

## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.



President: Peter M<sup>C</sup>Lauchlan  
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 SEPTEMBER MEETING:

a) ATTENDANCE: 34. Apologies from Margaret M<sup>C</sup>Lauchlan.

b) OBSERVATIONS: Pilot Bird in the Watagans, Channel-billed Cuckoos heard in the area, a Spotted Pardalote constructing its burrow in a backyard compost heap at Metford, Spangled Drongo at Valentine, and Striped Honeyeaters at Blackhalls.

c) BIRD CALLS: We were fortunate to have two bird calls this month; in celebration of the spring weather, Peter M<sup>C</sup>Lauchlan opened the meeting by playing the song of a Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*) which arrives to take up summer residence at his home at about this time every year. Bill Dowling then played us a call, and, once again, the members found great difficulty in identifying the songster. This time, however, we had an excuse, this was a call rarely heard in recent years, that of the Rufous Scrub-bird (*Atrichornis rufescens*). This bird has a very restricted distribution, living only in highland rainforest and adjacent eucalypt forest where undergrowth is especially thick, between the Mistake mountains and Barrington Tops. Bill recorded this particular specimen in the Gloucester Tops in late August.

d) BIRD OF THE EVENING: The Bird of the Month this month was the Pacific Baza or Crested Hawk (*Aviceda subcristata*). Mavis Gillies, attracted by the rather splendid plumage of this bird, had always wanted to see one, and, after 10 years of birdwatching, has now seen two. This bird belongs to the family of Cuckoo-falcons (*Leptodontinae*), so called because of a superficial resemblance to the European Cuckoo, which consists of five or six species (depending on which book you read) distributed throughout the world. The Pacific Baza is the only Australian species and can also be found in Papua-New Guinea and SW Pacific islands, including the Solomons. As a group the Cuckoo-falcons are distinguished by their crest, broad wings, conspicuous plumage and feeble talons. The Pacific Baza is distributed in Australia from the Kimberleys right round the coast to about Sydney, although there have been one or two records further south. Mavis quoted Pizzey as saying they are rather rare south of Grafton. The vast majority of sightings of this raptor have been within 350 km of the coast. There have at times been considered to be two races but opinions on this differ. The Pacific Baza inhabits coastal and subcoastal forests,

both closed and open, and their margins. It is also found in belts of timber along waterways. The bird is mainly sedentary, although some seasonal movement is suspected in some localities. They are mostly seen singly or in pairs but occasionally in family groups of up to about nine. One such group was reported near Cooranbong a few months ago. Mavis first saw this species near Cairns but was lucky enough to have one near her home about three weeks ago. Quiet and unobtrusive outside the breeding season, they are more likely to be spotted during the courtship and nesting phases of their lives. They have a relatively long tail, about half their total length, and conspicuously barred wings and underparts. This, together with their crest and a prominent yellow eye make them unmistakable in the field. Their wing span of 90 cms is about the same as that of a Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus notatus*) but they are longer and heavier than this bird. In flight they have a leisurely glide with occasional flaps and have been known to soar in flat circles. They exhibit a spectacular tumbling display flight in the mating season. Their voice is a weak piping not unlike that of the Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*). Mavis reported that they prey mainly on phasmids (stick insects) and mantids but also take frogs, small lizards, beetles, mice and grasshoppers. Breeding takes place between September and March with most birds breeding from October to December. Unlike other raptors, their nest tends to be small and flimsy, built in the outer foliage of trees. Both sexes incubate the eggs which are bluish to greenish-white with irregular splotches. Both also feed the young, although the majority of this is done by the female. Mavis finished with a quote from 'Hawks in Focus' by Jack and Lindsay Cupper regarding the high infant mortality caused by chicks wandering too close to the edge of the undersized nest.

e) Announcements: A copy of the Wilderness Society's Draft Management Plan for the Barrington Tops has been received and is available for perusal. A letter has been sent stating the concern of the Club over the marina proposal which may threaten the migratory wader habitat at the Northern side of Stockton Bridge. As a result of the Club's raising of \$140 for the NPWS feral cat appeal, we have received a Cooe Koala doll which will be raffled at the December club meeting. Along with Cooe Koala was sent a note indicating that \$60,000 has been allocated for a study of Gould's Petrel (*Pterodroma leucoptera*) whose major breeding ground is Cabbage Tree Island.

f) MAIN FEATURE: Mr. Neville Foster, a nature photographer from the Maitland Photo Salon showed us some slides he has taken of birds, mostly from the Hunter region. As well as exhibiting his slides, Neville gave us some useful tips on the art of bird photography and illustrated this with slides which demonstrated some of the pitfalls. These included depth of field problems, problems of background (an excellent shot of a grey fantail seemingly feeding her young at night was used to emphasise the importance of background), and the need to carefully plan the positioning of flash units to give the best lighting whilst not obstructing the bird's flight path. Useful tips such as the use of a cardboard cutout to help in photo composition and the attracting of birds by broadcasting their song or providing food items were mentioned. Neville finished with a piece of advice worth repeating; whilst taking photographs for competition purposes can be a serious business, photography as a hobby should be fun.

## VALE NORM MULLARD

We were shocked and saddened to learn of the sudden passing of our friend Norman Alexander Mullard on 27th September, 1989.

Norm joined our Club in 1984 and immediately impressed with his earnest desire to learn about birds.

At first armed with Cayley's "What Bird is That" he found the going a little difficult so he soon changed over to "Pizzey", then with Beth in tow, and book in hand set out in his own resolute and indomitable manner to find and identify his feathered friends.

To say that Norm was keen to learn would be an understatement. He was continually seeking knowledge and always impressed with his sincere appreciation of advice and information offered by more experienced 'birdos'.

An enthusiastic traveller - on his retirement he undertook a 'round Australia' tour in his faithful Holden, and more recently enjoyed a lengthy coach tour, covering similar ground, and notching up some memorable ticks for the life list.

He was a regular attender at Club nights, and wouldn't miss a camp or an outing if he was at home.

Farewell to Norm - he will be missed; but we value the friendship he freely gave us; and the contribution he made with his quiet unassuming nature, and his dry sense of humour will be long remembered.

At Sunday School we used to sing of a "green hill far away". We know that Norm has found his "green hill" and wherever there are birdos on warm days with blue skies, soft breezes and the songs of birds Norm will be there with us.

To Beth and their two sons we offer our sincere condolences at this time of great loss.

## LIBRARY NEWS.

1. As advised in the July Newsletter, the Club is subscribing to the new ornithological magazine - BIRDS INTERNATIONAL.

The first two editions have been received and are available to members. To preserve each magazine it has been decided to 'keep' them in the cardboard delivery containers.

2. A new addition to our Library is a copy of:

The Illustrated Dictionary of Australian Birds by Common Name.  
Most birds have common names other than those given in the standard bird books - this dictionary lists over 3500 entries.

3. Thanks to Jim and Kay Imrie, we have acquired 47 editions of the CORELLA. This is the quarterly journal issued by the Australian Bird Study Assocn. These issues have been referenced and are available to any member seeking information of an unusual nature about a particular bird.

Camp at Wollar - 30th September to 2nd October, 1989

With the hard-core of dedicated campers mostly away on mouth-watering trips to who-knows-where, it was a much depleted, but nonetheless enthusiastic team of six members and two visitors who braved the dusty roads that lead to Wollar for the October long-weekend.

Previous visits to this locality in 1985 (witnesses please note) and 1987 produced a quite impressive list of species, so we were somewhat disappointed to find that many of the expected 'regulars' were not to be found. There is evidence of the very wet weather of the Winter months, when enormous volumes of water must have swollen Kingfisher Creek, and while at present the area is extremely dry, there is still plenty of water available on the property.

Some evidence of early breeding was found, but other species at present are proceeding with the job of nest-building.

An overall species count of 79 birds, some excellent weather, and good company made for a most relaxing and enjoyable week-end.

Sue Hamonet.

4. NEW MEMBERS: A warm welcome to Richard and Joan Evans of Shortland and Mark Dedman from Kotara South.

5. COMING EVENTS

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