

# NEWSLETTER



## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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

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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.*

### ● January Field Day

## Shorebirds at Stockton Sandspit - Rare Sightings off Cormorant Drive.

Since work began on Stockton Sand Spit to make it a bit more friendly for migratory waders, precious little had been observed to indicate any immediate success. However, we live in hope and it was with an optimistic view that our Kooragang Island outing was to start at that particular site.

With a high tide approaching, the usual good sightings from the breakwall over the mud flats and oyster beds was not available and the best we could glean from that location was the occasional warble of a Mangrove Gerygone.

Back to the sand spit area and the encroaching waters had surrounded a large sandy island which was being used as a resting place by several Silver Gull, a couple of Caspian Tern, Gull-billed Tern and four Pied Oystercatchers. The later proved to be a family group consisting of mum, dad and two youngsters, all confirmed by oystercatcher expert Mike Newman. And a good thing too! Personally, I still can't quite see the difference in bill shape (male - chisel, female - pointed) but a juvenile is easier - duller and darker red bits (legs, eyering) and a dark bill tip.

Before long we had our migratory types represented in the form of two Eastern Curlew which stood about on a sandy beach, opposite the island refuge of the oystercatchers. It will be a great moment when finally some Pacific Golden Plover find the improved habitat safe enough for roosting.

Another family troupe was found in the salt marsh area - a pair of White-fronted Chats with a dependent tagging along as they walked about the place. The youngster is not much to look at and lacks any kind of head markings but its persistent whinging means that it doesn't go unnoticed by parents at least.

But we had come to the Hunter Estuary to see shore birds so pressing on down stream we got very lucky and found a group of twenty Grey-tailed Tattlers all sitting on an old wreck just off the bank. These birds later flew to the shelter of some mangroves a little further down where they were much harder to see.

The high tide was really mucking us up as we tried to get out on the dykes of Kooragang Island; the water came right up over the track which deterred most of the group so we didn't really get amongst the waders until we stopped at the large shallow pond off Cormorant Road.

First birds I noticed were the Royal Spoonbill. A couple of dozen progressed across the shallows swishing away purposefully as Marsh Sandpiper and Black-winged Stilt probed about or took to short flights over the water. Large numbers of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper in particular, massed in groups of 30 - 100 birds.

One individual remained alone and pretty much in the same place for the duration of our visit. A strong delineation between dark chest markings and light belly and could have passed for a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper but was identified as a Pectoral Sandpiper after some deliberation. It wasn't so much of a puzzle for one Canadian amongst us who has seen these birds regularly from his part of the world. One bird amongst a thousand others; you really do have to be patient and look at everything on these ponds.

Another rare sighting on this pond proved much easier. Two immature Banded Stilts, stood together, also apparently alone and not mixing at all with their cousins the Black-winged Stilts. At first these birds look very much alike but the young Banded Stilt lacks the dark saddle around the neck.

Tom Clarke.

# Artificial Wetland At Kooragang Coal Handling Facility

As an extra feature to our Kooragang Island field outing in January it was arranged that a small group revisit Port Waratah Coal Services Kooragang site (Curlew Street) to look at their now completed artificial wetland.

The work carried out has established two large ponds complete with islands and reedy margins. Surrounding the ponds, a sloped embankment has been planted up with hundreds of trees and shrubs. These plants are still just getting established but should eventually provide some good habitat for small bush birds like thornbills and honeyeaters.

The ponds have been constructed to contain varying depths of water and will suit a variety of waterfowl. Dusky Moorhen, Purple Swamphen, Australasian Grebe and Grey Teal were using the site and all were observed with dependent young. The possibility of Black Swan, Musk Duck and Eurasian Coot establishing themselves there is also highly likely.

The reedy margins had already existed and have been landscaped into the overall design of the pond. During our time there, they were hiding places for Clamorous Reed Warbler, Tawny Grassbird, Little Grassbird and Golden-headed Cisticola. Most of these birds remained invisible but gave their identity away with their signature calls.

All in all, this artificial wetland appears to be a very good job well done and a model for other

organisations to take note of.

However, one detail does raise some concern and needs to be expressed. For reasons best described as erroneous, these ponds are regarded by PWCS as a prototype for the replacement of the reclaimed wetlands now being used as coal stockpiles. This is the message conveyed to the public by their press release in April 1994 which announced the commencement of the project.

The habitat that has been lost was ideally suited for small migratory waders such as Marsh Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint. The replacement wetland is largely suited for waterfowl.

There is most certainly a difference between a wetland of general benefit and one specific for target species.

As for the waders, they now only have the large shallow pond next to Cormorant Road fossick in during their non-breeding season at Kooragang Island. Fortunately this patch of water has been "engineered" to provide water levels suitable for these birds but the amount of habitat available is only a fraction of that two years ago. This situation must surely place even more value on this pond as a wader feeding ground.

Just for the record our species count for the visit at PWCS totalled 40. This compares with similar count of 38 during a pre construction visit in June 1994. Generally the same species were present with the seasonal "reed birds" obvious this time but missing in the winter survey.

Tom Clarke



## Birding Down The Information Super Highway - RAOU World-wide Web

The Virtual Emu is the  
World-wide Web server of the RAOU.

Point your browser at:  
[http://www.vicnet.net.au/vicnet/  
RAOU/RAOU2WWW.html](http://www.vicnet.net.au/vicnet/RAOU/RAOU2WWW.html)

Send comments to:  
Cameron Williams: [cwilliam@deakin.edu.au](mailto:cwilliam@deakin.edu.au)

## New Bird Group On The Central Coast

The first ever meeting of the Central Coast  
FOC Group was held on December 21st, 1995.

The group is originally made up from  
members of NSWFOC living on the Central Coast.

Regular meetings will be held in the future on  
the fourth Tuesday of each month and these  
gatherings promise to be social and educational  
events for Central Coast birdwatchers.

For more information telephone Alan Morris  
on (043) 89 1390.

## Huge Wattlebird Terrorises Neighbourhood

"and people complain about the noise of a  
few puny planes flying overhead!" cries Duccio  
Cocquio, of Hunters Hill.

"They should hear the thundering wing beat  
of the Little Wattlebird when it comes to feed on  
my grevilleas, landing with one foot in my garden  
and the other six houses away. There is no doubt  
about its identification, as per my faithful  
*Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian  
Birds*". It reads -

"IDENTIFICATION  
LENGTH: 270-310m  
ADULTS: Sexes similar etc."

Source: Sydney Morning Herald, February 5th 1996.

## BIRDLINE NSW

(02) 290 1778

*Please Note The New Number*

This is a service for Birdwatchers by  
Birdwatchers.

Just ring the Birdline number and you will get a  
recorded message of all the latest information on  
sightings and other things of interest.

If you have anything to add which may be useful  
to other birdwatchers then you can leave a  
message at the end of the recording. Your  
contribution may then be used in the next update  
of the recording.

Birdline NSW is Coordinated by  
RAOU Sydney Committee.

## Shortland Wetlands Centre 10th Anniversary Celebrations

13th & 14th April 1996

Featuring open days at the Wetlands Centre with  
plenty of activities for a variety of interests.

Participate in the famous

**BIRD WALKS**

conducted by members of  
Hunter Bird Observers Club.

Other things on offer include canoe rides, bike  
rides, kite flying, displays, kids corner etc

## NEW MEMBERS

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

Marilyn Berrisford of San Remo  
Graeme & Lorna Mee of Seaham  
Bill Dowling of Dungog  
Rachel Williams of Merewether

With these additions membership  
stands at 200!

## ● Observations

### Reports from December, 1995 meeting

<b>Apr. 8</b>	Black Kite	1	Singleton	P.Alexander
<b>May 16</b>	Spotted Harrier	1	Mt. Thorley	P.Alexander
<b>Jul. 24</b>	Figbird	80	The Junction	M.Blanch
<b>Sep. 14</b>	Superb Lyrebird	1	Bucketty	J.Meynell
<b>21</b>	Red-rumped Parrot	6	Allandale Hospital	J.Meynell
<b>Oct. 3</b>	Superb Lyrebird	1	Spencer	J.Meynell
	Glossy Black Cockatoo	4	Spencer	J.Meynell
<b>28/30</b>	Diamond Dove (heard)	1	Ellalong	J.Meynell
	Rufous Scrub-bird	1	Gloucester Tops	A.Rogers
	Paradise Rifle Bird	2	Gloucester Tops	A.Rogers
	Olive Whistler	several	Gloucester Tops	A.Rogers
	Eastern Rosella	2+2dy	New Lambton Heights	I.Hamilton
<b>Nov. 14</b>	Spotted Harrier	1	Jerry's Plains	I.Hamilton
<b>17</b>	Nankeen Night Heron	1	Elernmore Vale	J.Imrie
	Mistletoebird	2	Greenhills	K.Priestley
<b>19</b>	Fairy Martin	many	Shortland	I.Hamilton
	White-breasted Wood Swallow	many	Shortland	I.Hamilton
	Peregrine Falcon	1	Shortland	I.Hamilton
	Grey Goshawk	1	Shortland	I.Hamilton
<b>23</b>	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2	Freeman's Waterhole	P.Durie
<b>24</b>	Pied Cormorant	1	Seaham Nature Reserve	N.Foster
<b>25</b>	White-bellied Sea-Eagle	2	Lake St. Clair	P.Alexander
<b>26</b>	White-winged Chough	2	Thornton	J.Smith
<b>27</b>	Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	East Maitland	P.McLaughlan
<b>29</b>	Musk Lorikeet	2	Toronto	P.Durie
<b>30</b>	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	2	S.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
<b>Dec. 1</b>	Whistling Kite (juvenile)	1	Belmont South	J.Cockerell
	Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	The Junction	M.Blanch
	Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	Kotara	M.Blanch
<b>2</b>	Australian Shoveller	2	S.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	2	S.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
<b>3</b>	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	6	Raymond Terrace	R.Smith
<b>6</b>	Whistling Kite	2+2dy	Gillieston Heights	K.Priestley
<b>8</b>	Regent Bowerbird	5	New Lambton Heights	I.Hamilton
	Grey Goshawk (white)	1	Mt. Vincent	G.O'Connor
	Superb Lyrebird	2	Mt. Vincent	G.O'Connor
<b>9</b>	Variiegated Fairy-wren	3	Mt. Vincent	I.Hamilton
<b>10</b>	Bar-shouldered Dove	3	Mt. Vincent	I.Hamilton
	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	3	Toronto	I.Hamilton
	Rainbow Lorikeet	7	Toronto	I.Hamilton
<b>11</b>	Channel-billed Cuckoo	2	Toronto	I.Hamilton
	Plumed Whistling Duck	2	Tarro	J.Smith
<b>12</b>	Marsh Harrier	1	Beresfield	J.Smith
<b>1996</b>				
<b>Jan. 14</b>	Grey Goshawk	1	New Lambton Heights	M.Hamilton
	Red-browed Finch	2	New Lambton Heights	M.Hamilton

## Cats, Dogs and Car Alarms in Our National Parks

"How did I sleep? Great, well pretty good but I heard dogs barking. They only barked for a short while but it was a little unnerving, and then the rustle in the bush around my tent, the car alarm first thing in the morning and the cats meowing".

I have heard this from many who have ventured into our National Parks and it doesn't take much to work out what they actually heard, especially when you know where they camped.

Our National Parks are the best place to experience wildlife but when you go, leave your city senses behind and listen to the bush. People who are unfamiliar with the Australian bush may become uncomfortable with its sounds, especially when they are only relying on their sense of hearing and of course the night does play tricks.

Go with someone who knows the bush well and your worries will be quickly replaced by awe or read about the animals

and plants that inhabit the area so you will know what to expect.

Now, for the noises. Although Australia has a growing problem with feral cats you will rarely see one in our National Parks and never hear them. They are far too cunning but we do have a magnificent bird with iridescent green plumage and white paired spots down its flight feathers that is easily mistaken for a cat. Not by its appearance but by its call. The aptly named Catbird's call is a loud meowing that is distinct. If you hear the call sit quietly and you may be rewarded by an actual sighting. If not the Catbird then possibly a Lyrebird. They mimic many noises especially other bird calls and may show themselves too if you are quiet.

The noises by day that may startle people include the rustling of leaf litter possibly made by Brush Turkeys turning over the leaves for morsels of food or in spring resorting their nests to

keep the temperature right for egg incubation, or by small skinks that always sound ten times larger than they actually are. Rustling sounds are rarely made by snakes. They move silently and are rarely heard

At night the bush comes alive with noise. Just after sunset Barking Owls awaken from their day-long rest and call. Their deep "WOOK-WOOK" is often mistaken for a dog's bark by the inexperienced. Then for the rest of the night they hunt in silence.

The things that go bump in the night are quite often Bandicoots or Wallabies hopping through the bush or Possums leaping from trees or off your table if you have left food out. The 'Hop-Hop-Rustle' of the Marsupial Mouse is very entertaining. Have a torch and binoculars handy for a close view of these miniature noise makers.

Lastly the 'Car Alarm'. Just before dawn it starts. The repetitive "WOO-WOO" of the large slatey grey Wonga Pigeon. How could a bird call for so long without taking a breath? Luckily their batteries go flat as the sun rises.

Next time you venture into our National Parks take along your bush ears and soak up the sounds of the Great Aussie Bush.

Leonie Hansen.

*Leonie occasionally joins her husband on his tours into the bush (Kaneley 4x4 Tours) and is always delighted by some of his guests comments about Australian birds in the bush.*

*Their interpretation of our bush sounds prompted the writing of this article.*

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and endangered species.

## Ramsar Convention 1996 in Brisbane

Many of us have heard about Ramsar and the fact that this year in mid March the Ramsar Conference will be held in Brisbane. But what is Ramsar? What does it stand for? and What is its role in the protection of waders and wetlands.

The following summary was printed in the Queensland Ornithological Society Newsletter recently and with their permission is largely reproduced here as explanation.

The original meeting at Ramsar on the Caspian Sea called for the establishment of a Convention for the protection of Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Wildfowl Habitat. This was in 1971. Australia was one of the first to sign and ratify the convention and has designated 40 sites in Australia as wetlands of international importance.

The Ramsar Convention defines wetlands as *areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water, the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.*

From the definition it is clear that wetland covers many types of habitats including coral reefs, salt marshes, sewerage works etc.

**Countries that become contracting parties must meet certain conditions:**

- agree to the common definition of wetlands
- nominate at least one wetland to the Ramsar list that meets the criteria
- conserve the listed wetland(s), including planning for appropriate land use at the site, monitoring ecological conditions, increasing waterfowl numbers and training staff appropriately to manage

the wetland effectively.

- promote wetland conservation within their borders, including declaring reserves over significant wetlands whether they are on the Ramsar list or not.
- participate in conferences to review the Convention and its implementation
- encourage wetland management agencies to implement the recommendations of the conferences.

The Ramsar Bureau which is its small business secretariat based in Switzerland, has the following responsibilities:

- maintaining an up-to-date Ramsar list and keeping contracting parties informed of any changes
- maintaining information on ecological changes to Ramsar sites
- organising conferences of the contracting parties
- ensuring all contracting parties are aware of the recommendations of conferences of contracting parties

Particular Ramsar Convention programs include:

- The Ramsar Data Base
- The Montreux Record (in 1990 Ramsar nominated sites suffering ecological threat)
- The Monitoring Procedure which watches over the status of wetlands
- The Wise Use Concept - this is particularly important in developing countries where sustainable wetland management policies must be developed.
- The National Wetlands Policies
- Wetland Conservation Fund
- \$300,000 is spent annually on small scale projects.

Articles for our Newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is  
29th March, 1996

Mail to: Tom Clarke 28 Kokera St, Wallsend 2287  
Phone: 513872 (h) 686316 (w) Fax: 686390

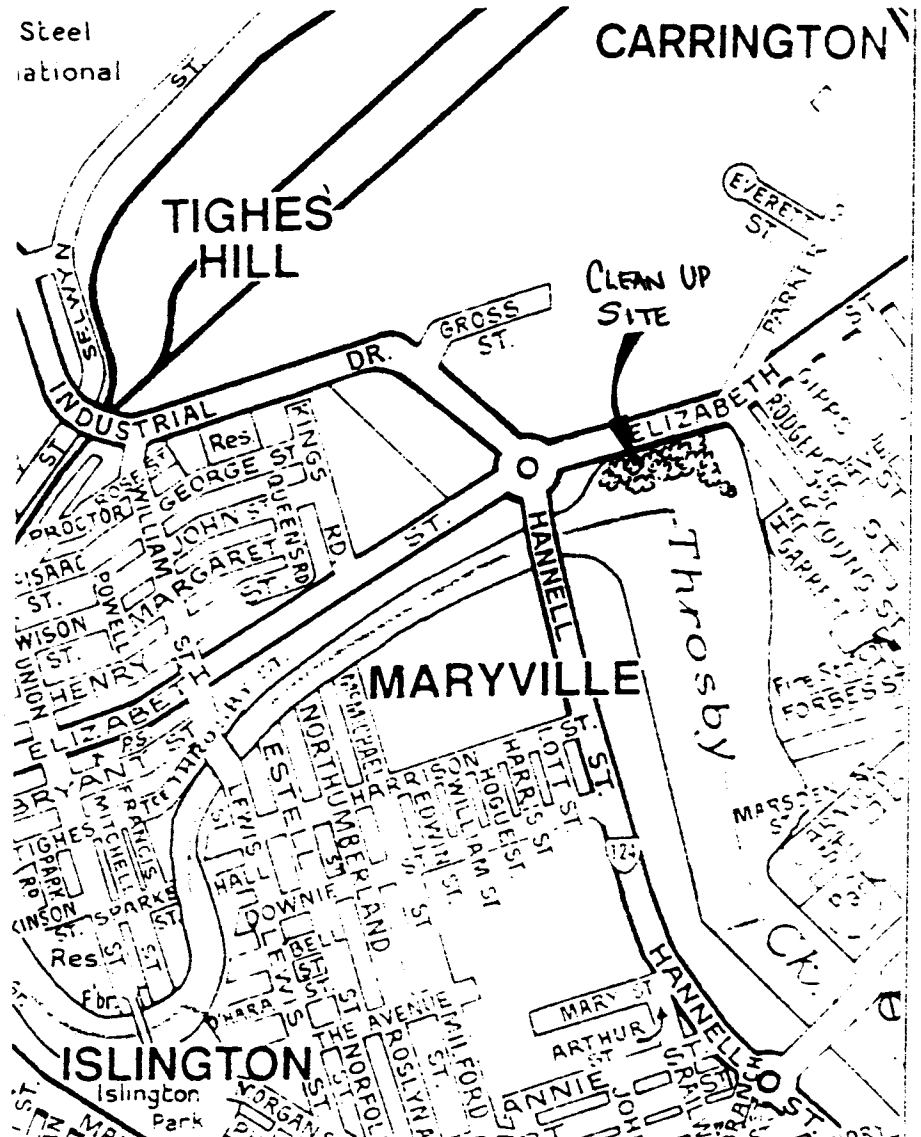
## Clean Up Australia Day - Throsby Creek Mangroves

Last year HBOC members got involved with this community program and had a great time cleaning up Ash Island and it was our intention to repeat the work this year. However, the Newcastle City Council has organised a Clean Up Industry Day for the weekend before Clean Up Day and has local industry doing their bit on Ash Island.

An alternate venue which needs plenty of attention is the mangrove area near Elizabeth Street, Carrington. You may have read just lately that a boardwalk through these mangroves has been completed by participants in the Throsby Land Care New Work Opportunity Project funded by DEET.

So HBOC's effort this year will still be amongst the mangroves but with a more urban backdrop. The real work will start at 11:00am at Carrington but as a prelude to this activity we will reward ourselves with some birdwatching. An 8:00am meet at Nobby's Beach Car Park will give us plenty of time to explore the birdlife of the rock platforms off the esplanade and around the Ocean Baths.

We look forward to another large roll up full of enthusiasm, so bring your mud runners, gloves, insect repellent and sunblock.



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# 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.

<b>Sunday 25th February</b>	<b>Field Day:</b>	Jerusalem Creek / Telegherry S.F.
	<b>Meet:</b>	McDonald's Raymond Terrace 6:30am Bandon Grove Shops 8:00am
	<b>Contact:</b>	Peter Phillips 547118
	<b>Leader:</b>	Bill Dowling
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<b>Saturday 2nd March</b>	<b>Regent Honeyeater Survey - Paterson River Valley</b>	
	<b>Meet:</b>	Park by the river at Paterson 7:30am
	<b>Leader:</b>	Ann Lindsay 512008
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<b>Sunday 3rd March</b>	<b>Clean Up Australia Day:</b>	Throsby Creek Mangroves 11:00am
	<b>Meet:</b>	Nobby's Beach Car Park 8:00am
	<b>Leader:</b>	Tom Clarke 513872
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<b>Tuesday 5th March</b>	<b>Midweek Outing:</b>	Stockton/Fern Bay
	<b>Meet:</b>	Stockton Sewerage Works 8:00am
	<b>Contact:</b>	Max Blanch 611655
<hr/>		
<b>Wednesday 13th March</b>	<b>Clubnight:</b>	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm
	<b>Main feature:</b>	Pelicans of Wallis Lake - David Turner (NPWS - Forster)
<hr/>		
<b>Sunday 24th March</b>	<b>Field Day:</b>	Awabakal Nature Reserve
	<b>Meet:</b>	Dudley Bluff Car Park 8:00am
	<b>Leader:</b>	Tom Clarke 513872
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<b>Tuesday 2nd April</b>	<b>Midweek Outing:</b>	Glenrock Lagoon S.R.A.
	<b>Meet:</b>	Yuelarbah Track Head 8:00am
	<b>Contact:</b>	Margaret Woods 633070
<hr/>		
<b>Easter Weekend 5th - 8th April</b>	<b>Camp:</b>	Schwagers Bore - Pilliga
	<b>Contact:</b>	Graeme O'Connor 531304
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<b>Wednesday 10th April</b>	<b>Clubnight:</b>	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm
	<b>Main Feature:</b>	Photographing Nature - A display of prints by Jim Thomson
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<b>Weekend 13th/14th April</b>	Shortland Wetlands Centre 10th Anniversary Celebrations Don't miss the displays and activities including Bird Walks conducted by HBOC volunteers.	
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<b>Sunday 21st April</b>	<b>Field Day:</b>	Tahlee/Carrington/North Arm Cove
	<b>Meet:</b>	McDonald's Raymond Terrace 7:30am
	<b>Leader:</b>	Graeme O'Connor 531304