



Hunter Bird Observers Club

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1. NOTES FROM THE MARCH MEETING: 13/3/85.

a) Attendance - 36, including visitors Madge and Ken Wolfenden who accompanied the guest speaker. We also welcomed Jim and Judith Cook, club members down from Taree.

b) Bird Call Of The Evening - Presented by Nigel Walker.
Although experienced birdwatchers seem to have no difficulty in distinguishing between the Pied Butcherbird (*Cracticus nigrogularis*) and the Grey Butcherbird (*C. torquatus*), the lesser experienced can have trouble. Nigel played a tape of these two birds to enable us to compare them. He also played the very musical call of the Black Butcherbird (*C. quoyi*), not found in N.S.W., but which some members may see (and hear) on their migration this year to the Northern Territory.

c) Bird Of The Evening - Presented by Jim Imrie.
Pied Heron - *Ardea picata*. - Jim first observed this as a single bird during the 1983 B.O.C. Gulf tour. It fed deliberately for at least an hour close to the people on the tour. In the Northern Territory Pied Herons invade garbage dumps and sewer ponds and are regarded as trash birds there. They nest in mangroves and lay up to four eggs. Their breeding and extent of distribution has not been studied to any large extent and consequently not a great deal is known about them.

d) Guest Speaker - Arnold McGill O.A.M., F.R.Z.S., F.R.A.O.U. .
We were very privileged this evening to be able to share in the memories and reminiscences of one of Australia's most distinguished ornithologists. In a talk based loosely around the Birds of Botany Bay Arnold McGill took us back to the 1930's and 40's, in the days when Sydney Airport was known as an "aerodrome" and where up to 500 Little Terns nested. From his home in Arncliffe all his early birding was done by bicycle and he soon gained a reputation for discovering rare or unusual birds. He claims the first sighting in the area of many species including Scarlet Honeyeater, Little Egrets, Little Friarbird and Yellow-headed Wagtail! On finding the Cooks River estuary in Botany Bay he discovered a roost of some 5000 waders and was the first to record the Pectoral Sandpiper and the Kelp Gull. His talk was illustrated with some excellent slides many of them quite historical and unrepeatable today. One of these was the picture of hundreds of Giant Petrels and Albatrosses feeding near the ocean outfall from the Homebush abattoir. Thanks Arnold for a fascinating talk.

2. FIELD DAY TO GRAHAMSTOWN DAM : 24/3/85.

Our early morning start, 6.30a.m., was somewhat dampened by a thick fog, but still 22 people turned up. In the foggy conditions some of us almost missed the Hexham Bridge turnoff and a passing truck driver gave us words of encouragement (or something!) as we

dived, belatedly, into the right hand lane to make the turn.

At our first stop the fog was still very thick and we could just make out a few birds around the water's edge, amongst them Black Swans, Pied Stilts and Black-fronted Dotterel.

We travelled further up the highway, to enter the grounds at the far end of the dam, and were 'piped aboard' by a Grey Shrike-thrush. By this time the fog had lifted to reveal a warm sunny day with a gentle breeze.

On our arrival at the water side a Wedge-tailed Eagle rose up from the shore. Beyond were several waders, as well as Little and Large Egrets, and the Royal Spoonbill. There were many ducks about; eight species were sighted. Of these, the most interesting were the Mountain Duck and the Southern Shoveller, which required the telescopes to be seen well. In the centre of the lake, amongst the dead trees, was an adult Sea Eagle near its huge stick nest. A little later, two immature Sea Eagles delighted us with a graceful aerial display just above our heads. Further along the shore we saw two species of dotterels together- Black-fronted and Red-kneed - and we were able to compare the two. A White-fronted Chat also joined them. A Tawny Grassbird made a brief appearance from the bushes, but few saw it because it didn't remain long.

At the next stop, we had excellent views of Musk Ducks, including a displaying male. The woodlands here were, at first, very quiet but more activity was noticed further in, when sightings included the Rufous Fantail, many Sitellas, a Little Cuckoo-shrike, and a close sighting of a Shining Bronze-cuckoo with the sun on its metallic-green back. As we travelled around we noticed that the water level was well down and in fact the old Pacific Highway, with the tar still intact, was uncovered on the eastern side of the lake.

During lunch Jim Perry discovered a Crested Hawk (Pacific Baza), which was good enough to remain still until the rest of the party came to see it and until Wilma retrieved the telescope. In all six species of raptors were sighted, including the Brown Goshawk, Swamp Harrier and Whistling Kite. However, very few honeyeaters were seen, despite all the flowering gum trees.

In the afternoon our group was spotted by a ranger, who enquired about us but went away satisfied. It's good to know that protection of the area is taken seriously. In all, 92 species were sighted - an excellent day's birding.

Jenny Axtell.

3. WADER COUNT SUMMER 1984/85

This year's summer wader count was the most successful on record with a grand total of 10892 individuals counted, comprising 28 different species. The major areas surveyed were Kooragang Island, Wentworth Swamp, Swan Bay, Swansea and Shortland. Another 12 smaller areas were also surveyed.