

# 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.*

## International Visitors To Shortland Wetlands

There was great excitement in early January 1998 when after an early morning walk in the wetlands I discovered a Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* on Reed Marsh. I thought for a split second that it was a pipit but then noticed the following features: long tail relative to the body, plain brown upperparts - no streaks, dots, scallops etc - white underparts with minimal, incomplete necklace, striking white eyebrow, white outer tail feathers and dark central tail feathers, black bill and legs.

As I was noticing these features, it did what all Motacillid wagtails do, it quivered its tail up and down. I suppose Willie Wagtails were named after these "original" wagtails, but their movements are quite different.

At this stage I was beside myself with excitement and trepidation (in case I was wrong) and after having written down as many features as possible, I dashed home to the books. Armed with more information I walked calmly back to Reed Marsh where it was still cooperatively sitting on the same piece of reed stubble. Incredible!

Because of the relative rarity of the Yellow Wagtail in the Hunter (Tom Clarke saw a coloured bird at Kooragang Island in February 1993) I realised I needed someone else to see it as well. Again I dashed home to ring Sue Hamonet who came immediately. Fortunately we located the bird

quickly for by this time it was midday and very hot. We were not able to approach the bird too closely but we did get the telescopes on to it for some minutes. The greatest surprise was at 12:28pm when Sue spotted another individual fly in to join the original bird on the reed stubble. This joyful scene was disturbed by buzzing Welcome Swallows and whilst we lost track of one, we were able to watch the fast, jerky, undulating flight pattern of the other as it departed for another marsh.

The next morning David Geering, Michael Todd and I found the other individual. This bird was similar to the first one but it had a faint, but fully developed breast band.

Yellow Wagtails in breeding plumage are brightly coloured yellow birds but these female/young birds had no sign of yellow anywhere. Motacillid wagtails are strongly migratory and occur in Europe, Asia, Africa, Alaska and New Guinea and are regular visitors to northern Australia.

I would like to point out that a more complete description of these sightings still has to go before the rarities committee before it is officially confirmed.

Ann Lindsey

# Clean Up Australia Day

## Stockton Sand Spit

Sunday, 1st March, 1998

And before you know it, its upon us. Yes, that's right, time to clean up Stockton Sand Spit again.

Last year our club members attacked this great birdwatching spot with gusto and surprised even ourselves with the amount of litter we recovered. Unfortunately, this area continues to be used by some people to throw rubbish!

The area has once again been registered with the Newcastle City Council as an official clean up site so let's get to it everybody.

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 9:00am 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. And don't forget to bring your binoculars for some sneek birdwatching during rest periods etc. One volunteer may be needed to manage the registration table for at least the initial rush at the start of the day.

Also, I am looking for a couple of volunteers to represent HBOC at the official Clean Up Australia Day Launch. This will take place in Newcastle on Monday 23rd February at 11:00am at Queen's Wharf Brewery where Ian Kiernan will be the guest of honour.

For more information about this clean up day effort ring Tom Clarke on 4951 3872.



# Blackbutt Observations

President Ann in her forward to the 1966 Hunter Region Annual Bird Report states there are no documented breeding records for the locally common Crimson Rosella. There was, during the spring of 1997, a pair using a Eucalypt hollow, only about 4m up, just off McCaffery Drive on the track leading to John Hunter Hospital. Also, an adult pair was observed with dependent young in Blackbutt Reserve during December. The immature birds are dull green where the adult is red, except for the bright red crown, face, upper breast and undertail coverts. The tail is also dark green where the adult birds attain dark blue, and their completed adult plumage, at about 15 months. Yes, Crimson Rosellas are breeding in Newcastle!

Blackbutt's Powerful Owls also produced another young this year. This is good news as it is the third for the pair in three years. The youngster was very alert, roosting fairly high in a Turpentine, it watched with interest the birds on the track below. The adult bird appeared to be snoozing. I guess it had us under constant observation.

Caryl and I followed the breeding cycle of a family of Wood Duck around Jo Richely Reserve during October- November. The adult pair started out with an incredible twenty-three fluffy new born ducklings. This number diminished slowly over the next few weeks. To our astonishment sixteen survived to mature ducks about the same size as their parents. The literature usually quote fourteen as the upper limit to the number of eggs produced. Is this a record? No wonder the Wood Duck is so successful and has actually benefitted, as a grazer, from European invasion.

One concern of birding in Blackbutt is the reduced numbers of small birds. The large flocks of Red-browed Finches have vanished. The Eastern Spinebill, Lewin's Honeyeater, Eastern Yellow Robin, Superb and Variegated Fairy-wren as well as Eastern Whipbird once so common are rarely seen. This has occurred in just two or three years. Is it habitat destruction in nearby areas, such as Jesmond, or is it the invasion of the Noisy Miners?

Paddy Lightfoot.

## Harrington - deluxe birdwatching

Just about everything was perfect for the September 21 outing to the Harrington area: the weather, the birds, the company, the transportation. Almost incredibly, we recorded 105 species around Harrington in half a day, and an additional 10 or so species at nearby Crowdy Head.

Although it is a long drive to Harrington, which is at the mouth of the Manning River north of Taree, we had an effortless trip thanks to the committee's foresight to organise a coach. I think this may well have been the first ever coach outing by HBOC – judging from the success of it, I'm sure there'll be more in future.

21 people assembled at the Wetlands Centre for a 6 a.m. departure. Conditions were distinctly gloomy. There had been heavy rain all night and drizzle was continuing. Our spirits began to lift when the coach arrived (on time). They lifted even higher when we discovered how luxurious the coach was! Then nearing Taree, the weather began to break up and soon we were in sunshine for the rest of the day.

We were doing BOP Watch from the coach, but there weren't many birds of prey to see at first, apart from a solitary Swamp Harrier near Hexham. At a park in Taree, where we stopped for a break and complimentary tea and biscuits, we saw a Nankeen Kestrel but when back on the coach, where we could count it, it had disappeared. Curses! Fortunately, we had better successes in BOP Watch during the rest of the trip.

Bob Langdown was waiting to greet us at Harrington, and he showed us to some of the variety of habitats in the area, including the sand dunes where Little Tern nest in summer. Bob and his wife Marie are voluntary wardens for this area; any additional volunteers would be most welcome.

Our coach crew, Paul and Barbara, dropped us near the start of a rainforest walk and took the coach into the main village to wait for us. The Harrington rainforest is fantastic! The walktrack was wide and sandy (no leeches!) and birds were everywhere. Sometimes it was hard to keep up with what was going on. Highlights included Varied Triller, Spectacled

Monarch, Regent Bowerbird and Emerald Dove. A pair of Brown Gerygone had their intricate nest hanging from a low branch close to the track, where we all could have good views.

The walktrack emerges at a lagoon in front of the beach. Some Bar-tailed Godwit were roosting by the water's edge, with a pair of Red-capped Plover darting around them. An Osprey came down, then flew off clutching a large fish in its talons.

We had morning tea at a small park, discussing corvids and concluding that the nearby bird was a Torresian Crow. Thank heavens it had called! Then, a walk along the massive breakwater, from which we could have better views of the various waders and terns roosting on sandbars in the river mouth.

After that, we drove to Crowdy Head where we had a clifftop lunch and a quick scan of the seascape. Several Australasian Gannet went by, and six shearwaters that we concluded were Wedge-tailed. Next stop was the National Park, with an interesting raptor seen by some people from the bus on the way there. It generated much discussion, with the identification not yet resolved.

The National Park was relatively quiet in comparison to the excitement of earlier in the day. On our way south again, we detoured to the sewage treatment plant. Highlights here included Common Bronzewing, Dusky Woodswallow and Rainbow Bee-eater. Nearby, the Osprey perched at its nest tree although there was no indication to us of any young birds being present.

The icecream supplies at Cooperook took a hammering when we stopped there on our way home. Otherwise, our return trip was uneventful and we arrived back at the Wetlands Centre at 5.30 p.m. Rain was still falling. It was wet all day in Newcastle – but it was perfect in Harrington!

Special thanks to Peter Phillips for organising the coach and to Bob Langdown for showing us the delights of Harrington.

Alan Stuart

# Difficult Birdwatching Ultimately Satisfying

Field Outing to Swansea area - 7th December 1997

A strong south-westerly wind made conditions just a little difficult for birdwatching, however thirteen members welcomed the cloud cover which kept temperatures somewhat bearable on this, our last outing for 1997.

The track down to Galgabba Point was first explored, and produced some nice sightings, including a pair of White-breasted Sea Eagles loudly proclaiming their rights to the territory which we were invading. Spotted Pardalotes fed young just out of the nest, Channel-billed Cuckoos and Koels competed with cicadas for choral supremacy and several Southern Emu-wrens, some carrying food were roundly appreciated.

In the parkland surrounding Bargoed House, Nankeen Night Herons appeared to have shifted camp back to an earlier site, a flock of 20+ Dollarbirds was seen by some and several species feeding young or carrying food were noted. Extremely dry conditions were thought to be most likely for a lower than usual bird count for this part of the outing.

The morning's activities were rounded off with a trip to the lake and here we found the viewing platform constructed at the tip of Coon Island was an ideal place to scan the sand banks even though the incoming tide was not quite ideal. Several species of waders could be identified by means of telescope and three species of tern were seen lazing on the sand bank. In the Casuarina and spike rush a pair of Variegated Fairy-wrens worked ceaselessly to satisfy the demands of a Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo chick while Mangrove Gerygone and Brown Honeyeater provided musical accompaniment.

Lunch by the channel, under a shady tree provided an opportunity to prepare a bird list which overall amounted to some 82 species - a most satisfactory morning's effort.

Sue Hamonet

# Pilliga Scrub On The Mend

HBOC held its 1996 Easter Campout at Pilliga Scrub and everyone who attended found that the birdwatching was excellent; especially near the waterholes.

Last year's massive fires affected large sections of Pilliga Scrub and it is always hard to know the extent of the burning (and recovery) from a distance. We thank club member Judith Cook for this update (see letter opposite) on the state of the forest from a closer viewpoint.

# Dora Creek Amok With Mallards!

Field Outing - 19th January 1998

Thirteen members gathered in the early hours of a clear, still summer morning for the first field outing of the new year.

The party traversed the northern bank of Dora Creek to its junction with Lake Macquarie and some 60 species were recorded along the way. Great concern was expressed at the enormous numbers of Mallard crossed with Pacific Black Duck (estimated to be 500+) which appear to have taken over the waterfront area. The habit of local residents in providing feed trays is no doubt responsible for the overpopulation of these ducks and the resultant degrading of the area for other species.

A small population of Indian Ring-necked Doves (aviary escapees obviously) is also established in the area. A mud island at the mouth of the creek seemed to be a favourite lounging spot for many different species including Eastern Curlew and Striated Heron. Four of the latter, including one juvenile were counted.

On Muddy Lake some 500+ Black Swans cruised, many with dependent young.

After a morning tea break the party moved on to Myuna Bay/Whitehead's Lagoon, where birds were found to be fairly scarce. The extreme heat and humidity of the middle of the day, plus a very strong north east breeze no doubt causing them to keep a low profile. An Osprey and several Common Terns were noted at the Power Station outlet.

Sue Hamonet.

**P.O. Box 576  
Coonabarabran**

**2357**

**J.T. & J.A. Cook  
Phone 02 68422020**

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9 January 1998

The President  
Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.  
PO Box 24  
New Lambton 2305

Dear Ann

Although we have not met Jim & I have been members of the HBOC for a number of years and have frequently camped in the Pilliga with various members. We thought some members may be interested in the final outcome of the latest Pilliga fire. Jim & I travelled to Narrabri recently and were quite pleasantly surprised to find quite a few pockets of forest that had not been touched at all and other areas slightly scorched that were already showing signs of recovery whilst further large tracts had been rather substantially destroyed.

So far we have not ventured off the highway to take a closer look but will do so once we get some cooler weather.

I recently spoke to the staff at the Forestry Office in Baradine and the forest is open once again and I was given the following information:-

"The area around the Salt Caves has been devastated as has the Sandstone Caves area and the Schwagers Bore was slightly affected but the Aloes and Rocky Creek Bore were fortunately spared. I was not able to ascertain how badly the bird population has suffered. The Koalas at the Aloes are safe and well."

The accompanying map is a reduced Pilliga Forest Map which shows the area inside the black line which was destroyed and the Blue Line being the bulldozed area which was put in in one single night of mighty effort. The whole town was quite overwhelmed by the number and quality of the volunteers who came in and also the effort put in by the locals in accommodating and feeding the "troops".

Since then the area has had quite a few good showers so it should not be too long till the Pilliga will once again be back to normal.

Trust this is of some interest and we wish all our friends in the club Good Birding for 1998.

Regards

*Judith*  
Judith Cook

## HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB - RECORD APPRAISAL COMMITTEE.

With the decision to move towards publishing an Annual Bird Report for the Hunter Region, there came a need to set up a body to appraise reports of birds which were considered to be unusual in the area. Thus the Record Appraisal Committee, consisting then of five members, came into being in August, 1993. Since then a sixth member has been added to the panel, a move which became advisable to cover the times when one or more members were unavailable, or else involved in a submission, where they would be disqualified from voting.

It is felt that our function and purpose may not be well understood by some of our newer members, and so a few words of explanation could perhaps be of assistance.

**CLASSIFICATION.** Our aim in setting up this Committee and system of appraisal, was to try, as far as possible to authenticate all records of birds included in our Annual Bird Report. Since this will stand as a historical record for, we hope, all time, the Committee agreed that it was imperative to make some attempt to secure the veracity of the document.

The first step taken was to address the classification of those species which we anticipated would be reported as observations in the defined area. Some were obviously quite frequently observed throughout the region, and could reasonably be expected to be seen at any time. These were given the classification of Category 1.

Other species, subsequently classified as Category 2, were those less frequently reported, but known to be regular visitors to parts of the Hunter, some as seasonal migrants, others seemingly accidentally. Of these, some could require assessment where the circumstances were unusual. In these cases the Records Officer will request further information in the form of an Unusual Observation Report [UOR]. Note that it is not necessary to submit a UOR for a Category 2 species unless specifically requested to do so.

Category 3 status was given to those species which were considered to be unusual for the Hunter region, and all reports of Category 3 species will therefore require the submission of a UOR to be assessed by the Records Appraisal Committee.

It should be noted that the basis for these classifications is frequency of reporting. Thus an increase or decrease in this frequency for a particular species could result in re-classification from time to time.

When a report is submitted to the Records Officer and processed, it is copied and circulated to each of the Committee members for appraisal and voting. No member is aware of the result of any other member's deliberations. These individual opinions, supported by reasons for the verdict, are then collated. With a vote of 5 to 1 or better in favour, a submission will be accepted. A vote of 5 to 1 against will be not accepted. Where voting is 4 to 2 for or against, or in the case of a split 3 to 3 vote, this will result in the report being circulated for a second time. Should a positive result still not be forthcoming, a discussion forum will be held and then a third and final vote taken.

Where a report has been accepted it becomes a part of the Annual Bird Report for that year, and the observer is given the credit for the observation. In the event of a non-acceptance, the observation is published in the Annual Bird Report as an unconfirmed sighting. It is most important to note that no record is rejected.

Since its inception the Committee has assessed some 117 separate reports, resulting in some exciting new records for the Hunter Region. Several observations can probably be made at this point to assist members who may be lodging a UOR.

Where a record is not accepted the reason is most likely to be lack of information or description. Field notes taken at the time of the sighting are therefore invaluable. Consider the position of the assessor when completing descriptive notes. The observer is asked to describe the bird in detail sufficient to convince a person who has not seen it. Accompanying sketches are requested, but not very often supplied, but these can also lend weight to the claim. It is suggested that comparisons be made with similar species, and reasons for their elimination noted.

It has been satisfying for us to have had indulgence and full co-operation from all quarters as we have worked our way along this difficult and somewhat onerous path, and the members of the Appraisal Committee would like to acknowledge this. This continues to be a learning experience for all of us, I'm sure, and if it makes us more careful and attentive to detail, then it has been a positive stepping stone.

Sue Hamonet

## Barren Grounds Bird Observatory

is considering publishing and selling through its shop its very own bush cook book which would have appeal to birdwatchers on the move with limited cooking facilities.

If you have that special memory of delightful camp cuisine, please consider donating the recipe to Barren Grounds Bird Observatory for publication (with or without author's name).

Recipes should contain easily obtainable ingredients and be reasonably simple to make. When forwarding same, please acknowledge that you are donating the work to the Observatory.

Along with recipes, it is also proposed to include brief serious or humorous articles on camp cooking experiences, drawings, pictures, cartoons, poems, crosswords, etc. which would add flavour (pardon the pun) to an enjoyable pocket book.

Please post your articles to:

The Cook Book Editor,  
Barren Grounds Bird Observatory,  
PO Box 3, Jamberoo. NSW 2533

## NEW MEMBERS

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

Claire Age of Coal Point  
Dianna Johnson of Wangi Wangi  
Jenny Powers of Speers Point  
Neil Rankin of Earlewood

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

Articles for our Newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is  
27th March, 1998

Mail to: Tom Clarke 28 Kokera St, Wallsend 2287  
Phone: 4951 3872 (h) 4940 1384 (w) Fax: 4940 1378

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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.

Sunday 22nd February	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Grahamstown Dam McDonald's Raymond Terrace 7:00am Jim Perry 4943 2496
Sunday 1st March	Clean Up Australia Day - Stockton Sand Spit Meet: Contact:	Stockton Bridge 9:00am Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 3rd March	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Green Point End of Dilkeria Ave, Valentine 8:00am Max Blanch 611655
Saturday 7th March	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Massey Creek State Forest Meet: Leader:	Tucker Park, Paterson 7:00am Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Intending participants must ring to confirm.
Wednesday 11th March	Clubnight: Main feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm Kakadoo Kapers - Paddy Lightfoot
Sunday 23rd March	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Kooragang Island Stockton Bridge Car Park 7:00am Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Saturday 4th April	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Massey Creek State Forest Meet: Leader:	Tucker Park, Paterson 7:00am Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Intending participants must ring to confirm.
Tuesday 7th April	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Blackbutt Reserve Car park off Carnley Ave. 8:00am Margaret Woods 4963 3070
Wednesday 8th April	Clubnight: Main Feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm Birdscaping Your Garden - Tony Saunders
Easter Weekend 10th-13th April	Camp: Contact:	"Carlton", Gunnedah. Sue Hamonet 4958 1023
Sunday 19th April	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Congewai Cessnock McDonald's 7:00am Liz Herbert 4959 3663