

Hamonet



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER NO. 7/87 AUGUST 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 JULY MEETING 8/7/87.

a) Attendance: 35. Apologies from Jim & Kay Imrie, Roger & Fay Heading, Rosemary Waymark, Sue Hamonet and Jim Perry. Welcome was extended to new member Esmee Gava.

b) BIRD CALL presented by Bevan McGregor: The calls of two "little brown birds" of similar size and habits were played. The Brown Warbler and the Brown Thornbill also live in similar habitat and could probably be identified by most of us as the colouring of the plumage is distinctively different. The call of the Brown Warbler would be the easier of the two to remember -- a brisk 'which-is-it, which-is-it'. The call of the Brown Thornbill is more difficult to describe. It has a variety of contact notes, a harsh churring alarm call, and a three-or four-note song heard frequently especially during the breeding season.

c) BIRD OF THE EVENING presented by Michael Pope: Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike. Although there are superficial resemblances, cuckoo-shrikes have no close relationship with either cuckoos or shrikes. This bird's other common names - Blue jay, Summer-bird, Shufflewing, Grey-jay and Leatherhead, all in some ways describe it. The plumage is light grey above, forehead and throat black, breast grey, belly white, tail black with white tips, flight feathers black edged with pale grey. They have spinescent rump feathers, these feathers have stiff shafts for part of their length and feel almost like spines. The flight of the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike is undulating and after alighting the bird always settles its wings with an exaggerated shuffling motion. Both male and female birds share the task of building the nest which they place on a horizontal fork, well camouflaged and out of reach of predators. Both birds incubate the 2-3 eggs and feed the young. They aggressively defend the nest, diving and clapping their beaks at intruders. Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes are widely distributed and frequently seen. Known among many birdwatchers simply as BFCS (or 'bifcus'), it is found in parks, gardens, woodland and scrubland all over Australia.

c) OBSERVATIONS: Interesting observations made during the past month included a flock (5) of Crested Hawks at Eleebana, eight Glossy Black Cockatoos at Salisbury, pair of Spangled Drongos at Belmont, Stubble Quail at Shortland Wetlands, Barking Owl at Blackbutt, and a White-breasted Sea-Eagle with a Magpie in its talons seen at Teralba.

d) EGRET WATCH: A disappointing result when nine cars went on the look-out for tagged Egrets -- none were seen. However, a new roosting site was found at Wyong with 100+ Egrets present.

Club members are reminded to note in the Observation Book any Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos seen, also if any Double-banded Plovers are seen, note if they are banded on the leg and how the colour-banding is placed on the leg.

Anyone in the position of being able to observe nesting birds are asked to make relevant records for Diane Rogers who is in charge of nest recordings. Also Diane would like any details whatsoever i.e. species, numbers, locations, dates, of any of the red-breasted Robin family observed.

e) MAIN FEATURE: Study of IBIS presented by Wilma Barden.

This was a comprehensive study of the many species of Ibis found throughout the world, with slides and commentary from tapes prepared by Ellen McCulloch and Kim Lowe of B.O.A.C. On the world scene Ibises are usually grouped with Spoonbills - about 28 altogether in the family Threskiornithidae and within this group at least two species are at risk. One is the Japanese Crested Ibis and the other a rare species of North Africa. Great efforts are now being made to conserve these species, by captive breeding programmes and by creating national parks.

Ibises are all much the same size and shape with faces bare of feathers, the head and neck also being naked in some birds, and a long, down-curved bill which they thrust into the mud when foraging for food. They lack the powder-down patches which herons and some other wading birds have and which are assumed to be useful when cleaning plumage, hence their somewhat bedraggled appearance at times. Ibises fly with their necks straight out in front. Sometimes when they find a thermal upcurrent they almost disappear from sight.

All three species of Ibis found in Australia - the Straw-necked, Sacred and Glossy - are dependent on wetlands. They feed in wet pastures and nearby dry paddocks, by lakesides and swamps. They breed in colonies, sometimes in numbers up to 40,000, but rarely as a single pair. The nests are in low trees and bushes or on reedy growth, but sometimes eggs are laid on bare ground. The start and continuation of the breeding cycle is dependent on maintenance of water levels in the area, so it is important that landowners and those in control of water levels are aware of the existence of breeding colonies. We saw excellent slides of young birds in the nest, nesting sites and large flocks of birds roosting, Ibis from other lands as well as those we see here.

The Straw-necked Ibis is the most wide-spread species in Australia. It has a white neck, underparts and tail, straw-like tuft of breast-plumes and black wings and tail. The Sacred Ibis is so called because it was revered by the ancient Egyptians. Vast numbers of them appeared when the Nile flooded its banks, so that people linked the two phenomena. The Ibis was to them the god Thoth, whose duty it was to record the life-story of every human being. Thousands of mummified birds were found buried in the pyramids, but no live Ibis are now found in Egypt. The Sacred Ibis is white with mostly black head and wing-tips. The Glossy Ibis is coloured rich purplish brown, glossed bronze or green, truly a handsome bird. Almost as handsome as the most spectacular of the species, the Scarlet Ibis, which has vivid scarlet plumage with black wing tips. It lives chiefly in the tropical zones of South America.

Many thanks Wilma for this informative talk on Ibis, birds we should not take so much as part of the scenery.

f) The Club has been approached by the Maitland Bicentennial Community Committee to be involved in a project to erect signs at Walka Waterworks and Morpeth Common to provide visitor information on common waterbirds. Your Committee has decided that the Club will provide and erect these signs, which are to be designed and purchased from Shortland Wetlands Trust at a cost of \$650. Funding sought from the Bicentennial Community Committee is \$590.

g) Shortland Wetlands Centre will be holding a fund-raising Barbeque at the Centre on Saturday 29th August. Activities will begin at around 9 a.m., with Barbeque lunch from 12.30. During the morning conducted walks will be organised, and a project called URBAN WILDLIFE STUDY will be explained. This study, planned to take place from September through until early next year, is to assess and record birds, native animals and reptiles living in our local gardens, backyards, parks, and roadsides. Come along to the barbeque on 29th August and learn how you can take part in this interesting project.

2. LIBRARY NEWS:

The latest addition to the Club Library is a copy of 'The Great Australian Birdfinder' by Michael Morcombe. This book has been divided into three sections - the first deals with various habitats with illustrations of some of the birds to be found therein; the second divides the continent into 14 regions and birds which are distinctive to these areas are featured; the third section is a comprehensive list of all birds likely to be found in Australia. Every bird is illustrated either by drawings or photographs and the latter, as one would expect from Michael Morcombe, are excellent.

Reference Cards: For the benefit of members seeking information about a particular bird (e.g. for Bird of the Evening), a set of cards (one for each bird) has been set up to record reference material relating to that particular bird - such material being contained in one or more of the books/publications in our Library.

3. TRIP TO BARRIER REEF ISLANDS:

The Club has received information about a boat trip being organised in conjunction with the Australian Bird Study Association. The group will be led by Bill Lane, member of the R.A.O.U., F.O.C., A.O.S., A.B.S.A., and will explore the uninhabited seabird islands north of Cairns, take part in field studies and banding of seabirds, and visit Research Stations. There will be time for fishing, reef walking and swimming. The trip departs from Cairns on 4th October, lasts 7 days and cost is \$700 ex Cairns. For more details see Wilma Barden or Ruth Parker.

4. FIELD DAY TO GRESORD/ MT. RIVERS.

Twenty-one members met at the Hexham McDonalds at the rather fresh hour of 7 a.m. on Sunday 19th July. After only a short wait (the birds were prompt as usual) the group set out in convoy to the first of many stops between Vacy and Lostock Dam.

Wilma Barden led out in the birding for the day, which was for the most part restricted to short walks along the roadside vegetation. The surrounding countryside was primarily grazing land, undulating and extensively cleared.

Some of the first species sighted were of a non-avian class, i.e. a hare, rabbits, and a family of eastern grays (kangaroos).

Field Day to Gresford contd.

The bird tally for the day reached a moderately successful 61 species, including numerous cattle egrets (untagged), the two extremes of raptors, (Wedge-tailed Eagle and Australian Kestrel), an Azure Kingfisher at Lostock Dam, and our Club emblem the Golden Whistler. Three species were identified by sound alone, namely the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Striped Honeyeater and the Bar-shouldered Dove.

The stop for morning tea by the Paterson River at Gresford provided us with an entertaining testimony to the quality of the weather, in the form of a frenzy of nest building/excavating activity by Yellow-rumped Thornbills and Striated Pardalotes respectively.

In short, a most enjoyable day.

-- Dale Val.

5. COMING EVENTS:

SUNDAY 23RD AUGUST

FIELD DAY to Buttai, E. Maitland, Black Hill.
MEET: Intersection of John Rensha Drive & Lenaghan's Drive.
TIME: 7 a.m.
CONTACT: Jim Imrie 52 4524.

SUNDAY 20TH SEPTEMBER

FIELD DAY to Bob's Farm, Anna Bay, Taylor's Beach.
MEET: Fern Bay side of Stockton Bridge.
TIME: 7 a.m.
CONTACT: Jim Imrie 52 4524.

SUNDAY 25TH OCTOBER

FIELD DAY to Wangi, Eraring.
MEET: Toronto, Coles Car Park.
TIME: 7 a.m.
CONTACT: Bevan McGregor 59 4141.

WEEKEND CAMP 3/4/5 OCTOBER

WOLLAR Private Property.
CONTACT & DETAILS: Kay Imrie 52 4524.
Fees payable to owner - probably \$2 - \$3 per adult.

WEDNESDAY 9TH SEPTEMBER

CLUBNIGHT at Shortland Wetlands Cn. 7.30 p.m. Feature: Maddock/Markwell "Egrets v's Frogs" debate.

WEDNESDAY 14TH OCTOBER

CLUBNIGHT at Shortland Wetlands Cntr. 7.30 p.m. Feature: Alan Morris -

WEEKDAY OUTINGS:

24TH AUGUST

28TH SEPTEMBER

8 a.m.
BENNETTS' GREEN area. Meet Scrubby Crk/
HUNTER BOTANIC GARDENS. Meet there, at 7.30 a.m.

COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER

GARDEN SUBURB SCHOOL 5.30 p.m.

CLUB BADGES AND CAR STICKERS ARE AVAILABLE
FROM THE TREASURER

Metal badges: \$3, Car Stickers \$1.50,
Iron-on badges \$2.

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