



9/90 October  
NEWSLETTER No. 8/90, ~~SEPTEMBER~~ 1990.

## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

President: Peter M<sup>C</sup>Lauchlan  
Secretary: Peter Phillips  
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: 13. Apologies from Margaret M<sup>C</sup>Lauchlan, Fay Thompson, Kay & Jim Imrie, Rosemary Waymark, Barbara Kelly, Auriol Royds, Sue & Ed Hamonet and James O'Connor.

b) OBSERVATIONS: Barn Owl at the Newcastle Wetlands Reserve, Shining Bronze Cuckoo at Shortland Wetlands Centre and Cooranbong, twenty to thirty Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos at Edgeworth, White-throated Warblers at the university, three Pied Oystercatchers at Wangi, a Pacific Baza at the university, Crimson Rosellas in New Lambton, Little Wattlebird at Toronto, a Striated Thornbill collecting cats' fur for nest building, a pair of Osprey at Blackhalls Park, a pair of Masked Lapwing have successfully raised three young in a park at Eleebana, Sea-eagles performing courtship display flights, a Dollarbird at Cardiff, a Blackbird at Metford, a Hobby was seen to take a Sparrow at Mayfield. Sighting of the month was a Black-breasted Buzzard at Thornton.

c) BIRD OF THE EVENING: European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*). Tom Clarke described this bird which is common around his home in Mayfield. The Goldfinch is a native of Europe and has spread from there as far as China in the East and North Africa in the South. It was introduced to Australia in the 1860's by the Victorian Acclimatisation Society and has been one of their more successful imports. In Australia, its stronghold is still the South-East but it has spread through the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and up the coast as far north as Brisbane. It is widespread in cleared areas of Tasmania and a small population survives around Perth. Whilst most of the spread has been by dispersal of natural increase, some can be attributed to aviary escapes. With its colorful plumage and pretty song, together with its seed-eating habits, it has become a popular cage bird throughout the world. The bird prefers cleared agricultural areas as these provide large quantities of its principal food source, the seeds of thistles, indeed the bird's scientific name means 'thistle finch'.

The Goldfinch is about 120 to 130 mm long, has a red mask on a white face, a black crown and a yellow band on each black wing. It sports a white rump, black tail and a cinnamon back, with buff marks on the belly and flanks. The female is similar with somewhat less red in the mask. Juveniles lack the red mask and are fairly plain but still exhibit the golden yellow wing bars. Field identification can be difficult if the bird is seen from below, when the head looks all black and the distinguishing features are a slightly forked black tail with two white spots. This bird is often seen in mixed flocks with sparrows and silvereyes. In flight the yellow wingbars are diagnostic.

The Goldfinch makes a neat cup nest of fibrous material, hair, grass and cobwebs, lined with fluffy down from thistles and bullrushes. Like typical finches, it lays about five eggs which are pale blue speckled with cinnamon. Incubation time is about one and a half weeks with a further two weeks for fledging. Parents feed the young for another week or so after fledging. The young are fed mainly on spiders whilst adult birds feed on the seed heads of exotic plants and weeds. They seem to be particularly fond of the seed balls of the plane tree.

Goldfinches can raise two or three broods in a season, depending on conditions. In winter they form flocks which feed on the seeds of conifers. They can be found in parks, gardens, cleared agricultural land and railway embankments etc.

d) ANNOUNCEMENTS: There are some places available for a weekend course on bird song recording at Barren Grounds for the 12th-14th October. \$110 covers accommodation and all meals, see Peter M<sup>C</sup>Lauchlan for details if you are interested.

A recent edition of Earthworm on ABC radio 2NA (8.30 Wednesdays) featured Peter Hunt, who runs a wildlife reserve in the Adelaide Hills. He commented on a Superb Blue-Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) in the reserve with completely black wings. It is known that males of this species exhibit greater areas of breeding plumage as they get older and the theory is that black wings are only uncommon because the introduction of cats and foxes has meant that fewer birds live long enough to acquire them. The reserve in question is secure from these predators. On this same topic, a male Superb Blue-wren with extensive black colouration on the breast and underparts has been seen at the Wetlands Centre; keep an eye out for this old bird.

Recent media reports have highlighted the dangers to Satin Bowerbirds of the blue plastic ring from milk bottle tops. Apparently the ring can become caught over the male bird's head during his acrobatic courtship displays and causes death from starvation. Pressure is on for the milk companies to change to a less attractive (to Bowerbirds) colour for their milk bottle tops.

e) Rufous Scrub-bird. The recent outing to Gloucester Tops in search of this elusive bird was not completely successful in that only a lucky few managed a glimpse of the main quarry. To compensate for this an extract from a video was shown which featured the first known video footage of this bird ever taken. Superb scenes of the bird in the open in full territorial display strengthened the resolve of most present to return for another attempt to see this rare bird. The video

was made by Glen Threlfall in Lamington National Park and was featured on Brisbane commercial TV recently. This video is shown as part of the evening entertainment at O'Reilly's Guest House near the park and is well worth seeing for some great shots of Noisy Pittas at the nest as well as views of the Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove.

f) MAIN FEATURE: GRASS PARROTS VIDEO. This video is one of a seven part series on Australian parrots entitled Land of Parrots. This part of the series deals with the smaller parrots which are often found on the ground feeding on the seeds of native and introduced grasses. All of the grass parrots were covered, although the probably extinct Paradise Parrot was shown by way of still photographs from many years ago, as well as shots of museum specimens. Along with the familiar Red-rumped and Turquoise Parrots were scenes of the rarer Golden-shouldered and Hooded Parrots and the endangered Orange-bellied Parrot. Museum specimens were used to demonstrate the differences between the three races of the Blue Bonnet, although shots of live specimens were also seen. The rather unusual nesting habits of the Rock Parrot were featured in the video along with hints on how to tell a Blue-winged Parrot from an Elegant Parrot. Although covering a lot of species in a relatively short time, this video treated each fairly well and thanks must go to Graeme O'Connor for sharing it with us.

## 2. FIELD OUTING - KINCUMBER/KATANGRA 23rd September 1990

A small group of 4 members arrived at Kincumber Nature Reserve on an overcast morning. This reserve is heathland on the top of a mountain with a wonderful view. I expected to see a few birds. On arriving we spotted a Coral Flame Tree in full bloom, with a chorus of singing birds, to name Honeyeaters, Scaley-breasted and Rainbow Lorikeets. It was indeed a view worthwile. Further along the track we came across some large caves which we guessed were long ago aborigine dwellings. Our list grew with our letter-headed bird, the Golden Whistler. Birds were getting scarce, maybe due to lack of sunshine, so a cup of tea was decided the best thing.

Katangra Reserve is a rainforest area. Almost as soon as we started our birding we came across 3 Regent Bowerbirds with one drab female and a bower. The Black and Yellow of these birds was a sight to see as they were in the same tree. Other highlights were Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Green Catbird and a pair of White-browed Scrubwrens who had young nestlings nearby which we were unlucky not to see. Total count for the day was 40 birds. ....Jeanette Stephenson

3. LONG WEEKEND CAMP AT BOOTAWAH: Last time we camped on Ted and Anne Wilson's property at Bootawah, near Taree, it was winter and the weather was cold and windy. Many of us present on that occassion said how good it would be to return in more pleasant weather. Although it rained on the Saturday evening, and threatened to at several times throughout the weekend, the weather remained dry and warm during the days providing good conditions for birdwatching. Attendance was disappointing, with only four birdwatchers in the total of seven campers, but the group made up in enthusiasm for its lack of numbers.

The Wilsons have really done a magnificent job in caring for their two hundred acres. Mown tracks lead the walker through areas of rainforest

along creek banks before meandering out through woodland and into cleared pasture areas. Ted has erected many nest logs for the benefit of hole-nesting species whilst providing food in the form of native plants for many others.

The combination of warm weather, good habitat and birdwatching enthusiasm produced a total count for the weekend of 82 species seen, with a further five heard. Highlights included an Australian Owlet-nightjar, which had taken up residence in one of the nest boxes and sat obligingly near the entrance with its head in full view. A Comb-crested Jacana provided three of us with a new bird for our life lists, whilst Alan was lucky enough to see a Brown Bittern. Japanese Snipe were spotted, winging rapidly away from the edge of a dam at our approach and the same dam provided an Azure Kingfisher. Pigeons were well represented on the property, with five species seen or heard. White-headed Pigeons and Bar-shouldered Doves were especially numerous. Cuckoos were also represented by five species, including Channel-billed Cuckoo and Pheasant Coucal. Next to Grey Fantails the most numerous bird was the Scarlet Honeyeater with Golden and Rufous Whistlers not far behind. Add to this a Leaden Flycatcher and a Black-faced Monarch and it becomes clear that the failure (once again) to find the Red-backed Wrens, reputed to be present, was not overly disappointing.

One result of the low attendance was that we all received a larger share of Alan's birthday cake and champagne, putting the icing on a very pleasant weekend. ....Paul and Irene Osborn

#### 4. COMING EVENTS

##### Sunday 21st October

Field Outing: Barrington area  
Meet: M<sup>c</sup>Donalds Hexham 6 AM  
OR Barrington Guest House gate 8 AM  
Contact: Tom Clarke 67-1396

##### 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

##### Sunday 9th December

Field Outing: Kooragang Island  
Meet: Information Sign Kooragang 11:30 AM  
Contact: Kay Imrie 524524

##### Wednesday 12th December

Clubnight: Shortland Wetlands Cntr. 7.30 PM

#### 5. LAST CHANCE ! HUNTER REGION SPRING BIRDATHON

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

Further details and application forms are available from Alan Stuart or Peter Phillips.