



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia

NEWSLETTER

Issue 5/11
October 2011 - November 2011

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



The fifth edition of HBOC's occasional journal, *The Whistler*, is now ready for distribution. The Editors are keenly awaiting your contributions for the sixth edition.

Please send Newsletter articles direct to the Editor,
Liz Crawford at: chrisliz@internode.on.net
Deadline for the next edition - 30 Nov 2011

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President's Column

Members attending the September Club Night were treated to an entertaining talk given by long-time member Harold Tarrant. Harold, a classical scholar, spoke of the significance of birds in ancient cultures before moving on to talk about his field observations, focussing on his personal interest in falcons. His presentation was timely, not only with respect to his cultural comments but also because Harold and his wife are moving back to England later this month to live. On behalf of HBOC I wish to acknowledge Harold for the contributions he has made over the years, for his field observations and more recently for bringing his editorial skills and individuality to bear on the publication of the last four issues of *The Whistler*. Many thanks, Harold, and very best wishes from HBOC for the future.

A small digression with some notes adapted from my notebook:

Days 1-2: General interest in site by up to six birds.

Day 3: Nest building commences at similar site to Sept 2010; nest located in shrub about 1200mm from ground. Well secured close to main trunk and well supported by side branches, some overhead protection. Very close (<1m) to clothes line; next to path from house to garage, very frequently used by people passing within half metre of nest. Birds often present in the spotted gums immediately behind nest site.

Day 4: Nest building continues, cooperation evident.

Day 5: am - Nest nearly complete, woven assorted materials including very fine twigs, cat's hair!

Days 5-6: No observations.

Day 7: pm - Nest appears to be complete. Nest is bowl-shaped, 120 mm wide, 100mm deep. I was swooped accompanied by loud clicking calls several times when passing close to the nest.

Day 8: am - No eggs. Magpie caught taking nesting material from the nest for its own use. Six nearby birds protesting loudly, swooping nest site—see magpie off, nest repaired; pm - no eggs.

Day 9: Only two eggs found in nest at midday, buff with light chocolate blotches mainly near the base, egg size about 25mm x 20 mm, female beginning to sit but leaving nest frequently, perhaps wary of passing pedestrians, settled late afternoon. Some aggression to passers-by, clicking calls on aborted swoops.

Day 10: Unsettled, frequently absent from nest, feeding in adjacent spotted gums.

Day 11: am - Third egg discovered in empty nest. Female settled later in the day.

Day 12: Settled into a U-shaped posture, head up tail up; almost always east (head)-west (tail)

direction. Eyes level with rim of the nest.

Days 13 - 20: (present). Female frequently leaves nest to feed, direct flight path to either of two trees and return; other birds not obviously present but appear if there is any kind of disturbance in the area. Sitting bird seems to have habituated to frequent passers-by as it takes no notice. Sitting bird swoops only if the intruder is on the direct flight path to food source. Frequently absent from nest when sun warms nest site. I must try to establish sitting/absent time especially with respect to temperature/weather.

Species? What do you think? The outcome of this breeding attempt will be notified.

This column started with a mention of the influence of birds on ancient classical cultures but the recent passing of Steve Jobs prompted the thought that perhaps these days it is modern cultural development that is the driving influence on the future of the birds and potentially the way in which we go birding. The accessibility of portable technological devices and the comprehensive and versatile nature of the applications are but one example of this trend. There is now available an e- Guide to Australian birds which is an example of an “app” allowing the transition from a heavy, printed book to a light, pocket-sized digital device. Its use is convenient, straightforward, and to the technologically challenged even magical. The listings are comprehensive and the ability for birders to identify and compare chosen species, check geographical range, keep track of lists and listen to the calls of each species via one neat hand-held device may be just the beginning of the development of further technological aids for the birder. In perspective, these applications remain aids to the enjoyment of the birding experience and not act as an armchair substitute for the real experience. In my “book” the magic of the dawn chorus prevails.

Good Birding!

Paul Baird

New Members

The Club extends a warm welcome to:

David Bertram of Hawks Nest

We hope to meet you at Club outings and meetings

Club Activity Reports

Blackbutt Reserve Walk

Tuesday 4 October 2011

It was a dark and bleak morn with portent of rain..... but this did not deter 19 keen HBOC members from the October Tuesday walk. Clad in their usual sartorial elegance of anoraks and daggy hats, they set off from the Mahogany Drive carpark, past the Lily Pond and Echidna Creek to the Bowerbird Creek Track. Despite the sometimes muddy conditions and grey skies, 50 species were seen or heard en route. One of the highlights was a group of Scarlet Honeyeaters high in the trees directly above us, inducing several cases of birder's neck. There were good views of a Grey Goshawk. A Channel-billed Cuckoo being chased by a Pied Currawong was one of several Channel-bills seen and heard. Other cuckoos on the day were Shining Bronze and Fantailed. Brown Cuckoo-Doves, which are quite common in that area, were heard but not seen and we dipped on the Powerful Owl, which was recently reported to have dependent young. A beautifully coloured Sacred Kingfisher was seen on the way in and out of the Bowerbird Track.

A side trip into Paddy and Carol's garden to view their resident Brush Turkey on its mound and their resident Satin Bowerbird guarding its bower gave good photo opportunities. The total mess the Brush Turkey had made of the driveway raised a few laughs.

The Lily Pond, which rarely has visible birds, turned up three species of duck which were not inclined to move away. Scaly-breasted and Rainbow Lorikeets, King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas were recorded, with many in nesting hollows or carrying food. Of course, those ubiquitous Blackbutt birds, the screeching Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were making their presence heard. Also in that area were two other summer migrants: Dollarbird and Black-faced Monarchs.

Most of the group expressed surprise at the diversity to be found on the walk. Few members had visited that part of Blackbutt Reserve before and those that had, had not been there for several years and were surprised at how the area had changed from a once rather open habitat to quite dense rainforest and bush.

After morning tea (attended by opportunistic Magpies, Laughing Kookaburras, Noisy Miners and Grey Butcherbirds), most of the group did a second short walk into the old Kotara Quarry. This is a much more open habitat with lots of bushes and weeds which small birds love. Although many birds were heard, few were seen owing to the later time of day. The proximity of a major highway and the main Newcastle / Sydney railway is no

deterrent to the diversity of mostly small bird species found in this place.

Joy Nicholls

Bird Call Workshop

13-14 August 2011

Fourteen enthusiastic Club Members attended Fred van Gessel's Bird Call Workshop. The first half of the workshop was held at the Hunter Wetlands Centre where Fred discussed the physiology of bird calls and the theory behind bird call identification. Fred gave an overview of: how birds produce sound; the types of equipment available to record, listen to and broadcast bird calls; the use of sonograms for identifying the calls of different species and even individuals of the same species; and, tested participants' knowledge by playing a range of calls from birds found in the Hunter Region.

The first half day gave participants a solid background on how to tune our ears into the different birds calling around us and an awareness of the many different calls which may be made by the same species or individual bird.

On the following Sunday morning, participants ventured into the beautiful forests and heathlands of Awabakal Nature Reserve, Dudley, to put our listening skills into practice. Fred led the walk and participants familiarised themselves with the calls of many of our local forest and heath species such as Grey Fantail, Eastern Yellow Robin, Brown Thornbill, Eastern Whipbird, Brown Gerygone, White-browed Scrubwren, Common Bronzewing, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Red and Little Wattlebirds, Grey Shrike-thrush and Golden Whistler. Interesting birds sighted included a Spangled Drongo and an adult White-bellied Sea-Eagle carrying a sizeable catch in its talons over the bluff.

HBOC thanks Fred for offering his time at no cost to the Club to run the workshop. Fred's experience as a wildlife sound recordist extends over 40 years. He has published widely in various ornithological journals and magazines and has also published various CDs on bird vocalisations. The participants were very fortunate to share some time with Fred, further improving our birdwatching skills. To read more about Fred and the many CDs he has available for purchase, go to:

<http://www.professionalwildlifesounds.com.au>

Kristy Peters

Club Activity Reports cont.

Seal Rocks Spring Camp

19 – 21 September 2011



Good company, good weather and good birding. It doesn't get much better than that. Thirty-one members of the HBOC Tuesday Group gathered at Seal Rocks from 19 to 21 September to check out the local avifauna and they weren't disappointed.



Apart from Seal Rocks itself we explored Yagon campsite, Myall Lakes National Park; Sugar Creek Picnic Site, Wallingat National Park; Smith Lakes town site; Cellito Beach and Naraine. The final tally revealed 99 bird species seen and a further 8 heard for a grand total of 107 species.

For those who haven't been there, the area is well worth a visit. The scenery is stunning, and there are lots of non-taxing walking opportunities through habitats that are sufficiently diverse to attract a good variety of bird species. Most members stayed at the Seal Rocks Campground, which overlooks the beach, a good vantage point for watching whales and dolphins and close enough to the water for at least one member to do some early morning fishing.

I think it's safe to say that Brown Gerygones and Golden Whistlers are definitely not endangered in the region. In fact, most of the bush birds were reasonably abundant and singing with spring-time gusto.



Active nests were spotted in most locations, which is always a promising sign. There were also a few special birds such as Speckled Warbler, Black-faced and Spectacled Monarchs, several Green Catbirds, a Reef Egret and a very flashy Regent Bowerbird.

While White-bellied Sea-Eagles and Whistling Kites cruised overhead, gulls, terns, gannets and shearwaters could be seen feeding offshore or roosting on the rocks. The area behind the lighthouse residence was great for watching seabirds.

As always, "Bird-Call" was a happy event, and a good chance to catch up with friends and compare notes on the daily sightings.

Lois Wooding

EMAIL Addresses - Have you changed yours lately? Please advise the Membership Secretary, Ian Martin ian.martin@exemail.com.au whenever your address changes to ensure that you can still receive email alerts from the Club.

Club Activity Reports cont.

Our First Rufous Scrub-bird Survey

20-22 September 2011

With only a slim chance of seeing a Rufous Scrub-bird (RSB), we joined Alan's team at Gloucester Tops for the RSB field survey. Mike's and Alan's meticulous planning gave us a great opportunity to learn about calls and habitat of this elusive character from experienced birders. We began with a training session on the range of calls to expect, then visited a known site, and bingo! the bird was calling.

As we returned to camp, Paul alerted us to a fallen tree which had blocked the track with a car stranded on the other side. The couple went for a bush walk and came back to find a very large tree across the track.

While Ann contacted the Rangers, who had finished work for the day, Peter deployed his array of gadgets to begin the clearing. All the energetic blokes began to chip away with saws and axes and the tree was soon prepared for winching off the track.

Then the National Parks "cavalry" arrived with chainsaws, cut up the main trunk and cleared the track for the very grateful car owners.

On Wednesday the survey began with pairs of observers walking each set of transects, observing all the birds and listening for RSBs, hoping for a glimpse of the subject. Lorna and I were lucky to have a known site which had yielded 5 RSBs last year and as we returned along the last transect a bird stepped out in front of us, sat briefly on the track then disappeared into the bracken again. We couldn't believe our luck! It just goes to prove the old adage – you have to be out there to get your bird.

These surveys by HBOC members are great experience for beginners, add to the scientific knowledge of threatened species and help with protection of birds into the future. We would like to encourage all birders to be involved.

Toni Marsh and Peter Struik



Membership Fees for 2012

Membership fees for 2012 are \$30 Single, \$30 Family, \$5 Junior (under 16 years), and are now being accepted by the Treasurer. Membership forms can be obtained at Club Night or by downloading from the website: www.hboc.org.au

Please pay at Club Night, or mail a cheque or money order to HBOC, PO Box 24, New Lambton NSW 2304.

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

Club Activity Reports cont.

Rufous Scrub-bird Surveying 20-22 September 2011

The Barrington Tops & Gloucester Tops Important Bird Area (IBA) is one of five IBAs for the Rufous Scrub-bird (RSB). Last year, we started to survey for RSBs in the Gloucester Tops which historically was known to be the local stronghold for this cryptic species. An enthusiastic team of people made two 3-day visits in September and October 2010 plus a few additional day trips. From that work over about four months, we were able to develop an inventory of territories – these being defined then as sites where calling RSBs were present at intervals >4 weeks. We found 22 territories in 2010 plus several other sites which had calling birds on at least one visit.

So it was with great excitement that we prepared for the 2011 surveys. And what a success we had in the September visit to Gloucester Tops! Things could hardly have gone better for the keen team of 12 surveyors. The weather was ideal (sunny, mild, and almost no wind while the surveys were underway; although there were some earlier dramas when strong winds brought down some trees across the main road through the National Park). The Gloucester River was fairly low, so those people who crossed it to survey the Glowang and Mount Nelson Tracks had no difficulty in the crossing. And the Scrub-birds, mostly, were very obliging. So obliging, in fact, that 7 of the 12 surveyors were fortunate enough to have a sighting of a Scrub-bird at some point in their survey work! Put this down to a combination of time-in-field, improved knowledge of RSB behaviour, and an element of luck perhaps as well.

Our definition now of what constitutes a confirmed territory is convincing call evidence or sightings from within the same small area in both the 2010 and 2011 breeding season. A preliminary evaluation of the latest results indicates 21 confirmed RSB Territories on that basis, with >85% continued occupancy of territories from the 2010 season. There are also several territories which involved multiple records in 2010, but where the birds are yet to be recorded in 2011. Hence by the end of the 2011 surveys the number of confirmed territories quite possibly will have increased.

Surveying all birds during the surveys is an important aspect of our work. The number of species found at high altitude (>1100m) is limited, but 41 species were recorded. Highlights included a large increase in New Holland Honeyeaters compared with 2010 and the first high-altitude records of the Paradise Riflebird. Flame Robins were noticeably absent compared with last year. Will they be present in October?

The next surveys are over 18-20 October 2011. We do not guarantee a sighting but we do guarantee an interesting time and that you will learn a lot about Rufous Scrub-birds.

Alan Stuart and Mike Newman

Bluegum Hills Regional Park Tuesday 6th September 2011

Twenty-seven members gathered on a beautiful spring morning to see what we could see at Bluegum Hills Regional Park near Minmi. Some members had not been there before and were impressed with the area, including the adventure park. We set off across the park and before long sighted our first male Regent Bowerbird in the distance. Later on another male and a female were seen. We also managed to get sightings of Satin Bowerbirds. Scarlet Honeyeaters were calling from the tops of the trees and with perseverance we managed to get them in our binoculars. Golden Whistlers were proving equally elusive but some keen spotters soon found them. However we did not manage to see the Whipbirds we heard. After morning tea we walked down the new heritage trail that has been constructed past old mining relics and soon saw two Fan-tailed Cuckoos that had been heard earlier. During morning tea we had seen two Grey Goshawks circling above and one of the group pointed out to us the nest they had occupied last year, but there was no sign of them using it this year. A total of 46 species seen and another 5 heard.

Margaret Stewart



Grey Goshawk and Regent Honeyeater - Chris Herbert

Featured Birdwatching Site - the Ocean

2011 Pelagics.....so far

The 2011 Hunter pelagic season has seen a lot of great birds with a probable new species for the Hunter Region. But alas we have also seen a lot of heartache.

The heartache comes in the form of a record number of cancelled Port Stephens pelagics. So far this year eleven pelagic trips have been organised from Port Stephens; out of these only four trips have gone ahead with a total of seven trips cancelled due to inclement weather.

The weather plays a huge part in the success of pelagics. A lot of organising goes into the preparation of these trips and there's nothing more disappointing for Mick, myself or Ray (the skipper) when we have to cancel. We are often ruled by the weather and Ray who has many 'seafaring years' behind him has to make a call on safety.

Successful trips were made during January, March (2) and April. Highlights from these trips included Gould's Petrel, Sooty Terns, Long-tailed Jaegers, Sooty Shearwaters, Streaked Shearwater, Black Petrel and large numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrels.

The biggest pelagic sighting for the year was a Great Shearwater, seen off Swansea during April. Unfortunately a few of the March/April pelagics off Port Stephens were cancelled which coincided with an unusual influx of Great Shearwaters around the southern waters of Australia. On the back of these 'dips' Alan Richardson, Mick and myself headed outside Swansea in my 'tinnie' and were rewarded with a Great Shearwater right next to the boat! This is a new species for the Hunter Region and was one of my most exciting birding 'moments' in recent memory. There was much rejoicing!



Great Shearwater - Steve Roderick

Large numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrels were also seen off Swansea. Although usually thought to be a 'shelf' species, we saw around 100 birds within 10 miles from shore. I have also had these storm-petrels within 3 miles from Stockton Beach.

The winter pelagic scene has seen many 'cold water' species along the east coast. This year, low water temps all the way to Southport Qld have produced species such as Northern Royal Albatross, Common Diving-Petrel, Grey-backed Storm-Petrel, possible Soft-plumaged Petrel, large numbers of Prions sp. including Fairy, Antarctic, Salvin's and Slender-billed.....and a possible New Zealand Storm-Petrel!

All these species were seen from Southport, Sydney and Wollongong trips, hence our frustration having our trips cancelled!

This winter has also seen a lot of 'big' seas and wild weather including strong winds which resulted in a few unusual records, such as a Prion sp. found at Medowie and a Shy Albatross found at Tomago! Who knows where they could turn up!

The remaining Port Stephens trips for the year are fully booked out, mainly due to hungry birders from cancelled trips. The anticipation of the October trips is always high as we try to coincide with the southern migration of many pelagic species (praying for good weather).

Pelagic trips are a real lucky dip and it's this 'unknown' that keeps many people hooked. There is also a chance that something rare or unusual may turn up.....even a NZ Storm-Petrel!

2012 trips are in the planning.....stay tuned for the dates!

Steve Roderick



Providence Petrel - Phil Hansbro

Notes from Club Nights

Native Animal Trust Fund

The Guest Speaker for July was Jill Dean from the Native Animal Trust Fund (NATF). While the NATF carers tend to all native wildlife: mammals, reptiles, bats and birds, of particular interest to HBOC members of course, were birds.

Over 5,000 birds a year are taken into care locally and they include some surprising species. Jill related how once she was called to a retirement home to collect an albatross in the back yard. “Oh yeah!” was her secret thought, “probably another dove”. On arrival at the address she was astonished to see a Shy Albatross. “My God! It’s an albatross!” The retirement home contact replied: “We told you it was an albatross!”

Jill mostly specializes in injured raptors and she gave an impressive list of the species that have been in her care. Every raptor species that is found in the Hunter Region, and some that are not usually found here, have, at some time, come into Jill’s care. Aviaries have to be extra large for raptors and NATF carers are neither paid nor receive a grant. So Jill built her own cages and aviaries with the help of her son.

All seabirds that come into care are sent to Taronga Park Zoo for specialist care. Other carers specialize in waders, passerines, pelicans, bats, other mammals or reptiles, with some overlap and variation.

In spring and summer many nestlings come into care when they fall from nests. All birds are released back at the spot where they were found. All migratory birds not released by the time of migration, must be euthanased.

Channel-billed Cuckoos, Koels, Dollarbirds, exotic fruit-doves, are only some of the species that come into care. They have even had Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots.

Badly injured birds and animals are treated by vets. Medications are often expensive and are paid for by the carers.

HBOC considers that the carers do a wonderful job in their work with injured birds. The HBOC Committee has decided that a donation of \$500 to NATF for their ongoing work is well deserved.

Thank you Jill Dean for a wonderful presentation.



Footnote: An injured Painted Button-quail found at the HBOC Easter Camp in the Capertee Valley was handed over to a wildlife carer in the area. It has since been released, hale and hearty, back at the dam above April Mills’ house where it was originally found. It dived straight back into the grass and went to look for its family.

Joy Nicholls

Rehabilitating Kooragang Dykes

At the September meeting, Jo Erskine, Hunter Wetlands National Park Ranger, gave an interesting presentation on the process undertaken by NPWS to begin rehabilitating Kooragang Dykes.

Kooragang Dykes is a 1.5 kilometre long sea-wall constructed in the 1960s along the northeastern side of Kooragang Island, just upstream of Stockton Bridge. Slag from BHP’s blast furnaces was dumped by trucks and progressively extended to form a road along which more trucks dumped more slag until the sea-wall reached the northern end of the embayment. The long-term plan was to fill in the area behind the sea-wall, reclaiming the tidal mudflats and wetlands for industrial use. Fortunately, the planned reclamation did not proceed and instead, the area of tidal waters behind the sea-wall and the sea-wall itself, as well as part of the North Arm of the Hunter River upstream of Stockton Bridge and Fullerton Cove were included in Kooragang Nature Reserve, gazetted as a conservation area in 1984. The area is now part of the Hunter Wetlands National Park.

For many years, Kooragang Dykes has been, and still is, the most important roost site for thousands of migratory and endemic shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary. Stockton Sandspit, just across the Hunter River from the Dykes, is also a very important roost site for shorebirds – in fact the birds need both sites to provide alternative roosts

Notes from Club Nights cont.

when they are disturbed by fishermen, bait-gatherers or people out exploring.

The intertidal areas behind the dykes are important foraging sites for shorebirds. Tidal flow into these areas is restricted by narrow breaches through the dykes, resulting in a lag in tide height between the river and the ponds behind the dykes. Consequently, shorebirds are able to forage on exposed mudflats behind the dykes for an hour or so after their foraging areas in Fullerton Cove have been covered by the rising tide.

However, ongoing erosion of the dykes has resulted in undercutting and destabilization, leading to numerous shallow breaches and expansion of two major breaches. Without remedial action to reinforce the dykes, fill in the shallow breaches and stabilize the major breaches, it is feared that the dykes will rapidly erode and cease to provide roost sites or to protect the foraging areas behind the dykes. Potential future sea-level rise will only exacerbate the problem.

In 2010, National Parks and Wildlife Service explored options for remedial action and finally implemented the initial stage of remediation in winter 2011. Using trucks to access the northern end of the dykes, rip rap and coarse aggregate were dumped along the dyke, filling the shallow breaches of the northernmost section and armouring the sides of the dyke to provide stability for the trucks as well as protecting the dykes from further erosion. The dyke surface was raised some 40cm above its existing height to offset future sea-level rise. The rock used was not as dark as the slag and we wondered how the birds would react to the lighter-coloured material.

Spring brought returning migratory shorebirds and to our delight, Pacific Golden Plovers, Red Knots, Bar-tailed Godwits and Curlew Sandpipers have roosted happily on the rehabilitated dyke section – the remediation is successful!



Pacific Golden Plovers roosting on rehabilitated Dykes - Chris Herbert

Powerful Owl Project

At the August Club Night, Rod Kavanagh talked about the Powerful Owl Project recently commenced in Sydney, which aims to locate all the breeding pairs of Powerful Owls in the Sydney region, identify where their nest locations are and record the outcome of each nesting attempt at the end of the breeding season. This information will identify the critical roosting and breeding requirements of the owls and the locations of important areas requiring protection.

Although the survey is centred on Sydney at this stage, the survey methodology could be applied to the Hunter Region too so that critical habitat for these impressive owls is better documented and can therefore be better protected. Information on the Sydney Powerful Owl Project is provided on the Birds in Backyards website: <http://birdsinyourbackyards.net/surveys/powerful-owl.cfm> Please email Holly Parsons and Rod Kavanagh at birdsinyourbackyards@birdsaustralia.com.au with details of your sighting as well as HBOC's Records Officer, Sue Hamonet on ninox@exemail.com.au

There are recommended protocols for surveying Powerful Owls, particularly during the nesting season from May to August, when disturbance at the nest site must be avoided otherwise the owls may abandon their nesting attempt. If you suspect that an owl is roosting in a particular area, search during daylight hours for indications such as whitewash, greyish pellets or calling.

Powerful Owls breed in hollows in very large, very old trees (>150 years old). Look for species like Lilly Pillies, Coachwoods, Turpentines and Black She-oaks. The tree will have a diameter at chest height of at least 80cm. The hollow itself will be usually vertical and in the trunk of the tree. It will be at least 0.5m deep.

The female doesn't leave the hollow until at least a month after the chicks hatch. It is the male's role to supply food to the female and the young during that time. The male will keep an eye on the hollow from trees nearby and may swoop if he feels threatened. Always use caution around nest hollows and keep your distance. Young birds remain with the parents for several months after fledging (in August/September) and may stay within their parents' territory for several months or more.

During May to September, minimise the amount of time spent near nest trees during darkness, for your safety and to reduce the chance of disturbance and possible abandonment; do not use lights or flash photography

Notes from Club Nights cont.

near nests; do not alert the male to your presence near a nest site and keep a minimum distance of 30m from the nest hollow. Males can swoop if they feel threatened.



Owl-call playback can be used to detect Powerful Owls outside the breeding season, from October to April. Powerful Owls generally choose rainforest trees for roosting and sit high up on horizontal branches; Coachwood is favoured but they also use Turpentines, Lilly Pillys, Pittosporums and Allocasuarinas. Nest hollows have been found in Mountain Grey Gum, Red Bloodwood, Sydney Blue Gum and Blackbutt. Often hollows have a large pronounced lip on the edge.

Powerful Owls prey on tree-dwelling animals and birds, with Common Ringtails comprising more than 50% of their diet. They also take Greater Gliders (ripping out the stomach full of eucalyptus leaves to reduce the weight of the prey) and Grey-headed Flying Fox. They have even been recorded taking Koalas.

Money raised by this year's Twitchathon will be used to fund a Project Officer to manage the Sydney Region's Powerful Owl Project.

Other interesting snippets from Rod's talk included:

Six of the seven owl species in Australia require large hollows for nesting;

Powerful Owls generally nest in May/June; Barking Owls in late August; and Southern Boobooks in October;

20 pairs of Barking Owls in Pilliga State Forest have been intensively studied; there are very few records of Barking Owls around the Sydney area and on the Central Coast;

Lots of records of Sooty Owls in rainforests around Gosford;

Masked Owls are sparse around Sydney - more common in Lake Macquarie LGA;

The most reliable feature to distinguish Masked Owls from Barn Owls is the number of bars on the leading feather on the inside of the wing: <5 bars for Barn Owl and >5 bars for Masked Owl;

Grass Owls have rufous colour underneath and trill like crickets. Their southernmost breeding location in New South Wales is in the Lower Hunter, in the vicinity of the Hunter River.

Advertisements

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White-necked Herons

My trip into outback Queensland this year (August & September 2011) has shown a large increase in White-necked Herons in the inland river systems of the Diamantina and Coopers Creek. Nankeen Night-Herons also appear to have bred up successfully with large numbers of juvenile birds covering the banks of these rivers, especially in the Diamantina system.

While photographing along the banks of Coopers Creek, I noticed several White-necked Herons in the air, flying up and down a large waterhole section of the creek. Believing this to be a great photo opportunity, I set up my camera and started photographing. I soon learnt that these herons were fishing, and I was about to learn several things about White-necked Herons that I never knew. The birds would fly slowly up the creek in a northerly direction towards the sun as this appeared to allow them to look into the water and see the fish. To me the water was a dirty colour and how they could see anything I do not know. After reaching a point along the waterhole they would turn around and fly back to restart their searching flight again. I had never known that these birds could hover over a spot but they would do this, rising and falling over the same point once prey had been found. The heron would then dive towards the water or drop straight down catching up the fish in its bill and heading to the shore to land and eat it. They never ate fish on the wing. Also, when they dived down their body never entered the water - their head would dive in and their legs would enter the water but the body remained in the air. They were very graceful to watch and while I remained on the top bank of the river I was ignored and the fishing continued.



I returned to the same spot again that afternoon but there were fewer birds fishing. Rather than flying along above the water, the birds tended to sit on a branch on the bank or in a tree and when fish appeared near the surface of the water, the White-necked Herons would fly down to catch their prey. There were also around a dozen birds fishing from the road bridge over Coopers Creek. I was amazed by their success rate in taking fish

from the water. Previously I had only noticed these birds fishing while standing in the water or on the bank and had never ever seen them catch a fish. Today they were catching them from the air above the water in numbers.

The late afternoon heat had reached around 31 degrees C. and I was surprised to see another habit of these birds. They would stand on a branch and fold their wings out sideways putting the trailing feathers in front of their body. This reminded me of the way a cobra snake flattens out its neck, or a man holds his coat open with outstretched arms. It is a strange sight to see. They would also open up their feathers along their neck and upper body to let any breeze in or heat out, panting at the same time.



With so many birds, territorial disputes were common. The neck feathers would be fluffed up and protrude outwards and the wings raised as opponents faced off for the challenge. These short conflicts only lasted a few seconds before one bird would surrender its spot and move on.

It was an interesting day on the banks of Coopers Creek and I learnt a lot about White-necked Herons. It is surprising what we can learn if we just stop and observe. Isn't Nature GREAT? Help preserve it for our Children and Grandchildren.

Alwyn Simple

Hunterbirding

Hunterbirding is an email group set up by HBOC that is run through the Yahoo Groups. It is a great way to keep in touch with the latest goings-on in Hunter Region birding. Members are able to report sightings, post questions to the group and get involved with group discussions on bird-related issues. If you are interested in joining the group then please visit the HBOC website for details on how to sign up: <http://www.hboc.org.au/index.cfm?menukey=27>. You can choose either to receive individual emails or a single daily digest. Alternatively, email me at scythrops@yahoo.com.au and I'll sort it out for you – what could be easier?! The following article highlights some of the reports and discussions that have happened on hunterbirding within the last two months.

August

The regular August Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot survey was publicised through hunterbirding and as for previous surveys a number of respondents volunteered their services. Later in the month around 100 Swift Parrots were reported at Dora Creek and were enjoyed by several hunterbirders. Also, a sighting of Emu in the Lower Hunter sparked some discussion as to the status of this species in this area. A few people had observed them in locations across the Lower Hunter, but it seems difficult to know whether they are wild birds or of captive origin.

A request for first arrival sightings of Latham's Snipe in the Hunter was met by a number of replies. The responses suggested that they are typically observed in NSW from around 14th August. They seem to have been a little later arriving this year, with the earliest known sighting in the region being at Seaham on 21 August 2011. This date was similar to other first arrival sightings across the State. Finally, a link was shared by one hunterbirder to a website of the Internet Bird Collection, which is a project attempting to create an online library of bird photos, videos and sound recordings for every species in the world! A challenging but interesting project, it currently has almost 9,000 species represented.

September

A feature of this month's discussions was the arrival of spring migrants. As species such as Channel-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Koel, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird, Rufous Whistler and White-throated Gerygone began

to make their presence known the hunterbirders awoke from their winter hibernation to share their experiences. It gives pleasure to many of us to hear these birds returning to the region and many of them form the quintessential sounds of spring and summer. Happy days! Other birds returning to the region – not with the change of season, but after a prolonged absence following the inland rains – were White-necked Heron and Yellow-billed Spoonbill. Welcome back, we missed you!

A sighting of a juvenile Pied Oystercatcher in Port Stephens was reported to the group. It sported a yellow flag on its left leg, which generated a bit of discussion. The yellow flag in question is part of a 'banding' scheme, which uniquely identifies individual birds – enabling an understanding of their movements to be gained when sightings are reported. With this particular species it seems they are typically banded with a yellow alphanumeric flag. Reading the information on the flag was unfortunately not possible in this instance due to the distance at which the bird was observed. Many other shorebird species are also banded with colour-coded leg bands where different combinations of colours on each leg can identify the location at which the bird was banded. If you are ever fortunate enough to observe a colour-banded shorebird then it is good practice to record the colour arrangement and any other visible information and to report the sighting to the Australasian Wader Studies Group (<http://awsg.org.au/reportform.php>), to assist those studying these birds.

Whilst on the subject of waders, a fun posting to the group contained photos of birds taken at Stockton Sandspit. The hunterbirders were invited to help identify a few species – Swamp Harrier, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit and Red-necked Stint. Many thanks to the supplier of the photos and those that responded with their suggestions, as I'm sure it was an informative and enjoyable exercise for many readers. One photo contained a mass of Red-necked Avocets in flight, much akin to a "Where's Wally?" picture. Apparently there were at least three non-Avocets in the photo, but I've not persevered to find them – it hurt my eyes too much!

Dan Williams

Ash Island Bridge Update

Ash Island Bridge is still not trafficable - the logs have been laid at the right height across the creek by Hunter Water Corporation's contractor but due to the increased height of the bridge, the road approaches require significant stabilisation works, to be undertaken by National Parks. Hunter Water will be working with National Parks to provide a satisfactory solution for the remaining works but as yet there is no estimated completion date.



Where have the Pallid Cuckoos gone?

The calls of the Pallid Cuckoo used to be a pleasant and familiar confirmation that spring had arrived in the Hunter. However, in a recent discussion several of us concluded that it is a call we seldom hear these days. Examination of the Birds Australia (BA) Atlas records for the period 1998 to 2010 supports the anecdotal view that Pallid Cuckoos have declined in the Hunter Region.

In the diagram it can be seen that between 1998 and 2005 the Pallid Cuckoo became increasingly scarce. Records increased slightly between 2007 and 2009, but remained well below the levels of a decade earlier when this species was a familiar aspect of the Hunter's landscape. Then surprisingly in 2010, a high rainfall year, which might be expected to favour both the Pallid Cuckoo and its host species, records plummeted to a 13-year low.

tailed Cuckoo is primarily a bird of woodland and forest. Between 1998 and 2006 the frequency of observations (reporting rate) of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo fell, but this trend subsequently reversed with observations increasing from 2007 to 2010.

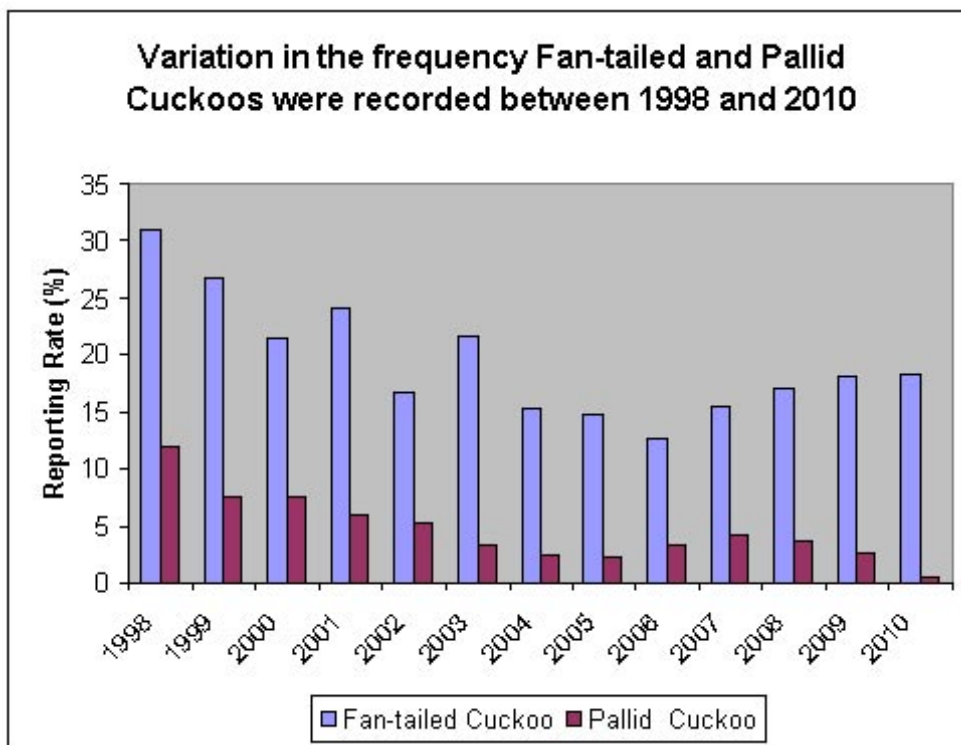
The results for the two types of cuckoo are sufficiently different, particularly in 2010, to dispel any concerns that the apparent decline in the Pallid Cuckoo is almost entirely due to changes in Atlas effort, although this may have had some impact on the extent of the decline.

Differences in rainfall over the last decade provide an obvious explanation for the variation in Fan-tailed Cuckoo observations, with the decline between 1998 and 2006 primarily attributed to a protracted dry period between 2001 and 2006. A return to higher rainfall, particularly in 2010 would have favoured this species,

which is often recorded in the wetter forest of the Hunter.

The trends for the Pallid Cuckoo were generally similar to the Fan-tailed Cuckoo until 2010, although the extent of recovery was less after the drought first broke in 2007. However, the glaring difference was in 2010 when observations of the Pallid Cuckoo were at a 13-year low with just four records submitted, despite the high rainfall which would have been expected to provide excellent conditions. An explanation is that conditions for the Pallid Cuckoo were even better inland than in the Hunter. As

Variation in the frequency Fan-tailed and Pallid Cuckoos were recorded between 1998 and 2010



When suggesting that a bird has declined it is important to ensure that the effect is real and not a consequence of the way the supporting information has been collected. For instance we know that there have been changes in the people contributing to the Atlas and some have modified their data collection activities. Have these changes been sufficient to explain the apparent decline in the Pallid Cuckoo? To address this possibility I compared the Pallid and Fan-tailed Cuckoo results which are also shown.

The Fan-tailed Cuckoo is the most frequently recorded cuckoo species in the Hunter Region but unlike the Pallid Cuckoo, which favours open country, the Fan-

pointed out to me by Harold Tarrant, it could be that the parasitic Pallid Cuckoo's breeding host has found greener pastures elsewhere and this has lured the cuckoo away from the Hunter Region. However, this seems improbable as, unlike some other cuckoo species, the Pallid Cuckoo is catholic in its selection of hosts, even though it favours honeyeaters and their cup-shaped nests. There are notable exceptions to this type of host, such as the Pallid Cuckoo chick found in the tunnel of a Rainbow Bee-eater's nest! As it approached full size the chick had to move to an external ledge to avoid getting stuck, and no doubt was forced to survive cold nights un-brooded as a consequence of its obesity.

Pallid Cuckoos cont.

Of the Hunter Region's other cuckoos the Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, which favors open drier country, showed very similar trends to the Pallid Cuckoo with just five records for 2010, well below its 13-year average. Again the conclusion is that this is predominantly an inland species when conditions are favourable.

The Shining Bronze-Cuckoo and Brush Cuckoo both prefer forests and not surprisingly the conditions in 2010 suited them, with observation rates during the year similar to recent levels. Similarly, those two raucous characters, the Eastern Koel and the Channel-billed Cuckoo, found 2010 conditions to their liking. All four of these species showed trends similar to the Fan-tailed Cuckoo.

So will calls of the Pallid Cuckoo once more herald the advent of the 2011 spring in the Hunter Region? It's pretty wet right now and I would put my money on Pallid and Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoos being hard to find come Twitchathon time.

When you receive the 2010 Annual Bird Report you will find the BA Atlas statistics provide numerous other examples of species which were abnormally scarce in the Hunter Region during 2010, particularly waterbirds.

This article is only possible thanks to all those who contribute to the BA Atlas, Andrew Silcocks and BA for making the data available and Ian Martin for transforming it into a user-friendly form. We need HBOC members to continue to support the Atlas Project so that we can improve our understanding of the birds of the Hunter Region. New contributors to the Atlas Project are most welcome. Contact Ann Lindsey for an introductory kit (ph 4951 2008 or email: ann.lindsey@bigpond.com)

Mike Newman

BOOK REVIEW: *Alex and Me*

If you manage to get a bit of quiet time and are looking for a good book to read then *Alex and Me* is certainly worth the while. Written by Dr Irene Pepperberg, the book is a reflection of her journey to show the world that the term 'bird brain' is grossly mistaken. The star of the book is Alex, an African Grey Parrot with whom most of you would be familiar. The life of Alex became well documented when this bird was able to show that he understood over 100 words, and could tell shapes, colours and numbers. In fact Alex proved he had the intelligence of about a 5-year-old human child. The book takes you back before the media frenzy when one young scientist decided to delve into the new and controversial field of animal behaviour and her childhood love of birds led

Book Reviews cont.

her to an obvious choice. Not only does the book show the development of Alex but also the struggles and hardships of Dr Pepperberg as she attempts to secure funding and space to continue her ground-breaking work that was not easily accepted by the wider scientific community.

The book flows well and draws you in as you discover just how much of a battle it was to get Alex's cognitive abilities accepted and how one scientist with no formal training was able to teach human concepts to a non-primate animal. Along the way you discover the deep bond that was formed between Alex and Irene and the relationships that Alex developed with others in the research team. Alex certainly had a personality (like most animals) and the ability to communicate with his researchers allowed for some crafty expressions of that personality.

I found the book to be an inspiring (although sad at times) narrative that was hard to put down and I strongly recommend it to you if you have an interest in animal behaviour.

Hayley Boyce

BOOK REVIEW: *Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia*

Second Edition. Richard Thomas, Sarah Thomas, David Andrew and Alan MacBride (paperback \$49.95)

Pick up this book and you start planning and plotting even if you were only having a flick! An updated edition of the 'Thomas and Thomas' of 1994, it is arranged in three sections. The first is a locality guide, starting in Victoria, going state by state (anti-clockwise) and then the territories, which gives important destinations listing key species and with an overview of what you might hope to find at the sites. The second part is a bird-finder guide, arranged taxonomically, so you can look up your target species and learn the likeliest places to see them. The last section contains four appendices listing: Vagrants and Accidentals; Introduced Birds; a glossary of terms; and a directory of useful information and contacts. In the middle there is a collection of nice colour photographs, and the occasional black and white photograph scattered throughout, but this is a book you buy for the text, not the illustrations. There are basic maps, but not for every location; the directions for finding specific sites are contained within the text and are clear and concise. The style is easy to read, informative and conversational in tone. All in all, this could easily become an indispensable companion for any trip you plan, and an excellent guide as and when you get to your intended destination!

Lindy Jones

Events

Birds Australia Australasian Bittern Survey - Sunday 16 October 2011

Now is the time to check out your local wetlands for our newest nationally threatened species, the Australasian Bittern. Many wetlands in SE Australia are in prime condition for breeding bitterns and birds should be calling and hence relatively easy to detect.

Recent reports suggest that Bitterns are very vocal at the moment. The best times to listen for them are at dawn and dusk (ideally half an hour before dawn or half an hour after dusk), although calls are sometimes heard during the day. If more than one bittern is calling at a wetland, record the bearing and distance to each calling bird to try and calculate the number of calling birds present.

HBOC date for the Australasian Bittern survey is the evening of **Sunday 16 October 2011**, commencing 30 minutes after dark.

Suggested sites:

Hexham Swamp – east side
Hexham Swamp – west side
Hexham Swamp – north side
Pambalong Nature Reserve, Minmi
Hunter Wetlands Centre, Sandgate
Newcastle Wetlands Reserve, Sandgate
Market Swamp, Sandgate
Tomago Wetlands, Tomago – restricted access
Morpeth Wastewater Treatment works – restricted access
Ash Island, Hexham
Other suggestions.....

If you are interested in taking part in this survey and require more information, please contact **Ann Lindsey** ann.lindsey@bigpond.com or by phone 4951 2008.

Great Eastern Ranges Initiative Saturday 22 October 2011, 7.00am

A Warm Invitation.....

We invite you to come along to the Cressfield Landholder Field Day to hear about our pilot bird project, using birds as an indicator of ecosystem health, the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative and to come bird surveying with us. The relaxed morning will conclude with a sausage sizzle breakfast.

Cressfield is a 1500-hectare horse stud in the Upper Hunter. The property is part of a north-south corridor

identified in conservation planning undertaken as part of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative (GERI), with key areas of the property being managed for conservation.

In support of the GERI projects, a pilot study has occurred on *Cressfield* using birds to measure the success of habitat protection and restoration works and as an indicator of ecological connectivity. Bird surveys of *Cressfield* have revealed 77 species thus far, including threatened species. The surveys have confirmed the role the property plays in supporting core habitat and habitat corridors as part of the larger corridor.

***Cressfield* is an example of how a productive property can also contribute to conservation outcomes in the broader landscape.**

What: *Cressfield* Landholder Field Day

Where: *Cressfield* Horse Stud, Parkville, Upper Hunter Valley

When: Saturday, 22nd October 2011

Time: 7am - 10.30am (Please arrive by 7am sharp so that we can survey while the birds are active).

Cost: Free

Bring: Binoculars, bird identification book, water bottle, long trousers & hat.

RSVP: By the 12th please to OzGREEN Birds Project Coordinator on sbaunach@ozgreen.org.au

We hope you are able to join us for a relaxed morning.

Talk on Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Monday 24 October 2011, 6.30pm

Where: Wharf 1 Sydney Theatre Company's home

The WA Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo is headed for extinction. Dr Denis Saunders (President of WWF Australia, a member of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists and a Research Fellow with CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences) has been detailing the ecology and behaviour of these increasingly rare birds since 1968. In that time he has observed that the clearing of native vegetation and increases in agriculture and urban development have had a dramatic effect on the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo. Dr Saunders tells the story of just one species and what it can teach us about human impacts on our environment. More information: <http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/back-stage/the-wentworth-talks-birds>

Tickets are free but we encourage you to get in early and book your seats by calling the STC Box Office on (02) 9250 1777 Please note: Tickets are limited to 2 per customer and must be collected 30 minutes prior to the performance.

Twitchathon 2011

The Birds Australia Southern NSW and ACT (BASNA) Twitchathon is nearly upon us!

For those of you not aware of the Twitchathon, it is a fundraising competition organised by Birds Australia each year whereby you aim to record as many different bird species as possible in a given 24-hour period. Sponsorship is sought in the form of either a money value per bird or a donation to the team for their efforts.

This year's Twitchathon aims to raise money for a Project Officer during the 2012 winter-spring breeding season of the Powerful Owl. Nocturnal birds are often cryptic or difficult to survey and for many species we have insufficient information about their distribution, population size, breeding success and conservation status. The Powerful Owl Project will begin by featuring the Powerful Owl *Ninox strenua* in the Sydney Region, with new information collected, analysed and displayed on the new, interactive Birds in Backyards (BIBY) website. The Powerful Owl will also serve as a focal point for the collection of new information on all nocturnal bird species. The aims of this project are to stimulate and harness community interest in this iconic Australian species so that, for the first time, an accurate assessment can be made of its population size, distribution and breeding success in the Sydney Region. Incidental records of the owls have been made over the past 20 years, but it is not known whether these locations represent separate breeding territories or non-breeding "floaters". A significant number of records also involve road-killed birds and others that have been injured and taken into care. Little is known about the exact breeding and roosting locations, and other requirements, of the Powerful Owl and other owls, and very little information is available about their fidelity to nesting sites and their annual breeding success. Co-ordinated surveys and an annual monitoring program are needed to provide this information. The Project Officer position will assist with co-ordination and training of volunteers, validation and mapping of records, provision of regular reports and live web updates, preparation of educational packages, publicity and media presentations. This project provides an opportunity to highlight the beauty and vulnerability of the Powerful Owl and other owls, and to educate the general public about these species in ways that are likely to significantly enhance efforts to ensure their long-term conservation.

Twitchathon 2011 aims to raise about \$20,000 to assist this project.

In 2011, the Twitchathon will be held on the weekend of **Saturday 29th October** and **Sunday 30th October** and will run from 4pm on the Saturday until 4pm on the Sunday. There are 3 broad categories, including children's races, a not-too-serious 'Champagne Race' and the somewhat-more-serious 'Main Race'.

The challenge of pitting yourself against the clock in a race to locate as many species as you can in a day's birding can be very rewarding! There are also some great prizes to be won.

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 over 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 EL 10 x 50 Swarovision binoculars; a weekend in a motel at Leeton with a personal guided tour of the Ramsar internationally famous Fivebough Swamp Wetlands (sponsored by the Fivebough & Tuckerbil Wetland Trust); 2 nights for two at other B&Bs at a known birding site; a digital camera; books; book vouchers; CDs; champagne; wine; special 'T' shirts; and other prizes to go to the winners in the various categories of the Twitchathon.

Remember that fundraising is the main purpose of the event, so if you cannot take part, you could consider sponsoring one of the Hunter teams. In recent times, the Hunter Region has dominated the event with virtually all winning teams either being HBOC members or finishing their run within the Hunter – a testament to the great diversity of birds we have here on our doorstep.

Further to this info., don't forget that there will be a BBQ held at the Hunter Wetlands Centre after the Twitchathon has finished at 4pm Sunday. Bring your own food, drinks and chairs and listen to the Twitchers' stories for 2011!

Contact Pixie at BASNA for your 2011 Twitchathon kit – email: basna@birdsaustralia.com.au

For further information on how to register / donate or to ask any questions, contact me on 0409 452 921 or email roddo75@hotmail.com

Steve Roderick

Salute to Shorebirds - Events

The Hunter Estuary is home to 31 species of Migratory Shorebirds protected by international treaties. Every Spring they arrive from as far afield as Alaska and Siberia to feed up and rest in the estuary before returning on their homeward flight. Join us to welcome the shorebirds back to Newcastle.

Salute to Shorebirds Community Day under Stockton Bridge at Stockton Sandspit, Sunday 13 November 2011, 9am - 1pm

See shorebirds on Stockton Sandspit with guided tours provided by HBOC and NPWS; educational activities; displays by HBOC, NPWS, Newcastle City Council, Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (Hunter-Central Rivers CMA), WetlandCare Australia and others. Entry is free. Food and refreshments will be available for gold coin donation. For more information please phone Kooragang Wetlands office (02) 4964 9308.

Salute to Shorebirds Observation Cruise aboard catamaran *N'Joy* Sunday 13 November 2011, 9am – 12noon

Join expert guides from HBOC aboard *N'Joy* to observe and learn about migratory shorebirds and their habitat in the Hunter Estuary. Departing from Crown Plaza Wharf (directly in front of Crown Plaza Hotel). Bring your binoculars.

Bookings essential: phone Bruce Hodgkinson on 4959 5600 or 0411 755 888

Cost \$55 per person, morning tea included.

Hunter Estuary Shorebird Seminar Thursday 17 November 2011, 1- 5pm Hunter Wetlands Centre Sandgate Road Shortland

The Hunter Estuary

- a mosaic of land tenures and management priorities from conservation to industry
- a Ramsar listed wetland of international significance
- 31 species of migratory shorebirds protected by international treaties
- 12 species of shorebirds protected by the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995

Objectives of this seminar

Develop knowledge, understanding and capacity for land managers to protect shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary.

Who should attend?

Land Managers, Environmental Managers and Natural Asset Managers with sites located on the Hunter Estuary, and consultants providing environmental services in the estuary.

Bookings

Hunter Wetlands Centre : 49516466, email hwca@wetlands.org.au

Payment

\$45 per pers by cheque or credit card when booking or cash on the day



Three recently-arrived Bar-tailed Godwits, one with an orange flag, banded in Victoria - Chris Herbert

Shorebirds 2020 I Phone App

The shorebirds 2020 Identification booklet is now available as an I Phone Application. It has been developed by Neil Shelley, one of our volunteers, to be made available for free to everyone interested in our migratory and resident shorebirds.

Download the iPhone Web App that helps you identify and learn more about shorebirds

1. Point Safari on the iPhone at <http://www.penboc.org.au/shorebirds/>
2. Tap on the “+” or ‘forward arrow’ on the toolbar at the bottom of the Safari screen
3. Tap on “Add to Home Screen” and change the name to “Oz Shorebirds”
4. Tap on “Save” or “Add”
5. You should now have an icon on your home screen (of a Hooded Plover) that you can tap on to run the app

<http://www.shorebirds.org.au/>

Club Night Observations August - September 2011

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

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Australasian Shoveler	42	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Australian Hobby	Pr	regularly	Teralba [Five Islands]	M. Blyth
Australian King-Parrot	1	27/6/11	Newcastle University	H. Boyce
Australian White Ibis	496 br	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Australian White Ibis	42-10 nnests	13/9/11	Market Swamp	A. Lindsey
Banded Lapwing	2	13/9/11	Hexham Swamp	A. Lindsey
Barn Owl	1	mid Sep	Carey Bay	K. Wroe
Bassian Thrush	2	5/9/11	Blackbutt Reserve	J. Nicholls
Beach Stone-curlew	2	22/5/11	Opposite Dowardee Is. [Port Stephens]	T. Murray
Black-necked Stork	2	16/8/11	Hexham Swamp	K. Straw
Black-necked Stork	1	16/7/11	Bulahdelah	M. Blyth
Black-shouldered Kite	1	24/8/11	Newcastle Rock Platform	J. Thomas
Brown Cuckoo-Dove	1	26/6/11	Blackbutt Reserve	H. Boyce
Brown Quail	11	18/7/11	Stockton Sandspit	M. Blyth
Buff-banded Rail	1	Jul/Aug	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Bush Stone-curlew	1	July	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Bush Stone-curlew	1	Aug	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Chestnut Teal	104	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Common Blackbird	1	22/8/11	Morisset Railway Station	H. Tarrant
Crimson Rosella	1	26/6/11	Blackbutt Reserve	H. Boyce
Dusky Moorhen	110	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Eastern Osprey	1	12/9/11	Teralba [Five Islands bridge]	K. Thumm
Eastern Osprey	1	16/1/11	Singleton [Clydesdale Res.]	P. Alexander
Eastern Osprey	1	Aug	Newcastle Rock Platform	J. Thomas
Eastern Osprey	2+ on	7/9/11	Marks Point	C. & R. Goodenough
Eastern Osprey	1+ on	14/9/11	Marks Point	C. & R. Goodenough
Eastern Osprey	1	13/9/11	Hexham Swamp	A. Lindsey
Eastern Osprey	1- at nest	21/9/11	Karuah	E. Bradbury <i>et al</i>
Eastern Reef Egret	1	12/6/11	Catherine Hill Bay	M. Blyth
Eastern Reef Egret	1	15/7/11	Seal Rocks	M. Blyth
Emerald Dove	1	16/7/11	Seal Rocks	M. Blyth
Eurasian Coot	51	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Fluttering Shearwater	30	4/8/11	Newcastle Ocean Baths	A. Richardson
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	7	3/8/11	Wollombi [Narone Creek Rd]	R. Greig
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	3	6/8/11	Wollombi [Narone Creek Rd]	R. Greig
Glossy Ibis	18	14/9/11	Hexham Swamp	M. Newman
Grey Goshawk	2	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Grey Goshawk	1	Sep.	Eraring [Rocky Point Rd]	K. Wroe
Grey Goshawk	1	17/09/11	Wollombi [Narone Creek Rd]	R. Greig
Grey Goshawk	1	13/9/11	Green Wattle Creek	M. Newman
Grey Teal	479	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Grey-crowned Babbler	7	Sep.	Wollombi [Narone Creek Rd]	R. Greig
Grey-crowned Babbler	1	7/9/11	Walka Water Works	H. Tarrant
Intermediate Egret	30	14/9/11	Hexham Swamp	M. Newman
Little Black Cormorant	100+	4/6/11	Warners Bay	R. Walker
Little Corella	~80	20/8/11	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Long-billed Corella	24	3/7/11	Cessnock [Allandale Rd]	P. Alexander
Masked Plover	Pr+3 dy	4/8/11	Warners Bay	R. Walker
Nankeen Kestrel	1	7/9/11	Adamstown Heights	P. Pountney
Nankeen Kestrel	2	9/9/11	Adamstown Heights	P. Pountney

Club Night Observations August - September 2011 cont.

Nankeen Night-Heron	4+2imm	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Northern Mallard	3	7/9/11	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Pacific Baza	1	13/9/11	Green Point	K. Thumm
Pacific Baza	1	8/8/11	Wangi Point	H. Windon
Painted Button-quail	1	25/9/11	Carey Bay	K. Wroe
Painted Honeyeater		20/9/11	Medhurst Bridge	H. Tarrant
Plumed Whistling-Duck	163	24/4/11	Doughboy Hollow	P. Alexander
Powerful Owl	1	26/6/11	Blackbutt Reserve	H. Boyce
Powerful Owl	1+1imm	19/9/11	Blackbutt Reserve	P. Lightfoot
Powerful Owl	1	Sep.	Bolwarra [Kensington Rd]	per H. Tarrant
Purple Swamphen	103	8/9/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
Regent Honeyeater	11	6/8/11	Morisset	A. Richardson
Rufous Songlark	~6	20/9/11	Martindale-Bureen	H. Tarrant
Southern Boobook	1	10/8/11	Nobbys Beach	A. Richardson
Southern Boobook	1	resident	Carey Bay	K. Wroe
Swamp Harrier	2	13/9/11	Market Swamp	A. Lindsey
Swift Parrot	~65	25/8/11	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Swift Parrot	2-20	30/8-14/9	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Swift Parrot	4-12	12&13/9/11	Dora Creek	C. & R. Goodenough
Wandering Whistling-Duck	20	9/8/11	Hunter Wetlands Centre	P. Lightfoot
White-fronted Tern	~120	30/8/11	Newcastle Rock Platform	J. Thomas
White-headed Pigeon	6	13/8/11	Nelson Bay Road	L. Wooding
White-necked Heron	1	10/7/11	Singleton [Dyrring Rd]	P. Alexander
White-necked Heron	1	7/8/11	South of Singleton [Highway]	P. Alexander
White-winged Triller		20/9/11	Medhurst Bridge	H. Tarrant
Wompoo Fruit-Dove	1	22/7/11	New Lambton	J. Nicholls
Wonga Pigeon	2	Aug	Coal Point [ridge reserve]	K. Wroe
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	2	3/8/11	Elmore Vale	R. Walker
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	2	26/7/11	Hillsborough	R. Walker
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	25	5/8/11	Wye	V. Moon
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	10+	6/8/11	Wye	V. Moon

Note: br = breeding; dy = dependent young; imm = immature; on = on nest; pr = pair.

List of critically endangered Australian birds swells

A new report on Australian birds has added four more species to the critically endangered list and found that a total of 39 species or sub-species are more threatened now than they were a decade ago. The [Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010](#), compiled by researchers from Charles Darwin University and published on 30 September 2011 by the CSIRO, is an update on the previous report released in 2000. This 2010 report lists 27 taxa (which means species or sub-species) as Extinct, 20 as Critically Endangered, 60 as Endangered, 68 as Vulnerable and 63 as Near Threatened as at 31 December 2010.

The four taxa that that were added to the Critically Endangered list are the Grey-headed Albatross, the Western Ground Parrot, the Regent Honeyeater and the Norfolk Island Tasman Parakeet. These birds are now facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. However, seven taxa have been downlisted because conservation efforts have improved population numbers. The seven are Gouldian Finch (which went from Endangered to Near Threatened), Southern Cassowary, Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagle, Albert's Lyrebird, Abbott's Booby, Christmas Island Hawk-Owl (which shifted

from Critically Endangered to Vulnerable as a result action to control invasive ants) and Southern subspecies of Western Corella (which shifted from Endangered to Least Concern).

The report is based on interviews with experts around the country and a review of scientific literature on Australian bird populations that has been released since 2000. "The situation would be worse without the conservation efforts of the last ten years but there is still a lot of work to do," said report author Dr Judit Szabo. "There needs to be more money going into conservation. Australia is not doing well compared to the rest of the world." Dr Szabo also called for more coordinated efforts between agencies responsible for controlled burning and action on overseas threats such as long line fishing, which is driving down albatross numbers. Many of the birds added to the list in 2010 have faced habitat loss along their migratory pathways in East Asia, introduced predators or land clearance. Domestic and feral animals, including herbivores that contribute to habitat loss, remain a major threat, the report found.

Adapted from a report by **Sunanda Creagh**, 30 September 2011, on <http://theconversation.edu.au/list-of-critically-endangered-australian-birds-swells-3647>

HBOC Activities October to December 2011

OCTOBER			
Wednesday 12 October	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Judy Harrington – White-bellied Sea-Eagles at Sydney Olympic Park Bird of the Evening: Bob Greig
Saturday 15 October	Hunter Wader Survey	10.00 am Ash Island 10.30 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 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 – Deep Pond
Tuesday 18 October	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Tuesday-Thursday 18-20 October	IBA monitoring for Rufous-Scrub-bird in Gloucester Tops	Camp at Sharpes Creek	Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday 23 October	Field Outing: Mungo Brush & Johnsons Hill, Myall Lakes	8.00 car park next to Plough Inn, Bulahdelah	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785
Saturday - Sunday 29 - 30 October	TWITCHATHON Join a team & help raise money for Birds Australia	4.00pm Sat to 4.00pm Sun for a BBQ at Hunter Wetlands Centre (Entry Fee)	Mick Roderick 0421 761 237
Sunday 30 October	White Ibis Community Survey	Please record sightings of Australian White Ibis at the website	www.environment.nsw.gov.au/surveys/WhitelbisSightingForm.htm
NOVEMBER			
Tuesday 1 November	Midweek outing – Swansea / Galgabba Point	7.30am Corner Old Pacific Highway and Marks Street, Swansea	Garth Cooksey 4954 9620
Wednesday 2 November	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Paul Baird 4938 5039 All members welcome
Wednesday 9 November	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Chris Herbert – Birding at Iron Range, Cape York Special Guest: Ron Sorenson – Newcastle Port Authority
Saturday 12 November	Hunter Wader Survey	9.00 am Ash Island 9.30 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 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 – Deep Pond
Sunday 13 November	Salute to Shorebirds Cruise Hunter River North Arm	9am – 12noon Catamaran <i>N'Joy</i> , Crown Plaza Wharf, Newcastle	\$55 per person; morning tea included. Bookings - phone Bruce Hodgkinson on 4959 5600 (Enquiries Liz Crawford 4959 3663)
Sunday 13 November	Salute to Shorebirds Family Day	9am – 1pm Stockton Sandspit	Organised by WetlandCare Australia, Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Project and National Parks and Wildlife Service Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Tuesday 15 November	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm
Sunday 20 November	Field Outing to: Main Creek private properties	8.00am at park on RHS of road into Dungog	Alan Stuart 4952 8569
DECEMBER			
Tuesday 6 December	Mid-Week Outing – Belmont Wetlands	7.30am New parking area on old railway track, corner Kallaroo Avenue and Railway Crescent, Belmont	Margaret Stewart 4963 2029
Wednesday 7 December	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	Paul Baird 4938 5039 All members welcome
Saturday 10 December	Hunter Wader Survey	8.30 am Ash Island 9.00 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 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 – Deep Pond
Wednesday 14 December	Xmas Club Night	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Topic: Members' Night - bring your slides, anecdotes, videos and a plate to share the festive spirit
Sunday 18 December	Latham's Snipe survey at Pambalong NR and other locations	8.00 am Minmi Pub	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Tuesday 20 December	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265 Please ring to confirm