

NEWSLETTER



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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

Telephone: (049) 585942

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|--------------------|----------------|
| 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.

● August Club Night

Little Tern - - bound for Botany Bay.

Club night was held on 9th August and our guest speaker for the evening was Geoff Ross of the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. Geoff has been managing a conservation program for Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) in Botany Bay in an attempt to improve this species breeding efforts.

The Little Tern is a migratory shorebird and is regarded as endangered throughout its range. It is protected under Schedule 12 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act as well as the international treaties between Japan, China and Australia.

Like other birds that nest on beaches, fewer Little Tern are reaching breeding age each year because of high failure rates encountered at the breeding stage. The most serious cause of the poor breeding success in Botany Bay is disturbance by humans and their pets. Geoff pointed out that foxes are also a common predator around Botany Bay and he and his team had gone to some great lengths to exclude foxes from the breeding areas near the Sydney Airport runway.

Little Tern arrive in Botany Bay around September each year and egg laying can start as early as October. The best breeding season that Geoff has witnessed was in 1992 when they managed to relocate the breeding population to Spit Island near Towra Point Nature Reserve. The Island

proved to be a very good predator free refuge and resulted in a bumper year.

Ongoing maintenance of the island is necessary to guard against tidal action eroding away this sandy bank. Also the continued education of local recreational fishermen etc is needed to give the Little Tern as least disturbance as possible and hopefully secure this spot as a valuable breeding area.

Bird of the Evening segment was a very concise delivery by Ed Hamonet on the Crimson Chat (*Epthianura tricolor*). Ed's love of unravelling history revealed that in 1842, Sir George Grey (Governor of South Australia) found what he believed was a new species of honeyeater. What he did have, it was later proved, was a Crimson Chat

Crimson Chats have brush-tipped tongues and do in fact feed on the nectar of inland plants such as Sturt's Desert Pea. Their main source of energy is insects which are taken on the ground or in low shrubs of the savannah plains of the interior.

These highly nomadic birds have adapted extremely well to life in the driest parts of Australia and drink water at any opportunity; the brush-tipped tongue again is used to good effect in collecting dew drops. Other adaptations to life in the desert include breeding at times of low evaporation and the bird's ability to slow down its metabolic rate during times of extreme cold. Birds have been found lying on the ground in semi-torpor and later come to life in the warmth of the morning sun.

Another of Ed's interests is the stories behind the derivation of scientific names and this species presented him with a real challenge. *Epthianura* eventually proved to have a rough Greek base in *phthinas*, meaning decreasing or wasting; the Greek *aura* of course refers to the tail.

The short tail is a subtle feature common to all the Chats and Ed also pointed out some other comparisons between the four endemics.

Powerfuls Produce Progeny

This weekend (23-24 Sept.), Blackbutt Reserve's pair of Powerful Owls were spotted in a Turpentine tree with a new dependent young. This is the second young one produced in the past twelve months. Pickings of Ringtails must be good in Blackbutt!

The parents were completely uninterested in the audience on the track below. They just kept us under constant surveillance with an almost imperceptible swivel of their heads and looked out from under their hooded lids.

Their teenager almost fell off the branch with excitement. The youngster moved continually up and down the branch to get a better view, twisting and turning both body and head. He, or she, appeared to be about the same length as the parents, much slimmer - I guess lacking their powerful musculature. The colour around the prominent eyes was quite pale, the chest light and downy with distinct markings on the back. The adults are more uniform in feather colour.

The area of Blackbutt is 182 hectares. This is much smaller than the 800 hectares quoted as a suitably sized territory for a pair of Powerfuls. I guess they could also use the adjacent bushland at Jesmond around the John Hunter Hospital and probably travel as far as Glenrock SRA without much trouble.

With the production of two young in twelve months, I wonder if the species is as rare as quoted in the literature.

Paddy Lightfoot.

RAOU TWITCHATHON

This year's twitchathon is almost upon us and the HBOC will be entering at least two teams.

Our famous *Hunter Thickheads*, comprising Ann Lindsey, Jill Warner, Peter McLauchlan and David Geering, will be going around for a third time and keen to break that elusive 200 species barrier. That's a serious effort in anyone's language.

A not so serious Champagne team, *Lesticum phoradae*, of Bonnie Orr, Sue Owens, Shirley Rooke, Raymond Walker and Tom Clarke will strive for more relaxed achievement and enjoyment.

Either way, both these teams will be happy for your sponsorship and support. Please be a part of this major fund raising event and help in the conservation of our native birdlife.

Pledged sponsorship for these teams can be made by calling Ann Lindsey 733519 or Tom Clarke 671396 anytime before the end of October.

This year's effort will go towards two key projects. Three quarters funds raised in NSW will go to the Barren Grounds Bird Observatory, home to the Eastern Bristlebird and the Ground Parrot. The remainder will go to the RAOU's national project aimed at saving the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo which is endangered in South East Australia.

The HBOC effort will also feature a Children's Activity Day at the Shortland Wetlands Centre, 1:30 to 3:30pm, Sunday 29th October. The activities will include an observation walk, collecting natural materials for craft exercises, dip netting, games and much more. Two hours of organised fun for children of all sizes. For further information see Tom Clarke 671396.

All Twitchathon activities will culminate in a 5:00pm BBQ and get together at the SWC and all members are invited. BYO everything.

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● Club Outings

Buttai Area
Sunday, 23rd July,
1995.

Hoping for a calm day, nineteen keen Bird Observers gathered just off John Renshaw Drive at about 8:15am in the Buttai Area, which is between Hexham and Kurri Kurri. Unfortunately as we were setting out the wind arrived, a nuisance but it did not lessen our enthusiasm.

Amongst the first sightings were - Olive-backed Oriole, White-naped Honeyeater, a lone Straw-necked Ibis near a dam and a Rose Robin hen feeding along the track.

After morning tea we proceeded a short distance to

private property - Elliot's Hill. Probably the more interesting sightings here were a Speckled Warbler and a Little Cuckoo-shrike.

Bird Call showed 36 passerine and 9 non-passerine sightings for the morning. And I should not forget to mention the sighting by a few of the birdos of a very unusual Blue-breasted Biscuit Eater (Anous Lindseyostris).

Thank you, Peter, for an enjoyable outing.

Leone Storm.

Howe's Valley,
Sunday, 24th
September, 1995.

Was it the threat of inclement weather, the very early start, or the Rugby League Grand Final? Something kept members away in droves and only four stalwarts made the trip to Howe's Valley.

An early morning rendezvous at Broke allowed time for a spot of birding along the riverbank, which produced a list of 32 species.

At Howe's Valley the threat of rain was always there but a glorious morning was spent exploring the Handy Property where we enjoyed communing with many White-throated Gerygones and numerous Speckled Warblers. Most numerous on the day were the Rufous Whistlers, in full voice, and almost under every rock. Unfortunately the Regent Honeyeaters seen during the previous week had left and only small numbers of Yellow-tufted, White-naped and Brown-headed Honeyeaters remained.

We were treated to a Cook's Tour by Mrs Ann Handy who proudly pointed out the numerous nests of many species including the Grey Shrike-thrush, warm and cosy on her nest and two eggs in a disused letter-box.

Rain in the mid-afternoon prompted our departure but a most enjoyable day was the all-round verdict, with the list of 50 species probably not a true indication of the potential of the area.

Sue Hamonet.

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● September Club Night

Ivory-billed Mud pecker? - just a silly old coot!

Main feature of the September Club Night was a presentation on bird watching in the USA by Bonnie Orr. Bonnie is from Oregon and is enjoying a 12 month visit in Australia and has been a regular participant in our Club's activities since arriving.

Bonnie delighted us with slides especially sent over for her talk and proudly showed off some of her favourite North American native birds.

Some classics included the Roadrunner, the Blue Jay and the Mockingbird but the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was a real show stopper. A spectacular woodpecker that specialises in feeding on the sap of trees and the insects that are attracted to it. Other woodpeckers bore deep into the wood for insect larvae but this bird finds its food just under the bark.

Another very distinctive American bird is the American Robin. This well known species is not a true robin but is in fact a large thrush related to the European Blackbird. Early colonists named it Robin because of its red breast.

Many birds in the USA have suffered from the pressures of settlement and the changes it imposes on the various habitats. Bonnie explained the reductions of distribution of some of her favourite birds. That typically American species, the Turkey, had been exterminated over much of its original range as a result of early hunting. Nowadays, after a program of reintroductions and protection, wild birds are once again widespread.

The Burrowing Owl has suffered greatly from habitat destruction and was once a familiar sight in the deserts and dry grasslands of the North-west. Bonnie's experience with these birds is that quite often they can be found in the shoulders of roadways! The Killdeer is a large plover type and typically covers the same ecological niche as our own lapwings. Apparently lapwings do not occur in Bonnie's homeland.

Two other favourites, the Great Blue Heron and the endearing Tufted Puffin are found easily enough, especially if you follow the tried and true method of birding with "little old ladies in tennis shoes". This is a standing joke amongst bird watchers of Bonnie's ilk. Another "swifty" is the

introduction of new bird watchers to the *Ivory-billed Mudpecker*, a common waterfowl with an uncanny likeness to the Eurasian Coot.

For the serious birdo, North America holds many secrets and puzzles to unravel as birds spend most of the year dressed in their drab out-of-season plumages. Coupled with the fact that looking for birds in gloomy conifer forests or Juniper woodlands only allows rare glimpses in good light, a well trained ear for the bird calls would be an absolute must.

Bird of the Evening was presented by Mike Newman who has been taken by the uncommon Speckled Warbler (*Chthonicola sagittata*) since moving to this area.

Quite often found on stoney hill sides or dry grassy woodland, Mike has been able to observe this bird near his place at Woodville. Almost always it will be found getting about on the ground where it seeks insects and occasional se for nourishment. Nesting also takes place on the ground or in the base of some shrub. The nest is a dome of woven grasses with a side entrance and the Black-eared Cuckoo takes particular advantage of it.

Identifying the Speckled Warbler in the field may cause a problem at first as its bold streaked appearance, white 'eyebrow' and tip of tail are typical characteristics of other *groundwrens*. Mike described some of the similarities with Chestnut rumped Heathwren, Striated Fieldwren and Redthroat. All these birds have previously been lumped together with the *Sericornis scrubwren* but now according to taxonomical studies, fit themselves separated into different genera.

Another pointer for the patient observer in determining the sex of the Speckled Warbler was also described by Mike. On each bird a dark line from the lores to the nape marks the boundary of the whitish 'eyebrow' and the brownish head. This line is black in the male bird and a reddish-brown in the females. But the catch is that it may very well be partly hidden by the feathers of the crown.

A sound recording of this bird's quiet cadence was played but it is the cranky rattle which is more often encountered in the field.

● Field Outing

Hunter Region Botanic Gardens 20th August 1995

The Hunter Region Botanic Gardens are located at Moto Farm and covers 140 hectares of natural bushland with a network of trails for walking. The sandy soil supports Eucalypt forests dominated by Blackbutt, Bloodwoods and Angophora and is bordered to the north and south by perched swamps. In the western half of the complex, theme gardens have been planted and these include a Protea Garden, Grevillea Garden and an Acacia Garden.

Not long after getting there it was evident that the nectar feeders were in great abundance and very active. Eastern Spinebill, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Red Wattlebird, Little Wattlebird and White-cheeked Honeyeater were finding the flowering Grevilleas very attractive indeed. A stop at the Grevillea Garden and the whole place was alive with birds. Tempted to just stay in this area, I spent quite some time enjoying the spectacle. Not just honeyeaters were seen in this area as small groups of Red-browed Finch and Superb Fairywren busied themselves about at ground level.

By mid-morning most of our group (18 bird watchers) had set their own pace to get about and any semblance of a large group had disappeared. This meant that those who wanted to dawdle more than others could

do so and still meet again later as each path met.

Most birds that were found in the Botanical Gardens proved to be in good numbers. Spotted Pardalote, Brown Thornbill and Variegated Fairywren were no exceptions and the thornbills were seen involved in nest building.

Two specials for this bird watcher was the excellent views we managed to get of a Brown-headed Honeyeater and a pair of Rose Robins. It was the female robin that we encountered first and we really had to work hard to determine the identity of this elusive and drab bird. By the time we had put away the field guide, the male turned up to validate our conclusions in spectacular fashion.

A fleeting glimpse of a single Crested Shrike-tit was another gem and was happily added to our collective bird list of 48 species.

Tom Clarke

SGAP Wildflower Spectacular

2nd & 3rd September 1995

For the second time, the HBOC participated in the Wildflower Spectacular at the Shortland Wetlands Centre and once again, the weather was a major factor in our fortunes.

The Saturday was a miserable day and tested everyone's enthusiasm, but a bright, sunny and well attended Sunday certainly made up for it.

The Club had "Birds and Gardens" as its display theme and promoted both its Garden Birds Survey Charts and the recently produced handout "Living Jewels - How to attract native birds to your garden".

Other activities included instructional talks by David Geering on birdscaping gardens as well as bird walks around the Wetlands Centre. These proved to be very popular and came as an added bonus for many people who originally came just for the plants.

Those members who helped out at the display counter, fielding bird enquiries or helping children discover the birds on the pond in front of the tent, enjoyed the experience of contact with the general public, some of whom revealed very good bird information of their own.

NEW MEMBERS

The HBOC extends a very warm welcome to the following new members:

PAUL THOMAS - KOTARA
JANET PARSONS - LAMBTON

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Articles for our Newsletter are always
welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is

4th December, 1995

Mail to: Tom Clarke 24 Ackerson St, Mayfield 2304

Phone: 671396 (h) 686316 (w) Fax: 686390

KIRRAMA WILDLIFE TOURS
1996

Cape York Bird Week
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Tablelands / Georgetown / Musgrave

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Mt Isa / Lawn Hill Nat. Park / Cloncurry

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OBSERVATION NOTES

The Regent Honeyeaters at Morisset were first reported by F.O.C. per Alan Morris. The birds had been feeding in blossoming Swamp Mahogany (*E.robusta*) and were monitored regularly up to 9th August.

The Whistling Kites west of Raymond Terrace were attending to a nest used regularly over the last four seasons.

The Brown Cuckoo-dove at Rankin Park was nesting in a staghorn on a verandah, the same site used previously.

Two adult Shining Bronze-cuckoos were heard calling, and later a juvenile heard calling and observed being fed with small grubs by an adult of the same species.

The Bassian Thrush at New Lambton Heights was identified by the call taped by Marta and Ian. The bird's pre-dawn song was heard throughout the months of July and August and it is assumed that a single bird was responsible.

The Square-tailed Kite reported from Woodberry is a Category 3 species and thus requires a report to be assessed by the Records Appraisal Committee before confirmation.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos were reported from the F3 Freeway in September, too far south to be included in the Hunter Region.

A note regarding
**THE READER'S DIGEST
PHOTOGRAPHIC
FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF
AUSTRALIA**

It is well known that this book was published with multiple errors of identification. It appears that if people who purchased this book contact:

Gerri Foxall or Chris Taylor on (02) 690 6244
or write to:

Reader's Digest (Aust) Pty Ltd, The Prudential Building,
39-49 Martin Place, Sydney 2000, marking their letter to the
attention of either of these people.

the faulty book may be replaced.

● Observations

Reports from August and September meetings

| | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|------|---------------------|--------------|
| Apr/May/June | Crimson Rosella | 1 | Salmander Bay | T.Reynolds |
| | Eastern Rosella | 1 | Salamander Bay | T.Reynolds |
| Apr. 14 | Fan-tailed Cuckoo | 1 | Belmont South | J.Cockerell |
| May 4 | White-winged Chough | 1 | Salamander bay | T.Reynolds |
| | Australian Hobby | 1 | Mayfield | T.Clarke |
| | Brown Honeyeater | 1 | Mayfield | T.Clarke |
| 14 | Whistling Kite | 2 | Raymond Terrace | T.Reynolds |
| Jun. 1-3 | Pheasant Coucal | 1 | Garden Suburb | J.Perry |
| Jul. | Topknot Pigeon | 12 | Woodville | M.Newman |
| | Bassian Thrush | 1 | New Lambton heights | M&I.Hamilton |
| | Pacific Baza | 2 | New lambton heights | M&I.Hamilton |
| 13 | Australian Raven | 1 | Mayfield | T.Clarke |
| | Black-shouldered Kite | 2 | Warabrook | T.Clarke |
| 14 | Brown Cuckoo-dove | 1 | Rankin Park | P.Lightfoot |
| 15 | Plumed Whistling- Duck | 1 | Blackbutt Reserve | P.Lightfoot |
| 17 | Regent Honeyeater | 20+ | Morisset | A.Morris |
| 19 | Regent Honeyeater | 3-6 | Morisset | A.Morris |
| 20 | Regent Honeyeater | 3-6 | Morisset | A.Lindsay |
| 21 | Regent Honeyeater | 4 | Morisset | A.Lindsay |
| 22 | European Goldfinch | 1 | Windale | T.Clarke |
| 23 | Welcome Swallow | 60+ | Hamilton North | T.Clarke |
| 27 | White-headed Pigeon | 1 | Birmingham Gardens | K&M.Simkus |
| 31 | Spangled Drongo | 1 | Blackbutt Reserve | R.Walker |
| Aug. | Nankeen Kestrel | 2 | Tarro | E.Brady |
| 4 | Spotted Harrier | 1 | Hinton | M.Newman |
| 5 | Black Swan | 200 | Kooragang Island | T.Clarke |
| | Grey-tailed Tattler | 11 | Fern Bay | T.Clarke |
| | Sacred Kingfisher | 2 | Fern bay | T.Clarke |
| | Shining Bronze-cuckoo | 3 | Belmont South | J.Cockerell |
| 7 | White-headed Pigeon | 2 | Speers Point | R.Walker |
| 8 | Australian Hobby | 1 | Mayfield | T.Clarke |
| 9 | Pheasant Coucal | 1 | New lambton Heights | A.Robotham |
| 14 | Laughing Kookaburra | 2 | Mayfield | T.Clarke |
| | Australian Raven | 1 | Mayfield | T.Clarke |
| | Square-tailed Kite | 1 | Woodberry | L.Marshall |
| 19 | Eastern Curlew | 1 | Throsby Creek | T.Clarke |
| 20 | Spangled Drongo | 2 | Mew Lambton Heights | M&I.Hamilton |
| 21 | Nankeen Kestrel | 1 | Tighe's Hill | T.Clarke |
| 23 | Pied Currawong | 1 | Mayfield | T.Clarke |
| | Common Myna | 4 | Mayfield | T.Clarke |
| 28 | Topknot Pigeon | 2 | Allynbrook | K.Priestley |
| | White Goshawk | 1 | Tocal | K.Priestley |
| Sep. 3 | Channel-billed Cuckoo | | Woodville | M.Newman |
| 4 | Regent Honeyeater | 1 | Ellalong | J.Meynell |
| 6 | Latham's Snipe | 2 | Irrawang Swamp | K.Preistley |
| 7 | White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike | 1 | Woodberry | L.Marshall |
| | Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo | 3 | S.W.C. | W.Barden |
| 9 | Swift Parrot | 30+ | Tahlee | F.van Gessel |
| 10 | Straw-necked Ibis | 100+ | Munghorn Gap | M.Newman |
| | Topknot Pigeon | 18 | Paterson | K.Preistley |
| 11 | Common Koel | 1 | Garden Suburb | J.Perry |
| 12 | Eastern Whipbird | 2 | Paterson | K.Preistley |
| | Channel-billed Cuckoo | 1 | Garden Suburb | J.Perry |
| 13 | Channel-billed Cuckoo | 1 | New Lambton | A.Stuart |
| | Dusky Moorhen | 7 | Redhead | E.Huber |
| | Eutasian Coot | 2 | Redhead | E.Huber |
| | Masked Lapwing | 2 | Redhead | E.Huber |

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 29th October | Twitcherthon & Novelty Events at S.W.C. Childrens Activity Day - \$8 per head - 1:30 to 3:30pm BBQ & Get Together from 5:00pm Contact: Tom Clarke 671396 | |
| Saturday 4th November | Regent Honeyeater Survey - Paterson River Valley Meet: Park by the river at Paterson 8:00am Leader: Ann Lindsay 733519 | |
| Tuesday 7th November | Midweek Outing: | T.B.A. |
| | Contact: | Jeanette Stephenson 575255 |
| Wednesday 8th November | Clubnight: | Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm |
| | Main feature: | Birds of Venezuela by Trevor Qusted |
| Sunday 19th November | Field Day: | Grahamstown Dam |
| | Meet: | McDonald's Raymond Terrace 6:30am |
| | Leader: | Rowley Smith 641389 |
| Saturday 2nd December | Regent Honeyeater Survey - Paterson River Valley Meet: Park by the river at Paterson 8:00am Contact: Ann Lindsay 733519 | |
| Tuesday 5th December | Midweek Outing: | T.B.A. |
| | Contact: | Jeanette Stephenson 575255 |
| Sunday 10th December | Field Day: | Glenrock Lagoon S.R.A. |
| | Meet: | Scout Camp Carpark 7:00am Midday picnic/BBQ |
| | Leader: | Graeme O'Connor 531304 |
| Wednesday 13th December | Clubnight: | Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm |
| | Main feature: | Xmas Party - Member's Night BYO slides, tapes, stories, etc. |

Annual Bird Report Update

Yes folks, the 1994 bird report is off to the printers, after going through the rigours of proof reads and final drafts and many members will have the chance to receive their (free) copy by the December Club Night.

We cannot bear the costs of posting the report to all members, so the options for distribution are as follows:

- reports can be collected at club nights or on monthly outings from December onwards.
- members who are unable to collect the report personally can organise for another member to collect it for them.
- we will post a copy upon receipt of \$1.50, or a self-addressed A5 size envelope bearing an 85cent stamp.

Already the report for 1995 is well in hand, and many members are submitting observation records.

Your sightings are also important - please send them in!

Any unusual sightings are certainly of interest, but so too are the full records of what you see at some site that you visit. This information could well have future value in some conservation issue as well.