

NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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President:	Ann Lindsey
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*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.*

Migratory Shorebirds, Ramsar Listings and Australia's Obligations. Club Night - June 12th 1996.

Main feature at the June meeting was a presentation by Prof. Max Maddock based on his experiences at the latest Ramsar Conference held in Brisbane in March 1996.

The Conference was attended by 1190 participants, made up from delegations of 91 Contracting Party Governments, 32 Observer states, 51 government organisations, 94 Non-Government Conservation Organisations, the Ramsar Secretariate, the Press and others. The official languages were English, French and Spanish.

The key issue for the Conference was the Ramsar Strategic Plan, formulated to guide the development of the Convention through to the year 2002 and clarification of guidelines on the selection of Ramsar sites and on the definition of 'wise use' of wetlands.

Max spoke of 'wise use' and its implications. "Some sections of the community treat the environment as something apart from us which must be protected at all costs, others see it as something from which we have to be protected or as a resource to be plundered and exploited for human gratification. Balancing human and environmental needs is sometimes promoted but

in practice often results in 99% for us and 1% for the environment. In a water resource management context of environmental flow allocations, this is a particularly contentious issue. Wise use is all about making sure that our share is ecologically sustainable and equitable. If our use is not wise, the wetlands will not be all that suffer - humankind will be far worse off as well."

Max attended the Conference as a delegate for the Australian Wetland Alliance, a coalition of 29 conservation organisations in Australia including the Shortland Wetlands Centre and the Australian Wader Studies Group. The Alliances "Position Paper" strongly urged that the most degraded of Australia's Ramsar listed sites should be listed on the Ramsar Montreux Record.

"It is not much use putting sites on the Ramsar list unless the proper measures are taken to ensure their integrity. Unfortunately, most countries are very remiss in this aspect, Australia included. Wader habitat at Moreton Bay, Port Phillip Bay, Towra Point and inland sites such as the Macquarie Marshes are all under some form of threat. Conflict between commercial and developmental interests and habitat conservation needs continually arise".

The Montreux Record worries beurocrats as it implies negligence and is the first step to removing the site from Ramsar status. The Government did not take this action at the conference, but accepted a strong resolution passed by the conference on future action for degraded wetlands in Australia.

Another significant event of the conference was the launch of the **East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Reserve Network**. Wetlands listed on the network lie within the East Asia-Australasian Flyway and are used by shorebirds for their annual migration between breeding grounds in north Asia and overwintering sites in Australasia. It includes sites in many countries along the way which are used as 'refuelling' stopover points during the long migration flight.

Bird of the Evening was an excellent account of the Australian kingfishers. Ed Hamonet's talk was mainly based on the magnificent Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher (*Tanysiptera sylvia*) of northern Australia and New Guinea but also dealt with kingfishers in general.

Ed explained the original (European) derivation of the term 'kingfisher' was from observations of 'royal' blue birds hunting fish in streams. Of ninety species world wide there are ten species of kingfisher living in Australia and only two of these fit the previous description. These are the *Alcedo* species, the Azure and the Little Kingfisher that most closely resemble the European River Kingfisher in their habitat preference and feeding biology.

The Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher was known for about 130 years as the White-tailed Kingfisher ever since John Gould described it

from field reports he acquired in the 1860s.

The two, long, white, central tail feathers are a stand out feature of this bird as they wave up and down while the bird is in flight. This gives the allusion of an undulating progression but in fact the bird is flying straight ahead.

These kingfishers arrive in north Queensland from New Guinea in early November and are reputed for their sudden appearance in the rainforests where they breed. One day the place has no kingfishers; the next day they have all turned up! At this time they are most attractive in their new plumage and look like so many large blue-and-white butterflies fluttering about below the canopy.

Ed described this birds nesting efforts in excavating termite mounds close to the ground where they risk predation by monitors and snakes. A feature of this bird's nesting habits is its apparent lack of hygiene. The nest chamber is never cleaned out and any food items (insects, frogs, lizards etc) dropped during feeding the chicks is left to decay. This can result in a revolting carpet of maggots and flesh flies; good incentive perhaps for fledglings to leave the nest.

Ramsar Sites of New South Wales and ACT.

There are now fifty Ramsar Sites in Australia, seven of which are within NSW and ACT.

Towra Point Nature Reserve
Kooragang Nature Reserve
Macquarie Marshes
Blue Lake - Kosciusko National Park
Little Llangothlin Nature Reserve
Lake Pinaroo
Ginini Flats

A Ramsar Listing alone does not ensure the protection, restoration or wise use of these areas.

Wetlands Day - The Not So Secret Treasures Of Shortland.

Field Outing June 23rd 1996.

Wetlands Day does not necessarily mean looking at birds at Shortland but in the last couple of years we have found it hard to ignore this area. Once again, the entire day was spent wandering about the Shortland Wetlands Centre and the adjacent Newcastle Wetland Reserve.

I'm not opposed to this at all; I can think of plenty of worse places to be on a Sunday; and the three hours it took for our group to dawdle around the centre was just the way I like to go birdwatching.

Recent rains have meant that plenty of water is in all the ponds and as a result most bird species were evenly spread about the place. The BHP Pond and the Brambles Pond were just full of waterbirds including Eurasian Coot, Dusky Moorhen, Pacific Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Hardhead and Australasian Grebe.

The Dusky Moorhen have enjoyed some breeding success and five young chicks were found following an adult about the reedy edges of the water. Sitting on top of a handrail a couple of motley looking Magpie Geese with dark bills tells us that these birds have bred lately as well.

Something to get really excited about was the discovery of two Pink-eared Duck and an Australasian Shoveler. With persistence and with the aid of a spotting scope most of the observers got close enough to admire the features of these waterfowl.

As an aside to birdwatching, our attention is taken up from time to time by giant sculptures placed about the wetland. What best can be described as a rope and pole construction resembling a huge hanging bird's nest, a giant crane made of corrugated iron and Shortland's version of a Loch Ness Monster add to the visual impact. A giant dragon-fly of wire and gauze was another wonderful surprise.

As we approached the marsh area, the calls of Striated Pardalote could be heard constantly. Eventually a pair is found inspecting and excavating a hole in the trunk of a melaleuca at about 4m above the ground. It was possible to get really close to these confiding birds but they went quiet for the duration of our brief occupation of their space. Left to their efforts the calling started

again as we made our way down the track.

Around the next bend we were lucky enough to encounter a pair of active White-cheeked Honeyeaters. These birds were busy feeding on flying insects and it was observed that they often returned to a favoured branch to consume the meal and wipe the beak. Further on and eight Nankeen Night Herons were found totally inactive as they sat about on lonely perches amongst the melaleucas.

Our wanderings finished with the threat of rain as some very dark clouds moved in. Just in time too as morning tea was taken under the awning of the centre as a tremendous downpour sent us racing for cover. A *bird call* at this stage registered 64 species for the morning.

The weather now was not conducive to good birdwatching as a fairly stiff breeze persisted after the storm, but despite that a reduced party of keen souls ventured over the road to the Newcastle Wetland Reserve.



Great Cormorants and Darters were found sitting on nests built in the trees standing in the water above and below the golf course dam wall.

In the air an Australian Hobby raced about the place and at one stage was seen chasing a Brown Falcon out of the area. Later on the falcon reappeared as well as a Whistling Kite which did its best to stir up the mad mob of Little Corellas that frequent the place.

The constant breeze had driven most birds to cover and new sightings were far and few between but a male Musk Duck on the golf course dam was a good reward for persistent endeavour.

Tom Clarke.

Birdo's Bonanza At Stockton Borehole Swamp.

Mid-week Outing, Tuesday 2nd July 1996.

Our first Mid-week Outing (what delightful decadence), but we suffered because the first hour or so was freezing. Ten hardy souls, led by Margaret and Keith Woods and Max Blanch met in the car park at Speers Point Swimming Pool.

We began with a highly productive wander around Speers Point Park, and recorded some 20 species in as many minutes. From there we made our way over the Five Islands Bridge, but only gave this area a cursory examination before we moved on because of the extremely soggy conditions under foot. Thus there are delights still to be savoured.

Into our cars and off to Teralba, more precisely to the large artificial lake that lies between the Teralba-Barnsley Road and the colliery, complete with trains and keep out signs (that we obeyed!), and morning tea.

And what a birdo's bonanza this lake proved to be; not so much because of the number of species (although we did pretty well) but because of the sheer numbers - one thousand plus Hardheads, seven hundred plus Chestnut Teal and fifty plus White and Straw-necked Ibis.

We then split up after about four hours of very enjoyable birding (verb) with a score of forty nine species. That's 4.9 per person or 12.25 per hour if you're a twitcher.

Bev & David Kibble.

NEW MEMBERS

The Hunter Bird Observers Club extends a very warm welcome to the following new members:

Lauren Brooks of Mayfield

Jill Bender of Newcastle

Lynne & Charles Vella of Lemon Tree Passage

we look forward to meeting you
at Clubnights and field outings during the year.

White Box Camp - Goulburn River National Park.

Queen's Birthday Weekend, June 1996.

The White Box area, a former timber-getter's camp, is within the Goulburn River National Park. As the name suggests the dominant vegetation is White Box. The surrounding forest includes casaurina, calitris and ironbark. The camp is in high country and is kilometres from the river. However, there is an abundance of firewood. Thanks to Ed. Hamonet who looked after our evening campfires. They were very much appreciated.

Twenty two members braved the wintery conditions. Is this a record for a June camp? On Sunday morning the temperature was zero at 7:30am. The days were very pleasant and good for walking and bird watching.

Notable among the observations were four Glossy Black Cockatoos which persistently sat crunching casaurina cones throughout Saturday and Sunday. Everyone had excellent views of them at "Cockatoo Corner".

Along the Wollar Road near the entrance to the camp, the really big old ironbarks were flowering and provided plenty of food for several species of honeyeater including approximately ten **Regent Honeyeaters**. These birds were very obliging and stayed around for most of Sunday so that once again everyone had good views of them feeding and moving about high in the pink blossoms.

Our President was so excited. For the first time in eighteen months of filling out Regent Honeyeater Survey Forms, she will be able to answer "YES".

Conspicuous by their huge numbers were Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters. There were Yellow-tufted and White-eared Honeyeaters in good numbers as well. Three Black-chinned Honeyeater and a single Crescent Honeyeater were spotted. Both Spotted and Striated Pardalotes were much in evidence and there were several beautifully coloured Variegated Fairy-wrens.

The number of species seen was not as many as at some camps but considering the dry nature of the area and few water birds the count of seventy two was quite satisfactory.

Kay Imrie.

Romancing The Stone (Curlew)

Club Night - July 10th 1996

Every birdwatcher has a favourite bird and it is quite often the case that the reasons for this is a result of close encounters with the particular species. We all remember with affection the experiences that have touched us personally and enriched our lives.

Liz Herbert has such an affinity with the Stone-curlews and it all came about during a sailing holiday last year up the Queensland coast.

Liz delivered the *Bird of the Evening* segment at our July meeting and described for us the magic of the sounds that came across the water from the shores and the bush.

The first encounter with the mournful wailing of the Beach Stone-curlew was while at anchor near Wave Break Island. This island is just a stones throw away from the bustle of the Gold Coast high rise but sitting in behind it with only the sounds of nature to interrupt the conversation, Liz felt far removed from civilisation.

After that, the Stone-curlews became a regular feature of her trip and seemed to pop up at most points of call. Both the Beach and the Bush Stone-curlew were encountered along the Queensland coast.

The Beach Stone-curlew (*Esacus neglectus*) can be found at most beaches and islands of tropical Australia from Point Cloates in Western Australia to Red Rock on the north coast of New

South Wales. Nesting pairs are less common south of the tropics and rare in NSW.



Bush Stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*) can be found over a wide range of mainland Australia but has suffered from habitat destruction near settled areas.

Liz showed us slides and played sound recordings of these wonderful birds that made her sailing holiday just that much more memorable.

Main feature at this Club Night was a slide show of Birds of Eastern Australia by well known photographer Greg Little. Greg was a member of the Hunter Bird Observers Club in its early days and some of his photographic work has featured in many publications.

Most slides shown were of birds that can be found locally and many had a good story behind the picture. Greg's method of attracting Emus by lying on the ground and waving a handkerchief resulted in a couple of great shots of an adult male and a troupe of striped youngsters.

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● Observations

Reports from the June meeting.

Jan-Feb '96

Pink-eared Duck	6	Seaham	N.Foster
		One pair nested and produced two fledglings.	

May '96

4th	Wonga Pigeon	1	New Lambton Heights	M.Hamilton
8th	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	1	Jesmond Bushland	P.Lightfoot
11th	Sacred Kingfisher	1	Stockton Bridge	A.Lindsey
12th	Grey Goshawk	1	Kotara South	P.Lightfoot
12th	Spangled Drongo	2	The Junction	M.Blanch
19th	Spangled Drongo	2	Shortland	A.Lindsey
19th/25th	Shining Bronze-cuckoo	1	Shortland	A.Lindsey
20th	Spangled Drongo	2	Nesca Parade	J.Moyse
23rd	Spangled Drongo	1	East Maitland	K.Priestley
25th	Spangled Drongo	1	Tenambit	N.Foster
29th	Spangled Drongo	1	Morisset	A.Lindsey

June '96

7th/8th	Spangled Drongo	1	Birmingham Gardens	A.Mahaffey
10th	Wedge-tailed Eagle	3	Denman	A.Lindsey
11th	Striated Heron	1	Fennell Bay	A.Lindsey

Reports from the July meeting.

June/July '96

June '96	Osprey (pair on nest)	2	Tanilba Bay	S.Chapman
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4th	Powerful Owl (heard only)	1	Halliday's Point	T.Peake
5th	Satin Bowerbird	1f	Halliday's Point	T.Peake
11th	Black-winged Stilt	300+	Woodberry	K.Priestley
14th	Sacred Ibis	79	Toronto	B.Kelly
16th	Whistling Kite	2	Woodberry	K.Priestley
17th	Australian Hobby	3	Cockle Creek	M.Newman
19th	Brown Falcon	4	Vacy	K.Priestley
20th	Australian Hobby	1	Broadmeadow	A.Lindsey
21st	Grey Goshawk	1	Kotara	A.Lindsey
24th	Pacific Baza	3	Charlestown	F.Thompson
24th	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	3	Belford	K.Priestley
25th	Wedge-tailed Eagle	2	Paterson	K.Priestley
27th	White-faced Heron	30+	Morpeth	K.Priestley
29th	Pacific Baza	1	Wangi Point	B.Kelly

July '96

1st	Brush Turkey	1	East Maitland	B.Geering
2nd	Pacific Baza	1	Valentine	D.Bone
4th	Australian Hobby	2	Raymond Terrace	K.Priestley
7th	Sooty Oystercatcher	1	Catherine Hill Bay	T.Gwatkin
10th	Pacific Baza	1	Fishing Point	M.Hamonet
	Spotted Harrier	1	Shortland	S.Hamonet

Just When You Thought You Had A Spare Weekend To Lounge Around And Do Nothing!

Gould's Petrel at Cabbage Tree Island.

Volunteers with banding experience are required to help out with this project. Banding activities will be carried out this season from October through to March as six individual banding efforts of seven days duration each.

For more details phone Michael Fendley at RAOU on (03) 9882 2622.

Beach Nesting Birds Survey.

The Australasian Wader Studies Group of the RAOU is conducting a coastal survey of beach nesting birds along the south east coast and would like as many people as possible to take part. The special emphasis this year is on Hooded Plover, Pied Oystercatcher and Little Tern.

The main weekend for the survey will be 16/17th November. However, if you cannot walk your beach on that date then a survey on the weekend 9/10th November will be accepted.

If you would like to contribute please contact Phil Straw on (02) 290 1810.

HBOC members please note that Peter McLauchlan (049) 333224 has volunteered to be our local coordinator.

Regent Honeyeater Surveys.

Don't forget that Regent Honeyeater Surveys continue at regular monthly intervals and are presently concentrating the effort around the Port Stephens area. Hopefully, this year's Swamp Mahogany blossom will be good enough to attract these rare birds to our region.

See "Comming Events" for Survey Dates in September and October. Survey leader is Ann Lindsey (049) 512008.

Please note that anyone intending to be part of these surveys should contact the leader prior to each outing to ensure that you do not miss out on last minute instructions or get left behind.

Regent Honeyeater Habitat Rehabilitation.

Organised working partys in the Capertee Valley Area are required for one day efforts to carry out fencing of remnant habitat as well as tree planting.

Also on offer in the Capertee Valley are regular surveys of the Regent Honeyeater during its breeding season.

For further information talk to David Geering or phone (049) 282636.

RAOU Twitchathon

Are you looking for a fun day's birding - with the chance to make a contribution to bird conservation? Why not enter the RAOU's annual Twitchathon, which runs for 24 hours from 4:00pm on Saturday 26th October.

The Twitchathon is a bird race, with participants being sponsored (by friends, businesses etc.) for the number of birds they record. Last year the Southern NSW and ACT group of the RAOU raised over \$10 000 (from 18 teams), with more than \$20 000 being raised nationally.

Money raised this year will go towards assisting Barren Grounds Bird Observatory and also the national "Woodlands Appeal", to save the birds of one of Australia's most threatened habitats.

Entries are being accepted now for teams of 3-5 people, who can enter one of the two categories. There is the 'Serious' event, where time for eating and sleeping is optional, and the 'Champagne' event where there is plenty of time allowed for everything. There will be good prizes such as binoculars, as well as the chance to make a significant contribution to bird conservation.

You don't have to be an expert. Contact David Geering (049) 282636 for further details and an entry form, and start getting your team members and sponsors organised.

RAOU - Birds On Farms Survey.

There are now over 100 farms being surveyed around Australia since the project has gone national. The project is on target to have a total of between 200 and 300 farms participating in the survey.

New farm surveys can still be started up until the end of this year. That will mean that the last surveys will be completed two years later at the end of 1998.

For every farm being surveyed there is an average of three 20 minute sites, which means that all up there will be about seven hundred survey sites in different habitat throughout Australia. With such diversity of habitats being surveyed it will be nice to find out which bird groups are associated with each habitat type.

The project is still low on ungrazed sites and sites where there is both over-story (tree canopy) and under-story (shrubs). If you are still selecting a site could you please consider this.

For further information write to Geoff Barrett, Coordinator, Birds on Farms Project, c/- RAOU, 415 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn East, Victoria 3123.

Or see Ann Lindsey (049) 512008 for Site Registration Forms and instructions on survey methods etc.

RAOU - BOP Watch (Bird Of Prey) Is On Again.

This scheme was previously run during the late eighties and secured a very good data base on our native raptors. Recommencing the BOP Watch project is seen as a great opportunity to provide wildlife managers with comparative information on the impact of Rabbit Calicivirus Disease induced rabbit declines on raptor populations.

Surveys are carried out while driving through the country side at normal highway speeds. If you would like to participate write to the BOP Watch Coordinator, RAOU, 415 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn East, Victoria 3123.

New South Wales Wader Study Group.

Regular bird banding sessions are carried out over the year at sites in the Hunter estuary. Stockton Sand Spit, Kooragang Island and Fullerton Cove are visited to trap and band migratory shorebirds such as Pacific Golden Plover, Terek Sandpiper and Eastern Curlew as well as endemic waders like Black-winged Stilt and Red-necked Avocet.

Previous banding experience is not essential for these weekend sessions. If you would like to be a part of this important study contact David Geering (049) 282636.

New Parrot Association To Form

A new special interest group devoted to the study of wild parrots in Australia, New Zealand and Oceania is to be formed within the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union.

The **BIRDS Australia Parrot Association** will focus interest on some of the region's rarest species, like the Kakapo and Orange-bellied Parrot, as well as some of the most abundant and difficult to manage, like the Long-billed Corella and Galah.

The Association will have a newsletter, 'Eclectus', run expeditions and projects and prepare policies on parrot-related matters.

The Association will also promote discussion and an exchange of ideas that should benefit many other bird species as well.

Forms for membership, which costs \$18 are available from the Membership Officer, BIRDS Australia Parrot Association, c/- RAOU, 415 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn East, Victoria 3123.

Request For Lorie Information.

Rosemary Low of England requires observations from anywhere of raptors attacking and/or capturing any species of Lories or Lorikeets for a book she is writing on these birds. Please send your observations to P.O. Box 100, Mansfield, Notts., NG20 9NZ,

No Excuses Now - Go For It.

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.

Tuesday 3rd September	Midweek Outing:	Hunter Region Botanic Gardens	
	Meet:	HRBG	9:00am
	Contact:	Keith Woods	633070
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Saturday 7th September	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Port Stephens Area		
	Meet:	Corner of Cabbage Tree Rd & Masonite Rd	at 7:30am.
	Leader:	Ann Lindsey	512008
		Please notify leader if you intend to go.	
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Wednesday 11th September	Clubnight:	Shortland Wetlands Centre	7:30pm
	Main feature:	Birds of Madagascar by Trevor Quedsted	
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Sunday 22nd September	Field Day:	Milbrodale	
	Meet:	Broke	7:00am
	Leader:	Sue Hamonet	581023
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Tuesday 1st October	Midweek Outing:	Shortland Wetlands Centre	
	Meet:	SWC	9:00am
	Contact:	Max Blanch	611655
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Weekend 5th-7th October	Camp:	Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve	
	Contact:	Graeme O'Connor	531304
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Wednesday 9th October	Clubnight:	Shortland Wetlands Centre	7:30pm
	Main Feature:	Bird Watching in Korea by Keith Laverick (To be confirmed)	
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Saturday 12th October	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Port Stephens Area		
	Meet:	Salt Ash Public School	at 7:30am
	Leader:	Ann Lindsey	512008
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Sunday 20th October	Field Day:	Stanhope Creek	
	Meet:	MacDonalds at East Maitland	6:30am
		Elderslie turnoff	7:00am
	Leader:	Sue Hamonet	581023
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Weekend 26th-27th October	1996 RAOU Twitchathon (See article in this Newsletter)		

This fundraising event will be followed by a Club BBQ at the Shortland Wetlands Centre from 5:00pm 27th October. Bring your own everything.
For more details see David Geering 282636.

Articles for our Newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is 27th September, 1996
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Phone: (049) 513872 (h) (049) 401537 (w) Fax: (049) 401575