



## Hunter Bird Observers Club

*Affiliated with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia*

# Newsletter

Issue 5/12  
October - November 2012

### 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

### CONTENTS

<b>President's Column</b>	2
<b>Meeting Highlights:</b>	
Just Black and White	3
<b>Club Activity Reports:</b>	
Will O Wyn Valley Murrays Run	4
Budgewoi	4
Lake Glenbawn Camp	5
Munmorah SCA	5
HBOC Waves its Flag	5
<b>Featured Birdwatching Site:</b>	
Kurri Woodland	7
<b>Features</b>	
Saltmarsh Monitoring	10
Windeyers Reach Rehabilitation	11
Hunterbirding	12
<b>Future Activities:</b>	
Bittern Survey	14
BirdLife Australia Twitchathon	14
Welcome Waders	15
<b>Past Activity</b>	
Elderly Birdwatcher Protests	15
<b>Club Night Observations</b>	16
Advertisement	18
Hunter Estuary Waders	18
Australian Shorebird Conference	19
<b>Club Activities October - December</b>	20

### CALL FOR FOX ACTIVITY REPORTS

WetlandCare Australia is planning to conduct a fox control program in the Hunter Estuary commencing later this month. Coordinator Louise Duff is calling on members of HBOC to assist by submitting reports of fox activity throughout the shorebird season. Last year, 10 birdwatchers participated in a training session, received a reporting template and submitted 28 reports. Louise is calling on the fox monitoring group to resume reporting to help evaluate the success of the program. If you would like training and the reporting template contact Louise: [louiseduff@wetlandcare.com.au](mailto:louiseduff@wetlandcare.com.au).

### NATIONAL ART & PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Artists and photographers are invited to submit works depicting wetland scenes and birdlife to WetlandCare Australia's National Art and Photography competition. There are cash prizes up to \$1,000 in each category, and the finalists will be exhibited at Hunter Wetlands Centre for World Wetlands Day 2013. The exhibition will tour regional centres throughout the year and is a great way for your work to be seen and appreciated. For details visit [www.wetlandcare.com.au](http://www.wetlandcare.com.au)

#### Further information contact:

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## President's Column

What a great time of year spring is.

But I am getting a feeling that it may not be any 'ordinary' spring this year. As I write this piece, there seems to be a 'vibe' in the air and it is looking like being an exciting springtime, with the arrival of some noteworthy birds, some of which have been pretty scarce since the inland rains started in early 2010. Brown Songlarks and White-winged Trillers seem to be turning up in a number of areas where they have not been seen in quite a few years, White-browed and Masked Woodswallows are filling the skies and birds like Baillon's Crakes are starting to be recorded again. We've even had our first Banded Stilt since 2004.

It really makes me marvel at the way the Australian environment seems to function – in a "boom / bust" fashion. We may have had to wait for a couple of years while many birds enjoyed the conditions on the other side of the ranges (in some cases, in the interior of the continent), but it seems that we may be starting to see evidence of some good breeding seasons and the drying out of inland areas, as some birds head for the coastal

regions. It will be interesting to see what other birds arrive in the Hunter this spring-summer.

Aside from this, many birds have their 'breeding boots' on already. Reports of nesting birds have been trickling in steadily, including some of our threatened bird species such as Brown Treecreepers. Fluffy baby Red-capped Plovers are running round the Stockton Sandspit while the parent birds play plover-politics and the resident pair of Pied Oystercatchers drive off intruding Pied Oys despite the failure of their second nesting attempt. Eastern Yellow Robins are feeding dependent young in Blackbutt, as are Bassian Thrushes down at Cooranbong (the latter is an interesting record that adds to our limited understanding of that species).

I don't know...it is just a hunch, but I personally am getting a very 'good feeling' about this spring, whether that feeling be for breeding birds, returning migrants or unusual records. Either way, there is no doubting that this really is a great time of year for observing birds – get out there and enjoy it folks!

**Mick Roderick**

## Membership Fees for 2013

Owing to rising costs for public liability insurance and other items, membership fees for 2013 will increase from the current fee structure as follows:

Single membership currently \$30 in 2012 will increase to \$35 in 2013;

Family membership currently \$30 in 2012 will increase to \$40 in 2013;

Junior membership currently \$5 in 2012 will remain at \$5 in 2013.

However, if fees are paid by 28 February 2013, an Earlybird Discount applies:

Single Membership will be \$30 and Family Membership will be \$30.

**So get your membership for 2013 paid promptly and benefit from the Earlybird Discount!**

## New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

Susan Rennie

Helen and Jim Stevens of Coonabarabran

We hope to see you at Club outings and meetings.

This Bar-tailed Godwit was flagged in the Hunter Estuary in November 2004 as part of Michelle Foate's honours thesis. Last summer (non-breeding season) it stayed in the Hunter Estuary from 4 October 2011 to 26 March 2012. It recently returned on 3 October 2012, having completed yet another amazing long-distance migration to its northern hemisphere breeding grounds of at least 27,000km!

Photo - Chris Herbert



## Just Black and White

Many brilliant, coloured birds have I seen on Club outings and the thrill of spotting new ones on my travels throughout Australia has been a great adventure. Jewels like Azure Kingfisher on quiet waterways; Crimson Finches in tall grasses; dazzling gold and black Regent Bowerbirds in remnant rainforest; sky-blue White-winged Fairy-wrens in coastal heath - a virtual artist's palette of colour. But mostly, looking out my back window, or sitting in the garden, I see muted grey or brown birds: Spotted Doves, Noisy Miners, Little Wattlebirds .... so that a crisp black and white bird stands out in the crowd. Perky, happy Willie Wagtail, busily fanning his own special dance; Pied Butcherbird, perched high on a TV aerial calling in liquid notes, his own musical composition; a pair of Magpie-larks strutting their stuff in a grid pattern on the lawn.

The Australian Magpie is one of the most iconic black and white birds: common and very abundant in the countryside, open scrub, parks and playing fields, the bush, and suburban nature strips and gardens. Its melodious sound can be heard in the early mornings and evenings with a group of his fellows singing a wonderful chorus to advertise and defend their territory - they seem to sing for the sheer joy of it.



Australian Magpie - Ian Montgomery

Called 'magpie' by the early settlers after similar black and white birds in their homeland, it often earned the names "Flute Bird" or "Organ Piper". The ornithologist John Gould wished that people in England could hear the magpie's song - it was so beautiful it defied human description.

Like bowerbirds, magpies are fascinated by shiny objects and will often decorate their nests with found objects such as spoons and even diamond rings! So it is advisable not to leave valuables around at the start of the breeding season. They are notorious for their aggressive behaviour at this time of year (August) and newspapers often carry stories about people wearing strange hats with eyes painted on the back or bike helmets with spikes protruding like space warriors. "Beware Magpies" signs go up on walking paths and unsuspecting bike riders can be mercilessly kamikazied by these birds just doing what comes naturally.

Female magpies are capable of breeding at one year old, but may not get the opportunity until the age of five. Only one male is privileged to father the brood. The nest is often an untidy bowl of sticks and twigs, lined

with grass, wool and other soft materials, and placed high in a tree. Sometimes nests are made from pieces of wire and placed on telegraph poles. One nest brought into the Hunter Wetlands Centre years ago looked like a large abstract sculpture, worthy of display in an art gallery. You have to marvel at the birds' ingenuity.

Alone, the female incubates 2 to 5 bluish or greenish mottled brown eggs for about 20 days. The dominant male is usually incapable of feeding more than one female and even then she isn't well fed. As well as feeding "his bird", the male has lots of extra duties - like keeping the group in order and defending his territory. The young stay in the nest for about 4 weeks and their incessant begging can be heard throughout the summer months. They

are dusky replicas of their parents for 12 months.

As many as 25 magpies can live together and cooperate in defending their territory against other birds, including members of their own species.

One Saturday morning, at my grandchildren's

football ground, I counted more than 40 magpies feeding on an adjacent field with many birds venturing amongst players, risking being trampled underfoot or soccer boot, calmly digging in the soft soil for grubs. Our team in blue and the visiting team playing in black and white certainly made a sight to remember.

More than 30 magpies live near McDonalds in King Street, in the city of Newcastle. A local gentleman often feeds the birds and has made a prosthesis from a paddle-pop stick for one of the young birds who was missing a lower leg. These birds are recognised by everyone and are great survivors in the Australian landscape.

*The Magpies are calling, calling  
Round the nesting tree  
The sound of their collective song  
Is liquid melody.*

If you miss their concert recital, you can hear it every Sunday morning with Macca on Australia All Over!

**Pat Pountney**  
**presenter of Bird of the Evening in August**



## Activity Reports

### ***Will-O-Wyn Valley, Murrays Run***

Sunday 19 August 2012

As we headed for Wollombi village the sun rose brightly melting the white frost across the paddocks. A clear, calm and sunny day was developing, just perfect for bird watching. The previous two days had been overcast with strong and gusty winds.

The eager bird watchers met at Wollombi Park and we were soon heading towards Murrays Run. Our ultimate destination was Greg and Bonnie Mulder's farm close to the end of a wooded valley called *Will-O-Wyn Valley* where we found a clear mountain stream meandering down from the hills and heard many birds calling.

On arrival we made our way along the banks of the stream. We had to be careful not to fall into one of the many wombat burrows along the way. We spied a couple of sleepy wombats in our travels.

We saw Australian King-Parrots, Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, Brown Cuckoo-Doves and a number of Eastern Yellow Robins feeding alongside the track. There were also Superb Fairy-wrens flitting about in the low bushes and rocky areas. Many White-Browed Scrubwrens were heard and seen. A female Scarlet Honeyeater was observed feeding in a low sapling, while others were heard in the tall trees above.

Some three hours later we arrived back at Greg and Bonnie Mulder's home sited on top of a high wooded hill. We settled ourselves in the native home garden areas and enjoyed our lunch in the company of many honeyeaters. The beautiful Eastern Spinebills entertained us with their visits to the birdbaths nearby. As usual the 'Little Brown Birds' kept us busy trying to identify them. Unfortunately we were unable to spot the Gang-Gang Cockatoo but we heard them and were told that they had been feeding on the geebung bushes just prior to our arrival. Greg Mulder told us they had been feeding daily in the house grounds.

After a relaxing lunch and our birding in the house grounds we thanked Greg and Bonnie Mulder for their hospitality and headed out of the valley. Some of the group stopped at a nearby neighbour's wetland and were rewarded with sighting of Eurasian Coots, Purple Swamphens and Dusky Moorhens, to name a few. Three Pelicans were also seen feeding before two of them took to the sky providing us with a great aerial display. We departed after having spent a rewarding day bird-watching in this lovely valley.

**Melva Fisher**



Gang-Gang Cockatoo and Grey Shrike-thrush at *Will-O-Wyn Valley*  
- Greg Mulder

### **Budgewoi Area**

Mid-week 4 September 2012

We started our outing at the Colongra Swamp Nature Reserve (which is east of the Munmorah Power Station), where we had a long walk down to the edge of the swamp. Some of the birds seen were: Australian King-Parrot, Eastern Rosella, Eastern Spinebill, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Rufous Whistler, Eastern Yellow Robin, Brown Gerygone with nest, Eastern Great and Intermediate Egrets, Royal Spoonbill, Australasian Darter, White-breasted Woodswallow, Pacific Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, Australasian Grebe, many Black Swans, Whistling Kite and a Grey Goshawk.

We drove to Mackenzie Park (near the caravan park) and after having an early lunch we walked across the foot bridge to the nearby island - here we saw Long-billed Corella, Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Australian White Ibis, Australasian Darter, Eastern Great Egret nest building, Striated Heron, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Red Wattlebird, Eastern Yellow Robin and a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.

Our final stop for the outing was the Budgewoi Beach viewing platform where we saw New Holland Honeyeater, Little Wattlebird, White-browed Scrubwren and out to sea a White-bellied Sea-Eagle and Australasian Gannets. A total of 65 species seen and 5 heard.

**Val Moon**

## Activity Reports cont.

### HBOC Midweekers revisit Lake Glenbawn

Monday-Wednesday, 17-19 September 2012

Lake Glenbawn is beautiful and great for a quiet holiday. Take the family! There are wallabies, kangaroos, birds, fishermen and lovely views over the lake. Approach is by way of Segenhoe Road; Broad Crossing on Rouchel Road has been washed out by floods and is closed.

We visited Broad Crossing from the northern approach and found that closing it to traffic makes an excellent platform for bird watchers. Greeted by a Whistling Kite perched on a nearby fence post, we saw Rainbow Bee-eater, Red-rumped Parrot, Zebra and Double-barred Finch, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Diamond Firetail and Dusky Woodswallow among 34 species.

The Allen Bridge on the Pages River was closed for repair when we arrived (opened later on that same day) but Ray was lucky enough to meet a local, Vince, who invited us to a nearby 1400acre property on Rouchel Road. This property, on the convergence of Pages River and Rouchel Brook, has four big waterholes and a spectacular White-bellied Sea-Eagle's nest with two adult and an immature eagle (harassed by an enthusiastic Whistling Kite while we were there). A White-bellied Sea-Eagle carrying a red carp circled the waters for a very long time. Large, coloured carp were noticed in the clear, running waters of the brook. Numbers of Rainbow Bee-eaters, Australian Reed-Warblers, White-plumed Honeyeaters and Superb Fairy-wrens; 38 species in total.

The Washpool at Towarri National Park, out of Scone, is another superb bird-watching spot. There were 51 species including White-throated Gerygone and Superb Fairy-wren (with dependent young) everywhere, White-naped Honeyeater, Little Black Cormorant, Crimson Rosella, Wedge-tailed Eagle, and Australian Wood Duck (with dependent young).

Glenbawn Dam itself produced 44 species; among the waterbirds were Hardhead and Great Crested Grebe. Among the bushbirds were numbers of Red-rumped Parrot, Satin Bowerbird, White-winged Chough and Noisy Miner (with dependent young). There were also Common Mynas and Common Starlings in numbers.

Total bird count for the camp over two days was 93 species.

**Max Blanch**

### Munmorah State Recreation Area

Sunday 23 September 2012

We had a successful morning at Munmorah SRA. Judi Thomas and I gathered as a noisy and expectant throng at the Birdie Beach Drive entrance, drove to the start of a secret walking track in the north part of Munmorah SRA and then ambled slowly along the gravel track catching sight of 26 of the usual bird species of coastal heath. Highlights were Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters which Judi happily added to her enviable Hunter list, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo and a Spotted Harrier putting in a quick show as we were finishing the walk. There was some almost-lively discussion among the group as to whether the heath needs more burning or not. Personally I think it does but the other half of the group dissented.

At the entrance hut at 0700 there were no collectors of fees present, no automatic coin tolling device and not even a can to drop some coins into, so, we went in, had our morning and left at 0920, still with no person or no thing wanting to collect fees.

**Greg Little**

### HBOC waves its Flag

The Club has acquired a new colourful banner to promote the Club at community events in order to raise awareness of Hunter birds and other environmental issues. The banner, sporting our magnificent Golden Whistler emblem, waved proudly in a very brisk breeze at its first public outing at the **Maitland City Council Youth Forum** held at Walka Water Works on 9 August 2012.



The Forum has been held annually for a number of years, mainly involving interested Year 5 to Year 9 students from the area's schools. This year it attracted nearly 80 students and supervising staff. The program consisted of a series of 15-minute sessions where students were exposed to various local issues including



## Activity Reports cont.



Paul Baird and Kristy Peters at the Maitland Youth Forum

biodiversity, soil, water and wildlife management. These sessions were conducted by organisations such as the Catchment Management Authority but also by local community environmental groups. The program also provided opportunities for students to participate in a series of one-hour hands-on workshops. HBOC presented one of these workshops about the significance of the Walka Water Works wetland and its waterbirds. Students were given some pointers on how to identify the waterbirds of Walka (with the aid of photographs shot by the Club's photographers), followed by a short bird walk and practical session using spotting scopes to put their new knowledge to the test. Some students had a reasonable awareness about birds in general while for others, this workshop was their first real exposure to the world of birds. Simple delights, such as discovering that the Eurasian Coot has a red eye, can be a rewarding experience! Apart from interaction with students another major benefit from attending these events is being able to share ideas with the school staff. There is much interest in the environment and lots of good things are happening, especially at the primary level. Many thanks are due to Lorna, Kristy and Jim for their time, involvement and willingness to let students use their spotting scopes. (Just a thought - if you happen to have a pre-loved spotting scope/tripod or binoculars that you are not using please consider donating it to the Club as it can certainly be put to good use at these community events. You may never know but it could just light that spark of enthusiasm for birds in a youngster's mind).

The Golden Whistler on the Club flag had far less trouble staying on its perch at the recent **Biodiversity Day 2012** held on Thursday 27 September at Blue Gum Hills Regional Park at Minmi as the weather was fine and sunny with only a zephyr to flutter the flag. This was only the third time this event, initiated through the efforts of Tom Clarke and the Green Corridor Coalition, has been held, and to use Tom's words, "What a rip roaring success it was!"

Paul Baird and Lorna Mee sharing the joys of birdwatching with students at the Maitland Youth Forum



Support for this event has escalated both through the number of organisations attending but also, importantly, the number of people attending. About a dozen prominent environmentally-based organisations, including HBOC, mounted displays and activities to promote biodiversity, connectivity and the organisation's special interest. The outstanding feature of the day was the number of people attending, estimated conservatively to be in excess of five hundred! As it was held in the school holidays there were many family groups, enthusiastic children with grandparents in tow all enjoying the experience. At the HBOC display we spent the day fielding questions about the Club (one gentleman signed the membership form and paid on the spot), the photographs (the Superb Fairy-wren seems to be a very popular bird amongst those older people attending), and talking about the "migratory bird that flies 11,800km" and "a bird that lives on Hexham swamp that sounds like a distant foghorn" to the youngsters as they filled in their passports. This constant activity was only interrupted by helping children look through the spotting scope at a sometimes cooperative Kookaburra on the other side of the park (reading the orienteering sign was a poor substitute). Then it was back to the questions....scopes... questions... Hectic to say the least! Many thanks are due to Kristy for rescheduling her work commitments and working tirelessly all day, helping to make the display "a rip roaring success."

**Paul Baird**

## Featured Birdwatching Site - Kurri Woodlands

The “Kurri Woodlands” is a loose term that is used for a range of birding localities around the Kurri Kurri/Cessnock region. The majority of birding sites are within National Park (including State Conservation Areas) and Crown Land. These areas are less than an hour’s drive from Newcastle and can produce a very rewarding day’s birding. The National Park that encompasses the area is Werakata. Formerly the Cessnock and Aberdare State Forests, Werakata is divided up into a number of sections in the vicinity of Abermain, Kearsley, Kitchener, north of Cessnock and west to Pelton. Although no parts of Werakata are near Kurri itself, there is Crown Land near Kurri that can be accessed. Note that Google Maps is generally unreliable for this part of the world, as it shows wrong names and misleading boundaries (but can be used as an initial point of reference).

### Habitat

Werakata National Park (NP) is dominated by dry open forest that is predominantly lowland. This is why the area is so important – as it provides habitat for a range of birds that are not found in national parks away from the valley floor. There isn’t any rainforest to be found within the park, although wet sclerophyll forest does occur in some areas.

The dominant forest type is Spotted Gum-Ironbark Community (SG-IB), which accounts for a large proportion of the forested areas within all the sections of Werakata and surrounding areas. It is one of the largest areas of SG-IB to be found in the Hunter Valley.

A variety of other communities can be found throughout the area, although on a smaller scale. Such communities are Kurri Sand Swamp Woodland and Hunter Lowland Redgum Forest. These two communities along with SG-IB are all threatened communities and make up the majority of forest types to be found.

Smaller eucalypt dominated communities occur supporting such species as Grey Gums, Grey Box and various Stringybarks, all adding to the very rich eucalypt diversity of the area.

### Birding Locations

There are a number of localities for the keen birder to access within the Kurri Kurri/Cessnock area.

The main sites would be:

- Werakata NP - Abermain Section
- Werakata NP - Pelton Section
- Werakata NP – Kitchener Section (South Kearsley Fire Trail)
- Hunter Economic Zone and surrounds

Werakata NP doesn’t contain traditional walking trails as other parks support, but they are made up with a

plethora of car tracks and trails, which provide great access throughout (from the State Forest days). Most of these tracks can be driven with a 2wd although some will need 4wd or at least higher clearance. One can often come across trail bikers using these areas and yes it’s a NP but it is not policed. I find the vast majority of trail bikers to be friendly and can even vouch for two guys who stopped for a chat about Regent Honeyeaters for 20 minutes!

The seasonality of birds varies and is worth considering when targeting certain species. Winter provides just as much birding action as you would find in summer. A trip in both seasons is certainly recommended. Threatened species occur throughout the whole year and a list of up to ten threatened species is not uncommon during a day visit.

When conditions are right in winter, such as abundant flowering of Spotted Gum, this area can be your best bet to track down Swift Parrots or Regent Honeyeaters in the Hunter Valley. It is fast becoming one of the most important areas for Regent Honeyeaters in Australia!



Swift Parrot - Steve Roderick

### Werakata NP – Abermain Section

The Abermain section of Werakata can be found by following the road from Kurri Kurri to Cessnock. The road goes through Abermain and once past Ridgely Didge Pies and Sticky’s Takeaway (good luncheon spots!) look for a turn to the right, which is Government Drive/Orange Street. Turn right into Government Drive and continue on for around 1km where you turn left into Lismore Street. Follow this road for around 800m, the road will veer left but on your right will be a track into the NP

One of the better locations would be to follow the dirt road in for around 200m when you’ll see a turn to the right named Shiralee Fire Trail. A good option would be to park the car here and take a stroll down this trail; another 200m further there is a track on your right and this area can be especially productive.

This area of forest can be alive with birds and at other times be very quiet. A wide variety of species can be seen along here especially when the Spotted Gums are in



## Featured Birdwatching Site - Kurri Woodlands cont.

flower. Common resident species such as Yellow-tufted and Fuscous Honeyeaters will be found. The area can also produce the threatened Black-chinned Honeyeater. The track that comes off Shiralee Fire Trail can be a good spot for Painted Button-Quail. Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters have both been found along these tracks and Varied Sittellas are often found along here.



Varied Sittella and Regent Honeyeater - Allan Richardson

### Werakata NP – Pelton Section

The township of Pelton is located to the west of Cessnock. Follow the road through Cessnock as if heading to Wollombi; once through the last of the township (Bellbird) you'll pass under a railway bridge, another 200m and you'll find a left turn to Pelton. Take the Pelton turn and proceed to about the second last house on your right, on your left is the entrance to the NP. Follow the track for about 500m where you'll come to a left turn. Ignore the rubbish and park your car here.

Some great birds can be found following this left hand track and also taking a smaller track to the right. There is an old railway line nearby which also provides a good walking trail. This area is predominately SG-IB. When the Spotted Gums are in flower in winter this is traditionally the most reliable area for Swift Parrots. Swift Parrots can often be found in large numbers and you'll usually hear them before sighting our Tassie friends. Not to be outdone the area is also a great haunt for Regent Honeyeaters and in 2009 we had around 50+ birds here!



The ever present Yellow-tufted Honeyeater will check you out as you walk the tracks, along with a suite of other honeyeaters such as Yellow-faced, White-naped, Brown-headed, White-cheeked and Fuscous. This area is also one of the most reliable for Black-chinned Honeyeater; listen for their unusual grated flute-like calls.

Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters  
- Mick Roderick

In winter this is a great location for Gang-Gang Cockatoos which can often be found by hearing the crack of fruit or the falling nuts. The area contains many species of thornbills and both Superb and Variegated Fairy-wrens. Rose Robins are also here during the cooler months. Taking the left track and going down into the creekline and up the hill can also be a good spot for Scarlet Robin.

Four species of lorikeets can be found, although Scalys are scarce. Other good residents include Spotted Quail-Thrush and Little Eagles and if you're lucky enough you may come across a Powerful Owl sleeping off the night's kill amongst the Melaleucas along the creekline.

In summer the sounds of Koels, cuckoos, Bee-eaters and Dollarbirds will be heard. Sacred Kingfishers move in, as do Dusky Woodswallows, Leaden Flycatchers and Cicadabirds.

### Werakata NP – Kitchener Section (South Kearsley Fire Trail)

The South Kearsley Fire Trail can be found between the townships of Abernethy and Kitchener. To get to Abernethy follow the road to Mulbring from Kurri Kurri (Leggetts Drive), take the turn to Cessnock along Lake Road. Follow this road until you come to a turn to Abernethy, take this turn and then turn right to Kitchener once in Abernethy. The trail can be found on the right hand side of the road about 1km from Abernethy (it is where Murray Street meets Abernethy Street on Google). There is a gate here, park the car here and walk the trail. The best birding can be found along the first 500m or so. There is also a trail off to the right about 100m in, which is also worth exploring.

A wide variety of birds can be found here with Yellow-tufted Honeyeater being your usual companion. White-naped, Brown-headed, Fuscous, Yellow-faced and Black-chinned Honeyeaters are all found here as too are Scarlets and Eastern Spinebills. Once again this is a great winter location for Gang-Gang Cockatoos and if you're lucky, Glossy Black-Cockatoos.



## Featured Birdwatching Site - Kurri Woodlands cont.

Walking the main track up towards the hill is a great spot for Scarlet Robin (winter) and also Speckled Warbler. White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes are also likely along the track and Olive-backed Orioles can be found here year round. If taking the trail to the right you may encounter a resident pair of Spotted Quail-thrush, along with Eastern Yellow Robins, Eastern Whipbirds and White-throated Treecreepers.

If the Spotted Gums or Stringybarks are in flower, this is also a great location for Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters. In 2009 there were 20+ Regents here and this year there were around 30 birds. This year also saw around 150-200 Swift Parrots use this area.

Summer species would include Dollarbirds, Rainbow Bee-eaters and cuckoos, including Pallid Cuckoo. Dusky Woodswallows and White-throated Gerygones are also present along with Leaden Flycatchers.

The paddocks next to the track often have Grey-crowned Babblers jumping around; I've also seen them on the edge of the track. Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos are also reasonably common here. Commonly encountered raptors would be the resident Brown Goshawk and Collared Sparrowhawk. Grey Goshawk and Little Eagles are also seen.

### Hunter Economic Zone and surrounds

The Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ) is a large area of woodland, part of which was rezoned for proposed industrial development some time ago. The area is located just south of Kurri Kurri, with the entrance being located south of Pelaw Main. The area often referred to as HEZ is made up of Werakata NP, Crown Land, land claimed by Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council and privately-owned land (owned by HEZ).

To describe specific locations to look for birds in this article would be too difficult as it's quite confusing as to who owns what in this area. If you intend visiting the Kurri Kurri Woodlands I would be more than willing to personally describe those areas that are able to be visited. A good start would be to consult Google Maps, which shows at least the area that has been zoned for development. Unfortunately it does not accurately portray the section of Werakata NP here, which is generally north of Lake Road (along Hebburn Road) and east of Neath Road, though some parts of the bushland in these areas are also Crown and/or Mindaribba-claimed land. It can be confusing!

The upside is that some great birds inhabit this area.

All of the above-mentioned species occur within these woodlands, which are mostly SG-IB. Good numbers of Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters have been found here this year and Regents have bred here in the past. There are some good locations for Brown Treecreeper,

which seems to be becoming harder to find in the Lower Hunter in recent years. Spotted Quail-thrush and Speckled Warblers can be found and so too can Gang-Gang Cockatoos. Jacky Winters are also common at the right places. Uncommon species such as Chestnut-rumped Heathwren are located in a number of areas.

Summer birding can really heat up in this area with such species as Rufous Songlarks and White-winged Trillers making an appearance. Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo is a regular, as too are Koels, Channel-billed and Pallid Cuckoos. Occasionally, Turquoise Parrots can be found and Diamond Firetails have also been recorded here. During the last two weeks of September, there is a good chance there will be an influx of White-browed and Masked Woodswallows - sometimes up to 700 birds! These woodswallows have bred here before and what a sight it can be when the sky is filled with these wonderful birds which are normally far more commonly seen west of the divide.



White-browed  
Woodswallow  
- Allan Richardson

The Kurri Kurri Woodlands are a great area to go birding. Winter and summer produces a different suite of birds with a wide variety of residents. Threatened species abound and it's a great place to see some uncommon Lower Hunter birds. It is worth noting too that a wide range of raptors can be seen while driving within the region, such as Square-tailed Kites and the occasional Black Kite!

Apart from the birding, the area also offers a plethora of interesting vegetation, with threatened species such as *Grevillea montana*, *Eucalyptus parramattensis decadens*, *Rutidosia heterogama* and *Grevillea parviflora* subsp. *parviflora* all found fairly easily. Spring puts on a great show of many varied wildflowers especially from the 'pea' family.

I hope to see you out there sometime and good birding!

**Steve Roderick**

Email: roddo75@hotmail.com Mobile: 0409 452 921

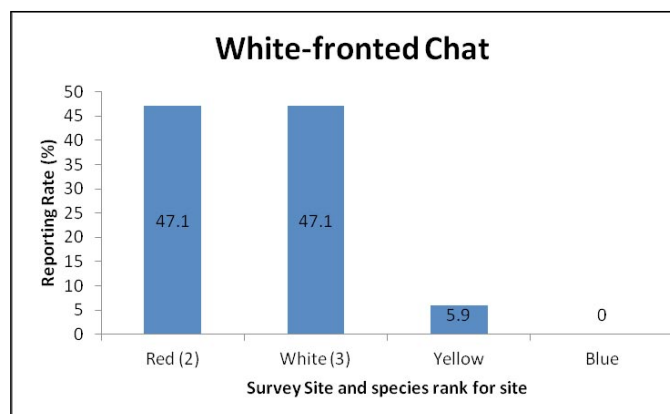
## Saltmarsh Monitoring on Ash Island

Between early March and mid-August 2012, ten HBOC members conducted 17 sets of four 2hectare-20minute bird surveys on Ash Island. Two survey sites, designated red and white, were in areas which had been recently burnt during a wild fire. The other two sites, designated yellow and blue, were in unburnt areas. The objective was to compare the bird populations of the rehabilitating burnt sites with the unburnt control sites.

Our survey sites deliberately excluded mangrove-lined creeks. Consequently, our 20-minute bird lists were quite short. Nevertheless 20 and 19 species have been recorded in the burnt areas, slightly more than in the unburnt control sites (16 and 17). While the species-lists lengths might be similar very different types of species were involved.

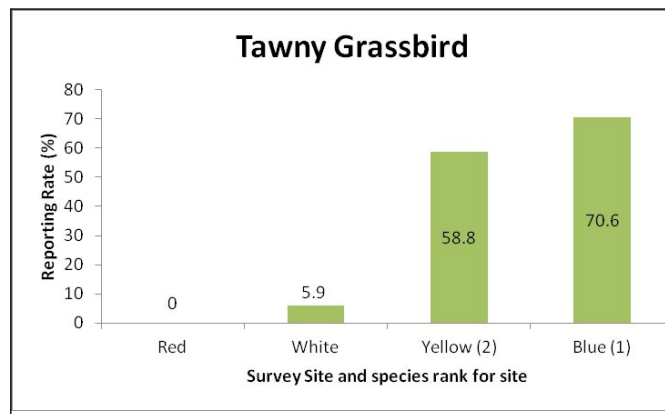
The Superb Fairy-wren was in the top three most frequently observed birds at all four sites; clearly a very versatile and opportunistic species.

Four species, White-fronted Chat, Willie Wagtail, Magpie-lark and Australasian Pipit, were found almost exclusively in the burnt area. The chart for the chat is typical of these species which seem to like bare ground. The chat was the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> most frequently recorded species in the burnt area and was often present in flocks of up to 20. This is really encouraging as chats are an increasingly scarce threatened species listed as Vulnerable in NSW under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*.



The occurrence of Magpie-larks was opportunistic with up to 20 being recorded in the burnt areas during the first couple of months after the fire. Since then they have been seldom seen.

In contrast the Tawny Grassbird was found almost exclusively in the mature vegetation of the unburnt saltmarsh at the control sites. As it tends to be a skulking species it was slightly surprising that it was the most frequently observed species at the unburnt blue site. There was one record at the burnt white site.



The Little Grassbird showed a similar preference for the unburnt sites, but was harder to detect. It also seems to favour the mangrove-lined creeks. Golden-headed Cisticolas were more versatile and while favouring the unburnt sites were occasionally recorded at the burnt sites.

This work is being carried out in collaboration with NPWS who have other teams working on different aspects of the regeneration of the burnt areas. Trials are being conducted to control the growth of *Juncus acutus* and favour the natural saltmarsh species during the rehabilitation. The HBOC team is noting the extent to which different birds use *Juncus acutus* when foraging and sheltering.

Inevitably you get some big surprises. In late August I went over to introduce myself to two university students sitting on the ground digging out samples to determine what snails were present. As I bent down to speak to them a male Stubble Quail walked out from a small bush immediately in front of me and very close to the students. First decent view I have had of this species which is normally flying rapidly away. Rob Kyte went out two days later and failed to find the quail, but flushed a Latham's Snipe from the edge of the burnt area. Alan Stuart was fortunate to flush an Australasian Bittern as he walked out to the study area and several of us have seen Eastern Ospreys.

Thanks to all those dedicated people (Alan, Ann, Graeme, Hayley, Lorna, Jim, Joy, Rob and Win) involved in this study. Stomping through flooded saltmarsh in welly boots can be very demanding.

**Mike Newman**

## Windeyers Reach - shorebird nocturnal roost site



Mangroves encroaching on shorebird roosting ponds at Windeyers Reach (left) have been removed by a team of Conservation Volunteers Australia, funded by NCIG (right) - Boyd Carney



Windeyers Reach is probably the most remote place in the Newcastle LGA. To get there involves a trip up or down the North Arm of the Hunter River by boat or canoe. Then you need to navigate to the right spot and land your watercraft doing your best to avoid the sinking mud. Once there you can then marvel at the beauty of the site as the salt marsh and mangroves stretch out before you. You really get the feeling that you are the first person to arrive on site. Unfortunately the only thing that ruins your feeling of remoteness is the view over the tree-tops, as you can just see the tops of the coal loaders and you can also hear the slight sound of industry in the background. That is the reality of Kooragang Island's neighbors to the Hunter Wetlands National Park.

Before European settlement and tidal gates, dredging, ring drains and land reclamation, the estuary would have been a far different place. But the changes in the estuary are also evident in the European History at Windeyers Reach. One of the main navigational points, when looking at aerial photos of the site, is the parallel farming or cropping scars on the banks of the river just to the north of Windeyers Reach. These were once raised beds for some sort

of crop. Investigation of the farm site on foot reveals a circular brick well, made from bricks that look hand-made. Also, across the salt marsh and into the mangrove forest, you can find remnants of an old wooden farm fence, which stretches for hundreds of metres through the mangroves. Today the local environment is totally saline in nature and there would be no chance of supporting agriculture in the area. It is amazing that even a hundred or so years ago people could have undertaken agricultural pursuits in the area. How different would the environment have been back then for people to have gone to the effort to dig wells, fence paddocks and grow vegetable plots in what, even then, would have been a remote area.

So why is Windeyers Reach so important for birds? Windeyers Reach is one of the most important sites for migratory waders in the Hunter Estuary as it is considered to be the primary night roost. The area consists of a number of shallow mud pools in the salt marsh, two of



Brick-lined well at Windeyers Reach

which stand out as they are quite large. The birds come to Windeyers Reach in the evening, when high tide floods their intertidal foraging areas, and roost in the middle of the ponds. With their feet in shallow water, they are better able to detect ground predators approaching. This is important as there is a lot of evidence of fox activity on site. Also, as is well known with waders, they need a good line of sight without trees where winged predators can position themselves.

Windeyers Reach had all these attributes. However, as has been commonly seen in the estuary, mangroves have started colonising Windeyers Reach, moving into the tidal ponds and slowly expanding over the salt marsh.

Aerial photos over the last 40 years clearly show this expansion and this threatens the suitability of the area as appropriate habitat for waders. Over the last year NPWS has gained approvals and started to undertake works in the area to try to reverse the declining nature of the site for shorebirds. NPWS is looking for community support to assist with the ongoing works required for the Windeyers Reach project. We have set up the "Mud Sweat and Cheers" adventure conservation project. This is a free day where we want to engage the community to assist with these restoration works as well as having a bit of fun and exercise with a canoeing adventure on the Hunter River. So, if you are interested in being involved, please watch this space for next year's program. We are also working on partnership with community and industry to support this project. Recently, NCIG (the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group) funded Conservation Volunteers Australia in conjunction with NPWS, to conduct a couple of days' work on site. Partnerships like this are really important and add great value to the park.

Windeyers Reach is one of the many challenges and opportunities that NPWS is committed to in the Hunter Wetlands National Park.

**Boyd Carney**

**Bush Regeneration & Volunteer Coordinator NPWS**



## 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](mailto: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.

Spring is in the air and as now appears customary, discussion on Hunterbirding has focussed on people's observations of returning migrants. It's great to keep a track of the movements of our summer faves such as Koels and Dollarbirds as they get reported across the region. This led to some interesting discussion as to the status of some of our local partial migrants such as Olive-backed Oriole and Fan-tailed Cuckoo.

We were also treated to regular updates to the Spring comings and goings at Stockton Sandspit – the highs and the lows of life as a breeding shorebird. Finally, a turf war broke out between the Cennie Coast Crew and the Hunna Massive as records from the northernmost section of Munmorah SCA were fought over. A lot of hot air was blown but fortunately no shots were fired. The dispute may not yet have been resolved though...

There's no prizes for guessing my selection for special attention this month. The late flurry of discussion on the status of Striated Pardalote in the Hunter pushed all my right buttons. It highlighted how some of our most familiar birds can become easily overlooked and not understood as much as we'd like. I'll reproduce an entire Hunterbirding posting by Mick Roderick as it provides an excellent summary.

Essentially "it seems there could be as many as 4 subspecies that occur in the Hunter (some authors may even treat some of these as full species). Below is a coarse summary of things to look out for when observing Striated Pardalotes: Loosely, of the potential 4 subspecies, there are 3 with "striped crowns" and one with a "black crown" (which is the last one dealt with here)."

"The nominate race (*striatus*) is known as the 'Yellow-tipped Pardalote'. This one breeds in Tassie and migrates to the SE mainland in autumn and winters here. The main feature to look for is the yellow spot in the wing

and narrow white edge to the primaries."

"Probably the most common Striated Pardalote we have in the Hunter is the 'Eastern Striated Pardalote' (race *ornatus*). HANZAB [Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds] says that it is sedentary or resident in the Hunter, but that the subspecies is partly migratory and nomadic in winter, so we probably don't have a full understanding of it. This one has a red spot in the wing (as the other two do), but has a very narrow white wing-stripe."

"The race that could be confused with this one is the one that is generally found in inland Australia (race *substriatus*). It also has a red wing spot but the white on the wing is much broader than in race *ornatus*. Although this one is generally confined to inland Australia, HANZAB says it occurs in the "drier parts of upper reaches of Hunter River catchment". Durrigere Road and Goulburn River National Park maybe?"

"The 4th one is the 'Black-headed Pardalote' (race *melanocephalus*). This one is possibly the least likely to be seen of the four, as its range is from NE NSW into Qld. HANZAB does not make any reference to birds having been recorded in the Hunter but Pizzey's field guide lists the range as "from Hunter River (NSW) to ne Q". Perhaps there have been records here? I'd be very interested to hear about them. It should be an easy one to pick as it has an all-dark cap (with no streaks) and a broad white wing-stripe (again with a red wing spot)."

"Simpson and Day is by far the best field guide to look at for this (and their mapping and illustrating of subspecies is their main strength in my opinion)."

"So in summary:

Striped crown + yellow wing spot = *striatus* = migrant from Tassie.

Striped crown + red wing spot + narrow white wing-stripe = *ornatus* = our 'common local bird'

Striped crown + red wing spot + broad wing-stripe = *substriatus* = 'western bird'

Black crown = *melanocephalus* = 'northern bird'

There are also apparent differences in call between the subspecies. The Michael Morcombe app (for those that are into that sort of thing) is good for this as it provides calls for each of the subspecies. However, it is not comprehensive and some subspecies may have calls which are similar to others. The complication of hybridisation between subspecies also adds further complexity.

## Hunterbirding cont.

Hopefully it is not too daunting a prospect the next time you see or hear a Striated Pardalote, to try and discern which subspecies it belongs to. It adds an extra layer of interest to something we take as a common bird. Also, records at the subspecies level will help to further our

understanding of their occurrence in our region. Have a go and see which subspecies you observe and whether this varies seasonally.

**Dan Williams**

## Books Birds Books - recent releases

**Sentinel Chickens** by Peter Doherty, published by Melbourne University Press in 2012 discusses *what birds tell us about our health and the world*. This is a fascinating discourse on the role of birds and eggs in cutting-edge medical research that has contributed enormously to the well-being of the human race. "Not only chickens, but puffins, eagles, canaries and toucans - birds of all kinds are recruited by humans to help us interpret changes in our increasingly challenged and unpredictable world. These wonderful creatures continually sample the atmosphere, oceans, fields and forests, signalling toxic and environmental dangers that threaten all vertebrates." Studying birds has helped us to understand the nature of human cancer, malaria and influenza, and contributed to the development of new vaccines and cures. Peter argues that since birds pollinate, spread plant seeds and control insects, endangering their habitats through human activities is a threat to our own wellbeing. His stores beautifully illustrate the inter-connectedness of all life on earth.

**Moonbird** by Phillip Hoose, published by Farrar Strauss Giroux Books for Young Readers in 2012 describes *a year on the wind with the great survivor [Red Knot] B95*. This book is a joy for anyone who's looked up at a soaring flock of shorebirds and wondered about the perils of the long-distance migrations they make every year. Easy to read, the book takes you along on the Red Knot's journey from the remote beaches of Tierra Del Fuego across the Americas to its breeding grounds in the Canadian tundra, with fascinating details on the essential stop-over sites, the bird's physiological changes and human-induced modifications to its habitat, as well as vignettes of those devoted to shorebird conservation.

*"B95 can feel it: a stirring in his bones and feathers. It's time. Today is the day he will once again cast*

*himself into the air, spiral upward into the clouds, and bank into the wind, working his newly moulted flight feathers for real. After weeks of flight testing he feels ready. Day by day, he has spent the nonfeeding hours during the high tide carefully smoothing the barbs on each feather vane to seamless perfection. Now there are no gaps for the wind to pass through and slow him down. He has packed all the fuel he can, gorging on clams, mussels, and tiny crustaceans. His inner GPS is set for north. The whole flock is rippling with anticipation, chattering, waiting for one of them to make the first move."*

**Waders The Shorebirds of Australia** by David Hollands and Clive Minton, published by Blooming's Books Melbourne in 2012 is a fabulous illustrated account of 80 Australian species. It took 12 years of passion, dedication, mud, wind and water, and combines Clive's encyclopaedic knowledge of waders and wader migration with David's writing, personal observations and photography. There are chapters on all the species, on migration and all aspects of migration study, on threats and conservation issues for waders and on prospects for their future. Some of the prime wader sites in Australia are covered and the book ends with a Field Guide section, including distribution maps and detailed descriptions for all species.

*"They appear as if from nowhere, grey birds with swift wings and long legs, ignoring the shelter of heath and woodland to base themselves on the windswept mudflats of the coast. They have flown vast distances from remote and desolate places and their voices seem to reflect this; mournful cries and piping whistles, which will rise above the sounds of wind and sea. They are the migratory waders."*

**Waders** has been added to the Club's Library.



A single Banded Stilt among the Red-necked Avocet on Kooragang Dykes on 3 October 2012. Banded Stilt was last recorded in the Hunter Estuary in November - December 2004. Prior to that, a single bird was recorded at Swan Bay Port Stephens in September - October 2000 and at Kooragang Nature Reserve in November - December 2000.  
Photo - Chris Herbert

## Future Activities

### Australasian Bittern Survey - Thursday 11 October 2012

In October 2011, HBOC members took part in BirdLife Australia's bittern survey, finding six calling Australasian Bitterns. The HBOC committee has decided to repeat the effort this year and is calling for volunteers to survey a wetland of their choice. The date of the survey is 11 October 2012. Sunset is at 7.33pm daylight saving time and the plan is that participants are in place at their chosen wetland at 6.30pm, remaining there until a little after sundown. The survey technique involves listening for the birds to call; there is no requirement for sloshing your way through a swamp.

For information about bitterns go to <http://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/bittern-project/volunteering-ab> where you can also download a survey form. Also, please contact Ann Lindsey at [ann.lindsey@bigpond.com](mailto:ann.lindsey@bigpond.com) to let her know where you intend to survey.

The Australasian Bittern is an Endangered species across Australia. The more we can find out about where any birds are, the better are the chances of understanding how to help them prosper. Here's your chance to help.

### NSW and ACT Twitchathon 27-28 October 2012

This year's Twitchathon aims to raise money for a project to increase both the area and connectivity of native habitats in the Cowra District, which is located on the Central Tablelands of New South Wales, approximately 100km southwest of Orange and 317km west of Sydney. In this area, as throughout the agricultural lands of south-east Australia, woodland bird populations have declined, mainly due to the removal of woodland habitat. The small woodland fragments that are left are unconnected to other fragments, are often degraded and suffer from the effects of invasive species. The Cowra Woodland Birds Group (CWBG) is currently involved in a funded project at *Spring Forest*, Koorawatha, to rehabilitate (by re-introducing native plant species) a large paddock adjoining Morongla Creek, to improve connectivity between the creek (which flows into the Lachlan River) and nearby woodlands to enable birds to move more easily between habitats.

CWBG proposes to use the Twitchathon funds to appoint a (part-time) Project Officer to develop a plan for an extended woodland habitat corridor along Morongla Creek from *Spring Forest* to the Lachlan River. This would involve setting up a number of rehabilitation/re-vegetation projects on private properties. CWBG is already doing quarterly surveys on some of these properties and has a good knowledge of possible sites but needs the Project Officer to approach landholders, select suitable sites, develop appropriate management plans and advise on re-vegetation/rehabilitation methods. As well, the Project Officer would give advice to landholders about funding sources. The project would also involve a limited amount of planting of native shrubs and grasses. This would link in with the broad 'Biodiversity-Resilient Landscapes' project being developed by the Lachlan Catchment Management Authority. This project includes isolated paddock trees and revegetation sites, as well as priority corridors for future large-scale restoration projects. Together with Cowra Council, the CWBG would also like to investigate the feasibility of such a corridor to the north-west of Cowra township, linking a few scattered remnants of

Grassy-Box Woodland with the Peace Precinct (Cowra Common) in town.

Twitchathon 2012 aims to raise about \$24,000 to assist this project.

#### How to join the Twitchathon 27 October – 28 October 2012

1. Contact Pixie at the BirdLife Australia Office for your 2012 Twitchathon Kit (email: [southernsw@birdlife.org.au](mailto:southernsw@birdlife.org.au))
2. Form a team with three or more friends and family and go birdwatching over this October weekend. You can travel anywhere in NSW and/or the ACT. See how many species of birds your team can find from 4 pm Saturday 27 October to 4 pm Sunday 28 October 2012.
3. Get sponsors. In the weeks before this event, persuade family and friends to sponsor you so many cents or even dollars for each species your team sees. You just need either lots of little sponsorships or a few big ones!

There are prizes for the most species seen by two winning teams in the Main Race and the Champagne Race Sections, as well as prizes for the most money raised, the rarest bird seen by an individual, and prizes for children. There are also prizes to the team that sees the most birds in the shortest distance travelled, providing that they see over 180 species in the Main Race and 130 species in the Champagne Race. Participants are invited to record the distance travelled from 4pm on the Saturday to 4pm on the Sunday. The prizes include: Trophies; a pair of Swarovski 10x32 binoculars; a digital camera; two nights for two at Chorleywood B & B in beautiful Moss Vale; Taronga Zoo family passes; books; book vouchers; champagne; wine; special hand-printed T-shirts; and other prizes to go to the winners in



## NSW and ACT Twitchathon 27-28 October 2012 cont.

the various categories of the Twitchathon. Contact Alan for a full list.

So don't think that you have to be an A-class birdwatcher to take part. Whichever method you chose for your Twitchathon – the laid back (i.e. the Champagne Race), the deadly serious Main Race, or the donor-only version, remember it is all about educating others in the importance of nature conservation, particularly the conservation of Australian birds.

Last year we raised \$25,000, and the two years before \$24,500 and \$24,000 respectively! In the past five years we have raised over \$88,000. This is a great achievement and we have been able to make a significant difference for the birds in the Capertee Valley, the Education Unit at Gluepot Reserve and the Australian Bird Discovery Centre at Sydney Olympic Park, the Australian Bird Study Association's Research Fund, the Gosford Friends of the Bush Stone-Curlew, Kangaroo Island (SA) Glossy Black-Cockatoo Recovery Fund, Murray Regions Bush Stone-Curlew Captive Breeding & Release Project

the Hunter Bird Observers Club's Shorebird Roost Protection Scheme, the IBA Monitoring project and the Greater Sydney Powerful Owl Project. I know that you will join me in making a fantastic contribution one way or another. So, do ask Pixie for your Twitchathon Kit **TODAY** or sponsor a Twitchathon team in your bird club or group! I can put you in touch with a team if you do not know of one in your area!

### Alan Morris

Twitchathon Co-ordinator

(For BirdLife Australia, Southern NSW Group)

Tel: 02 9647 1033

Fax: 02 9647 2030

E-mail: [southernsw@birdlife.org.au](mailto:southernsw@birdlife.org.au)

**Remember to look at [www.swarovskioptik.com](http://www.swarovskioptik.com) for all your telescope and binocular requirements. Major sponsors for Twitchathon 2012 are: Swarovski International (Australia) Pty Ltd, Taronga Zoo, Alison Green T-Shirts, Chorleywood B&B, Fred Van Gessel CDs & tapes, Maxwell International, and Andrew Isles Bookstores.**

## Welcome Waders - Sunday 18 November 2012

A community display and information session will be held at Stockton Sandspit on Sunday 18 November 2012 from 10am till 2pm to welcome the waders. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project, Wetland Care Australia, Hunter Wetlands Centre and HBOC will all have displays. A coffee van and sausage sizzle will be provided and HBOC will assist community members to identify waders and learn about their amazing migrations.

You are very welcome to assist with wader identification, with talking to the community about birds, or simply coming along to learn about waders. If you can assist, please contact Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 or Paul Baird 4938 5039.

## Past Activity - Elderly Birdwatcher in Peaceful Protest

Elderly birdwatcher Russ Watts locked himself to the gates of a coal mine in early August 2012, blocking a coal haulage road used by the Boggabri Coal Mine. He is protesting a planned major expansion at the mine which would have devastating impacts on biodiversity in the Leard State Forest. Twenty members of the Maules Creek community joined Mr Watts in support. Three massive open cut coal mines are planned for the area, and are widely opposed by the local community.

Russ Watts, who developed the Barraba Birding Routes and introduced HBOC to the joys of camping at Borah Travelling Stock Route near Barraba, talked about what moved him to take action in a peaceful protest at 84 years of age.

"I'm not against coal mining, but I can't accept the way that governments have manipulated the laws to suit the mining industry and given them free rein to destroy the environment" he said.



"The area where I was protesting is a special bird-watching area because it is one of the last intact remnants of bushland in the heavily cleared Wheat-Sheep Belt.

## Elderly Birdwatcher in Peaceful Protest cont.

"I have previously been made a Member of the Order of Australia for my work in eco-tourism and I appreciate that Leard State Forest, where these mines are being developed, is a priceless natural asset.

"I feel that I can't stand by and watch a public forest destroyed for open-cut coal mining when it is such a valuable resource to teach people about the unique values of the Australian bush.

"I have worked hard during my life to develop local bird routes to encourage people to interact with nature and it

is terrible that the NSW Government can condone the destruction of an area that is home to as many as 21 threatened species of bird.

"It seems that there are no areas that are off-limits to coal mining companies and that even our last, most precious wild places are up for grabs" he said.

Information or comment: Russ Watts on 02 6766 2352  
**Photos and video are available at** <http://www.flickr.com/photos/77295017@N03/>

## Club Night Observations

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 Hobby	1	8/8/12	off Lovedale Road (nr Pokolbin)	T. Clarke
Australian Owlet-nightjar	1 heard	13/9/12	Walka Water Works	G. Brosie
Australian Reed-Warbler	1	6/9/12	Tighes Hill	T. Clarke
Australian White Ibis	648 br	7/8/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Australian White Ibis	676 br	11/9/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Banded Lapwing	1	23/9/12	Booragul	C. Anderson
Barbary Dove	5-6	19/8/12	Millfield	J. Nicholls
Barking Owl	1	3/9/12	Goulburn River NP	M. Kearns
Beach Stone-curlew	2	17/8/12	Sunset Beach	J. Thomas
Beach Stone-curlew	2	26/8/12	Dowardee Is, Pt Stephens	P. Alexander
Bell Miner	Pr+ny	31/8/12	Cooranbong	A. Richardson
Black Falcon	1	1/8/12	Scone	T. Clarke
Black Kite	1	20/8/12	Over Merewether	J. Thomas
Black-chinned Honeyeater	1+	5/8/12	Ellalong	A. Lindsey
Black-necked Stork	1	1/8/12	Dungog	D. Jenkin
Black-necked Stork	1	11/4/12	Newline Road, Irrawang	P. Slack
Black-shouldered Kite	2	1/8/12	South of Bunnan (Upper Hunter)	T. Clarke
Black-tailed Godwit	3	8/9/12	Stockton Sandspit	L. Crawford/C. Herbert
Blue-faced Honeyeater	3	1/9/12	Speers Point	R. Walker
Brahminy Kite	1	5/8/12	Stockton Sandspit	T. Clarke
Brahminy Kite	1 juv	12/9/12	Kooragang Dykes	L. Crawford/C. Herbert
Brown Falcon	2	2/8/12	South of Bunnan (Upper Hunter)	T. Clarke
Brown Goshawk	2	7/9/12	Tighes Hill	T. Clarke
Brush Bronzewing	1	5/8/12	Awabakal Nature Reserve	M. Blyth
Buff-banded Rail	1	7/8/12	Shoal Bay [Anzac Park]	T. Clarke
Buff-banded Rail	2	6/9/12	Tighes Hill	T. Clarke
Buff-banded Rail	1	Jul-Sep	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Buff-banded Rail	3	15/6/12	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Bush Stone-curlew	heard	9/9/12	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Caspian Tern	1	27/8/12	Raymond Terrace	L. Mee
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	18/8/12	Wingham	per L. Filewood
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	1/9/12	Wangi [flying over]	S. Roderick
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	15/9/12	Soldiers Point, Pt Stephens	C. McDonald
Chestnut Teal	105	7/8/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	~25	21/8/12	Tomago House	N. McNaughton
Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	~30	22/6/12	Hexham Swamp	G. Little
Crested Shrike-tit	5	5/8/12	Ellalong	A. Lindsey
Crested Tern	17	30/7/12	Newcastle Rock Platform	A. Lindsey

## Club Night Observations cont.

Curlew Sandpiper	73	8/9/12	Stockton Sandspit	L. Crawford/C. Herbert
Double-banded Plover	91	7/8/12	Worimi NR (Stockton Bight)	A. Lindsey
Eastern Barn Owl	1	8/8/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	L.Crawford
Eastern Koel	1	3/9/12	Merewether	R. McDonnell
Eastern Osprey	1	6/8/12	Boat Harbour	T. Clarke
Eurasian Coot	106	11/9/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Fairy Martin	3	8/8/12	Carey Bay, nr Toronto	L. Crawford
Fairy Martin	>12	13/8/12	Raymond Terrace	L. Mee
Fairy Martin	many	10/9/12	Pokolbin	G. Brosie
Flame Robin	Pr	17/7/12	Quorrobolong	A. Richardson
Flame Robin	Pr	17/7/12	Wingen [garden]	G. Newling
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	2	14/8/12	Wallerawang State Forest	L. Mee
Great Crested Grebe	2	2/8/12	Grahamstown Dam	A. Stuart
Grey Butcherbird	1+ny	7/9/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Grey Goshawk	2	Sept	Blue Gum Hills Regional Park	J. Nicholls
Grey Goshawk	1	9/9/12	Wangi Wangi	H. Windon
Grey Teal	507 dy	11/9/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Grey-crowned Babbler	7	21/8/12	Duns Creek	M. Newman
Grey-crowned Babbler	4	16/8/12	Maison Dieu (nr Singleton)	P. Alexander
Gull-billed Tern	107	8/9/12	Stockton Sandspit	L. Crawford/C. Herbert
Hoary-headed Grebe	20+	2/8/12	Grahamstown Dam	A. Stuart
Latham's Snipe	7	21/8/12	Tomago Wetlands	N. McNaughton
Latham's Snipe	2	22/8/12	"Greswick Angus", East Seaham	N. McNaughton
Latham's Snipe	2	22/8/12	Seaham [private property]	N. McNaughton
Little Corella	411	28/7/12	Thornton [sports field]	P. Slack
Little Eagle	2	7/8/12	Over Minmi	G. Brosie
Little Lorikeet	many	14/8/12	Wallerawang State Forest	L. Mee
Masked Lapwing	Pr+4dy	14/8/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Musk Duck	5	2/8/12	Grahamstown Dam	A. Stuart
Nankeen Kestrel	2	1/8/12	South of Bunnan (Upper Hunter)	T. Clarke
Nankeen Night-Heron	19+imms	7/8/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Nankeen Night-Heron	15+imm	11/9/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Noisy Pitta	heard	21/8/12	Duns Creek	M. Newman
Noisy Pitta	1	30/8/12	Blackbutt Reserve	J. Nicholls
Northern Mallard	5	2/9/12	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Pacific Baza	1	25/7/12	West of Scone	T. Clarke
Pacific Golden Plover	9	12/9/12	Kooragang Dykes	L. Crawford/C. Herbert
Painted Honeyeater	1	3/7/12	Medhurst Bridge	M. Kearns
Pheasant Coucal	1	7/8/12	Shoal Bay [Anzac Park]	T. Clarke
Pied Oystercatcher	11	7/8/12	Worimi NR (Stockton Bight)	A. Lindsey
Powerful Owl	heard	25/8/12	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Rainbow Bee-eater	2	3/9/12	Weston [garden]	S. Roderick
Rainbow Bee-eater	2	4/09/12	Singleton	R. McDonald
Rainbow Bee-eater	5	12/9/12	"Cressfield Stud" (nr Scone)	R. McDonald
Rainbow Bee-eater	several	10/9/12	Pokolbin	G. Brosie
Red Knot	50	8/9/12	Stockton Sandspit	L. Crawford/C. Herbert
Red Knot	5	20/8/12	Stockton Sandspit	F. Van Gessel
Red Wattlebird	1 fdy	10/9/12	Pokolbin	G. Brosie
Red-capped Plover	13	7/8/12	Worimi NR (Stockton Bight)	A. Lindsey
Red-necked Stint	1	7/8/12	Worimi NR (Stockton Bight)	A. Lindsey
Red-rumped Parrot	1	Aug	Hunter Stadium, Broadmeadow	S. Rennie
Red-winged Parrot	Pr	6/8/12	Cassilis	G. Brosie
Red-winged Parrot	1	19/8/12	Morpeth	F. Van Gessel
Regent Bowerbird	1	Sept.	Dooralong	S. Rennie
Rose Robin	1m	15/8/12	Carrington	I. Benson
Ruddy Turnstone	Pr	17/9/12	Nobbys Breakwater	R. Nicholas
Rufous Fantail	2	1/9/12	"Old Brush", Brunkerville	R. McDonald
Rufous Songlark	1	4/9/12	Singleton	R. McDonald
Satin Bowerbird	1	1/8/12	Weston [garden]	S. Roderick
Satin Bowerbird	30+	26/7/12	Hidden Treasure Mine, Copeland	A. Stuart
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	1	8/9/12	Stockton Sandspit	L. Crawford/C. Herbert

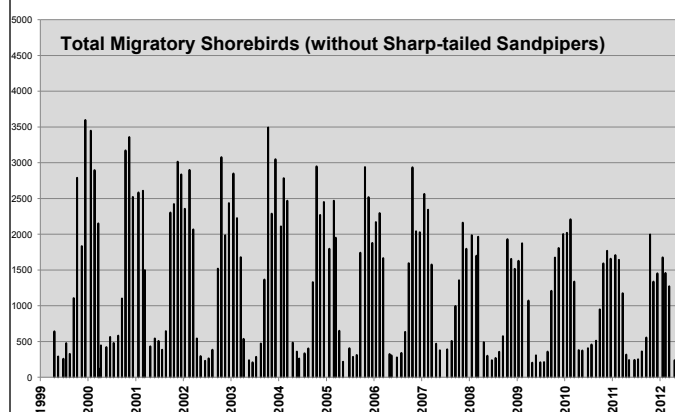


## Club Night Observations cont.

Spangled Drongo	1	22/8/12	Cardiff Heights	T. Clarke
Spotted Crake	2	31/7/12	Hexham Swamp	A. Lindsey
Spotted Harrier	1	2/8/12	South of Bunnan (Upper Hunter)	T. Clarke
Spotted Harrier	1	14/9/12	Telarah	G. Brosie
Square-tailed Kite	1	11/8/12	Rutherford [flying]	G. Brosie
Square-tailed Kite	1	12/8/12	Green Wattle Creek, Butterwick	M. Newman
Striped Honeyeater	1	10/9/12	Pokolbin	G. Brosie
Superb Fairy-wren	32	7/8/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Topknot Pigeon	2	19/8/12	One-Mile Beach	per L. Filewood
Topknot Pigeon	12+	18/9/12	Pelican, beside Swansea Channel	J. Cockerell
Varied Sittella	4+	5/8/12	Ellalong	A. Lindsey
Wedge-tailed Eagle	2	2/8/12	South of Bunnan (Upper Hunter)	T. Clarke
Whimbrel	12	8/9/12	Stockton Sandspit	L. Crawford/C. Herbert
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	1	27/7/12	South of Bunnan (Upper Hunter)	T. Clarke
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Pr+nest	7/8/12	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
White-breasted Woodswallow	some	13/8/12	Ash Island	L. Mee
White-fronted Tern	1	30/7/12	Newcastle Rock Platform	A. Lindsey
White-winged Chough	4 nb	21/8/12	Duns Creek	M. Newman
White-winged Triller	1	4/9/12	Singleton	R. McDonald
White-winged Triller	2	12/9/12	"Cressfield Stud" (nr Scone)	R. McDonald
Wompoo Fruit-Dove	7	26/7/12	Copeland SCA [car park]	A. Stuart
Wompoo Fruit-Dove	1	Sept	Blackbutt Reserve	J. Nicholls
Wompoo Fruit-Dove	2	2/9/12	"Old Brush", Brunkerville	R. McDonald
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	Pr	14/8/12	Wollaroo State Forest	L. Mee
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	14	16/8/12	Hunterview (nr Singleton)	P. Alexander
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	32	25/9/12	Speers Point	R. Walker
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	many	14/8/12	Wollaroo State Forest	L. Mee

## Hunter Estuary Waders

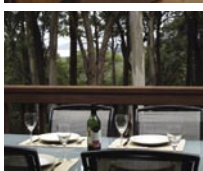
At the Adelaide Shorebird Conference (see p. 19), Chris Herbert won the prize for best presentation with his paper on the declining population of migratory shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary. The graph below shows the populations counted by the great team of HBOC birdwatchers who have participated in Wader Surveys since April 1999. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers have been omitted from the graph because they occur irregularly, depending on inland rainfall. The graph clearly shows a continuing decline in shorebird numbers and the linear trend on this data suggests that very few waders will be visiting the Hunter Estuary by 2030. It is time to conserve and rehabilitate shorebird habitat in the Hunter Estuary and to ask our government what measures it is taking to encourage the Chinese and Korean governments to conserve essential intertidal flats in the Yellow Sea.



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## 8th Australian Shorebird Conference

Adelaide, 29-30 September 2012

Bird Conferences are always interesting - there is such a variety of topics to cover. Even concentrating on one group of birds - shorebirds - does not detract from the variety, in fact it emphasises how many different aspects of birds there are to investigate.

The keynote address by David Paton discussed the *Ecological consequences for the Coorong from over-extraction of water in the Murray-Darling Basin*. His presentation exposed the competition for natural resources between humans and other animals - humans are winning, birds in particular are losing as their wetland habitats are robbed of essential water. Lack of water flows through the Murray mouth allowed the mouth to close and killed off the wetland plant *Ruppia tuberosa*, essential for the healthy ecology of the Coorong. Lack of tidal fluctuation in the Coorong restricted foraging shorebirds to a narrow static fringe around the water body. Under intergovernmental agreements with other countries along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF), the Australian government is committed to protecting migratory shorebird habitat. This commitment finally pushed the government to dredge the Murray mouth to re-instate tidal fluctuations and improve shorebird habitat. Key points from David's talk were that:

- water is over-allocated in the Murray-Darling Basin
- the environment is not valued enough
- there is a problem of scale - someone extracting water 1000km upstream has no idea of the downstream consequences
- there are time lags in changes in the natural environment - leading to cumulative deterioration that can be catastrophic

More information on the Coorong can be found in David's book titled *At the End of the River: The Coorong and Lower Lakes*, published in 2012 by ATF Press, Hindmarsh.

Some highlights from the conference are summarised below.

### Migration

Geolocators attached to Ruddy Turnstones showed that these birds followed a narrow path on northward migration with many completing an initial non-stop flight of 7,600km to Taiwan and most later staged in the Yellow Sea before continuing north to their breeding grounds. Southward migration paths generally showed a much wider spread, ranging from Mongolia to the central Pacific, including a bird that moved east to the Aleutian Islands before making a long trans-Pacific flight in two successive years - a round trip of 27,000km each year!

Geolocators weigh one gram and record light intensity. The information they record can be used to determine their location (day length is related to latitude) and also when incubation occurs. Most Ruddy Turnstones arrive on the breeding grounds before 1 June and are now known to share incubation and to re-nest after 5-8 days if the first clutch fails. Researchers anticipate that a one gram electronic device that can be detected by the Icarus satellite will be available for use in tracking shorebirds in 2015 - this will provide even more detailed information on the whereabouts of shorebirds.

Danny Rogers made a study of museum specimens and Grey Plovers caught in Australia and found that over 98% of Grey Plovers in Australia are female! They breed in the arctic tundra and migrate thousands of kilometres to non-breeding grounds in the south, with females migrating further than males. The northernmost non-breeding population in the EAAF is dominated by males.

### Ecology of Migratory Shorebirds

Lemming cycles in the arctic have been correlated with shorebird breeding success in the African-Eurasian Flyways - when lemming populations crash, predators prey on shorebirds and their breeding success is poor; when lemmings are abundant, shorebird breeding success is high. A study of breeding success in the EAAF showed no correlation with lemming cycles since the 1980s, possibly because birds coming to Australia breed over a very broad area in the arctic, including areas not necessarily affected by lemmings. Furthermore, lemming cycles have shown a tendency to disappear over the last two decades, perhaps climate change is influencing lemming lifestyles.

### Resident Shorebird Ecology

In May 2010 Banded Stilts had a successful breeding event on an island in Lake Torrens National Park, following heavy inland rainfall during February to April 2010. Stilts lay up to 5 eggs per nest and the colony contained approximately 70,000 nests. It is likely that 200,000 chicks left the island. Following a subsequent breeding event, Reece Pedler attached satellite transmitters to several Banded Stilt and tracked individual birds flying both west and east from the colony. Cross-continental scale movements demonstrated that the degree of interconnectedness between eastern and western Australia is likely to be much greater than previously thought and that regular movements of hundreds of kilometres are commonplace for this species.

**Liz Crawford**

## Activities - October - December 2012

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
<b>OCTOBER 2012</b>			
<b>Wednesday 10 October</b>	<b>Club Meeting</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetlands Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: David Bain – <i>The Powerful Owl Project</i> Bird of the Evening: John Cockerell - <i>Eyre Bird Observatory</i></b>
Thursday 11 October	Bittern Survey	6.30pm till after dark at a wetland of your choice	Please contact Ann Lindsey by email to let her know where you will be surveying Email: <a href="mailto:ann.lindsey@bigpond.com">ann.lindsey@bigpond.com</a>
Saturday 13 October	Hunter Wader Survey	7.00 am Ash Island 7.30 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 Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay
Tuesday 16 October	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Tuesday to Thursday 16–18 October	Rufous Scrub-bird Monitoring, Gloucester Tops IBA	Camp at Sharpes Creek on Tues 16 and Wed 17	Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday 21 October	Field Outing: Jerusalem Creek	7.30am at park at southern end of Dungog	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Sat - Sunday 27 - 28 October	TWITCHATHON Join a team & help raise money for BirdLife Australia	4.00pm Sat to 4.00pm Sun for a BBQ at Hunter Wetlands Centre (Entry Fee)	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237 Steve Roderick 0409 452 921
Sunday 28 October	White Ibis Community Survey	Please record sightings of Australian White Ibis at the website	<a href="http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/surveys/WhitelbisSightingForm.htm">www.environment.nsw.gov.au/surveys/WhitelbisSightingForm.htm</a>
<b>NOVEMBER 2012</b>			
Tuesday 6 November	Midweek outing – Ash Island	7.30am Car Park over bridge onto Ash Island	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Wednesday 7 November	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	All members welcome
<b>Wednesday 14 November</b>	<b>Club Meeting</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetlands Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: Joy Nicholls - <i>Banding Rehabilitated Birds</i> Bird of the Evening: Lois Wooding - <i>Red-backed Fairy-wren</i></b>
Saturday 17 November	Hunter Wader Survey	10.30 am Ash Island 11.00 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 Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay
Sunday 18 November	Welcome to Waders Community Day	10.00am - 2.00pm Stockton Sandspit	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Paul Baird 4938 5039
Tuesday 20 November	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Sunday 25 November	Field Outing: Myall Lakes – Johnsons Hill Track	7.30am The Plough Inn, Bulahdelah	Tom Clarke 0418411785 (Note: carry morning tea on this walk)
<b>DECEMBER 2012</b>			
Tuesday 4 December	Mid-Week Outing – Catherine Hill Bay; Xmas Lunch at Catho Pub	7.30am Cemetery off Flowers Drive	Max Blanch 4961 1655
Wednesday 5 December	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	All members welcome
<b>Wednesday 12 December</b>	<b>Xmas Club Night</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetlands Centre</b>	<b>Topic: Members' Night</b> - bring your slides, anecdotes, videos and a plate to share the festive spirit
Saturday 15 December	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30 am Ash Island 10.00 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 4959 3663 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay
Sunday 16 December	Latham's Snipe survey at Pambalong NR and other wetlands	8.00 am Minmi Pub	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Tuesday 18 December	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>