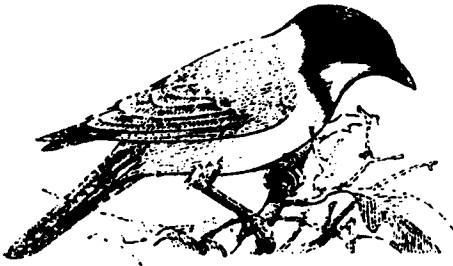


NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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

Telephone: (049) 585942



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.

Wandering All Over The Hay Plains

April Club Night

A recent birdwatching trip to the Deniliquin area presented Peter Phillips with a great opportunity to see Plains Wanderer *Pedionomus torquatus* in its natural habitat. Peter did get to see this rare bird and happily shared his experiences by presenting the species as *Bird of the Evening*.

Plains Wanderers were once thought to be related to the button quails and are similar in some respects but have a hind toe like true quails. Other aspects of its biology like head shape, bill, egg and some behaviour resemble the plovers. Regarded by some as an aberrant shorebird it has been argued that they are not really quite like any other bird and so it is a single species in its own family.

To see a Plains Wanderer, you apparently have to go out at night in the back of a ute with a spotlight and drive around for ages in the dark. This is Peter's experience anyway and it did prove to be successful. Eventually Peter was fortunate to find the bird out in the middle of some flat sparse country but with no idea at all where he was.

Seeing this bird in daylight is just about impossible as their plumage is a very effective camouflage amongst the patchy stubble of the plains.

The Plains Wanderer is regarded as vulnerable these days as their original range has shrunken greatly. Biggest destroyer of their preferred habitat has been the cultivation of the land for agriculture (especially wheat) and over the

last century has seen this bird disappear from the coastal areas. The Riverina district is today regarded as the stronghold for this bird where it exists on a diet of seeds and insects.

Peter also described the calls of the female as a mournful bovine 'moo', while the smaller male of the species utters a soft 'cluck'.

In total contrast to the Hay Plains, the main feature for the evening was a lesson in the natural history of rain forests. Local naturalist and reptile expert, Theo Tasoulis, shared his detailed knowledge of the Barrington Tops and adjacent forests.

Theo's obvious love of snakes, snakes and more snakes was the centre of much of his presentation with many wonderful slides and skeletal remains to hand around for closer examination. Birdwise, an example of a young male Superb Lyrebird's lyrate feather was also on display for all to admire.

In describing the various habitats within the forested areas in and around Barrington Tops, Theo sees the birdlife as groups relating to selective feeding niches. Theo classified birds as *Litter rakers* - lyrebirds, pittas; *Insect eaters* - fantails, scrubwrens; *Gleaners of leaves* - gerygones, thornbills; *Fruit eaters* - pigeons; and *Raptors* in which he includes both diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey.

Theo stressed the importance of the litter rakers and describes these bird's actions as absolutely critical for the turn over of nutrients and the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem.

Weed Watchers Required At Wader Wonderland.

Stockton Sand Spit is regarded by many birdwatchers (local and visiting) as a great place to see large numbers of waders of many species. Birds such as Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover and Grey-tailed Tattler are just some of the migratory shorebirds likely to frequent the place. Other wading types like White-faced Heron, Red-capped Plover and Red-necked Avocet are just as much a part of this typically estuarine habitat complex.

Unfortunately, this area had slowly become less attractive for these birds, especially the shorebirds that once used the sand spit as a roosting site, as saltmarsh was invaded by Spiny Rush and Bitou Bush and tidal flats colonised by mangroves.

Major landscaping work was carried out to improve the amount of tidal flushing and this immediately got rid of the invaders (weeds). However, the weeds are relentless and once again are threatening further invasion. Regular follow up weeding sessions are required to keep some control and since HBOC members have a clear interest in the state of this area the club has decided to be involved with this action.

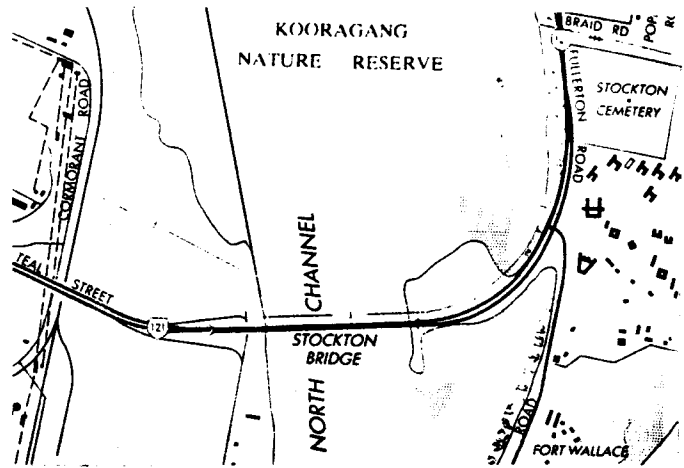
At this stage, two dates have been chosen as weeding days - 6th July and 2nd November. These days will compliment our efforts in March on "Clean Up Australia Day" when HBOC joined forces with Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project personnel in a monumental effort.

Anyone wishing to participate can do so by presenting themselves on the day, dressed suitably for work in the sun and if you have some favourite digging/weeding tools or equipment by all means bring them with you.

Appropriate instructions and/or tools (if you don't have any) will be issued to each individual prior to ripping into it so that a planned and coordinated effort can be achieved.

Starting and finishing times as well as the extent of your effort is up to the individual and no-one will mind if a bit of birdwatching distracts you. The main thing is that you do turn up and register your attendance.

For further information or suggestions please speak to Tom Clarke on 513872.



NEW MEMBERS

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

Jan Pietraszek
and
Janice Simmons of Aberdeen

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

Introduction To Elementary Birdwatching

A course in the techniques of identification.

Organised and conducted by Peter Phillips and Ann Lindsey, the course will be held at the Shortland Wetlands Centre on 14th September, 1997. This is a great opportunity for those with a burgeoning interest in birds and with a mind to make birdwatching a hobby they can enjoy.

The course will include a morning lecture covering bird identification skills and techniques and instruction on the various habitat types within the grounds of the centre. After lunch an afternoon 'bird walk' about the wetlands accompanied by other experts from HBOC, will test the theory and this will be followed by a 'post mortem' session to compare notes and experiences.

All you need to bring is a note book and pencil and your own binoculars if you have them.

All enquiries about registrations etc should be directed to Donna Marshall of the Shortland Wetlands Centre on 516466.

Out Of Africa - Ann On Safari.

HBOC President Ann Lindsey has recently visited Africa on an animal watching holiday and her recalling of that experience provided the bulk of the May Clubnight.

Ann was accompanied by her daughter and the seasoned African traveller, David Bishop and family for a colossal 51 nights through Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. This trip of a lifetime was described as exhausting, exciting and full of fabulous opportunities to see heaps of new birds.

Ann restricted her presentation to the Kenyan leg of the trip which saw the party follow a circuit from Nairobi through most of the significant land forms of that country. Famous places like Thika, Mount Kenya, Rift Valley and Lake Victoria all had something different to admire, not least the hundreds of bird species that Ann had to work so hard to identify.

Of particular interest to her were the weavers. There are ninety odd species of weavers and most of them are yellow-and-black birds of various combinations and they all weave slightly different shaped nests. Weavers are birds of the grassy savanna and build great colonies of their complex nests in trees or thornbush. With so many combinations of plumage pattern and nest shape, identifying many of these birds is a real challenge.

Other birds however were much easier like the Helmeted Guinea-fowl, a Long-tailed Widow-bird in breeding plumage and the spectacular Crowned Crane.

Ann's group visited many National Parks and Nature Reserves and this is apparently done with the escort of an armed guide. Partly for the protection of the tourists (in case of trouble with various wild beasts) and partly for the protection of the animals (from humans). Poaching of White Rhinoceros and Elephant still continues and a shoot first, ask questions later approach would be poachers is the locally recommended procedure. A curfew is adhered to and anyone found in a National Park after 6pm is assumed to be a poacher!

Everywhere Ann went there were more birds to see as well as the spectacular African scenery. In the more mountainous areas, Ann managed to spot several species of sunbird, the unusual Forest Ibis and some strange habitat

dominated by giant heather and misty bogs.

And a visit to Africa is just not complete without a look at the soda lakes of the Rift Valley with their great flocks of flamingo and avocets.

Bird of the Evening for the May Clubnight was the very topical Orange-bellied Parrot, *Neophema chrysogaster*. David Kibble gave the presentation of this rare bird which is facing more pressure from habitat destruction in its wintering grounds in Victoria.

The Orange-bellied Parrot breeds on the western coast of Tasmania south of Macquarie Harbour and migrates to the southern coastal areas of mainland Australia for winter. At that time it is dispersed in small groups but most individuals winter around the shores of Port Phillip Bay. An estimated 50% to 70% of the known population, which could be less than 200 individuals, congregate at three sites in western Port Phillip Bay - Murtcain Wildlife Management Area, Lake Connewarre and Swan Bay.

Here they feed on seeds of plants in saltmarsh and along beaches and because other species of *Neophema* can show orange abdominal markings they may be easily mistaken at a glance. The most reliable field character is its unique alarm call and David played a tape recording of this rapid buzzing sound.

Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) is a listed Ramsar site and needs to be protected from the adverse impacts of unwise use. The Murtcain Wildlife Management Area had been established with the support of the four main landholders of the Avalon area. This includes the Victorian Government which has forgotten its responsibilities lately when it announced the establishment of a chemical storage facility at Point Lillias. This decision has prompted many conservation groups to voice their concern and HBOC has submitted its objections.

There is a lot of interest in protecting the Orange-bellied Parrot from extinction and a Recovery Plan established in the 1980's continues to be implemented. This includes habitat management by government conservation authorities and population counts by volunteer birdwatchers. People wishing to be a part of the Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Plan can volunteer to carry out coastal surveys (Victoria or South Australia) during the winter or become volunteer wardens at remote Melaleuca (Tasmania) for 2 weeks at a time over summer to observe breeding efforts.

OBSERVATIONS FROM APRIL MEETING.

Feb 26	Satin Bowerbird	6	Ellalong	J.Meynell
	Southern Boobook	Road kill 1	Bolwarra	H.Tarrant
Mar 1	Australian Hobby	2	Walka Water Works	"
Mar 2	Brown Quail	1 f.	Mungo Brush Rd.	M.Newman
Mar 3	Red-rumped Parrot	52	Woodville	"
Mar 4	Dollarbird	1	Woodville	"
Mar 8	Peregrine Falcon	1	Bolwarra	H.Tarrant
	Brown Goshawk	1 imm.	Bolwarra	"
	Hoary-headed Grebe	1	Walka Water Works	"
	Tawny Grassbird	6	Walka Water Works	"
Mar 9	Zebra Finch	2+5 imm.	Bolwarra S.T.W.	"
Mar 15	Rufous Fantail	1	Woodville	M.Newman
Mar 16	Chestnut-rumped Heathwren	1	Finchley Lookout, Yengo N.P.	"
Mar 11	Pacific Baza	2	North Arm Cove	B.Mollar
Mar 13	Pectoral Sandpiper	5	Kooragang Is. Big Pond	Clarke/Lindsey
	White-fronted Chat	20	" " "	"
	Zebra Finch	2	" " "	"
Mar 15	Grey Goshawk	1	Belmont North	A.Stuart
Mar 17	Sooty Oystercatcher	4	Newcastle Ocean Baths	"
Mar 18	Glossy Black Cockatoo	2	North Arm Cove	"
Mar 23	Rainbow Lorikeet	2	New Lambton Heights	M.Hamilton
	Nankeen Night-heron	1 juv	Woodville	M.Newman
	Tawny Frogmouth 2	2	Woodville	"
Mar 23	Great Crested Grebe	1 + 1dy	Walka Water Works	H.Tarrant
Mar 23	White-faced Heron	17	Stockton Beach	K.Gibson
Mar 23	Pomarine Jaeger	adult +juv.	Caves Beach/Blacksmiths	J.Davies [per S.W.C.]
Mar 24	Striated Heron	imm.	Warners Bay	R.Walker
Mar 30	Regent Honeyeater	4+	Ellalong	J.Meynell
Mar 31	Little Eagle	1	Wingen	G.Newling
Apr 1	Great Egret	1	Wingen	"
Apr. 3	Southern Emu-wren	2	Myall Lakes N.P.	D.Kibble
Apr 4	Little Corella	200+	Buttaba	R.Waymark
Apr 4	Turquoise Parrot	2	Goulburn River N.P.	H.Tarrant
Apr 5	Spangled Drongo	1	Stockton	E.Felton
Apr 6	Collared Sparrowhawk	1 imm	Green Wattle Ck. Woodville	M.Newman
	Black Kite	1	Aberdeen	G.Newling
Apr 11	Peregrine Falcon	2	Wingen Village	"
	Whistling Kite	1	Aberdeen	"
	Black Kite	1	Aberdeen	"
Apr 12	Whistling Kite	2	Muswellbrook	"
Apr 13	Wedge-tailed Eagle	2	Wingen Village	"
	Peregrine Falcon	2	Wingen Village	"
Apr 14	Spotted Harrier	1	Bayswater Colliery, Muswellbrook	"

OBSERVATIONS FROM MAY MEETING

Apr 22	Red-capped Robin	6+	Bulga	A.Lindsey
	Hooded Robin	2	"	"
	Western Warbler	3+	"	"
	Weebill	20+	"	"
	White-backed Swallow	5	"	"
	Yellow-faced H/E.	2,450	"	"
23	Ruddy Turnstone	10	Newcastle Baths	M.Kearns
	Sooty Oystercatcher	3	"	"
	Australasian Gannet	1	"	"
25	Eastern Whipbird	Pr	Fennell Bay	M.Carmody
	Brown Goshawk	1	Beresfield	D. Biddle
	Little Pied Cormorant	150+	Lower Myall River	M.Kearns
	Pacific Black Duck	100+	" " "	"
	Bar-shouldered Dove	3	" " "	"
26	Rufous Fantail	1	Violet Hill . Myall Lakes N.P.	"
	White-bellied Sea-eagle	2+1 imm	Myall Shores N.P.	"
	Silvereye	50+	Violet Hill. Myall Lakes N.P.	"
27	Black Swan	200+	Lake Boolambayte/M.L.N.P.	"
	Musk Duck	2	" " "	"
	Little Lorikeet	6	Myall Shores N.P.	"
	Pacific Black Duck	20+8dy	" " "	"
	Blue-faced Honeyeater	5+ 1juv	" " "	"

27	Spangled Drongo	1	Taylor's Beach, Port Stephen	M.Kearns
26	White-headed Pigeon	30	Eagle Reach, Vacy	P.Lightfoot
21	Regent Honeyeater	10+	Ellalong village	J.Meynell
22	" "	3	" "	"
23	" "	4	" "	"
26	" "	2	" "	"
22	Royal Spoonbill	30	Ellalong Lagoon	"
May 5	White-winged Chough	23	Ellalong	"
	Great Crested Grebe	12	Walka Water Works	J.Stephenson
	[includes pr +4 dy & pr + 1 dy]			
8	Tawny Frogmouth	1	Ellalong	"
12	Turquoise Parrot	2	Pelton/Ellalong Rd.	"
12	Spangled Drongo	1	Marmong Point	D.Kibble
9	Darter	1	North Creek, Warners Bay	R.Walker
10	Swamp Harrier	2	Williamtown	"
13	Crimson Rosella	2	Blackbutt	"
11	Brown Cuckoo-dove	1	Blackbutt	P.Lightfoot
May 1	Crimson Rosella	3	Nesca Pde. Newcastle	J.Moyse
2	Crested Hawk	3	Newline Rd. Clarendtown	L.&J. Storm
3	Yellow-tailed Black C'too	30	Tomago	A.Lindsey
10	Spangled Drongo	1	Shortland	"
13	Rainbow Lorikeet	70+	Tanilba Bay	M.Kearns
	Red-rumped Parrot	40	" "	"
	Bar-tailed Godwit	1	" "	"
	Eastern Curlew	1	" "	"

Attract native birds to your garden with native plants from

Newcastle Wildflower Nursery



260 Lake Road, Glendale
Telephone: 54 5584

*Specialising in Native Plants
For All Australian Gardens*

A small nursery with a wide range of plants including:

Banksias Bottle Brush Kangaroo Paws Grevilleas Tree Ferns Ground-covers

Bird attracting plants AND many rare and endangered species.

Kerewong State Forest A Haven For Passerines.

Club Camp at Swans Crossing
Anzac Day Weekend 1997

Swans Crossing has never before been visited by HBOC on either a field outing or a camp but the area is familiar to our famous Twitchathon team the Hunter Thickheads. It was on their recommendation that the club have a camp at Swans Crossing because they had previously seen many species there during the Twitchathon.

And they were correct! This place was crawling with birds since most species were represented in pretty good numbers.

To get to Swans Crossing is not such a difficult task at all. You simply travel up the Pacific Highway to Kew, turn left and follow the signs. Swans Crossing is within the Kerewong State Forest on Upsalls Creek and a fairly large camping ground is just nearby. The camp is well established and I got the impression that at other times it could prove to be fairly crowded. Our camp enjoyed a relatively peaceful time of it and for the most part the trails about the place were only being explored by birdwatchers.

I personally found the bird watching very satisfying and even as you sat around the camp at meal times the observing continued. Lunchtime on the Sunday was augmented by the arrival of a pair of Restless Flycatcher. Both birds kept pretty close to each other as they made their way from tree to tree. At one stage it was possible to get to within just 10m of them for a tremendous view of a bird that I haven't had much experience with.

One of the best birdwatching spots that I found was along a trail that led from the camp away from the creek and steadily climbed the end of a spur. Up there my first bird sighting through binoculars was a quiet Pale-Yellow Robin. I had only just left the camping ground after an early breakfast and over my shoulder I could still see children running about the camp chasing a couple of poor unfortunate guinea-fowl. Anyway the robin sat still for me on a thin branch and uttered a short 'chirp' as if to say 'welcome to the real world'.

Satin Bowerbirds were calling and moving about the tree tops that morning and eventually I managed to latch onto a female sitting on a high branch overhanging the track. It looked great in the morning sunlight - its patterns and barring of

green, yellow and brown contrast beautifully and are interesting to the eye.

The forest was full of birds actively feeding and calling and all within a couple of hundred metres of the camp. At one particular spot I could hear the calls of many different birds; Eastern Whipbird, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Pied Currawong, Lewin's Honeyeater, Grey Shrike-thrush, Crimson Rosella, Green Catbird, Laughing Kookaburra and Satin Bowerbird. This was accompanied with all sorts of clicks and chips and the performance lasted for about ten minutes. It was of course just one bird, the Superb Lyrebird.

A little while later another performance added Grey Butcherbird, Golden Whistler and that sound that only lyrebirds can make, the one that conjures up images of water dripping into a tank - 'boyink'. After all that, I was left wondering about the validity of some of my 'heard only' recordings in my note book.

Another brilliant spot I found was somewhere north of the camp where I sat on a comfortable stump at the edge of a small clearing for a rest and some morning tea. During this time I was entertained by the comings and goings of Yellow-throated Scrubwren and Large-billed Scrubwren, both species being happy to forage quite close to a resting birdwatcher content to sit quietly in the bush and watch the passing parade.

Below Swans Crossing the 'Cascade Trail' follows the creek to a set of low falls over a rocky clearing. The walk along the creek produced some excellent birdwatching as well. Lots of small passerines such as White-browed Scrubwren, Variegated Fairy-wren and Brown Gerygone were seen along this trail.

Of particular interest to myself was the behaviour of a male Rose Robin which appeared on a branch a few metres in front of me and at about 3m above the ground. With no apparent intention of flying off, this bird carried on with what I can only describe as some sort of display. The action was a repeated opening and closing of alternate wings in a quick flicking motion. Occasionally both wings were flicked open but for the main it alternated one then the other. I could not decide if the bird was agitated at all but it kept up the display for a minute or two and then flew off. I have since looked up a few different texts but have failed so far to discover the meaning of this semaphore. Another mystery yet another wonderful moment watching birds.

Tom Clarke

Gould League Bird Study Camp

This year's camp will be held at

Currawinya National Park

from 30th September to 9th October 1997.

Suitable for all ages and expertise.

For further details please contact the organiser

Ann Lindsey

37 Long Crescent, Shortland 2307

Ph: 512008

Minder Required For Birds On Farms Project.

Harold Tarrant is currently conducting bird count surveys on a farm just north of Dungog on the Fosterton Loop Road. A 40ha area has been registered and several survey outings have already occurred.

Harold unfortunately will be away for possibly 12 months and is keen to have a stand-in birdwatcher maintain the survey for that time. What is required is three 2 hour visits over next spring, summer and autumn.

Anyone interested in carrying out these surveys should ring Harold Tarrant on 301054 before the end of July to secure the job and to receive relevant instructions.

HBOC Conservation Committee

is an ad hoc group that meets once a month on the first Wednesday night of the month at 7:30pm at Garden Suburb Public School. This is also the same time and venue as the Management Committee meets.

All members are welcome to attend and are encouraged to do so. All enquiries should be directed to the Conservation Officer, David Kibble on 585537.

Articles for our Newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is 2nd August, 1997

Mail to: Tom Clarke 28 Kokera St, Wallsend 2287
Phone: (049) 513872 (h) (049) 401556 (w) Fax: (049) 401575

Bus Trip to Harrington

Field Day, Sunday 21st September, 1997

\$25 per person return from Shortland.

To avoid disappointment, secure your seat on the bus as soon as possible and join in the fun. Tickets are available from Rowley Smith and it is a case of first in best dressed.

The bus will be leaving the Shortland Wetlands Centre at 6:00am sharp and returning by 5:00pm.

Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Plan Volunteers.

If spending a fortnight in remote Tasmania watching the breeding efforts of one of the world's rarest birds inspires you or you can help out with winter surveys in Victoria or South Australia then you should contact;

Michael Fendley
Threatened Bird Network, RAOU
415 Riversdale Road
Hawthorn East 3123
Ph. (03) 9882 2622

Megapodes: Serious Adventures for Science and Conservation.

Little Dessert Lodge, Nhill, Victoria.

The Third International Megapode Symposium on 6th-8th December 1997 will bring together the world's foremost authorities to discuss all the latest on this unique family of birds. The 3 day event will include a wide variety of presentations, field trips, entertainment and free time to enjoy the mallee.

Registration is \$50 and accommodation is \$130 per day all inclusive.

For further information and application forms write to:

Dr Darryl Jones
Megapode Specialist Group, Faculty of
Environmental Sciences
Griffith University
Nathan, Queensland 4111.

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 22nd June	Field Day:	Wetlands Day
	Meet:	Teralba Post Office 8:00am
	Leader:	Ann Lindsey 512008
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Tuesday 1st July	Midweek Outing:	Stockrington
	Meet:	Seahamton 8:00am
	Contact:	Margaret Woods 633070
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Saturday 5th July	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Salt Ash area.	
	Meet:	Cr. Masonite Rd & Cabbage Tree Rd Williamtown 7:30am
	Leader:	David Geering 282636 Intending participants must ring to confirm
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Sunday 6th July	Weed Watchers:	Stockton Sand Spit 9:00am (See article in this newsletter)
	Contact:	Tom Clarke 513872
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Wednesday 9th July	Clubnight:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm
	Main feature:	Diane Fraser - Godwits On The Tundra
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Sunday 20th July	Field Day:	Mulbring/Colliery Dam
	Meet:	Mulbring Sports Ground 8:00am
	Contact:	Tom Clarke 513872
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Saturday 2nd August	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Tanilba Bay area.	
	Meet:	Salt Ash Public School 7:30am
	Leader:	Ann Lindsey 512008 Intending participants must ring to confirm
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Tuesday 5th August	Midweek Outing:	Jesmond Park
	Meet:	Robinson Ave Car Park 8:00am
	Contact:	Max Blanch 611655
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Wednesday 13th August	Clubnight:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm
	Main Feature:	Dr Richard Kingsford - What Makes Kooragang Island Tick?
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Sunday 24th August	Field Day:	North Arm Cove/Tahlee
	Meet:	McDonalds Raymond Terrace 7:00am
	Leader:	Graeme O'Connor 531304
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Saturday/ Sunday 30th/31st August	S.G.A.P. Wildflower Spectacular at Shortland Wetlands Centre	
	HBOC volunteers required for display stand and/or Bird Walks.	
	Recruitment:	Tom Clarke 513872