



## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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### THE JUNE MEETING.

At the June Clubnight, held on Wednesday, 12th, the Bird Call, of the Wonga Pigeon was presented by Kay Imrie.

Instead of the usual Bird of the Evening Ed Hamonet gave us his expertise on the subject of nomenclature. Five of his favorites being the King Parrot - *Alisterus scapularis*, Barred Cuckoo-shrike - *Coracina lineata*, Gibberbird - *Ashbyia lovensis*, Black-tailed Treecreeper - *Climacteris melanura*, Galah - *Cacatua roseicapilla* (appears in 15 books), *Eolophus roseicapilla* (appears in 5 books). The Main Feature was an illustrated talk given by Walter Boles from the Australian Museum, the subject bird fossils found at the Riversleigh deposit, Gregory River, N/W Queensland and Murgon, S/E Queensland.

The following observations were recorded:-

Brown Booby at Foster.

Pr. Little Falcons at Shortland.

Jabiru at Thornton Station.

Ground Cuckoo-shrike at Mulbring.

Black Bittern at Buttaba.

100's Yellow-faced Honeyeaters at Gwandalan.

White-breasted Sea-Eagles at Buttaba and Gwandalan.

### Library News.

The Kakadu Billabong cassette has been purchased.

Slides of the Black-winged Stilt have been donated.

### New Members.

We extend a very warm welcome to the following new members:-

Jan Angel Merewether.

Kathleen Walker Edgeworth.

### Congratulations.

Members of the HBOC Inc., wish to convey their congratulations to Associate Professor Max Maddock on being made a Member of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honour's list, for his services to conservation and the environment.

### Project Pelican Watch.

The June/July newsletter brought to your attention Project Egret Watch. In March 1991, Project Pelican Watch became a reality with the first wing tagging on Pelican Island in Wallis Lake, Foster. This area being the only confirmed all-year-round breeding colony of Pelicans.

If you observe a Pelican with a pink wing tag (number if possible) please inform Project Pelican Watch at the Wetlands Centre, Shortland, Box 130, Wallsend, 2287. Telephone (049) 516466. Or telephone David Turner, (065) 545710.

If you would like to help with the Reed Warbler Project, please contact Bob Reed, 514768, John Smith, 487018, Graeme O'Connor, 531304 or SWC 516466.

Queen's Birthday Weekend Camp at Munghorn Gap. 8th-10th June, 1991.

The weather looked doubtful on Friday but having packed up camping gear and looking forward to the Club's annual visit to Munghorn Gap we decided to go ahead. Heavy rain as we reached Denman made us rethink this decision. Much clearer skies and even a little sunshine at Wollar raised our spirits and on arriving at the camp site we found the Club well established, cooking fires burning and an air of hope for a fine weekend. Night was falling fast as we hastily erected tents and the "Blue Loo". Hot soup was very welcome and we were soon sitting round the campfire.

The musical calls from nearby Lyrebirds and Yellow Robins greeted the morning, skies seemed to be clearing. Munghorn Gap is an excellent birding area as it provides a number of different habitats - open grassy paddocks, well wooded slopes, creeks and rocky cliffs. Many honeyeaters - Yellow-tufted, White-plumed, White-naped, Black-chinned, White-eared, New Holland and Eastern Spinebills were feeding on low blossoming bushes. Flocks of Brown, Yellow and Yellow-rumped Thornbills flew busily from tree to tree, Hooded Robins were numerous, Speckled Warblers foraged in the damp leaf litter and Spotted Pardalotes peep-peeped above. By evening Bird Call a respectable number of sightings were reported and campers had increased to 13 adults and 2 children.

A clear night with stars gleaming boded well but it was not to be. By 11 o'clock on Sunday the weather turned decidedly wet, although till then we had good birding. Rock Warblers and Lyrebirds were elusive; more honeyeaters were seen, plus Stubble Quail and Southern Whiteface. A total of 79 species were recorded but this time not one Grey Fantail - that friendly little chap who is almost always present. Munghorn's weather for our camps has varied between freezing cold and beautifully fine. On Sunday most of us regretfully abandoned it and headed for home comforts.

Ruth Parker.

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SCALY THRUSH MORTALITY AND MOVEMENTS.

During April and early May 1991, Scaly Thrush (or Australian Ground Thrush) were reported in suburban gardens and other localities where not usually found. In addition during the two weeks 21 April - 4 May, 1990, I know of five birds found dead after having flown into windows, apart from others that were killed and/or eaten by domestic cats in gardens.

I suspect that these movements were not only the usual movement from the highland forests in late autumn to the warmer lowlands, but also the movements out of the coastal rainforests and wet gullies due to the extreme dry conditions pertaining to the Illawarra, Central and Hunter coastal areas. I would therefore welcome any information from people about unusual sightings, dead birds etc., of Scaly Thrushes during April and May and also advice as to whether the birds subsequently disappeared following the rains that commenced after 11 May, 1991. If there is sufficient information I intend publishing a paper on this unusual phenomenon.

Alan K. Morris,  
1, Wombat Street,  
Berkeley Vale, N.S.W. 2259.

## The Gulf Country - Birdwatching in the Wet Season

Our birdwatching holiday to Mt. Isa and the Gulf Country in February 1991 was memorable for many reasons, including the extraordinary amount of floodwater everywhere and the birds (of course!). I would like to share with you five bird sightings which made an impression on me.

The first bird sighting really started with us *hearing* the birds chattering away in the gum trees. It was a group of excited **Budgerigars**, flying wildly from one tree to another. This sight and sound was special to me, because up until then I had only seen budgerigars in cages. Here at last I was able to see these birds in their natural habitat

The second sighting was the result of an expedition the group made into a remote area. The group leader Gordon Beruldsen, had been entrusted with directions to get to the area 95km NNW of Mt. Isa where the **Carpentarian Grasswren** had recently been sighted. To me (being a city person), the directions were rather brief; for example the directions said "take this road for X kilometres, then travel Y kilometres and you'll find a yellow ribbon which marks the spot"! In our "B!rdmobile" (as we christened the 4 wheel-drive) we set off to explore this luna landscape. The vehicle managed to negotiate the steep track and at last we stopped on the valley floor. The heat was intense and the flies were very friendly. After a little time searching the area, two Carpentarian Grasswrens were found, jumping around the rocks.

The third sighting was a visual delight. The 4 wheel drive vehicle drove along the highway as far as it could go, and halted where the floodwater flowed over the road. At this point we alighted, and prepared for a long walk along the road. The sun's rays were intense and I was glad that I was wearing a long sleeved shirt. As we walked slowly towards Karumba, the birds flew into the sky. **Black-winged Stilt** left their eggs which they had laid on the road itself or in the gravel on the roadside. In a few

weeks this road would be opened for trucks and cars bringing in precious supplies for the community. I had a vision that the traffic would drive over the eggs and offspring-I prayed the other birds would build their nests on safer ground.

The fourth sighting was really a surprise for me. At Kurumba Airport, walking through the grass I flushed a finch-like bird. The colours I saw were red and yellow and it was marked with spots. Little did I know that I had just seen my first **Star Finch**. The second surprise was that referring to the field guide, we discovered the Star Finch was out of its normal range!

The fifth sighting was a spectacular one. The group hired a small plane for an hour to search for a **Pelican** breeding colony. The directions were once again very brief and went something like this "*somewhere in a straight line between Normanton and Burketown you will find a pelican colony. You can't miss it*". What an expanse of water! You couldn't see where the coastline started or finished as the sea and rivers were coloured a dirty brown. After a short flying time, we flew over some trees and white specks. This was the egret colony on the Flinders River. A little time later at Mornington Inlet, we spotted a desert island with the pelicans. The birds were in the water and on the island. At a guess there were at least 500 pelicans. The pilot circled clockwise and anticlockwise so everyone could get a good view. What a sight and what a memory!

I shall leave you with these pertinent remarks by Stephen Garnett, "The south-east Gulf of Carpentaria is a superb place for birdwatching, especially in the wet season. Just how important the region is for Australian waterbirds nobody knows ....There are no National Parks whatever in the Gulf country, partly because its value has never been recognised. The more birdwatchers who visit and the better known the area becomes the more likely that adequate sections of it will be preserved".

Margaret McLauchlan

## Wetlands Day. Field Outing on 23rd June, 1991.

Wetlands day was, for a while at least, looking more like a drylands day but the recent good rains have remedied that. Interestingly enough there does not seem to have been any great surge in bird population since the rain. I imagine this may happen later when other areas become less inviting as places to feed or nest in.

So for those bird observers who sweat on spotting something spectacular everytime they go out, the field day may have been a little disappointing. However, for my mind, there were a few significant events which made it all worthwhile.

Firstly, the sighting of a single rather plain looking brown duck on the pond at the Shortland Wetland Centre. Not much to look at but nonetheless a puzzle in identification. It was of course a female White-eyed Duck, with a black eye! Another puzzle for me was the small brown bird that refused to keep still in a casuarina tree over water in the Newcastle Wetland Reserve. I finally managed to get enough clues, dark eye, pale face and white eyebrow, thin beak, it is all so obvious when someone tells you, a Brown Warbler. Less puzzling but still worthy of a good look

through a borrowed telescope were a group of Darters perched on top of melaleucas. A magnificent bird and the contrast between male and female is remarkable. A Yellow Spoonbill stood out as an uncommon visitor.

At the Wetlands carpark some of us were fortunate enough to witness a Whistling Kite feeding on a bird and constantly calling until a larger kite, presumably a female, arrived, the male then gave his prey to his mate.

At this point in time the group of 17 had observed a total of 64 species. Not all wetlands birds as the list included Red-rumped Parrots, Black-shouldered Kites, Pied Butcherbird and many common suburban birds.

The friendliest bird of the day was definitely the mad Magpie Goose who was self-appointed tour guide at the Wetlands Centre.

A brief visit to Beresfield proved to be a bonus for those who stayed as fifteen Nankeen Night-herons were found in the trees at the Steggles turn off. One bird had the speckled attire of a juvenile. All the birds seemed content to just keep out of the icy wind that was blowing unchecked across the wetlands and making the warmth of home and a bowl of pumpkin soup very inviting indeed.

Tom Clarke.

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## Ground Parrot Census.

The Ground Parrot census for Spring 1991 will commence at 0900 hours on Saturday, 21st September.

For further details contact the Wardens.

## The Observatory

The Observatory was established in 1982 by the RAOU in the 2000 hectare Barren Grounds Nature Reserve. It is situated on a plateau with an elevation of 600 metres, giving spectacular views of the Illawarra coastline and surrounding countryside. Most of the vegetation is heathland, along with significant areas of woodland and rainforest. This variety of habitats enables a great diversity of flora and fauna to exist in the Reserve, including several rare and endangered species. In Spring, spectacular displays of wildflowers can be seen.

The Nature Reserve is managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales. It was originally gazetted to protect the habitat of the endangered ground parrot and eastern bristlebird. The Observatory facilitates research and management of these species. Regular ornithological studies include mistnetting and bird banding, census work, daily sightings and participation in the RAOU Nest Record Scheme.

## "On a Wing & A Prayer"

A zany look at birds with John Dengate

Dates: Feb 21 - 23

Cost: \$130

RAOU: \$120

John works for NPWS as a Wildlife Officer. He is also a well known personality on Burke's Backyard, the Today Show, the ABC radio Sunday Show and he does a weekly talkback segment on 2BL. Don't miss this great opportunity to join John and a group of friendly people for an enjoyable weekend at Barren Grounds.

## THE JULY MEETING.

The July Clubnight was held on Wednesday the 10th and James O'Connor presented the Bird Call of the Torresian Crow. The Bird of the Evening was the Azure Kingfisher, presented by Paul Osborn. The Main Feature was a Parrot Video presented by Alan Stuart, showing the Ground, Night and Swift Parrots, the Double-eyed Fig-Parrot and the Budgerigar.

The following observations were recorded:-

A pair of Scaly Thrush at New Lambton Heights.

Pink Robin at New Lambton Heights.

Regent Bowerbirds at New Lambton Heights.

White-headed Pigeon at New Lambton Heights.

Juvenile Whistling Kite at Shortland Wetlands - proving that the Kites have bred at the Wetlands.

Imm. White-breasted Sea-Eagle at Wallsend.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo at East Maitland.

Crimson Rosellas at Speers Point.

Striped Honeyeater at Newcastle University.

Brown-headed Honeyeater gathering nesting material at East Maitland.

### Library News.

Alan Keating has very kindly donated 2 volumes of the RAOU Handbook and a copy of Birds of Australian Gardens.

Another addition to the library is Wading Birds of the World by Eric Soothill.

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Following is an item taken from Australian Natural History, a publication of the Australian Museum. The article appeared in the Autumn 1991 issue, and was submitted by Dr. Suzanne Hand, Biological Science, University of N.S.W.

### Risky Business

In a paper entitled "Man bites dog - glider bites owl!", Monash University postgraduate student Paul Peake has recently reported some unusual behaviour in an Australian marsupial.

During a study of the Powerful Owl [*Ninox strenua*] in South-eastern N.S.W. Peake observed Yellow-bellied Gliders [*Petaurus australis*] 'mobbing' a tape-recorder emitting the mournful 'woo-hoo' calls of Powerful Owls. It is the first time mobbing behaviour has been recorded in a marsupial species. Peake reports that several gliders would typically approach the tape-recorder from as far away as 200 metres, to as close as three metres, calling loudly and frequently [a loud, high-pitched, somewhat unnerving shriek followed by a throaty rattle], and on one occasion chased away an owl that was also present. [Despite the catchy title, at no time did a glider actually bite an owl].

Although the harassment of a predator by members of a prey species has been reported in a number of animals, benefits to the prey species have been assumed rather than demonstrated. In this case, however mobbing appears to offer a direct benefit to Yellow-bellied Gliders. Peake reports that these gliders are rarely taken as prey by Powerful Owls despite their abundance in the study area. Instead the larger Greater Glider [*Petauroides volans*] and smaller Common Ringtail Possum [*Pseudocheirus peregrinus*] and Sugar Glider [*Petaurus breviceps*] are the three most commonly recorded species in the Powerful Owl's diet.

Reports of Bird Watching in Korea, Malaysia and Japan, by Keith Laverick.

Keith is a member of the HBOC who is at present living and working in Korea. He has been sending the Club reports on his activities over the last two years and these reports are now filed in the Library. They are recommended reading and will surely wet your appetite for bird watching in these countries.

Thank you Keith for taking so much trouble to send such interesting reports and we look forward to further news of your activities.

Editor.

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Field Outing to Stockton and Fern Bay. 21st July, 1991.

The July outing covered a variety of habitats on a bright, sunny, though windy day. 19 observers met at Kooragang Island and set off to inspect the BHP ponds, which in complete contrast to the March outing were now rather overfull - not enough mud for feeders. Clouds of Welcome Swallows accompanied us. Shovellers and a couple of Black-fronted Dotterels were sighted, a flotilla of Avocets bobbed on the water and there were Black Swans aplenty. Amongst the little birds a pair of Zebra Finches were busy nest building in an old tree hollow. White-fronted Chats were in evidence, a pair of Bar-shouldered Doves were spotted on the railway line and every now and again we would hear the sad song of the Little Grassbird. Next stop was Stockton Beach and the breakwater where the wind was unrelenting. However, on the beach we happened on a pair of courting Crested Terns, displaying spectacularly. We were also treated to the acrobatics of two fishing Gannets. (Some rather strange "birds" just over Nobby's had some of us fooled for half a minute - they were radio controlled!).

The sewage ponds were unusually empty of birdlife, probably due to the wind and only a few Chestnut Teal, Little Grebes and Black Duck were sheltering in the lee of the banks. However, amongst some resting Silver Gulls a few Caspian Terns were spotted with their distinctive large red bills, so we angled around to have a good look.

At Fern Bay it was quiet bird-wise, although we did add a Fan-tailed Cuckoo, a White-throated Tree-creeper, some Yellow Robins, Lewin's Honeyeaters and Grey Fantails to the list.

After testing the new picnic tables at the Fern Bay playground, a few of us made a last stop under Stockton Bridge to find the tide too high, but we obtained a good close-up of three Grey-tailed Tattlers intent on not relinquishing the only piece of exposed mud. Also about a dozen White-faced Herons were simultaneously startled into the air.

76 species were recorded - 39 Non-passerines and 37 Passerines.

Jenny Meynell.

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Newsletter Printer.

Bevan McGregor has had to relinquish the job of newsletter printer, which he has held for the past few years - we thank him for all his hard work.

Alan Stuart is now the printer of the newsletter.

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To Feed or not to Feed - Birds.

The general consensus seems to be that it is undesirable to feed the birds that frequent our gardens. The problems of over feeding, unbalanced diet, dependency and vulnerability to domestic cat attacks, being the main arguments against feeding.

Most of us will have witnessed how greedy and aggressive birds are when they gather at a known feeding spot, eating anything that comes their way and possibly raising their young on the same food. Do they adjust to a different diet or do they perhaps suffer in some way or another in future generations?

It would seem to be an issue which may never be fully resolved.

Nature directs birds to attain a balanced diet and as most Australian birds are essentially nomadic, a continuous supply of food in one place can interrupt their natural instincts to move on and they can easily fall prey to adverse weather conditions.

Perhaps it is the more sedentary species who take the most advantage of being handled and how many of us can deny the pleasure of having a regular population to observe. Most humans enjoy birds and most want to have birds around them but it seems innate in us to want to provide food to attract them to our gardens. If this brings people into contact with birds and creates more awareness, then this is good, the humans and birds should gain.

But - and this should be considered to be an important alternative - there are other ways to attract the birds and create a regular population, native trees and shrubs will provide the more balanced diet. If you cannot resist the temptation to feed, then do not make it a permanent or regular supply, it should only be a supplement to the natural food supply and take advice on what to feed and any necessary additives required. Always place the feed tray to try and protect the birds from the cats.

Water is a very important factor, not only for drinking but for bathing and obviously the size and layout of the garden dictates as to the size and positioning of the bird baths. Water and a native garden will bring the birds and they do stay without being fed.

In times when birds are under stress, as in recent drought conditions, then a few morsels from a caring person would be attractive to most birds. Because Australia is such a big country and droughts and floods are part of the natural scheme, the avifauna has adapted to the environment and will probably continue to do so, as the environment will continue to change.

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My thanks to those of you who sent your views on the above subject and from which this article was written.

Don't forget to monitor your results and report to the HBOC any interesting observations on the numbers and behaviour of your garden birds.

There is an interesting article in the June 1991 edition of The Bird Observer - Native Birds Which Use Humans as a Source of Food.

Editor.

COMING EVENTS.Weekend, 24/25 August.Camp:  
Contact:Sharpe's Creek, Gloucester Tops N.P.  
Kay Imrie 524524.Wednesday, 11 September.Clubnight:  
Main Feature:Shortland Wetland Centre, 7.30 pm.  
Ann Hatton - illustrated talk on  
Birds of Malaysia and Thailand.Sunday, 22 September.Field Day:  
Meet:  
Contact:Eraring/Mora Creek.  
Coles Carpark Toronto. 6.30 am.  
Sue Hamonet 581023.  
Kay Imrie 524524.Weekend, 5-7 October.Camp:  
Contact:Kariang, nr. Brisbane Water N.P.  
Sue Hamonet 581023.Wednesday, 9 October.Clubnight:  
Main Feature:Shortland Wetland Centre, 7.30 pm.  
To be advised.

The above information whilst as accurate as possible should be checked nearer to Field Days etc. with the contact person.  
On Clubnights where newsletters are not issued, an update of activities will be given.

Deadline for your contributions to the October/November newsletter - 20 September.

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POSTSCRIPTMichael Pope

We were all saddened to learn of the death of Michael; he finally lost his long battle with leukemia early in May.

He and Anne-Maree Hunter were members of the HBOC for several years and they have both made a valuable contribution to the Wetlands Centre.

We extend our sincere sympathy to Michael's family and to Anne-Maree.