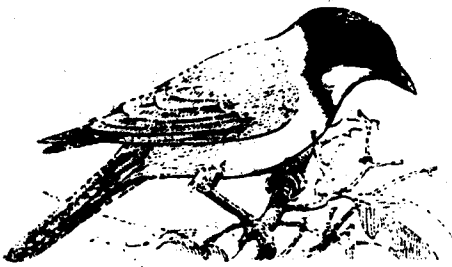


Sue



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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Peter Phillips

Newsletter Editor:

Rosemary Waymark

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 DECEMBER 1993 MEETING.

The December Clubnight was held on Wednesday the 8th. The end of year meeting had a different format to the usual clubnights, there was no Bird Call, Bird of the Evening or Guest Speaker. Members were invited to show their slides and Keith Laverick entertained us with some of his results from a 10 month camping trip around Australia. Keith recorded 3,308 sightings and 345 species on his travels. The evening ended with the Christmas Raffle and the usual supper, many thanks to all members who supplied such an excellent variety of food.

Observation reports from December meeting

Nov. 2	Australian Hobby	1	Mayfield	T. Clarke
7	"	1	"	"
15	"	1	"	"
7	Great Cormorant	2	Throsby Creek	"
12	Red-capped Plover	2	"	"
20	Eastern Curlew	4	"	"
20	Bar-tailed Godwit	1	"	"
20	Red-capped Plover	1	"	"
20	Ruddy Turnstone	10	"	"
25	White-bellied Sea Eagle	1	Carrington	"
26	Red-capped Plover	1	"	"
28	Yellow rumped Thornbill	2	Tighe's Hill TAFE	"
Nov. 16	Scarlet Honeyeater	1	Cardiff North	T. Douglass
16	White-cheeked H/eater	1	"	"
Nov. 20	Channel-billed Cuckoo	3	Belmont North	J. Cockerell
Nov.	White-cheeked H/eater	6	Ellalong	J. Meynell
	New Holland Honeyeater	1	"	"
Nov. 13	Dollarbird	50-75	Green Hills	J. Smith
Nov. 17	Little Corella	31	Morisset	A. Lindsey
Dec. 1	Long-billed Corella	21	Morisset	"
3	Rainbow Lorikeet	15-20	Tyrrel St. N'cle.	R. Parker
6	Latham's Snipe	70	Sandgate Swamp	A. Lindsey

NEW MEMBERS.

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

Peter Bamford

Rankin Park.

Kim King and Leonie Hansen

Jewells.

John McLennan

Ellalong Beach.

Rhiannon Pond

Tarro.

Membership at the end of 1993 stands at 153.

The Bush Fires.

I feel confident that, on behalf of all members of the HBCC, I can offer a heartfelt thank you to all the fire fighters who worked so very hard to help save houses and bush in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas. We are all horrified and saddened at the devastation the fires have caused to homes, bush and consequently so much flora and fauna. As bird watchers, we are concerned at the tremendous losses that must have occurred to the bird population and perhaps future losses through lack of habitat.

Editor.

A Small Piece of the Warrumbungles - October, 1993.

This was to be a very brief visit, a bare three days, therefore no High Tops or Breadknife or any of those athletic triumphs! The first afternoon and the next day being overcast were good for birding. Even the koalas were out and about. Our first night camping threatened to be a washout - 2" of rain. We pitched our tents at Camp Wambelong and restricted ourselves to the adjacent areas, with a reconnoitre past Camp Pincham and up West Spirey Creek for part of the way. Wallaby Flat was the most productive - Speckled Warblers, Brown Treecreepers, Yellow-tufted and Striped Honeyeaters and lots of kangaroos.

On a walk along Burbie Creek we saw a good variety of birds, including seven kinds of honeyeater, Red-winged Parrots and a most beautiful little fairy-wren which could only have been the Purple-backed assimilis race of the Variegated Fairy-wren. It was a vivid splash of colour as it foraged amongst the clumps of grass along the banks of the watercourse. There were Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters here and all over the place around the camping area.

Our next destination was the road approaching, and the Woolshed area itself, where we had been told there would be Turquoise Parrots. No parrots, but a pair of very unconcerned Common Bronzewing and a collection of the noisiest Fuscous Honeyeaters we had ever heard. However, on a site re-booking trip to the Information Centre we scored, at last, our first Turquoise Parrots. Only two or three, but the one we were able to observe best was a male feeding on the ground and we were able to watch him for about a quarter of an hour. The brilliance of his plumage is breathtaking, and yet, mainly due to his small size, he almost 'disappears' in the ground cover. Nevertheless, once seen, quite unforgettable. In this area also seen were White-winged Choughs, a Hooded Robin, Dusky Woodswallows and an Emu with six semi-grown but still stripey chicks. It was suggested a short roadside sortie beyond the Western entrance to the Park would be worthwhile. It was. We saw Diamond Firetails, Double-barred Finches, White-browed Babbler, Red-rumped Parrots and nests of both a Striped Honeyeater and a Crested Shrike-tit. Yet most memorable of all were the Rufous Songlarks, darting from one prominent point to the next and back again, calling almost non-stop and so loudly, their song was striking even as we drove along the road.

Around Dubbo we caught up with Apostlebirds, Yellow-throated Miners, Red-capped Robins and Blue-faced Honeyeaters.

Altogether a nice breath of different air, country and birds, even if all too brief. The country around Dubbo, Gilgandra and Coonabarabran was looking good, as if they had received more rain than we had near the coast. Unless you need to stock up (no shop or petrol in the National Park) I suggest you track off via Tooraweenah and enter the Park by the Western entrance - some gravel, but more bitumen than there used to be. You might even fluke a Spotted Harrier, as we did!

Jenny Meynell

PORT STEPHENS OUTING - Sunday, 21st November, 1993.

After meeting at Kooragang Island at 6.30 am, a group of twelve members stopped briefly at the northern end of Stockton Bridge to view the waders, the tide being half-out. This stop became extended as there were large flocks there, but no surprises. 17 species identified.

Next stop was at Tilligerry Habitat at Tanilba Bay. A group of local residents is working to save and regenerate this area of 14 hectares and some of our club members are assisting them with bird-counts. Members of that group walked with us through the habitat. There were good sightings including Dollarbird, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet and Whistling Kite. Sharing one flowering Jacaranda were Blue-faced Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, White-cheeked Honeyeater and Scarlet Honeyeater. An immature Black-shouldered Kite puzzled some of us for a while.

At morning-tea we had a marvellous, prolonged view of two Scarlet Honeyeaters, very close and visible, feeding on a garden grevillea. Nesting currawongs too. A Koala in the school grounds was a bonus sighting. 48 species identified.

Later we walked through Koala Park at Lemon Tree Passage but as the morning was advanced sightings were fewer, Red-rumped Parrots were evident and we watched a spectacular exchange, lasting some minutes, between a pair of Whistling Kites on the one hand and an Australian Raven and a Pied Currawong on the other, the raven and the currawong taking turns to battle with the kites. All four birds were very determined and aggressive in their attacks. Lunch on the foreshore picked up a few more sightings. 40 species identified at Lemon Tree Passage.

Max Blanch

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Field Outing to Stanhope Creek. 5th December, 1993.

Eleven members braved the seemingly ominous weather conditions to attend the field outing to the Stanhope Creek area. The bird count started at the Hunter River crossing with a few species of ducks, a Rufous Whistler and an Australian Kestrel among other species. The party moved on to a small creek where we observed Rainbow Bee-eaters, Dollarbirds and an Azure Kingfisher before a short sharp shower of rain, which had threatened earlier, sent us scurrying back to our vehicles. We decided to head on to our main destination to try and get in some birding before the heavens opened up,

Despite a light mist of rain and overcast conditions the Stanhope Creek area was alive with bird calls, most noticeable of which was our own Golden Whistler. Other prominent observations along the creek bank included Black-faced Monarchs, Eastern Spinebills and Brown Gerygone, with at least one pair of these beautiful little birds nesting. We doubled back and headed up the road while a Wedge-tailed Eagle soared overhead and the first of several sightings of the magnificently plumed male Regent Bowerbird was recorded. Through the trees in the distance White-headed and Topknot Pigeons were seen, so we decided to go on further to try and get a closer look. We were soon rewarded when a mixed flock numbering fifty odd flew over us. Further up the road we saw these birds again, not feeding but roosting on a dead tree and then later in other trees. There were now fifty plus Topknots and thirty plus White-headed Pigeons perched for all to see.

We came back down the road adding several species as we went, including Leaden Flycatcher and Rufous Fantail. As we dined on our prepared sandwiches, a Mistletoebird perched obligingly just above us and called for us all to look at him. He would fly off a short distance and return almost immediately to his same favourite branch and recommence his song at the top of his voice.

The bird count was conducted at this time and numbered eighty two, which was a very good effort considering the conditions. The heavens again threatened to open up, so we headed home.

Doug Biddle.

Nest test revealed some surprises

The Australian Museum nest test was organised to try to find out what the common nest predators are in cities, how common they are, whether human activities affect their behaviour, which localities have the highest predation risk and what habitat features have an important impact on predation rate.

The experiment was to run for two weeks in September but because there was such an enormous public response it all took longer than expected.

More than 2000 people offered to take part and as 90 per cent of those returned their observations, an enormous number of computer data entries resulted.

The overall rate of predation was 64 per cent and it was shown that predators are extremely active around human settlement compared with national parks around Sydney, which had been shown to be 42 per cent in an earlier study.

Participants were sent a nest made of half a tennis ball containing two white, artificial eggs firmly attached. They were asked to site it with some care and inspect twice daily for predator damage to the eggs.

Mine was on a disused clothes line, where it was difficult to see from the side but extremely visible from above. It was not visited by a predator in the 14 days of the experiment as far as I could tell.

When predation did occur, it usually happened within the first few days and in some cases within 30 seconds.

Big birds were the most common culprits, with small birds accounting for most of the remainder and cats, rats and possums playing only a minor part. Rats had accounted for 25 per cent of predation in the previous experiment in national parks.

Of the big birds, currawongs were the most common predator and others included magpies, kookaburras, butcherbirds and ravens. Noisy myna was the most commonly observed small bird although a variety of small native and introduced species were reported.

The survey showed that people who fed meat to kookaburras were more likely to have their nest preyed on than people who did not. This is not conclusive but is interesting and can be tested later.

The importance of shrubs to protect small birds is implied by the correlation between nest height and predation intensity because higher nests suffered greater predation than lower ones.

The Australian Museum nest test will go ahead again next breeding season and the public will again be asked to help.

This time it will not be with artificial nests, so if you find a nest in the garden next year, phone Dr Richard Major on 339 8357 and ask for data sheets prepared by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union on which to record your observations.

Photographers might be able to snap predators and help unravel the puzzle about declining numbers of willie wagtails. Three strong recommendations came out of the survey.

One is the desirability of converting lawns into shrubberies, particularly hakeas to provide protection and grevilleas to provide food.

The second is to reduce the number of introduced berry-producing plants like cotoneaster, privet, ochna and camphor laurel because currawongs feed on these.

And third is not to encourage large birds into the garden by feeding them.

FIELD OUTING REPORT. Stockton/Kooragang 20 January 1994

The first club outing for 1994 took place in ideal weather - warm but not hot, clear and light winds. A total of 18 people attended.

Our first port of call was the Stockton Sewage Works. The highlights here were a single Australasian Shoveler and hundreds of shearwaters off shore. Across the road about 20 waders posed in full view on a wreck allowing the group to calibrate its wader identification skills.

We then proceeded to the Stockton Bridge area. Despite the encroachment of noxious weeds this is still a top birdwatching spot. We timed our visit well and as the tide receded waders arrived in numbers starting with the Eastern Curlew and then in decreasing order of size to the smaller dotterels and stints.

Highlights here were Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot, Terek, Common and Curlew Sandpiper, Lesser Golden and Mongolian Plover and Greenshank. To relieve the hard work of wader identification we had a prolonged view of a Collared Sparrowhawk (although one well-respected opinion holds that it may have been a Peregrine Falcon).

On the eastern side of the bridge we added Red-capped Plover, Red-necked Stint, Whimbrel and Ruddy Turnstone.

We were fortunate in having with us a number of wader experts to leaven the majority of mere puzzlers. Thanks to the more experienced for patient guidance and the use of telescopes.

At the conclusion of our Stockton survey we had seen 61 species and some members called it a day. About 10 went on to Kooragang. The "usual" spots of Kooragang Nature Reserve and the ponds by the (now non-existent) information sign were visited.

We had difficulty of access at both places and the Committee will have to see what it can do to clarify matters. We did see a large number of Red-necked Avocet, some Black-Winged Stilt, a Marsh Sandpiper and five Marsh Harrier. We lifted our tally to 73 for the day — which is a bit down on our usual species numbers at Kooragang/Stockton.

A theme for the day was how much bird habitat was changing — often for the worse. The Stockton Sandspit situation is to be remedied by the National Parks and Wildlife Service — taking off some soil to allow more of the area to be inundated at high tides. Kooragang Island just seems to get worse with the inevitable depredation of construction and industry. In the long term humans and their industry remain a greater source of habitat decline than even the most severe bushfires.

Thanks to everybody for a good day and excellent company.

Peter Phillips

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LIBRARY REPORT.HANZAB.

The Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB) is being published in six volumes, to be completed by the end of the century. Volume 1 was published in November, 1990 and volume 2 in October, 1993. Both volumes are now in the Library and are available for loan, for a maximum of one month and permission is required from the Librarian before removal from the Library table.

SLIDE REPORT.

Ann Lindsey has very kindly donated slides to the library.

AUDIO/VIDEO REPORT.

No new additions to the library.

COMING EVENTS.

<u>Weekend 12/13</u> <u>February.</u>	<u>Camp.</u> <u>Contact:</u>	Woko National Park. Graeme O'Connor - 531304.
<u>Sunday 20 February.</u>	<u>Field Day:</u> <u>Meet:</u> <u>Contact:</u>	"Old Brush" Property. Freemans Waterhole - 6.30 am. Ann Lindsey - 733519.
<u>Wednesday 9 March.</u>	<u>Clubnight:</u> <u>Main Feature:</u>	Shortland Wetland Centre, 7.30 Peggy Svoboda, Project Co-ordinator, Kooragang Island Wetland Rehabilitation Project
<u>Weekend 19/20 March.</u>	<u>Camp and</u> <u>Field Day:</u> <u>Contact:</u> <u>Meet:</u>	Yengo National Park. Ann Lindsey - 733519 for camp. For Sunday, 20th at Laguna. Outside the wine bar - 7 am. Contact Ann for any enquiries
<u>Easter Weekend.</u> <u>1 - 4 April.</u>	<u>Camp:</u> <u>Contact:</u>	Munghorn Gap. Peter McLauchlan - 333224.
<u>Wednesday 13 April.</u>	<u>Clubnight:</u> <u>Main Feature:</u>	Shortland Wetland Centre. 7.30 Guest Speaker from National Parks & Wildlife Service "the role & responsibilities of NP"

Please note that this year's programme will be affected by bushfire damage. Any changes to the programme will be advised in future newsletters and at Clubnights. In the meantime, it is a good idea to check with the contact person for each outing if an area has been affected by fire or is in danger of further bushfires.

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Editor.