



NEWSLETTER No. 5/90, JUNE 1990.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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1. NOTES FROM MAY MEETING:

a) ATTENDANCE: 28. Apologies from Rosemary Waymark and Ruth Parker

b) OBSERVATIONS: A Jabiru was seen at Wyong, Regent Honeyeaters at Munghorn Gap, a Spangled Drongo in the Bean's garden, Plum-headed Finches at Murrumbo and a Figbird at Eleebana. A pair of Kestrels have reportedly raised a brood in Nesca Park. Also reported this month were Scarlet Robins at Green Hills, Rose Robin and Crested Hawks at Rankin Park and a possible Olive Whistler (since confirmed) in the Watagan Forest.

c) BIRD CALL: Roger Heading presented this month's bird call, that of the Green Pygmy-Goose (*Nettapus pulchellus*). This bird inhabits lilly ponds and lagoons in the northern part of our country and has a loud whistling call which it utters frequently, especially when engaged in fighting other members of its species, which, apparently, it does often.

d) BIRD OF THE EVENING: Continuing the duck theme of recent meetings, Fay Heading chose the Green Pygmy-Goose to be this month's bird of the evening. The bird's scientific name is *Nettapus* (meaning duck foot) *pulchellus* (beautiful). Other common names by which it has been known are Green Dwarf Goose and Goose Teal. Although called a goose, it is one of the perching ducks and is closely related to the Wood Duck. It has probably gained its name from the short, stout goose-like bill which is a grazing adaptation present in the true goose of the Northern Hemisphere. Under its beguilingly beautiful plumage this small, exquisite creature is one of the most aggressive of all ducks; the males engaging in frequent fighting. Fights begin over nesting territory, food supply or mates and an enraged male will swing its bill up and down in threat and then attack with its bill open, buffering its opponent severely. During the fighting, which is savage and sustained it gives voice to the loud trill heard earlier.

The Green Pygmy-Goose is a small duck (30-36 cm) with a stubby, blackish bill which is tipped with pink and sometimes pink beneath. In flight it can be distinguished from the Cotton Pygmy-Goose by large white wing panels on the rear edge of the wing, near the body. The male is a glossy green/black on the head, neck and upperparts, with a the head barred brown and with two large bright white cheek patches. It has grey-white flanks and mantle, each feather distinctly marked with crescents of dark

green or brown. The undertail is dark brown while the legs and feet are a green/grey. The duck has a dark brown eye. The female is less green and less distinctly marked on the head. The back of her neck is green but the rest is white, striped with green crescents. The area below the eye and extending to the back of the neck is white with some grey flecks. Immatures resemble the female but their face, chin and neck are heavily spotted brown. By two months, young males begin to acquire the solid green neck of their fathers. The ducklings have a dark crown with a light grey face accenting a dark eye stripe. Their wings are dark brown above, grey below and have white trailing edges. The bill is pink with a yellow ridge and the feet and legs are yellow/green.

The Green Pygmy-Goose flies low and swiftly over the water. It is one of the most water loving of all ducks, seldom coming ashore. Whilst it sometimes rests at the water's edge it is very awkward on land. It may occasionally crawl from the water to rest on partly submerged fallen trees. It can usually be found among blue waterlilies on lagoons. This duck feeds on aquatic vegetation and a few insects, probably swallowed by accident. It grazes on the buds and heads of emergent waterlilies and dives in a Coot-like manner up to 50 cm for submerged plants. It also filters floating seeds and flowers from the surface of the water. Investigations in the Northern Territory have revealed their diet as being made up of nearly 50% seeds and buds of the waterlily, 30% seeds and leaves of grasses and the rest made up of pond weed and other water plants.

Green Pygmy-Geese are always seen in pairs and presumably mate for life. The males find potential nest sites with the female making the final selection. All the brooding duties are performed by the female but the male joins in to help in the rearing of the young, once hatched. During this time the male defends the nest area strongly and vigorously. Nests can be found in swamp vegetation, variously on the ground or in hollows of trees in the water, sometimes up to 10 metres above water level. Eight to twelve hard shelled, smooth lustrous cream/white eggs are laid. The incubation time is not known. Within its range, the Green Pygmy-Goose is locally common on waterlily lagoons, dams and swamps of northern Australia, from Broome to Rockhampton. It is also found in southern New Guinea. Highest concentrations are between Darwin and Oenpelli, where it is found in great numbers. During the wet season it spreads across the subcoastal plains to breed in the deepest swamps and lagoons. It also utilises shallow spike rush dominated swamps and wild rice for grazing. This duck seems to have been little affected by the spread of human settlement, the destruction of some of its habitat being balanced by the provision of large water storages for stock and irrigation, which in these tropical areas quickly develop the deep water plants on which it feeds.

e) MAIN FEATURE: Our guest this month was Teena Wigman from the Native Animal Trust Fund. Teena explained the work of the Fund, set up to care for and rehabilitate native animals which are injured or orphaned, mostly as a result of human activity. The Native Animal Trust Fund is manned by a group of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers who give up their time and other resources to fulfill the aims of the Fund. All the ongoing expenses of the Fund are covered by membership fees, donations and sale of goods at exhibitions and fairs etc. All of the Fund's carers, rescuers and releasers operate under licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and have first to be trained to the appropriate standard before being granted a licence. Although the idea of caring for, say an orphaned joey, may sound romantic, as Teena explained, it is really quite hard work. Carers are frequently required to get up in the middle of the night to feed their charges, who require almost constant attention.

Many of the Fund's workers tend to specialise in one type of animal or another and Teena's particular specialty is birds of prey. Teena spent some time explaining the difficulties and rewards of looking after such creatures and the best ways of handling them (apparently, their talons are more dangerous than their beaks). A common mistake made by well meaning members of the public who come across an injured bird is to force water down their beak. This water can get in the bird's lungs and lead to pneumonia; to give a bird a drink, drip the water on to the top of its beak. Another common mistake occurs when people attempt to remove a joey from the pouch of a kangaroo or wallaby that has been struck by a car. It is very important to cut the mothers teat from the pouch to avoid ripping the young macropod's mouth. These things have been learnt by the members of the Native Animal Trust Fund by experience over many years and passed on from one member to another. Teena also discussed the feeding of birds of prey and stressed the importance of providing food as near as possible to that utilised by wild birds. To this end she breeds her own mice and rats and obtains day old chicks from poultry farms.

Much of the Fund's efforts are directed towards education and members regularly address groups of schoolchildren in order to raise their awareness of the correct way to go about helping injured native fauna. During the course of the meeting, members dug deep and we were able to present Teena with a donation of around \$90 at the end of her talk.

Anyone finding native animals in trouble should advise one of the Native Animal Trust Fund people listed below, or contact the RSPCA who will refer the caller to the appropriate person.

Dianne Philpott	(WEST)	595756
Rhonda Parkinson	(NORTH)	873164
Anne Feighan	(CITY)	540331
Arthur Bryant	(KOTARA)	439934
NPWS (Raymond Terrace)		873108

Anyone wishing to join the organisation or wanting more information should contact :

Teena Wigman (President) 24 King St. Adamstown 2289
Audrey Koosmen (Secretary) 8 Conway St. Toronto 2283
Arthur Bryant (Treasurer) 43 Catherine St. Kotara Sth. 2289

2) FIELD DAY to BRUNKERVILLE - MULBRING AREA, 20th May

Thanks to Robert Bignell's kind invitation, we visited his property, "Old Brush", just North of Brunkerville. It was a beautiful, clear morning, but very cold, with frost on the grass when we arrived - no sun in the valley yet. The group of Wood Duck on the lagoon was the first sighting and until the sun warmed up we saw little else, but could hear a Lyrebird, Eastern Whipbird, Bell Miners and a Dusky Moorhen on the lagoon. We had time to admire the pots of native orchids, ferns and palms which appeared unexpectedly everywhere. These large pots, like the tiled benches, Greek columns and the head of Nefertiti, which Kay spied, added a magnificent touch to the day. As the mist rose, the birds began to stir and we soon saw the gold of Eastern Yellow Robins and Golden Whistlers. Some of us were lucky enough to see a Rose Robin as well. Grey Fantails were everywhere and White-throated Treecreepers, Brown Warblers, Red-browed Firetails and Superb Blue Wrens were seen.

We had a coffee break by the lagoon, soaking up the sun and removing all the leeches which had crawled inside boots and socks! It was in the tall trees around this cleared area where Crimson Rosellas, two Crested Hawks and a lone Noisy Friarbird had been seen earlier. Feeling full of enthusiasm now we tackled the hill once again, crossing Bangalow Creek and climbing into the rainforest. We were very

pleased to find Large-billed Scrubwrens, as predicted, high up in the trees. This was a first for some of us! There were White-browed Scrubwrens about as well. Honeyeaters seen included White-naped, Yellow-faced and Lewin's and we were now able to see Bell Miners and the Eastern Whipbirds which we had been hearing since 7.30AM. We were disappointed not to find more birds on such a sparkling morning and made our way back to the lagoon for lunch, where a count revealed only 44 species had been seen. However, the seventeen members present had enjoyed the morning very much and several planned to go on exploring after lunch. Our thanks again to Robert Bignell.

..... Garry and Barbara Bean

3) TRIP TO GULF COUNTRY, 1991

If enough starters can be found, I hope to arrange a 3 week camping trip up to the Gulf of Carpentaria next year. The trip would be sometime in the period May-July (participants to decide the actual starting date) and would be run by Phil Maher of Deniliquin. Phil is an expert bird finder who runs several birding trips per year; several club members have been on other of his trips, such as down the Strzlecki Track.

The trip would start and finish in Newcastle. Areas that would be visited around the Gulf include Burketown (birds to find include: Pied Heron, Great-billed Heron), Karumba (Collared Kingfisher, Zitting Cisticola) and Borroloola (Carpentarian Grasswren). Stops along the way will include such well known bird haunts as Lawn Hill N.P., Eulo Bore, etc, etc. Other birds we can expect to see include Purple-crowned Fairy-wren, White-browed Robin, Red-headed and Bar-breasted Honeyeaters, Sandstone Shrike-thrush and most of the Finches.

We would be bush camping each night, and not always in the complete lap of luxury, so the trip is not for the ultra-fastidious or fussy. The cost will be \$2000-\$2200, depending on the number of participants. This price includes tents, etc, transport and all meals. We need a minimum of 10 and maximum of 14 starters if the trip is to be possible. Deposits of \$200 will be required when signing up. Anyone from the HBOC who is interested, please see me for further details. First come, first served!

Alan Stuart

4. COMING EVENTS

Sunday 24th June

Field Outing Wetlands Day
Meet: Shortland Wetlands, 8AM
Contact: Kay Imrie 524524

Wednesday 11th July

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.
7.30 PM

Sunday 22nd July

Field Outing Australian Museum,
Sydney
Meet: Museum Foyer , 10AM
Contact: Peter M^CLauchlan 333224
BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL

Wednesday 8th August

Clubnight, Shortland Wetlands Cntr.
7.30 PM

18th/19th August

WEEKEND CAMP Gloucester Tops