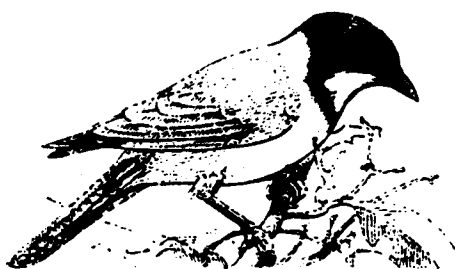


NEWSLETTER



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

P.O. Box 24, New Lambton, N.S.W. 2305

Telephone: (049) 52 8569

President:

Ann Lindsey

Secretary:

Peter Phillips

Newsletter Editor:

Tom Clarke

The aims of the club are:

To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat.

To encourage bird observing as a leisure time activity.

● November Field Outing

Maybe we were silly,
but only the Maggie was
"Stupid".

The 27th November, 1994 was a stinking hot day which bordered on unpleasant out in the sun. Perhaps not quite the conditions for comfortable bird watching but as they say, you'll never ever know if you never never go.

First site today was John Kopko's property on the Bucketts Way near Allworth. This place is about two thirds bush while being surrounded by other cleared or partly cleared properties. It had been of interest to me for some time as a possible bird watching site and the opportunity presented itself when it was incorporated into a HBOC field outing.

The first bird you are likely to encounter at this place is a magpie called "Stupid". This bird has been hand reared and has the run of the place as well as the attention of everyone. It has been trained to produce speech like phrases such as "I want more" and "hello" etc and behaves like a real spoilt brat.

With the entertainment over it is well worth while to walk away from the house about twenty metres and listen to the sounds of the bush. Immediately our group could hear Australian

Raven as well as Torresian Crow. Then White-throated Gerygone, Peaceful Dove, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler, Magpie-lark, Olive-backed Oriole, Spotted Pardalote, Willie Wagtail, Grey Fantail, Jacky Winter etc etc. The HBOC came up with quite a magnificent list.

Most of these birds remained invisible though as we were "guided" around the place by two of John's sons who knew all the wallaby pads that were big enough for boys but not quite the size for adults. It was with some relief that we finally found the side fence which had a neighbour's access road running along it on the other side.

Along this track we found three Speckled Warblers. These birds were mainly getting about on the ground but would occasionally flit up to the fence wire. A terrific find for myself personally; my previous experience with this species has been in the Upper Hunter Valley only.

At the far end of the property we found raptors in abundance. Best count was seven Wedge-tailed Eagles, two Whistling Kites, a White-bellied Sea-Eagle and maybe a dozen ravens or crows. The many chicken sheds in this area may have given rise to increased feeding opportunities for these birds and one eagle was seen to fly off from a dead chook as we approached.

Walking back to the house a Dollarbird made an appearance and many White-throated Needletails swung about the sky.

● Club Outing

UTS Field Research Station, Booral.

On the same extremely hot day as previously described we visited the University of Technology, Sydney Field Research Station on the Bucketts Way just north of Booral. This place has a lot of potential also as a bird watching spot.

The main feature is Alderley Creek which is the common border of the field station and a property owned by a Novocastrian, Tony Smith. The field station is to the east of Alderley Creek and extends all the way to the main road. The creek takes an immediate right angled bend and heads downstream to the Karuah River.

Because of the heat our explorations were confined to the shaded corridor of the creek. As it turned out, I'm sure that was where most of the birds were also. And there were plenty of gems to

be found. Occasional glimpses of Satin Bowerbird, Grey Shrike-thrush, Lewin's Honeyeater, Sacred Kingfisher, Black-faced Monarch, King Parrot, Golden Whistler and Rose Robin.

A rare moment for myself was the discovery of a Yellow-throated Scrubwren which was busy on a leafy bank and stayed in view long enough to admire the striking contrast of its black mask and yellow throat. On the same bank a pair of Azure Kingfishers flitted up and down with no apparent intention at all of leaving. After one bird was seen to fly in under the bank we guessed that we had found a nesting pair. It was just great to sit in the shade and watch these beautiful birds.

A future outing should encourage the exploration of the creek all the way through to the river. By the way, our little outing has already added thirteen species to the official UTS list offered by their 1988 Site Description Report.

Tom Clarke.

Bird Predation in Blackbutt Reserve

Caryl and I are lucky to have a garden backing onto Blackbutt Reserve and this affords us an excellent opportunity to observe bird behaviour. Last Sunday a Grey Goshawk, which is frequently about this side of Blackbutt, was harrassed by four Noisy Miners. The goshawk took and killed one of the miners which certainly quietened the remainder. I have never seen a White-throated Treecreeper pause for a second in its busy trunk running before. On this occasion one stayed motionless, not moving a muscle, on the opposite side of the trunk of a medium sized Spotted Gum, *Eucalyptus maculata*, for a good fifteen minutes before the goshawk flew off and then away it went. I guess very relieved not to follow the miner's fate.

On the same day a Laughing Kookaburra took and killed a juvenile Eastern Spinebill which had spent the previous week around the gardens of Ridgeway Road with its parents. I had last year seen a Kookaburra take an adult Eastern Spinebill straight out of the top of a *Grevillea refracta* where it was feeding on the flowers. The act was performed at such speed I scarcely realised what had happened till the Kookaburra perched on a nearby branch with its unfortunate prey.

The weekend before we had seen the two

local Powerful Owls perched fairly low in an *Allocasuarina torulosa* (Forest Sheoak). I looked up and there was a dead Dusky Moorhen clutched in the talons of one owl. The sight was remarkable in that the long spindly legs of the moorhen hung down off the branch making the scene quite grotesque. We have previously seen one of the pair eating a Ringtail Possum. The Dusky Moorhens course are very common on the nearby ponds in the Jo Richley Reserve part of Blackbutt. Last month we had watched a juvenile Powerful Owl with its parents. Quite a number of local residents came to view the owls. The adult just watched out of hooded eyes keeping all below under surveillance by an almost imperceptible swivel of its neck. To the contrary, the teenager was intrigued, almost falling off the branch to obtain a better view of those strange creatures on the ground. It was a much lighter colour than the adult and the widely staring eyes were made more prominent by the light surrounds. I noticed that the youngster's talons looked proportionately big for its size - they seemed to be as big as those of the parent bird.

Newcastle is certainly lucky to have a bushland reserve that is the size of, and has the diversity of, Blackbutt.

Paddy Lightfoot

Clean Up Australia Day

Ash Island - Sunday 5th March

This year, the Hunter Bird Observers Club has decided to get involved in this very worthwhile community program, Clean Up Australia.

Ash Island has been chosen as our clean up site since it is this area's rehabilitation that has great importance with regards to the many birds dependant on it. With the drastic reduction of suitable wetland habitat for migratory waders and waterfowl on Kooragang Island, the Ash Island area takes on even more significance as a feeding ground and roosting place. It is important, therefore, that birdwatchers take a bit more than a passing interest.

David Geering has volunteered to be our coordinator for this event and if his enthusiasm is any guide the day is bound to be a great success.

The Clean Up Day will start out as a normal club field outing with a couple of hours of terrific bird watching. After that it will be on with the gloves and into the job at hand.

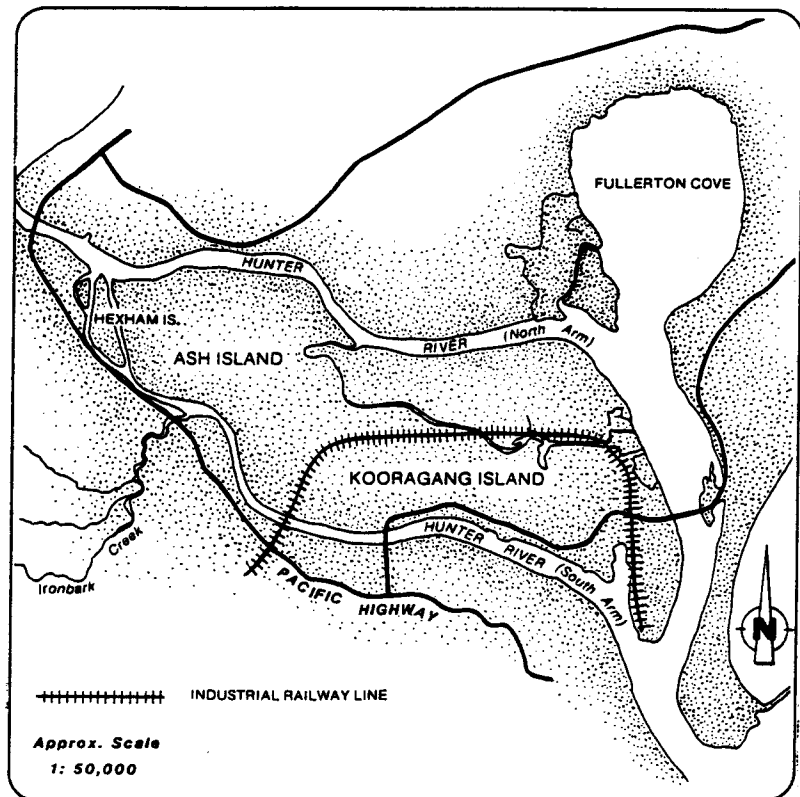
Many members may have already been involved in Clean

Up Day activities with other groups in the past. Perhaps you have thought about doing something but never quite got around to being actively involved. Well now is your big chance and you'll be enjoying what you like best (birdwatching) as well as doing a wonderful job

for the environment.

So please consider, and act! Ash Island's future and its birdlife needs your most practical support. We look forward to a large and enthusiastic turn out.

HBOC Committee



Regent Honeyeater Survey

HOWES VALLEY SURVEYS of Regent Honeyeaters will be conducted on the following dates in 1995.

APRIL 9TH

MAY 7TH

JUNE 11TH

On each occasion the group will meet at the "corner shop" in Broke at 7:00am. All

people wishing to take part must make contact in advance with Ann Lindsey (ph. 733519).

By making these extra club outings to Howes Valley we hope to survey the area for its bird populations and in particular, to look for any signs of Regent Honeyeaters.

We have access to at least two private properties and there are numerous roads to explore. The area is beautiful and the bird life prolific.

Bring a picnic lunch and your binoculars and enjoy another day in the bush.

Ann Lindsey

● Library Report

Birds of Australia.

The Reader's Digest Photographic Field Guide.

This is a new concept for birdwatchers, being the first comprehensive field guide of Australian species to be fully illustrated with photographs.

A total of 840 colour photographs depict each bird in typical stance and habitat clearly showing plumage details for ease of identification. Text descriptions highlight distinctive features, plumage variation, behaviour, calls and songs and habitat. Colour maps show the distribution of each species.

The book really complements the previously published "Reader's Digest of Australian Birds".

Two features which may not please some readers are;

1. On the 27 Birds of Prey (excluding owls) 18 are shown in the perched position. As many birdwatchers know, these birds are usually seen in flight and may therefore prefer to see them illustrated as such.

2. Captions on most of the Whistlers have been misnamed but these inaccuracies have been corrected in the Library copy by our own expert ornithologists.

Ed Hamonet.

● New Books to Buy

The Birds of Western NSW:

A Preliminary Atlas.

A new atlas of NSW birds is to be published. This will be the first Atlas describing the distribution of birds from Western New South Wales (encompassing the Central and Western Divisions of NSW).

Western NSW is often neglected in terms of attention to conservation of birds and other animals. There is a general decline in many species populations.

The atlas provides distribution maps for all species for the last 15 years. It also contains a comprehensive account of the history of the region since white settlement along with information on climate, habitat and conservation issues affecting the recorded species and discussion on distribution maps.

The pre-publication cost for this valuable account was \$20 but for further information and orders please contact:

Dick Cooper
PO Box 652
ALBURY NSW 2640

Large Forest Owls of NSW

NSW Field Ornithologists Club

Also available soon is the FOC "owl" book. A pre-publication price of \$4 is very cheap for the excellent information it contains about our owls. For details and orders make contact again with Dick Cooper of Albury.

Cuckoos, Nightbirds and Kingfishers.

Australian Museum.

This is the ninth volume of the ten volume series being produced by the Australian Museum and as with its predecessors utilises the photographs available from the National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife.

Although titled Cuckoos, Nightbirds and Kingfishers, this book actually covers 17 families in 5 orders of birds. In addition to the foregoing, this volume deals with Swifts, Bee-eater, Dollarbird, Pittas, Lyrebirds, Scrub-birds, Larks, Swallows and Martins, Pipits and Wagtails, Cuckoo-shrikes and Bulbuls as well as Vagrants and Very Rare Species.

Ed Hamonet.

New Members

The HBOC extends a very warm welcome to the following new members and looks forward to sharing our interest in bird life.

Neville & Pauline Jones of Blackalls Park

Grant Brosie of Jesmond (Junior Member)

● Observations

Reports from December meeting

Oct.	16	Tawny Frogmouth	2+2dy	Blackbutt Reserve	N&J Lewis
	23	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	4	Broke/Pokolbin	A.Stuart
Nov.	10	Gang Gang Cockatoo	20+	Putty	D.Biddle
		Pheasant Coucal	3	Rankin Park	D.Biddle
		Regent Bowerbird	3	Ferndale Park	I.Watson
	16	White-bellied Sea-Eagle	1	Stockton Beach	D.Biddle
		Pied Oystercatcher	6	Stockton Beach	D.Biddle
		Caspian Tern	2	Stockton Beach	D.Biddle
	20	Tawny Frogmouth	2+2dy	Rankin Park	J.Stephenson
	25	Spotted Quail-thrush	1	Mt Sugarloaf	J.Stephenson
	28	Buff-banded Rail	1	Pokolbin	D.Biddle
		Superb Lyrebird	1	Wollombi	D.Biddle
		Gang Gang Cockatoo	1	Wollombi	D.Biddle
	29	Australian White Ibis	70	Buttaba	R.Waymark
Dec.	1	Barking Owl	(h)	Edgeworth	G.O'Connor
		Olive-backed Oriole	1	Paterson	D.Biddle
	4	Black Noddy	1	Iluka Bluff	J.Stephenson
		Nankeen Night Heron	1	Morpeth	D.Biddle
		Swamp Harrier	1	Morpeth	D.Biddle
		Glossy Black-Cockatoo	7	Ferndale Park	I.Watson
	6	Grey Butcherbird	1+1 imm	Mirrabooka	G.McCulloch
	6-13	Tawny Frogmouth	up to 7	Newcastle University	P.McLauchlan
	7	Barking Owl	(h)	New Lambton Heights	I.Hamilton
		Eastern Rosella	1	New Lambton Heights	I.Hamilton
	8	Pacific Baza	1	Newcastle University	R.Reece
	10	Powerful Owl	1+1dy	Blackbutt Reserve	P.Lightfoot
		White-throated Nightjar	1	Mt. Sugarloaf	R.Yank
	11	Little Eagle	1	Abermain	R.Yank
		Pacific Baza	1	Mirrabooka	G.McCulloch
		Pacific Golden Plover	7	Stockton	D.Biddle

The Powerful Owl is an exciting breeding record for the Blackbutt Reserve.

Tawny Frogmouth at Blackbutt is another breeding record. Two young were fledged, but it seems that only one survived.

The Barking Owls recorded at Edgeworth and New Lambton Heights were identified by call alone.

The Eastern Rosella seen at New Lambton Heights was sporting an unusual amount of red from the undertail to within 0.5cm of the head. Also showing red on the back from base of the tail to under wings. The Eastern Rosella has hybridised with several other species in aviary situations and the description fits other reports of oddly-coloured parrots seen from other suburban situations earlier in the year.

Sue Hamonet.

● A Most Unusual Observation; make of it what you will.

KILLER OWL

A GREAT HORNED OWL that terrorised a senior citizen's development and killed a dog was shot dead by game wardens.

The owl was the prime suspect in the disappearance of several cats in Greenville, Maine.

Robert Shufelt said the bird attacked his 9kg dog, lifted it into the air and dropped it from the sky.

Sunday Telegraph 8/1/95

Important Wader Study Commenced in the Hunter David Geering

Despite being the most important estuary in New South Wales for shorebirds, and the centre for much of the activities of the NSW Wader Study Group, the Hunter has been a source of much frustration. In recent years it has become increasingly difficult to census waders because of changing patterns of use of roost habitat brought about by certain changes to major roost sites. This has been compounded by the lack of a boat to conduct surveys.

This is about to change with the Shortland Wetlands Centre being commissioned to conduct an ecological study of the shorebirds of the Hunter estuary and surrounding wetlands for the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project. Funding has been provided by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. The study commenced on November 28 and is being conducted by Hunter Bird Observers member David Geering.

The study will cover most aspects of shorebird ecology with the broad objectives being to determine the distribution and size of the shorebird population, roost and feeding habitat preference and the patterns of usage of these including effects of weather and disturbance. The study will provide basic ecological data that will serve as baseline information from which to assess existing and potential threats as well as providing information that will assist local, state and national authorities in making informed decisions regarding conservation of shorebird habitat. This includes the rehabilitation and/or creation of roost and feeding habitat.

Potential roost habitat will be identified to determine the extent, and degradation, of this habitat in the estuary. Regular monitoring will be undertaken of roost sites to determine the size and species composition of the population and pattern of usage of these areas. A major part of the study will, however, be concerned with feeding ecology. Activity patterns and behavioural observations will be collected from individual foraging birds across a range of variables such as substrate type and tide height. Extensive sampling, identifying substrate characteristics and fauna, will take place throughout across the estuary. Once feeding habitat requirements have been identified and described the potentially available area of this habitat will be determined for each species.

An important part of the study will involve the tracking, by radio telemetry, of ten individual birds. These will be Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Golden Plover, Terek Sandpiper and Latham's Snipe. These species represent a cross section of the common waders utilising the estuary while incorporating a range of roost and feeding characteristics. The radio telemetry aspect of the study will help determine patterns of usage of roost and feeding habitat under, potentially, a range of conditions. It is expected that the birds will be tracked for from 2 to 3 months.

The first Eastern Curlew was fitted with its transmitter on January 23 and has been routinely tracked from its high tide roost on the Kooragang dykes a secondary roost in Fern Bay and then to its feeding area in Fullerton Cove. All radios should be deployed by early February.

Counts already undertaken by the NSW WSG and HBOC are providing valuable information about the distribution of shorebirds but studies of this type are essential if we are to more fully understand the factors that affect this distribution and provide information that can be used for effective conservation and management of estuarine, and other wetland, habitats.

Members interested in offering assistance with any aspect of the study, particularly regular counts of sites such as Ash Island, should contact David at Shortland Wetlands Centre.

Overseas Penfriends

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is the UK partner of BirdLife International. They are keen to promote the exchange of ideas and experiences between young people around the world.

To achieve this they have recently launched

Par Avian. This is a penfriend scheme for young people interested in wildlife and the environment. It will link together people aged 8 to 18 who share similar enthusiasms and young people can join at any time.

If you know anyone who may like an overseas penfriend, please give them a copy of the application form included in this newsletter. They do not have to be members of this club.



**Green penfriends
around the world**

Do you like getting letters? Yes? Especially from abroad? Then join Par Avian, the penfriend scheme for anyone under 18 interested in wildlife. It's FREE! All you have to do is write. Your new penfriend could live anywhere in the world!

Fill in this form, and send it to the address below and we'll send you details of your penfriend. We'll try to match you up with someone who has similar interests to you.

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode (zip code): _____ Country: _____

Your age: _____ I am a girl ☐ boy ☐ (please tick box)

My interests are: _____

My penfriend should be: a boy ☐ a girl ☐ I don't mind ☐ (please tick box)

Please tell us if you speak/write any languages other than English: _____

Please send us a recent photograph of yourself if you can, and – if you live in the United Kingdom – a stamped envelope (23.5 cm x 16 cm) with your address on it.

Once we've received your letter, you should hear from us within six weeks. We will try to match you with another young person with similar interests. We'll send your address to your penfriend, and theirs to you. Then it's for you to get to know each other – and that's the fun of it.

**Send this to Par Avian, YOC, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire
SG19 2DL, UK**

Par Avian is organised by the YOC, the junior section of The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The RSPB has joined with bird and habitat conservation organisations to form a global partnership called BirdLife International.



Registered charity no 207076



Coming Events

Please check with the contact person for each outing in case of changed details or suitability of site for the camp or field day.

Sunday 19th February	Field Day: Meet: Contact:	Barrington House MacDonald's Raymond Terrace at 6:30am Allan Stuart 528569
Sunday 5th March	Clean Up Australia Day: Meet: Contact:	Ash Island MacDonald's Hexham at 8:00am David Geering 282636
Wednesday 8th March	Clubnight: Main feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm Seabirds of Sub-Antarctic Islands - Allan Rogers.
Sunday 19th March	Field Day: Meet: Contact:	Wentworth Swamp Kurri Kurri Post Office at 7:00am Richard Yank 486905
Wednesday 12th April	Clubnight: Main feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 8:00pm Ecology of Balikera Canal - Anne Heinrich
Weekend 14th-17th April	Camp: Contact:	Widden Valley Peter MacLauchlan 333224
Sunday 23rd April	Field Day: Meet: Contact:	Dunn's Creek MacDonald's East Maitland Peter MacLauchlan 333224

NORTHERN INSTRUMENT SERVICES

990 Hunter Street, Newcastle
Ph: 69 4021

SPECIALISING IN SALES AND SERVICE OF:

BINOCULARS
SPOTTING SCOPES
&
TELESCOPES

Binocular Repairs done professionally, quickly and at reasonable rates.