



# Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

*Affiliated with BirdLife Australia*

Issue No. 5/14 October 2014

- 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



Channel-billed Cuckoos have arrived in the Hunter Region, announcing spring in no uncertain terms!  
 Left: Possible mating ritual where each bird grasps the other's throat - photo by Steve Merrett. Above: A quiet Channel-bill - photo by Dick Jenkin.

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## Club Activities October - December

## President's Column

Yesterday I met with some club members getting prepared for the HBOC stall at the Australasian Bird Fair in Sydney next month. We were all critiquing some of the latest promotional material produced by our membership secretary, Rob Kyte. This time it was a "Birds of the Hunter Region" poster to be displayed for the first time at the Bird Fair, but which will also feature at future events. Someone mentioned that HBOC was the "envy of many other clubs" because of our great organisational capacity for things like this. We are indeed fortunate to have some very talented and motivated people in our club to fly our banner at major events like this.

As I mentioned at the last club meeting, we will be without a couple of those people in 2015. Liz Crawford and Kristy Peters are both setting sail for the entire year (one of them literally) and in their absence we have a couple of 'positions vacant' next year. Liz is the newsletter editor and if you're reading this then you obviously like to read this valuable publication, so why not consider having a go at being editor? Liz can fill you in on the details and I am sure she'd be able to assist next year from time to time if need be. Kristy leaves the

club's secretary position open; an important role on the committee of the club. The position description for that job is fairly straightforward – take minutes at committee meetings monthly, then circulate them ahead of the next meeting. There are various other tasks that Kristy has taken on (such as monitoring the club's email address) but they can be shared amongst other committee members if required. Committee meetings are great fun and it's a good way of appreciating just how much goes on "behind the scenes" in this great club.

And whilst I'm on the subject of the club flying its banner, we were recently represented by Ann Lindsey at the Sydney Engineering Excellence Awards where "we" (i.e. a team led by the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of NSW) won the *Environment and Heritage Award* for their world-leading example of eco-engineering on the Tomago Wetlands Restoration Project. Read more about this in Ann's article later in the newsletter.

Good birding to all.

**Mick Roderick**

## New Members

**The Club extends a warm welcome to:**

John Harding from Laurieton  
Pat Burrows from Gloucester

**We hope to see you at Club meetings and outings.**



White-browed  
Scrubwren at a  
bird bath - photo by  
Trevor Murray



Ruddy Turnstone (above)  
newly arrived at Nobbys  
Beach in September and  
Double-banded Plover  
about to depart for New  
Zealand - photos by  
Richard Nicholas

## Health and Safety Awareness for Activities

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

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

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

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



## Meeting Highlight - Red Knots in the Hunter Estuary

Red Knot start arriving in the Hunter Estuary on southward migration in late August. These days, quite a few shorebirds wear coloured leg flags and many of these are engraved with letters and/or numbers, so that you can track individually-marked birds. We started looking for flagged shorebirds on a regular basis in September 2011 and have built up a fascinating picture of the migratory flight path of Red Knot that use the Hunter Estuary. Birds flagged in Chukotka and Kamchatka, Eastern Siberia; on Sakhalin Island; in South Korea; in China; in north Western Australia; in South Australia; in Victoria; and New Zealand have all been seen in the Hunter Estuary.

In July 2012, three adult male Red Knots were captured by Russian researchers on the Chukotka breeding grounds and had geolocators strapped to their legs. These devices record daylight hours that can be used to calculate likely migration routes. The geolocators were retrieved the following year. Their data showed that the birds headed south from the Siberian breeding grounds in four flights: first to the Sea of Okhotsk (2900 km), then to northeast China (2600km), then to the Gulf of Carpentaria in northern Australia (6700km), where one bird stayed for the entire non-breeding season while the other two flew direct to New Zealand (4000km). On the return journey, two birds flew direct from New Zealand to the Yellow Sea tidal flats in China (10,100km) while the third flew direct to China from the Gulf of Carpentaria (6700km). After refuelling, they flew to the breeding grounds in a single flight (4000km) (Tomkovich *et al.* 2013).

The chicks of one of these Red Knot were caught and banded in July 2012 when they were just four days old. A week later they were caught again and lime green bands and white engraved leg flags were placed on their legs. In September 2013, one of the Red Knot chicks banded and flagged (white engraved CUE) on the breeding grounds turned up in the Hunter Estuary. It was 14 months old and had not been seen since it left the breeding grounds. It stayed for about 3 weeks then moved on. In March 2014, it was seen in New Zealand, in company with a flock ready to migrate north to the Yellow Sea. But it probably didn't get that far. It turned up again in the Hunter Estuary in August this year, aged just two years, looking fat and well-feathered, as though it had again spent the breeding season somewhere in the southern hemisphere - probably in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was travelling with another Red Knot that was slimmer, somewhat dishevelled and moulting out of its breeding plumage - looking like it had just completed a full migration cycle. CUE stayed two weeks before moving on, probably flying directly across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand where it was seen 3 weeks later on 5 October 2014. Hopefully it will make a complete migration to the breeding grounds in 2015.

Most flagged Red Knot seen in the Hunter Estuary have been caught and banded in Victoria, New Zealand or Chongming Dao, China. In addition, each year three or four arrive from different places such as Chukotka, Kamchatka, South Korea, north Western Australia and South Australia. So we have flagging evidence that supports the migration route shown by the Red Knots with geolocators. Plus we have some evidence that young Red Knot also travel across Australia from northwest Australia to New Zealand via the Hunter Estuary.



Red Knot lime/white CUE and travelling companion at Stockton Sandpsit on 28 August 2014 - Chris Herbert

Red Knot on southward migration build up to a peak of about 700 birds in the estuary during early October before declining to almost zero by the end of December. The majority of Red Knot passing through the Hunter Estuary are on their way to New Zealand, which is home to around 40,000 Red Knot over the non-breeding season (September to March). Some birds, particularly juveniles, will be en route to Victoria where about 1000 birds spend the non-breeding season. Band recoveries and flag sightings sent to the Australasian Wader Studies Group have established that many of the Red Knot that spend their first year in south-east Australia migrate to New Zealand in their second year and from then on become New Zealand "citizens", migrating from and returning to New Zealand (Minton *et al.* 2011), some via the Hunter Estuary.

Our observations of flagged birds show that there are two main waves of Red Knot passing through the Hunter Estuary, one in late September and one in early October. It appears that most of the September arrivals depart before the October arrivals peak. Therefore we suggest that the peak counts for September and October should be added together to represent the total flux of Red Knot passing through the estuary each year (perhaps a little more than 1000 birds). Their flag origins confirm the migration route established by band recoveries and most recently by geolocators. We know that birds can stay for as little as one day and as long as a month, with most birds staying less than 2 weeks before moving on. Around 16% of the individually-marked birds make repeat visits to the Hunter Estuary, sometimes in consecutive years but sometimes several years apart. Thus there is considerable opportunistic use of the estuary. Given that Red Knot move through the Hunter Estuary in waves, it is likely that more than 1000 birds stopover in the estuary each year representing about 2.5% of the total population that ends up in Victoria and New Zealand for the non-breeding season. Such numbers make the Hunter Estuary an important stopover location for Red Knot on southward migration.

### Liz Crawford & Chris Herbert

Tomkovich, P.S., Porter, R.R., Loktionov, E.Y. and Niles, L.J. (2013). Pathways and staging areas of Red Knots *Calidris canutus rogersi* breeding in southern Chukotka, Far Eastern Russia. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 120(3): 181 - 193.

Minton, C., Wahl, J., Gibbs, H., Jessop, R., Hassell, C. and Boyle, A. (2011). Recoveries and flag sightings of waders which spend the non-breeding season in Australia. *Stilt* 59: 17-43.

## Activity Reports

### South Tacoma & Central Coast Wetlands, Tuggerah

Tuesday 5 August 2014

Twenty-eight birders met at South Tacoma - this included six visitors from the Central Coast Group of Birding NSW. We started our outing by walking the Reserve Track to the Point which looks over Tuggerah Lake. In this area we saw Olive-backed Oriole, Striped Honeyeater, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Satin Bowerbird, White-browed Scrubwren, Yellow and Brown Thornbills, Lewin's Honeyeater and a Grey Shrike-thrush.

On the lake were 400+ Black Swans, Pacific Black Duck, 3 Eastern Great Egret, 1 Little Egret and many cormorants and pelicans.

After morning tea we drove to the Central Coast Wetlands at Tuggerah. We stopped first at the southern side of Dairy Swamp and then moved onto the eastern side near the car park. Highlights on the swamp were 84 Pink-eared Ducks, Black-fronted Dotterel, Australasian Shoveler, Hardhead, Australian Darter, White-necked Heron, White-faced Heron, Eurasian Coot, Australasian Grebe and Hoary-headed Grebe.

Other birds seen at the wetlands included Eastern Rosella, Superb Fairy-wren, Eastern Spinebill, Red-browed Finch, Eastern Whipbird, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Golden Whistler, Australasian Figbird, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Eastern Yellow Robin, Buff-banded Rail, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Whistling Kite and a Nankeen Kestrel.

The Black-necked Stork which had been seen the previous Saturday was not sighted.

After lunch, some of the group moved on to the McPherson Road Swamp, Tuggerah, where we added to our list: 8 Freckled Ducks, 5 Royal Spoonbills, 1 Yellow-billed Spoonbill and a Swamp Harrier.

Total species seen for this mid-week outing was 79.

**Val Moon**

### Blackbutt Bird Walk

2 September 2014

Weather was less than optimal being very grey, but 30 HBOC members turned out for the walk through the rainforest. Our target species on the day was the Noisy Pitta which was spotted soon after we started. Everyone had good views, as it obligingly hopped slowly along

the path. George Gillam made the next great sighting: a Powerful Owl tucked away in thick foliage with a very substantial meal of a large Brushtail Possum. Also of interest, a very young Raven possibly on its first flight from the nest was perched nervously in a small tree, just above head height. It seemed reluctant to attempt a second flight and was still in the tree when we returned sometime later. (It was not there when I checked next day so I am assuming the parent birds guided it back to the nest.) There were at least two active raven's nests high above.

At this point we deviated from our usual bird watching and walked through the Blackbutt aviaries to look at birds from all over Australia. Most people were delighted to see these birds at such close range, sometimes just 2 feet away. Of course the song of the Chiming Wedgebill delighted everyone, as it does me everytime I hear it. A strange bird song to hear in the middle of Newcastle. In total we had 42 species.

Two days later, in sunny weather, I returned to part of the walk to see if the Powerful Owl was still present. The owl had gone but a rare but regular visitor, the Crested Shrike-tit, had returned. Birds were much more active everywhere and I am sure we would have seen greater numbers had the weather been better for our members on Tuesday.

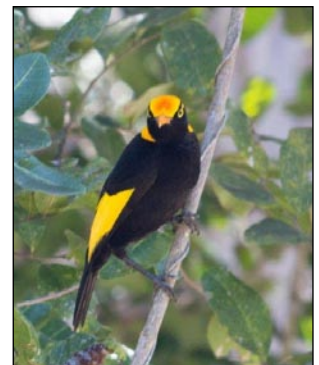
**Joy Nicholls**

### Lower Manning Area, Midweek Camp

15 to 17 October 2014

2014 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> annual mid-week bird camp. These camps are organised so that both campers and non-campers can attend, with good birding areas within reasonable travelling distance. In this regard the Old Bar Caravan Park was an ideal location. The weather was perfect for the 24 of us gathered for 3 days of good birding.

Our first stop was Saltwater National Park, a small but very productive seaside area. At least 6 to 10 Regent Bowerbirds were constantly seen both in the trees and on the ground, as were 5 Green Catbirds. Several Spangled Drongos were hawking above the trees and the inevitable Little Wattlebirds were everywhere.



Regent Bowerbird - Robert Stewart



## Activity Reports cont.



Left: Green Catbird &  
Right: Regent Bowerbirds  
- Richard Nicholas  
Below: Regent Bowerbird  
female - Judi Thomas



Unfortunately the Nature Walk was flooded and therefore inaccessible but we still managed to see and hear 61 species in the park. Pam also came across a Diamond Python sunning itself. A sad sight was two dead Humpback Whales beached on Saltwater Beach, which were attracting much media attention.

In the afternoon we visited Mudbishops Point. We sighted several species of bush birds in the reserve and Joy rescued a Laughing Kookaburra being attacked by another of the species. Some of us then did the long trek along the beach and were rewarded with views of Double-banded and Red-capped Plovers and Sanderlings near the Manning River entrance. In all we saw 46 species in this area and heard 3 more.

The next day we visited Cattai Wetlands which had been specially opened for us by the council staff. Garth very promptly found us a Pacific Baza which gave us all good views as it flew from tree to tree. There weren't a lot of waterbirds present but we did find five Jacanas as we walked around the perimeter of the wetlands. Bush birds were in abundance including thornbills, gerygones, pardalotes and Southern Emu-wrens. Total species here were 56 seen and 6 heard. Taree Council is to be congratulated on the work done in this area.

After lunch we moved to the Harrington rainforest where we saw a Wompoo Fruit-dove and a Black-faced Monarch. In the evening we all enjoyed a meal at the Old Bar Bowling Club.



Before heading home on Wednesday some of us drove down to Manning Point where a pair of Ospreys was observed on a nest, and good views were had of one of them feeding on a fish on a dead tree. A total of nearly 120 birds were sighted in the different areas visited during the camp.

A special thank you has to go to Alan Stuart who supplied us with the text of his upcoming brochure on the Old Bar Area Birding Route, and to the staff of Cattai Wetlands for opening it up for us. The Manning area proved to be very productive for everyone at the mid-week group camp.

**Robert and Margaret Stewart**

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## Grahamstown Dam

21 September 2014

A reasonably-sized group gathered at Finnan Park ready to tackle the wilds of Grahamstown Dam for September's Sunday outing. All three grebes, various ducks as well as a swan and a coot were spotted relatively quickly, both through the scope and up close. It was then onto Ferodale to salvage what bush birds would still be about despite the dreary weather. This casual walk then turned into the great Brown Quail hunt after one of the group members spotted some gathering near the track. Much stomping and rustling was heard in the following minutes but, as is characteristic of quail behaviour, they proved elusive. Over the next few hours a large contingent of pigeons, honeyeaters and raptors were spotted in addition to a large amount of native orchids. Following our walk, we had morning tea near a spot where we heard Emu-wrens calling and, before long, they decided to show themselves, giving us magnificent views of both the male and female. After that, we walked towards another patch of forest where we saw White-throated Gerygone as well as yet more birds of prey. All in all I'm sure everyone would agree it was yet another very successful outing.

**Krishna Nagarajan**

## Activity Reports cont.

### Port Stephens Pelagic

Sunday 10 August 2014

Boat: M.V. Argonaut, skippered by Ray Horsfield  
Departed Nelson Bay Public Wharf at 07:25 returning at 16:55

There was an air of trepidation from some of the punters milling at the picnic tables at the wharf, with a strong wind warning issued for Hunter waters, with BOM talking about westerly winds to 25 knots. The wind was supposed to have gotten up overnight but there was barely a breath of wind as the boat pulled into the wharf. Off we set with the attitude of “see how it goes” and the first Procellariiform seen as we rounded the islands was a Wedge-tailed Shearwater – a bird largely off everyone’s radar as they are just starting to return to their breeding grounds. Gradually more and more were seen, including a feeding flock of about 150 birds to the south. Suddenly the trip had a summery feel to it.

Continuing on we saw small groups of Fluttering-type Shearwaters, amongst which were some definite Fluttering. The first of many Indian Yellow-nosed Albatrosses made its way up the wake and soon there were half a dozen in pursuit. A distant Brown Skua kept its distance and unfortunately was the only one for the day.

The westerlies then set in and when we were approaching deeper water the white caps were substantial and some quite steep wind waves were chasing the boat. I did think that it would be fun returning to port in this!

Quite a few breaching Humpback Whales were seen and probably close to 5 miles short of the shelf break we started seeing our first Solander’s Petrels as well as the first Black-browed Albatross-type and Hutton’s Shearwater. Dozens of gannets were seen in every direction and then we saw one of reasons they were likely in the area when a Yellow-nosed Albatross dropped onto the water and plucked up a reasonably-sized garfish. We reached the start of the drift in about 250m of water (at -32.881676 152.598679), with the boat being pushed into deeper water by the stiff westerly wind.

A few Fairy Prions, more Yellow-nosed Albatross and another Hutton’s Shearwater were seen before an adult Shy-type Albatross joined in. This bird was joined by a very short-staying second-year bird and then a juvenile. The juvenile gave some cause for excitement because of the jet-black primaries, forming a beautifully demarcated line with the remaining white underwing.



Shy-type Albatross (both)

A second Black-browed type Albatross came in (another young bird) and the first of 3 White-faced Storm-petrels flew by the stern and fed in the slick. There was the occasional Wedge-tailed Shearwater out wide and a consistent turnover of Solander’s Petrels was noticed, with 9 being the maximum count at one time. It was a while before the first Antipodean (Gibson’s) joined in and then more excitement as a Buller’s Albatross also joined the fray. Always popular, there was some excitement too when a Cape Petrel flew in.



Buller’s Albatross

We departed from -32.932312 152.620071 and had a second Buller’s Albatross and Antipodean join us for a period, though we could not manage to see any more Black-browed Albatross. We made a detour on the way back in to see a number of fur seals loafing on the rocks on the northern shore of Cabbage Tree Island.

**Mick Roderick**



## In Search of Special Species

### The Waiting Game.....

Thursday 28 August 2014: Sue Chatfield reports a Citrine Wagtail at Putta Bucca Wetland, Mudgee. Grant works 6am – 4pm, says a swear word.

Friday 29 August: Mick Roderick, Kurtis Lindsay, John Weigel, Frank Antram and Chris Cott see the bird. Grant works 10am – 9pm, says a few more swear words.

Saturday 30 August: Richard Baxter, Christine D and Carl Corden report the bird. Grant works 6am – 4pm, breaks a nervous sweat.

Sunday 31 August: Allan Benson, Alan Morris, Mike Kuhl, David James, Brigitte Dawson, Ian McAllan and many others tick up the wagtail. Grant works 10am – 8pm. Heart rate increases.

Monday 1 September: Rowan Mott bags a lifer. Grant works 6am – 3pm. Sharp pain develops behind right eye.

Tuesday 2 September: Max de Beer, Andrew Stafford, David Mitford see the bird. Grant works 6am – 5pm. Headache now behind left eye.

Wednesday 3 September: Bernie O’Keefe nails the Wag plus a Spotted Crake. Grant works 10am – 9pm. Headache now behind both eyes.

Thursday 4 September: Michael Crosland makes the trip. Grant works 6am – 4pm. Needs oxygen and has run out of swear words.

Friday 5 September: Bruce Roubin adds a crippler to his list. Grant works 10am – 9:30pm. Does a lousy job, tells off the boss and is lucky to still have a house.

Saturday 6 September, 8:30am: Grant ticks his 640<sup>th</sup> species!



Three days later.....gone.

Thanks to Birdline NSW for the records.

**Grant Brosie**

### Short-tailed Grasswren *Amytornis merrotsyi*

During July this year, Robbie and I were invited to accompany the three Sydney young guns (Maxie Drongo, Ashy Rudder and Josh Bergmark) on a whirlwind visit to the Gawler Ranges in South Australia in the hope of nailing a true birder’s bird.....the Short-tailed Grasswren.

Formerly a subspecies of the similar Striated Grasswren, the Short-tailed Grasswren is restricted to the spinifex-clad hills of the Flinders and Gawler Ranges. This preferred habitat and isolated range leaves them susceptible to wild fires and feral predators. Apparently their numbers have declined in the Flinders but are still going strong in the Gawlers.

The plan was to spend two nights camping at Mt Ive Station, a working sheep station located 150km northwest of Iron Knob at the southern end of Lake Gairdner. They offer camping and accommodation facilities, fuel and a small shop. We found it extremely comfortable and well maintained with loads of birds within walking distance of our camp.

Our first morning was quite leisurely with a good breakfast (rare event when birding) and a quiet stroll around the camp ground. As Robbie and I stalked a pair of Mulga Parrot, Ashy came hurtling out of the camp kitchen with a bowl of cereal in one hand and the walkie talkie in the other. “Josh has Short-tails!” Unknown to us Josh had headed off at dawn and was now standing on top of the large hill behind the homestead. It was quite comical to see Josh as a small dot waving frantically to get our attention from half a kilometre away.

Our excitement led to a sprint towards the hill but we soon slowed as the ascent steepened. It’s times like this one regrets the constant supply of lamingtons and chocolate at work. We eventually got to the top and found Josh’s location but of course the birds had moved on but at least we knew the general location. It’s at this stage I should mention the complete lack of luck we’ve had with grasswrens in the past and just the day before we had spent an entire day failing to see Thick-billed. With this in mind we were astounded at what happened next.

Josh pinpointed them first and then Maxie got on to one. Nothing is certain with grasswrens so it wasn’t a done deal yet. “There!!” “Where?” “Near the spinifex clump.” “Which clump? The hill is covered in clumps!” “On the rock!” “Which \$\*#@ing rock!!!!”..... “GOT IT!” And there he was, posing beautifully on the rock next to the spinifex clump. Everyone was getting spectacular views, high fiving etc as Ashy slowly stalked in with his camera. It was then that two things happened.....a second bird hopped into view and I realised we had left the cameras back at camp!

## In Search of Special Species cont.



We had our fill and started heading back down the hill, praising Ashy's amazing shots and congratulating Robbie on ticking his 500<sup>th</sup> species! The rest of the morning was spent on the Blue Bush flats where we dipped on Western Grasswren but saw some great western birds like White-fronted and Crimson Chat, Hooded Robin, Port Lincoln and Mulga Parrot, Horsfield's Bronze and Pallid Cuckoo, Redthroat, Whiteface, White-winged and Splendid Fairy-wren and Brown Songlark. We decided to leave Mt Ive early as we had our target but I was determined to nail some Short-tailed shots before leaving. Robbie and I walked back up the hill not really anticipating seeing them again but after a short stroll through the spinifex we again found the same pair as before and boy did they perform!! Without the aid of play back we were treated to prolonged, uninterrupted views and loads of calling. With the shutters firing it sounded like the red carpet on Oscar night.

We walked back down the hill with big smiles and full memory cards. If you're ever travelling through South Australia, I can strongly recommend a visit to Mt Ive Station: (08) 8648 1817.

**Grant Brosie**



Short-tailed Grasswren  
- Grant Brosie

## Future Activities - Rankin Springs Birds of the Bush Festival

Rankins Springs, about 100 km west of West Wyalong, is the venue for the **"Rankins Springs – Birds of the Bush Festival"** to be held on the **weekend of 11 & 12 October 2014**.

The festival is now in its 5<sup>th</sup> year & is run by a very dedicated community group, trying to put their area "on the map" as a great birding place to visit. There are many birding-dedicated activities including:

- Photography & Art competitions
- Birding bus trips on the Saturday & Sunday - (the Saturday being an all-day fully catered trip costing only \$40 – this year going to Lakes Ballyrogan, Brewster & Cargelligo, and also a visit to Lake Cargelligo Sewage Treatment Ponds – an absolutely great birding spot.)
- Saturday evening dinner, with this year's guest speaker being comedian Steve Abbott (aka The Sandman), who is also a birder and has released a very funny ABC Podcast "Birdbrain".

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/sites/birdbrain/>

Last year, on the Saturday birding bus trip, we saw Budgies, Black Honeyeaters, Painted Honeyeaters, Splendid Fairy-wrens (5 males together...wow!), Crimson Chats, Blue Bonnets, and great views of a Shining Bronze-cuckoo, to name just a few.

There are also many other activities on the weekend, such as a market day, a family/community fun run, and of course, the chance to meet up with some "local characters"... such as "Wally the Junk-Sculpturer".

Please check out the website:

[www.birdsofthebush.com](http://www.birdsofthebush.com)

### Australasian Shorebird Conference

Held in Darwin in late September 2014, this conference highlighted the inexorable decline in migratory shorebird populations on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. However, there were some brighter moments: Alan Stuart spoke about his and Lois Wooding's observations of Grey-tailed Tattler behaviour and Liz Crawford spoke about her and Chris Herbert's observations of flagged Red Knot in the Hunter Estuary. Alan received the prize for the best Nature Study presentation and Liz received an Honourable Mention.



## Future Activities - Australasian Bird Fair 25 - 26 October 2014

The 2014 Australasian Bird Fair (the Bird Fair) will be held at the Newington Armory, Sydney Olympic Park, from 9am to 6pm on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 October. It will showcase the latest optical equipment; provide advice on bird-friendly gardens; introduce you to specialist tour operators; dazzle with bird photography and bird art; provide opportunities for browsing bird books, bird club displays, and birding locations within Sydney Olympic Park; entertain kids; and provide great presentations by well-known speakers on a range of birding topics. All this for a \$15 entry fee.

The Bird Fair aims to raise community awareness about the plight of so many bird species in peril across the Australasian region and all profits from the Bird Fair will go to bird conservation and endangered species programs in this region. There will also be many prizes for visitors including tour packages, books and top-of-the-range optical equipment

The Bird Fair will have something for everyone irrespective of their level of expertise or experience in birding! The venue provides a variety of birding locations including the 65 hectare Badu Mangroves, which is listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia.

You can easily get around the venue and access different birding locations on foot, by bicycle or by use of the free shuttle bus service that will be at the Fair.

Other things to attract visitors include

- Informative presentations that will cover endangered species in the region will be by well-known celebrity speakers, scientists and researchers from Australia, New Zealand and across the globe;
- Tips from top wildlife photographers and optical experts who will be at the Fair;
- Photo and arts pavilions that will offer a stunning array of images from some of the world's top nature photographers. Many items will be on sale: ideal adornments for your home or office;
- Expert advice from BirdLife Australia's Birds in Backyards program about how to landscape your garden and what to plant to attract birds to your garden; and
- Advice from expert tour companies about where your next birding holiday may be.

For more information about the Australasian Bird Fair, go to [www.birdfair.com.au](http://www.birdfair.com.au)

**Phil Straw**

General Manager [admin@birdfair.com.au](mailto:admin@birdfair.com.au)

HBOC will mount a display at the Bird Fair. If you would like to help man the stall and gain free entry to the Bird Fair, please contact Liz on [chrisliz@internode.on.net](mailto:chrisliz@internode.on.net) or 0412 722 644

## Future Activities - NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2014

Yes, it's on again! The 24<sup>th</sup> annual Twitchathon, where teams form to race around the countryside looking for as many different species of birds as they can in 24 hours, will be held on the last weekend of October (25/26<sup>th</sup>).

There are Main, Champagne or Children's Races – and it's not too late to register. All you need to do is email Frances Czwalinna [[secretarybird@bigpond.com](mailto:secretarybird@bigpond.com)] or BirdLife Southern NSW [[southernnsw@birdlife.org.au](mailto:southernnsw@birdlife.org.au)] or Alan Morris [[a.morris42@optusnet.com.au](mailto:a.morris42@optusnet.com.au)] and ask for a Twitchathon Kit.

Of course, it is also a fundraising event. The proceeds from the 2014 Twitchathon funds will be going towards the Bird Conservation Portal project, to complement the BirdLife Australia Bird Atlas Project. The Bird Conservation Portal will draw together structured bird monitoring, the synthesis and analysis of bird data and biological, ecological and conservation reporting for BirdLife Australia into one place. A downloadable and user-friendly native (free to user) App (Android and iOS) will be developed which will allow volunteers to record and submit data. The specific focus of the portal

is to encourage repeat surveys of fixed sites needed to support bird conservation. The approach complements the content of existing applications targeting recreational birders (such as Eremaea Ebird).

The Hunter is always well-represented in the Twitchathon, both in the form of teams entering and raising money (over the past few years, HBOC-based teams have raised nearly \$5,000 each time). Hunter teams, please note: **we will not be finishing the Twitchathon at the Wetlands Centre this year.** We have decided to 'try something different' and will finish the race at 4pm on Sunday at the **Blackbutt Reserve BBQ shelters** at Carnley Avenue. If you're not into racing round looking for birds, why not come along to the BBQ and share in the frivolities as the teams tally up their lists? Whatever you decide, it would be great if you could support a local team via sponsorship.

For more information, contact **Mick Roderick** 0421 761 237

## Future Activities cont. - Aussie Backyard Bird Count

BirdLife Australia and the Birds in Backyards team have come together to launch this year's national Bird Week event - the **Aussie Backyard Bird Count!**

Celebrate National Bird Week 2014 by taking part in the biggest citizen science project to hit Aussie shores! From **20-26 October**, thousands of people from across the country are heading out into their backyards, local parks or favourite open spaces to take part in the first ever **Aussie Backyard Bird Count!**

To get involved all you need is 20 minutes, your 'green patch' of choice, and some keen eyesight (or binoculars!) And it doesn't matter if you're a novice or an expert—we'll be there to help you out along the way! Simply record the birds you know and look up those you

don't on our new Aussie Bird Count app (available for download in September) or our website. You'll instantly see live statistics and information on how many people are taking part near you and the number of birds and species counted not just across your neighbourhood but the whole of Australia!

Not only will you get to know your feathered neighbours, but you'll be contributing to a vital pool of information from across the nation that will help us see how Australian birds are faring.

So get your friends and family together, head into the great outdoors and start counting!

[www.aussiebirdcount.org.au](http://www.aussiebirdcount.org.au)

## Conservation - Port Waratah Coal Services Proposed T4 Coal Loader

### Planning Assessment Commission 27-28 August 2014

On behalf of HBOC, Ann Lindsey spoke against the PWCS proposed T4 coal loader at the Planning Assessment Commission, held at the Panthers Club in Newcastle. Eleven HBOC members attended the protest demonstration outside the Panthers Club prior to the hearing of submissions from the Community.

Ann spoke passionately about the habitat value of Swan and Deep Ponds on Ash and Kooragang Islands respectively; the need to uphold international agreements for protection of migratory waterbirds and their habitat; the importance of these habitats for congregatory waterfowl as well as shorebirds; the importance of these wetlands as drought refuge for wildfowl; the lack of compensatory habitat for previous habitat loss on Kooragang Island; the uncertainty in providing effective compensatory habitat; and the fact that habitat for other threatened species including White-fronted Chat and Australasian Bittern will be destroyed.

Ann concluded:

"Commissioners, we believe that the costs of losing two important wetlands within the most important coastal wetland in NSW far outweigh any short-term benefits offered by the coal industry. We believe that the laws which protect threatened species and migratory shorebirds and their habitats must be upheld."



HBOC members joined the protest rally outside the Panthers Club in Newcastle where the Planning Assessment Commission listened to the community's submissions on the proposed T4 Coal Loader - photos by Lorna Mee



## Conservation - Tomago Wetlands Restoration Project

21 September 2014

Corks popped and champagne flowed when it was announced that Tomago Wetlands Restoration Project had won the Environment and Heritage category of the Sydney Engineering Excellence Awards for 2014 from a field of six finalists. The Sydney Engineering Excellence Awards acknowledge the professionalism and pursuit of excellence by engineers throughout the country. There are several categories: Control Systems and Communications; Software and Embedded Systems; Products, Manufacturing Facilities and Processes; Environment and Heritage; Welfare, Health and Safety; Innovations and Inventions; Research and Development; and several Project and Individual Awards.

Water Research Laboratory, School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, UNSW were joint entrants and finalists with Parks and Wildlife Group, Office of Environment Heritage, and Conservation Action Group, NSW Department of Primary Industries. Will Glamore, head of the Project, generously invited HBOC to attend the Awards night dinner at the Westin Hotel in downtown Sydney as HBOC members have been monitoring bird populations on Tomago since 2007, before restoration commenced.

The other five finalists in the Environment and Heritage category were: a temperature control structure at Burrendong Dam so that warmer surface water could be released into the river instead of freezing cold water; a heat and power-saving plant at Ryde Aquatic Leisure Centre; treatment of contaminated material at HMAS Platypus on Sydney Harbour resulting in its reuse on site; a photovoltaic solar power generation system for Australia Post in Sydney; the refitting of an Australian 'fibro' house to become a net-zero energy, affordable, attractive and comfortable home. But the Tomago Restoration Project won the day.

Tidal flow from the Hunter River had been cut off and, for sixty years, Tomago Wetland site was degraded, fairly useless farmland. The aim of the Restoration Project was to design and build a new system that would naturally encourage salt marsh regeneration. Salt marsh requires very specific hydrological and water quality conditions. The engineering challenge was to deliver the right volume of water, to the right place, at the right depth, at the right time and at the right salinity, over a large area to allow nature to flourish and generate salt marsh.



L-R: Doug Beckers (NPWS), Ann Lindsey (HBOC), and Will Glamore (Uni of NSW) celebrating the Tomago Wetlands Restoration Project win at the Sydney Engineering Excellence Awards

And they did it!

Migratory shorebirds have returned in significant numbers and several pairs of Australian Red-kneed Dotterel are breeding with ten chicks produced at last count. Late afternoon visits have revealed up to 2000 Red-necked Avocets and about 150 Gull-billed Terns along with several other species arriving at sunset to roost for the night. Many hundreds of ducks of five species have been observed and egrets, herons, spoonbills and cormorants put in appearances from time to time.

I feel so immensely happy seeing the birds at home on Tomago Wetlands and am so grateful that habitat which allows our bird population to flourish is being created and supported by projects such as this. Further information is available at: <http://www.wrl.unsw.edu.au/site/projects/tomago-wetland-remote-monitoring/>

### Ann Lindsey

Editor's Note: Ann Lindsey is to be congratulated for instigating on-going surveys of Tomago Wetlands prior to opening of the floodgates and Neville McNaughton is congratulated for his ongoing commitment to these surveys.



Sapphire Wetlands at Tomago following opening of floodgates and re-introduction of tidal water - photo by Neville McNaughton

## Conservation - Great Shorebird Migration Under Threat

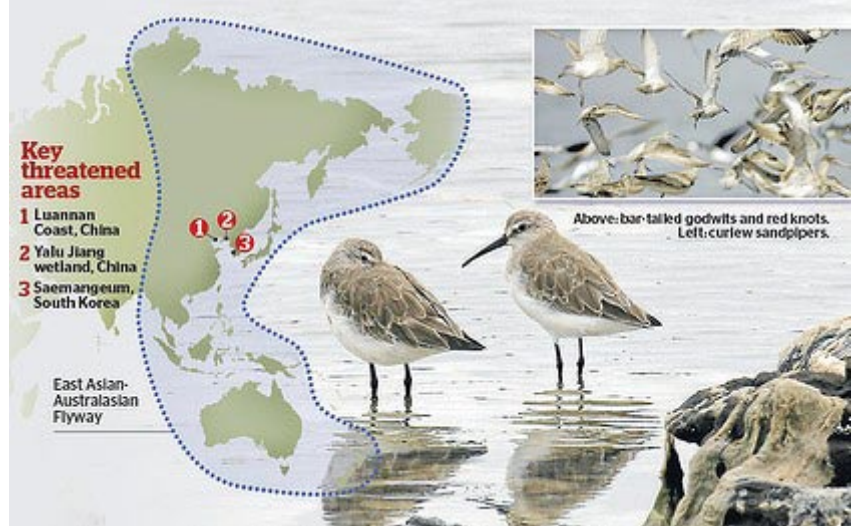
The epic migration of shorebirds from Australia to their Arctic breeding grounds is said to be in imminent danger of collapse. Birds are disappearing by the tens of thousands on their globe-spanning flights, mainly because of the loss of all-important “refuelling” habitat, scientists warn.

Once-familiar summer patrollers of Australian tidal flats such as the stately Eastern Curlew, and its smaller cousin, the Curlew Sandpiper, are now plummeting towards local extinction. “I have been working on threatened species for more than 30 years and have never heard such a tale of woe,” said Stephen Garnett, chair of the Australasian Shorebird Conference, where the crisis was detailed this week.

Around 36 Australian bird species use the East Asian-Australasian Flyway for the mass migration which sends them north to food-rich Arctic summer nesting habitat, then south to capitalise on the austral summer. Hunting in the northern hemisphere, and coastal development in Australia, are costing the birds. But the most critical danger appears to be at staging grounds in south-east Asia - and particularly around the Yellow Sea bordered by China and the Koreans.

The conference heard most Yellow Sea tidal flats are disappearing under accelerating industrial development and invasive grasses, while in the few remaining food-rich silt lands, pollutants like DDT have accumulated. Birds arriving there on migration already have burned through their energy stores, and with these feeding areas lost, fly on to die exhausted. One study, of the Great Knot, a high-alpine Siberian breeder that once summered widely in Australia, found at least 80,000 simply disappeared after the world’s longest sea wall closed off South Korean tidal flats at Saemangeum.

At the far southern end of the flyway, in Tasmania, Eastern Curlew numbers have collapsed by 75 per cent while just five per cent of Curlew Sandpipers remain, ornithologist Eric Woehler said. Around Australia,



Curlew Sandpiper numbers are declining 10 per cent a year, meaning it faces extinction within a decade, according to Deakin University’s Marcel Klaassen.

Both the Curlew Sandpiper, and the Eastern Curlew, are set to become the first migratory shorebirds to be added to the Australian threatened species list, mandating recovery plans for them.

The University of Queensland’s Richard Fuller said a long-term lack of political will was at fault for the losses. “There have been international migratory bird agreements in place since the 1970s, and yet habitat loss has been going on at more or less the same rate,” Dr Fuller said. “Clearly this sort of work needs to be stepped up,” he said. “The most important thing is to protect the habitat that remains.”

One sign of hope is the formation of an East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership, which brings together 30 government and non-governmental organisations. It has registered a network of 113 sites, and identified around 900 more, but only some are protected.

### Andrew Darby

Hobart Correspondent for Fairfax Media  
27 September 2014

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/great-shorebird-migration-under-threat-20140926-10m1xt.html#ixzz3ESsORRxU>

## Conservation - Rufous Scrub-birds & Climate Change

Rufous Scrub-birds have been calling loudly from the mountains of eastern Australia ever since Australia parted from Gondwana 65 million years ago. They are still there today – as noisy as ever, though incredibly difficult to see – but perhaps not for much longer.

Models predict that the climate of places like the Lamington Plateau in southeast Queensland will change

to something quite unlike what is there at the moment. That is one of the scenarios described in the [Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Australian Birds](#).

More than 100 Australian bird species face the prospect, within half a century, of having nowhere in the country with a climate quite like the one they now enjoy. It begs the question of what we should do, should these model predictions be confirmed.



## Conservation - Rufous Scrub-birds & Climate Change cont.

### Limited options

There is a fairly limited range of actions we can take, and climate change is challenging some fundamental beliefs about the very purpose of conservation. No longer can protected areas be expected to safeguard all of the species that currently live within them. One option is to do nothing: to accept human-induced changes to the planet as natural, and let evolution take its course. After all, previous mass extinctions have been followed by a prolific emergence of new species. But that wouldn't occur in our lifetime, and perhaps not even within the lifetime of humans as a species.

An alternative to this long-term perspective is to help climate-challenged species to survive where they are, especially in places that have proved to be [refuges](#) in the past, such as pockets of the Wet Tropics or the northwest Kimberley.

Relieving species of pressure from predators and competitors by protecting their nests and providing extra food may lift survival rates enough to compensate for extra climate-related deaths. Such intensive management is already applied to some threatened species – so perhaps we should just extend it to the climate-challenged. Such interventions may become increasingly expensive, but at least they will keep species in their “natural” environment.

### A moving problem

Another option is [assisted colonisation](#). For Rufous Scrub-birds, the climate in Tasmania should become suitable even as that in New South Wales and Queensland becomes unsuitable. A relative of the scrub-bird, the Superb Lyrebird, has been [introduced successfully to Tasmania](#), so we might expect scrub-birds to have at least a reasonable chance of survival.

There are now many examples from around Australia of animals being moved to places, particularly islands, where they have not been recorded before so that a population [can be secured](#).

For some birds it is not whole species that need be moved, just some of their genes. In our Action Plan, many of the birds that are predicted to lose their climate space could be replaced by close relatives that live in a slightly different climate. For instance, the population of Tasmanian Brown Thornbills could be augmented by bringing in members of the mainland subspecies that is adapted to warmer climates. The purity of both subspecies would be compromised, but that is surely better than having them go extinct.

Then there are zoos. The investment would need to be substantial, and keeping enough genetic diversity is a challenge, as evolutionary processes in captive populations can end up with animals quite different to

their wild counterparts. However, captive insurance populations are key to the conservation of [Helmeted Honeyeaters](#) and [Orange-bellied Parrots](#). We have no idea whether zoo populations can persist in perpetuity, or at least until the climate improves (effectively the same thing), but it can be done. Père David's Deer has been [extinct in the wild for 2,000 years](#), while still surviving in captivity.

Eventually, the option of last resort for threatened birds may be [cryogenics](#), or even a virtual life as preserved genetic code. Currently, such options are science fiction, and somehow I suspect that society will put less value on a frozen egg or a string of nucleic acid codes than a real-life squawking, feathered animal, even one in a zoo.

### Tough decisions

All of the options above are feasible, if expensive, and at some stage the government will have to make some hard decisions about where to invest in climate change adaptation. However, politicians have had little guidance on what options the public might prefer.

While there has been heated debate on the merits of [assisted colonisation](#), and some researchers have assumed captive populations have little conservation value, these are personal opinions on what are fundamentally moral issues. In democracies, government investment is ultimately decided through the ballot box, so a key recommendation for the adaptation plan has been surveys on the social acceptability of different adaptation options.

**This social consultation** is one of our reasons that we have written this article. What do *you* think might be the best option for the Rufous Scrub-bird? Leave it adapt, help it stay where it is, move it to Tasmania, or establish a population in a zoo? What about Brown Thornbills? Where would you like the government to invest in saving species from climate change? What might you personally be willing to invest? If funds are limited, which options or birds would you abandon?

If you have an opinion about how to respond, should climate change start affecting wild bird species in Australia, we would welcome hearing it. Anyone can take this [short, anonymous, online survey](#) – and what you say can help us, policy makers and managers develop appropriate climate change adaptation strategies for wild birds.

### Stephen Garnett<sup>1</sup> & Kerstin Zander<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor of Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods at Charles Darwin University

<sup>2</sup>Senior Research fellow at Charles Darwin University

**Source:** [theconversation.com/finding-new-nests-for-birds-threatened-by-climate-change-28720](http://theconversation.com/finding-new-nests-for-birds-threatened-by-climate-change-28720)

11 August 2014

## Pied Oystercatchers breeding at Stockton Sandspit

Pied Oystercatchers have been attempting to breed at Stockton Sandspit every season since 2007. In that year 2 runners were produced and reared to independence. Since then at least 17 breeding attempts have been made (mostly unsuccessful) resulting in only a further 5 runners reared to independence. This latest attempt has resulted in one runner (the 8<sup>th</sup>); the chances of being raised to independence are high given the wonderful previous track record of every hatchling surviving to the point where the parents kick them out.

One runner hatched on Monday 29 September 2014 and is in the constant care of its parents. A single un-hatched egg remains in the nest. On Monday, while I was trying to confirm the presence of runners, both parents became involved in repelling four intruding Pied Oystercatchers. The head-down-charging behaviours were taken up and continued until at least one of the intruders took flight. This prompted all the birds to get airborne and a chase ensued. Upon returning the female walked from the saltmarsh (where the newly born lay hidden) up to the nest (hadn't been sat on for over an hour) and sat down. So it was obvious that at least one egg was still in the nest. After a brief 25 minutes the female walked off and has never been back at the nest. It was only this afternoon that I was able to check out the nest and confirm the single egg.

When both oystercatcher parents leave the youngsters to pursue a threat, I have noticed on a few occasions that the "abandoned" are not entirely without supervision. Whenever a chase starts to take up a certain amount of time, one of the parents will momentarily pass back over the spot where the youngsters are hidden and call quietly before resuming the chase. I would like to think that the parent "touching base" has confirmed the youngsters are still OK and perhaps also reiterating the instruction to stay low.

This very action took place this afternoon when we dropped by the Sandspit to see how our birds were faring. The youngster has been walked off nearly 50m from the nest now and still remains within the saltmarsh, an excellent place to hide. The predator in question was a Spotted Harrier and looked quite magnificent in the low late afternoon sunlight but looked far from magnificent as it retreated with two Pied Oystercatchers hot on its tail.

### Tom Clarke

The same defence strategy is adopted when non-breeding oystercatcher flocks approach a nest or runners tended by adult oystercatchers. However, in the case of oystercatcher on oystercatcher confrontations the initial strategy is for the two adults to charge the flock heads down doing the piping display. This leads to fighting and the birds taking flight. The net effect is to create total mayhem with heaps of alarm calls and birds flying in all directions. So I suspect all potential avian nest/brood predators are distracted and take flight. Meantime



Pied Oystercatcher pair adopt 'piping display' to drive away unwelcome Pied Oystercatchers who have invaded their breeding territory at Stockton Sandspit - Chris Herbert

the cryptically coloured young take cover and freeze. The trick is for the adult oystercatchers to be the first birds to come back to the nest / young. I suspect the driving factor is this ritualised piping display where two charging birds are a match for the mob; i.e. the adults are programmed to act together.

If you think about it, it works on bird watchers. We do not know what to look at with so many birds going in different directions and unless we are very single minded we lose sight of the runners.

As Tom describes, the adults and young are in constant contact even when the young are hidden. This communication starts during the hatching process, which can be a protracted event, with the young calling as they chip out of the egg. I suspect the adults kept incubating the unhatched egg as long as they continued to hear the calls from within.

Experienced parents in a good territory raise far more young in their lifetime than pairs in a marginal territory. It is all about the location of the real estate. Stockton Sandspit is upmarket real estate with an excellent concierge looking after it in contrast to Stockton Beach, in the Worimi Conservation Lands where breeding success is abysmally low. So keep up the good work Uncle Tom and others.

The recently released series of accounts of the status and conservation needs of the various oystercatcher species of the world has some fascinating facts\*. Perhaps the most dramatic is the expansion in numbers of the South Island Pied Oystercatcher SIPO, a vagrant to NSW. Over a 50-year period numbers increased from around 10,000 to over 100,000 following the banning of hunting of oystercatchers. This stunning increase shows the excess breeding capacity of the species over that required to maintain numbers. In Australia where there are limited numbers of coastal breeding sites there are lots of non-breeding oystercatchers queuing for real-estate. They have an interesting choice to either wait their time and fight to gain control of prime real estate at the Stockton Sandspit or slum it on Stockton Beach where all that breeding effort makes minimal contribution to the survival of the species.

### Mike Newman

\* See web link to this publication on next page



## White-throated Needletail Report for 2013/14 Season

Again your records for the past season indicate that the extremes of weather did correlate with unusual swift behaviour. White-throated Needletails delayed their arrival to much of Victoria, apparently remembering the extreme heat and dry of the previous season. They were very scarce over the forests where I usually find them.

After distributing last year's report, I received almost 300 reports so this year (2013) I sent out a reminder and have received hundreds of extra sightings again. As a result the 2,393 reported sightings are 418 more than finally received last season. Thank you very much for this extra effort.

It appears some birds over-wintered last year. Luke Jackson saw lots (I wish he had defined how many he calls "lots", so his observation would be useful in the study of the decline of this species) in Qld on 10/6/2013. Then single birds were seen on 3/8/2013 in NSW by Peter Struik & Toni Marsh, and in Qld by Andy Jensen. The first probable migrants were 17 birds seen at Bowra Qld, 16/9/2013.

The first report from NSW was of 20 birds at Sawtell seen by Michael Cheers on 3/10/2013. The first seen in Victoria is usually on Melbourne Cup Weekend in East Gippsland, but this year we did not see any there on that long weekend. The first were 2 birds seen by Nicole Spillane & Paul Jacobson at Croajingolong N.P. on 6 November 2013. The first reported sighting for Tasmania was on 17 January 2014 when Dion Hobcroft saw a single bird at Black River Picnic Area. The first sighting from South Aust. was made by Terry Dennis at Lyndoch North on 13 February 2014.

There were 2 (0 last year) reports from the NT this season. There were no records from WA (1 last year), 3 (3) records from SA, 25 (39) from ACT, 23 (11) from TAS, 716 (426) from Qld, 343 (327) from Vic, and 1233 (902) from NSW.

With Needletails again clumping more than is usual in NSW & Qld, five flocks of 2,000 birds or more were recorded compared to last year's three, and the previous year's one. There were nine sightings of a thousand or more birds.

The average flock size this season was 41 - the same as last year. This compares with 40 for the previous year & 44 for the year before that. All figures are lower than the mean of 52 for the last decade. So not even the clumping caused by the extremely hot dry weather in southern and central Australia, was able to raise the mean flock size by more than one.

A paper on the decline of this species is soon to be published in Australian Field Ornithology so if you are interested to see more of what we have learnt from your collective observations, check this paper out.

This past season the clumping also evidenced itself in Victoria. For three days running Paul Jones had a flock

of 3,000 Needletails around the Mt St Leonard Fire Tower, while the rest of us had almost no birds in the rest of Victoria. It was almost as if many of those that wanted to brave the dryness and heat of Vic decided to follow some experienced birds to known and proven feeding areas, that are worth visiting in drought conditions. The birds were so thick around the tower that it was difficult to estimate their numbers, so Paul took five or six zoom photos and we worked out that with 98 to 104 birds in each zoom photo and 30 fields around the tower that 3,000 birds was a good estimate.

So who reported the most Needletail sightings this season? If you live in a city most of your sightings are going to come while driving, away from home. If you live in the forest, you will see them more often around home. If you live in the forest and deliberately go outside throughout the day to look for Needletails, then you will see lots more. That's where Irene lives and that is what she does. So once again the top recorder for the season was Irene Allan, making 165 sightings. Irene has made an important contribution to understanding the birds' behaviour and numbers. If you reported just one sighting however, that is also an important contribution, as 196 of this season's sightings were lone reports from faithful reporters. That is a significant proportion of the season's sightings. So please keep them coming. Phil Murray reported 78 flocks, Andy Jensen 77, David Charley 58, Paul Jones 56, Len & Jacquie Axen 48, Tim Morris 47, Ross Smith 41, Bas Hensen 40, Julie Sarna 38, Mike Tarburton 33, Peter Alexander 32, Jenny Stiles 29, Kaye Pointer 28, Liz Hawkins 28, Alan Morris 27, and Ben Lawson 26.

Thanks again to all of you who have taken the trouble to send me your sightings. It does not matter whether you sent in 1 report or more than 100, they are all useful in helping determine the WTNT population status and defining other aspects of their behaviour. Remember to check out the Big Picture in the next issue of Australian Field Ornithology. Thank you & happy swift watching in the coming season.

**Mike Tarburton**

tarburton.m@optusnet.com.au

### Conservation Status of Oystercatchers around the World

The 2014 issue of the International Wader Studies (IWS) on the *Conservation Status of Oystercatchers Around the World* is now available online and can be accessed at: <http://www.waderstudygroup.org/pubs/iws20.php>

The chapter on the Australian Pied Oystercatcher can be downloaded as a PDF: Taylor, I.R., Newman, O.M.G., Park, P., Hansen, B., Minton, C.D.T., Harrison, A. & Jessop, R. (2014). Conservation assessment of the Australian Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus longirostris*. *International Wader Studies* 20: 116–128.

## 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 the easiest way is to send an email to [hunterbirding-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.au](mailto:hunterbirding-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.au). You can choose either to receive individual emails or a single daily digest. Alternatively, email me at [scythrops@yahoo.com.au](mailto:scythrops@yahoo.com.au) and I'll sort it out for you – what could be easier?! Some of the Hunterbirding highlights from the last couple of months include:

- Many observations of returning spring migrants, earliest records including:
  - o White-breasted Woodswallow at Belmont Lagoon on 3<sup>rd</sup> August;
  - o Rufous Songlark at Giants Creek on 18<sup>th</sup> August;
  - o Four Red Knot at Stockton Sandspit on 23<sup>rd</sup> August;
  - o A Common Tern at Newcastle Baths on 25<sup>th</sup> August;
  - o Channel-billed Cuckoo at Tighes Hill on 26<sup>th</sup> August;
  - o Two Latham's Snipe on Ash Island on 2<sup>nd</sup> September;
  - o Brush Cuckoo at Weston on 6<sup>th</sup> September;
  - o Sacred Kingfisher at Salamander Bay on 6<sup>th</sup> September;
  - o Rufous Whistler at Weston on 8<sup>th</sup> September;
  - o Rainbow Bee-eater at Bureen Bridge on 9<sup>th</sup> September;
  - o Eastern Koel at Maryville on 9<sup>th</sup> September;
  - o Three Pallid Cuckoos at HEZ on 11<sup>th</sup> September;
  - o White-throated Gerygone at Martins Creek on 11<sup>th</sup> September;
  - o Leaden Flycatcher at Main Creek on 16<sup>th</sup> September
  - o Black-faced Monarch at Blue Gum Hills on 20<sup>th</sup> September;
  - o Rufous Fantail at Sugarloaf SCA on 21<sup>st</sup> September;
  - o Ten Ruddy Turnstone at Newcastle Baths on 21<sup>st</sup> September
  - o Dollarbird at Richmond Vale on 21<sup>st</sup> September;
- Sightings of a Regent Honeyeater at Belmont Lagoon in early August;
- Breeding activity from the resident Australian Pied Oystercatchers at Stockton Sandspit;
- An observation of c.50 Swift Parrots at the Singleton Training Area on 6<sup>th</sup> August;
- On-going feedback from the Striated Pardalote Project;
- The continued presence of Freckled Ducks at Newcastle Wetland Reserve, including a count of 45 birds there on 9<sup>th</sup> August;
- Observations of potential nesting behaviour of Black-necked Storks on Hexham Swamp;
- Discussions on embedding metadata into digital images taken with cameras;
- A sighting of at least four Regent Honeyeaters at Giants Creek on 18<sup>th</sup> August;
- A report of ten Swift Parrots at Charlestown on 20<sup>th</sup> September;
- A sighting of a possible Little Curlew at Stockton Sandspit on 21<sup>st</sup> September;
- Around 12 Painted Honeyeaters at Medhurst Bridge on 22<sup>nd</sup> September;
- Discussion on the breeding behaviour of Cuckoo species;
- A discussion on the importance of Mistletoe to woodland bird populations; and
- Records of Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves at Mungo Brush, including at least four present on 29<sup>th</sup> September.

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



## Hunterbirding - Selection of Observations

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Eastern Curlew	104	9/08/2014	Swan Bay	S. Hamonet
Grey Butcherbird	2+dy	9/08/2014	Swan Bay	S. Hamonet
Australian Owlet-Nightjar	1	9/08/2014	Speers Point	S. Hamonet
Noisy Pitta	1	21/05/2014	Green Point	G. Tong
Pacific Baza	1 juv	12/08/2014	Rankin Park	T. Kendall
Crested Shrike-Tit	1	4/09/2014	Blackbutt Reserve	J. Nicholls
Bassian Thrush	2	8/09/2014	Blackbutt Reserve	J. Nicholls
Double-barred Finch	7	9/09/2014	Galgabba Point	J. Adams
Australian Wood Duck	2+5dy	26/08-7/09/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Rainbow Lorikeet	2+2dy	7/09/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Little Black Cormorant	c.200	17/07/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Rainbow Lorikeet	ny	1/08/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Rainbow Lorikeet	20+10dy	Jul-Aug	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Noisy Miner	nest+egg	9/08/2014	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Pied Currawong	c.50	15/07/2014	Eraring	C. & R. Goodenough

Note: dy = dependent young ny = nest with young

Dan Williams

## Hunterbirding - Snippets on Bird Behaviour

### King Parrot Impersonation

26 September 2014

This morning when the Noisy Miner alarm went up I saw a bird which for a very brief moment I thought was a King Parrot. Something however didn't gel. When I put the binoculars on it I saw a Brown Goshawk, from size probably a male.

It was flying from west to east with flight almost like a King Parrot but with a more buoyant wing beat (tern like?) as though it was toying with the southerly wind. It then went into a shallow, fast Peregrine-like stoop, flattened out and started the typical circling flap-and-glide flight until it gained some height then flew west again in the buoyant-type flight. Turned north and I lost sight of it behind my house.

I have never seen a Brown Goshawk fly this way. I thought perhaps it was a mating display but no other bird was evident. Was it just playing in the southerly wind or has this bird learnt a devious hunting strategy?

Scenario: Lorikeets sitting in a tree.

"It's OK just a King Parrot"

"Yes no danger just a King Parrot"

**OMG !!!!!**

**Tom Kendall**

### Necrophiliac Spinebill?

2 October 2014

Whilst standing at the kitchen sink, listening to and watching all the Spinebills feeding in the Grevilleas outside the window, a particularly loud, persistent call caught my attention. Within a metre of the window was a very amorous male pecking at and attempting to mate with another Spinebill.

The female then dropped to the ground and lay on her side and looked for all intents and purposes, dead. The male had three goes at pecking her around the head and then trying to copulate with her. He then gave up and flew off back to his flower. The female continued to lie there looking dead. I went out a couple of minutes later to check her and she jumped up and flew away strongly.

### Dick Jenkin



Eastern Spinebill bathing - photo by Trevor Murray

## Club Activities October to December 2014

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
<b>OCTOBER 2014</b>			
Wednesday 8 October	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	<b>Speaker: Holly Parsons - <i>Birds in Backyards</i> - recent and future projects</b> <b>Bird of the Evening: Alan Stuart</b>
Saturday 11 October	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30 am Ash Island 10.00 am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 0412 722 644 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago
Sunday 19 October	Field Outing - <i>Bush Haven</i> , Italia Road, Seaham	7.00am Seaham Bird Hide	Lorna Mee 4987 2913 mobile 0499 015 500
Tuesday 21 October	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Tues to Thurs 21 - 23 October	Rufous Scrub-bird Monitoring, Gloucester Tops IBA	Camp at Sharpes Creek	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171
Sat - Sunday 25 - 26 October	Australasian Bird Fair	9am - 6pm Newington Armory, Sydney Olympic Park	Liz Crawford 0412 722 644
Sat - Sunday 25 - 26 October	TWITCHATHON Join a team & help raise money for BirdLife Australia	4.00pm Sat to 4.00pm Sun for a BBQ at Blackbutt, Carnley Ave entrance	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237
<b>NOVEMBER 2014</b>			
Tuesday 4 November	Midweek outing – Ash Island	7.30am Carpark on Ash Island, just over bridge on left hand	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Wednesday 5 November	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Mick Roderick 0421761237 All members welcome
Sunday 9 November	Welcome Shorebirds Community Event	9am - 12noon Stockton Sandspit	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Liz Crawford 0412 722 644
Wednesday 12 November	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	<b>Speaker: Chris Herbert - <i>Surveying Shorebirds in the Gulf of Carpentaria</i></b> <b>Bird of the Evening: Joy Nicholls</b>
Saturday 22 November	Hunter Wader Survey	8.00 am Ash Island 8.30 am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 0412 722 644 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago
Sunday 16 November	Field Outing - Cessnock Travelling Stock Routes	8.00am TBA	John Goswell 4930 7013
Tuesday 18 November	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
<b>DECEMBER 2014</b>			
Tuesday 2 December	Mid-Week Outing – Dudley / Awabakal Christmas lunch afterwards	7.30am Boundary Street, Dudley	Max Blanch 4961 1655
Wednesday 3 December	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Mick Roderick 0421761237 All members welcome
Wednesday 10 December	Xmas Club Night	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	<b>Topic: Members' Night</b> - bring your slides, anecdotes, videos and a plate to share the festive spirit
Tuesday 16 December	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 <b>Please ring to confirm</b>
Saturday 20 December	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30 am Ash Island 8.00 am Other locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Chris Herbert 0412 722 644 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390– Tomago
Sunday 21 December	Latham's Snipe survey at Pambalong NR and other locations	8.00 am Minmi Pub	Liz Crawford 4959 3663 Mobile 0412 722 644