

NEWCASTLE CITY & LOWER HUNTER ESTUARY BIRDING ROUTE

INTRODUCTION: Newcastle is the second largest city in New South Wales. It is densely urbanized and has a diverse heavy industry that has occupied a large part of the Hunter Estuary, mostly around the South Arm. However, the greatest concentration of migratory shorebirds in NSW roost at Stockton Sandspit and the Kooragang Dykes in the North Arm, only 5km from the city centre. Thus, the Hunter Estuary is the most important coastal wader habitat in the state and is also a Ramsar listed site of international importance. A variety of seabirds can be seen roosting on the Newcastle City foreshore or flying offshore and preserved areas of natural vegetation, such as Blackbutt Reserve, support a diversity of bushbirds in the western suburbs. A Newcastle street directory is essential to follow the routes discussed.

1. KOORAGANG DYKES: This rock training wall on the western side of the North Arm of the Hunter River runs for about one and a half kilometres upstream of Stockton Bridge. From September to March, it is used as a high-tide roost by thousands of migratory waders such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Eastern Curlew, Curlew Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, and Red Knot. In addition, several thousand non-migratory birds such as Red-necked Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, oystercatchers, lapwings, gulls, terns and pelicans also use the dykes. Smaller numbers of overwintering, non-breeding migratory waders can still be seen from April to August. Best views are obtained by boat which can be launched from a boat ramp accessed via the exit lane off the western approach to Stockton Bridge. Only limited views can be obtained by walking along the dykes to a large concrete block immediately before a breach in the dykes restricts further access. It is advisable not to attempt walking further along the dykes to avoid disturbing the birds.



Kooragang Dykes



2. STOCKTON SANDSPIT: From September to March each year Stockton Sandspit hosts the most spectacular assemblage of shorebirds to be seen in New South Wales. The selective removal of mangroves and weeds from this man-made sandspit has been highly successful in attracting shorebirds back. Immediately after passing over the Stockton Bridge turn right onto Fullerton Street, signposted "Stockton", and within 100m turn right. Proceed down this road to a

parking area under the bridge. A good observation area can be found immediately behind information signs. For several hours around high tide the lagoon may contain large numbers of Red-necked Avocet, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and a few Black-winged Stilt, Gull-billed Tern and Caspian Tern. Eastern Curlew roost around the lagoon margin, the sand flats and salt marsh. Diminutive waders such as Red-necked Stint, Red-capped Plover and Black-fronted Dotterel also use the lagoon margin and salt marsh. Check out the mudflats for foraging waders, herons, spoonbills and ibis. Listen for Mangrove Gerygone in mangroves on the eastern side of the sandspit. The sandspit is also well worth visiting at lower tides to observe feeding activity in the lagoon, along the river foreshore and on oyster banks. Avoid walking into the salt marsh as stilts, plovers and lapwings nest here. Terek Sandpiper roost on oyster racks in Fern Bay which can be observed by walking about 200m to the right (when facing the sandspit) to the grassy road verge. Cautionously approach this vantage point as Grey-tailed Tattler roost on rocks immediately below the road.



Stockton Sandspit

3. STOCKTON CHANNEL: Follow Fullerton Street towards Stockton for 1.3km from the Stockton Sandspit turn-off and look for a rusting wreck in the river. Grey-tailed Tattler and Common Sandpiper often roost on the wreck at high tide. Follow the river for another 800m south, towards a small-boat harbour, to observe Golden Plover, Grey-tailed Tattler and occasional Common Sandpiper roosting on foreshore boulders. Watch for foraging Striated Heron.

4. NOBBYS BREAKWATER: From a car park near the start of Nobbys Road walk along the southern breakwater until nearly abreast of Nobbys Head. Rocks on the river side of the breakwater (Stony Point), often have roosting Silver Gull and, in summer, as many as four tern species such as Crested, Common, Little and White-winged Black Tern. Check the river for passing jaegers and terns roosting on navigation buoys. From the end of the breakwater, shearwaters, gannets and more exotic seabirds such as albatross and giant petrel may be seen, if you're lucky.

5. NEWCASTLE FORESHORE: Ruddy Turnstones and Sooty Oystercatchers forage on the rock platform surrounding the baths at the northern end of Newcastle Beach. Seabirds can often be seen further offshore. Obtain elevated views of the rock platform from Shortland Esplanade and walk through the baths to observe turnstones and terns on the seaward side of the baths.

6. ARCADIA PARK & KING EDWARD PARK: Arcadia Park is a small area of mixed remnant and exotic vegetation at The Hill immediately west of the Obelisk. Enter from the end of Pit Street or the end of The Terrace. Figbirds can be seen from a walking track joining these entrances. Nearby King Edward Park, although a pleasant parkland with exotic trees, is not of great interest to birdwatchers. However, it offers magnificent coastal views and, at times, may be good for viewing passing seabirds, especially from a lookout off York Drive.



Figbird

7. GLENROCK STATE RECREATION AREA: Access the northern end of Glenrock SRA via Hickson Street, off Scenic Drive, Merewether. About 200m along Hickson Street a walking track leads off to the right between a water tower and a communications tower. Within 100m, the track descends steeply to the coast where it joins The Great North Walk. A variety of coastal scrub and heath birds can be seen on the way and a Sea Eagle is often seen patrolling the coast. After birding around Glenrock Lagoon, where Lewins Rail is sometimes seen, retrace your steps, or keep going to emerge at Burwood Road, Kahibah, at the southwestern part of the recreation area. Here Regent Bowerbirds, Bellbirds and Powerful Owls frequent rainforest along the creek.

8. ISLINGTON PARK/CARRINGTON: An interesting 5km circuit to view inner-city birds passes through the suburbs of Islington, Maryville and Carrington. Park off Tighes Terrace, Tighes Hill, near "Liquorstop", and walk south through a grassy reserve to observe a variety of waterbirds in Throsby Creek. Cross the creek, via a footbridge at the end of Union Street, to Islington Park. Then follow a walking/cycling track along the creek bank and look for figbirds, wattlebirds and waterbirds. Cross Hannell Street, immediately turn left, cross the bridge and follow a concrete path to the Throsby Creek Mangrove Boardwalk that leads to a creek-side park. Walk south, down the left bank of Throsby Creek, and cross back over at the Cowper Street bridge.

Make your way back through Wickham to Islington Park via Albert Street, Sheddon Street and Power Street.

9. JESMOND BUSHLAND: Park 100m along Robinson Road, off Newcastle Road, Jesmond. Cross the concrete-lined creek in Jesmond Park via a little bridge and, behind a children's playground, find a bitumen cycleway signposted to "John Hunter Hospital" and "Jesmond Bushland Walking Track". Follow this cycleway for 180m until the walking track diverges off to the right. A variety of bushbirds can be seen from the track, which eventually loops back to the cycleway.

10. GEORGE MCGREGOR PARK: Access via a picnic area off Cambridge Drive or at the end of Sygna Close, Rankin Park. This is an area of eucalypt bushland, similar to Jesmond Park, including a creek lined with sparse rainforest vegetation. In addition to a variety of bushbirds a pair of Powerful Owls have sometimes been observed roosting in rainforest along the creek-line.



Powerful Owl

11. BLACKBUTT RESERVE: This extensive area of natural vegetation supports a diversity of dry sclerophyll to wet sclerophyll bushbirds. Many hours can be spent exploring tracks that traverse the reserve from access points off Carnley Avenue, Kotara and from both ends of Mahogany Drive, New Lambton. Pacific Baza and Regent Bowerbirds can be seen and Powerful Owls have bred in the reserve. Another entrance off Lookout Road provides access to the Rainforest Lookout Walk where a Flying Fox colony can be seen. A well constructed aviary complex displays native Australian birds and marsupials at Black Duck Picnic Area off Carnley Avenue.

For Newcastle Birding Routes No.1 - Ash Island and No.3 - Newcastle Wetlands, contact the Hunter Bird Observers Club or download from the website.

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HBOC meets at 7.30pm, every 2nd Wednesday of the month (except January) at The Wetlands Centre, off the roundabout, Sandgate Road, Shortland.

Newcastle Birding Route No. 2



Hunter Bird Observers Club

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Red-capped Plover nesting at Stockton Sandspit.

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