



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER NO. 6/86 JULY 1986.

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Annual Subscription: Family Rate: \$7.00 Single \$6.00) due
School Student \$2.00) on 1st Jan.
Club Badges \$3.00)
Car Stickers \$1.50) available from Treasurer (Ed Hamonet)

1. NOTES FROM JUNE MEETING 11/6/86.

a) Attendance - 53 people were present in our new meeting place at Shortland Wetlands Centre, all resplendent with name tags which were beautifully lettered by Fiona Perry, our president's daughter. We appreciated the spaciousness of the Centre, especially the comfortable chairs!

b) Bird Call of the Evening - Presented by Sue Hamonet.

This was a call familiar to many of us, yet some find it difficult to identify when out in field and wetland. Very few ducks say "Quack! Quack!" and our Australian Wood Duck is no exception. Sue described the call of the female as a long-drawn "Miaow", growing in intensity, and that of the male shorter and more high pitched. They also make clucking, chortling noises when displaying. When sitting around camp at night it is rather eerie to hear calls from a flock of Wood Ducks flying overhead.

c) Bird of the Evening - Presented by Alan Stuart.

This evening's bird was one from the very popular family of Grass-finches, of which there are 18 in Australia, the Double-barred Finch (*Poephila bichenovii*) named by the naturalist Bicheno in 1830. Also called Bicheno finch, black-ringed finch and owl-faced finch because of the prominent black line curving around the head, and another black bar across the lower breast. The Double-barred Finch seen in the Hunter region has a white rump, a black rumped race is found west of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Habitat is open forests and grass lands but not far from water, it must drink hourly and does so by sucking. It is an agile, avid seed eater, sometimes eats insects but does not catch them on the wing. Like all Australian finches, they are monogamous, the pair bond is very strong and they stay together all year. Double-barred Finches flock tightly in groups of 4-20 birds, and will roost together in old nests. It is a beautiful sight to see flocks of these immaculate looking little birds feeding among grasses and low vegetation.

d) Scientific Names - Presented by Ed Hamonet.

We continued our study of nomenclature with more members of the Meliphagidae family, i) PHYLIDONYRIS (Philos = loving; Hedone = pleasure -- which may be an allusion to the way in which they move around their habitat):

- Phylidonyris novae hollandiae = New Holland ... New Holland Honey-eater.
- " nigr = black ... White-cheeked Honeyeater.
- " melanops = melas - black, ops - face ... Tawny-crowned Honeyeater.
- " pyrrhoptera = pyrrhos - fire-coloured ... Crescent H.E.
pteron = wing

(These scientific names ignore the more prominent features of

Scientific names contd.

colouring and marking of plumage)

ii) Myzomela sanguinolenta ... Scarlet Honeyeater
Myzein = to suck, meli = honey; sanguinolentus = blood coloured
which is a very apt name for this bird.

e) Observations:

Flocks of between 1500 and 2000 Red-necked Avocets have been seen near Kooragang Island and under Stockton Bridge, and 200 Shovellers on Stockton Borehole lagoon.

f) Main Feature - Presented by Steve Heeren.

Our guest speaker was Steve Heeren, taxidermist, who was born and grew up in Holland. As a child of ten he became interested in birds as he saw huge flocks of migratory birds passing over his home. Flocks numbered tens of millions and always some would be found dead in the snow. His pet owl also perished and Steve began his career because he wanted his pet preserved and his family could not afford to have it stuffed professionally. So he taught himself the craft and went on to become taxidermist for the Zoological Museum of the Amsterdam University, and has prepared specimens for the Museum König in Bonn. At present he is taxidermist for the National Parks & Wildlife Service. He has worked voluntarily for many years as honorary ranger for wildlife protection. He is also a splendid raconteur and we were entertained by racy accounts of his experiences and views, and were given an insight into the value and difficulties of preserving birds in this most naturalistic manner. As I could well believe it is not an easy procedure, one needs lots of patience and dexterity, also a love of birds. Taxidermy's contribution to science lies in the field of research into food requirements of birds, causes of death, and understanding the structure and biological composition of plumage; it serves to preserve rare and extinct species for posterity and is educationally valuable in that people who are unable to see birds in their natural habitat may have an alternative experience in a museum. Incidentally, those wanting to keep a bird for later taxidermic treatment are advised to place it in a plastic bag and freeze as soon as possible after death. Steve is a highly skilled craftsman and a very entertaining speaker, and we all learnt something from his talk.

2. CAMP AT SMITH'S LAKE FIELD STATION JUNE 7/8/9.

The Queen's Birthday weekend no doubt encouraged many bird fanatics to get out and about. The Wetlands Symposium at Shortland and the camp-out at the N.S.W. University Field Station were the two major attractions though.

The Station is situated on the southern banks of Smith's Lake about 4km. east of Bungwahl. The 14 of us who attended the camp enjoyed the comforts of hot showers, bunks, pot belly stove, gas cookers, refrigerators, "rat proof" pantry and most other modern camping comforts.

One of the highlights of the camp was Win Filewood's banding project. He has been working 3 or 4 weekends a year for the last 5 years and has banded 400-odd birds in the immediate area. Among the more interesting birds tangled in his nets during our visit were the Eastern Whipbird, an eclipse male Rose Robin, an eclipse male Golden Whistler, Eastern Spinebills and White-cheeked Honeyeaters.

Accompanying Win was John Handel who had a particular interest in photography, to my delight. One experience we shared was photographing a Tawny Frogmouth on Saturday night. It allowed us to approach within half a metre on the same branch, part-way up a paper bark tree.

It posed for a few photos but refused to be grabbed! The photo highlight for the weekend for me was the Azure Kingfisher. It produced some of the best picture-taking opportunities I've experienced, i.e. an Azure at 5 metres with a 10-times lens.

Meanwhile the other birdwatchers were viewing White-breasted Sea-Eagles, Southern Emu-Wrens, Tawny Grassbirds, a White-headed Pigeon (which Win maintains is a new specie for the area), Spotted Quail-thrush, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos -- and an octopus! The Crake dilemma and John's near treading on a Pheasant Coucal half dressed in breeding plumage also helped make the weekend more exciting.

Total birds for the Field Station area was 28 non-passerines and 45 passerines. On Monday morning before leaving nearby rainforest proved to be rather depauperate in contrast to the coast which supported flowering banksia wherein numbers of the larger honey-eaters were seen. Out at sea Australian Gannets displayed their diving tactics.

Overall we had a great weekend and would like to thank Club members who attended, Win, John and the N.S.W. University for the use of the Field Station.

-- David & Vanessa Blagden.

3. FIELD DAY AT HEXHAM SWAMP 22ND JUNE.

Sunday dawned bright and sunny, an excellent day for a field outing to Hexham Swamps. After assembling at the rendezvous point we proceeded to C. & A. Washery via Tarro to walk along the private railway line through the swamp. A bitterly cold breeze -- er -- wind didn't blow away the enthusiasm of the 24 people present. Very little water was visible, and few birds were sighted, but the Swamp Harriers showed us how they battle the wind. After returning to the vehicles, we drove to the western side of the swamp via John Renshaw Drive, where a number of wetland birds were observed: Egrets, Herons, Spoonbills, Swampheens, Glossy Ibis, and even a Pelican. A short walk from here down Cedar Hill Drive and again we were rewarded by more species, including Black Swans and the White-Breasted Sea-Eagle.

Retracing our steps and a scramble down to the railway line again, we were delighted by the sighting of a Black Swan nesting. A Restless Flycatcher flitting across the water and a Jacky Winter brought the total of 48 birds for the day. We were grateful for permission given by Coal & Allied Ltd. which enabled us to enjoy birdlife in areas which otherwise would be inaccessible.

-- Joyce and Les Hewson.

4. Report on the International Symposium on Wetlands.

The recent International Symposium on Wetlands held jointly by the Hunter Wetlands Trust and University of Newcastle from 5th to 8th June was a great success. Over 170 delegates from all over Australia and New Zealand with some from further overseas attended the symposium. The opening address was given by Mr. Vincent Serventy who was so impressed by the programme of events that he decided to stay for the whole four days. Mr. Hal Woolton Q.C. of the Australian Conservation Foundation and Mr. John Aquilina, the N.S.W. Minister for Natural Resources also spoke in the opening addresses.

The first two days were given over to presentation of papers on

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a very wide variety of wetlands topics. The keynote paper was given by Mr. Joe Blossom from the Wildfowl Trust in the U.K., who showed slides and spoke about the activities of the Wildfowl Trust with a special emphasis on Slimbridge.

Events on the Saturday and Sunday were concentrated at the Shortland Wetlands Centre which was filled with displays and posters on wetlands subjects, with a full programme of slide presentations and films in the new theatre. Bus trips were laid on to transport delegates and members of the public on tours around some Lower Hunter wetlands, including Toronto, Seaham, Irrawang, Tarro, Hexham and Kooragang Island.

Overall, the four days of the symposium were extremely enjoyable and informative. Thanks to all H.B.O.C. members who attended, especially those who undertook various chores to help the symposium go smoothly.

-- Nigel Walker.

5. COMING EVENTS.

SUNDAY 20TH JULY

- DAY TRIP TO TARONGA. Meet 10 a.m. Top Car Park. Important to be there c time. If we have 12 or more the admission price is reduced to \$5 adults \$2.50 kids. Contact - Kay Imrie 524524.

SUNDAY 24TH AUGUST

- FIELD DAY TO SINGLETON AREA. Meet 7 a.m. McDonalds Hexham or 8.15 Burdekin Park, Singleton. Contact - Ruth Parker 25569.

NOVEMBER 21/22/23

- WEEK-END at BARREN GROUND. There are still some vacancies, contact Kay Imrie.

SUNDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER

- FIELD DAY to WARKWORTH/BROKE. Meet 7 a.m. "Oasis" at Edgeworth. Contact - Jim Perry 432496.

WEEKEND CAMP
4-6TH OCTOBER

- CAMP AT WIDDEN VALLEY. Contact Sue Hamonet 581023.

WEDNESDAY 13TH AUGUST

- CLUB NIGHT at Shortland Wetlands Centre. Guest Speaker G. Harison on Pigeons. 7.30p.

SEPTEMBER 8TH

- MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING at Garden Suburb Public School at 5.30 p.m.

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