



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

President: Peter M^CLauchlan
Secretary: Rosemary Waymark
Correspondence: P.O. Box 24 New Lambton 2305
Telephone enquiries: Alan Stuart 528569
Newsletter Editor: Paul Osborn 781151
P.O. Box 83 Jesmond 2299
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1. NOTES FROM MARCH MEETING:

- a) ATTENDANCE: 46. Apologies from Bill and Gillian Knight and Roger Heading.
- b) OBSERVATIONS: Powerful Owl, Raven with white rump (!) and a Peregrine Falcon attacking rabbits all seen in Glenrock area; Little Corellas were reported from various suburbs with one report of a flock of 200+ birds; an Owlet Nightjar at Gwandalan and an Osprey in the harbour. Also regular sightings in the harbour of four Arctic Skuas, one with a white head.
- c) BIRD CALL: Peter M^CLauchlan entertained us with a story about J. Hutchinson, bird song recordist and author of the book 'Save that Song'. Five cassettes of his work are available for loan from the Club's audio library. Peter described how the gentleman in question came to ascribe the call of a Horsefield's Cuckoo to the Black-Eared Cuckoo and then he played both calls for comparison. The call of the Black-Eared was both lower and slower than that of its relative, but the similarities were apparent. It's reassuring to know that even experts make mistakes.
- d) BIRD OF THE EVENING: Jim Imrie described for us the Crested Bellbird (*Oreoica guttaralis*), a bird frequenting the lightly timbered, mallee and mulga habitats of the country, west of the Divide and south of 19°S. The male is a distinctive grey/brown bird with an erectile crest and white face and throat, surrounded by a black band, which contrasts with an orange eye. The female is much duller of plumage. The birds, measuring 20-23 cm long, have been seen at Munghorn Gap and Pilliga in recent years. This bird's most distinctive feature is its voice, a cowbell-like tone consisting of two slow notes followed by three quick ones. Frequently, this is finished off by the addition of a 'plonk' from the female, which has been compared to the sound of a stone dropped in a well. The Crested Bellbird has a reputation as a ventriloquist and can be difficult to locate because of this. It is a ground feeding bird which eats insects and caterpillars, particularly the hairy variety. It has a curious habit of lining the perimeter of its nest with paralysed caterpillars, the function of which

is a source of much argument among ornithologists. The Crested Bellbird is included in the family PACHYCEPHALIDAE (thickheads) because of its sexual dimorphism (like whistlers) its crest (wedgebills and whipbirds) and its ground feeding habits (thrushes). Its nearest relatives are considered to be the shrike-thrushes. Like most of this family, the Crested Bellbird is an accomplished songster and will sometimes sing for hours on end.

e) LIBRARY: Ed Hamonet gave us a quick refresher course on how to borrow books from the Club library, which has been swollen to 111 items by the donation of five books from Keith Laverick. Please ensure, when borrowing books, that you write your name and the month on the card and place it in the box provided. Ed also pointed out that the Club maintains a collection of over 200 journals which may be used for reference purposes.

f) GREEN POINT: The Club has been asked to assist by providing a bird survey of this Lake Macquarie area, for which development is proposed. Any member who has visited the point recently, or who intends to do so in the future is asked to make a note of species seen or heard.

g) SILVER GULLS: These birds are the subject of a banding study and members are asked to note any with colour bands and record which legs have which colours in which order (top to bottom). Forward observations to the Shortland Wetlands Centre.

h) MAIN FEATURE - Mr. Rex Buckingham : Mr. Buckingham is the National Secretary of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) and agreed to address us on the Council's work. Rex is also a past president of The Bird Observers Club of Australia and an internationally renowned recordist of bird song.

He began his talk by sketching some of the history of the ICBP (founded in 1922, the first international conservation organisation ever formed) and its structure. The ICBP is headquartered in Cambridge UK where a small staff of dedicated workers co-ordinate the various projects. It is a federation of 63 national bodies and has members in 110 of the world's 160 countries. The Australian branch, part of the Asian Group, is made up of field naturalist's clubs and ornithological societies from every state. The HBOC is one of the member organisations.

The ICBP publication 'Birds to Watch', lists over 1000 species which are considered to be in need of assistance, about 11% of the world's species. Most of the Council's work is carried out in 3rd world countries, too poor to fund their own programs, and is financed by diverting money from more fortunate countries, like our own.

The ICBP works by identifying problems, setting priorities and lobbying governments with their solutions. Much of their work is aimed at educating local communities to try and build an awareness of the beauty and utility of birds and how vital it is to try to save them.

Rex identified three categories of birds into which most endangered species fell. These were island birds, tropical forest birds, and migratory species. Problems facing the first two of these mainly arose from loss of habitat because of clearing for development, agriculture (especially slash and burn) and mining and forestry. He also indicated that poaching for both food and the caged bird market, as well as 'scientific' collecting also had an effect. The problems facing

migratory birds were more difficult to solve, he said. This was because it is easier to protect a bird that stays in one place than one that regularly crosses the borders of many different countries, not all of whom are interested in bird preservation. Their habit of massing in large concentrations also makes them more vulnerable (too many eggs in one basket).

Mr. Buckingham illustrated his talk with slides of some of the world's rarest birds, including the Mauritius Kestrel, down to only six individuals in 1964 and now at a population of about two dozen in the wild and ten more in captivity, thanks to a captive breeding programme initiated by the ICBP in conjunction with the Jersey Wildlife Trust (Gerald Durrell's organisation). Other slides showed the Mauritius Pink Pigeon, the Seychelles Warbler and the Banded Wattletree, one of seven species of birds from the Camerouns included in the IUCN Red Data Book.

Closer to home, we were shown slides of Christmas Island birds including Frigatebirds, Tropicbirds and Boobys on whose behalf the ICBP has been lobbying the Australian Government since 1964 to little avail.

We wish Rex well in his important work and thank him for an informative, entertaining and thought-provoking talk.

2. FIELD DAY TO AWABA, SUNDAY 19th MARCH

With the start of Eastern Standard Time 18 members and 2 visitors made their way to John and Sharon Vernon's property 'Melaleuca' at Awaba. After a slow start, many birds were observed including female Satin Bower Bird, Rufous and Grey Fantails. There was some interesting detective work by members to identify the female Rose Robin. Soon came the call "What is that bird with the crest?", a Crested Hawk (Pacific Baza) a first for several members. The Fantail Cuckoo was heard and traced to high in a dead tree - a Pied Butcher Bird doing a good job of mimicry. Sharon accompanied us around her property, identifying the many native plants. Thank you Sharon for an informative morning; 47 birds seen, 4 heard.

Next stop was at the edge of Awaba State Forest where we had the tinkling of Bellbirds and the silent attack by the leeches. Several birds were seen here including the brilliance of an Azure Kingfisher. Total bird list for the day was 73. Thank you Rosemary and other members for an interesting morning. Margaret Piefke.

3. EASTER CAMP "YATHELLA" Property via PILLIGA, (24-27 March, 89)

This camp was attended by 19 adults and two children. The property itself was of several habitats, which of course suited some 103 birds which were recorded over the duration of the weekend. Indeed, many more birds may have been recorded had (i) the weather been more favourable, and (ii) had we been there just a month earlier to record migratory species; but of course, that was not possible and one can't change the weather. However, many of the birds recorded were 'newies' to some members in attendance.

The day of arrival (whether Thursday or Friday) was very hot, much too hot for birding, so it was ideal to just sit in the old house provided for our use for a long 'cuppa', until it cooled down. The remaining days were overcast with persistent drizzle. (One wonders whether the late arrival of the Imries triggered the rain).

Despite the unfavourable weather, a large number of birds began to appear on the list. However, on Sunday night's birdcall the birds were outdone by the work of two fine artists, namely Eric Parker and Fay Heading. Their fine works were appreciated by all and many were left wondering as to why they had not been blessed with such talent.

I have never seen as many Blue Bonnets, nor indeed Red Rumped Parrots, as there were in residence on this property. In fact, the amount of birds this delightful property had to offer was excellent. Some birds recorded that stood out included : numerous White Winged Wrens (rare in anyone's experience), the magnificent Red Winged Parrots, the elusive Ground Cuckoo Shrike, Little Falcon, Crested Bellbirds, Pale Headed Rosellas and, for those lucky enough to arrive on the Thursday, a family of Emus.

Much thanks must go to Pat and John Slacksmith for allowing us to use their property over the course of the weekend, and it is encouraging to note that others do appreciate the birds.

Jeanette and Mathew Stephenson

4. APOLOGY. Sincere apologies to Graeme O'Connor for misspelling his name in last month's Newsletter.

5. FAREWELL. Keith Laverick, a member for several years and a regular at club camps, is leaving to take up a new position in Seoul. We wish Keith and Jean all the best for the future.

6. NEW MEMBERS Welcome to new members Rick Austin of Uranga, Bill Dowling of Dungog, and Peter Saul and family from Adamstown Heights.

7. COMING EVENTS

Sunday 23rd April

Field day to POKOLBIN
MEET : Cessnock swimming pool
TIME : 7.30 AM
CONTACT : Kay Imrie 524524

Weekend 20/21 MAY

WATAGANS CAMP
Details and contact :
Kay Imrie 524524

Sunday 21st May

Field outing to WATAGANS
MEET : Cole's car park, Toronto
TIME : 6.30 AM
CONTACT : Alan Stuart 528569

Weekend 10-12 JUNE
(with Manning Valley Birdos)

TAREE AREA CAMP
Details and contact :
Kay Imrie 524524

Sunday 25th JUNE

Field outing Walka/Bolwarra/Morpeth
MEET : 7 AM, M^CDonalds, Hexham
CONTACT : Peter M^CLauchlan 333224

Wednesday 10th May

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.
7.30 PM