



NEWSLETTER No. 8/89, SEPTEMBER 1989.

## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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### 1. NOTES FROM AUGUST MEETING:

a) ATTENDANCE: 26. Apologies from Margaret Piefke, Kay and Jim Imrie Ruth Parker and the Hamonets.

b) OBSERVATIONS: Common Noddies near Newcastle Baths; White-faced Herons nesting in suburban backyard gum tree at Cardiff; Black phase of Little Cuckoo-Shrike at Congewai; Crested Hawk at Kahiba and a White-throated Warbler calling at Shortland.

c) BIRD CALL: This month it was the turn of Peter Phillips to stump almost everybody with a call that we should all have known, that of the Jacky Winter ( *Microeca leucophaea* ). This bird plays a leading role in the dawn chorus around our region and the scarcity of members correctly identifying the taped song is an indication of how much environmental clues, such as habitat and time of day, affect the way in which we recognise bird calls. Also possible is that this call was recorded outside our region and that the Jacky Winter's call varies from place to place.

d) BIRD OF THE EVENING: The bird of the evening for this month was the Lewin's Honeyeater (*Meliphaga lewinii*). Before discussing this bird in detail, Fay Thomson gave a brief introduction to the Honeyeaters in general. Honeyeaters belong to the family Meliphagidae which, with almost 70 species, is the largest Australian bird family. Their major distinguishing feature is a brush tongue which they use to gather nectar, although, as Fay pointed out, this purely carbohydrate food source cannot supply all their nutritional needs and so all species supplement their diet with a protein source, usually insects, but fruit is also taken. Honeyeaters are very important members of the Australian environment, being for many plants the major pollinating agent. Lewin's Honeyeater, (*Meliphaga lewinii*, from the greek meaning 'eater of honey' and after John William Lewin, an artist and naturalist) is a fairly large honeyeater (about 18cm long) and is a dull olive green in colour with a dark wash on the forehead and a very prominent yellow, 'half moon' cheek patch. Birds in the non-coastal and southern Queensland parts of its range are said to be brighter coloured than others. This honeyeater lives predominantly in rainforest and dense woodlands and nearby habitat with a preference for wetter areas. It ranges down the east coast from Cooktown to Melbourne and some nearby islands. It is readily recognised by its familiar 'machine-gun' call but also has a single note call which it uses when alarmed. Lewin's Honeyeater, is one of a group of honeyeaters who subsist mainly on insects and native fruits rather than nectar. Fay described

at possible sand mining in nearby areas as part of the need to make sure that the Botanical Gardens does not become an island surrounded by habitat unsuitable for native fauna. Adequate corridors for the comings and goings of birds, wallabies and, in particular, koalas are essential, he pointed out. Don finished by suggesting that any members wishing to go birding in the gardens should contact the staff on arrival so that they can receive advice on the best places to go. We thank Don for this offer and also for his talk, and congratulate all the people who have worked voluntarily to accomplish so much with so little. We wish them every success for the future, particularly with their planned bird garden.

## 2. FIELD OUTING TO ALLWORTH - Sunday 20th August.

Light fog was beginning to lift as twelve club members assembled at Hexham for the start of a glorious day of early Spring weather (at last !) Sufficient members took advantage of the proximity of a certain, early opening, family restaurant to almost make it worthwhile asking for a group discount. So it was that a well fed convoy set out for Allworth, where a further three members, presumably after home-cooked breakfasts, were waiting. By this time the fog had gone and the sun was starting its ascent, momentarily hidden by thin cloud. The sun was still far too low, however, for a party of seven Royal Spoonbills to think about stirring, so they slept on, undisturbed by our meanderings over the paddocks and along the mangrove-lined banks of the Karuah River and one of its small tributaries. Many other birds were stirring, however, including Egrets, Cormorants, Lapwings and Thornbills. Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were numerous and a large flock of Red-browed Firetails flew in loose formation as Galahs, King Parrots and Lorikeets screeched overhead. A sudden flash of blue sped low over the water, later returning to display the beautiful colours of an Azure Kingfisher. Bar-shouldered Doves called from the Casuarinas as we picked our way through some boggy ground, disturbing Southern Emu-Wrens and White-fronted Chats en route. After morning tea on the riverbank, with the Spoonbills finally deciding it was daytime, we proceeded to our next destination, stopping off at the park to use the facilities and view a contingent of Red Wattle Birds sharing a flowering Coral Tree with some Noisy Friars. Next stop was a poultry farm where we were greeted with the raucous calls of large numbers of Corvids of debatable specificity. Some remnant rainforest along a small stream yielded several more birds for the list, including a Brown Pigeon, Rose Robin, Eastern Whipbird, Satin Bower Birds and a Yellow-throated Scrubwren. After lunch, a further four species were added to the day's tally before the threat of an imminent thunderstorm called to an end a day of otherwise beautiful weather, during which a total of eighty four species were identified. .... Paul Osborn.

## 3. Sir Peter Scott

It is with regret that we note the passing of Sir Peter Scott. Sir Peter was one of the world's leading conservationists as well as being a noted artist and broadcaster. He was instrumental in establishing waterfowl sanctuaries in Brittain and, in recent years spent a lot of his energy and enthusiasm on efforts to save the Giant Panda, through his association with the World Wildlife Fund. The son of Scott of the Antarctic, he died of a heart attack just two weeks before his 80th birthday. In the words of Sir David Attenborough 'Nature has lost the greatest friend she ever had'.

one that regularly visits her home as being partial to Lantana berries, and spending a lot of time in both Camelia bushes and a miniature palm. The eating of cultivated fruit has also been recorded for this bird. The young of the species are fed mainly on fruit and the softer parts of beetles. Lewin's Honeyeaters are inquisitive and relatively fearless birds and have been known to come to picnic tables for food. They are very lively and rarely sit still for long. The nest of this honeyeater is a deep cup-shaped structure made from strips of bark, leaves and grass and sometimes bits of paper, bound together with spiders web. It is lined with soft plant material and suspended by its rim in a thin fork of a small tree or shrub. Usually situated in thick foliage on the outer part of the tree, it can be up to 10m from the ground but is more often at heights of 2-5m. People have seen them nesting in orange trees in the Sydney area. Two, or sometimes three, eggs are laid. They are 26X18 cm in size, light cream to white in colour with a few purplish-brown spots or blotches on the larger end. The female incubates the eggs for 2 weeks after which both parents feed the chicks.

e) STOCKTON MARINA: Recent media reports of the possibility of a marina being built in Newcastle Harbour are causing some concern to club members. One of a number of alternative sites suggested for this marina is adjacent to Stockton Bridge, very near the area used by the migratory waders and designated as a wildlife sanctuary. It has been decided to try to obtain more information about the proposed development before assessing whether any further action is needed to help protect important wader feeding grounds.

f) MAIN FEATURE: HUNTER REGION BOTANICAL GARDENS

Mr. Don M<sup>C</sup>Nair was our guest speaker this month, and gave us a brief rundown on the history of attempts to establish a botanical gardens in our district. The idea for such a local facility was first talked about late last century and in 1898 an area of land in Mayfield was dedicated for this purpose. Plans fell through, however, and later efforts identified the current Newcastle Sportsground as a possible site. The well documented apathy of the Australian population held out again and after suggestions for sites at Blackbutt and New Lambton (at the old drive-in theatre) came to nothing, nothing was done until 1981 when the Hunter District Water Board released some of its land for approved purposes. Seizing their opportunity, a group of local flora lovers held a meeting at the City Hall to raise support (and money) for the current project by the highway between Hexham and Tomago. The hard work of Don Barnett, Kevin MacDonald and others saw a Draft Management Plan drawn up and work began on the site, which was described as '300 acres of lantana'. Because the area is part of a water catchment for the Tomago Sandbeds no herbicide or pesticide chemicals can be used and so the Botanical Gardens must rely heavily on natural biological controls. This means that one priority of the Gardens' developers is to attract birds. To this end, some of the lantana has been left as it attracts both insectivorous and frugivorous birds, both because of the food it supplies and the excellent shelter it provides. Plans are underway to develop a 'bird garden' as one feature of the complex and part of this work will centre on the two natural wetlands within the garden's boundaries. Don described some of the problems encountered so far, including the need to ration tractor fuel as a result of lack of funds, and the natural problems of water supply and bushfires. Sadly, other problems to be overcome are vandalism and theft. Don also expressed his concern

### 3. COMING EVENTS

Sunday 24th September

Field Outing Stanhope Creek  
MEET : 6.30 AM, M<sup>C</sup>Donalds, 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.

Wednesday 11th October

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.  
7.30 PM

Main Feature : Bill Dowling, Dungog naturalist

Sunday 22 October

Field Outing Kooragang Island  
MEET: Sign on left of road between  
Stockton and Tourle St. bridges.  
TIME: 7 AM  
CONTACT: Alan Stuart

Wednesday 8th November

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.  
7.30 PM

Main Feature : Alan Morris, NSW NPWS

Weekend 18/19 November

CAMP, Dyer's Crossing  
Details : Kay Imrie

Sunday 10th December

Field Outing Swansea  
Meet : M<sup>C</sup>Donalds, Belmont, 6.30  
Contact: Fay Thomson

Wednesday 13th December

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.  
7.30 PM