



Hunter Bird Observers Club

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1. NOTES FROM DECEMBER MEETING 10/12/86.

a) Attendance: 62 including new members Garth Cooksey, Alan Ede, Adelaide Gray, Lloyd and Bronwyn Jennings, Bob Moffat, George and Thelma Rogers, Ray Tooby, Kath Walker and Ken Wells; also 3 visitors Les and Chris Walker and Jan Sorensen. It was good to see Doug Field down from Merriwa.

b) Bird Call presented by Jim Perry: The call of the Forest Kingfisher (*Halcyon macleayii*) is quite different to that of the Mangrove Kingfisher which it resembles in appearance. The tone is somewhat similar to the call of the Sacred Kingfisher which is well known to most of us, but is much more rapid, and can be described as high-pitched scratchy 'Kree-kree-kree'. The Forest and Sacred Kingfishers may occur in the same area, but their differently coloured plumage aids identification. The Forest Kingfisher is seen much further north, and is only seen rarely in the Hunter Valley.

c) Bird of the Evening presented by Alan Keating: The Rainbow Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*) is the most beautiful of all migratory birds seen in the Hunter Valley. The arrival of numbers of these gorgeously plumaged little birds heralds Spring, and their melodious 'Pirr, pirr, pirr' calls are heard along sandy river banks where they burrow their nests. There are 23 species of Bee-eater in the world, but only one in Australia. They come down from New Guinea, Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomon Islands in September. Their plumage is blue-green shot with gold, blue-edged black eye-mark, pale orange throat with black mark in centre, and fine curved black bill. From the tail feathers extend two spines 25-50 cm. long. Male and female birds are similar in colour, pairs are often seen perched over a creek, then skimming through the air, iridescent feathers flashing as they hunt insects -- as the name implies, they are voracious eaters of bees. Alan is intrigued to watch them wiping the bee along a branch, either to remove the sting or squeeze out the poison. He has observed Bee-eaters coming to the same spot on the river bank each year. It would be interesting to know if the same birds return.

d) Observations: Large numbers of Brown Honeyeaters have been seen at Teralba and other areas where previously they had not been observed. Black Cockatoos were sighted at Blackbutt Reserve.

e) Main Feature - Slides: We were shown a sample of the slides recently given to the Club by B.O.C. This donation of 139 slides is a very welcome addition to our library. Sue Hamonet gave a pictorial account of the safari to Cape York made by some Club members at the end of July, and we heard a little

about the ups and downs of the trip. Alan Stuart showed slides of some of the 30-40 birds he saw in parks and gardens during his visit to Japan -- the Rufous Turtle Dove and Azure Backed Magpie were two I liked. Ted Jones had photographed nesting Mallee Fowl at Waikerie in South Australia, so altogether it was varied and interesting viewing.

f) Christmas Raffle: An exciting array of prizes was offered the numerous winners of our raffle and we were all well satisfied with our booty. Many thanks to those kind donors. The sum of \$113.50 which resulted from the frenzied sale of tickets is a welcome boost to Club funds.

The evening climaxed with a delicious supper served in style and enjoyed by all.

2. FIELD OUTING TO KOORAGANG ISLAND - 7/12/86.

This outing was attended by 21 members and 2 visitors from Hornsby. The day started at the Australian Fluorine Chemicals sandspit which yielded 47 bird species. Some of the more interesting birds recorded were Mangrove Warbler, Mangrove Heron and Double-barred Finch. All had a good look at nearly every bird, although many an intrepid birdwatcher was trapped in the mud due to the low tide. Eleven species of migratory waders were sighted.

The second stop was at Stockton sewage treatment works. Here, many Chestnut Teal and Cormorants were observed. A Figbird was also found at this location along with a mud nest built on a television aerial. Out at sea, numerous seabirds were sighted including Common Tern, Short-tailed Shearwater and a Skua.

At the Stockton bridge sandspit were a few more interesting birds such as Mongolian Dotterel, Turnstone and Red-capped Dotterel. There were 2000+ Avocets and about 1500 Eastern Curlews at the Greenleaf Fertilisers ponds. Finally, we stopped at the Simsmetal area in an unsuccessful attempt to find the Banded Plovers which are frequently there. The day's bird count was 83. Thanks to all the members who attended for a thoroughly enjoyable day.

-- Mathew Stephenson.

3. FIELD DAY AT WALKA WATER WORKS/BOLWARRA/MORPETH - 18/1/87.

A hot and humid day, the overcast sky saved it from being a real scorcher. Seventeen members and one visitor from Canberra wandered around the 45 acre storage reservoir area, observing our feathered friends and enjoying some shady trees on the way. Forty five species were noted, including the resident Great Crested Grebe, plus two furred species, Cottontails.

After morning tea we drove to the Bolwarra Water Treatment Works for good sightings of a Whistling Kite and numerous water birds. Lunch was enjoyed at the Morpeth Nature Reserve, sightings were few. Apart from a lonely bull, our leader, Jeanette, spotted the tail end of a Snipe heading for the coast.

Next stop was the Water Treatment Works at Tenambit where we were greeted by swarms of flies and strong odours. Two large Sea Eagles perched in a tree, and a good variety of water birds were seen including Pink-eared Ducks. The humidity then caused us to disperse after a very pleasant outing. It was good to see keen member Trevor Jurd from Singleton. Sue was as helpful and informative as ever.

The Walka Works were established in 1887 in grounds of about 200 acres. Steam driven pumps were used to draw water from the Hunter River. After treatment it was forced to the reservoirs at Buttai for supply to Newcastle and South Maitland districts. Five coal fired boilers generated steam for nine pumps of various types and capacities. A staff of about twenty was required.

-- Alan Keating.

4. AUSTRALIA DAY WEEKEND CAMP AT ROWLEYS RIVER - 24-25-26/1/87.

The first camp for the new year was held on private property on beautiful Rowleys River near Mt. George. The source of this river is on the south edge of the watershed between the Manning and Hastings River systems.

Of the 33 people who attended, 11 were school students who enjoyed the warm river water fun. Nature turned on the sun for the holiday with the temperature up to 35 degrees.

Observations ranged from the Wedgetail Eagle at a very high altitude, down to the lowly Starling. Everyone enjoyed watching Bee-eaters feeding their young in river bank nests, plus numerous Catbird calls and the many Satin Bower Birds seen in the timbered areas. One bower was found. Sightings were also made of Spectacled Monarchs and Glossy Black Cockatoos. Altogether 98 different species were sighted which, considering the high temperature, was quite an achievement.

The highlight of the camp was the sighting of Joe's Damper (rare species indeed) and black billy tea. These were observed at Bird Call time on Australia Day Eve as we sat around the camp fire. The damper was eaten warm with butter and treacle.

Special thanks are due to Joe Fogarty who mowed the grass for the campsite and graded the track down to the level bank. Thanks also to those members who organised the camp, which should be known as "Camp Magnificent".

-- Ray Tooby.

5. COMING EVENTS:

SUNDAY 22ND FEBRUARY

FIELD DAY to BARRINGTON GUEST HOUSE AREA. Meet McDonalds, Hexham 6 A.M. Contact Kay Imrie 524524.

SUNDAY 22ND MARCH

FIELD DAY TO STOCKTON BOREHOLE/ TERALBA AREA. Meet Teralba Caravan Park 7 A.M. Contact Sue Hamonet 581023.

EASTER CAMP 17/20TH APRIL

PRIVATE PROPERTY "MURRUMBO", KERRABEE VIA SANDY HOLLOW. Details and Contact Kay Imrie 524524.

WEDNESDAY 11TH MARCH

CLUBNIGHT at SHORTLAND WETLANDS CENTRE 7.30 P.M. Ross Knowles from the Wilderness Society of N.S.W. will present an audio-visual programme.

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