



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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The aims of the Club are: To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat and to encourage bird observing as a leisure time activity.

THE JUNE MEETING.

The June Clubnight held on Wednesday the 10th commenced with Bird Call, Diane Rogers presented the call of the Black-necked Stork and Diane then gave an illustrated talk on the Black-necked Stork for Bird of the Evening. The Main Feature was a talk given by Fred Van Gessel on the birds of North Queensland with special reference to his recent bird banding trip to the McIlwraith Range, Cape York. Fred illustrated his talk with slides and his recordings of the bird calls.

The following observations were recorded:-

Crimson Rosellas - Rankin Park.
Brown Falcon - Shortland Wetland Centre.
Brown Goshawk - Shortland Wetland Centre.
Whistling Kite with 1 young - Myuna Bay.
Whistling Kite nest building - Cooranbong.
Sooty Oystercatcher - 4 at Merewether Beach.
Wonga Pigeon - 2 at Vacy.
Sacred Kingfisher - 4 and 6 at Kooragang.
Striped Honeyeater - 4-6 at Woodberry.
Australian Hobby - East Maitland and Mayfield.
Grey Goshawk - Mayfield.
Wandering Whistling-Duck - 60 at Shortland Wetland Centre.
Wedge-tailed Eagle - 2 at Woodberry.
Swift Parrot - 6 at Backyamma State Forest - others reported in Sydney.
Rainbow, Scaly-breasted and Little Lorikeets seen throughout the Hunter, especially in Spotted Gums.
Buff-banded Rail - 1 at Heritage Gardens Nursery at East Maitland.
Oriental Cuckoo - 3 foraging in ploughed field at Whittingham.

The Oriental Cuckoo is seen infrequently in the Hunter, the Buff-banded Rail is assumed to be a resident at the Nursery and the Wandering Whistling-Duck numbers are building up at the Shortland Wetland Centre.

New addition to the Audio/Video Library:-
Bird Symphony and Wetland Dawn (Slater).

NEW MEMBERS.

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

Chris, Liz, Sibella and Daniel Herbert
Susan Owen
Peter Woods
Janet Wright

Carey Bay.
Islington.
Merewether.
Mona Vale.

June Long Weekend - Smiths Lake

The club was very fortunate to have access to the University of NSW Field Station at Smiths Lake near Bungwahl for the June 6-8 long weekend. Although a camping area was available, the 8 attendees preferred the relative comfort of mattresses and electricity in the cabins that were on the site. With fridges, tables and chairs, running water and a pot belly stove to warm up with at night, it was a far cry from the usual club camp.

The field station is located right on the lake, which did look fairly inviting in the fine sunny weather. No-one appeared to be very tempted to go for a swim, though!

A total of 70 species were seen over the weekend. White-cheeked honeyeaters, little wattle birds, rainbow and scaly-breasted lorikeets were in abundance in the area; other sightings included spangled drongo, southern emu-wren (for some lucky people) and several raptor species including both white-breasted sea-eagle and little eagle. Variegated fairy-wrens were more abundant than were superb fairy-wrens - not our usual experience.

One night, tawny frogmouths were heard close by; a search next morning soon found a pair - in a tree right outside the bedroom window. They were still roosting there when we left at lunchtime.

It was particularly interesting to talk with and watch Wyn Filewood from the university over the weekend. He was bird-banding, part of a study of the area that he has been conducting for many years. While he weighed and measured white-cheeked and yellow-faced honeyeaters, variegated wrens, etc, it was a great opportunity for us to see these birds at close quarters. My kids were delighted to "shake hands" with a white-cheeked honeyeater on one occasion.

A few kookaburras (with bands on - Wyn has been busy!) were resident around the site and often came in to check what we were up to. One revealed an unexpected food preference. Having rejected a few other offerings, it suddenly landed on a table and snatched a scoop of margarine from a knife poised above a slice of toast about to be spread, then flew down to the ground where it proceeded to scoff down the booty and leaving a rather startled 7 year old staring at the empty knife. The bird ate the margarine in 3 or 4 bites, so it was not a case of trying and rejecting some new food type.

Alan Stuart

From the Desk of the Secretary.

Currently I hold many pamphlets for birdwatching holidays and venues - for example:-

Eyre Bird Observatory, West.Aust; Barren Grounds Bird Observatory, NSW; Gipsy Point Lodge, Vic; Cassowary House, Kuranda, FNQ; G.Beruldsen (Cape York, Iron Range); Emu Tours (in assoc. with RAOU) -Australia and Africa; and Northern Territory Tourist Commission (Aboriginal tours).

There is insufficient space for detail in the Newsletter so copies of pamphlets are available from me at Club Nights or by telephone (547118).

BIRDS OF ARTIFICIAL WETLANDS -- FIELD DAY 21-6-92

This field day was focused on the three large man made wetlands in the Maitland district; Walika Water Works, Bolwarra S.T.W. and Morpeth S.T.W. The two sewerage treatment works are typified by mud flats with varying depths of water cover surrounded by reed beds. This produces ideal habitat for many waders, waterfowl and 'reed warblers'. It can be argued that these places are not exactly the ideal habitat for humans (who in their right mind would spend a cold wet Sunday morning 'in the poo'?) but the promise of seeing some pink-eared duck makes the thought of mucking about in a sewerage farm very attractive indeed. Walika Water Works represents a permanent source of deep water surrounded by various reeds and scrub and has been a past favourite for birdwatchers eager to see great crested grebe.

Now it was a fairly cold miserable day and the threat of occasional showers might have proved to be too much but productive birdwatching in good company can take the chill off many a breeze. As it was, thirteen people turned up to share some memorable moments as well as a disappointment or two.

At Walika Water Works there are lots of birds to look at or to discover as you move along the walking path that circuits the dam and if you are historically minded you have the added bonus of the fabulous pump house, chimney and reservoir wall.

Of particular interest to myself was a single pacific heron standing almost knee deep in a quiet backwater. This bird's head and neck had a grey appearance and I would like to think it was a juvenile. Winter flocks of chestnut-breasted mannikin and goldfinch were present, both of which were in good numbers. Secretive reed warblers and cisticolas made occasional noises and quick dashes from cover to cover trying their best not to be detected. One bird, resembling a skinny brown sparrow proved to be a little grassbird. This bird had been moving about without calling and offered a rewarding moment for a couple of patient birdwatchers. On the water were many familiar types; cormorants, coot, moorhen, ducks and grebes; but absolutely no sign of great crested grebe. I don't mind admitting I was disappointed at that for I have regarded this species as the one that makes Walika a bit special. Other well known great crested grebe habitats don't allow you to get so close. It could well be that an apparent higher usage of this spot by picnickers and eel fishers has had an effect and the grebes have sought less stressful refuge.

At Bolwarra our group viewed the area basically from the roadside and after a short stay had added Australian shoveller and pelican to our list of observed species. A single red-kneed dotterel worked it's way along a shore line and a telescopic view was necessary to appreciate this neat little plover. Another short stop at Hand's Swamp revealed a pair of adult black swan accompanied by a half sized cygnet.

Morpeth sewerage treatment works was the smelliest venue of the day but in many respects was probably the most exciting. As we walked down the hill it was clear there were many waterfowl to be seen and almost immediately the pink-eared duck had been spotted. From a distance this bird has a distinctive shape; it's round head and square ended bill is a feature. As you get closer it's dark eye patch becomes evident and after a few more steps it's "zebra" stripes can clearly be seen. These ducks swam more or less as a group and numbered fifty plus.

Standing on a levee bank, an osprey watched for signs of fish and on one occasion made a flying sweep over a certain patch of water. The raptor had it's feet down for most of the flight. Soon, however, a sea eagle appeared and the two engaged in some spectacular aerial combat. After a while the osprey must have decided that the eagle surely had a greater claim to the area and moved on. A pair of black-shouldered kite also proved to be entertaining as they hovered about the place scanning the grassy banks. These birds would from time to time fly over to rest in a large dead tree which they shared with several ibis.

All in all these artificial wetlands proved to be very productive with a total of seventy nine bird species being recorded during the morning.

Tom Clarke.

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SEABIRD OUTING.

An offshore boat trip is being organised for either the 5th or 6th of September, approximate cost per person is \$50.
Bookings on a first come basis and payments secure a booking.
No cancellations after the August Clubnight but substitutions allowed.
Further details from Peter Phillips - 547118.

THE JULY MEETING.

The July Clubnight was held on Wednesday the 8th and the evening commenced with Bird Call, the Pacific Baza was presented by Daphne Halliday. For the Bird of the Evening, Adrian Ryan presented the Australian Bustard. For the Main Feature Gary Weber showed some of his excellent slides with an interesting commentary.

The following observations were recorded:-

Pacific Baza - Cardiff.

Scarlet Honeyeater - Lambton.

Spangled Drongo - John Hunter Hospital.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - Waratah.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - nesting at John Hunter Hospital.

Whistling Kite - Newcastle Golf Club.

White-throated Gerygone - Maitland and Rankin Park.

(Reports from observation sheets will be given in the next newsletter.)

COMING EVENTS.Sunday 23 August.Field Day:Meet:

Point Wolstonecraft/Munmorah.

Coles Car Park, Swansea - 7.30 am.

or entrance to Munmorah SRA - 7.45 am.

Diane Rogers - 761686.

Contact:Note. There is an entrance fee of \$6.50 per car to Munmorah SRA, so car pooling important, some members have season tickets for their cars.Weekend 5 or 6 Sept.Atlas Outing:

Seabirds. A full day boat trip from Port Stephens. See page 4.

Contact:Alan Stuart - 528569 or
Graeme O'Connor - 531304.Wednesday 9 Sept.Clubnight:

Shortland Wetland Centre - 7.30 pm.

Main Feature:

To be announced.

Discussion:

Sacred Kingfisher.

Weekend 19/20 Sept.Camp/Field Day:

Millbrodale (Private Property).

Contact:

Jeanette Stephenson - 575255.

Note. Suitable for day outing on the 20th non-campersOctober Long Weekend.3-5 October.Camp:(Private
Howes Valley, Putty Rd. Property).Contact:

Jeanette Stephenson - 575255.

Wednesday 14 October.Clubnight:

Shortland Wetland Centre - 7.30 pm.

Main Feature:

Rod Kavanagh. Owl Habitat expert

with Forestry Commission. Recent research on owls.

Rod requests reports on roosts or nests of the following species - Masked, Sooty or Powerful Owls.

Discussion:

Pied Currawong.

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 at Clubnights.

Members are reminded of the distinction between Atlas and Field trips. All members are welcome to both categories of outings, however the Field Day may be the best for beginners, in that it usually consists of a larger group and a venue closer to Newcastle. Experienced members are available to assist the less experienced. Relative beginners may also find the Atlas outings interesting but numbers will be fewer and experienced 'guidance' less likely.

Discussion Birds. This is a new segment of the Clubnight agenda. Members are invited to contribute their personal comments, observations and experiences with the designated bird. We hope to distil some of the collective HBOC wisdom on specific birds - questions are also welcome.

Contributions from members of HBOC are welcome and the deadline for the October/November newsletter is 1st October.

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Editor.

ON THE EDGE OF THE NULLARBOR**EYRE BIRD
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Eyre Bird Observatory was established as Australia's first Bird Observatory by the R.A.O.U. in 1977. The Observatory is a lovely old stone building within walking distance of the beach. It is situated in the Nuytsland Nature Reserve, 50 km south-east of Cocklebidy, near the site where the famous explorer, John Eyre, found water during his overland journey.

The Observatory offers courses in the study of birds, mammals, reptiles, plants, photography, history and art.

Discussion Birds.

The new segment at Clubnights, a discussion on a previously chosen species commenced at the May meeting with the Spangled Drongo. This was followed in June with the Yellow-faced Honeyeater and there was considerable information given by many members. The Superb Lyrebird was discussed in July and again many members contributed much information.

A precis of Lyrebird articles taken from "The Tragedy of Sherbrooke" by L. H. Smith and "Lyrebird Survey, Kinglake National Park, Vic." by John Prytherch. The Bird Observer, June 1992.

In Sherbrooke Forest, once the Mecca of Lyrebird seekers from all over the world, Lyrebirds are seldom seen and heard only occasionally. There are several reasons for this tragedy; one is urbanisation of the forest environs, but more important is the mismanagement of the forest itself. There has been a policy of total exclusion of fire resulting in accumulation of forest litter, and the almost uncontrolled intrusion of noxious plants. The result has been a gradual reduction in the area of forest floor accessible to the Lyrebirds for feeding purposes. Unless action is taken to tackle the fox problem and implement a plan of forest management, the Lyrebirds of Sherbrooke Forest are doomed to extinction.

Once a year Friends of the Lyrebird are joined by many BOCA members to participate in a survey of Lyrebirds in the Kinglake National Park, about 60 kilometres north east of Melbourne. The expansion of suburbs towards the park increases pressures on the Lyrebird population, as in Sherbrooke Forest. It is hoped that data from the survey can provide a basis for long term management and conservation of Superb Lyrebird habitats.

Car Alarm!

An ABC crew filming recently in the State's famous Jenolan Caves were continually interrupted by a noisy car alarm. In desperation, the crew stopped filming and decided to search for the cause of the racket. When they finally tracked the culprit down, they got a big surprise - a lyrebird that mimicked familiar sounds in the reserve. Unfortunately, its other calls included chainsaws and trail bikes!

Wildlife Australia, Autumn 1992.

Room to Let

'Guinea a week,' cries the Pilot Bird,
Searching for grubs on the forest floor.
'Guinea a week' - no more, no more.
Living is cheap in the bush.

To us, of course, this is quite absurd.
Guineas are out and dollars in,
And how can a landlord be a bird?
But the Pilot Bird doesn't know that.



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