



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER NO. 1/86 February 1986 (Released monthly at club nights.)

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1. NOTES FROM THE DECEMBER MEETING 11/12/85.

a) Attendance - 55, plus 5 visitors.

b) Bird Call of the Evening - Presented by Wilma Barden.

Several people mistook the call that Wilma played tonight for that of the Tawny Frogmouth, and indeed the repeated Oom-Oom sound was very similar. However in this case the call, which was occasionally prolonged for some time, belonged to the Red-backed Button Quail (*Turnix maculosa*). According to the Readers Digest book the males usually remain silent; this is a clever adaptation, subtly used by the males of other species - including *Homo sapiens*.

c) Main Feature - A slide presentation by Gary Weber.

Gary started off his presentation this evening with some slides of water birds which was very appropriate as the N.S.W. premier, Mr Wran, had launched the Shortland Wetlands Centre project that afternoon. The first slide was, in fact, the one of the Black Swan which was chosen by the Hunter Wetlands Trust for the cover of its publicity leaflet and first greeting card. The rest of the slides were of the same superb quality, with a wide range of both passerines and non-passerines being shown. Some of the close-ups were breathtaking in their clarity and were a tribute to Gary's patience and skill as a photographer. Thank you, Gary, for a marvellous presentation and we all look forward to the next one.

d) Members' Slides.

Nigel Walker showed slides of various birds, including terns and penguins, which everyone enjoyed, although some members swore they had seen them before. Wilma Barden showed some habitat shots taken around the Coongie Lakes area of South Australia, taken during a trip there searching for the Night Parrot. Various activities during the year at the Shortland Wetlands Centre were the subjects of slides shown by Nigel Walker. They included egret banding, and clean up work carried out by Hunter Wetlands Trust members at the centre.

e) Christmas Raffle.

Demand for raffle tickets outstripped supply at this year's Christmas Raffle to raise money for additions to the club library. The lucky winners, who departed with a glittering array of prizes, were Matthew Stephenson, Dot Bates, Lloyd Jennings - a visitor to our club -, Rua Jones, Nigel Walker, and Val Babinski. Many thanks to those members, who kindly donated the prizes: Rosemary Waymark, Diane Rogers, Ted Felton, Kay Imrie, and Sue Hamonet. The raffle raised enough money for a copy of Simpson and Day, with enough left over for further purchases. Thanks also to the Committee ladies who prepared a very tasty supper which was enjoyed by all members.

2. FIELD OUTING TO BENNETT'S GREEN - Sunday 18th December, 1985.

Several Brush Bronze-wings were calling as nine members, not deterred by doubtful weather and extremely high humidity, entered the bushland at the back of the light industrial area of Bennett's Green. The Bronze-wings remained elusive in spite of much careful searching but Rufous Whistlers abounded and continuously managed to outdo the cicadas with their attractive calls.

New members Milton Booth and Ron Douglass came along for the first time and, with Ron's expertise ably assisted by Patrick Noonan, we had a lesson on cicada identification. Two Double-Drummers were closely observed, one recently out of its case and drying out and the other just emerging.

An immature Fan-tailed Cuckoo, which called just like its foster parent, was seen being fed by a White-browed Scrubwren. Brown Quail were heard in the grassy areas bordering the swamp and were flushed to give everyone a good view. An old patch of blackberry brambles yielded a Golden-headed Cisticola and, much to everyone's surprise, a beautiful Southern Emu-wren. Here also were Red-browed Firetails, Silvereyes, and Double-barred Finches. Honeyeaters were generally hard to find except for the Yellow-tufted variety.

The number of species seen was 46; with the overcast, humid weather this was considered a satisfactory result for the morning's efforts. Our thanks to Arthur Williams for sharing his great knowledge of birds with us in one of his favourite areas.

Kay Imrie.

3. WHITE-THROATED NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus mystacalis*).

On the weekend of 23/24th November 1985 Hunter Bird Observers Club held a camp at Craven State Forest, which is located south-east of Gloucester. As nightfall approached on 23rd, I went for a walk along a Forestry road with a spotlight to look for nocturnal birds and animals, and to listen to the evening calls of the diurnal birds before they settled down for the night. Just before dark there was a loud chorus of many Kookaburras calling. This was followed, almost immediately, by numerous White-throated Nightjars with their strange laughing call, which is similar to the "kook, kook, kook" part of the Kookaburra's call but with a more exciting quality about it as it ascends the scale with increasing tempo. These calls were accompanied by a loud, continuous clapping noise, which I believe to have been a rapid bill-clapping noise being made by the Nightjars.

Many Nightjars could be seen in flight above the treetops as they hawked for insects in the weak moonlight, and I was able to follow one pair of birds with the spotlight when their flight carried them to within five or six metres of where I was standing. These birds were making the bill-clapping noise and, although I was only able to follow them with the spotlight for a relatively short time, their flight appeared to be synchronised, in the manner of many seabird species during courtship flights. I was also able to see the brilliant, pink eye-shine of this species as they turned towards me in the beam of the spotlight.

These observations have raised several questions about the behaviour of White-throated Nightjars. Does this species perform rapid bill-clapping in association with calling and, if so, is it part of a courtship display or does the clapping sound come from another source? The American publication 'The Encyclopedia of Birds' refers to Nightjars communicating with a wing-clapping noise but I find it hard to believe that this was the source of the rapid noise I heard, particularly when considering that the birds were in flight. Further, do the White-throated Nightjars participate in a synchronous courtship flight or was it merely coincidence that the pair I observed twisted and turned together during the short time I watched them? The reference books in my possession do not give answers to these questions and, to date, inquiries made of experienced bird observers have been unable to shed very much light on the subject.

Being totally absorbed by this most exciting display I am not sure how long the birds continued to call, but would estimate a minimum of half-an-hour. A second trip was made to the Craven State Forest on the following weekend in an unsuccessful attempt to record the calls on cassette. Only four, widely-spaced calls were heard in the evening and a similar number just before daylight next morning. A different weather

pattern existed on the second weekend, when heavy cloud moved in late on Saturday afternoon and threatened rain as well as extensive thunderstorm activity to the south, in the direction of Newcastle. Other differences noted were the lack of Sugar-gliders calling, as they had on the previous occasion, and the marked increase in the calls of several species of frogs. It is possible that White-throated Nightjars were no longer present in the numbers of the previous weekend, but it is also possible that the differences in weather may have had an effect on the behaviour of the Nightjars. Further investigations of ornithological literature may, I hope, provide some of the answers to my questions.

Bill Cambridge.

4. FIELD DAY AT MORISSET - Sunday 19th January 1986.

Once again the Great-Bird-Watcher-in-the-Sky came good with a glorious day, after a bout of rainy weather. Fifteen members met for the day, which began with a stroll around the dam and adjacent bush of the Gun Club area at the Morisset Hospital Park. The wet feet were compensated for by a sighting of a Reed Warbler, by splendid, prolonged views of a Yellow Robin - who appeared to belong to the Morisset People Observers' Club -, and by a Crested Shrike-tit who obligingly performed for those who had not seen one before. Some lucky viewers also saw a Marsh Crake at this stop.

Following morning tea we moved around to the waterfront, where the viewing list quickly grew. A walk along the water's edge and around a road through the area brought more sightings, which included several Dollarbirds, Sacred Kingfishers, and an assortment of Egrets, successfully fishing. A highlight, for those who had not previously come across them, was a tree full of Varied Sittellas busily working for their food.

After a pleasant lunch break by the water it was decided to finish the day by visiting the nearby Myuna Bay picnic area, in the hope that the local Ospreys might be fishing. Unfortunately, canoe and speed boat activities in the bay precluded this possibility. However, we were lucky enough to find in the area a young Cisticola and a Striped Honeyeater. The sightings at this last stop brought the day's total to 73 different birds.

Fay Heading

5. F.O.C. CAMP.

We have received an invitation to join the N.S.W. Field Ornithologists' Club members at a weekend camp. This is on 1st & 2nd March at Boott State Recreation Area on the Lakes Way, about 15kms south of Forster. Camp fees are \$7 per tent and 40c per hot shower. If you are interested please contact the leader, David Turner, directly on (065) 540446

6. CAMP AT CHICHESTER DAM - January 25th-27th.

15 brave souls set out on a cool and wet Saturday morning for the camp at Ferndale Park, a private property on the Chichester River just downstream from the dam. Our courage was rewarded, as the sun appeared just after lunch and we had beautiful weather for the rest of the weekend.

An Azure Kingfisher was one of the early sightings for most of us, and a promise of things to come. Bird life was plentiful, a noticeable feature being the number of young birds being fed by their parents. Obviously the breeding season was a good one in the area. Young cuckoos were also present, including Channel-billed Cuckoos being fed by Currawongs and Brush Cuckoos being fed by White-browed Scrub Wrens. A new species of bird - the Red-bearded Satin Bower Bird - aroused a lot of interest. The mystery was solved when some of the birds were observed feeding messily on blackberries!

In all 75 species were found, including a brief glimpse of a Lyrebird as we were driving out. The owner of the property sent in a list of 130

species for the Atlas, so there must have been some that we missed. General opinions were that a spot so close to home was worth another visit in the future, perhaps even on an ordinary weekend.

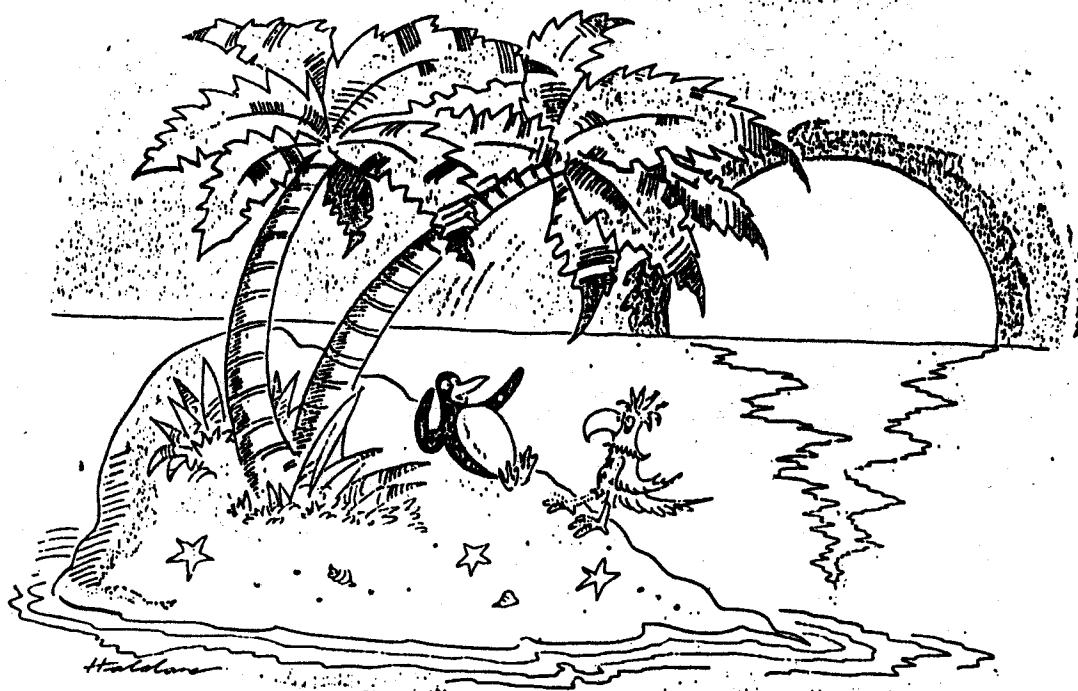
Alan Stuart.

7. YELLOW-TAILED BLACK COCKATOO SURVEY.

This survey was mentioned in our August 1984 newsletter and since then it has really gained momentum, with hundreds of bird watchers from all over south-eastern Australia now sending in regular sheets of observations on these magnificent birds. However, in a recent letter the co-ordinator, Jill McLean, mentions how few observations come from the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas. It is realised that sightings in the city are rare but club members are a well travelled group of people and should have more observations to report. Any data, however limited, can help to build up a larger picture on a regional scale. So, if you have seen Y.T.B.C. on your travels, or if you know someone in our region who gets them visiting a property for instance, please pick up a form from the library table, fill in details of sightings and send it to our area co-ordinator, Bob Sargent at Dungog.

8. COMING EVENTS.

- SUNDAY 23rd February - Field outing to RHONDDA & STOCKTON BOREHOLE SWAMP. Half day trip. Meet Teralba Caravan Park entrance, Anzac Parade, 7am.
Contact - Rosemary Waymark - 751819.
- SUNDAY 23rd March - Field day to POKOLBIN STATE FOREST. Meet Edgeworth Oasis car park, 7am, or Cessnock Swimming Pool, 7.45am.
Contact - Nigel Walker - 300138
- 28th - 31st March - Easter camp at MUNGHORN GAP - note change of venue.
Contact - Kay Imrie - 524524.
- SUNDAY 20th April - Field day to ELLALONG. Meet as for Pokolbin, 7.30am and 8.15am respectively.
Contact - Rosemary Waymark - 751819.
- MONDAY 3rd March - Management Committee Meeting, Garden Suburbs Public School,
- WEDNESDAY 12th March - Club night, Garden Suburbs Public School, 7.30 pm.



"Strictly speaking, we're not supposed to go away for the winter."