



# Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER No. 9 - 83 October, 1983 (Released monthly at Club Nights)

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Annual Subscriptions: Family Rate, \$6.00; Single, \$5.00; School Student \$1.00  
(due on 1st January each year)

Club Badges \$2.50 - available from Treasurer (Ed. Hamonet)

Meetings: Club Nights - 2nd Wednesday of each month (except January)  
at Garden Suburb School at 7.30 p.m.

Management Committee: 1st Monday of each month (Public holidays  
excepted) at 7.30 p.m.

## 1. NOTES FROM THE AUGUST MEETING - 10th August 1983.

- a) Attendance - 26
- b) Bird Call - presented by Jim Perry - the Rufous Scrubird
- c) Bird of the Evening - The Cicadabird, introduced by Arthur Williams.
- d) Main Feature - Two Nature Films arranged by Jim Perry:  
'Birds that Never Fly' and Bird Life of a Dry Season'

## 2. NOTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER MEETING - Wednesday 14th September 1983.

- a) Attendance - 23. Numbers are still down. Most of our Iron Rangers had returned but the Western N.S.W. contingent took off on the 9th September.

### b) BIRD CALL OF THE EVENING - Fred van Gessel

Fred played the call of the NEW HOLLAND HONEYEATER which has a loud, shrill liquid although monotonous note. By comparison Fred also played the call of its near ally, the WHITE CHEEKED HONEYEATER.

### c) BIRD OF THE EVENING - Al Gillies.

By way of introduction, Al spoke about Kingfishers generally. The world-wide family of Kingfishers include 87 species of which 10 occur in Australia. Kingfishers have short legs and comparatively weak feet. Despite their name only two Australian species (Azure and Little) hunt exclusively over water. Both these birds have narrow, sharp bills, ideally suited to transfixing or capturing prey in water.

With his shiny violet-blue back and orange-rufous colour below, the AZURE is probably the most handsome of our Kingfishers. His food consists of fish and other aquatic animals and insects. He nests in banks or upturned roots of fallen trees, near water. The nest chamber is usually at the end of a tunnel about 15 cms in length - five white eggs is the usual clutch.

The Scientific name is of interest - CEYX AZUREUS.

In Greek mythology, Ceyx was the husband of Alcyone. When Ceyx was drowned, Alcyone threw herself into the sea and both were changed into Kingfishers by the Gods. Both the Azure and the Little Kingfisher have CEYX as the first part of their scientific name. Azureus is a latin word meaning blue.

Thank you Al for a most interesting talk.

### d) MAIN FEATURE

The main feature of the evening was devoted to a study of the PARROT family.

2. d) continued

One-sixth of the world's parrot species occur in Australia. Here are found 59 distinct species of parrot-like birds. Although they occur in Central and South America, tropical Africa, Southern Asia, nowhere in the world are they more numerous, more beautiful or in greater diversity than in this country.

Parrots belong to the order Psittaciformes. They have a number of distinguishing features. Most prominent is the short, blunt bill with a down-curved upper mandible fitting neatly over a broad upcurved lower mandible. A structural 'hinge-like' arrangement in the attachment of the upper mandible to the skull allows maximum movement of the upper mandible in relation to the skull. This increases the leverage and allows the birds to crush seeds and nuts that form their diet. Some minor modifications occur in bill shape for different feeding habits but the basic structure is always identical; e.g. the elongated and less curved bill of the Long-billed Corella is used for digging up roots and corms; while the Red-capped parrot of W.A. has an adaptation for extracting seeds from the large woody capsules of the Marri. Parrots that feed on pollen and nectar have narrow protruding bills. The feet are always 'Zygodactylus', i.e. two toes forward and two back. They have remarkable dexterity in the use of the foot - for climbing and for holding food. The extremely muscular tongue is thick and prehensile. In some species it is tipped with elongated papillae or brushes for harvesting pollen and nectar. They are, of course renowned for their brilliant colouring. Every part of Australia, whether dense jungles of the tropical north, wet heathlands in Tasmania or sandy deserts in the interior, is inhabited by parrots.

Because of the number of birds involved (59), detailed discussion was confined to two groups:

Group 1. included Fig Parrots, Lorikeets and the Swift Parrot and Group 2 dealt with the Cockatoos, the Corellas and the Galah. Colour slides of most of the remainder were shown and it is hoped that we will be able to study these at some future date.

Our thanks to Sue Hamonet for the time and effort devoted to preparing the introduction and for the information supplied about Group 1.

3. WINTER WADER COUNT

The Winter Wader Count as carried out by Club Members recorded 17 species totalling 2,469 birds. The 1982 count showed 19 species for a total of 2,126. Largest counts for the 1983 survey were: Curlew Sandpiper 611; Bar-tailed Godwit 498; Eastern Curlew 395 and Black-winged Stilt 324.

Jim Perry.

4. FIELD DAY to GERMAN POINT (Watagan Mountains) - Sunday 21st August.

Not a good roll-up on this outing, despite the beautiful weather - the poor attendance no doubt being due to the large number of regulars being up North. Twenty seven species were recorded for the day including an almost near sighting of a Lyrebird - a strong call was heard from a gully but on approach, the prospect went quiet. Scarlet and yellow Robins were seen and a large number of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos.

Michael Noonan.

5. WIDDEN VALLEY CAMP - 1/2/3/ October 1983.

Fourteen adults and three children spent the week-end in the beautiful Widden Valley, flanked by the impressive rocky crags of the surrounding mountain ranges. The valley with its carpet of verdant pasture and running streams was a picture of peace, tranquillity and beauty. The Club has now camped in the area on five occasions but this was the first time that we had held a camp in the springtime.

Birdwise, it was very rewarding; 116 species were sighted including 12 which had not been recorded on previous visits. The sightings for this area not total 151 which makes it one of the 'richest' birding localities in the Valley. Among the more interesting sightings were the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, the Gang Gang Cockatoo, the flocks of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, numerous Crimson Rosellas, the striking Turquoise Parrot, the Pallid Cuckoo and the Regent Honeyeater.

6. WE VISIT JULATTEN.

Armed with binoculars and telescopes, we quietly settled into position on one side of a stagnant pool of water in the rainforest at Julatten. As we sat entranced and gazed in silent fascination, an endless stream of birds flew in, had a quick drink or stayed a little longer for a plunge into the pool with a subsequent preen down on a nearby branch.

Brown Pigeons surveyed the scene from a high branch before advancing to the water's edge for a long drink; Lewins Honeyeaters came and went; handsome Spectacled Flycatchers were followed by an Emerald Dove who didn't linger; the showy Grey Fantails arrived with their usual display of tail wagging to be followed by the even more ostentatious and more colourful Rufous Fantails; the demure Grey-headed Robin paid a brief visit; a Brush Turkey skirted the edge of the pool en route to something more interesting; Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Pale Yellow Robins, the Yellow-throated Scrubwren; Mountain Thornbills and Graceful Honeyeaters and a Green Catbird all came and went.

And then - at 6.05 p.m. an inaudible 'AH!' came from the lips of the observers whose eyes greedily devoured the Prince of the forest - the RED-NECKED RAIL who purposefully strode out of the rainforest and stepped into the pool; two quick drinks and then to the delight of the Birdos, he proceeded to have a vigorous splash. This completed, he departed as he had come - silently and swiftly.

Our mission had been accomplished. Julatten is the mecca of bird lovers who come to see this handsome creature, forehalf of whose body is a rich reddish-brown in colour. He is only found in wet areas on the far North-east coast of North Qld. We may never see him again but we are satisfied.

Note: Julatten is approximately 26 Kms south of Mossman.

7. IRON RANGE TRIP.

Ten of our members camped at Iron Range for 10 days from the 16th to 25th August. Prior to our arrival, the area had been well and truly soaked after 13 days of rain - consequently roads and tracks were wet, slippery and in some cases feet deep in mud. However, after the first few days the weather brightened and enabled us to move about more freely. All told our group with the assistance of 3 other birdos managed to see 135 species including 18 which (according to Pizze) are only found in the Cape York Peninsula, north of the 14th parallel. Among the more interesting sightings were: Cassowary, Frigatebirds, Great-billed Heron, Jabiru, Scrubfowl, Grey Plover, Black-naped Tern, Torres Strait Pigeon, Palm Cockatoo, Eclectus Parrot, Red-cheeked Parrot, Fig Parrot, Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo, Rufous-breasted Bronze Cuckoo, Papuan Frogmouth, Marbled Frogmouth, Spotted and Large-tailed Nighthawks, Grey Swiftlet, Little Kingfisher, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Mangrove Kingfisher, Yellow-billed Kingfisher, Barred Cuckoo-shrike, Northern Scrub Robin, Yellow-footed Flycatcher, Lemon-breasted Flycatcher, White-faced Robin, White-browed Robin, Grey Whistler, Rufous Shrike-thrush, Boatbill, White-eared Monarch, Frilled Monarch, Broad-billed flycatcher, Shining Flycatcher, Northern Fantail, Tropical Scrubwren, Mangrove Warbler; HONEYEATERS: Tawny-breasted, Yellow-spotted, Graceful, Varied, White-throated, Greenbacked, Brown backed, Dusky; Sunbird, Metallic Starling, Yellow Oriole, Fawn-breasted Bowerbird, Spotted Catbird, Magnificent Riflebird, Trumpet Manucode, Black Butcherbird and the Torresian Crow.

Apart from looking for and observing birds, some of our members managed to achieve some notoriety with their activities; Ray Walker, over keen to fit in as much as possible, breakfasted at dawn and hit the road, usually the wrong one, before the main party moved; he therefore earned the sobriquet of 'Wrong-way Ray'; to finally get to the right destination, Ray covered considerable distances - he is now considered to be a rival for Cliff Young.

Big Jim, busy chasing or avoiding crocodiles in a swamp, almost missed the truck one day. Evasive Eva, started off by getting lost in Cairns and followed up that effort by detouring on a walk to paddle in a creek while the pick-up truck rumbled past. Wilma, after numerous futile attempts to sight a Yellow-billed Kingfisher, finally decided that the bird didn't exist; however, as the days went by it was rumoured that she had seen the 'ghost' of the elusive bird.

All in all the visit to Iron Range proved to be quite eventful and birdwise very rewarding.

Eva Van De Werken

8. PRIONS.

On 26th June 1983 at Birubi Point and Birubi Beach, large numbers of Prions, species uncertain, were observed close inshore, from 30m to 500m from the Point. At the time a strong, cold southerly wind was blowing and the Prions were using this to travel north at a speed estimated at 60-70 Kms. per hour. Occasionally they turned into the wind, presumably to feed before resuming their northward flight. An estimated 50 birds per minute were passing the Point and this was unabated for the 3 hours plus that I observed - from 1145 to 1500. This estimate would give a total of 9,000 birds plus those which preceded and succeeded my observations. No beach washed specimens were obtained in a one hour walk northwards along the beach or in a 4 hour walk along the beach to the South Stockton beach, on the morning of 2nd July. A most unusual sighting for the Hunter area. Jim Perry.

9. CONSERVATION ISSUES.

Our Club is involving itself in several issues concerning some local habitats.

- a) Shortland Swamp. Following a decision by the Newcastle City Council to resume the dumping of garbage in this area, our Club supported the action of the Hunter Wetlands Group to have this decision rescinded. Following two Public meetings (at which we were well represented), the Lord Mayor arranged to have this matter deferred for further consideration. In this regard a very strong submission was made by Dr. Max Maddock who not only pointed out the desirability of saving the Shortland Swamp but also put forward a long range plan to establish viewing facilities and the setting up of a research centre for scientific means.
- b) Cardiff Point - coal mining in this area has now ceased and the Lake Macquarie Council is considering future use of the area. The land in question is located between Valentine and Belmont and extends from the Lake easterly to Belmont Hospital. To support any submission we may wish to make, an up to date bird list would be desirable. Lists from any member who has the time to 'observe' would be appreciated.

10. BOOK NEWS

- a) NIGHTWATCHMEN OF BUSH AND PLAIN by David Fleay  
This excellent publication of the OWLS of Australia has been added to our list of Library Books - kindly donated by Bill Cambridge and Wilma Barden.
- b) The manuscript for the ATLAS book containing details of 3.5 million observations recorded during the Atlas surveys is to be in the hands of the publishers by 31/10/83. Availability dates could be late 1983 or early 1984.
- c) SEABIRDS - AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE by Peter Harrison.  
This book gives a brief survey of the World's Seabirds. Plates show over 1600 birds painted in full colour. Maps show breeding, non breeding and migration distribution. Price \$35 at Arthur Warner's (Less 15% if Club Badge is shown) or \$23 plus postage from the Cumberland Club.
- d) AUSTRALIA'S BEAUTIFUL BIRDS and THEIR YOUNG -  
This is a publication by the Australian Women's Weekly. Ninety six Australian Birds and their young are beautifully illustrated. Photography is by Ken Stepnell supplemented by the National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife. The Introduction and Notes are by Waler Boles. Available from Newsagents for \$4.98
- e) BOOK SALES  
A recent report stated that there have been over 100,00 copies of the READERS DIGEST COMPLETE BOOK OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS sold, over 125,000 of Peter Slater's A FIELD GUIDE TO AUSTRALIAN BIRDS and 30,000 of Forshaw's AUSTRALIAN PARROTS.

11. The STREAKED SHEARWATER (Calonectris leucomelas)

Although the first on the list of species covered by the 'Japan-Australia Agreement for the Protection of Migratory Birds', the STREAKED SHEARWATER seems little known in Australia. Only those avidly interested in Seabirds, who regularly discuss reports with other observers, will be aware of the current status of this species. Many will not know what it looks like and some may never have heard of it although its alternative names of WHITE-FACED or WHITE-FRONTED SHEARWATER may assist a few.

Recent Records

Prior to 1980, reported sightings were few and far between; however, since 1980 there has been a proliferation of records in summer and autumn from south-eastern Queensland, N.S.W. and Western Australia with several observations by shore-based observers and seafarers.

Breeding:

The Streaked Shearwater breeds on islands off Korea and Japan from April to October and has long been known to be abundant north of New Guinea in the non-breeding season.

The BIRD

The Streaked Shearwater is a very distinctive bird, being larger than all other Australian Shearwaters with long and broad wings. The upperparts are generally brown and the forehead is white. The ventral surface is white except for the bill and smudgy margins to the under-wing. The bill is long, sturdy for a Shearwater and being very pale is easily seen. The legs are also pale. Some birds have the head wholly white, whilst others are dark on the crown and ear coverts.

They are apparently mainly surface feeders and are generally timid and sluggish. Flight is usually low over the water with slow and deliberate wing beats. When gliding, wings are held in a deep dihedral.

Illustrations of Streaked Shearwaters are neither numerous nor readily available. Peter Slater's Field Guide has a useful text figure and an idea of the general appearance can be obtained from Plate 8 in 'A Field Guide to the Seabirds of Britain/Australia and the World' by Tuck and Heinzel (1978).

Perhaps the last few years have been a unique period and excursions of Streaked Shearwaters in Australian waters will cease or recur erratically; perhaps these recent records indicate a permanent expansion of its range; perhaps the species has merely been overlooked in the past. Future research may determine whether any of these options is correct.

Extract from R.A.O.U. Newsletter No. 56 June, 1983.

12. BIRD CALL TAPES

A tape of 50 plus Calls of Birds of the Hunter Valley has been compiled by Fred Van Gessel - sales are being handled by our Management Committee - cost \$6.00 per tape. Enquiries to Kay Imrie or Ed. Hamonet.

13. SLIDE PROJECTOR

The next major project for the Club will be to purchase a SLIDE PROJECTOR. At the December meeting, in accordance with past practice, we will be having a raffle, proceeds of which are to be applied to the cost of the Projector. Prizes are being sought for the raffle and we would like to hear from any member who can assist in that regard

14. SLIDE LIBRARY

Donations are still being sought for our Slide Library.

15. COMING EVENTS

Sunday 23rd October - FIELD DAY TO LOSTOCK DAM.  
 Meet at the OAK, HEXHAM at 7 a.m.  
 Contact: Kay Imrie 524524.

Sunday 6th November - HALF DAY to Mt. Sugarloaf and Mt. Summit  
 Meet Mt. Sugarloaf Reserve, first car park at 7 a.m.  
 Contact: Kay Imrie 524524

Monday 7th November  
 MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday 9th November - CLUB NIGHT  
 Main Feature: The BIRDS OF IRON RANGE by  
 Bill Cambridge and Ray Walker.

WILD COUNTRY SAFARIS

Advice to hand is that Wild Country Safaris will be conducting the following tours/camps in 1984.

## 1. WEST OF THE SIMPSON DESERT

This tour will be available from 1st May 1984.  
 Cost ex Alice Springs will be \$690 for 14 days.  
 Maximum number - 7 persons.

## 2. IRON RANGE BIRD CAMPS

These will be held from Mid August 1984.  
 Cost ex Cairns including air fare (From Cairns to Iron Range and return) will be: For 7 days \$490: For 14 Days \$ 760.

Note: Wild Country Safaris organised the Bird Camp which was attended by 10 of our members in August of this year. (See page 3)

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S T O P P R E S S .

## FAREWELL to FRED VAN GESSEL

Our President, Fred, has accepted a position with the Northern Territory Electricity Commission and will be leaving Newcastle on 22/10/83

Fred was the convenor appointed by the Flora and Fauna Protection Society to set up a bird group which eventually emerged as the Hunter Bird Observers Club. Since then he has been Chairman/President of the Bird Group/Club. As a consequence, we have enjoyed seven years of Fred's leadership and the great wealth of ornithological knowledge he possesses.

Whilst we deeply regret his departure, we wish him well in his new sphere of activities and feel sure that he will maintain his contact with the HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB.

Au revoir Fred, and many, many thanks for your magnificent contribution to ornithology in the Hunter Valley and the volumes of bird lore you have passed on to us.