



# Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER No. 3/87 APRIL 1987.

President: Jim Perry.  
 Secretary: Rosemary Waymark.  
 Correspondence: P.O. Box 24, New Lambton 2305.  
 Telephone enquiries: Wilma Barden 573928.  
 Newsletter Editor: Ruth Parker 25569.

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## 1. NOTES FROM MARCH MEETING 11/3/87.

a) ATTENDANCE: 58, plus guest speaker Ross Knowles.

b) BIRD CALL presented by Wilma Barden.

Calls of two Grebes were played - the skittering call of the Little Grebe, which could also be described as a trill or titter; and that of the Great Crested Grebe, which is much more difficult to describe. The best I can say is that it is a slow, two-note 'row-ah' barking sound. Little Grebes are commonly seen on swamps and pools around the Hunter area, but the Great Crested Grebe is rarer, Walka Water Works, Grahamstown Dam and Lake Liddel being the only places where they have been found.

c) BIRD OF THE EVENING presented by Bevan McGregor.

BROWN GOSHAWK (*Accipiter fasciatus* -- accipiter = hawk, fasciatus = banded). Also called Chicken Hawk and Australian or Collared Goshawk, this bird can be confused with the Collared Sparrowhawk (which is also commonly called Chicken-hawk). As the two birds are quite similar in colouring and can share the same habitat, the confusion is understandable. It is when they are in flight that differences are discernable. The Brown Goshawk has a broad, rounded tail and flies slowly with rapid wingbeats, whereas the Sparrowhawk has a squared tail and flies more swiftly and directly. The calls are also different, the Brown Goshawk is mostly silent, has an alarm call 'kek-kek-kek' and a slow repeated 'seep-seep-seep' rather like the call of a smaller bird. It was this call that attracted Bevan's attention to the Goshawk he observed in his backyard. The plumage is brownish slate grey, rufous collar, throat pale grey barred white, underparts banded white to cream on rufous to dark brown. The tail is long and rounded, brown barred darker brown. The feet and legs are yellow and powerful, the eye ring and iris are yellow, giving the bird a fierce look. To make things more confusing, immature birds have entirely different plumage! Goshawks favour open forest and woodlands, especially near water, and are reasonably common throughout the Hunter Valley. This fierce hunter's diet includes small birds, chickens, rabbits, snakes, lizards, frogs, grasshoppers and beetles. They usually attack prey on the ground, sometimes pursuing their victim through the undergrowth, and hunt on the wing at dusk to catch unwary birds preparing to roost.

d) MAIN FEATURE presented by Ross Knowles, Wilderness Society.

The films shown by Ross were most beautiful scenes of wilderness areas in New South Wales, but were also a reminder that the future of these forests, valleys and semi-arid lands hangs in the balance. It is by no means certain that they will remain for future generations to enjoy. In the 200 years of settlement, over 95% of the product of millions of years of evolution has vanished for

ever, and over 100 species of plants and animals are lost. The value of wilderness cannot be over-stressed and there is very little of it left in New South Wales. Ross suggests that we each write to the Minister for Planning and Environment the Hon. R.J. Carr and the Premier Hon. B. Unsworth in support of the proposed legislation which will stop the destruction of our forests. After watching the audio-visuals of magnificent wilderness areas it is the least we could do.

2. FIELD DAY AT DORA CREEK & MYUNA BAY, SUNDAY 22/3/87.

Twenty-seven members of the Hunter Bird Observers Club met on a still, clear morning to walk along the path beside Dora Creek. We enjoyed especially the youthful, sharp-eyed company of Trent and Anthony, who already know so much about our birds. Seventy-seven bird species were sighted.

Those particularly interested in flight were able to watch the majestic Pelicans, the soaring Whistling Kites, Royal Spoonbills with large black bills outstretched, the White Ibis with curved bill in silhouette and the flocks of Black Swans. In contrast were the smaller birds such as the busy flight of Noisy Miners and the swoop and dart of the Welcome Swallows and the swift Sacred Kingfisher skimming across the creek. Wonderful colour was supplied by Eastern Rosellas, bright little Yellow Thornbills, Superb Blue Wrens, Rufous Fantails and the Mistletoe Bird high amongst the mistletoe on a Casuarina. We enjoyed watching Varied Sittellas which insist on travelling upwards, pecking at the tree trunks in their search for food. And of course the bird calls! So varied and fascinating, but confusing to the unpracticed ear. We were, as always, astonished at the ease with which the old hands readily identified them for us. There were nests too. Beautiful neat mud nests of the Magpie Lark, a large straggly looking twig nest of the Whistling Kite, and the familiar sight of the Osprey nest near the Eraring turn off, where some of our group were lucky enough to see one of the owners at home.

After morning tea and checking of bird lists, we drove back to Myuna Bay. Here we walked beside Whitehead's Lagoon, but by this time the sun was high and growing hot and the birds were few and far between, so we headed back to the picnic area. While lunching at this pleasant spot on the waterside we were entertained by groups of Pelicans and Cormorants, and a Large Egret who gave a demonstration of how to swallow a fish.

It was a very enjoyable and successful Field Outing. As always, the Club stalwarts were immensely helpful in locating and identifying the birds, and patient with those less experienced. Thank you all very much.

-- Barbara and Garry Bean.

3. FEATHERED BIRDS VERSUS WAR BIRDS AT WILLIAMTOWN.

Williamtown Fighter Base, situated on the Stockton-Port Stephens and Medowie Roads, could be described as a large industrial site. Aircraft and engines are repaired, great numbers of aircraft use the runways most days, and vehicular traffic plays a big part in daily activities. Over 2000 persons are employed or are living on the site. At present a reconstruction programme is underway, with landscaping to separate areas, disperse noise and provide a more pleasant workplace. A jet engine consumes vast quantities of air when under take-off power and this creates a huge conical shaped pressure area at the front of the plane. This is potentially a very dangerous situation for birds. When birds and jet

planes collide it would of course be fatal for the birds; if the bird strike is in the air inlet of the aircraft engine this could be fatal for the airplane.

Areas adjacent to the strip/runways are grassed and mown low to discourage birds and animals from living and feeding there. Approximately 80% of the Base perimeter adjoins Water Board land, the rest being farm lands. Very few trees suitable for bird habitat remain on the Base, birds appear to enter the area to feed only. Two sand mining dredges are working on Water Board land, resulting in loss of vegetation and cover for birds and animals, including Koala Bears. During January/February this year 17 species of birds were observed on the Base, including Glossy Black and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. This count excludes water birds that frequent the water treatment plant adjacent to the civilian air terminal.

-- Ray Tooby.

4. COMING EVENTS:

EASTER CAMP 17/20TH APRIL

PRIVATE PROPERTY "MURRUMBO"  
KERRABEE Via SANDY HOLLOW.  
Details and Contact: Kay Imrie  
524524.

WEEKEND CAMP 23/24TH MAY

PRIVATE PROPERTY NEAR STROUD.  
Details and Contact: Kay Imrie.

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY WEEKEND  
CAMP 6/8TH JUNE

CRAVEN STATE FOREST.  
Details and Contact: Kay Imrie.

SUNDAY 21ST JUNE

FIELD DAY TO FERN BAY/WILLIAMTOWN.  
Meet: Fern Bay side of Stockton  
Bridge. Time: 8 a.m.  
Contact: Rosemary Waymark 751819.

WEDNESDAY 13TH MAY

CLUBNIGHT at Shortland Wetlands  
Centre 7.30 p.m.  
Guest Speaker: Artist Robert Edden  
on techniques and experiences of  
bird painting.

WEDNESDAY 6TH MAY

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

NOVEMBER 6/7/8TH: Visit to Barren Grounds Nature Reserve. There are still vacancies for this weekend. Cost is \$64 for food and accommodation, and transport and associated costs may be shared by arrangement with the participants. Contact: Kay Imrie.

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