead and then we headed back up Singleton Street to check out Mugga Ironbark trees planted along Cochrane and Archer Streets. The most obvious birds here were Noisy Friarbirds, Noisy Miners and Red Wattlebirds, but a range of common birds were added to the list. A family group of Grey-crowned Babblers were busy nest building in an exotic pine in someone's front yard - critical habitat! White-plumed Honeyeaters were observed on the power lines, before we continued north along Nelson Street where alarm calls alerted the group to an Australian Hobby flying over. Open habitats to the east of Nelson Street initially appeared relatively quiet, but persistent observations and permission to enter the open lands via Brian's generosity, revealed a number of open country birds, including Red-rumped Parrot, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Australasian Pipit, Common Starling and a Nankeen Kestrel taking its ease on a fence post. A few ducks were present in a dam obscured from the road, but there were no other waterbirds to mention. We walked back to the cars picking up Superb Fairy-wrens and noting White-plumed Honeyeaters appearing to collect nesting material from verandah hanging pots.

We had morning tea across Wollombi Brook, but there were few birds to lighten the break. We had land holders expecting us at Wambo Road so we went directly to Ron and Janet Fenwick's property at Bulga, where Ron greeted us and gave us directions on how to access the different areas on his property. Wedge-tailed Eagles were roosting in dead trees and common open-country birds greeted us around the farm house. We headed up to the woodland edge to the south of the house and found the woodland silent. Mike Newman headed off to scout the area and we came across a male Mistletoebird who obligingly responded to a call and came in close enough for views of his colouration. As we made our way through the habitat we joined up with the group's scouts, who had come across a foraging group of small woodland birds, including Buff-rumped Thornbill, Weebill, Striated Pardalote, Varied Sittella and the highlight, a pair of Rose Robins, which offered the group clear views. The distant calls of Brown Treecreeper and White-eared Honeyeater were heard further up the hill and a high-pitched song sounded like a Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, but it went quiet and did not give us opportunity to confirm its identity.

After lunch we headed to the northwest of the

property noting Dusky Moorhens, Purple Swampheens, Australasian Grebes and Pacific Black Ducks on the dams. Australian King-Parrots were added to the list in the forest as were Brown-headed Honeyeater, Double-barred Finch and Lewin's Honeyeater. Jacky Winters were hawking for insects, and Crimson Rosellas made an appearance with the open country on the flats showing large numbers of Eastern Rosellas and Red-rumped Parrots. Babblers were observed on the way back to the cars, but further woodland treats such as Diamond Firetails and Hooded Robins were absent despite the searching of suitable habitat. The day was leisurely in character, but birds observed were enjoyed by the group and the bird watching at Ron Fenwick's farm deserves more exploration if he'll have us again.

Allan Richardson

Catchment Connections Day - Lake Macquarie 3 June 2011

Lake Macquarie Council's Catchment Connections Day is an education event aimed at school children, mostly in years 5-6 but also from early high school. As in previous years, HBOC provided a display and enthusiastic volunteers to interact with the kids. This year, a selection of the wonderful photos that members have submitted to Jim Smart for use in displays were used to illustrate bird feeding techniques. The variety of bill sizes and shapes and the types of prey and other food sources used by birds were beautifully displayed in large format prints that could be circulated among the children. The images were compelling and provided a terrific resource for the day. Many thanks to Paul Baird, Lorna Mee and Jim Smart for their efforts on the day and to all the photographers who have created and shared these images.

Tomago Wetlands Survey 17 May 2011

Tomago Wetlands is an area of reeds, grass and salt-marsh with stands of casuarinas on the western side of Fullerton Cove. It is part of the Hunter Wetlands National Park. Each month Neville McNaughton leads a survey of the areas, which are gradually changing as more tidal water is allowed to enter the area via tidal gates. It is a great place to see a variety of raptors and Southern Emu-wren in the grassy areas. A Black Bittern was spotted in the mangroves fringing the area in May. Australasian Bitterns are often present although we failed to see them on this occasion.

Liz Crawford

Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Surveys – May 2011

Surveys for the nationally endangered Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater were held on the weekend of 21st-22nd May (and during the week before and after). Birds Australia (BA) co-ordinate these community-based surveys for these species as part of their Woodland Birds for Biodiversity Project - click [here](#) for details (or go to www.birdsaustralia.com.au and follow the links). These surveys are conducted twice annually, once in May and once in August.

Since the last round of surveys in August 2010, the Regent Honeyeater has been listed as a Critically Endangered species in NSW. As NSW is by far the stronghold state for Regents, this is of major concern, as being “Critically Endangered” is only one step away from extinction.

Several HBOC members actively took part in conducting surveys on or around the survey weekend. Places covered included “old haunts” such as the Cessnock woodlands (e.g. Pelton, Kitchener, Quorrobolong) and some Swamp Mahogany Forests on the coast (e.g. Morisset, Buttaba, Swansea, Port Stephens, Forster).

In the lead-up to the surveys there had been a smattering of reports of Swift Parrots from around Seahampton and from Poppethead Park in Kitchener. There had also been a few Swifties recorded at Chain Valley Bay, which is right on the cusp of the Hunter Region (the region actually takes in the water from the low tide mark, but the land is part of the Central Coast). Whilst no Swifties were reported in the Hunter during the survey period, they were present at Chain Valley Bay and elsewhere on the Central Coast, such as Bateau Bay.

Just like last year, the Spotted Gum / Ironbark Forests around Cessnock and Kurri have not produced blossom in 2011. The only flowering trees in that area at the moment are street-planted Swamp Mahoganies and Mugga Ironbarks (with some limited Ferguson’s Ironbark also flowering in the woodlands). One thing that is obvious to the astute observer though, is that there is an abundance of bud on many trees, including Broad-leaved Ironbarks, Forest Red Gums, Stringybark spp. and importantly, Spotted Gums. It is unlikely that the latter will flower this year, but it could mean that 2012 may be a great year in the Cessnock woodlands like we had in 2007 and 2009.

The most exciting news however, is that Allan Richardson has located Regent Honeyeaters at the Morisset sites where good counts of them were made in 2002 and 2007. Allan initially recorded about 8 birds on the survey weekend, feeding on Swamp Mahogany blossom in company with other nectivores, most notably



Regent Honeyeater in Morisset bushland (above) and Swift Parrot at Chain Valley Bay on 27 May 2011 - Mick Roderick

Noisy Friarbirds and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. Since then, up to a dozen birds have been seen at the “feeding site” and 3 or 4 birds also seen at the “roost staging site”. This is currently the biggest concentration of these birds we are aware of anywhere in their range and this area is obviously vitally important to Regent Honeyeaters as they seem to return regularly. There are still a lot of Swamp Mahogany trees budding, so the blossom could be present for a couple more months to come.

The next organised survey weekend is on 6-7 August and we are keen to get as many people out and about looking for these birds as possible again. It would be great to have some more in-depth exploration of the Swamp Mahogany forests of the coastal belt as there are many areas yet to be searched. Steve Roderick will be the local contact for the next round of surveys.

Obviously, we are interested in records of these birds outside of the survey weekends. If you encounter either Swift Parrots or Regent Honeyeaters please report it to the BA co-ordinators (Swift Parrots – 1800 665 766; Regent Honeyeaters – 1800 621 056) or contact Steve on 0409 452 921 or via email roddo75@hotmail.com and he will relay the information.

Mick Roderick

Great Winter Effort at Stockton Sandspit

Stockton Sandspit is a major day-time roost for shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary and is located adjacent to the Stockton Bridge approaches on the eastern end. The Sandspit forms part of the much larger Hunter Wetlands National Park. Over the years, members of Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) have kept a fairly high profile at Stockton Sandspit through wader surveys, club outings and habitat restoration.



Stockton Sandspit from the air - KWRP

Restoration works initially focussed on the roost but these days also have a feeding and breeding habitat focus. By far the greatest effort required these days is what we describe as the Great Winter Effort because this time is dedicated to preparing the roost for the next season's migratory bird arrivals. A major focus of this effort is the creation of shelly sand.

Shelly sand is the preferred roosting place for Red Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Sand Plover and Red-capped Plover at the sandspit. Other shorebirds prefer standing in the saltmarsh or in the open water of the lagoon. Shelly sand is also the preferred habitat for our resident ground-nesting birds.

The creation of shelly sand is, of course, a never-ending story as each year the invasion of various plants onto the sand continues unabated. To create shelly sand it is necessary to reverse, at least temporarily, that invasion and remove as much vegetative matter as possible from the substrate. This is achieved by the manual effort of weeding, raking, piling and barrowing.



Volunteers creating shelly sand – Tom Clarke

Of course this work is well worth the effort and last year's breeding records are all the incentive we need to keep at it. A whopping 78% (14 out of 18) of all nesting attempts by Red-capped Plover and Pied Oystercatcher had nests placed on prepared shelly sand. The sight of the male oystercatcher returning from the oyster bank with a morsel to feed to its offspring hiding in the saltmarsh provides a moment of great joy and satisfaction for those volunteers that contributed months before in preparing the ground.

This year's effort has made a good start but there is plenty left to do. If you would like to help out then check out the dates below and see if you can make it to one of the volunteer days.

Designated volunteer days for this winter are June 26th, July 10th, July 24th and August 7th. All these days start at 7.00am to take advantage of a mid-morning low tide and go to lunch time. Feel free to turn up any time during the morning that suits you.

Out side of these days the work continues (every other Sunday except for June long weekend) with mostly after lunch-time efforts. You are welcome to these also but please ring me (Tom Clarke 0418 411 785) to confirm actual times.

Tom Clarke

Chestnut Teal Survey

9 April 2011

Eleven members of Hunter Bird Observers Club turned out in warm and sunny conditions to count Chestnut Teal in the Lower Hunter. Large concentrations were found at Hexham Swamp (1800), Deep Pond (1388) and Ash Island (908). A short note on the count will appear in the next Whistler.

Ann Lindsey

Brown Falcons with Problems

It is well known that the Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* is something of a generalist compared with most raptors, with a wide range of hunting techniques and a variety of prey (Olsen 1995: 88). Unlike more typical falcons that concentrate on aerial prey, its feet are adapted for taking prey on the ground, as are those of the Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* (Olsen 1995: 19), whereas its wingtips are slightly rounded. This enables them to be 'great opportunists and versatile hunters' (Olsen 1995: 95), though they lack the power of some falcons. Their versatility might lead one to suspect that they are quite intelligent raptors, but it may rather be that they are particularly prepared to experiment, and many of their experiments misfire.



Brown Falcon - Dan Herbert

When driving along Jones Reserve Road, Bureen, on the 25th April 2011, there was (as often) a considerable falcon presence. Nankeen Kestrels were most common, and they were mostly first seen in flight or perched on the wires. There was a group of two Black Falcons *Falco subniger* at one point, and three Brown at another. All the larger falcons were occupying power poles, from which they get a good view of potential prey across the surrounding farmland, where insects, small mammals, and well-adapted bird species (particularly feral species and cockatoos of various kinds) can reach plague proportions. At least one kestrel was hunting without incident close to the Black Falcons, and two kestrels accompanied the group of Brown Falcons. Since both these species are best adapted to the hunting of prey on the ground, it was logical to suppose that they had gathered together because of an abundance of small mammals.

As I approached the last of the Brown Falcons, all darker birds, it left its pole and dropped to the ground to a point where there was a Nankeen Kestrel. This had presumably been an attempted act of piracy. What is certain is that the result was that neither bird had a meal. The two birds rose, and the kestrel was observed to make three aggressive approaches at the Brown Falcon as if to demonstrate its displeasure. However, when the Brown Falcon passively returned to its pole without

returning the aggression, the kestrel too resumed its place on the next pole along. I wondered whether I had witnessed something akin to an attempt by the kestrel to demonstrate that its neighbour had transgressed the rules of communal foraging. In circumstances where three Brown Falcons and two Nankeen Kestrels are all looking for prey within a short distance of one another, it would have been desirable to develop a semi-cooperative approach to hunting to ensure that prey is not lost altogether by squabbling between the competitors.

About ninety minutes later on Martindale Road I encountered a light-phase Brown Falcon so positioned in the middle of the road that I could not easily pass by on either side. I slowed expecting it to take off, and pulled up on the verge alongside it when it did not do so. I am used to Brown Falcons allowing one to approach somewhat closer than most raptors, but this was exceptional. It was by now clear that the falcon was reluctant to move because it was in possession of a Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*. However, I was keen that it should not stay the middle of the road until a less caring or less observant motorist came along, so I wound down the driver's window to stare at it from two metres away, whereupon the falcon finally lifted its prey and headed away from me, straight through the barbed wire fence on the other side of the road. Unfortunately the bird was quite unable to lift the pigeon through the same gap in the fence that it flew through itself, and when either its legs or its intended prey had hit the wire below it had to let go. It was last seen pursuing the escaped pigeon through a neighbouring garden, though whether its attempt to retrieve its prey was successful or not I did not see. The pigeon was still able to fly reasonably, but not so well as to shake off its pursuer.

Even allowing that the Brown Falcon might have been relatively inexperienced (and I had detected no sign that it was a juvenile), I found this a good example of a dangerous experiment that might well have ended badly. It is possible that the Brown Falcon had trapped the pigeon on the road and been unable to kill or disable it quickly. However, while one might think of such behaviour as a sign of incompetence, it may well be that the bird's ability to improvise in order to overcome natural weaknesses is precisely what has given the species its reputation for versatility.

Reference:

Olsen, Penny. (1995). *Australian Birds of Prey: the Biology and Ecology of Raptors*. UNSW Press: Sydney.

Harold Tarrant

Great Shearwater – a new species for the Hunter



Great Shearwater off Swansea 21 April 2011 - Allan Richardson

Up until February this year there had only been 5 accepted records of Great Shearwaters on the official Australian bird list. This Atlantic-breeding seabird has always been considered a true vagrant to Australian waters, but in 2011 something unusual occurred.

It began on the 20th February when a single Great Shearwater was recorded on a pelagic off Eaglehawk in Tasmania. Of interest, a European Storm-petrel was claimed on the same day (and a couple of HBOC members were lucky enough to be on board!). Two weeks later I received a phone call from Dan Mantle who was tea-bagging out on the shelf off Eden – he was looking at a Great Shearwater at the time, as it sat right next to the boat. Dan and I laughed as he had actually recorded Australia's 5th ever Great Shearwater, off the Abrolhos in WA in October 2008 and here he was looking at the 7th.

It would normally be unusual for two birds thought to be 'vagrants' to be recorded in such close proximity to each other (after all, following years of pelagic trips in Australia only 5 had been recorded previously). But then on the 3rd of April the run continued, but in spectacular fashion. Off Portland (Victoria), the BA Vic Group's pelagic found no less than 8 Great Shearwaters that day. This report was soon followed by the Port MacDonnell (SA) trip, which reported seeing as many as 50 of them!

A phenomenon was unfolding and over the next few weeks virtually every pelagic run off south-eastern Australia recorded at least one Great Shearwater, as close as 3 miles from shore off Tasmania. The Kiwis also had their share with the 4th and 5th records of the species for New Zealand (this info may be outdated by now if they've had more in the interim). After Sydney recorded one on the 9th April, things were looking good for the Port Stephens pelagic which was due for a double-header weekend on the 16 and 17th of the month. The now-predictable bad weather for the Port Stephens

pelagic weekends cancelled both of these trips, but we did manage to get a boat out on the Friday.

Alas, no Great Shearwater, which got me thinking... could Port Stephens be slightly too far north? Looking at the species that had been recorded on Hunter-based pelagics over the years we considered that our chances off Swansea to see a Great Shearwater would be better than off Port Stephens and although we only had Steve Roderick's 15-foot aluminium tinny at our disposal we made plans to give it a go on the 21st April.

Steve, Al Richo and I met early at Swansea boat ramp (it had to be early as I had to drive to Canberra that day) and in near-perfect conditions we motored out of the heads – if only sea birding could be so incidental all of the time! About 5km from the heads we started seeing our first shearwaters, which were incidentally mostly Fleshy-foots. Not that further out (maybe 12km from the heads) we started seeing Wilson's Storm-petrels (in fact by the end of the half day we spent out there we saw about a hundred of these birds which was a little surprising to us being reasonably 'inshore').

The plan was to set a berley trail, much the way we do on traditional pelagics, but before we'd even cut the motor Steve alerted our attention to a tubenose with white underparts coming up the wake (there were quite a few Pomarine Jaegers around).

"It's a Great Shearwater!" he yelled (with profanities removed). Al got onto it and I was initially a bit reserved, making sure it wasn't something else like a Buller's Shear...but he was on the money and slowly but surely the Great Shearwater flew up the wake, to no more than 10m behind the stern. We cut the engine and soon we had the bird sitting metres from us on the water, showing interest in the chicken mince concoction we were berleying with. It wasn't a popular bird and it was constantly harassed by the Fleshy-foots. It flew off down the wake but we soon re-located it. Once again, it could not really get a look in and at one point one of the Fleshies actually attacked it from above. The bird had by now had enough and it took flight and headed south out of view.

The record has been submitted to the Birds Australia Rarities Committee and if accepted will be a first for the Hunter Region.

It's nice when a plan comes together.

Mick Roderick

Sonograms, Birdsong and You

Recording bird calls and using their sonograms is an important technique used by HBOC field studies teams to detect and monitor rare and endangered species.

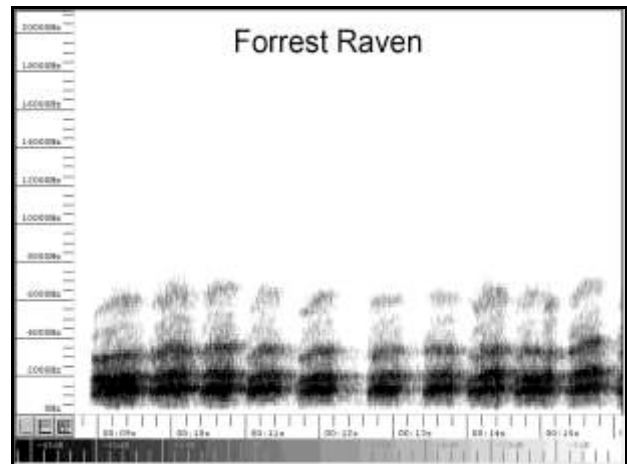
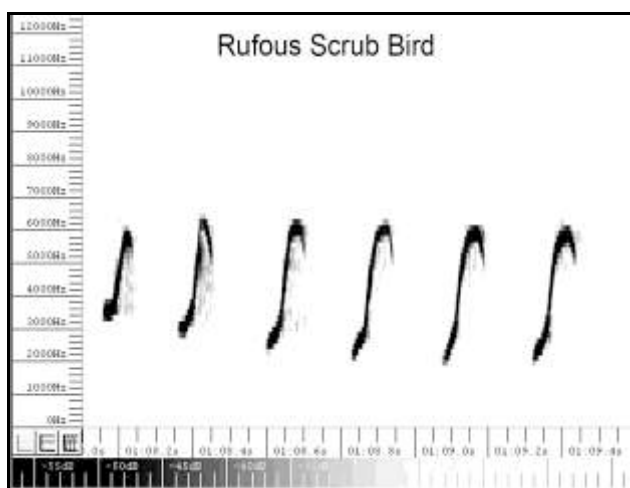
Following the talk given to the HBOC meeting on 11 May 2011, a number of interested HBOC members have sought more details about sonograms, how to read them and how to make and view their own sonograms. In response, a short article on the topic has been placed in the “Field Studies” section of the HBOC website at www.hboc.org.au. It shows how anyone with a computer can use bird call recordings to make their own sonograms ... and all at very little cost. This is a brief overview of that article.

And if you do get interested in recording and possibly looking at sonograms or in any other aspect of field studies, then you may wish to volunteer to help with the Club’s conservation efforts concerning rare and endangered species in our region. Two of our major projects are the detection and monitoring of Rufous Scrub-birds and Australasian Bitterns, both of which are best monitored via their calls. And we need all the volunteers that we can get!

Sonograms

A sonogram is a picture of sound frozen in time. It shows how the sound’s pitch (frequency) and loudness change with time. Sonograms allow us to examine sounds at our leisure rather than fleetingly and so sonograms can help to improve our listening skills and greatly enhance our listening pleasure.

Two typical sonogram displays might appear as follows:



The sonogram of one of the many Rufous Scrub-bird calls is typical for calls of a simple musical nature, while the Forest Raven sonogram is typical for those more complex calls, in this case harsh-sounding calls.

Sonogram reading basics involve just five easy steps (see the website article for expanded details):

1. Look at the scale under the sonogram and note what one second in time looks like. You should also take the time to glance at the scale on the left to note the highest and lowest frequencies displayed.
2. Sonograms are read from left to right (just like reading a line of writing).
3. Intensely coloured areas are loud and faint ones soft.
4. The higher the pitch of a note the higher up the display and vice versa.
5. In a sonogram, a note which starts as high on the left and ends as a lower note on the right, is descending or lowering in pitch (frequency) and vice versa.

When a recorded bird call is played, one way to improve listening skills is to play it on a computer using sonogram-producing software (see “Raven Lite” below). Look at and follow the sonogram on the screen while at the same time listening to the call. In this way you can educate your ear, improve your listening skills and learn to recognise calls. But studying bird call sonograms can be useful in many other ways. Books such as the *Handbook of Australian and New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (HANZAB) series include sonograms as part of the call description for many species, and so the ability to understand the basics of sonograms is important. Some other uses for sonograms include studying the same species for regional differences in calls, identifying and following groups or even recognising individual birds, finding out if bird calls are learned or genetically determined, if calls

change with the seasons or over the years, or are influenced by other nearby birds of the same species or other species, or comparing original calls with their mimicked versions, and so on.

What Do You Need?

And so what do you need to “make” sonograms? Actually not much, and provided you have a computer it can cost you nothing or very little for a basic setup.

Other than a computer the first real essential is some appropriate software. The cheapest “good” solution to the software requirement is “Raven Lite” which is free but requires registration. For details of how to obtain and use it see the website article.

Next you need to get some bird calls to study. Many websites allow you to download bird calls and other wildlife sounds and googling for Australian websites should bring results. As well there are a number of CD sets of Australian bird calls (see website article). If you wish to record your own bird calls, starting with those birds around your own home, then there are a vast number of alternatives depending on how far you wish to go. The simplest is to use an existing MP3 player which has a built-in microphone. Next up the line is a digital recorder at from fifty dollars or less, up to those costing hundreds of dollars or more. These should all have at least an inbuilt microphone and ideally provision to attach an external microphone and being able to save in WAV format is an advantage. Whatever digital recorder and format you use, the recordings will need to be transferred to a computer for use with the sonogram software. This is usually via a USB connection or via a memory card. Then open, play, watch and listen to the sound files in Raven Lite and enjoy.

For a more extensive treatment see the website article at <http://www.hboc.org.au> and the references below.

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2. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Website: <http://www.birds.cornell.edu>
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Ian Martin

If you have room plant a Celery Wood

Caryl and I are privileged to have, at the foot of the garden, a magnificent Celery Wood tree. The scientific name for this tree is *Polyscias elegans*. *Polyscias* comes from the Greek *poly* meaning many and *scias* a canopy or umbrella-like bunch of flowers. *Elegans* means neat or elegant. This tree is fairly large and about twenty years old. In the forest trees can attain a height of 20m. The leaves are a dark glossy green, paler underneath. The flowers are in large football-sized masses of purple. However it is not the flowers which stand out but the many fruit which follow the flowers. These footballs consist of dozens of 0.5cm globular, purple to black, succulent irresistible fruit. Each bunch makes a dark mass among the leaves.

The tree grows naturally from Jervis Bay to Thursday Island and is described as a fast-growing, handsome, pioneer species. Celery Wood likes moist but well-drained rich soils. I think the roots of this Celery Wood obtain their moisture from under my glasshouse.

Why am I suggesting that you – if you have room that is – plant a Celery Wood? Last week, relaxing on our deck in armchair luxury, the following birds provided excellent viewing as they swallowed as many fruits as possible:

- male and female Regent Bowerbird – the male in his splendid regal colouring and often right out in the open;
- male and female Satin Bowerbird – two males and hangers-on. We saw one male dash earthwards to his bower followed closely by a female – presumably to look at his etchings after dinner!
- male and female Figbirds – large flock;
- an Olive-backed Oriole;
- male and female Australian King-Parrots - superbly coloured; and
- Lewin’s Honeyeaters.

As well, while not actually seen in the Celery Wood, Currawongs have been in the nearby gums – and we have heard the constant call of the Brown Cuckoo-Dove.

I have just obtained 5 specimens for planting in the rainforest here at Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia. If you don’t have room in your garden, you can have the pleasure – down the track - of watching these frugivorous birds here at our wetlands in the rainforest along Ironbark Creek.

Paddy Lightfoot

Shorebird Monitoring in Moreton Bay

A new study using Queensland Wader Study Group data reports worrying declines in Moreton Bay shorebirds, and highlights the value of regular monthly counting.

I, like many in Australia, have marvelled at the clouds of migratory shorebirds that visit our shores each year. Many of us are further amazed by the incredible physical endurance and navigational skills that must be required for these birds to travel thousands of kilometres each year. Increasingly though, shorebird counters are seeing fewer shorebirds around now than just a few years ago. For example, it was recently reported that the Curlew Sandpiper has decreased by 80% throughout southern Australia over the past 25 years. On top of this, there are increasing reports of habitat destruction in the staging sites used by migratory species in SE Asia. It is therefore not surprising that many of us are concerned about the plight of migratory shorebirds. The remarkable long-term shorebird population monitoring counts that have been conducted throughout Australia offer a unique opportunity to try to analyse and document the declines in shorebird populations. A new scientific paper due to appear in the journal *Conservation Biology*, 'Analyzing Variability and the Rate of Decline of Migratory Shorebirds in Moreton Bay, Australia', gives us some insights into how our existing long-term data can be put to work using new sophisticated modelling techniques to detect changes before they become catastrophic.

The paper, by researchers Howard Wilson, Bruce Kendall, Richard Fuller, David Milton and Hugh Possingham, highlighted the usefulness of doing monthly counts, as well as the differences between using simple versus more rigorous analysis techniques. Specifically, the study looked at 15 years of shorebird population monitoring data collected by QWSG volunteers at shorebird roosts throughout Moreton Bay. Monthly surveys on this scale represent a huge logistical effort, and substantial input of time by many QWSG volunteers. This new paper highlights how that extra effort allows trends to be identified for more species than would have been uncovered if counts were done just once in summer and once in winter. The sophisticated modelling techniques employed in this study would probably not have been possible to run on most computers 10 to 20 years ago, but the techniques are particularly suited to data with large amounts and different types of variability. They are well-suited to estimating how much our shorebird populations have changed, and how confident we can be that these changes are real. The paper uncovered strong evidence of long-term declines in Moreton Bay populations of White-winged Black Tern, Red Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Greenshank, Great Knot and Whimbrel, with evidence of an increase in Red-necked Stint (probably owing to the Port of

Brisbane reclamation). There was some evidence of decline in another 4 species, and some evidence of increases in another 3. Interestingly, this paper showed that if counts had only been done twice a year in Moreton Bay, declines would have only been detected in four species: the Bar-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Whimbrel and Eastern Curlew. These results highlight the question: how much evidence do we need to decide when species are in decline?

In order to understand how to interpret the results, it is worth first reviewing what might affect the numbers of birds counted. In the simplest case we might expect bird abundances to stay level, which would mean the abundance counts shouldn't change. Now anyone who has ever counted shorebirds knows that if you do multiple counts, even when they are at a similar time of year, they will not be the same. At a local level falcons can zip by leaving no shorebirds at the roost you usually count at, or poor weather can make it hard to count accurately, or push the birds around the corner you can't see. Furthermore, across large areas, such as the whole of Moreton Bay, there are considerable logistical difficulties in counting all the birds in one area at one time. This results in counts that, if plotted over time would not be identical even if the actual bird population was not changing. Additionally, at a broader scale, one season the birds spend in the arctic might be particularly good with a long warm summer, with plenty of food and few predators around resulting in more young coming to Australia, while the following year might be a bad one. These natural fluctuations in numbers occur in every wild animal population, but they occur to different degrees in different species. All these sources of variation obscure underlying patterns in the bird abundances, whether that pattern is the population staying constant over time, or increasing or decreasing.

A simple model, such as linear regression, will assume that all the variation comes from one source (usually the variation in our ability to count the birds accurately). However, the recent paper by Howard Wilson and colleagues compared these simple methods with recently developed stochastic state-space models to account for many more sources of variation in bird counts, a much more realistic model. Simple population analysis techniques were more likely to identify population declines when there was in fact no decline happening. The more complex stochastic state-space models are less powerful at detecting change but give rise to fewer "false alarms".

It is clearly beneficial to have comprehensive techniques which result in less doubt that the identified decline in a population is in fact happening, and which can then be

Shorebird Monitoring in Moreton Bay cont.

used as compelling evidence of a problem when talking to decision makers. However, is it better to be more certain about the declines we do report, or should we identify all species that are possibly declining even if this gives rise to some false alarms? One solution is to make the scientific reporting complete enough to do both, as was done in this paper, so that the difference between those we are sure about and those with some evidence of decline can be made clear. In the case of QWSG, the paper shows clearly how monthly surveys enable greater scientific certainty regarding the changes in population abundance.

The shorebird monitoring data that has been collected over the last 25 years represents one of the best, most systematically collected long-term data sets in Australia: a data set which represents many thousands of hours of work by volunteers throughout the country. It is exciting to know that now a team of researchers at the University of Queensland led by Richard Fuller, Howard Wilson and Hugh Possingham will be extending the work discussed here. Supported by QWSG, DERM, the Port of Brisbane, the federal environment department, and the Australian Research Council, the team will determine if the results observed in Moreton Bay reflect what is happening throughout the East-Asian Australasian

flyway. This project will be further assisted through the valuable input from those who have collected data from throughout the country, including representatives from each of the following organisations: Australasian Wader Studies Group, Bird Observation and Conservation Australia, Birds Australia, Birds Australia Western Australia, Birds Tasmania, Friends of Shorebirds SE, Friends of Streaky Bay District Parks, Hunter Bird Observers Club, New South Wales Wader Study Group, Ornithological Society of New Zealand, The South Australian Ornithological Association Inc., Victorian Wader Study Group, and Wetlands International. More importantly, the team will also try to uncover what is driving these declines.

For more information or to download a pdf copy of this paper, visit www.fullerlab.org

Rob Clemens

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Editor's note: HBOC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with researchers at the University of Queensland to allow inclusion of our 12 years' of shorebird monitoring data in the study of shorebird declines in the East-Asian Australasian Flyway.

North Pacific Gyre - setting sail to investigate Great Pacific Shame

Each year over a million sea birds and hundreds of thousands of sea-dwelling animals die from ingestion of plastic and entanglement in debris. Newcastle environmentalist Tim Silverwood will set sail across the Pacific Ocean in July to research plastic pollution and marine debris in the North Pacific Gyre, otherwise known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

The research voyage is being conducted by California-based organisation Algalita Marine Research Foundation, founded by Charles Moore, the man credited with discovering the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in 1997. Twice the size of France and growing exponentially, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is threatening to become one of the great ecological disasters of our time. The result of the convergence of ocean currents from Asia, North America and nations in the Pacific, tonnes of debris have been brought together to create a swirling vortex of plastic rubbish which is thought to double in size every ten years.

Tim will join researchers from around the world on a three-week expedition on a 72ft (22m) sailboat called the *Sea Dragon* to the heart of the gyre. Throughout the

voyage the team of researchers will undertake a range of studies to assess the burgeoning size of the ecological disaster and its impact on marine life.

Tim is the co-founder of a program called 'Take 3 - A Clean Beach' initiative that encourages Australians to pick up three pieces of rubbish each time they go to the beach. At least 80% of rubbish threatening marine life in our oceans is the result of land-based littering entering our storm water drains and finding its way out into our waterways. As Tim says, 'the ocean is downhill from everywhere', which means all of the accumulated litter of our coastal catchments ends up on our beaches and in our oceans.

Tim has been raising funds to cover the US\$10,000 he needs to pay for his spot on the research voyage, he is also planning to produce a documentary on the voyage to help raise awareness of this important issue. The Hunter-Central Rivers CMA has agreed to sponsor Tim, if you'd also like to support his campaign, go to www.pozible.com.au/index.php/archive/index/251/description/0/0

Lord Howe Island

Plastics in the news on Lord Howe Island

Recent research reported in [The Age](#) is a stark reminder to us all about the effects that plastic pollution is having on the oceans, and particularly our vulnerable seabirds. At least 95% of Flesh-footed Shearwaters on Lord Howe Island, one of Birds Australia's [Important Bird Areas](#), have been found with large amounts of plastics in their digestive systems, as plastic is commonly mistaken for food. We can all help by reducing the amount of plastic packaging that we use, and disposing of our rubbish appropriately. Read more about this on [Birds Australia's website](#).

Conservation Wins and Challenges for Birdlife on Lord Howe Island

A free talk on Lord Howe Island bird life by Ian Hutton, OAM.

WHEN: Sunday 7 August, 2 - 4pm,

WHERE: Building 22, Newington Armory, Sydney Olympic Park.

COST: Free

Ian will present a very brief history of Lord Howe Island, involving introduced animals and the effect on the birdlife and then follow this with details of the Woodhen rescue (one of most successful captive bird breeding projects in the world); the extra benefits for all birdlife of eradicating cats and pigs from the island; challenges with rat eradication and the possibility of reintroduction of subspecies closely related to the extinct birds; other threats to seabirds – long-line fishing and plastic ingestion - and then finish with best locations and times to visit seabird colonies. Everybody is welcome.

Please register your name with Pixie on 9647 1033 or to basna@birdsaustralia.com.au

Gould's *Birds of Australia* is about far more than ornithology; it was and is a revelation

An eye for the birds by Anson Cameron

The Age 29 May 2011

I got to know the whistling eagle on trips with my father up the Darling River in outback New South Wales. It sat high on bare branches, its call a descending whistle that ended in an eruption of notes. As a boy I believed that cry held news in its nuances that travelled the length of the river in relay from one bird to another, from Queensland to Victoria, like semaphore along the Great Wall of China. I learnt the whistle, and in later life would use it to find my children in a crowd. They would hear it and look around for me, knowing I was the only whistling eagle in the Bourke Street Mall or the Louvre.

This bird led me to Gould. Having become our family totem, my wife gave me a hand-coloured lithograph of it taken from John Gould's *The Birds of Australia* for my birthday recently.

I visited Gould's book by appointment in the sanctum that holds Rare Printed Collections at the State Library. A friendly bibliophile named Jan chaperoned me into its presence. An original 1848 volume reclining on beanbags on a table, a scuffed leather spine and worn green linen cover. We wore white gloves to turn its brittle pages, yellowing and torn, patched with tape by generations of doting librarians.

On every second one of these ageing pages lies a bright wonderment. Birds finely drawn in inks still vividly coloured; a synthesis of science and art. Birds

brought immortally to life by meticulous hand and eye. Pre-photographic truths as clear and informative as anything subsequently caught by the camera. The three-dimensional green and bronze sheen on Gould's bronzing pigeon could initiate courting rituals in a live bird. His kookaburra might at any moment shatter the reverence in this library and send the foreign students stampeding for the exits.

In the climate-controlled sanctum of the Rare Printed Collections these birds have become kin to the figures on Keats' grecian urn; each of them a foster-child of silence and slow time. Outside though, the birds Gould discovered continue to lessen in number and range - 23 are now extinct; many are endangered. But in this day and age of binary life I have the whistling eagle, and all Australian birds, on an app in my phone. If I want to hear that eagle I press a button and from out beyond the Darling and my childhood it calls to me.

On the tram home I play this raptor's territorial whistle. A strange visitation among the frowning suits. Maybe this is the future of the birds Gould brought to our world. Perhaps more eagles will soon whistle while riding trams than thermals. Perhaps in times to come parrots will screech more often in cantinas than casuarinas. And more owls will sleep in the pockets of men than in the hollows of trees.

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/animals/an-eye-for-the-birds-20110528-1f9m7.html#ixzz1NkDMY6r6>

Introducing BirdLife Australia

At the AGMs on 21 May 2011, members of Birds Australia (BA) and Bird Observation & Conservation Australia (BOCA) voted on whether the two organisations should merge. For the merger to go ahead, at least 75% of all Birds Australia members who voted and at least 75% of all BOCA members who voted needed to vote for the merger.

The outcome: Members of both organisations voted for the merger of BA and BOCA to create BirdLife Australia. Over 93% of those that voted from BOCA voted for the merger and over 95% of those that voted from BA voted for the merger.

A combined total of 4517 Birds Australia and BOCA members voted on the resolution, with over 36% of Birds Australia members and more than 50% of BOCA members voting. This is the biggest response to a proposed resolution that either organisation has ever received. A huge thank you to our members for being part of this process – and welcome to your new organisation - BirdLife Australia!

What happens next? Over the coming months BA and BOCA operations will begin to come together; however ensuring that the transition from two to one is smooth and successful will take time. Over the next six months, both BA and BOCA will focus on delivery of our key work as well as implementing the merger and beginning to amalgamate operations. Between now and December 2011 this includes:

- the first meetings of the 'transition Board' of BirdLife Australia;
- meetings of BA Council and BOCA Board to wrap up organisational and financial operations;

- consulting with groups and branches on future arrangements;
- finalising the BirdLife Australia vision and goals and developing a new logo;
- developing the new BirdLife Australia website ready for launch in early 2012;
- bringing together both organisations' staff into one building; and
- producing separate membership magazines for the rest of 2011, but working closely together behind the scenes.

By January 2012: BirdLife Australia is fully operational.

Early 2012: formal launch of our new organisation, the new website and publications.

Over the next six months we will be keeping you updated through monthly bulletins on the BA and BOCA merger web pages. These updates will be summarised in the September and December issues of *Wingspan* and the August and November issues of the *The Bird Observer*, and via BA's monthly e-news.

By joining forces, we will achieve more for Australia's birds in our conservation and education efforts and will work better for our members in encouraging and facilitating enjoyment and appreciation of birds. We hope that with your help we can make BirdLife Australia a place for everyone with an interest in birds – and look forward to an exciting and successful future together.

(From BA and BOCA working party)

Current Events

Rituals of Seduction: Birds of Paradise

An exhibition of rare footage, beautiful specimens, cultural objects from Papua New Guinea and unique photographs all combining to give a bird's-eye view of one of the world's most secretive seductions.

WHEN: until 7 August 2011

WHERE: Australian Museum, Sydney

COST: Adults \$14, child \$7, family \$35/\$22, concession \$9 (includes general museum entry)

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2010

Photographic images which offer an insight into some of the world's most spectacular wildlife and nature.

WHEN: until 30 July 2011

HOURS: Mon – Wed 9.30am – 8.00pm; Thurs-Fri 9.30am – 5.00pm; Sat 9.30am – 2.00pm.

WHERE: Lovett Gallery, War Memorial Cultural Centre, Laman Street, Newcastle

COST: Free

Hunterbirding

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 please visit the HBOC website for details on how to sign up: <http://www.hboc.org.au/index.cfm?menukey=27>. 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?! The following article highlights some of the reports and discussions that have happened on hunterbirding within the last two months.

April

The headlines were stolen by the presence of two rarities in the Hunter this month, with each receiving a very different response. Spotted Bowerbird was first up, with a report coming to light of a bird seen in North Rothbury. Apparently there were up to three birds present nearby last year! An accompanying photograph left no doubt as to the identification and soon fellow subscribers were championing at the bit to unearth more details – no doubt eager to add the bird to their Hunter lists! It was seen by a number of observers over the following weeks, with their experiences relayed to hunterbirding.

The second mega-rarity of the month was a report (again with accompanying photo) of a Great Shearwater seen by three men in a tinny, off the coast from Swansea. They'd made a targeted excursion to attempt to see one during a current 'invasion' of them in Australian waters and were justly rewarded with a first-ever record for the Hunter! No response was returned to the news of this bird on hunterbirding however, in stark contrast to the Bowerbird. I put it down to people being exceedingly gripped off. Keen for info on the Bowerbird in an attempt to snag the beast for themselves, the same individuals were most likely knocked for six by the news of the Shearwater, knowing that there was almost no hope of them seeing one for themselves. I know that's how I felt anyway!

Rarities aside, there was still much discussion on our bread-and-butter birds of the Hunter too. Chestnut Teal, Rufous Fantail, Peaceful Dove and Restless Flycatcher all shared some of the limelight. The Teal enjoyed its largest ever count in the Hunter, with around 4,500 birds recorded over several sites. This is a very large count indeed and the abundance of the species in the Hunter is one of the reasons for the Hunter Estuary being designated an Important Bird Area (IBA). The winter departure of Rufous Fantail was discussed, prompted by a couple of late (but not so late) reports from observers. The distribution and occurrence of Peaceful Dove in the region

was questioned and a request for information regarding the status of Restless Flycatcher was also received. Both were responded to quickly and informatively, which is the norm for these types of request on hunterbirding.

Technology aplenty was also a feature this month, with no less than four different birding technological issues addressed! Firstly, there was a request for information and resultant discussion on the options for night-vision optical equipment. A request for recommendations regarding GPS devices was met with much response, including which makes and models were worth investing in, substantial information concerning the correct use of such devices and a step-by-step guide as to how you should ensure that you never get lost in the bush! This was particularly important as one has a tendency to over-rely on technology and then come unstuck when things go awry! The use of ipod and other MP3 players for bird-call playback was touched upon and there was yet more discussion on camera lenses – a common topic on hunterbirding it would seem!

Finally, one of the most hotly responded topics was that concerning the impact of Miner birds on smaller honeyeaters and other woodland species. These species have become much more common due to the increase in their favoured edge habitats – a direct impact of human land management. The birds can act aggressively towards other species, particularly when in large numbers, and will often drive them out of an area to reduce competition for food. This is likely having an adverse impact on other species, particularly those woodland species whose habitat has been reduced and fragmented as the Miners habitat has increased.

May

Most of the hunterbirding activity in May related to bird reports and observations. Much commentary was exchanged over the appearance of a Cape Barren Goose in Newcastle. It was first observed on a BHP site, where it was reported to have been for a few weeks. It later relocated to Merewether Beach – if only for a day. Clearly being this far north the bird is either a serious rarity or indeed an escapee. The status of the bird with regards its origin was aired through hunterbirding. Either way, it certainly proved to be an interesting visitor to the Region.

In Blackbutt Reserve, the first Emerald Dove reported there for over ten years was seen by a few observers and was also successfully captured and banded. The bird was seen loitering around the Emerald Dove enclosure but was wild. All captive birds were accounted for and sported bands. It must have flown into the Reserve, located its buddies and decided to hang around for a while! The

Hunterbirding cont.

return of Regent Honeyeaters to a site in Morisset after a lengthy absence was welcome news. Eight birds were reported but there are now believed to be twelve.

A few observers were reporting the return of Yellow-billed Spoonbill to the area after being missing for over a year, following the inland rains which commenced in December 2009. The most remarkable bird report was of a Ground Parrot in Munmorah SCA. Only 4km outside of the Hunter Region, a report of a single bird marks the first for the Central Coast and the first in the Hunter for almost a century! It ignites hopes that there may still be a remnant population of this species present somewhere within the Region.

Some unfortunate news was that the Pinegrove Road (near Warkworth) birding site appeared to now be closed due to the increasing proximity of mining activities to the site. This excellent site has been enjoyed by many

birders and represents one of the best remnant woodland sites in the Middle Hunter Valley. However, good news for access to birding sites was that, following research from some hunterbirding members, Travelling Stock Routes appear to be readily accessible to birders. It is recommended that visitors to TSRs ring the relevant ranger in advance if intending to visit such a site.

Discussions about the seasonal movements and group behavior of Pied Currawong also continued this month and were an interesting read. Many observers may regularly notice large movements of Currawong, particularly come winter, when they move off the colder ranges and into the lowlands. We look forward to more interesting discussions such as this, so if you'd like to contribute then please get involved...

Dan Williams

A call to save the enigmatic Spoon-billed Sandpiper

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* is one of the world's most unusual birds. The species is listed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Critically Endangered on the basis of an extremely small population, estimated at 120-200 hundred pairs, and due to an annual decline of 27%. This means that it is at an extremely high risk of extinction in the next few years. Hunting and habitat loss on the non-breeding grounds, combined with the loss of important intertidal feeding areas during its migration, have all contributed to this precipitous decline.

An International Action Plan for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been produced on behalf of BirdLife International and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Along with actions related to habitat protection, site management, awareness raising and education particularly in the non-breeding grounds, the possibility of establishing a captive breeding program was explored. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) in conjunction with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), British Trust for Ornithology, Birdlife International and Birds Russia have now embarked on an ambitious breeding program. This will entail extensive field operations in Chukotka, in the Russian Far East, in the forthcoming summer of 2011. Ongoing husbandry will be carried out through WWT facilities in the United Kingdom. The cost of this program is very high and, while it is being funded in the short term by RSPB and WWT, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership has invited Partners to provide financial assistance to enable the success of this critical program.

Although this species is not one that we see in Australasia it is, nevertheless, the most iconic wader species in our flyway.

Its current critical conservation situation should be of concern to every shorebird lover wherever they live. Moreover, the problems faced by this species are common to many of the shorebirds that migrate through our flyway. In many ways this is a flagship species that is demonstrating to the world the significant issues that are faced by these long-distance migrants.

Proposed action:

In June/July 2011, 20 Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs would be taken from the 10 pairs expected to breed at Meinygilgyno (as the species lays 4 eggs per clutch this would represent 50% of the eggs expected to be produced). The birds would be hatched and reared at facilities in the breeding area, and then fledged birds would be transported via Moscow to a captive breeding facility in the UK.

Captive birds would be reared to adulthood, and then bred. The intention would be to spread the birds among more than one facility as quickly as possible.

The captive population should produce an annual cohort of 40 or more juvenile birds for introduction back into the wild in Russia from approximately 2018 onwards.

The Australasian Wader Studies Group of Birds Australia (AWSG) supports this program and invites anyone interested in saving this species to provide financial assistance. Birds Australia has agreed to handle funding at no cost to the project. Donations may be made by cheque, payable to Birds Australia and forwarded to Suite 2-05, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia, or by credit card by phone 1300 730 075 or +61 3 9347 0757 (please **do not** make your donation online at the Birds Australia website). Please specify the Spoon-billed Sandpiper fund when making your donation.

Directions for Camp at *Myall View* 11 - 13 June 2011

Myall View, a private property owned by Michael McNiece, is the last private property before entering the Myall Lakes National Park down the Violet Hill Road access.

Directions

- Travel north along the Pacific Highway and through Bulahdelah.
- Approximately 3km north of Bulahdelah the highway changes from single lane to double lane. At this point move into the right-hand lane ready to turn off the highway at "The Lakes Way" exit heading for Forster.
- After about 1km of double lane highway turn right onto The Lakes Way.
- Travel 6.1km along The Lakes Way and turn right into Violet Hill Road. You will pass at least two spots where evidence of recent road deaths can be observed; please travel safely along the Lakes Way.
- Travel 3.37km along Violet Hill Road and (just after crossing a small bridge) look on the left-hand side for the entrance gate marked "Myall View".
- After passing through the front gate, you will be on the main track that leads to the house. Stay on this main track and head up the hill.
- Follow the signs to the camp area, to the left of the main track. The possible route can vary, depending on conditions.
- You may encounter a couple of horses in the camp paddock. They will not bother campers provided we don't leave bread lying around.

Camping Requirements

- Take all your own water.
- Take all your rubbish home.
- HBOC camp toilets will be erected for our use.
- Depending on current fire restrictions we are allowed to have a communal fire.

Future Workshop 13/14 August 2011

Bird Calls of the Hunter with Fred Van Gessel

Fred van Gessel will be conducting a workshop on Bird Calls of the Hunter on Saturday 13 August 2011 from 1pm to 5pm at the Hunter Wetlands Centre, followed by a field outing to Awabakal Nature Reserve on Sunday 14 August 2011 from 7.30am. Numbers for the workshop are limited to 12, so if you are interested, please contact Paul Baird on 4938 5039 to book your place. There will be a small fee to cover room hire. Because of the necessity to limit numbers for participants' benefit, Fred has offered to conduct another workshop in 2012.

Access to Ash Island

As many of you would know, easy car access to the ponds on Ash Island has been impossible since the bridge on Ramsar Road over Dead Mangrove Creek subsided during construction of a water main (Trunkmain Upgrade) by Hunter Water across the Island in 2010. The bridge was removed to allow unobstructed flows through the creek whilst a restoration method was decided.

Hunter Water has informed HBOC that the bridge will be reinstated by mid-July 2011 (subject to wet weather), following resolution of outstanding issues with the Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries) and National Parks and Wildlife Service.

We look forward to enjoying improved access to the shorebird ponds on Ash Island before the migratory birds return in September.

HBOC Membership Fees for January - December 2011

Membership Fees for 2011 are \$30.00 Single and Family, \$5.00 Junior (under 16 years)

Membership forms can be obtained at Club Night or by downloading from the website: www.hboc.org.au

Please pay at Club Night or send cheque or money order payable to HBOC, PO Box 24, New Lambton 2305.

If you prefer to pay by electronic transfer, please include your name in the transaction to:
Greater Building Society; BSB 637000; Account No. 782260316; Account Name: Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

Club Night Observations March 2011 - May 2011

Please note that all sighting reports published in HBOC's newsletter or its on-line forum (Hunterbirding) are unofficial and have not been confirmed by the club. Such reports are publicised in order that others can be made aware of the sighting(s) reported and have the chance to help verify them. Official records of bird sightings in the Hunter Region appear in the Annual Bird Report, for which written submissions supported by field notes and photographs are a vital part of the process for acceptance of locally uncommon/rare species.

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Australian Ringneck	1	19/5/11	Cessnock TAFE	C.McDonald
Bassian Thrush	1	20/3/11	Gap Creek [Watagan Mts]	M.Blyth
Bassian Thrush	1	13/5/11	Blackbutt Reserve	J.Thomas
Beach Stone-curlew	Pr	20/1/11	Dowadee Island	L.Wooding
Bell Miner	~10	Apr	Newcastle University	M.McRae
Black-faced Monarch	1	5/4/11	Bolwarra [garden]	H.Tarrant
Black-necked Stork	Pr	9/4/11	Hexham Swamp	A.Lindsey
Black-necked Stork	2	22/4/11	HWC [Ironbark Marsh]	P.Davidson
Black-necked Stork	1f	27/4/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre (HWC)	P.Lightfoot
Black-necked Stork	1	7/5/11	Coon Island	J.Adams
Brown Goshawk	1	22/4/11	Tighes Hill	T.Clarke
Brush Cuckoo	1	24/3/11	Mt Sugarloaf	R.& C.Goodenough
Buff-banded Rail	1	11/3/11	Dora Creek	R.& C.Goodenough
Buff-banded Rail	1	10/4/11	Dora Creek	R.& C.Goodenough
Buff-banded Rail	2	23/5/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot
Chestnut Teal	83	27/4/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot
Cockatiel	1-2	1/4/11	Newcastle University	M.McRae
Double-banded Plover	2	9/4/11	Coon Island	J.Mills
Eastern Koel	1	10-12/4/11	Wangi Wangi	H.Windon
Emerald Dove	1	5/1/11	Blackbutt Reserve	J.Nicholls
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1	23/5/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot
Grey Goshawk	2	23/5/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot
Grey Shrike-thrush	1	20/3/11	Gap Creek [Watagan Mts]	M.Blyth
Little Black Cormorant	~100	15/4/11	Toronto	C.&R.Goodenough
Little Corella	~80	18/4/11	Dora Creek	C.&R.Goodenough
Little Penguin	1	17/3/11	Dudley Head	T.Clarke
Little Penguin	2	21/4/11	Glenrock SRA	T.Clarke
Little Penguin	1	6/5/11	Salamander Beach	T.Clarke
Long-billed Corella	3	7/4/11	Dora Creek	R.& C.Goodenough
Masked Lapwing	50-60	2/5/11	Williamtown Airbase	R.Walker
Pacific Baza	1	13/4/11	Kotara	J.Nicholls
Pacific Black Duck	81	27/4/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot
Peregrine Falcon	1	7/4/11	Lorn/Bolwarra	H.Tarrant
Red-browed Finch	55	17/3/11	Redhead	R.& C.Goodenough
Royal Spoonbill	10	27/4/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot
Sooty Oystercatcher	6	20/4/11	Near Birubi Point	T.Clarke
Spotted Quail-thrush	2	17/3/11	Mt Sugarloaf	R.& C.Goodenough
Spotted Quail-thrush	2	27/4/11	Sugarloaf NR	C.&R.Goodenough
Wandering Whistling-Duck	18	27/4/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot
Wandering Whistling-Duck	101	23/5/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot
White-backed Magpie	1	weeks	Ellalong [garden]	C.McDonald
White-headed Pigeon	1	20/3/11	Gap Creek [Watagan Mts]	M.Blyth
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	3	23/5/11	HWC	P.Lightfoot

Note: f = female pr = pair

HBOC Activities June to August 2011

JUNE

Wednesday 8 June	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Holly Parsons – Superb Fairy-wrens Bird of the Evening: Joy Nicholls
Friday 10 June	Volunteer Day at Ash Island – mangrove seedling removal	7.00am Milham Pond, Ash Island	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Long Weekend 11 - 13 June	Camp at <i>Myall View</i> , Violet Hill Road, Bulahdelah	Private property – bring everything you need.	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Saturday 18 June	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30am Ash Island 10.00 am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton
Sunday 19 June	Field Outing to Kitchener area	8.00am Poppethead Park, Quorrobolong Road, Kitchener	Liz Crawford 0412 722 644
Tuesday 21 June	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Friday 24 June	Volunteer Day at Ash Island – mangrove seedling removal	7.00am Milham Pond, Ash Island	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Sunday 26 June	Volunteer Day at Stockton Sandspit – weeding and birdwatching	7.00am at Stockton Sandspit carpark	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785

JULY

Tuesday 5 July	Mid-week Outing – Tomago area	8.00am At locked gate near Tomago House, Tomago	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Wednesday 6 July	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Paul Baird 4938 5039 All members welcome
Friday 8 July	Volunteer Day at Ash Island – mangrove seedling removal	7.00am Milham Pond, Ash Island	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Sunday 10 July	Volunteer Day at Stockton Sandspit – weeding and birdwatching	7.00am at Stockton Sandspit carpark	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Wednesday 13 July	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Jill Denning – Birds and Hunter Wildlife Rescue
Friday 15 July	Port Stephens Wader Survey	Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Please ring to confirm - limited spaces available
Saturday 16 July	Hunter Wader Survey	8.30am Ash Island 9.00am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Island Ann Lindsay 4951 2008 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton
Saturday- Sunday 16-17 July	HBOC Camera Twitch	Consecutive 8 hours – your choice of start time – anywhere within Australia	Darryl Luck at darryl.luck@hotmail.com Rules provided on HBOC website: www.hboc.org.au
Tuesday 19 July	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Friday 22 July	Volunteer Day at Ash Island – mangrove seedling removal	7.00am Milham Pond, Ash Island	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Sunday 24 July	Volunteer Day at Stockton Sandspit – weeding and birdwatching	7.00am at Stockton Sandspit carpark	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Sunday 24 July	Field Outing: New Members Day	9.30am Hunter Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Paul Baird 4938 5039

AUGUST

Tuesday 2 August	Mid-week Outing - Kitchener area	8.00am Khartoum Hotel, Quorrobolong Road, Kitchener	Robert Stewart 4963 2029
Wednesday 3 August	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Paul Baird 4938 5039 All members welcome
Saturday/ Sunday 6/7 August	Swift Parrot & Regent Honeyeater Surveys	Various locations as desired or directed	Steve Roderick 0409 452 921 Please contact for information
Sunday 7 August	Volunteer Day at Stockton Sandspit – weeding and birdwatching	7.00am at Stockton Sandspit carpark	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Monday 8 August	Volunteer Day at Ash Island – mangrove seedling removal	7.00am Milham Pond, Ash Island	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Wednesday 10 August	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Rod Kavanagh – The Powerful Owl Project