



NEWSLETTER No. 1/91, FEBRUARY 1991.

## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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### 1. NOTES FROM DECEMBER MEETING:

a) ATTENDANCE: 35. Apologies from Marta Hamilton, Peter Phillips and Bevan M<sup>C</sup>Gregor

b) OBSERVATIONS: Two Noisy Pittas have been seen every morning for the last week or so near the guest house at Barrington. Long-billed Corellas in the company of Galahs have been reported from Eccleston. Some of the same species have been seen with Little Corellas at the Steelworks Golf Club. A Pacific Baza was sighted at Maitland Golf Course while Blue-billed Ducks and Great Crested Grebe are being regularly seen at Walka Water Works. Japanese Snipe were reported from Bonnel's Bay and seem to be around the district in large numbers in suitable habitat lately. Marsh Crakes are in evidence at the Wetlands Centre, becoming more easily seen as the ponds dry out. A young Bowerbird found helpless near the Bean's front fence has been rescued and handed over to Teena Wigan of the Native Animal Trust for rehabilitation. Scarlet Honeyeaters were seen at Edgeworth and a party of six Banded Plovers were spotted on Kooragang Island. Also found on the Island was the nest of a Black-winged Stilt, with eggs. The Bush Thick-knees near Lemon Tree Passage have reared their young and are now renesting.

c) BIRD CALL: Peter M<sup>C</sup>Lauchlan played for us a taped recording of the rich, melodious song of the Sandstone Shrike-Thrush which he hopes to see (and hear) on his forthcoming trip to Lawn Hill Gorge. The song had obvious affinities with that of the familiar (to us) Grey Shrike-Thrush and this, coupled with Peter's clues on where it lived, made this an easy call to identify.

d) CONSERVATION CORNER: News that the proposed Marina development at Stockton has been rejected by Newcastle City Council in favour of a Throsby Creek site was greeted with much relief. However, there are now plans afoot for commercial development of Walka Water Works, which, if not carried out sensitively, may endanger the breeding of Great Crested Grebes and Blue-billed Ducks. It is to be hoped that this important wetland will not be sacrificed for the benefit of power boats and water skiers.

e) CAPE YORK SPACEPORT: Jim Iarrie presented an edited video extracted from a recent '60 Minutes' programme about the proposed Cape York Spaceport. This part of the video highlighted the wildlife of the area and in particular good footage of such birds as Palm Cockatoos, Lovely Fairy-Wrens and Tawny-breasted Honeyeaters. Included was some very rare footage showing not one, but two, Rufous Owls.

f) RUFIOUS SCRUBBIRD: Whilst we were in the mood for videos of rare birds, Peter McLauchlan showed again the Glen Threlfall video of the Rufous Scrubbird that he had screened at an earlier, poorly attended clubnight. Those that would like to see this bird 'in the flesh' should attend the Sharpe's Creek weekend camp later this year armed with warm clothing and a lot of optimism.

g) BIRDATHON PRESENTATION: Trophies were presented to the members of the winning team in this year's birdathon. Recipients were Alan Stuart, Jim Perry and Irene and Paul Osborn. This event will be held again in 1991, probably in October and the challenge is out to see if any team can beat the 1990 score of 163 species sighted in a 24hr period.

h) BIRD IDENTIFICATION COMPETITION: Mathew Stephenson showed a selection of twenty five bird slides from the Club's library and all present tried to identify the birds portrayed. Some of these proved quite challenging as there were instances where the audience had to be told where in the slide the bird was situated! This sort of competition helps us to realise how much reliance we place on locality, habitat and calls when we try to identify birds, and how far wrong we can be without these clues.

2) AIR SAFETY: The following article was published in New Scientist, September 1990.

'Why do some animals fly? The principal reason, according to a biologist in Uganda, is that by flying they are better able to escape the clutches of predators.

Derek Pomeroy of Makerere University believes that this outweighs all other benefits which flight confers, such as the advantage of being able to move faster while expending less energy, and being able to gain access to food resources not available on the ground, such as fruit on trees. He has analysed mortality data gathered on a variety of birds, bats, land mammals and penguins (Biological Journal of the Linnaean Society, vol 40, p53).

Pomeroy compared the annual death rate among animals of the same weight and found clear evidence that flying animals survived to the greatest age, with the animals that spend the longest time in the air surviving the longest.

Swifts have the lowest mortality rate, and this is at least three times lower than their non-flying relatives. The death rate for other birds is higher than for bats but still only half that of land mammals. Pomeroy found that the birds that live the most perilous lives are penguins. Nevertheless, their death rate is still lower than land animals of the same weight.'

### Field Outing to Kooragang Island 09/12/90

This was the last field outing for 1990 and it was focused on the waders. The experienced birdwatchers in the group freely shared their knowledge of bird identification and this was really appreciated. The field outing started late (11.30 a.m.) compared to the normal "early bird" meeting hour. This time coincided with the high tide enabling us to view the waders' most active feeding period on the outgoing tide. Ten birdwatchers enjoyed the field outing and observed 78 species.

We started at the BHP ponds and among the shorebirds were black-winged stilt, red-necked avocet, greenshank, eastern curlew (the World's largest wader), sharp tailed sandpiper, red-capped plover and mongolian dotterel.

We marvelled at these migratory waders from Europe, Siberia and Asia. To secure a future for these birds, it is essential we protect the wetlands and coastal strips for feeding and roosting purposes. We discussed Newcastle City Council's current proposal to build a marina development at Stockton Bridge (a recognised habitat for shorebirds) and hoped that the aldermen would respect this internationally important bird area.

Soaring overhead was a swamp harrier and after a short walk we saw a male musk duck, white-fronted chat, black swan and the three cormorants- black, great and little pied. Large and intermediate egret some in breeding plumage were seen hunting for food and we recalled that the birds' plumes had been "harvested" for the millinary trade in the name of fashion. It was the protest over the killing of egrets which gave rise to the establishment of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSBP) 101 years ago in the United Kingdom.

Rain stopped further exploration of this site, so we travelled to the northern side of Stockton Bridge. Sheltering under the Bridge we had lunch and then we explored the water's edge. We had a good view of an osprey (an uncommon bird for this area) flying over the mangroves. On the Hunter River we spied several cormorant attempting to swallow fish and two crested terns "canoeing" on a large floating log. Unfortunately the rain continued to fall and so the outing came to a close.

By Margaret McLauchlan

*P.S.*

*Congratulations to the Newcastle City Council for their decision not to build a marina at the Stockton Bridge. This important decision will result in the protection of marine and avifauna, thus making a significant contribution to Australia's role in adhering to the International Treaties (RAMSAR, CAMBA, JAMBA) to protect wading and water birds and their habitats.*

#### 4. FIELD OUTING. SWANSEA/BELMONT Sunday 20/1/90

Twenty one members braved the wet conditions at Nesca Park to be greeted at the entrance by a Red-whiskered Bulbul; not a good sign as the Bulbuls march northwards. Soon we may see them alongside Sparrows and Starlings in Civic Park. The Bell Miners were their typical lyrical selves near the start of the park. Other species seen here were Southern Emu-Wrens, a Grey Goshawk, Olive-backed Orioles, Eastern Yellow Robins and both Azure and Sacred Kingfishers. The highlight was a pair of Rufous Night Herons roosting in the tall eucalypts.

After morning tea, we moved on to Belmont Lagoon where the day was clearing to a very hot one. Unfortunately, due to the heat, the birds were all sitting quietly in the shade but we still managed to see half a dozen Brush Bronzews, an encouraging sign. Others seen here included Hardhead Duck, White-breasted Woodswallow and White-faced Herons.

The final tally for the day was a species count of 83 seen and three heard. Thanks to Sue Hamonet for organising a very enjoyable day.  
Trent Bagnall

#### 5. COMING EVENTS

Sunday 24th February

Field Outing: Brunkerville  
Meet: Freemans Waterholes Garage, 7AM  
Contact: Ruth Parker 295569

Wednesday 13th March

Clubnight Shortland Wetlands Centre 7.30 PM

Sunday 17th March

Field Outing: Kooragang Island  
Meet: Information Sign, Kooragang, 7AM  
Contact: Kay Imrie 524524

Friday 29th March -  
Monday 1st April

Easter Camp: Widden Valley  
Details : Kay Imrie 524524

Wednesday 10th April

Clubnight Shortland Wetlands Centre 7.30 PM

Sunday 21st April

Field Outing: Buladelah  
Meet: McDonalds Hexham 6.30 AM  
Contact: Jeannette Stephenson 575255