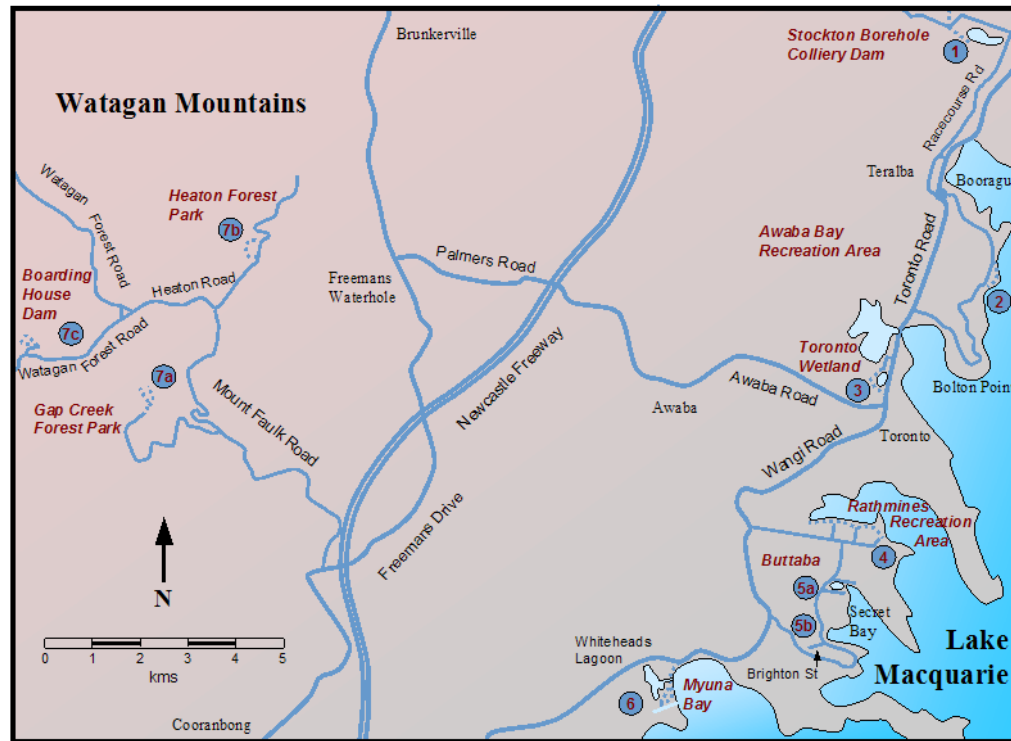


WESTLAKES BIRDING ROUTE

INTRODUCTION: The north-western side of Lake Macquarie is only moderately urbanised. Consequently there are many suitable bird habitats ranging from lake margin forests to swamps and lagoons. Extensive tracts of dry sclerophyll forest and heath exist between the lake and the dissected sandstone plateau of the Watagan Mountains further to the west. Here, Heaton State Forest and the recently declared Watagans National Park offer magnificent wet sclerophyll forest with pockets of rainforest in deep gullies. A Newcastle street directory and a Newcastle State Forests map for the Watagans would greatly assist navigation.



1. STOCKTON BOREHOLE COLLIERY DAM: This large body of water can be viewed from several spots along Racecourse Road, which follows the western side of Cockle Creek north of Teralba. The dam usually has a large variety of waterbirds such as ducks, swans and grebes. Waders include stilts, dotterels, lapwings, Marsh Sandpiper and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Look for White-bellied Sea Eagles and Osprey flying over or roosting in dead trees. One of the best viewing positions is at the start of guard rails on Racecourse Road, passing into Weir Road, about 3.4km north of Teralba post office (spotting scopes helpful). More vantage points can be gained by walking to the right behind the guard rails. On the other side of Weir Road, about 1.3km further along, you can walk along a track on the top of an embankment and look into heathy scrub to the right and swampy vegetation to the left. This track can be found off a sweeping right-hand bend opposite a track on the southern side of Weir Road marked by two signs warning of buried pipelines. A little further along Weir Road look for Azure Kingfisher and bush birds at a causeway over Cockle Creek, just before Barnsley.



Chestnut Teal

2. AWABA BAY RECREATION AREA: Gain access to Awaba Bay from The Ridgeway via either Booragul or Bolton Point. From the Booragul end the signposted start for the walk is about 2.4km from the Teralba roundabout. This remnant bushland along the western shore of Lake Macquarie has recently been included as part of the Lake Macquarie State Recreation Area. While not spectacular for birds it makes for a pleasant excursion.

3. TORONTO WETLAND: This important wetland is a remnant of a formerly more extensive swamp that has been halved

in size by infilling and reclamation for light industries, club facilities and a railway easement. Park at the end of Sara Street, Toronto, and continue by a walking track into the reserve. After about 50m observe from the edge of the swamp under She Oaks. Walk another 50m to a railway easement that has been converted to a "greenway". Walk left along the walkway/cycleway or the disused railway tracks for more views into the swamp. At dusk hundreds of White Ibis fly in to roost for the evening. Large numbers of Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants nest here in spring and summer. Many other species of waterbirds frequent the wetland, including Latham's Snipe and Nankeen Night Heron.



Great Egret

4. RATHMINES RECREATION AREA: This is an area of grassland, open woodland and lake margin scrub. Access from a picnic area entered from a road adjacent to the Catalina Memorial Nursing Home off Dorrington Road, Rathmines. Various paths can be explored around the lake margin and eastwards to the old catalina flying-boat base, and north to Styles Point. Also access from Bayswater Road to follow tracks and paths along the lake margin to the west for about a kilometre until encountering a sewage pumping station. From here you can explore tracks into dry sclerophyll and Casuarina forests further on or return. Striated Heron and Black Bittern can be encountered along the lake margin.

5. BUTTABA: A small wetland at the western end of Secret Bay, Buttaba is well worth a look (5a). It can be approached from Earswick Crescent and Glen Cory on one side, and Letchworth Parade on the other. A Black Bittern has often been seen here, but requires diligent observation. Another woodland merits occasional visits, especially for Regent Honeyeaters when Swamp Mahogany is flowering. It can be accessed from Brighton Street (5b) and at the end of Todmorden Street.

6. MYUNA BAY: About 9km south of Toronto, on the Wangi Road, note a roadside/lakeside picnic area on the shore of Myuna Bay. About 100m further on, turn left onto a dirt track and park just before a footbridge over the

entrance channel to Whiteheads Lagoon. A recently installed gate may prevent driving to the footbridge. Walk over the bridge through an Angophora/Casuarina forest where whipbirds, scrubwrens and fairy-wrens can often be seen. After about 600m the outlet canal from Eraring Power Station is encountered. Crested and Common Terns and cormorants are sometimes present. White-bellied Sea-eagles and Whistling Kite frequent this area. Return by walking along the canal to the lake, turn left and follow lake-margin tracks back to the bridge.

7. WATAGAN MOUNTAINS: The cooler forests of the Watagans provide a contrast to the warmer, lower woodlands surrounding Lake Macquarie. A variety of bush birds include Gang Gang, Glossy and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo and Rock Warbler on sandstone outcrops. In addition, rain forest species such as Superb



Grey Shrike-thrush on nest

Lyrebird, Brush Turkey, Eastern Whipbird and Green Catbird can be seen in moister gullies and southerly facing slopes. Many of the forest owls such as Southern Boobook, Masked, Sooty, and Powerful Owls can be

seen or heard here. Access via

the Mount Faulk Road, about 8km south of Freemans Waterhole on Freemans Drive or 5km north of Coorabong. Alternative access from the north is via Watagan Forest Road off Sandy Creek Road, which runs between Mulbring and Cessnock.

7a. GAP CREEK FOREST PARK: About 4.9km along the Mount Faulk Road, turn left at the signpost on Bangalay Road. Proceed to Gap Creek Picnic Area at the end of road, 4.8km. This is now part of the Watagans National Park. Where the habitat begins to change from dry to wet sclerophyll forest a track leads off to Gap Creek Falls (850m), passing into rain forest vegetation with Red Cedar and a large Illawarra Flame Tree. Watch for Brush Turkey and listen for catbirds. About 400m along this track a fork to the right leads another 600m to Gap Creek upstream of the falls. Note how the bird species change as the habitat varies.

7b. HEATON FOREST PARK: From the Gap Creek turnoff, continue along the Mount Faulk Road for about

4.1km and turn right onto Heaton Road. After 2km arrive at Heaton Lookout in Heaton State Forest offering a vast panorama of Lake Macquarie, and much further on a clear day. A short loop track opposite the lookout passes through rain forest habitat.

7c. BOARDING HOUSE DAM: At the Mount Faulk Road/Heaton Road junction take the Heaton Road leading west into the Watagans National Park. At a junction with the Watagan Forest Road keep going west. About 2.8km after the junction look for a right turn to Boarding House Dam. A short loop walk leads off from this attractive picnic area and follows



Southern Boobook at nesting hollow

Boarding House Creek through a rain-forest of Water Gums, Lillypilly and Coachwood.

In the evening Sooty Owls and Southern Boobooks have been seen and heard here. Bassian Thrush

have been observed at the picnic area.

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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 Rd, Shortland.

Lake Macquarie Birding Route No. 1

Hunter Bird Observers Club



WESTLAKES BIRDING ROUTE



Eastern Yellow Robin on nest

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