



# Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER No. 10/83 November 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 Club 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 OCTOBER MEETING - 12th October 1983.

- a) Attendance 43 - by far the best we have had so far this year.

A welcome was extended to new Members Leif Lemke and Hassan el Taher.

- b) Bird Call of the Evening - Jim Imrie.

The NORTHERN CHOWCHILLA (*Orthonyx spaldingii*) commonly known as the Northern Logrunner.

The call is distinctly different from the Spine-tailed or Southern Logrunner. It is a loud resonant 'chow-chilla' (hence its common name) and is mostly uttered about dawn.

- c) Bird of the Evening - Rosemary Waymark.

The LITTLE CORELLA (*Cacatua sanguinea*) was the bird chosen by Rosemary for her maiden venture into the Bird of the Evening segment.

This Corella is a small white cockatoo with a pink stain between bill and eye and a bare blue-grey eye patch.

Scientific Name - *Cacatua* is derived from the French word Kakatoe = cockatoo  
*Sanguinea* from the latin sanguineus = blood stained.

Distribution: Found in all mainland states but in N.S.W. confined to areas west of the Great Dividing Range. Sightings have been reported in coastal areas but are considered to be aviary escapes.

Habitat: Open country interspersed with belts of scrub or timbered watercourses

Food: Seeds of grasses and other plants also on bulbs and roots.

Nest: A hollow in a tree - occasionally in large termite mounds.

Eggs: Usually 3 white. Breeds from August to October.

Thank you Rosemary.

- d) Main Feature - WHERE DID AUSTRALIA'S BIRDS COME FROM by Walter Boles.

Members are still talking about the main feature at the October meeting when Guest Speaker, Walter Boles of the Australian Museum traced for us the evolution of birds as we know them, delving way back to their most primitive ancestry and origins. It was quite fascinating to watch the development of skeleton, plumage and eventually flight and to ponder on the reasons for adaptations.

Altogether much food for thought here and I'm quite sure that thanks to Walter we will all henceforth really see what we look at when watching birds.

One of the books recommended for information on this subject is "BIRDS FOR BEGINNERS - How Birds live and behave" by J.D. McDonald. Available in Public Libraries.

1. e) FAREWELL TO FRED VAN GESSEL

At the close of the meeting, Vice President, Jim Perry took charge of proceedings and on behalf of Club Members bade farewell to Fred who is leaving Newcastle to take up an appointment in Darwin. Jim was followed by several speakers and then Wilma Barden presented Fred with an Open Order on a Book Store in Darwin and one of the new tapes of Bird Calls from the B.O.C. in Victoria.

Jim Perry and other speakers referred to Fred's long association with the Bird Group/Club and mentioned, apart from his expert knowledge of Australian Birds, his assistance in obtaining Bird Book discounts for Club Members and in the printing of the Newsletter; his recording of Bird Calls leading to the production of a tape of Bird Calls of Hunter Valley Birds; his banding activities using both mist nets and cannon netting; his photographic efforts including some hair raising episodes; the Bird Classes he has conducted for the W.E.A. - these classes providing quite a few recruits for the Bird Club, his versatility in demonstrating how taxidermists prepare 'skins' for the Museum and finally his interest in herpetology.

In reply, Fred thanked members for their support and co-operation throughout his terms of office; expressed appreciation for the presentation and regretted the necessity of having to leave Newcastle.

2. FIELD DAY TO GRESFORD/LOSTOCK DAM - Sunday 23rd October 1983.

Twelve adults and three children met at the OAK, Hexham at 7 a.m. in warm and sunny conditions for what promised to be a good day's birding. We certainly weren't disappointed as our first stop before Paterson gave us an excellent sighting of two CHANNEL-BILLED CUCKOOS. East Gresford Park was the next stop where we saw several RAINBOW Bee-Eaters and watched WHITE-BACKED SWALLOWS building nests in the river bank. Lunch was taken at Lostock Dam. not a good choice - due to the lack of birds and preponderance of very noisy picknickers. However, during the day 89 species were seen or heard. Other highlights included several sightings of the REGENT BOWERBIRD, both male and female; DOLLAR BIRDS; STRIATED PARDALOTE and a flock of about 200 CATTLE EGRET.

Nigel Walker.

3. TRANS-GLOBE TERN

Arctic Terns are known for the huge distances they cover on migration. But the BTO's ringing scheme has revealed a champion traveller. Arctic Tern CE 77150 was ringed as a nestling in the Farne Islands (off the coast of Scotland) on 25th June 1982. Just 115 days later, it was picked up in Melbourne, after an attack by a group of native plovers. Unfortunately it died shortly afterwards. This is only the third arctic tern known to reach Australia.

Extract from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds magazine.  
provided by Nigel Walker.

4. WILD COUNTRY SAFARIS

Firm dates are now available for two ventures for 1984:

i) WEST OF THE SIMPSON DESERT SAFARI

Dates from Alice Springs; 5th May to 19th May; 23rd May to 6th June;  
10th June to 24th June; 28th June to 12th July.  
Fare: \$690 from Alice Springs back to Alice Springs. Duration : 15 days.

ii) IRON RANGE BUSH CAMPS 1984

Dates for which bookings may be made:  
August: 16th, 23rd, 30th; September: 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th; October 4th & 11th.  
Cost per person \$490 for 7 days all inclusive from Cairns and return thereto.  
Cost for 14 days - \$760

5. BINOCULAR REPAIRS

A Mr. W. Reigert has advised the F.O.C. that he is skilled in all types of binocular repairs. He is a qualified technician. His address is No. 18 McCulloch St. Five Dock 2046, Tel. 713 1665.

6. AILEEN BLACK v. CRESTED PIGEONS.

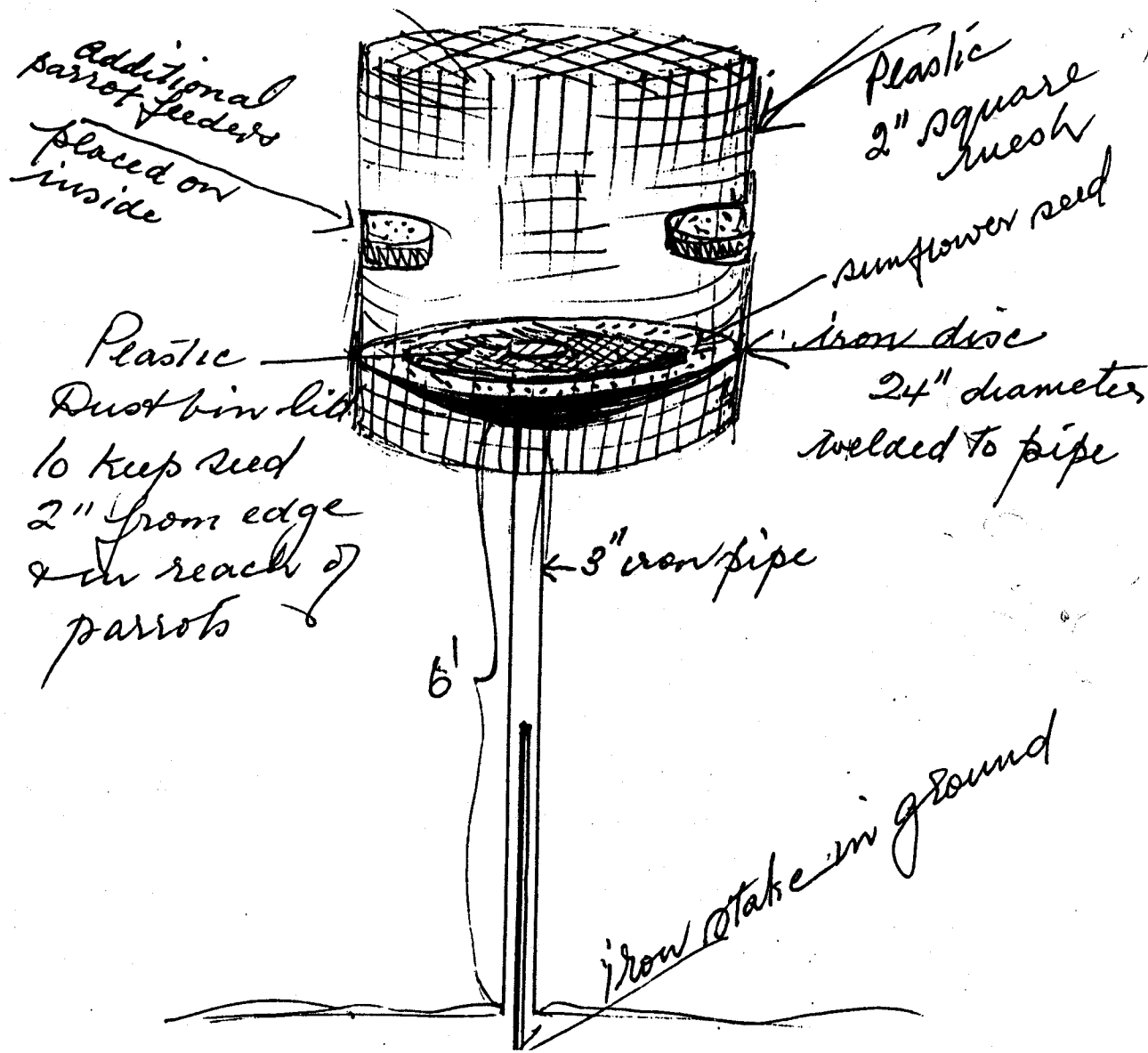
One of our members, Aileen Black who lives at Belmont North, recently overcame the problem of Crested Pigeons in 'plague proportions' taking over her bird feeders.

The feeders are made from disused plough discs (24" in diameter) welded on to 6 ft. of 3" pipe which is then placed over an iron stake driven in where required. The discs being slightly concave have small holes drilled in the centre to drain off water down the pipe.

For two years the Crimson Rosellas, Eastern Rosellas, a pair of Galahs and a Mallee ringneck were coming each morning and evening to feed, then recently the Crested Pigeons arrived in their dozens and completely took over the feeders hunting everything and scoffing all the sunflower seed.

While pondering the problem, Aileen suddenly realised that parrots could cling upside down if necessary to winkel out the kernels from the seeds but pigeons, being ground feeders could not. So she placed some green plastic mesh (about 1½" squares) around and over the feeders and it works like a charm. The parrots climb around the mesh and stick their heads through to feed but the pigeons can only stand on the top - no way can they get to the seed. A couple tried the humming bird stunt level with the seed but their inadequate wings wouldn't support them for more than a couple of seconds and they flopped to the ground exhausted and have now given up and don't come to the feeders at all. There is also an added bonus as the parrots can no longer scatter the seed to the ground, as they used to while bickering about the pecking order and those feeding on the ground were vulnerable to cats in the early hours of the morning.

Congratulations Aileen on overcoming your problem but we do feel sorry for the Crested Pigeons - perhaps you could redirect them to Speers Point where we could set up a refugee camp for them! Below is a sketch of Aileen's 'Parrot Feeder'.



7. COMING EVENTS:

Some details regarding Field Days/Camps may have altered since the Annual Programme was released in December 1982. Members are therefore advised to check the Newsletter for the latest information.

Sunday 20th November 1983 - Full Day's outing to Dunn's Creek (near Paterson)  
Meet at the Oak, Hexham at 7 a.m.  
Contact: Kay Imrie 524 524.

Week-end 10/11 December

The Camp scheduled for this week-end is now in doubt.  
Please contact Kay Imrie for alternative arrangements.

Monday 5th December 1983

Management Committee Meeting at 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday 14th December

CLUB NIGHT - final for 1983.  
Members' Slide Night to be followed by supper.

8. BIRD TAPES FOR SALE.

Tapes with 53 Calls of Birds of the Hunter Valley, recorded and taped by Fred Van Gessel from Kay Imrie. Cost \$6.00 per tape.

9. W.A. v. STARLINGS

TWO skilled bird hunters are closing in on four elusive starlings which have defied the might of the West Australian Government for one year on the western edge of the Nullarbor Plain.

The hunters, using rifles fitted with silencers, shotguns, nets and gellignite, are searching a 15km by 20km area 40km north of Esperance.

The starlings crossed the Nullarbor Plain from South Australia and threaten to cost the State millions of dollars if they remain free and multiply.

So far Western Australia has managed to keep out starlings, which also spread 20 different types of human disease and carry lice, but a build-up in Victoria is causing the starlings to migrate westwards.

The chief hunter, Mr Lynton Gurney, has spent the past five years on the Nullarbor Plain trapping starlings. He was called to the Esperance area 12 months ago when a large group of starlings was located in swamp country.

With Mr Peter Miller and a group of helpers they have exterminated 117 starlings. But now they are nearly at wit's end trying to find the last four which have vanished in the area, or possibly elsewhere.

Mr Miller and Mr Gurney spend every day from dawn to dusk in a "trap" dressed in full combat gear.

Starlings are declared vermin in Western Australia because of the threat they pose to agriculture and the environment of native birds.

Most of the 117 starlings caught so far were trapped in cages. But they are so elusive special legislation was passed by the West Australian Government to allow the hunters to use rifles fitted with silencers.

Gellignite, which kills by concussion, is used to exterminate the birds in trees.

Mr Gurney is very confident about finding the four starlings. But he warns they must be found in the next two to three weeks before they start breeding.

"They are the most cunning birds I know, even more cunning than foxes and crows," Mr Gurney said.

"Farmers can drive around their paddocks and not worry them, but the moment they see our government vehicles they are off."

**Damage**

"They know our Land Rovers and our pattern of hunting - they can see for miles."

Mr Gurney believes more effort is needed in South Australia to stop starlings spreading across the Nullarbor Plain.

But he concedes starlings will probably win the battle in the end and get into Western Australia despite the large expense incurred by the Government to keep them out.

He says control measures in the eastern States would make the job easier.

Starlings cause immense damage to food crops, in particular grapes and cherries, and they attack winter sown cereals at germination.

10. HANDLIST of BIRDS in NEW SOUTH WALES.

The F.O.C. advises that this book has been reprinted and will be available to Club Members for \$5.00 plus po (70c.) Orders to Kay Imrie O. Ed. Hamonet.