

Hunter Bird Observers Club



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1. NOTES FROM OCTOBER MEETING.

a) ATTENDANCE: 40. Apologies from Fay & Roger Heading, and welcome to visitor Dawn Flanagan.

b) BIRD CALL presented by Judith Smith: Rainbow Lorikeet. The musical chatterings of these multi-coloured Lorikeets are a familiar background sound in gardens and parks where there are blossoming eucalyptus trees. Usually in pairs or small flocks, noisy shrieks as they fly from tree to tree are a sure indication of their presence.

c) BIRD OF THE EVENING presented by Ed Hamonet: Plains-wanderer (Pedionomus torquatus).

This bird has been described as one of the most remarkable avifauna in Australia. It is also hard to find and difficult to see. Between 1954 and 1974 only three sightings were recorded, and in 1978 it was on the endangered species list. Originally named by Gould as Plain-wanderer, it is in fact a very plain brown bird, although the larger female has a white-spotted collar above rich yellow-buff or rufous breastband. Plains-wanderers are found in semi-arid farm lands in the district around Narrandera and Deniliquin, prefer habitat with bare patches of ground between low shrubs and dry grass, or among stubble crops. Usually solitary, the bird stands on tiptoe to get a better view around, and when disturbed, puts it head down and runs like a rat, or crouches motionless. Settlement and farming destroy its habitat and source of food (grass seeds and insects), as cattle and sheep not only eat the grass but trample on nests. Co-operation of farmers is necessary to preserve the Plains-wanderer, as it is not found in any National Park or public reserve.

d) OBSERVATIONS: The Dowitcher has been seen again on Kooragang Island, Cicadabird in Blackbutt, White-headed Pigeon in Charlestown, Blackbird at Widden Brook, and we heard of Bourke's Parrots, Hall's Babblers and Flock Pigeons being seen by those lucky people who have recently travelled inland.

e) MAIN FEATURE: Slides presented By David Blagden, Andrew Perry, Dale Val and Alan Richardson.

We were entertained tonight by a colourful account of David's trip, in company with friends and students, to Sturt National Park in the north-west corner of N.S.W. Colourful in more ways than one, as, contrary to the usual weather pattern in July, heavy rain turned roads in to long stretches of very sticky red mud. However, enthusiasm and good spirits triumphed, and they were able to take good slides of quite a few of

the birds they saw, notably Red-capped Robins and Black Honeyeaters, male and female, plus nest. We gained a good idea of how difficult travelling and camping can be in the outback during wet weather.

Alan then showed slides of several different Thornbills which are found in our local area. These slides could be essential viewing to enable one to correctly identify these often seen small birds. Dale concluded with slides of some birds from his home state of South Australia. Many thanks to these keen young photographers for their preparation and presentation of this programme.

2. A Wonderful Weekend At Widden Valley

What a glorious valley in which to spend a holiday weekend! Nature had certainly painted the valley a luscious green and turned on the Spring weather. There was a definite contrast in colour between the green valley and the dry, sandstone habitat of the adjoining Wollemi National Park. On this camp we were lucky to witness many species of birds nest-building and feeding young. The nineteen Club members and three visitors did not need to walk far, for at the campsite a commune of white-winged choughs was feeding young in the nest and nearby was a pair of red rumped parrots nesting in a hollow fence post.

The sights and sounds which I will remember are the colour of the crimson rosellas and king parrots against the she-oaks, the rainbow bee-eaters' dazzling colours reflected in the sunlight, the lowing of cattle with calves, the song of the rufous whistlers and the lyrebird singing its repertoire which included a whipbird and a currawong.

On this our second visit to the valley, we managed to go further afield. Among the bird observations on the walks was a spotted pardalote nesting in a windrift which was protected by the wiremesh fence (what a clever bird!), three young white-winged choughs on the ground calling to their relatives, a small group of diamond firetails feeding, yellow tufted honeyeaters in the gums and a male hooded robin.

After soaking up the lovely sunshine during the day, in the cool evening we were all grateful to be around the blazing camp fire; even at this time we were serenaded by the boobook owl and the "ooming" of the tawny frogmouth.

The most unusual bird to be tape recorded by Fred Van Gessel was the blackbird. This is thought to be the first record of a blackbird in the area. Fred believes that the bird has travelled here from the South by following the river systems.

As we said goodbye to the valley, the last view was the flocks of sulphur crested cockatoos feeding from the horse feed troughs. The bird sightings numbered 105, plus 5 heard.

We would certainly love to return to this beautiful valley and sight the regent honeyeaters, as they managed to elude most of us.

3. FIELD OUTING SUNDAY 23rd OCTOBER - OLNEY STATE FOREST AND COORANEONG.

Fifteen members and visitors had a thoroughly enjoyable day investigating three distinct habitats.

Our first stop was a swamp at Mandalong. Occasionally a Jabiru has been sighted here but not this day. We had to be content with the regular resident ducks, cormorants and rails. White-breasted Woodswallows were active overhead and a Channel-billed Cuckoo loudly announced his presence.

Two stops in the forest were fruitful. A colony of Bell-miners were very vocal, as were both Golden and Rufous Whistlers. A Rufous Fantail gave an acrobatic performance. On a walk from Muir's Lookout, James O'Connor earned the "spotter of the day" award with a magnificent Diamond Python -- all 2½ metres of it stretched out across a huge boulder. Just near the picnic area a Mountain Dragon was sitting in the leaf litter. Its sandstone colour blended in with the leaves -- a perfect camouflage.

After lunch we moved on to the Avondale College grounds at Cooranbong and spent the remainder of the outing along Dora Creek. Here there were many birds nesting, including Grey Fantail, Brown Warbler and Yellow Robin. A lone fruit-bat was found and several Water Dragons completed our interesting walk. The vegetation along the creek was a real haven for both birds and animals.

The number of bird species recorded for the day was 76.

-- Kay Imrie.

4. INFORMATION SIGNS ERECTED AT WALKA AND MORPETH.

A brief resume of events leading to Sunday's completion of this project may be of interest. In May last year the Club was invited to attend a meeting of the Maitland Bicentennial Events Sub-Committee. Peter McLauchlan attended and as a consequence it was decided that the Club be involved in a project to erect signs which would give information on common waterbirds at Walka Water Works and Morpeth Common. The signs were to be designed by and purchased from Shortland Wetlands Centre for \$650. After seeking funding through the Maitland Bicentennial Community Committee, we received a cheque for \$500. The end of National Bird Week seemed an appropriate time to erect the signs, and after some initial hard work by Jim Imrie, Bevan McGregor, Brian Hare and Peter McLauchlan of cementing in the metal frames, the signs were ceremoniously erected on Sunday. This historic event was attended by Alderman F.J. Murray, Chairman of Morpeth Oval Board, who met the group at the Ray Lawler Reserve, Morpeth

Common, and the following Club members and their children: Peter & Margaret McLauchlan, Kay Imrie, Alan & Margaret, Robyn & Sally Stuart, Bevan & Robyn, Heath & Sara McGregor, Nigel, Michelle & Haley Walker, George, Thelma & Diane Rogers, Les & Joyce Hewson, Brian Hare, Rosemary Waymark, and guest Maureen Mead. A special vote of appreciation is extended to Peter McLauchlan who co-ordinated the whole operation.

