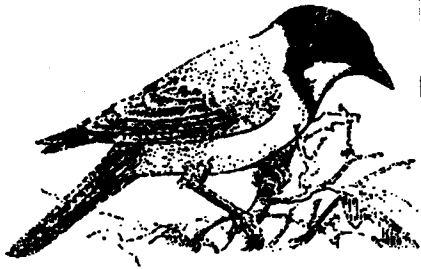


NEWSLETTER



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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<http://www.ee.newcastle.edu.au/users/staff/eepcm/hboc>

President:	Alan Stuart
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.

Is Time Running Out For Hexham Swamp?

Let's (re)Turn The Tide.

June Club Night

We actually had two guest speakers at our June Clubnight. The first to speak was Dennis Hirst from the United Commercial Fishermens Association and he gave a very interesting overview of the plight of Hexham Swamp.

Hexham Swamp was once a large and diverse (and thriving) wetland of around 3800ha. It was a dynamic complex being affected by tidal (salt water) flushing from one side and by catchment (fresh water) runoff from the other. Depending upon the current amount of rainfall and the height of the tides the dividing band between freshwater swamp and saltmarsh/mangrove areas would march up or downstream. The state of the swamp was in constant ebb and flow with the occasional inundation caused by a flooded Hunter River.

The swamp was rich in wildlife and supported many thousands of birds and of course provided a magnificent nursery for fish and crustaceans. Dennis has been connected with the fishing industry just about all his life and by association with Hexham Swamp. He still has vivid memories of this very productive area before the floodgates were installed.

As far as birds go, Dennis recalls seeing all sorts of waterfowl including Freckled Duck on

Hexham Swamp, as well as crakes and lots of waders. The image of huge flocks of Black Swan descending upon the waters to create a seething mass of black necks and red bills remains a clear and remarkable recollection.

Back in the late 60s the view was held (by those that made the rules) that to create more grazing land by draining swamps was a greater advantage than the losses incurred to fish stocks, wildlife habitat and flood mitigation. As a matter of fact, the fishing industry was never even consulted in the decision making process to build "flood gates" near the mouth of Iron Bark Creek.

It is ironic to note that an Environmental Impact Statement tendered at the time did in fact state that the gates should be left in an open position only to be closed in time of flood waters coming down the Hunter. This of course was never adopted, the opposite position in fact has prevailed for 26 years.

The construction of the gates and subsequent non-use of them has dramatically reduced the amount of tidal flushing into Hexham Swamp. As a result the mangrove community has dwindled to nearly 10% of the original area and the subsequent impact on commercial fish stocks, crabs and prawns has been quite substantial.

What is obvious now (if it wasn't already) is that the flood gates need to be managed to allow the rehabilitation of mangrove areas; however there are hurdles to overcome. The biggest one it seems is the purchase of farming land (previously wetland) which will be affected by the

reintroduction of tidal water. Landowners have agreed in principle to these purchases but getting the money from the NSW State Government is quite another proposition.

The loss of Hexham Swamp as a productive fish nursery actually impacted greatly on the entire Hunter Estuary. Birds and prawns regularly moved about the area including Hexham Swamp, Ash Island, Kooragang Island and Fullerton Cove chasing feeding and breeding options. A large slice of those options has been missing now for a long time. It most certainly can be regained and the opportunity should be taken now.

HBOC is participating in some of the initiatives being coordinated by Ocean Watch Australia Ltd to raise the public profile of the Hexham Swamp situation. HBOC has recently issued a press release supporting the values of a well managed wetland to all the community.

President's Column

Birdwatching and conservation seem to go hand in hand these days. Mostly, our focus is on protecting particular areas. There seems to be never-ending pressure to "develop" areas that are great places for birds. In the Hunter, we're faced with these problems all the time. Conservation is a regular agenda item at the club Committee meetings each month and there always seem to be 5 or 6 issues to discuss. Obviously, we try to focus on what seem to be the most important ones - the fates of the Big Pond at Kooragang and Colliery Dam at Mulbring are of current concern - but almost every case is a worthy one and we do what we can to help.

However, conservation is also about endangered species. Often, the main issue is that we don't know enough about the behaviours and needs of the birds in question - where they range, what they need for breeding success, what are their competitors. This is why HBOC fully supports studies such as the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys that Birds Australia is organising. At the time of writing, there was to be a survey over the weekend of

August 8/9, and we are sending people to many locations around the region. It will be a while before the results are collated. In a similar survey in May, only 12 Regent Honeyeaters were found in the whole of NSW. Where are the others?

I recently read of some good news to do with conservation, that shows that it is possible to make a difference. In Spain, the majestic Imperial Eagle is endangered. People knew that young birds left their nesting areas and then returned 4-5 years later to breed. What wasn't known was where the birds went in the meantime, and why so few nowadays were returning. After fitting some birds with radio transmitters, it was found that the young birds went to 'dispersion zones' many hundreds of kilometres away in Africa, and that 60% were being electrocuted on electricity transmission wires in these areas. As a result, local authorities have moved the wires, the mortality rate from electrocution is down to 10%, and the prospects for the species are greatly improved.

I'm delighted to report that HBOC now has a Website. Those of you with access to the Web will be able to check out what's coming up in the program for Club nights and outings, for example. Would-be visitors to the Hunter can get information about some good birdwatching spots, contact details for the club, and so on.

The Website is at www.ee.newcastle.edu.au/users/staff/eepcm/hboc. Our special thanks go to Adrian Ryan, who did a great job in developing the site, and to Peter McLauchlan who is now responsible for maintaining it.

While on the subject of tele-communications, in the last newsletter I gave an incorrect e-mail address for the Birding Australia group. To join this interesting network of birdwatchers, send a message with nothing in the subject line, addressed to majordomo@deakin.edu.au bearing the message *subscribe birding-aus* followed then by your e-mail address.

Happy birding
Alan Stuart

Birding In La La Land.

Overseas birdwatching should be researched and undertaken obsessively - no distractions except minimal eating and sleeping. Ideal companions - fellow twitchers with stamina and local knowledge.

But life isn't like that. Children must be minded, shopping done, family life maintained. Compromise rules - with the occasional half day off for good behaviour.

My family and I visited Southern California in the first week of May 1998 - I birded when I could. My preparation was to read Peterson's Field Guide on the plane and make some lists.

Day One. From LA Airport to Anaheim by freeway - various medium size birds (possibly American Crows) and unidentified small raptors in the distance. Amazed that any animal life could exist in this environment.

After check-in went for a walk. Anaheim is an urban wasteland - Parramatta Road plus Gold Coast. Found a grass verge. House Sparrows - no, wait, some of them are Red or Orange - frantic leaf through Field Guide identified House Finch. First new bird! Plain bird with melodious call on pylon identified as Northern Mockingbird. American Crow confirmed. Hey, I could get to like this country.

Day Two. Off by bus to San Diego Sea World. Greeted by Western Gulls. Then in quick succession, Brewers Blackbird, Mourning Dove and Snowy Egret. Between the Orca and Seal shows I find an estuary out back which proves fruitful - Brown Pelicans, Cormorant (sp) and a Great Blue Heron. On a grassy area I convince myself I see a Song Sparrow.

Then suddenly I realise that the "bees" zipping around are Hummingbirds! Completely unexpected: I nearly wet myself. An hour of great fun as book in hand I follow the birds oblivious to people, family, trees or dog poo. Binoculars are useless with hummers - you have to use your bare eyes. At first glance they are indistinguished - then they reveal a flash of iridescent green or cerise or purple on chest or neck. Saw Anna's Hummingbird! Humility and awe and triumph in equal doses.

Day Three. The dreaded Disneyland. You've seen the theme parks of the Gold Coast? Disneyworld is different only in scale. The birds show good sense by their absence. Late in the day we find ourselves in a quieter area on a mock

waterfront and I see the American Coot. Just like ours but its chicks have a distinctive pink-red head. And just on dusk a pair of Black-crowned Night Herons. A perfect end to a grueling day.

Day Four. Universal Studios. Los Angeles. As a theme park better value than Disneyland but as a birdwatching venue pretty ordinary. Only new bird is a rather nice Scrub Jay.

Day Five. Off to San Diego again - this time to the Zoo. Great place. Don't miss the Rose-breasted Cockatoos from Australia in the endangered birds section (Galahs!). Saw California Towhees, California Gulls and the Black Phoebe (a Tyrant Flycatcher). Usual range of confusing sparrows and warblers.

Day Six. My turn to take the kids to Disneyland again. We have summoned up our courage and attempt the scarier rides. I expect nothing of the birds and to my surprise, under a tree next to the Haunted House, I see a hummingbird. Its an Allens Hummingbird! Flowers grow on dung heaps, hummingbirds at Disneyworld. They won't believe this at the Club.

Day Seven. My day off. 6:00am clutching a newspaper cutting I tell the taxi driver "Take me to this swamp!". Fifty American dollars later I arrive at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary in the city of Irvine. I have died and gone to heaven. A wetland on a reclaimed ranch and duck shooting club run by the Audubon Society. Five duck ponds plus bushland and a birdlist of 223.

Where to start? There were ducks: Cinnamon Teal (brilliant), Gadwell, Ruddy Duck (superb), Shovellers and Eared Grebe. There were swallows: Violet Green and Barn. And warblers: Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warbler. The waders were great too: Killdeer, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Marbled Godwit (in breeding colours) and Greater Yellowlegs.

And so quickly, it was all over. Just when I was getting my eye in. My taxi is coming and I must pack and fly. 34 species at San Joaquin - many more almost seen or "not quite sure". A total of 43 species on the Southern California list of which 37 were completely new to me.

My first overseas birdwatching foray was rewarding. Every bird on the list was earned. No local expert to tell me what I saw. No group of fellow fanatics to confirm my doubts. Just me and Peterson and my binoculars and the birds. It re-awakened the excitement that I had when I began birdwatching. When the world was new and everything in it pristine and yet to be discovered.

And if you can say that after a visit to Los Angeles you have had a unique experience.

Peter Phillips

NEW MEMBERS

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

Muriel Hearn of Newcastle
Judy Matheson of Caves Beach
Theo Tasoulis of Dudley
Lyn Welch of Dora Creek

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

Colour-banded Regent Honeyeaters

As the ongoing research into the movements and breeding biology of Regent Honeyeaters continues it is important to record any of these birds you see and notify the Records Officer. Also, as many individuals have been colour-banded it is possible to determine their identity just from field observations rather than having to retrap the bird.

In most cases banded Regent Honeyeaters will carry a metal-band (silver) and a colour-band on one leg and two colour-bands on the other leg. If all bands are correctly recorded it is possible to positively identify the individual bird. It can take some time to get all colours and be sure of their position if the birds are actively foraging in the canopy but it can be, and regularly is, achieved. It is important to record which colours are on which leg. This is best written down immediately as it is easy to become confused.

Please record colours thus: Left leg - x over metal, Right leg - y over z. Remember, these are the bird's left and right legs. Please note that the metal band can be on either of the legs. The leg carrying the metal band plus the colour identifies the location of the banding; the other two colours identifies the individual.

Records of sightings of colour-banded Regent Honeyeaters can be sent to:

David Geering

Regent Honeyeater Recovery Coordinator
Phone (03) 9412 4297 or Freecall 1800 621 056.

Articles for our Newsletter are always
welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is 2nd October, 1998

Mail to: Tom Clarke 28 Kokera St, Wallsend 2287
Phone: (02) 4951 3872 (h) (02) 4940 1384 (w)
Fax: (02) 4940 1378

Regents At Last!

Seven ever hopefuls set out today, the 25th July, on the 23rd Regent Honeyeater Survey outing scheduled by the Club. To date no Regent Honeyeaters had been seen in the Hunter Region on any of these particular outings.

But this was the one! After a stunning day's birdwatching which included White-backed Swallow, Speckled Warbler, Hooded Robin, Red-capped Robin, Scarlet Robin and Eastern Yellow Robin, Zebra Finches and Double-barred Finches by the score, and two Black-eared Cuckoos (a rare bird for the Hunter), we decided to check Jim Perry's regular spot for Fuscous Honeyeater on the way home.

Within a minute two Regent Honeyeaters could be seen high in the blossom of Spotted Gums. One was seen only fleetingly, but the other stayed around long enough for us to establish that it was unbanded. As well as feeding, it spent some time chasing Fuscous Honeyeaters when they came too close. These birds were located 8.2km west of Hermitage Road along the Pokolbin-Broke Road on army land and could be seen from the side of the road.

As we drove home we noticed that most of the eucalypts in the area were in flower. At one point about 500 White-naped Honeyeaters crossed the road and milled about in the trees in a most extraordinary fashion. They were more like huge insects than birds. Should you be birdwatching along this road at any time, please be careful as the traffic hurtles along unexpectedly.

I would like to say thank you to those people who have participated so consistently in this survey so far. But this is not the end. There is still much work to be done in trying to understand about feeding and nesting habits and how birds move about the countryside in search of their basic needs.

Ann Lindsey

One week later: One Regent Honeyeater, probably the same one, was seen in the same place on Saturday 1st August.

OBSERVATIONS FROM JUNE MEETING.

1998				
Apr	Regent Honeyeater	7	Wye Point	D. Geering
Apr 9	Black Kite	2	Wingen	G. Newling
Apr 18	Black-fronted Dotterel	11	Bayswater Colliery	"
May 12	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1	Wingen	G. Newling
May 17	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	7	Paterson	J. Smith
May 28	Pacific Baza	1	Speers Point	Sue Hamonet
May 9/10	Crested Shrike-tit	1	Ellalong	J. Meynell
	Dusky Woodswallow	2	"	"
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	"	"
	Regent Honeyeater	>8	"	"
	White-naped Honeyeater	100's	"	"
	Turquoise Parrot	1	"	"
May 2	Musk Lorikeet	>50	"	"
May 18	Spotted Turtle-dove	38	Woodberry	J. Smith
	Maggie-Lark	~40	"	"
Jun 6	Swamp Harrier	1	Shortland Wetland Centre	P. Lightfoot
Jun 26	Brown Falcon	1	" " "	"
	Golden Whistler	Pr.	" " "	"
	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1	" " "	"
Jun 8	Satin Bowerbird	3	New Lambton Heights	"
Jun 11	Powerful Owl	1	Blackbutt Reserve	"
Jun 15	Powerful Owl	2	" "	"
Jun 8	Powerful Owl	1	Ridgeway Rd. New Lambton Hts	"
Jun 7	Pacific Baza	1	" " " "	"
Jun 8	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	2	Jesmond Bushland	"
Jun 21	Bar-tailed Godwit	53	Lemon Tree Passage	M. Kearns
	Grey-tailed Tattler	16	" " "	"
	Eastern Curlew	3	" " "	"
Feb - Apr	Dusky Woodswallow	1 - 8	Malabula	"
Jun 17	White-necked Heron	1	Williamtown	"
Jun 20	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	1	Oyster Cove	"
Jun 21	Sacred Kingfisher	3	Swan Bay	"
	Mangrove Gerygone	1	"	"
	Musk Lorikeet	10	Tanilba Bay	"
	Mangrove Gerygone	1 imm.	Lemon Tree Passage	"
	Whimbrel	2	" " "	"
	Bar-tailed Godwit	12	Swan Bay	"
Jun 17	Australian Hobby	1	S.W.C.	"
	Brown Goshawk	1	"	"
Jun 24	Brown Goshawk	1	"	"
Jun 24	Little Eagle	1	"	"
Jun 21	Eastern Curlew	7	Swan Bay	"
Jun 27	Osprey	1	Tanilba Bay	"
Jun 27	Little Grassbird	7	Lemon Tree Passage STW	M. Kearns
	Tawny Grassbird	3	" " " "	"
	Clamorous Reed-warbler	2	" " " "	"
	White-fronted Chat	8	" " " "	"
Jun 25	Pacific Baza	2	Dungog	J. Smith
Jun 27	New-Holland Honeyeater	4	Fassifern Railway Stn	P. Durie
Jul 1	Pacific Baza	2	Rankin Park	J. Stephenson
Jul 1	White-plumed Honeyeater	1	S.W.C.	M. Kearns
	Dusky Moorhen	81	"	"
	Eurasian Coot	184	"	"
	White-bellied Sea-eagle	1	Fennell Bay	P. Durie
Jul 2	White-necked Heron	11	Near Williamtown	M. Kearns

Jul 5	Pheasant Coucal	2		
Jul 7	Azure Kingfisher	1	Near Salt Ash	"
Jun/Jul	White-necked Heron	1	Seaham Weir	"
Jul 1	Swamp Harrier	2	Near Salt Ash	"
Jul 1-2	White-necked Heron	1	Kooragang Island	"
Jul 7	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	" "	"
	Tree Martin	1	Seaham Swamp N.R.	"
	Rainbow Lorikeet	7	Clarencetown	"
	Yellow-rumped Thornbill nb	1	"	"
	Great Crested Grebe	3	"	"
	Musk Duck	2	Grahamstown Dam	"
Jul 5	Blue-faced Honeyeater	16	"	
Jul 5	White-cheeked Honeyeater	4	North Arm Cove	M. & K. Woods
		1	Woodberry	J. Smith

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Twitchathon 1998

The Twitchathon is a fund raising activity conducted by Birds Australia on an annual basis. The objective of the day is two fold:

- first is for teams of Birdwatchers to see as many different species of Birds in a 24 hour period. Teams are of three or more members and to achieve their goal members travel as a group to as many sites and habitats to see birds
- secondly to raise funds for conservation, this is achieved by gaining sponsorship from individuals or from organisations for the number of species seen

Whilst fund raising is the objective, teams must have fun. For some this means going to extraordinary lengths to see as many species as possible, the state record is 211 species and to achieve this kind of record teams travel large distances and in many cases have only a brief stop if any at night. The competition is hard and fast, but these competitors see it as fun. This is the **Main Race**.

For those who can think of nothing worse than participating in the Main Race but who would still like to make their contribution to conservation there is the **Champagne Race**. To join in all one has to do is go birding for the day, or even check the birds you see in your back yard. Just have a normal birdwatching outing and get some sponsorship, absolutely anyone can do this.

To make it all worth while there are prizes for the teams having the most species on their list by the end of the day. There are prizes for both categories, Main and Champagne. What will you get, well that depends on the sponsors we can get. however there is always the Emu Tours perpetual trophies for the most species seen and the most funds raised.

So what are the details

- dates are 24th and 25th October 1998
- race starts at 1600 on the 24th and ends at 1700 on the 25th (summer time starts this weekend)
- funds raised during the weekend will go towards conservation and study of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo in NSW (75%) and Nationally (25%) towards the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. Of course all funds are tax deductible
- For more details or to register a team and get the full Twitchathon package please contact:

Peter West
45A Excelsior Ave
Castle Hill, NSW 2154
ph (h) 02 9634 3883
ph (w) 02 9833 5469
fax 02 9833 5585
e-mail pdwest@mmm.com

Coming Events

Please check with the contact person for each outing in case of changed details or suitability of site for the camp or field day.

Sunday 23rd 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
Tuesday 1st September	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Redhead/Dudley area Corner Ocean & Collier Redhead at 8:00am Keith Woods 4963 3070
Weekend 4-6th September	Extra Special Activity: Cost: Organiser:	Barren Grounds Bird Observatory \$110 - pay up now or be disappointed. Liz Herbert 4959 3663
Wednesday 9th September	Clubnight: Main Feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30am Joy Pegler - Birding on Rennell Island
Sunday 20th September	Field Day: Meet: Overnight camping available in private ground at your own cost. Contact:	Ferndale Park (Wangat) Raymond Terrace MacDonalds at 7:00am Sue Hamonet 4958 1023
Weekend 3-5th October	Camp: Contact:	"Glen View", Capertee Valley Sue Hamonet 4958 1023
Tuesday 6th October	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Wyee Point 36 Bay St, Wyee Point (last house in street) Margaret Woods 4963 3070
Wednesday 14th October	Clubnight: Main Feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30am Ursula Munro - Bird Migration
Sunday 18th October	Field Day: Meet: Overnight camping available on site at your own cost Leader:	Bowarri National Park, Middlebrook via Scone. East Maitland MacDonalds at 6:30am Greg Newling (02) 6545 0318
Weekend 24/25th October	1998 Birds Australia Twitchathon Funds raised this year will help the Glossy Black Cockatoo Project The event will finish at the Shortland Wetlands Centre at about 5:00pm on 25th October. Come and join the teams in a celebratory BBQ. Bring your own everything. For more information contact Tom Clarke 4951 3872.	