

NEWSLETTER



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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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.

Family Day At Big Pond

Kooragang Island Field Outing - 19/1/97.

While it never was advertised as a family day, our outing to Kooragang Island certainly had a family feel about it. Keith Woods brought his brother Robert, Chris Herbert brought his parents and Micheal Kearns brought his mum. I think they enjoyed themselves despite the fact that they were primarily looking at waders; a group of birds that can puzzle experienced bird watchers. Yes I'm sure they went home enriched and that our collective efforts in identification resulted in a perfect score.

The "Big Pond" is looking less like a pond and more like a dry and barren waste land these days since the draining operation has taken place. First impressions is heart breaking as you realise that the pond's usefulness as a feeding ground has vanished for small waders like Marsh Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper and other shallow feeders such as Red-necked Avocet and Black-winged Stilt. Even the reeds about the edges and to the east are silent and do not conceal the likes of Clamorous Reed Warbler, Golden-headed Cisticola or Little Grassbird.

The persistent bird watcher is still rewarded with some gems (but certainly not in great numbers) however after carefully scanning the few remaining "wet bits" at the north end. Red-capped Plover were found dotted about the place in twos and threes. One family group containing a

female and a dependant youngster held our interest for some time. The little one still displayed a fair amount of fluffy down and, by running only, pursued the adult all about the place.

They were first noticed in the air as they approached the pond and wheeled about a couple of times before landing. A flock of about 70 Red-necked Stints were recognised after they had settled out in the middle of the open dried up area. As they landed several birds started to probe about the place and it seemed that they had come in to feed. Very quickly though, this behaviour cut out and a roosting attitude prevailed as they huddled together and sat down on their bellies.

By the time we had walked to the back of the pond we had also discovered a few Lesser Sand Plover. These birds were mixing it with the Red-capped Plover and it was demonstrated that a female of the later can be easily mistaken for the former in their non-breeding plumage.

Sitting on top of a power pole nearby a rather scruffy looking raptor turned into a Brown Falcon when it flew down to grab a bite to eat. The predator then returned to its perch to devour its prey as a small group of observers made entries in their note books. The rest of our party had missed it completely but had been preoccupied with White-fronted Chat, Zebra Finch and Double-barred Finch! So it was tit for tat and we all cursed what we had missed.

Back at Cormorant Road, a quick inspection of the long narrow pond revealed a mixed array of

cormorants, egrets and herons. The "improvement" of this area for wildlife has apparently begun and it will be interesting to see the results of this work.

The tide had turned and it was time to head off over to Stockton Sand Spit to look for more waders. Just about on cue (Paddy Lightfoot reckoned they were a minute late) the birds flew in from across the river but were never going to land where we had anticipated. The beach area where they like to feed had a group of humans pumping the mud for worms etc to use as bait for fishing. So it was that only through spotting scopes could we appreciate these birds as they opted for Plan B and landed on a small sandy island about 800m upstream.

Obvious types like Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel and Red-necked Avocet could only be accounted for from this distance. At closer range on the exposed oyster reef just in front of the mangroves, better views of Pacific Golden Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Lesser Sand Plover and Red-necked Stint. It was great to see the Pacific Golden Plover in good numbers as we counted 30 birds standing about on the reef. Every bird in view, of the migratory shorebird type, was in non-breeding plumage but through a scope at 20m still look neat and handsome to my mind.

The sweet warble of a Mangrove Gerygone issuing from a nearby mangrove attracted some of our group and after a short time of stealthy approach, two birds were found. One of the pair had secured a grub of some description which it held in its beak for the duration of its appearance. A new bird for the enthusiastic Micheal Kearns.

Downstream from the Stockton Bridge the oyster beds had attracted a couple of Pied Oystercatcher, a dozen Grey-tailed Tattler as well as a raft of Silver Gull, Common Tern and Crested Tern.

Tom Clarke.

Articles for our Newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is
29th March, 1997

Mail to: Tom Clarke 28 Kokera St, Wallsend 2287
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BIRDLINE NSW

(02) 9290 1778

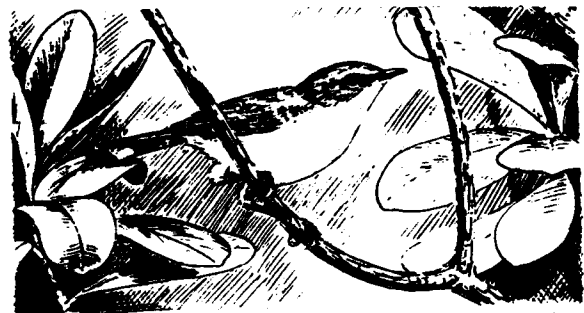
Please Note The New Number

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.



NEW MEMBERS

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

Mathew Bell of Wingham
Charlotte & Neville Brock of Maitland

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

Clean Up Australia Day - Stockton Sand Spit

Sunday, 2nd March, 1997

Previous efforts by members of HBOC on Clean Up Australia Day have been at wader habitats of some description and this year will be no exception.

The Stockton Sand Spit area is adjacent to the east end of Stockton Bridge and has been the focus of some major landscaping work just over a year ago. The main purpose of this work was to re-establish the site as a possible roosting area for various migratory shorebirds.

Unfortunately, this area is still regarded by some people as a good place to throw rubbish!

Also of concern is the constant pressure on this sand spit from invasive weeds, especially Spikerush. An effort in pulling up as many of these is planned for the day as well.

The area has been registered with the Newcastle City Council by the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project coordinator, Peggy Svoboda, as a designated clean-up site and collection support will be at hand for the day.

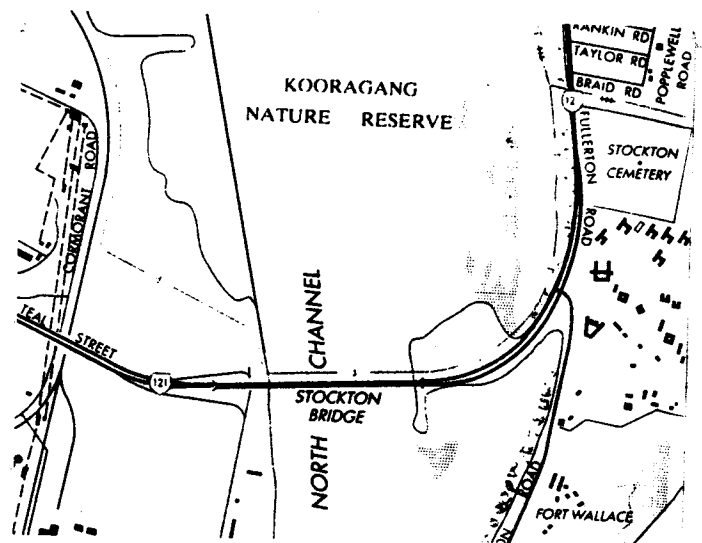
A large and enthusiastic crowd of bird watchers is called upon to attend to the job of cleaning up. Clean up work will begin at 8:30am and continue till about lunch time or for as long as there are people willing to help out.

All participants are required to bring their hats, gloves, boots and sunblock and register at the car park under the bridge prior to

commencing. A volunteer is also needed to manage the registration table for at least the initial rush at the start of the day.

And don't forget to bring your binoculars for some sneek birdwatching during rest periods etc. As a matter of fact, excellent viewing of waders may be obtained at this site from about 5:30am on the day.

For more information about this clean up day effort ring Tom Clarke on 513872.



Attract native birds to your garden with native plants from

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*Specialising in Native Plants
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OBSERVATIONS FROM DECEMBER MEETING

Oct				
18 - 21	Bush Stone-curlew	2+2 fy	Lemon Tree Passage	M. Blanch
22	Pied Oystercatcher	3	Pelican	M. Blanch
12 - 29	Pied Oystercatcher	11	Oyster Cove	M. Blanch
26	Owlet Nightjar	1	Wingen Village	G. Newling
Oct	Spotted Harrier	1	Between Tarro & Hexham	H. Tarrant
Oct 27	Peregrine Falcon	2	Hands Lagoon	H. Tarrant
Nov 28	Ruddy Turnstone	40	Newcastle Ocean Baths	P. Pountney
	Common Tern	6	Newcastle Ocean Baths	P. Pountney
Dec 26	Fairy Penguin	1	Lake Macquarie	Matthew Hamonet
			Between Coal Pt. & Fishing Pt.	
Nov 10	Great Crested Grebe	2	Walka Water Works	H. Tarrant
Nov 6	White-headed Pigeon	1	Bolwarra	H. Tarrant

The Magpies

When Tom and Elizabeth took the farm
The bracken made their bed,
And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle
The Magpie said.

Tom's hand was strong to the plough
Elizabeth's lips were red,
And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle
The Magpie said.

Year in year out they worked
While the pines grew overhead,
And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle
The Magpie said.

Elizabeth is dead now (it's years ago);
Old Tom went light in the head;
And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle
The Magpie said.

The farm's still there. Mortgage corporations
Couldn't give it away.
And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle
The Magpie said.

- Denis Glover

From "Stories Of Australian Birds" introduced by
Graham Pizzey.

This book is available from the HBOC Library; just
ask for HBOC No.81/85.

BUSH REGENERATION

A method adapted from that proposed by Joan Bradley

Bush regeneration is a long term program using minimal disturbance techniques with the aim of establishing self-sustaining bushland. As such, bush regeneration is made up of many short sessions of weeding. Weeding the bush is not the same as weeding the garden. In the garden we try to remove all the weeds from a bed in one go and are prepared to do the task over and over as new weeds appear. The following descriptions are taken from a Gould League publication entitled "Bush Invaders".

Pre-treatment

1. Choose your area.

When choosing the area to be regenerated within the overall bushland, care should be taken to relate this to the size and expertise of the team.

2. Identify the species.

It is essential not to remove any native plant species or leave any weeds. Be thorough in your identification!

- remove only those whose identity you are positive about.
- make your own reference collection. Dry and press specimens from your local area. Add a full written description. Include date collected, common name, botanical name, favoured location, flowering period, method of seeding and seeding period.

Treatment - Stage 1

3. Deal with the heavy seeders in the area first.

Such heavy seeders as Pampas Grass, Privet and Camphor Laurel should be the first to be removed from the area in which you intend to work. Removal of these will reduce successive maintenance by 50% or more. Lantana should also be removed at this stage.

4. Attend to trees and shrubs that are smothered with vines.

Vines encourage damp resulting in problems for the trees and can eventually kill. They also produce a dense canopy reducing light penetration. A small group of workers should remove the vines as quickly as possible by cutting them off at chest height and then removing the roots. It isn't necessary to get them off the trees as they will dry and drop.

Treatment - Stage 2

5. Begin where there is least weed infestation.

Work from the healthy bush moving towards the weeds. Seeds of the natives are already in the ground. Removing the weeds will favour the natives over the invaders and assist them to regenerate.

Beginning with areas that are heavily infested only assists the invaders. It is the seeds of these invaders that are present in the soil in these disturbed areas rather than those of natives. The increased light and water in such newly cleared areas

encourages weed growth.

Areas that are heavily weed infested and that are isolated from healthy bush may require a different technique such as total clearing and replanting with indigenous species.

6. Minimise soil disturbance.

Hand pulling of weeds is the best method to use as this minimises soil disturbance, prevents breaking the roots of adjacent natives and preserves native seedlings. For the same reasons, small hand tools such as trowels, secateurs and sharp knives are to be preferred to spades and mattocks. Before a large invader is removed conserve the mulch by sweeping it away from the digging site. On completion this should be replaced to discourage weed seedlings coming up in the bare patch of soil.

7. Remove all roots.

Many of the invaders have shallow roots and are readily removed by pulling. Large plants such as Lantana may need to be cut back with loppers and secateurs following which all the main roots thicker than a small finger's width must be removed from the soil. In the case of small leafed privet, all roots must be removed.

8. Remove all weeds from the area.

It is essential to carry out all:

- bulbs, tubers, rhizomes.
- seed heads - these should be carried out in a plastic bag to prevent their spread.
- plants that root at the nodes. Common example are couch, kikuyu and buffalo grasses. Also Wandering Jew, Honeysuckle, Ivy and Jasmine.

9. Mulching.

It is preferable not to mulch with the weeds themselves. Heavy weed infestation is an indication that the soil and water are likely to be highly enriched. Using these as mulch retains the nutrients on the site making it unsuitable for many of our native species, especially the drier sclerophyllous types. However, if it is impossible to remove the weeds from the site or no natural mulch is available, break them into small pieces and scatter widely. Heavy mulching with introduced mulch should be avoided as this keeps the moisture in the soil and inhibits the re-establishment of the native plant community.

10. Allow regeneration to dictate the rate of clearing.

Clearing must be geared to regeneration. Never over clear as this can result in new weed infestation and require time consuming follow-up. Better results can be achieved by spreading the effort to a number of small areas rather than concentrating all the effort in one area.

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 23rd February	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Barrington House McDonald's Raymond Terrace 6:30am Rowley Smith 641389
Saturday 1st March	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Paterson River Valley Meet: Leader:	Tucker Park, Paterson 6:30am Ann Lindsay 512008 Intending participants must ring to confirm.
Sunday 2nd March	Clean Up Australia Day: Meet: Contact:	Stockton Sand Spit 8:30am Stockton Bridge Tom Clarke 513872
Tuesday 4th March	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Swansea North of Swansea Bridge 8:00am Max Blanch 611655
Wednesday 12th March	Clubnight: Main feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm Natural history of our shorelines - Keith Davey
Sunday 23rd March	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Blackbutt/ Jesmond area The small park with the reservoir at the the top of Ridgeway Rd, New Lambton Heights. (Just up from the John Hunter roundabout) 8:00am Paddy Lightfoot 521820
Easter Weekend 28th-31st March	Camp: Contact:	Widden Valley Graeme O'Connor 531304
Tuesday 1st April	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Ash Island McDonald's Hexham 8:00am Margaret Woods 633070
Saturday 5th April	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Paterson River Valley Meet: Leader:	Tucker Park, Paterson 7:00am Ann Lindsay 512008 Intending participants must ring to confirm.
Wednesday 9th April	Clubnight: Main Feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm Ecology of the rainforest - Theo Tasoulis
Sunday 20th April	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Main Creek/ Dungog area McDonald's Raymond Terrace 7:30am Ann Lindsey 512008
Anzac Day Weekend 25th-27th April	Camp: Contact:	Swans Crossing Sue Hamonet 581023