



## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

President: Peter McLauchlan  
Secretary: Peter Phillips  
Correspondence: P.O. Box 24 New Lambton 2305  
Telephone enquiries: Alan Stuart 528569  
Newsletter Editor: Rosemary Waymark 751819

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### THE OCTOBER MEETING.

The October Clubnight was held on Wednesday the 9th. The evening commenced with Bird Call and Sue Hamonet presented the call of the White-tailed Kingfisher. The Bird of the Evening was the Mistletoebird presented by Ian Hamilton. The Main Feature was an Audio Visual programme - Spring in West Australia. The slides and commentary were loaned by the Bird Observers Club of Australia.

The following observations were recorded:-

Channel-billed Cuckoo )  
Koel ) Rankin Park.  
Crested Hawk )  
Black-faced Monarch at Speers Point.  
Dollarbirds appear to be late arriving this year.  
Buff-banded Rails )  
Whiskered Tern )  
Glossy Ibis ) Shortland Wetland Centre.  
Greenshank )  
Lesser Golden Plover )  
White-breasted Woodswallow at Newcastle Golf Course.  
Australian Raven observed taking a Noisy Miner.  
Magpie taking a Sacred Kingfisher.  
Galah feeding an Eastern Rosella.  
Topknot Pigeon at Kariong.

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### Obituary.

Michael Rowe died in Sydney on the 26th October, 1991, his funeral was held at Tea Gardens Anglican Church on the 1st November. All members of the Hunter Bird Observers Club who knew Michael were saddened by his death. He was guest speaker at the Clubnight in June 1989 and will be remembered for his entertaining talk on his trip to Papua New Guinea in 1987, for a RAOI conference in Lae and a subsequent five weeks spent visiting some of the more remote areas of Papua New Guinea. Michael also showed slides of Lord Howe Island, Queensland and Northern N.S.W., which demonstrated his unique photographic style. When Wilma and Kay were planning future field days, Michael was a great help in taking them around the Hawks Nest/Tea Gardens area. He will be remembered for his great interest in the conservation of birds and their habitat and for all his hard work in the field of general conservation. We wish to extend our condolences to Michael's family.

# One of Hunter's best known conservationists had active role

ONE of the Hunter Region's best known conservationists, Mr Michael Rowe, has died of a heart attack, aged 58.

The former manager of the Hawks Nest Lodge Motel, Mr Rowe played an active role in Great Lakes conservation groups, including the Myall Lakes National Parks Advisory Committee.

The Federal Opposition Industrial Relations spokesman, Mr Howard, and the Governor of NSW, Rear-Admiral Peter Sinclair, both close friends of Mr Rowe, will attend his funeral tomorrow at Tea Gardens Anglican Church.

Retired Hawks Nest general practitioner Dr Johannes Pacy, also a close friend of Mr Rowe, said Mr Rowe had been one of the few people allowed on Cabbage Tree Island, off Port Stephens, to count breeding White Wing Petrels unique to the island.

He also fought for the protection of the endangered Little Tern, threatened by four-wheel



Mr Michael Rowe . . . also involved in tourism.

drive vehicles on Hawks Nest sand dunes.

Mr Rowe was a ministerial appointee to the Hunter Region National Parks Advisory Committee and was on the Conservation Council of the City of Canberra.

He was born in Cornwall, England. Aged 17, he moved to

Australia, where he first worked as a jackaroo. He lived in Hawks Nest for 14 years and had just taken up a position as the manager of a Sydney resort hotel that backed onto a national park.

Dr Pacy said Mr Rowe had carried out the most extensive and continuous count of birdlife ever undertaken in the Hawks Nest area and produced educational leaflets for birdwatchers.

Mr Rick Wraight, a director of Raine and Horne Tea Gardens and a friend of Mr Rowe, said Mr Rowe was greatly involved in the area's tourist industry and was one of the first members of the Great Lakes Tourist Board.

Mr Wraight and his wife, Trish, will establish a Michael Rowe Memorial Trust with the ANZ Bank and approach the Great Lakes Shire Council and the Lands Department to have an area of Hawks Nest public land dedicated as the Michael Rowe nature reserve.

Mr Rowe is survived by his wife Jean.

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## October Long Weekend Camp (October 5-7)

The Scout Camp grounds at Kariong, near Gosford, are an attractive, secluded location. The campsite is located in a sandy heathland setting, which was in abundant flower at the time we were camping. A short walk from the grounds leads to a spur of the Great North Walk, and a series of walking trails around the steep gullies. At the campsite and also in the gullies there were some good swimming holes, which proved very welcome for a quick plunge, as the weather was very hot every day.

Rufous Whistlers, Eastern Spinebills and Little Wattle Birds were plentiful around the campsite, which also sported resident pairs of Leaden Flycatchers, Sacred Kingfishers and many other species.

Some birds were only seen flying over the campsite; these included Rainbow Lorikeets, Pelicans and a White Breasted Sea-eagle.

A Boobook Owl made a brief visit one night, taking off again very quickly when it realised people were camped underneath.

Birds in the rainforest areas around the gullies included Rock Warblers and a Collared Sparrowhawk. Brown and Topknot Pigeons were seen (the latter as a flock of 4 birds seen soaring over the forest on successive days). Wonga Pigeons preferred to be at the camping grounds - mostly around the feeding tray at the caretaker's cottage.

The behaviour of one pair of Spotted Pardalotes was interesting. The species is generally observed to nest in banks of earth which they themselves dig out. A pair at Kariong were doing things differently - they were nesting in a natural hollow in the underpart of a rock overhang. The young should have been very safe from most predators - their biggest risk would have been falling out!

A total of 64 species were recorded, with almost no water birds amongst the number. Somewhat disappointingly, only 3 members attended the camp; the club did not take full advantage of the delights of Camp Kariong that were on offer.

Alan Stuart

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FIELD OUTING 20TH OCTOBER, 1991

The proposed camping weekend on Singleton Army Base did not eventuate. Instead, arrangements were made to have a day outing on land owned by the Wambo Mining Corporation at Warkworth. Seven members attended.

The countryside was very dry but the bird song in the early morning was a real treat. Rufous Whistlers were everywhere and certainly announced their presence. A pair of White-throated Warblers were nest building. In the casuarina woodland, we were treated to four Glossy Black Cockatoos busily crunching nuts. They stayed for ages; so long, in fact that the group of observers were preparing to walk away when.....a honeyeater flew into a bunch of flowering mistletoe high up in a nearby eucalypt. Of course it disappeared into the centre of the clump. First reaction...Could it be a Painted Honeyeater? (They have been found in this area before and it would be a new bird for some.)

All eyes on the mistletoe! A black head appeared; then scalloping on the breast was visible; then the size of the bird became obvious. Cheers. A Regent Honeyeater. A new bird for Graeme, Tom & Jean. We watched for quite a while and could not find any others. A single bird was considered fairly unusual. However, there wasn't much mistletoe in flower so maybe the bird was an advance scout.

Lunch was enjoyed in the shade at Warkworth Park where entertainment was provided by a group of vintage car enthusiasts displaying their driving skills.

A walk to Wollombi Brook - dry except for the odd puddle near the bridge pylon - concluded our outing. The resident Grey-Crowned Babblers were chattering away in the trees near the river bank.

With no water birds of any kind, the count of 60 species was a good result.

Kay Imrie.

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From The Bird Baths of Umbigumbi. Poems by Graham Alcorn.

Balance of Nature.

One day a Sittella, going down,  
Passed a Treecreeper, going up.  
'And how are the insects, up?'  
'And how are the insects, down?'  
'The insects up on which I sup  
Are juicy and divine.'  
'The insects down on which I dine  
Are sweet as honey wine.'  
And so they live in harmony  
Though they forage the bark of  
the selfsame tree.

## OUTINGS AND CAMPS 1992.

The programme for 1992 is attached to this newsletter. You will notice that a new category **ATLAS OUTINGS** have been introduced. These will operate on a trial basis and may not necessarily continue for the whole year even though they appear on the programme.

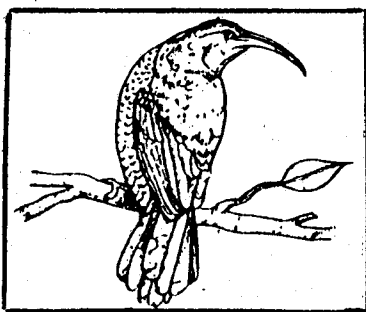
The H.B.O.C. is a member of the N.S.W. Bird Atlassers- a group responsible for the accumulation of information on the distribution of birds occurring within the boundaries of N.S.W., A.C.T., Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. Records of our regular field outings and camps are sent to N.S.W.B.A. Factual information about distribution, habitat preferences, movements, conservation needs and other aspects central to effective species management is lacking. Atlas information can be used to provide a sound and effective foundation for conservation planning. The **ATLAS OUTINGS** are an attempt to reach areas beyond the range of regular field outings and so add to the data being collected.

An **ATLAS OUTING** will generally involve travelling longer distances to record the bird species in that area. It may be a day outing or a weekend with one overnight camp. While it is anticipated that such outings will appeal to the more experienced members of H.B.O.C, beginners are not precluded. However, should they wish to go, they should be prepared to observe as individuals and not expect guidance as is provided at the regular monthly field outings.

In the **COMING EVENTS** of each newsletter the **ATLAS OUTING** will be listed with a contact person. All arrangements will be handled by that person. In the event of no-one (or very few) wishing to go, the contact person may decide whether the outing will take place.

Monthly Field Outings and Camps will continue to be held as usual.

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## Cassowary House

*A suggestion for anyone thinking of a bird-watching holiday in Australia*

Here, near Cairns in the tropical north of Australia, we can show you over 180 species in a week - all within a radius of 60 miles of here. Australia has 16 endemic families and our area, one of the best for variety of habitat, boasts over 35 species which cannot be seen elsewhere.

We have mangroves and mudflats, small lakes and swamps, high and low rain forests, the drier eucalypt woodlands and the tableland farms as well as the Great Barrier Reef!

*Speciality Week 11-18 January 1992.*

*A week in comfort at Cassowary House - 5 days to find the northern birds and migrants, a spotlighting evening and a day on the reef. \$1050.*

*Dates for the winter special weeks will be available later.*

*Throughout the year we operate bird-watching trips to the Atherton Tablelands and Cairns coast for a day or a week! We sometimes have a studio unit for the self caterer.*

*Details from Rita and John Squire, Cassowary House, Kuranda, Q.4872. (Box 252). Tel: 070 937318.*

*Further information available from Hon. Sec. Peter Phillips.*

## R.A.O.U. WORKSHOP HELD AT SHORTLAND WETLANDS CENTRE

Shortland was the venue chosen for the Workshop organized by the recently formed Sydney Committee of the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union over the week-end of 9/10 November, 1991.

This was something of an historic occasion, in that it was an avenue for the coming together of most of the Birdwatching groups operating in N.S.W. and the A.C.T. Representatives from New England District of Northern N.S.W., from Canberra Ornithologists, as well as Sydney-based groups were in attendance, and Hunter was more than adequately represented by President Peter McLaughlan, with Judith Smith, Jeanette Stephenson, Graeme O'Connor and Sue Hamonet lending support.

The Workshop was set up for several reasons, not the least of which was to explore ways in which RAOU can best serve its N.S.W. members, and at the same time contribute to the knowledge and conservation of birds in N.S.W. There is an acknowledged need for a common project to bring together the vast latent pool of talent and enthusiasm of birdwatchers all over the State and Territory, and it is foreseen that in the near future, funding becoming available, this will take the form of a survey to monitor changes in Waterbird populations in the Wetlands of N.S.W.

Saturday's sessions were taken up by Profiles of the various Organizations, our own interests being most capably presented by President Peter. For my own part I found this to be most valuable because it was soon found that we could all learn something from each other, and it was rewarding to find such a spirit of co-operation amongst all kindred groups.

If and when the Wetlands survey is under way, we would be hoping for wholehearted support from Hunter members, who will, I am sure find this a focal point for their own interests, at the same time providing valuable information which can be of great importance in the ongoing fight to preserve what little we have left in the way of Wetlands.

Sue Hamonet.

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*Wildlife News. Sept/Nov 1991.*

## The Orange-bellied Parrot

The Orange-bellied Parrot is one of the world's most endangered parrots. With a population currently numbering nearly 200 birds, they breed in the south-west of Tasmania and migrate each year mostly to the coastal regions of western Victoria.

The State Governments of Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia responded to the study with the preparation of a recovery plan in 1984. The implementation of this recovery plan is monitored annually by a Recovery Management Team.

Although the wild population has not increased dramatically, captive breeding has been successful and some birds may be released into the wild. Much of the habitat is now protected and additional mainland habitat is still being allocated to reserves. All of the parrot's breeding habitat is within the Tasmanian World Heritage Area.

*The Australian 26/10/91.*

## Orange-bellied parrot finds a helping hand

By BRUCE MONTGOMERY

ONE of Australia's rarest birds, the orange-bellied parrot, took wing to possible survival yesterday when the first to be bred in captivity were released from an aviary in Tasmania's south-west national park.

In 1978 there were estimated to be only 150 of the birds, which migrate each March from the button-grass plains of the south-west to feed in the saltmarshes along the southern coastline of Victoria and South Australia. Each October they return to Tasmania to breed.

Tasmanian wildlife scientists still do not know the reason for the decline in their numbers but the problem points to the industrial petrochemical complexes on Port Phillip Bay rather than the untouched wilderness of the south-west.

The Tasmanian Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage built an aviary for captured birds in the

Hobart suburb of Taroona. Using hollow branches brought from the south-west as nesting sites, the birds overcame disease and dietary problems to breed successfully.

Their number grew to the present 50. Ornithologists experimented with a close relative, the blue-winged parrot, to study the parrots' likely behaviour after release. The blue-winged parrots kept returning to their aviary at night, until eventually they had to be locked out.

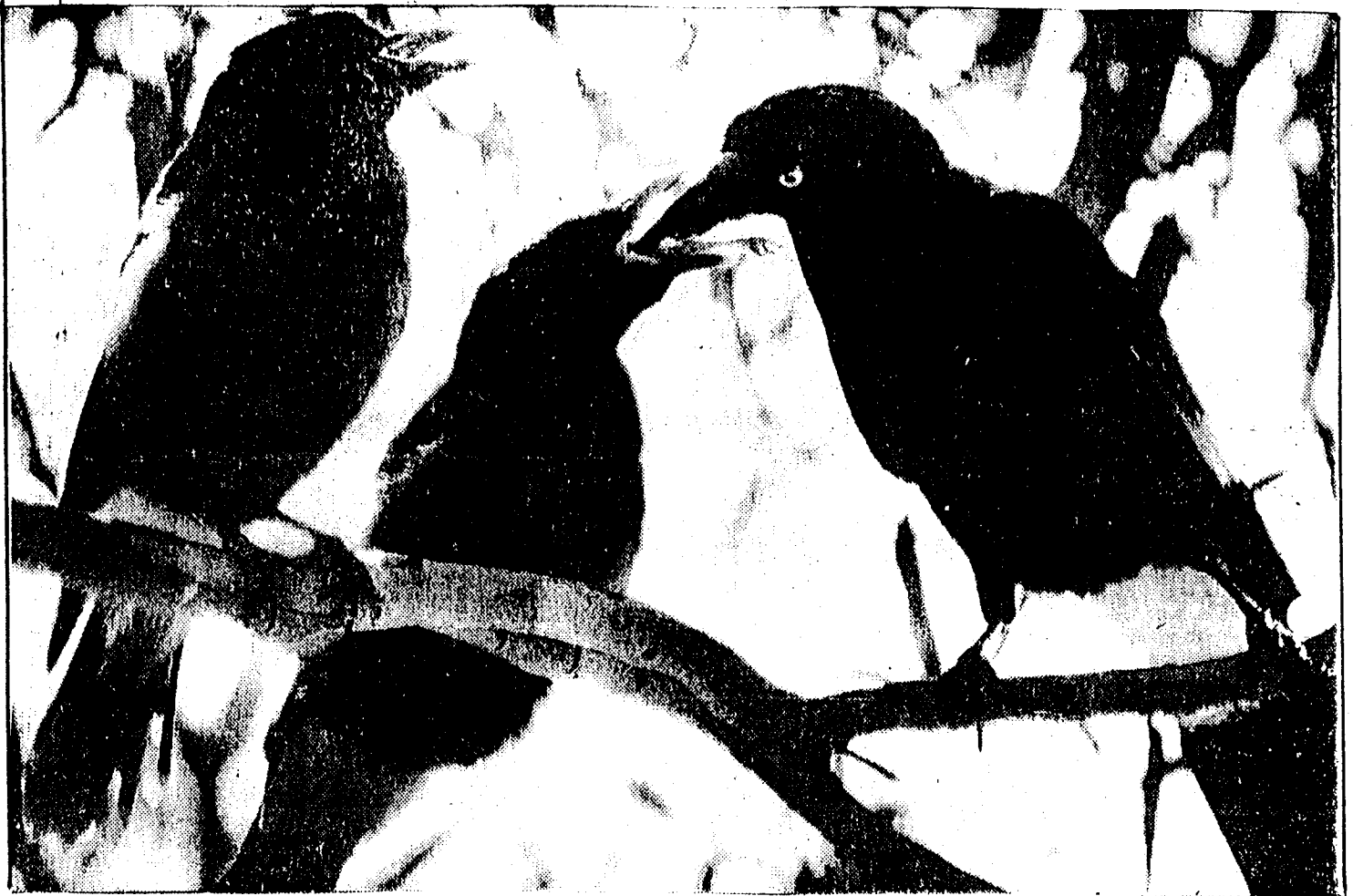
The first flock of 11 orange-bellied parrots were taken to a new aviary at Melaleuca to prepare for yesterday's release.

When the captives were released by the Minister for Wildlife, Mr Harry Holgate, they behaved in the same way as their cousins.

Now the watchers must wait until the autumn to see whether the birds of the new flock will fly north.

# The bird that's munching

A currawong mother-of-two from Gladesville feeds her young with the remains of a small bird



Picture by GREG WHITE

By GREG ROBERTS

Currawongs must be poisoned in their millions if the widespread extinction of other native birds is to be avoided, a leading biologist has warned.

Dr Harry Recher, a lecturer in ecosystem management at the University of New England, says there has been a population explosion among the large black-and-white birds because of human modifications to the environment.

The currawongs are eating the nestlings and eggs of almost any of the small birds. The list of victims includes fantails, finches, honeyea-

ters, robins, swallows, thornbills, thrushes, wagtails, warblers, whistlers and wrens.

The disappearance of blue wrens in much of Sydney had been blamed on cats, but now it seems that marauding currawongs are probably the cause.

Dr Recher said the pied currawong had increased its population in eastern Australia from about three million in the mid-1960s to between five and six million today.

This was largely because people had planted introduced bushes like lantana, camphor laurel, and pyracantha which, unlike most native

plants, produce fruit through winter. Usually about 80 per cent of young currawongs die of starvation when left by their parents to fend for themselves, but now they have an unnaturally high survival rate.

Twenty years ago, currawongs were scarce winter visitors to Sydney's inner suburbs; today they breed throughout the city.

There have been similar population explosions in and around Canberra, Armidale, and many other NSW cities and towns. To a lesser but still significant extent, numbers have increased in Victoria and southern Queensland.

"The population has risen dramatically and it is still increasing," Dr Recher said.

Dr Recher has been studying the nesting habits of small native birds for three years in an area of bushland near Armidale.

He said 90 per cent of all nests failed because of currawong predation. The hooded robin and other species were once common in the region but are now rare.

"The currawongs are contributing substantially to the looming extinction of many native birds in much of their range," he said.

Currawongs move systematically

from tree to tree in search of nests, and will sit for hours watching for signs of birds breeding, such as parents carrying insects to a nest.

Dr Recher said the currawong population had been increased by unnatural causes and should be decreased in the same manner.

He called for the destruction of introduced fruit-bearing plants as well as a program of mass poisoning of the birds.

"We ought to be looking at killing half a million currawongs a year for a while. I personally have a lot of affection for this bird but we don't have much choice," he said.

## On the currawong's menu



NOVEMBER MEETING.

The November Clubnight held on Wednesday the 13th commenced with the Bird Call of the Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo presented by Judith Smith. The Australasian Gannet was the Bird of the Evening and presented by John Moyse. For the Main Feature the guest speaker was Alan Morris, who gave an illustrated talk on the Birds of Kakadu.

The following observations were recorded:-

Blackbird in Hamilton.

Male Cicadabird in Garden Suburb.

Black-faced Monarch at Rankin Park.

Mistletoebird at Shortland.

Whipbirds at Buttaba.

King Parrot in Toronto.

Mountain Duck - Muddy Lake near Dora Creek.

Glossy Ibis - Borehole Swamp, Teralba.

Osprey - Borehole Swamp, Teralba.

Kestrels raising 4 young in workshed at Broadmeadow Railway Station.

Glossy Ibis at Beresfield.

Reed Warbler at Beresfield.

Regent Bowerbird at Palmdale.

Wonga Pigeon at Palmdale.

Brown Pigeon at Palmdale.

Powerful Owl at Swansea South.

Grey Goshawk at Swansea South

Marta Hamilton reported on 24 species visiting her birdbath in a 2 hour period.

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Bird Observers at Gipsy Point Lodge.

In the first week of November, we attended a bird observers' week at Gipsy Point Lodge, a guest house near Mallacoota, in East Gippsland. The week began with a boat trip from Eden to see palagic birds. Despite seasickness, a large number of seabirds were seen near the edge of the continental shelf, including Gannets, White-capped and Black-browed Albatross, Wedge-tailed and Short-tailed Shearwaters. Close encounters with two pods of Hump-backed Whales provided a thrilling bonus.

The next five days were spent doing birdwatching excursions from the lodge. Destinations ranged from Mallacoota and environs to Green Cape. One day was spent on a cruise on the Wallagaroogh River and back to the sand bars near Mallacoota. The diversity of habitats explored was reflected in the number of species seen, so that by the end of the week over 120 species had been observed by our group. Notable sightings included Hoary-headed Grebe, Black-faced Cormorant, Buff-banded Rail, Glossy Black Cockatoo, Crested Shrike-tit, Hooded Dotterel, Black-faced Monarch, Tawny-crowned and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters and Ground Parrot. Satin Bowerbirds and Scarlet Honeyeaters were so common as to present little challenge!

Our group of ten included a couple from Canada and an Englishman. Our host, Alan Robertson, took over the lodge eighteen months ago and has given thoughtful attention to accommodation, services and activities. The rooms were very comfortable with ensuite facilities, wonderful outlooks and fresh flowers. Meals were innovative and recipes were requested from the chef on several occasions. Alan himself led the birdwatching excursions with expertise and enthusiasm. He and his second driver, Brian, were ever ready to stop the vehicles to pursue interesting finds.

In short, everything was done to make one's birdwatching day most enjoyable. While a visit to the lodge would be worthwhile at any time, we found the special bird observers' week such a rewarding experience that we would commend it to other members.

Philippa Hodgins and Adrian Ryan.

FIELD OUTING TO FERNDALE PARK  
23/24 November, 1991.

Jeanette Stephenson.

This outing was a weekend camp for those who desired, or a Sunday outing for those who preferred a day trip.

The venue was Ferndale Park, which is a caravan park downstream from Chichester Dam.

The campsite is on the Chichester River, and is a pleasant spot to have a short break, after driving in the afternoon heat. After a cool drink, Graeme and myself went for a walk along the creek, where there are still a lot of waterholes with good deep spots for swimming.

The first of my lovelies was a Brown Pigeon, followed by a small party of Topknot Pigeons, which are a delight to see anytime. Soon after this treat, a male Regent Bowerbird, one of my favourite birds, came along and perched in a tree close enough to have a good look at without to aid of binoculars. These birds just flew in as we came by, with not a call or anything to warn us of their approach. It was birding at its best. Further along, there were Yellow Robins, Scrub Wrens, Grey Fantail and a few other common birds of the area.

At dusk while we were waiting for the White-throated Nightjar, which was seen on the last visit, a small flock of Spine-tailed Swifts were seen feeding on the myriad of insects which annoyed us while were trying to have tea. At last along came what we were waiting for, a lone White-throated Nightjar, which was a new bird for some.

Sunday gave an opportunity to view Chichester Dam at its lowest water level for a long time. The last time I had seen this dam, the water was flowing over the spillway. This time it was way down, less than half full, and upon seeing this you soon realise that we do have to stop wasting water, because once this lot has gone, how can we get more? On the dam, there were many waterbirds including Wood Ducks, Hardhead, Swans and Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants.

17 members attended the outing, including 6 campers, and the total count for the weekend was 89 birds, including 10 heard.

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COMING EVENTS.

<u>Weekend 18/19 January.</u>	<u>Atlas Outing.</u> <u>Contact:</u>	Bretti. Jeanette Stephenson - 575255.
<u>Sunday 26 January.</u>	<u>Field Day.</u> <u>Meet:</u> <u>Contact:</u>	Kooragang Island. Information Sign, Kooragang Island. 6a Graeme O'Connor - 531304 Or Peter McLauchlan - 333224.
<u>Weekend 8/9 February.</u>	<u>Atlas Outing.</u> <u>Contact:</u>	Singleton/Liddell. Peter McLauchlan - 333224.
<u>Sunday 23 February.</u>	<u>Field Day:</u> <u>Meet:</u> <u>Contact:</u>	Upper Allyn/Telegerry. McDonald's Hexham. 6 a.m. Kay Imrie - 524524.

WEDNESDAY 12th FEBRUARY CLUBNIGHT AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. WETLAND CENTRE 7.30

The above information whilst as accurate as possible should be checked nearer to Field Days etc., with the contact person. An update of activities will be given on Clubnights.

Deadline for your contributions to the February/March 1992 newsletter - 29/1/92.