

NEWSLETTER NO. 3/88 APRIL



Hunter Bird Observers Club

President: Jim Perry
Secretary: Rosemary Waymark
Correspondence: P.O. Box 24, New Lambton 2305
Telephone enquiries: Wilma Barden 573928
Newsletter Editor: Ruth Parker 295569

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1. NOTES FROM MARCH MEETING.

a) ATTENDANCE: 40. Apologies from Wilma Barden and Diane Rogers, and welcome to visitors.

b) BIRD CALL presented by Peter McLauchlan.

Peter began with a synopsis of bird names which relate to their plumage, behaviour, habits, location, person by whom they were discovered, or characteristics of their call, i.e. triller, whistler, babbler. A smaller group is named for the sound of the call, or by the word or words the call suggests. Peter then played the call of the New Zealand Morepork and the Australian Boobook Owl, and the rare N.Z. Stitch Bird, whose call is a strange crackling sound like the word 'stitch'.

c) BIRD OF THE EVENING presented by Jim Perry.

The bird chosen was the Wedge-tailed Shearwater (Puffinus Pacificus), also called Wedge-tailed Muttonbird or Petrel. Jim often sees these birds whilst fishing, indeed they follow fishing boats and can be a problem to fishermen. They tend to be solitary, but congregate in large flocks around feeding shoals of fish. The Wedge-tailed Shearwater is difficult to identify from other dark shearwaters except by flight style. Whereas the Short-tailed and Sooty Shearwaters have a direct and purposeful flight, the Wedgetail drifts unhurriedly, its broad wings curved well forward. It circles at low speed with slow wing flaps followed by a short upward glide before banking down to the water.

d) RAFFLE: An Easter Egg raffle resulted in \$18 for Club funds.

e) OBSERVATIONS: Sightings included a pair of Painted Button-Quail on the roadside near Mt. Sugarloaf, Little Eagle at Warners Bay, and Little Bittern at Koorangang.

f) MAIN FEATURE: The Dampier Archipelago presented by Deborah Perry.

During six years spent at Dampier, Deborah extended her budding interest in bird watching and was able to spend time sailing and fishing. Fortunately for us, she also photographed the typical surrounding terrain, shores, and some of the small islands which lie within a 30 mile radius of the town of Dampier. The basic structure of the low-lying islands and coastal area is rock piles and outcrops; the vegetation is spinifex and other plants able to withstand the meagre rainfall and high temperatures. There are patches of acacia scrub, some coolabah

trees in drainage lines, and mangroves along tidal flats. Despite the scarcity of trees, Deborah notched up an impressive bird list. Sea birds were plentiful and varied, some waders were present but not in large flocks, and two birds not to be seen on the east coast - the Mangrove Robin and the Spinifex Bird - were captured on film. Thanks, Deborah, for a most interesting account of your leisure-time activities in a remote part of Australia.

2. SEA GULL BEHAVIOUR. Have you ever observed gulls during a hailstorm? We have received news that five gulls were seen on Stockton Beach behaving in a very peculiar way. According to the report, the gulls lay down on their backs in wheel tracks and covered themselves with their wings with just their beaks showing, apparently to protect themselves from the hail stones!! Our informant wants to know whether he was 'seeing things', so if anyone can confirm this strange story, please 'phone John Metcalfe on 53 1224.

3. FIELD OUTING TO CATHERINE HILL BAY AND SWANSEA SOUTH 20.3.88

Doubts as to the possibility of holding this field day were entertained right up to the appointed meeting time at 7 am at Swansea Park. However, the doubts were obviously only mine as 16 other persons were assembled including new members, John and Jeannie Reay, Aron Bagnall, and 3 visitors.

First stop was the Yondaio Youth Camp, off Mine Camp Road, Catherine Hill Bay. The property extends from highway to ocean and is a delightful area of unspoilt bushland with both dry and wet sclerophyll habitats as well as heathland, beach and rocks. Birds were not easy to find in the damp conditions but the White-browed Scrubwrens and Yellow Robins obliged by hopping onto the track. Honeyeaters in good numbers included New Holland and White-cheeked and White-naped. Little Wattlebirds enjoyed the flowering banksias. Emu-wrens provided a highlight. Two Brown Quail crossed the track in the heath and stopped only about 2 metres in. Really good sightings were possible. On the beach, a Richard's Pipit thought it was a dotterel, working its way along the high tide line. Two Sooty Oystercatchers were spotted leaving the rocky headland and a Black-shouldered Kite hovered overhead. A walk along the 'Bellbird Trail' was fruitful and musical. By a more devious route than planned, we managed to arrive back at the cars before too many had collapsed from malnutrition.

After lunch the party moved to Nesca Park with its lakeside setting and the resident Nankeen Night Herons were on show in their usual roosting place. Both Sacred and Azure Kingfishers, several cormorants, ducks and thornbills were added to the list. The species count for the day was 62.

4. EASTER WEEKEND CAMP AT PILLIGA.

Kay Imrie.

Easter 1988 will be remembered for the inclement weather. "To go, or not to go?" The answer was in the affirmative for 36 members who converged on the Pilliga Scrub and defied the elements to do their worst!

The camp was set in lonely but beautiful surroundings of Callitirs, Casuarina, Acacia and Eucalypt species. At this spot was the one-time Rocky Creek Sawmill, and at least some evidence of its former

presence still remains. The Rocky Creek bed is wide and sandy and at the time of our arrival was quite dry. Water of quite good quality was available from a tank fed by a windmill from the bore which gives the site its name.

On Friday afternoon, and Saturday, the weather, although threatening, allowed us to do some very interesting and rewarding birding, with some of the newer members excited with their first sightings of some of the Western species. Notable on the list of birds were an albinistic Grey Fantail, and several sightings of two birds showing plumage features of Eastern and Pale-Headed Rosellas, and appearing to be hybrids of interbreeding between these two species.

Undoubtedly the highlight of our short stay were the several Koalas found in residence quite close to our camp, and these delightful creatures were admired by all.

After bird-call on Saturday night the heavens opened! After early consultation on Sunday morning most campers decided on a hasty retreat, and on the subsequent very wet trip home we reflected that in our long association with the Club there has never before been the need to abandon a camp in this fashion. A few hardy souls made the decision to stay on, and therefore the list of 75 bird species is probably incomplete.

-- Sue Hamonet.

5. COMING EVENTS.

ANZAC WEEKEND CAMP
23/24TH APRIL

SMITHS LAKE (Bunkhouse accommodation and facilities available).
CONTACT & DETAILS: Kay Imrie 524524.

SUNDAY 22ND MAY

FIELD DAY TO CLARENCETOWN.
MEET: McDonalds Hexham.
TIME: 7 a.m.
CONTACT: Kay Imrie 524524.

QUEENS BIRTHDAY WEEKEND
CAMP 11-12-13TH JUNE

MUNGHORN GAP NATURE RESERVE
CONTACT & DETAILS: Sue Hamonet 581023.

SUNDAY 19TH JUNE

FIELD DAY TO TOMAGO.
MEET: McDonalds Hexham
TIME: 7 a.m.
CONTACT: Alan Stuart 528569.

WEDNESDAY 11TH MAY

CLUBNIGHT at Shortland Wetlands Centre
TIME: 7.30 p.m.
FEATURE: Guest Speaker Graeme Brown.

WEEKDAY OUTINGS:

MONDAY 18TH APRIL

Cooranbong. Meet 8 a.m. Dorà Crk.

MONDAY 2nd MAY

Shortland W.C. Meet 8 a.m.

MONDAY 15TH MAY

Grahamstown Dam. Meet S.W.C. 8 a.m.

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