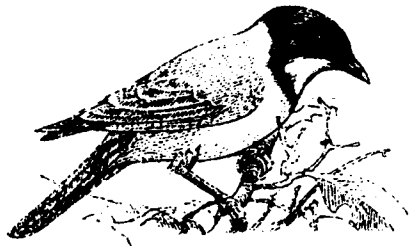


NEWSLETTER



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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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.

Birdscaping Gardens

April Club Night

Tony Saunders has had twenty years experience in landscaping and has developed many evolving ideas towards birdscaping gardens. Tony was our guest speaker and the following text supplied by himself perfectly summarised his presentation.

Many of us go out into the bush to spend time with nature and usually return home with fond memories. As you look around your garden you may wonder what it would have been like before the bush was cleared and houses built. Many people are looking for ways to create natural gardens so that they can experience the joy of having wildlife at home and know that they have put back some of that which has been taken away.

Birdscaping is the designing of a garden to attract the variety of birds that would have occurred originally in the area. Birds need many types of foods including insects, reptiles, seeds, nectar and fruit. Plants should be selected to provide as wide a variety of each of these as possible and over as many seasons as possible. They also need nesting material and shelter from the weather and predators. Plants that provide nesting material include grasses and stringy barks. Dense foliage plants or those with spiny foliage provide good shelter. Birds also have very different foraging and nesting requirements and the garden needs to be planned so that there is a diversity of shrub and tree heights, as well as leaf

litter/mulched areas and areas of mature grasses. To achieve this you need to be conscious of their needs and then set out to provide them. A balanced garden will attract a wide range of other wildlife such as insects, spiders, reptiles, frogs and possibly even mammals. Your garden will then resemble the bush.

The best way to provide for the local wildlife is to plant local native plants. Not only are these best suited to the conditions where you live but the wildlife is best adapted to them. Choose from a list of natives those that give you the greatest diversity of food types and heights.

Hybrid native plants are often chosen because they appear more spectacular having larger flowers and longer flowering periods; but they can present problems. Birds visiting these hybrids can pollinate local native plant species and cause natural populations of plants to have a mixed genetic makeup and this can lead to their extinction. In addition these hybrids are often more attractive to large aggressive honeyeaters and lorikeets which defend the flowers and prevent other smaller birds from entering the garden, even those that don't take nectar. In particular the Noisy Miner can be a serious pest. Our habit of clearing bush for housing development, leaving a few trees and then planting hybrid grevilleas creates ideal habitat for the Noisy Miner. Use of shrubs with smaller flowers that provide less nectar and more dense cover make it less worthwhile for the Miners and also more difficult for them to defend territories. If you live within a Noisy Miner colony you need to take this into consideration. It is

suggested that you avoid selecting plants attractive to them for at least three years while the rest of the garden becomes established and other birds take up residence.

Plants that provide fruit and seeds need to be selected carefully as birds will carry seeds back into the bush where they may germinate and compete with the local native plants. This can be as much of a problem with non-local native plants as with introduced species.

Artificial food supplements should be avoided as these can cause nutritional imbalances, aid the spread of disease and are more likely to attract introduced rather than native birds. Water is the only supplement that should be added. This can be provided by means of a bird bath placed a safe distance from dense shrub cover and with a high nearby vantage point so that birds can check for predators. The presence of water in the garden will increase the diversity of birdlife that visits your garden.

Protecting wildlife from domestic pets is always difficult. Cat bells do not work. When a cat is in "stealth mode" the bell is silent and when the cat is attacking it is too late. Cats should be kept enclosed 24 hours a day and should be provided with a cat run. Dogs can be trained to leave birds alone.

There are many reference books available for birdscaping gardens. They provide lists of plants, their requirements and the types of foods that they supply for birds. Take care however when consulting them as many suggest food supplements and do not specify which plants are local to your area. You will perhaps need to consult a local native plant guide or your local native nursery.

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President's Column

Because of work commitments, I didn't spend much of March and April in Newcastle. However, my timing for a trip back one weekend was perfect - it was the one that the Black-backed Wagtail was first seen.

What a lot of excitement that bird caused! We decided to share the news widely - to birdos around Australia, and to all of Newcastle. The amount of interest that was generated was just fantastic. I'd like to thank in particular Peter Phillips, Marion Walker and Sue Hamonet for their efforts in helping with publicity and advice to others. Also, the security staff at the Glendale shopping centre deserve a mention - they doubled as tourist guides for the week.

An interesting twist for Marion was the number of calls she received from people who claimed to have another of these birds in their backyard, or wherever. Well, the Willie Wagtail does have a black back!

I understand that it will be some time before the record becomes official - it will have to be endorsed by the Birds Australia records appraisal committee. There is a race (*ocularis*) of the White Wagtail which must be ruled out. Australian field guides don't cover either species very well.

The visit back in January/February of a group of Yellow Wagtail is old news now. However, it also aroused much interest. I was even shown the other day, a write up in Russian about it. This was from an Australian-based newspaper that is distributed around the world. The context of the story apparently (I can't read Russian) was that Yellow Wagtail breed in an area of Russia known as the Kamchatka Peninsula.

Did you see the news reports of the incredible journeys made by breeding Short-tailed Shearwater from Montague Island (near Narooma). Some of the birds, fitted with radio transmitters, were found to have travelled all the way to Antarctica and back, to feed their dependent chicks. The journeys were of around 15,000 km, made in about 2 weeks. There is always something new and interesting to learn about birds!

Those of you with access to e-mail might be interested to join a news group called Birding Australia. I find it a useful source on birds and their behaviour, good places to go birdwatching, equipment, tours, and so on. A great deal of useful information is exchanged (although sometimes some is useless/silly). To try it out: just send an e-mail message, with nothing in the subject line, addressed to majordomo@deakin.org.au and bearing the message *subscribe birding-aus* followed then by your e-mail address.

Happy birding
Alan Stuart

101 Native Plants Of The Sydney Region To Attract Native Birds

(Only Local Native Species That Are Generally Available In Cultivation and Not Hybrids Have Been Included Here)

Species	Size	Soils	Provisions				
<i>Acacia floribunda</i>	3m x 3m	sd, cl	sh, s, i	<i>Ficus coronata</i>	4m	cl	f
<i>Acacia longifolia</i>	3m x 3m	sd, cl	sh, s, i	<i>Ficus macrophylla</i>	50m	cl	f
<i>Acacia myrtifolia</i>	1m x 1m	sd, cl	sh, s, i	<i>Ficus rubiginosa</i>	10m	cl	f
<i>Acacia parramattensis</i>	3m x 6m	cl	sh, s, i	<i>Grevillea juniperina</i>	0.5m x 1m	cl	sh, n, i
<i>Acacia suaveolens</i>	0.5m x 1m	sd	s	<i>Grevillea longifolia</i>	3m x 3m	sd, cl	s, n, i
<i>Acmena smithii</i>	20m	cl	sh, f	<i>Grevillea mucronulata</i>	2m x 2m	sd	s, n
<i>Allocasuarina littoralis</i>	6m	cl	nm, s	<i>Grevillea oleoides</i>	1m x 2m	sd	s, n, i
<i>Allocasuarina nana</i>	2m	sd, cl	nm, s	<i>Grevillea sericea</i>	1m x 1m	sd, cl	s, n, i
<i>Allocasuarina torulosa</i>	8m	sd, cl	nm, s	<i>Grevillea shiressii</i>	2m x 3m	sd, cl	s, n
<i>Angophora costata</i>	25m	sd, cl	n, i	<i>Grevillea speciosa</i>	1m x 1m	sd	s, n, i
<i>Angophora hispida</i>	4m x 4m	sd	n, i	<i>Hakea bakerana</i>	1m x 2m	sd	s, n, i
<i>Baeckea virgata</i>	2m x 4m	sd, cl	sh, n, i	<i>Hakea dactyloides</i>	2m x 3m	sd, cl	s, n, i
<i>Banksia aemula</i>	2m x 2m	sd	s, n, i	<i>Hakea propinqua</i>	1m x 2m	sd	sh, s, n, i
<i>Banksia ericifolia</i>	2m x 3m	sd, cl	sh, s, n, i	<i>Hakea salicifolia</i>	2m x 5m	sd, cl	sh, s, n, i
<i>Banksia integrifolia</i>	3m x 5m	sd, cl	s, n, i	<i>Hakea sericea</i>	1m x 2m	sd, cl	sh, s, n, i
<i>Banksia marginata</i>	3m x 3m	sd, cl	sh, s, n, i	<i>Hibbertia dentata</i>	climber	cl	i
<i>Banksia oblongifolia</i>	2m x 2m	sd	s, n, i	<i>Hibbertia diffusa</i>	0.5m xp	cl	i
<i>Banksia robur</i>	2m x 1m	cl	s, n, i	<i>Hibbertia scandens</i>	Climber	sd, cl	i
<i>Banksia serrata</i>	3m x 5m	sd	s, n, i	<i>Isopogon anemonifolius</i>	1m x 1m	sd	i
<i>Banksia spinulosa</i>	2m x 2m	sd	s, n, i	<i>Isopogon anethifolius</i>	1m x 2m	sd, cl	i
<i>Boronia pinnata</i>	1m x 1m	sd	i	<i>Kennedea rubicunda</i>	Climber	sd, cl	s, n
<i>Bursaria spinosa</i>	2m x 2m	cl	sh, i	<i>Lambertia formosa</i>	1m 2m	sd	sh, s, n, i
<i>Callistemon citrinus</i>	2m x 2m	sd, cl	n, i	<i>Leptospermum juniperinum</i>	1m x 2m	sd, cl	sh, i
<i>Callistemon linearifolius</i>	2m x 3m	sd, cl	n, i	<i>Leptospermum rotundifolium</i>	2m x 2m	sd	i
<i>Callistemon linearis</i>	1m x 2m	sd, cl	n, i	<i>Leucopogon parviflorus</i>	1m x 2m	sd	f
<i>Callistemon pinifolius</i>	2m x 2m	sd, cl	n, i	<i>Morinda jasminoides</i>	climber	cl	f
<i>Callistemon salignus</i>	2m x 3m	sd, cl	sh, n, i	<i>Melaleuca armillaris</i>	3m x 3m	cl	sh, nm, i
<i>Callistemon sieberi</i>	2m x 4m	sd, cl	sh, n, i	<i>Melaleuca decora</i>	2m x 2m	cl	sh, i
<i>Callitris rhomboidea</i>	6m	sd, cl	s	<i>Melaleuca erubescens</i>	1m x 1m	cl	i
<i>Casuarina cunninghamiana</i>	35m	cl	nm, s	<i>Melaleuca hypericifolia</i>	2m x 2m	sd, cl	sh, n, i
<i>Cissus antarctica</i>	Climber	sd, cl	f	<i>Melaleuca linearifolia</i>	3m x 5m	cl	sh, nm, n, i
<i>Cissus hypoglauca</i>	Climber	sd, cl	f	<i>Melaleuca stypheloides</i>	3m x 5m	cl	sh, i
<i>Citriobatus pauciflorus</i>	1m x 1m	cl	f	<i>Melaleuca thymifolia</i>	1m x 1m	cl	n, i
<i>Clematis aristata</i>	Climber	sd, cl	sh	<i>Notelaea longifolia</i>	3m	cl	f
<i>Correa reflexa</i>	1m x 1m	sd, cl	n	<i>Pandorea pandorana</i>	climber	sd, cl	n
<i>Einadia nutans</i>	1m x p	sd, cl	f	<i>Persoonia pinifolia</i>	2m x 3m	sd	f
<i>Elaeocarpus reticulatus</i>	5m	sd, cl	f, i	<i>Petrophile pulchella</i>	2m	sd	s
<i>Enchylaena tomentosa</i>	1m x p	sd, cl	f	<i>Petrophile sessilis</i>	2m	sd	s
<i>Endiandra sieberi</i>	30m	sd	f	<i>Pimelea linifolia</i>	1m x 1m	sd, cl	i
<i>Epacris longiflora</i>	1m x 0.3m	sd	n	<i>Pittosporum undulatum</i>	8m	cl	s, f
<i>Eremophila debilis</i>	1m x 0.3m	cl	f	<i>Pittosporum revolutum</i>	3m	cl	s, f
<i>Eucalyptus crebra</i>	30m	cl	n, s, i	<i>Podocarpus spinulosus</i>	1m x 1m	sd, cl	s, f
<i>Eucalyptus eximia</i>	20m	sd, cl	sh, s, n, i	<i>Pultenaea pedunculata</i>	0.5m x p	cl	i
<i>Eucalyptus globoidea</i>	30m	sd, cl	nm, s, i	<i>Syncarpia glomulifera</i>	40m	sd, cl	n, i
<i>Eucalyptus gummifera</i>	30m	sd, cl	sh, s, n, i	<i>Syzygium paniculatum</i>	8m	cl	sh, f
<i>Eucalyptus maculata</i>	30m	cl	sh, s, n, i	<i>Telopea speciosissima</i>	1m x 2m	sd	n
<i>Eucalyptus oblonga</i>	6m	sd, cl	nm, s, i	<i>Themeda australis</i>	grass	cl	s
<i>Eucalyptus punctata</i>	35m	sd, cl	n, s, i	<i>Trema aspera</i>	4m	cl	f
<i>Eucalyptus robusta</i>	30m	cl	sh, s, n, i	<i>Tristaniopsis laurina</i>	6m	cl	n
<i>Eucalyptus sideroxylon</i>	25m	cl	n, s, i	<i>Trochocarpa laurina</i>	6m	sd, cl	f
<i>Eucalyptus tereticornis</i>	40m	cl	n, s, i				

Size:- Width in metres followed by height in metres, otherwise tree height (p=prostrate)

Soils:- sd-sandy soils, cl-clay or heavy soils

Provisions:- sh-shelter, nm-nest material, s-seeds, n-nectar, f-fruit, i-insects

T. Saunders

NEW MEMBERS

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

Susan Burgoyne of east Maitland
Eileen Gilshenan of Kotara South
Keryl & Paul Kavanagh of New Lambton
Timothy Rinkin of Singleton Heights
Anne & Ted Wilson of Tinonee
Jean Zweck of Coal Point

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

Lord Howe Island Tour

If you have not yet started to plan your movements for next Easter (1999) then maybe you should. Judith Smith certainly has and is very interested in forming a party of 12 to 15 people to join her in an 8 day guided tour of Lord Howe Island. Also, if enough interest is generated, Judith is keen to include an extra Norfolk Island leg to the holiday.

The tour guide will be Ian Hutton, who has lived on the island for 8 years and has extensively researched the natural history of this World Heritage Area. Each day of the tour, Ian will lead a walk or boat trip/walk to a different part of the island so that you can learn and experience the nature of the place.

Cost for the holiday will be about \$1600 which includes airfares ex Sydney, accommodation, evening meals, walks, boat trips etc.

Judith would like to hear from any interested people by the end of June 1998 so that a deposit on the trip can be made. For more information, itinerary, tour dates etc contact Judith Smith (02) 4964 1389.

Articles for our Newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is 31st July, 1998

Mail to: Tom Clarke 28 Kokera St, Wallsend 2287
Phone: (02) 4951 3872 (h) (02) 4940 1384 (w)
Fax: (02) 4940 1373

"Catbird" Birthday Party

Phillippa and I spent a mid-March weekend at "Catbird", a self contained one bedroom apartment adjoining the Smiths Lake home of nature author Libby Buhrich. It was supposed to be a surprise destination for my birthday, defying all attempts to guess its location - until our issue of "Wingspan" arrived a few days beforehand, complete with the advertisement that satisfied all the parameters in the hints hitherto imparted.

Libby's block is one that is perhaps best described as given over to nature. It backs onto a strip of temperate rainforest that threatens to engulf any paths humans make through it, down to the lake. The elevated position of the accommodation affords views over the canopy to the sandbar and the ocean - views which can be enjoyed from the comfortable bed which is graced - not entirely for the romantic ambience - by a large mosquito net suspended above. The somewhat quirky furnishings seem in keeping with the house's alter ego as a bird hide, female Satin Bowerbirds being attracted to the mango placed on a feeder outside the large glassed area of the living room.

One morning was spent in the company of another half dozen people on an organised "birdwatching breakfast" with Libby. Hot or cold breakfast was served at the beach near Sandbar, after which we went on a 2-hour walk through a variety of habitats. Although we saw no new birds among the 30 or so species seen on the day, it was one of the most enjoyable birdwatching walks we have done. (Attempts to tick the Diamond Python were abandoned when no Pizzey number could be found for it.) We found Libby a genial guide and hostess.

For a weekend away that offers possibilities for birdwatching, dining out (with Libby or in Forster/Tuncurry), cinema (Tuncurry) or just relaxing, "Catbird" merits consideration. I might add that the road between Hawks Nest and Seal Rocks is now open again but is a very slow 20km suitable for 4WD only; the reward is interesting scenery and the occasional quail scurrying off the road.

Adrian Ryan

Phenology In The Hunter - The Study Of Seasonality.

May Clubnight

Well known naturalist and environmental educator, Alan Reid, has developed a project known as the Timelines Australia Project where he questions the validity of the European concept of four distinct seasons to the Australian environment. As stated in a Gould League of Victoria publication:

"Through his observations, Alan has become acutely aware that Aborigines have understood the workings of the land and its shifting climates for many thousands of years. Aboriginal tribes have observed nature and followed its calendars or timelines by monitoring significant events, such as the migration and mating patterns of birds, changes in local vegetation, the effects of major weather changes and natural disasters such as fires and floods. They use calendars with from five to seven seasons depending on location.

Alan's research of Aboriginal culture and natural events has revealed that the European concept of four equal seasons is of little relevance in Australia. In all probability Melbourne and Perth have six natural seasons, Sydney has five and Brisbane has four seasons of varying length."

This idea of regular and systematic recording of observed natural phenomena was presented at Clubnight by the Hunter Region Coordinator of the Timelines Project, Kevin McDonald. Kevin lives at Seaham and has amassed four years of diarised observations of things such as plants in flower, plants in bud, plants in fruit, bird behaviour, weather, insect life cycles etc.

His collection of data has now enabled Kevin to produce several 'season wheel diagrams' for the lower Hunter. These diagrams mark the predictable annual events of various living organisms. Kevin displayed his wheel diagram of the cycles of the nine species of acacia found growing naturally around Seaham. The flowering times for each species is very predictable and are visible signs of the hanging seasons. The seasonal breeding sequence of Cattle Egrets is another example of very accurate forecast.

Kevin pointed out that as well as yearly rhythms of change there are other rhythms and cycles with predictable events in nature. These include diurnal/nocturnal cycles as well as cycles over many years.

Kevin would like to hear from anyone who would be keen to participate in the documentation of seasonal phenomena in the Hunter and he issued a challenge to the members of HBOC to keep records (daily or weekly) of natural events they observe.

He may be contacted at:

59 Italia Road, East Seaham NSW 2324
Phone (02) 4988 6471.

Yellow Wagtails, Black-backed Wagtails & Willie Wagtails - We're Wagtailed Out!

On Saturday 4th April at 4:45pm in the midst of a family and friends BBQ, our phone rang. It was a birdwatcher, Rowland Payne, who said he and his wife Lorraine had been shopping at Glendale Super Centre and had seen what he thought was a White Wagtail.

So getting our priorities right, the BBQ was put on hold while Ray and a friend went around to check out the sighting. He could not find the bird but we decided to go again the next day after ringing Wilma Barden who said she would check it out also.

Early Sunday morning, Wilma rang to say that she had seen the bird and in fact could hardly miss it as it flew under the front of her car; she had nearly run over it! Wilma said that she had identified the bird as a Black-backed Wagtail.

Knowing that Paddy and Caryl Lightfoot had been interested in seeing the Yellow Wagtails previously, I thought they would like to see this one as well. After ringing them we set out for Glendale, turned in at the roundabout, then went around again to the chorus of "where are you going?". Ray said "there it is" and there it was hopping (on an injured leg which didn't seem to worry it too much) along the footpath, feeding quite happily.

We all got out with books, binoculars and video camera at the ready and when Rowland Payne joined us we all agreed on Wilma's earlier identification. Paddy and Caryl arrived and soon we were making quite a small crowd when Super Centre Security arrived to check us out.

The rest of the day was spent ringing club members and our Publicity Officer, Peter Phillips put it on the Birdline on the internet and faxed radio and TV. Things livened up after that and the first call was from ABC Radio asking for more information. By Monday morning Prime Television, NBN and Radio National had all rang. For the next week it was constant calls from birdos and bird groups from here to Melbourne asking for directions to the Super Centre.

The wagtail preferred the area around the Lone Star Restaurant where it was feeding on peanuts customers had dropped in the car park. The Lone Star staff were much amused by the gathering of birdwatchers every day but were nice about it and kept us supplied with peanuts to encourage the bird to where we could all get a good look at it.

The bird stayed for another week after that (we did have a report that it had already been there for two weeks previous) but on the Thursday before Easter the weather changed to cold and wet and the Black-backed Wagtail was not seen again.

I kept getting calls from all over the Hunter from people who said they had the rare wagtail in their yard. These sightings, of course, proved to be of our own Willie Wagtail.

The next call was "there is a Noisy Pitta in my yard at Floraville" - here we go again!

Marion Walker

A Water Trough Is All You Need To Watch Birds In The Dry Country.

Campout at "Carlton" via Gunnedah.
Easter Weekend 1998

"Carlton" is a large property used mainly for grazing in the cotton growing area west of Lake Keepit. It is typically dry country made even dryer at the present by the persisting drought. The place is bordered on the east by the Kelvin State Forest which provides timbered habitat supporting a great amount of wildlife.

Our camp site was next to the timber in a paddock which had a water trough (continually topped up with bore water) acting as a bird magnet. All day long a continuous parade of birdlife came down to drink and these included Spiney-cheeked Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Silvereeye, Double-bar Finch, Zebra Finch, Speckled Warbler, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Crimson Rosella & Willie Wagtail.

Activity at the water trough was interrupted from time to time either at the approach of a Grey Butcherbird or the high velocity raid by an Australian Hobby. Both birds obviously doing well out of the situation.

Sitting out the front of my tent was very relaxing as I had a pretty good view of the water trough. Time to sit, consume a quiet beer and talk birds with a fellow birdwatcher while literally hundreds of honeyeaters and finches came to take advantage of the water supply.

All these birds spent enough time at the water for us to admire in any amount of detail. The variety of flank colour in the Silvereyes ranged from dark cinnamon to very pale birds and the depth of colour in the throats of the Spiney-cheeked Honeyeaters was quite remarkable. I'm not sure if it is the light out here or the diet or what, but mostly all the different species seemed to be richly toned. The creamy wash on the bellies of the Speckled Warblers for instance just featured so much more than the paler examples I remember seeing in the lower Hunter.

Real excitement in the camp happened at an alternate water trough when a Regent Honeyeater showed up. Most of the campers managed to see this bird as it satisfied its thirst then left again flying off back into the bush. It was only the second time I have laid eyes on this species and the excellent view made it very rewarding.

Also at this particular drinking spot I thought for a moment that I had found something pretty interesting. An oriole type with a streaked chest and belly, grey head and back, dark bill and pale eyebrow. After consulting my field guide I realised I had a juvenile Olive-backed Oriole. On its own, as it was, I was having all sorts of trouble identifying this bird. I'm sure if it had been in company with adult birds it would not have posed such a dilemma.

But not everything was seen by just sitting around at the camp site. Some classics had to be earned by working the various gullies which run down from the steep ridge of the Kelvin State Forest to the open and flat farm land.

Of particular interest to me were the robins. One sighting of a pair of Hooded Robins as they perched together at the top of a dead tree was a real treat. In more secret surroundings along a dry creek I found a small brown bird with a red forehead and a faint pink band across its chest, a female Red-capped Robin. This bird had a real subtle beauty about it which was quickly winning my admiration when a 'Flash Harry' arrived to steal the show. The male Red-capped Robin sitting on a sunny branch is absolutely stunning, the colours of its cap and chest so powerful that I could not let it out of my sight. My description of the colour in this male is a deep orange rather than red, perhaps the morning sun had an effect.

Another observation I noted was that both the male and female bird, from time to time, would drop one wing by quickly flicking it down. After holding the wing in this position for a moment it would be flicked back into the normal folded position. Both wings were flicked down but only one at a time and while I did not see both birds perform at the same time I certainly saw both birds perform. I have witnessed this behaviour in Rose Robins previously and cannot tell what it means. Were the birds signalling to each other? Did my presence trigger the behaviour? It is still a mystery to me.

Of course there were plenty of other birds about to observe and enjoy. Our group found 104 species over the weekend just within the confines of the property (walking distance from the camp) with 18 species reckoned to be over fifty in number.

Tom Clarke

New Field Guide

I have been interested in the correspondence on the topic of rarest birds. The following are the ones I have not seen, plus explanations. I feel quite strongly about this:

1. Approx. 52 species of seabird. I don't count these on the grounds that they never touch base in Australia unless dead. Ha!. Any bird you have to go to sea for clearly belongs on the list for "Oceans" - for which country I note there are no simple field guide. (Field guide! See what I mean?). My field guide is all the more portable for excising these non-Australian birds.

2. All those other alleged parrots that are really indistinguishable from Blue-winged Parrots. These obviously ARE Blue-winged Parrots but on "bad feather days". And the recent Wingspan article only confirmed this. The exception is the Orange-bellied Parrot which obviously exists - and I have seen it.

3. Purple-crowned Lorikeet. A hoax perpetrated by whoever runs the carpark at Tullamarine Airport. My observations confirm these to be Common Mynas.

4. Owls. Another series of bogus names for the Tawny Frogmouth. People get confused in the dark. Quite a few are probably bats (both the sightings and those who claim them as 'owls'). I have torn the relevant pages out of my field guide, as they cannot be read in the dark. This is when owls are alleged to be 'out' - how convenient!. All instances I have come across regarding owl calls at night turn out to be "owlers" playing tape recordings. (Probably of Ocean birds for all I know).

5. All those alleged fairy-wrens that look like Variegated Fairy-wrens. Obviously all ARE Variegated Fairy-wrens (I suppose that's why the original name was chosen). See entry above under Blue-winged Parrot. I've torn these pages out

too - useless lumber.

6. Waders. Don't make me laugh. Days spent at Werribee S.F. confirm that these are merely another single variable species, best subsumed under Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. People probably hallucinate from the fumes. Last time I was there some 'expert' pointed out a large and boisterous Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and called it a Rough. I dare say, but hardly grounds for naming a separate (and mis-spelt) species. Leg and bill colour variation and quite possibly plumage, clearly depends on the mud (or worse) that the sandpipers are wading in. My revised field guide has only one page for waders with several illustrations showing some of the major but still trivial local variations in plumage, size etc of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

This is of course only a start. I was pleased to see an honest emailer point out recently that the Lewin's Rail is 'probably extinct nowadays'. Of course it is. That's if it ever existed. My observations, incidentally, strongly suggest that the so called 'Spotless Crake' is very likely an immature Dusky Moorhen, so maybe we should rethink those crakes and rails' pages. Most people I know are honest enough to admit to not actually seeing many 'close up'. Like 'owls' and a number of other fraudulent entries, these are said to be seen only under adverse conditions. They are said to 'skulk'. I bet. Let's tear those pages out of the field guide as well, except of course for the Buff-banded Rail.

Perhaps we should produce a properly revised Field Guide that will be both more portable and more honest about the 362 species that actually exist in this country (all of which, incidentally, I have seen).

I think all sincere birders will join me in looking forward to hearing from someone more expert than I, who could lead the task of producing a more realistic Field Guide to Australian Birds.

Pat O'Malley
Melbourne
Email: p.omalley@latrobe.edu.au

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OBSERVATIONS FROM APRIL MEETING

Feb 18	Crested Tern feeding yng	2	Dudley Beach	J. Westphail
Feb 20	Magpie Goose	14	Seaham	D. Biddle
Mar 3	Hoary-headed Grebe	1	Bayswater Colliery	G. Newling
Mar 11	Common Tern	170	Nobby's [Macquarie Pier]	K. Laverick
	Common Tern	50	N'cle Ocean Baths	"
Mar 12	Peregrine Falcon	1	Carey Bay	C. Herbert
Mar 14	Peregrine Falcon	1	Redhead Bluff	"
	White-winged Black Tern	8	N'cle Harbour/Stockton Bight	K. Kaverick
	Arctic Jaeger	1	N'cle Harbour	"
Mar 15	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	lge flock	Woodberry	J. & R. Smith
Mar 16	Brown Falcon	3	Wingen	G. Newling
Mar 18	Australian Hobby	3	Bayswater Colliery	"
Mar 17	Darter	6 females	S.W.C.	M. Kearns
	Dollarbird	1	S.W.C.	"
Mar 19	Glossy Black Cockatoo	6	Wingen Village	G. Newling
Mar 20	Gang Gang Cockatoo	2	Sth of Milbrodale	"
	Pacific Baza	1	Medowie	J. Moyse
	Grey Goshawk	1	New Lambton Heights	M. Hamilton
Mar 23	Spangled Drongo	3	" " "	"
Mar 27	Arctic Jaeger	3	Newcastle Harbour	K. Kaverick
Mar 29	Arctic Jaeger	1	Nelson Bay	"
Mar 30	Arctic Jaeger	1	Newcastle Harbour	"
Apr 11	Osprey	1	Bull's Island	M. Kearns
	Pied Oystercatcher	6	Port Stephen	"
	Common Tern	2	"	"
	Noisy Friarbird	200+	Lower Myall River	"
	Little Lorikeet	22	"	"
Apr 12	Azure Kingfisher	1	Myall Lakes N.P.	"
Apr 11	Darter	3	Lower Myall River	"
	Swamp Harrier	1	"	"
	Little Black Cormorant	100+	Hawk's Nest/Tea Gardens	"
Apr 14	Azure Kingfisher	1	Lower Myall River	"
	Bar-tailed Godwit	75	Lemon Tree Passage	"
	Grey-tailed Tattler	88	"	"
	Black Swan	500+	Myall Lakes N.P.	"
	Pacific Black Duck	832	"	"
	Musk Duck	1	"	"
Mar 23	Dollarbird	1	Scone	G. Newling
	Painted Button-Quail	1	Garden Suburb	J. Perry
Mar 25	Peregrine Falcon	Pair	Nesca Pde, Newcastle	J. Moyse
	Brown Quail	1	Kotara [Carisbrooke Ave]	D. Woodgate
	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	S.W.C.	M. Kearns
	Latham's Snipe	1	S.W.C.	"
17 - 31	Spotless Crake	1	S.W.C.	"
Mar 29	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	2	Blackbutt Reserve	P. Lightfoot
	Wedge-tailed Eagle	1	Woodberry	J. & R. Smith
	Whistling Kite	2	"	"
Mar 30	Powerful Owl	2	Blackbutt Reserve	J. Perry
Mar 31	Little Grassbird	1	S.W.C.	M. Kearns
Apr 1	Black-necked Stork	1	4km west of Bungwahl	J. Perry
Apr 5	Peregrine Falcon	1	Glendale [supacentre]	C. Herbert
Apr 6	Eastern Spinebill	5	Woodberry	J. & R. Smith
	Aust. Magpie [Albino]	1	Duckenfield	D. Biddle
	Y.T.B.C.	7	"	"
	King Quail	Pair	Tomago	G. Little

	Striated Heron		"	"
	Swamp Harrier		"	"
	Brown Falcon	5	S.W.C.	M. Kearns
	Peregrine Falcon	1	"	"
Apr 7	Powerful Owl heard calling	1	New Lambton Heights	M. Hamilton
Apr 11	Australian Hobby	1	Steelworks Golf Course	"
Apr 12-14	Ruddy Turnstone	22	Newcastle Ocean Baths	R. Walker
Apr 13	Sooty Oystercatcher	3	" " "	"
	Australasian Gannet	1 + 2 imm	Off Ocean Baths	"
Apr 20	Noisy Pitta	1	Floraville	"
Apr 30	Black Kite	1	Stockton [off bridge]	"
	Whistling Kite	2	N'cle Golf Course	"
May 11	Darter	1	Warners Bay [North Creek]	"
Apr 21	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	6	Toronto	P. Durie
	Australian Kestrel	1	"	"
Apr 23	Eastern Spinebill	4	"	"
May 11	White-winged Chough	5	Carey Bay	"
Apr 22	Regent Bowerbird	4	Highfields	M. Jackson
May 1	Regent Bowerbird	2	"	"
Apr 24	White-necked Heron	1	Cundletown	M. Kearns
Apr 31	Peaceful Dove	1	Malabula	"
Apr 29	White-necked Heron	1	S.W.C.	"
Apr 24	Red-kneed Dotterel	2	"	"
Apr 16	White-necked Heron	1	"	"
May 6	Brown Quail	3	"	"
Apr 29	Eastern Spinebill	1	Merewether Heights	K. & M. Woods
Apr 29/30	Regent Honeyeater	4	Wyee Point	D. Moon
May 4-9	Regent Honeyeater	1	"	"
Apr 9	Musk Lorikeet	20	"	"
Apr 1	Glossy Black Cockatoo	3	"	"
May 1	Glossy Black Cockatoo	3	"	"
May 3	Silvereye [<i>Tasmanicus</i>]	10-15	Waratah [Mater Hospital]	D. Pritchard
	Grey Shrike-thrush	1	" & New Lambton	"
May 5	Eastern Spinebill	1	Charlestown	P. Lightfoot
May 5	Silvereye	4	New Lambton Heights	"
May 13	Spangled Drongo	1	S.W.C.	"
May 6	Spangled Drongo	1	Woodberry	J. Smith
	Swamp Harrier	1	S.W.C.	M. Kearns
	Buff-banded Rail	1	"	"
May 12	Swamp Harrier	1	"	"
May 10	Laugh. Kookaburra [albino]	1	Teralba	N. Granter
May 10	Turquoise Parrot	2	Widden Valey	J. Perry
	Painted Button-quail	3	"	"
	Spotted Quail-thrush	5	"	"
	Diamond Firetail	20+	"	"
May 11	Spangled Drongo	1	Marmong Point	B. Kibble
May 12	Satin Bowerbird	Pair	Warners Bay	H. Maher

"Secure Your Children's Future" Richmond Lakes Estate

Earlier this year, I was driving along George Booth Drive, and just at the Mulbring turn-off I noticed a large billboard. It was advertising the sale of many blocks of land surrounding a large body of water referred to as Richmond Lakes Estate. The map on the billboard had many similarities with the area known to HBOC members as Colliery Dam and on further inspection that notion proved to be correct.

Colliery Dam (referred to by the Cessnock City Council as John Brown's Lagoon) is a large dam which supports many water birds. The building of the dam actually had the effect of enlarging an already naturally existing "lake" which was part of the stream that runs into Wallis Creek.

The northern section is typically surrounded by cleared grazing land but the southern section is bordered by open woodland. At this end the dam more resembles a winding wetland habitat complete with reeds and lillies. The timbered zones adjacent to the water and along the creek upstream supports many bush bird species.

At the February Club Committee meeting it was decided to pursue this matter given the fact that on several Club outings, we have found the area to contain exceptional bird habitat supporting many species and including several breeding records. Grey-crowned Babbler and Comb-crested Jacana are just two "specials" that are always encountered.

A letter was subsequently sent to the Cessnock City Council expressing our concerns and seeking some clarification on land zoning in this area. The reply from the Council indicated that the land was currently zoned 1(a) Rural 'A' and that allotments must be no less than 40 hectares (100 acres). Also at that stage, no application for subdivision had been considered by the Council.

Further to that, the Cessnock City Council indicated that it was aware of the importance of the bird habitat and that any development application would need to be assessed.

By mid-May, I was driving by the aforementioned billboard and couldn't help noticing the big SOLD stickers splashed all over the sign. After some investigation I discovered that Stage 1 of this development had in fact been completed. Stage 1 was the sale of several 100acre blocks of land around the perimeter of the area but not actually adjoining the water. These blocks can be

described as a mix of open farmland and part or fully timbered country. The sale of these blocks was undoubtedly required to finance the next stage.

Stage 2, amid much fanfare and rave advertising, (so the real estate agent informs me) is due for release within the next 12 months. This next stage involves the subdivision of the land immediately surrounding Colliery Dam into 1 and 2 acre blocks, with streets and, eventually, houses plus a golf course etc. etc.

A recent letter to the Cessnock City Council requesting confirmation of this information has yet to be met with a reply.

Development of this land will have impacts (immediate and long term) on the existing woodland/wetland complex. The major concern is the possible massive increase in nutrient levels in the water of the stream and dam. We do have some allies in this matter and both the Mulbring Landcare Group and the Mt Vincent Landcare Group are very interested in gaining an outcome favourable to the well being of the natural environment. Water quality of streams has become very important to rural communities and all it takes to sustain it.

At this point in time I am gathering as much information as I can to support our arguments and if anyone has something to offer (information, advice, whatever) I would be most grateful for the assistance.

Tom Clarke

Gould League Bird Study Camp

This year's camp will be held at

"Timor View" adjacent to
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from 29th September to 8th October 1998.

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For further details or to be put on the mailing list please contact the organiser

Ann Lindsey

37 Long Crescent, Shortland 2307

Ph: 4951 2008

New National Environment Laws

The Federal Government is in the process of drafting new national environment laws. The new laws appear to signify a substantial abandonment by the Federal Government from its environmental responsibilities, with a substantial transfer of environmental responsibilities to the States. For those of us who have witnessed the rape of the Queensland coast by State Government backed developments such an abdication of Federal responsibility should ring alarm bells.

According to the Australian Conservation Foundation the following will feature in the new legislation.

- all existing national environment legislation is to be reduced to three new acts: the *Environment Protection Act*, the *Biodiversity Conservation Act*, and a new 'Heritage' Act.
- a continued retreat by the Federal Government from its national role and responsibilities for environmental matters by transferring these to the States wherever possible - all under the guise of "efficiency and reduction of intergovernmental duplication".
- an increased reliance on state-based assessments (EIA) and other accredited State procedures such as bilateral agreements. Based on current information, it is unlikely that these procedures would be rigorous, uniform, or open to public scrutiny. For example, activities affecting threatened species and World Heritage areas that are covered by a State bilateral agreement or management plan, would no longer require Commonwealth approval.
- severe restrictions on the range of environmental matters that require the automatic involvement of the Commonwealth. Alarming, crucial issues such as climate change, vegetation clearance, land degradation and water allocation, are not classified as being of national significance. Regional Forest Agreements fall entirely outside of the proposed reforms, thus exempting native forests from Commonwealth laws.
- inadequate participatory decision making processes. Conservation agreement and management plan processes would operate with little or no public involvement, essentially shifting

environmental decision making to the private sector.

- 'Standing' provisions to strengthen the rights of citizens and community groups to enforce laws will be limited.

Some questions that certainly need asking are:

- how will matters of "national environmental significance" be defined?
- why are issues such as Climate Change, Vegetation Clearance, Land and Water Catchment Degradation not considered as being of national significance?
- what powers will the Federal Environment Minister have to protect Australia's nationally significant environment and heritage?
- what degree of public consultation will be undertaken in the formulating of Federal-State bilateral agreements? Will the final agreement be made public?
- why are terms such as 'Multiple Use' being written into legislation relating to World Heritage and other conservation reserves?
- will the Australian Heritage Commission be retained in its current form?
- will the Government abolish the Register of the National Estate? How will National Estate listed areas be protected under the changes?
- why should areas of high conservation value covered by Regional Forest Agreements be exempt from the reform process, and excluded from the new *Biodiversity Act* considering that the majority of Australia's biodiversity is found in forests?
- how will the community conservation movement be able to negotiate legislative amendments with the Government?

You can express your concerns by contacting;

Senator Robert Hill - fax (02) 6277 6101
PM John Howard - fax (02) 6273 4100
Kim Beazley - fax (02) 6277 8495

(postal addresses for all: c/- Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600)

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 21st June	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Wetlands Day - first stop Cedar Hill Minmi Pub 8:00am Ray Walker 4958 5942
Sunday 5th July	Weed Watchers: Meet: Contact:	Stockton Sand Spit Car park under Stockton Bridge 9:00am Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 7th July	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Heatherbrae/Boomerang Park Fitzgerald Bridge Boat Ramp, Raymond Terrace 8:00am Margaret Woods 4963 3070
Wednesday 8th July	Clubnight: Main feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm Trevor Quested - Birds of Ecuador
Weekend 18/19th July	Camp/Field Day: Sunday Meet: Contact:	Monkerai Park on right hand side at Clarencetown end of Dungog 8:30am Judith Smith 4964 1389
Saturday 25th July	Regent Honeyeater Survey - Bulga or Howes Valley area. Meet: Leader:	Broke Fire Station 7:30am Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Intending participants must ring to confirm
Tuesday 4th August	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Stockton Area Car Park under Stockton Bridge 8:00am Max Blanch 4961 1655
Weekend 8/9th August	Regent Honeyeater & Swift Parrot Survey Weekend Wanted: Coordinator:	Small groups to survey various areas. Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Survey for the whole or just part of the weekend. Recording sheets and information from Ann Lindsey.		
Wednesday 12th August	Clubnight: Main Feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm Nicholas Carlile - Gould's Petrel & Cabbage Tree Island
Sunday 23rd August	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Colongra Lake (near Munmorah) Pacific Highway opposite Gwandalan turnoff 8:00am Diane Rogers 4976 1686
Saturday/ Sunday 29th/30th August	S.G.A.P. Wildflowers At The Wetlands - Shortland Wetlands Centre HBOC volunteers required for display stand and/or Bird Walks. Recruitment:	Tom Clarke 4951 3872