



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER NO. 4/85. May 1985. (Released monthly at club nights)

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1. NOTES FROM THE APRIL MEETING: 10/4/85

a) Attendance - 32, we were pleased to welcome new members Peter and Margaret McLauchlan and John Lewis.

b) Bird Call of the Evening - Presented by Jim Perry.

On one of our recent club outings the call of this bird was confused with that of an insect. Hardly surprising really, Jim chose to play the call of the Cicadabird (*Coracina tenuirostris*). Closely related to the Cuckoo-shrikes and Trillers, this bird gets its name from the Cicada-like call that the male makes during the breeding months. Distinctive, and often hard to distinguish from the 'real thing'.

c) Bird of the Evening - Eva van de Werken.

Eva chose to speak about the Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*), which belongs to the group of parrots known as Broadtails, the group that includes Budgerigars and Rosellas. Her decision was no doubt prompted by a recent visit to the Barren Grounds Bird Observatory, where some members were lucky enough to get a glimpse of this shy, elusive bird. The Ground Parrot is an endangered bird, not so much because of low numbers but, more importantly, because of loss of habitat. They prefer coastal and adjacent montane heathlands, which are very vulnerable to fire. Without burning, however, the heathlands can become unsuitable as Ground Parrot habitat. Controlled burning, at 8 or 10 year intervals, may therefore be part of an effective management plan.

d) Main Feature - 1984 Annual Migration - Jim Perry.

In October last year six members of the club departed on the annual migration to Northern N.S.W. and South-East Queensland. Major stop-over points on the way were: Yuragir National Park, Bundjalung N.P., and Broadwater N.P. in N.S.W., and Girraween N.P., Crows Nest N.P., Ravensbourne N.P., Chinchilla and the Wonga Hills property 100km. from Chinchilla in Queensland. Due to rain our stay at Wonga Hills was cut short, as was the time at Kyogle and Gibraltar Range N.P. Birding at Yuragir was excellent, with highlights being a pair of Painted Snipe and a pair of White-throated Nightjars, with egg. Northern species such as the Red-backed Wren and Blue-faced Honeyeater also began to appear. Other sightings on coastal N.S.W. included the Osprey, Brolga, Brahminy Kite and the Buff-banded Rail. Girraween, a new park for most, was another delightful spot, with the Turquoise Parrot and Chestnut-rumped Heathwren popular sightings. Crows Nest produced a pair of Spotted Quail-thrush and an imposing Peregrine Falcon. Memorable displays by male Paradise Riflebirds were the feature of Ravensbourne. Our three day stay at Wonga Hills produced over 100 species, including the stately Bustard and the magnificent Red-winged Parrot. The Spotted Bowerbird, Owlet Nightjar and Forest Kingfisher, with of course the Wonga Pigeon, were others recorded on the property. Despite the rain our return trip did provide much good birding, which we will remember long after our tents and clothes have dried out.

2. EASTER CAMP - PILLIGA STATE FOREST - SCHWAGERS BORE: 5-8 April

As most of us travelled over 400km to reach the camp site there was not much in the way of birding done on the first day. The calls of Owlet Nightjars predominated over camp chatter that night. The dawn chorus next morning was different to our local awakening at home. As usual

the white-plumed Honeyeater was very noticeable in this inland forest type. Most of the group ambled down a forest road after breakfast, taking care not to venture too far off the road as one could easily become lost in this area. The weather was fine, and soon warmed up considerably. Comment was made about how quiet the forest was, with no wind to rustle the leaves. So different, this Pilliga area - a character all of its own. This was an area of the state that had recently been declared drought stricken, which is worth noting when looking at bird species should we visit the area at some future date. Some of us had good sightings of a Red-capped Robin but the tiny Mistletoebird proved very elusive for quite a few. A Mallee Ringneck Parrot was shown to all as he devoured mistletoe berries which were hanging in a eucalypt close to camp. Some pigs were reported seen by several members. Before lunch the birds had become harder to find so back for a cooling drink. The ants had certainly found our camp by this time; the Pilliga certainly supports a large and varied population of them. The dappled shade of the Bull Oaks (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) and Cypress Pine (*Callitris glauca*) was welcome during the heat of the day.

Jim and Judy Cook from Taree district were with us by an unfortunate misadventure. They were on their way to a B.O.C. camp further west when, at Dubbo, their Ford 4-wheel drive and caravan finished in the river. Sporting a new Nissan and salvaged van they seemed none the worse for their accident, and cheerfully joined us instead. I think they were the only ones to see the Emus, which we all knew were around because of tracks left in the sand. Our best birdwatching was done late in the afternoon, at a puddle left by the rain a few days earlier and rapidly drying up. Several of these spots beside the road became popular. Double-barred Finches, Brown-headed and White-eared Honeyeaters were only a few of the birds seen bathing and drinking. A Common Bronzewing looked resplendent with the afternoon sun catching all the colours in his wings.

The next day, Sunday, fourteen of us travelled to Gilgai Nature Reserve in three 4-wheel drives, leaving three men behind at camp. Waterholes, reported to attract birds not seen elsewhere in the Pilliga, drew us to explore. Unfortunately, without local knowledge, and reduced to travel by foot when trees were found blocking the road, the journey became just a pleasant sojourn. When we all reassembled back at the cars for lunch several tales of 'slight variations off course' did nothing to allay our fears for Wilma, who did not return until after we had all finished eating. Back at camp the three men were much cooler than their returning companions, who came back to break the silence. Later in the afternoon we all checked the water puddles again, taking chairs for relaxed birding. Near one group a Fan-tailed Cuckoo was watched as it devoured a procession of caterpillars, one by one. Little Woodswallows were very active around our campsite and three Glossy Black Cockatoos flew in each evening. Groups of White-winged Choughs and a few Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters were also seen by all. That evening proved very pleasant and sociable when Arthur Williams was prevailed upon to play his guitar and sing some country songs. Jack Flanagan, who sighted Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos that day, was an amiable compere but, try as he might, not much was forthcoming from the rest of us to contribute to the evening's entertainment.

Next morning was time to pack, for most of us had to head home. A total of 80 species sighted, combined with a pleasant Easter break, made us reluctant to bid farewell to our companions of the last few days.

Suggested reading for more information on this fascinating area:
'A Million Wild Acres' by Eric Rolls.

Dorothy Bates.

3. FIELD DAY TO BOB'S FARM AREA - 21/4/85

Due to the prevailing dry conditions (then) the proposed excursion

through Hexham Swamp from Hexham to Minmi was rescheduled for the Bob's Farm area. 17 persons attended, including new members Peter and Margaret McLachlan and visitors Anne Robotham and Bruce Turnbull. The weather was fine at the Hexham meeting place but we could see we were heading into rain as we drove towards our destination. The first 20 minutes or so at Bob's Farm were spent sitting in the cars, out of the rain.

Once the rain eased birdwatchers scattered everywhere; along the mangrove-lined banks of Tilligerry Creek, across the samphire flats and into casuarina and eucalypt woodland. Here we had good sightings of Bar-shouldered Doves, Red-rumped Parrots, Striped and Brown Honeyeaters, Whimbrel, and a magnificent White-breasted Sea-eagle - a score of 55 species.

Upon reaching Taylor's Beach lunch was the first priority. Despite Eva's disapproval, the wind blew as we sat in the sun. It was here that Sue found a pair of Whistling Kites circling above their nest on Bull's Island. A walk along the old salt flats and along the shoreline netted us a few more species, such as the Eastern Golden Plover, Restless Flycatcher flitting about the mangroves, Double-banded and Red-capped Dotterels, and finally, on returning to the cars, Black Swans. A total count of 63 species seen for the day. After only a few kilometres travelling on our return trip the skies opened - nicely timed!!

Wilma Barden

4. LIBRARY REPORT MAY 1985

Two new books have been added to the library. 'Birds of Prey' by Michael Everett, published in London, deals with the evolution, characteristics, breeding cycle, hunting and feeding habits and migration of birds of prey. Easy to read text and large, coloured photographs make this an interesting acquisition to the library list. 'The Nesting Season', with comments by Helen Cruikshank, uses the superb photography of F.K. Truslow to illustrate chapters on topics such as Nest Building, The Egg, Hatching, The Fledglings etc. Many illustrations were originally published in the National Geographic, and this is a truly beautiful book.

Eva van de Werken

5. COMING EVENTS.

- WEEKEND 18/19 May. - Camp at McDonald's Valley near St. Albans. Please see Rosemary Waymark (751819) for details of how to reach the camp site.
- WEEKEND 8-10th June.- Camp at Sharpes Creek Camping Area within Gloucester Tops National Park. Contact and details - Kay Imrie 524524
- SUNDAY 23rd June.- Trip to the Australian Museum, Sydney. A 'behind the scenes' guided tour of the Department of Ornithology.
- MONDAY 3rd June.- Management Committee Meeting, Garden Suburb Public School. 7.30p.m.
- WEDNESDAY 12th June.- Club Night, Garden Suburb Public School 7.30p.m.