

Alison



NEWSLETTER No. 7/90, AUGUST 1990.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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1. NOTES FROM JULY MEETING:

a) ATTENDANCE: 28. Apologies from Margaret M^CLauchlan, Ruth Parker and Marta and Ian Hamilton.

b) OBSERVATIONS: An Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) was seen at Throsby Creek near Tighes Hill, a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) was reported from Freemans Waterholes and Pacific Bazas from Kahiba and Shortland. Spangled Drongos were reported from Stockton and Toukley whilst another was heard imitating a Black-faced Monarch at Speers Point. Rainbow Lorikeets seem to be on the increase in the Newcastle area with sightings coming from Shortland, New Lambton, Mayfield and Nelson Bay.

c) BIRD CALL: Peter Phillips played the call of a honeyeater which can be found in the more westerly regions of the Hunter Valley, and although many members thought the call familiar, only the Treasurer ventured the correct identification, a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater.

d) BIRD OF THE EVENING: Andrew Zoneff gave us a concise presentation about the Superb Lyrebird. This bird's scientific name is *Menura superba*, derived from *MENOS* (Greek for might), *OURA* (Greek for tail) and *SUPERB* meaning proud. Put together we have a proud bird with a big tail. The bird is distributed through coastal Eastern Australia from around Stanthorpe in Queensland to Melbourne. It has been introduced to Tasmania. The Lyrebird is easily identified, being about a metre in length, 600 mm of which is tail. The female is slightly smaller. The male's tail is made up of 16 feathers, 12 filamentaries flanked by two lyre shaped ones and with two very thin wire-shaped feathers in the centre. The tail of the female is plain. Perhaps this bird's most obvious feature is its remarkable voice. The Lyrebird has only three instead of the more usual four intrinsic muscles working its voice box. This gives it great flexibility, allowing it to mimic almost any sound it hears. Most often mimicked are the calls of other birds in its habitat, although some sounds are apparently learned from older Lyrebirds. This is demonstrated by the Tasmanian birds making Eastern Whipbird noises although there are no Whipbirds in Tasmania. Both sexes engage in mimicry. Lyrebirds also imitate the calls of some mammals. To illustrate the magnificent qualities of the Lyrebird's voice, Andrew played a recording of one in full song, displaying some of its extensive repertoire.

The female Superb Lyrebird builds its nest and rears its young unaided by the male. Only one egg is laid usually, but two have been reported. This egg takes a long six weeks to hatch and the chick remains in the nest for a further six weeks, even longer if the nest is high in a tree.

With many of us seeing a female Lyerbird sitting on a nest at Munghorn Gap at the last camp, it was apt that it should be chosen for Bird Of The Evening this month, thank you Andrew.

e) MAIN FEATURE: Alan Richardson, club member and local photographer entertained us with a selection of his slides, indicating the various methods used in bird photography. He started with a shot of an Australian Bustard, gained using the stalking method. This involves trying to get as close as possible to the bird without alarming it and using a long lens if you can afford it. Another method is to secrete oneself in a hide set up at a place where you know birds will come, and waiting quietly for whatever comes along. Alan showed us several slides of waterfowl taken in this way, including a shot of a Black Swan chick which had been hatched for barely two minutes. By far the most popular method amongst serious bird photographers is to find the bird's nest and set up camera and flash equipment there, knowing that the bird is highly likely to appear at regular intervals to feed its brood. Alan showed many slides of high quality gained in this fashion, including shots of a Superb Lyrebird at the nest. Alan's interests are wider than just birds, however and this was demonstrated by several good slides of frogs and lizards, mostly taken in the local area. Alan also displayed some slides taken in early morning light in the Barrington Tops area when everything was covered in a heavy dew. One of these demonstrated that, seen in the right light even a humble mosquito can look beautiful. We thank Alan for his presentation and look forward to the next time we can be entertained by viewing the products of his patience and keen eye; I for one will never tire of seeing his slide of the Yellow-rumped Thornbill at the nest.

2. KILLER SPARROWS This item is reprinted from New Scientist, May 1990. Infanticide is widespread in the animal world - and is largely carried out by males. Now, however, a Spanish biologist has found a species in which both females and males practice infanticide. Jose Veiga, of the Natural Science Museum in Madrid, has studied the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), a species in which infanticide is a major cause of the death of nestlings. He finds that the two sexes have different reasons for murdering nestlings. In both cases, however, infanticide is 'sexually selected' - that is, it occurs when members of one sex compete for mates. Infanticide is most common in males because females tend to invest most time and energy in reproduction. This limits the rate at which males can mate and produce offspring. By killing a female's young, a male will make the female available to breed and so increase his own opportunities to reproduce. Infanticide which has been sexually motivated is much rarer among female animals. It occurs only in species in which the females have to compete for the parental help of the males. Among House Sparrows, one in ten of the attempts to breed occur after a bird has committed infanticide. Veiga found that if male House Sparrows commit infanticide, they do so when they have recently lost a mate. They then breed with the female whose brood they have destroyed. On the other hand, Veiga found that the females that kill nestlings always seem to be the 'second wives' of bigamous males. He says this is because the male will help to feed the nestlings of his 'primary' mate only. The female kills these nestlings in order to redirect the male's parental care to her own offspring.

3. COMING EVENTS

Sunday 23rd September

Field Outing Kincumber/Lisarow
Meet: Charlestown library carpark 6.00 AM
OR Ourimbah (4 Seasons nursery) 6.45
Contact: Jim Perry, 432496

October Long Weekend

CAMP Wilson's property at Bootawah, near Taree.
Contact: Alan Stuart 528569

Wednesday 10th October

Clubnight: Shortland Wetlands Cntr. 7.30 PM

Sunday 21st October

Field Outing: Barrington area
Meet: M^cDonalds Hexham 6 AM
OR Barrington Guest House gate 8 AM
Contact: Alan Stuart 528569

Weekend 27/28th October

Birdathon: See below for details.

Wednesday 14th November

Clubnight: Shortland Wetlands Cntr. 7.30 PM

Sunday 25th November

Field Outing: Anna Bay / Bob's Farm
Meet: Information Sign Kooragang Is. 6 AM
Contact: Kay Imrie 524524

4. FINAL REMINDER: HUNTER REGION SPRING BIRDATHON

Don't forget that entries close on October 10 (club night) for the inaugural HBOC Hunter Region Spring Birdathon, which is to be held over the weekend of October 27-28, during Bird Week.

The Birdathon is to be a team competition (3 or 4 people per team) to see how many different species can be seen within the Hunter region during a 24 hour period from 2 pm on Saturday October 27 until 3 pm on the Sunday (daylight saving starts overnight). Teams plan their own itineraries and may start from anywhere within the region, but must be at the finishing point on time to qualify.

The competition is open only to HBOC members, but would-be participants can join the club on payment of the normal fee. The competition will be followed by a BBQ/post-mortem at the finishing point (in New Lambton).

Further details and application forms are available from Alan Stuart (Ph 52.8569) and Peter Phillips (Ph 51.6223).

5. BIRDS IN THIS ISSUE

White-faced Heron
Jabiru (Black-knecked Stork)
Crested Hawk (Pacific Baza)
Grey Goshawk
Brush Turkey
Pied Oystercatcher
Sooty Oystercatcher
Sooty Tern
Bridled Tern
Common Noddy
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo
King Parrot
Crimson Rosella
Port Lincoln Parrot
Southern Boobook
Barn Owl
Tawny Frogmouth
Azure Kingfisher
Superb Lyrebird
Rufous Scrub-bird
Scaly Thrush
Eastern Yellow Robin
Olive Whistler
Superb Blue Fairy-Wren
Red-backed Wren
Crescent Honeyeater
White-cheeked Honeyeater
Tawny-crowned Honeyeater
Spangled Drongo
Regent Bowerbird
Pied Currawong

Ardea novaehollandiae
Xenorhynchus asiaticus
Aviceda subcristata
Accipiter novaehollandiae
Alectura lathamii
Haematopus longirostris
Haematopus fuliginosus
Sterna fuscata
Sterna anaetheta
Anous stolidus
Calyptorhynchus funereus
Alisteria scapularis
Platycercus elegans
Platycercus zonarius zonarius
Ninox novaeseelandiae
Tyto alba
Podargus strigoides
Ceyx azurea
Menura novaehollandiae
Atrichornis rufescens
Zoothera lunulata
Eopsaltria australis
Pachycephala olivacea
Malurus cyaneus
Malurus melanocephalus
Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera
Phylidonyris nigra
Phylidonyris melanops
Dicrurus megarhynchus
Sericulus chrysocephalus
Strepera graculina

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Further details and application forms are available from Alan Stuart (Ph 52.8569) and Peter Phillips (Ph 51.6223). The closing date for applications is Wednesday October 10.

6. COMING EVENTS

<u>18th/19th August</u>	<u>WEEKEND CAMP</u> Gloucester Tops, Sharpe's Creek. One night camp, to allow an early start to find the Rufous Scrub-bird Contact: Jeanette Stephenson, 575255
<u>Wednesday 12th September</u>	<u>Clubnight:</u> Shortland Wetlands Cntr. 7.30 PM
<u>Sunday 23rd September</u>	<u>Field Outing</u> Kincumber/Lisarow Meet: Charlestown library carpark 6.00 AM OR Ourimbah (4 Seasons nursery) 6.45 Contact: Jim Perry, 432496
<u>October Long Weekend</u>	<u>CAMP</u> Wilson's property at Bootawah, near Taree. Contact : Alan Stuart 528569
<u>Wednesday 10th October</u>	<u>Clubnight:</u> Shortland Wetlands Cntr. 7.30 PM
<u>Sunday 21st October</u>	<u>Field Outing:</u> Barrington area Meet: M ^C Donalds Hexham 6 AM OR Barrington Guest House gate 8 AM Contact: Alan Stuart 528569
<u>Wednesday 14th November</u>	<u>Clubnight:</u> Shortland Wetlands Cntr. 7.30 PM
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7. Index of Bird Names in this issue.

Pacific Baza	Aviceda subcristata
Spangled Drongo	Dicrurus megarhynchus
Black-faced Monarch	Monarchus melanopsis
Rainbow Lorikeet	Trichoglossus haematodus
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Acanthogenys rufogularis
Australian Bustard	Ardeotis australis
Black Swan	Cygnus atratus
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Acanthiza chrysorrhoa

JULY 22 OUTING - AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM, SYDNEY

A group of twenty-six members and their families met at 10 o'clock at the Australian Museum. Most, still unused to the shorter trip from Newcastle (thanks to the extended Freeway) had arrived at least half an hour earlier and filled in the time bird watching in Hyde Park. Our boys were particularly taken by a Straw-necked Ibis with a bent beak and scruffy feathers that walked fearlessly amongst us pecking at crumbs on the ground.

At the Museum, we were taken 'under the wing' of well-known bird expert and retired curator John Disney who conducted the 'behind-the-scenes' tour. We were entertained with amusing reminiscences and shown many fascinating items including some well-preserved bird skins over a hundred years old, bird skeletons, stuffed and mounted birds, a magpie's nest constructed entirely of fencing wire, Registers, reference books and journals.

At present, the Bird Section of the Museum has a staff of one, who is required to be curator, archivist, researcher and secretary. One of his many duties is to record information about dead birds sent to the Museum by members of the public and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This information is freely available to researchers, as is access to the collection of birds.

The bird skins are stored on shallow drawers in huge steel cupboards and liberally sprinkled with naphtholene to ward off insects. (It was fairly effective on humans, too.) The highlight of the tour for many was being allowed to personally investigate the cupboards' contents. Open season, so to speak! The specimens came from all over the world and ranged from unbelievably tiny humming birds to emperor penguins and American bald eagles. The number of each species was astounding. There was shelf after shelf of lorikeets, honeyeaters, and birds of prey. In all, over 60,000. (Can we claim this as the bird count for the day?)

All those who attended were in agreeance that the tour was well worth a journey the the 'Big Smoke'.

Judith and Rowley Smith
and boys

A MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR NEW SOUTH WALES WADERS

Over the last ten years there have been a number of major studies of waders and of estuarine ecosystems in New South Wales. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is now reviewing this information and preparing a management plan for waders in this State. All wader species are being considered but the emphasis is on the waders and the problems in estuarine wetlands. The first objective is to identify the important sites for waders and establish priorities for reservation. The second objective is to identify the specific conservation problems for waders in this State and to decide what management actions the Service should be taking, both inside and outside reserves. The third objective is to identify the gaps in our knowledge and to make recommendations on research and monitoring programmes which the Service should be initiating or supporting.

The management plan itself will be fairly brief but will be accompanied by a separate document reviewing the biology and management of waders in New South Wales in some detail. The emphasis will be very much on specific sites and specific actions and will complement the more general Australia-wide management plan for waders currently being prepared by Doug Watkins for the Australasian Wader Studies Group and World Wildlife Fund.

And so, a plea for information. If you have unpublished records of numbers of waders at specific sites, please let me know. In some cases, the counts that have been published may underestimate the significance of a site for waders. I am anxious to find out the maximum numbers of waders of each species seen at each site over the last ten years or so. Also, I would be grateful for any information or opinions on the particular conservation problems at each site. The information will also be passed on to Doug Watkins for the Australian management plan. This is an opportunity to make a real contribution to the conservation of waders in this State. Please help.

Peter Smith
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(047) 39 5312 (any time)