



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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1. NOTES FROM JUNE MEETING:

a) ATTENDANCE: 32. Apologies from Graeme O'Connor, Auriol Royds and the Beans.

b) OBSERVATIONS: Spangled Drongos were seen at the Botanical Gardens and the Shortland Wetlands Centre; Wilson's Storm Petrel and Black-browed and Yellow-nosed Albatross off the coast; 2 Glossy Ibis were reported from Woodbury swamp and a Superb Parrot (escapee) at Bolwarra.

c) BIRD CALL: Alan Stuart played for us the call of a bird becoming common in the Newcastle area, the Little Corella. Although cursory examination might lead some to confuse this bird with the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, the call of this bird is quite distinctive, being much less harsh than that of its relative. Alan played us examples of the birds alarm call as well as its more normal call which is given in flight.

d) BIRD OF THE EVENING: This month Wilma Barden delivered a talk on the Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*), a bird which she described as mythical because, like most people, she has never actually seen a live specimen. This bird has a wide range, occurring in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australasia. The Australian subspecies (*I. m. dubius*) ranges down the eastern and south-eastern coast and in the south-west of W.A. Some reports also place it in the Top End and the Kimberleys. It chooses to frequent reed and cumbungi-choked sections of freshwater swamps, rivers and lakes. It can also be found in large tussocky grass in swampy areas.

Dietary intake consists of fish, crustaceans, amphibians, insects and small mammals and reptiles; i.e. just about anything that will fit down its throat. The male of this tiny species (255-355 mm long) is more strongly coloured than the female, having a blue-black or green-black crown, mantle, back, tail and flight feathers which contrast sharply with the rich chestnut of the neck and side of the head. Large chestnut and rufous wing patches are said to be conspicuous in flight. The underparts of this bird are buffy-white with minimal brown streaking, and small tufts of black feathers on the sides of the upper breast. The adult female is similar to but duller than the male, with brown striping underneath. Immatures are browner still and more boldly streaked than their parents.

Little Bitterns are shy and partly nocturnal birds, spending most of their time skulking through thick reed beds near water.

When alarmed they raise their bills skyward and freeze, relying on their streaked underparts for concealment. If flushed they rise awkwardly with trailing legs and then settle into a heron-like neck-folded flight low over the reeds before dropping back into cover. Little is known about the courtship behaviour but fanning of the pale wing coverts and bill clapping are said to play a part. At the start of the breeding season the male gives a monotonous 'hoch' advertising call which Wilma played for us from tape. The nest is made of dead stems of aquatic vegetation with the occasional few twigs added. It is built by the male and lodged in the reeds, rushes or grass from 10 to 100 cm above the waterline. The nest is often used for more than one season and contains from two to seven white eggs which are incubated by both parents for from 16 to 20 days. The downy chicks are rufous above and white below and are fed by both adults on regurgitated food. The chicks will adopt the bittering posture if disturbed. They begin clambering out of the nest after a week and leave it for good at two weeks. By four weeks they are able to fly.

e) BRING AND BUY SALE: This raised a total of around thirty seven dollars for the Club, some of which will go towards funding the National Parks and Wildlife Foundations campaign to eradicate feral cats from our National Parks. Thanks to all members who either brought, bought or both.

f) MEMBERSHIP DRIVE: In a bid to attract new members to the club it is planned to place advertising posters at strategic places throughout the district. Fay Heading has generously given up some of her time to prepare colourful posters for this drive and her artistic creations were displayed at the meeting. Well done Fay and thank you. If anyone else has the time and talent to prepare similar posters, I'm sure they would be appreciated.

g) BIRDS INTERNATIONAL: The Club has sent off a subscription to this latest magazine addition to the ornithological literature. Copies will be available in the library.

h) MAIN FEATURE: Mr. Michael Rowe. Mr. Rowe is the proprietor of the Hawks Nest Lodge and volunteered to give us a talk and slide show based on his recent visit to Papua New Guinea. He was in Lae in 1987 for the RAOU conference and subsequently spent some 5 weeks visiting some of the more remote areas of this fascinating country. As a result of the thickness of the jungle vegetation, bird photography is not easy in PNG and so the talk was lower in ornithological content than we are perhaps used to. However, his descriptions of the local people and their customs, interspersed with slides of the unique architecture of this near neighbour made for a lively talk. His descriptions of the frequency of sightings of birds such as Eclectus Parrots made those of us who have only seen such birds in cages envious indeed. Mr. Rowe also used some interesting shots of Lord Howe Island, Queensland and Northern NSW to demonstrate his unique photographic style.

2. QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY WEEKEND CAMP AT BOOTAWAH : Ann and Ted Wilson's property is located at Bootawah, about 20 kms. from Taree on the Bucketts Way. On the camp, 9 Newcastle members were joined by 4 Manning Valley Birdwatchers. They were very friendly and imparted their valuable local knowledge and bird locating areas freely. The habitat was excellent for birdwatching; ambling down the many klms. of mown tracks you could be in rainforest one minute the next in melaleuca scrub then open forest.

The weather was not on our side AGAIN !!! though. The days were cool

and there were gale force winds. In the night the temperature dropped to near zero, but there were still plenty of birds to be seen. The species count was 80, everybody was pleased with this effort despite the weather. There were some spectacular views of Eastern Whipbirds as close as 3m. away. Rose Robins were sighted along with a single sighting of a raptor - Collared Sparrowhawk. Red-backed Wrens had been sighted on the property but our party had no such luck. It was considered a relaxing and enjoyable weekend, and everyone vowed to return when or if the weather improves. James O'Connor

3. Field Outing to Walka, Bolwarra and Morpeth-Sunday 25th June

Flood Waters Fail To Dampen Birdwatchers' Spirit

When we turned into Scobies Lane which leads to Walka Water Works, we found that vehicular access was denied us because flood water (estimated to be at least 600mm deep) covered the road. This natural barrier failed to prevent the birdwatchers reaching their goal! Proceeding along the levee bank on foot, we entered the grounds of the Water Works. A bitter wind made us draw our scarves and coats closer. The waterbird sign which the Club members erected in 1988 was still in good repair, and looked as if it was also appreciated by the birds- as a perch!

The group walked around the lake and as well as recording many of the more common species (Little Grebe, Black Duck, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Morehen, Pelican, Masked Lapwing, White-faced Heron, etc.) we also sighted numerous Great Crested Grebe, a first for quite a few members. Two raptors were also sighted, a Whistling Kite and a Brown Goshawk.

After morning tea at Maitland Court House park, we travelled to the Bolwarra Sewerage Treatment Works. Flood waters were here too, and we were disappointed to register a small count of waterbirds. Moving on, we then went to Hans Swamp where we were rewarded with a nesting Black Swan and Royal Spoonbill. The question on our minds was "Where have all the Egrets gone?"

Our next stop was Morpeth Common. Once again paddocks were awash, and flood waters had left a high tide mark half way up the HBOC's Waterbirds sign. After putting on our wellingtons we waded through the water. This adventurous act solved the burning question.

What a glorious sight! It was estimated that there were well over 200 Egrets (mostly Cattle Egrets) sheltering from the flood waters- sorry Max, we couldn't see any tags! We waded carefully back to the picnic grounds where we ate our lunch while several Figbirds scambled for the fruit in the large Moreton Bay Fig trees.

A total of 47 species was recorded, a low but probably not surprising number considering the condition of the countryside after a week of flooding rain.

Margaret McLauchlan

4. THE RAOU AUSTRALIAN BIRD COUNT - THE ATLAS WITH NUMBERS !

The following is an extract from a document we received from the RAOU. The most exciting and challenging national bird project, the RAOU Australian Bird Count (ABC) is here at last! The RAOU invites you to enjoy the fun and thrill of being a CABBIE (Counter of Australian Birds). In complementing the Atlas project, the ABC aims to investigate seasonal and year-to-year changes in the abundance of land birds in a broad range of habitats throughout Australia. This project has immense scientific and conservation value because it will be the first of its kind to identify on a national scale, those bird species which are endangered, common, or even reaching pest status. Secondly, it will help to identify those habitats which should be conserved to ensure proper management of all our birds. Analyses of results will also improve our understanding of seasonal bird movements within Australia, which are poorly known at present.

The ABC is a five year study at least. It is now possible for all contributors to the Atlas Project, plus others who missed all that fun, to help the RAOU achieve the goals of the ABC by counting birds regularly in the same location or opportunistically in remote areas. Contributors will be given regular and frequent feedback on the project's progress through published articles, reports and seminars at local and national bird meetings.

Observers are asked to count birds regularly in defined areas, using identical procedures on each visit. The survey site can be in your local area, but the emphasis is on nature reserves, national parks, state forests or other areas where the natural vegetation is uniform and of stable tenure. The minimum number of surveys per site from each observer, is two in spring/summer and two in autumn/winter. Each visit to a site will involve at least three 20-minute surveys. In remote areas, even single 20-minute counts will be valuable in a specified habitat, (e.g. mulga or spinifex/mallee).

If you are interested, write to Stephen Ambrose at one of the addresses below for your Project Kit and instruction booklet.

Before 28th July 1989 : c/- RAOU office, 21 Gladstone St. Moonee Ponds, Vic. 3039

After 28th July 1989 : c/- Dept. of Vertebrate Ecology, The Australian Museum, 6-8 College St. Sydney, 2000

5. COMING EVENTS

Sunday 23rd July

Field Outing Kincumber/Lisarow

MEET : a) 7 AM, Charlestown Library
b) 7.15, Freemans Waterholes

CONTACT : Jim Perry, 43 2496

Wednesday 9th August

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.
7.30 PM

Sunday 20th August

Field Outing Allworth

MEET : 7 AM, M^CDonalds, Hexham

CONTACT : Peter M^CLauchlan 333224

Wednesday 13th September

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.
7.30 PM

Sunday 24th September

Field Outing Stanhope Creek

MEET : 6.30 AM, M^CDonalds, Hexham

CONTACT : Sue Hamonet 581023

October Long Weekend

CAMP Wollar (private property)

CONTACT: Sue Hamonet for details.

Fee payable to owner, \$5 per person maximum.