

Hamonet

NEWSLETTER No. 11/89, DECEMBER 1989.



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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1. NOTES FROM NOVEMBER MEETING:

a) ATTENDANCE: 44. Apologies from Wilma Barden, Rosemary Waymark and James O'Connor

b) OBSERVATIONS: A Pied Currawong with large amounts of blue in its plumage has been seen and photographed near O'Sullivan's Gap whilst another has been sighted (and again photographed) in Tilligerry State Forest and at Chichester with many red and green feathers. Is somebody out there dyeing Currawongs? Meanwhile, a more conventionally marked Pied Currawong colour banded at Springwood has turned up at Thornton. An Oriental Cuckoo was sighted near Cooranbong and another (or perhaps the same one) was reported at Rankin Park. Five Pectoral Sandpipers and a Stint were reported from Stockton, a Noisy Pitta near Dungog, a Starling mimicking a Kookaburra, and Jabiru at Mandalong and Thornton. The White-faced Herons reported in an earlier Newsletter to be nesting at Cardiff have fledged three young and are renesting. One of our youngest members, Branden Evans, proudly reported his sighting of a Yellow-faced Honeyeater in an Acacia tree, to finish off the month's observations.

c) BIRD CALL: Sue Hamonet played for us the call of the Channel-billed Cuckoo, a sound often heard in our area at this time of year. Sue related the story of her recent experience of having a pair of these large raucous birds calling in a tree above where her grandchildren were playing. To add to the din, a pair of Noisy Miners were trying to repel these invaders of their territory, whilst a Pied Currawong left her nest to help. The combined noise of these three, none too musical, species must have been appalling, especially as the fights went on for some hours. Peace was eventually restored when Sue played the Cuckoo's call back to them, an action that sent them scurrying from the area.

d) BIRD OF THE EVENING:-Striped Honeyeater. This bird was described for us by Bevan M^CGregor, who informed us that the scientific name, Plectorhyncha lanceolata, was derived from 'plectos', meaning straight and 'rhynchos' meaning bill. Lanceolata is Latin for lance shaped, referring to feathers of the breast. Neither name is helpful for field identification as the bill, although straighter than that of most honeyeaters is nevertheless slightly decurved. The lance shaped breast feathers are difficult to see unless the bird is in hand. This genus is monospecific (has no other species) and the bird is usually

grouped in field guides near the Wattlebirds (Anthochaera) to which it has some superficial resemblance. This honeyeater belies its name by taking very little nectar, and survives on a mostly insectivorous diet.

The bird is mostly grey-brown apart from the face, crown and neck which are strongly streaked black and white. This, the bird's most noticeable feature, gives it its common name. The bill is a bluish-black, the eye brown and the legs a blue-grey. Immatures are less clearly marked. The bird is from 20-23 cm long with southern birds being larger than their northern relatives. There are no subspecies recognised.

The Striped Honeyeater is distributed throughout the Murray-Darling area and the eastern coast from around Townsville to Tuggerah. It occupies woodland and scrubby habitats with a preference for native conifers, Acacia and Mallee. At the northern end of its range it has been reported in Mangroves and dense Melaleuca stands. In the Hunter district it seems to favour Casuarina, Radiata Pine and Eucalyptus species. Fairly regular irruptions occur at the edges of its distribution.

It is most often seen singly or in pairs but can be found in parties of up to eight birds. It is somewhat inconspicuous as it moves about the foliage, and a tendency towards ventriloquism adds to the difficulty of spotting this bird. The call is a loud cheerful whistling which Bevan suggested was reminiscent of a Grey Butcherbird. It apparently often nests close by this latter species. The Striped Honeyeater is aggressive in defence of its nest, attacking hawks, ravens and humans with equal ferocity, all the time continuing its shrill whistling call.

As previously said, the bird feeds mainly on insects and their larvae, which it gleans from foliage or from under bark. Bevan has recorded it pecking at bark in a manner similar to that of a Treecreeper. They have been seen to eat Mistletoe berries and orchard fruit, classifying them as pests in the eyes of orchardists. Some nectar is occasionally taken.

Breeding takes place between August and January with a nest placed from one to ten metres from the ground. The nest is slung from leafy twigs like a basket and is placed in dense foliage near the ends of branches. The nest is constructed from plant down and other vegetable matter lined with fine dry grass. In sheep grazing areas wool makes up a large part of the nest which is also often decorated with Emu feathers. Three or four eggs, 23 X 17 mm and white with light reddish-brown spots or blotches are laid.

e) Announcements: Some brochures advertising bird safari tours have been received as well as a petition against logging the south east forests. Peter McLauchlan mentioned some new additions to the tape library, which brings its coverage to over 500 species.

f) MAIN FEATURE:- BIRDS OF FIJI. This was the topic of a talk delivered by our guest this month, Ann Lindsay-Hatton. Ann visited Fiji with family and friends in January, 1984 for a period of three weeks. Most of this time was spent on the main island of Viti Levu but a few days were found for trips to the smaller islands of Kadavu and Taveuni.

Fiji has a bird list of 60 species, 23 of which are endemic. This is a very high proportion of endemic species. Unfortunately, Fiji has also obtained a large number (10 or 11) of introduced species, most of which have become pests. Like most places visited by Europeans, Fiji has a large assortment of feral animals such as dogs, cats, rats, donkeys and pigs, all of which have had an impact, either directly or through habitat degradation, on the native bird population. On top of this, the introduced Mongoose has severely affected ground nesting species such as the Bar-winged Rail, which is now very rare. Fiji is largely clothed in rainforest on the hills, with sugar and coconut

plantations around the coastal fringes. Ann described the difficulty of birdwatching in rainforest, where the birds are very hard to find amongst the thick foliage of the canopy, especially so during the wet season which is when she visited.

Ann showed us some slides of Fijian birds to illustrate her talk and it immediately became obvious that Australian birdwatchers would feel quite at home among the Common Mynahs, Reef Egrets, White-faced Herons and various Crakes and Rails, not to mention Fan-tailed Cuckoos and Golden Whistlers. To add to these were the beautiful Fiji Goshawk, parrot finches, lorikeets and flycatchers. Of special interest were the large (40cm) pigeons and doves endemic to the island group and the very beautiful Blue-crested Broadbill. The iridescent Silk Tail had its admirers in the audience and all were pleased to hear there were no House Sparrows or Common Starlings in Fiji.

Ann also showed us some photographs of the Fijian countryside and some of the interesting transport facilities. Her anecdotes demonstrating the warmth and helpfulness of the Fijian people touched a chord with we more 'civilised' people used to paying for such services. Thank you Ann for a lively and entertaining talk.

2. FIELD TRIP TO KOORAGANG - Sunday October 22nd.

A crisp morning greeted the 12 wader watchers who set off to explore the ponds along Cormorant Drive. Red-capped Dotterels were soon lined up in the telescopes in the drying sections of the ponds. Further out amongst the Gulls were some stately Large Egrets and over a dozen Little Egrets. A Sharp-tailed Sandpiper sat motionless on a dead mangrove until everyone had examined him closely. Towards the railway line, Pied Stilts, Greenshanks and Marsh Sandpipers were soon added to the list. Large numbers of Black Swans and Chestnut Teal were also in this vicinity, with a small number of Musk Ducks.

By morning tea time, at the fluoride works, the temperature had climbed considerably. The first call heard here was the Brown Honeyeater, an indication that this species seems to be colonising this area in greater numbers. A mixture of Fairy and Tree Martins sat on the fence so that they could be compared. From here we set off to the dykes along the river. It was low tide, not the best time to see waders in numbers, but the exposed mudflats near the mangroves, and the dykes themselves, yielded very worthwhile numbers and diversity including a Ruddy Turnstone and an Eastern Golden Plover superbly camouflaged amongst the exposed oysters. Eastern Curlews, Whimbrels and Bar-tailed Godwits were loafing and feeding within binocular and telescope range showing the differences in size, shape, bill length etc. which are needed to identify the waders. A flock of approximately 200 Black-tailed Godwits then flew in, displaying clearly the reason for their common name. The Mangrove Warbler was also called up here, with eyeball to eyeball views. Little Terns sitting on driftwood, Gull-billed Terns and a lone Striated Heron were also checking out the food supply.

Our next move was to the Stockton sewage ponds where a large flock of Curlew Sandpipers occupied the banks. Families of baby Chestnut Teal also moved from pond to pond through an interconnecting pipe.

A few Terek Sandpipers and Grey-tailed Tattlers were sighted under the mangroves as we headed for our lunch spot along the river. This is their favourite roosting area and is near the possible site of a marina. Red-rumped Parrots near Stockton Hospital helped send the morning's tally to 86 species.

Perhaps a few more of our dozen observers will now believe that waders can be distinguished after all, given time and patience, and we may have more volunteers for our summer and winter wader counts.

Jim Perry

3.

VALE JIM RALSTON

It was our sad duty once again to bid farewell to yet another of our Club members, James Ralston, who passed away on 2nd November, 1989. Jim was one of our long-standing members, having joined the then Bird Observers Group in June, 1976

He was a regular attender on Club nights and outings, until failing health forced him to curtail these activities.

In addition to bird-watching, Jim was a master photographer, and members were fortunate to see the results of his commendable talents when he took the floor as the main speaker on several occasions. We remember being impressed with the lengths Jim went to to produce his beautiful bird studies. Towers of timber and aluminium lofted him to great heights to reach some of the more elusive of his subjects.

A gentle person, Jim was blessed with the quiet patience one frequently finds in dedicated birdwatchers. When in later life he found it difficult to cover long distances on foot he adopted the practice of taking along a folding stool. Then he and Olga would choose a spot and wait and watch, this tactic producing some very rewarding and no doubt memorable experiences. The same patience and skill went into the construction of the aforementioned towers as into the final photographic results. Even the filing-boxes which housed his many slides were painstakingly and beautifully constructed.

Jim will be remembered lovingly by some of our older members, who found him always graciously willing to fill in, even at short notice, to produce a programme when required and those memories will live on in the beautiful slides donated by him that form part of our Club Slide Library.

To Olga and their family we extend our warmest sympathies.

Sue Hamonet.

4. CAMP AT DYER'S CROSSING, 18-20th NOVEMBER

This was the Club's second visit to this old dairying property situated between the Wang Wauk River and rain forest, with lovely hilly paddocks in between.

Early arrivers on Friday midday quickly selected shady campsites, as the weather was very hot with storm clouds gradually building up. Spine-tailed Swifts flew high in the humid air feeding before the weather change, and Rufous Whistlers "eee-chonged" incessantly. By late afternoon more people had arrived, including first-time bird-campers Barbara and Garry Bean -- a proper baptism for them as, just on dusk, down came heavy rain. This washed out both Club bird-call and the strange reverberating song of Bladder Cicadas which had just started up.

Saturday dawned fine and enthusiastic birdos were out early to take advantage of the clean, cool air and resultant busy bird life. Jim and Judy Cook led some of us up through the rain forest to the hill top. Many different bird calls were heard: the deep booming of Pheasant Coucal, 'did-you-walk' of Brown Pigeons, and the clear mellow 'which-you' of Black-faced Monarchs, making a good exercise in bird identification. The huge Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest is still much in evidence, situated high among tall trees on the side of a steep gully. Two well-feathered young Eagles were perched on the side of the nest, while the parent birds soared overhead. The massive size and height of this nest lends credence to the farmer's account that it has been in existence for forty years, occupied, in his opinion, by the same pair of Wedgies.

Other people chose to range across the lowlands and paddocks, and were well rewarded by seeing that vocal but elusive Cicadabird. A brilliant blue flash over the river was the Azure Kingfisher, also observed scuttling underfoot was an Echidna (Spiny Anteater) -- definitely a non-passerine! Close by camp, seven Glossy Black-Cockatoos feasted on nuts in a Casuarina tree.

By afternoon rain again looked likely, so to ensure that all birds seen were recorded, bird-call was held before the evening meal. It is interesting to note that some birds seen at last visit (88 species, same month two years ago) were not seen this time, while our group observed some, namely Regent Bowerbirds, Green Catbird, Emerald Dove and the Cockatoos not seen last time. Other fauna seen on the weekend were a Long-necked Tortoise and a Pretty-faced Wallaby, also three Brush Turkeys.

A quartet of melodious Magpies sang matins to greet a heavily overcast Sabbath. After breakfast a ramble over the hills yielded a few more birds, much to our delight including a well-coloured Red-backed Wren. Rain started and, rather dampened, we decided to break camp. Despite the weather, I think all those present -- fifteen campers and two day visitors -- enjoyed the weekend. The final total species seen was 99. Our hearty thanks to Jim and Judy Cook for again obtaining the farmer's permission for us to camp in this most scenic spot.

Ruth Parker.

5. COMING EVENTS

Sunday 21st January

Field Outing Bot'cal Gdns/Motto Farm
Meet : M^CDonalds, Hexham 6 AM
Contact : Rosemary Waymark, 751819

Wednesday 14th February

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.
7.30 PM

Annual General Meeting: Guest, bird photographer, Trevor Hetherington.

Sunday 25th February

Field Outing Morisset
Meet : Coles Carpark, Toronto 6 AM
or Morisset P.O. 6.20 AM
Contact : Kay Imrie 524524

Wednesday 14th March

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.
7.30 PM

Sunday 25th March

Field Outing Allworth
Meet: M^CDonalds, Hexham 6.30 AM
Contact: Alan Stuart, 528569

Anyone interested in camping on the Saturday night of the 24th should contact Kay Imrie, 524524. Details are yet to be finalised.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the AGM voting will take place for the following office bearers:

President
Vice-President
Secretary
Treasurer,

on the basis of one vote per member or family member, and in accordance with Section 16 (1) of the Constitution. A form of Appointment of Proxy (see overleaf) for those unable to attend the Annual General Meeting must be in the hands of the Secretary before the 7th of February, 1990

ELECTION OF MEMBERS

16. (1) Nominations of candidates for election as office-bearers of the Club or as ordinary members of the committee -
- (a) shall be made in writing, signed by 2 members of the Club and accompanied by the written consent of the candidate (which may be endorsed on the form of nomination); and
 - (b) shall be delivered to the secretary of the Club not less than 7 days before the date fixed for the holding of the annual general meeting at which the election is to take place.
- (2) If insufficient nominations are received to fill all vacancies on the committee, the candidates nominated shall be deemed to be elected and further nominations shall be received at the annual general meeting.
- (3) If insufficient further nominations are received any vacant positions remaining on the committee shall be deemed to be casual vacancies.
- (4) If the number of nominations received is equal to the number of vacancies to be filled, the persons nominated shall be deemed to be elected.
- (5) If the number of nominations received exceeds the number of vacancies to be filled, a ballot shall be held.
- (6) The ballot for the election of office-bearers and ordinary members of the committee shall be conducted at the annual general meeting in such usual and proper manner as the committee may direct.

FORM OF APPOINTMENT OF PROXY

HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB INCORPORATED (incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act, 1984)

I,
(full name)

of
(address)

being a member of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Incorporated

hereby appoint
(full name of proxy)

of
(address)

being a member of that Club, as my proxy to vote for me on my behalf at the general meeting of the Club (annual general meeting or special general meeting, as the case may be) to be held on the

..... *FOURTEENTH* day of February 19.. 90.....

and at any adjournment of that meeting.

.....
Signature of member

Date