

NEWSLETTER



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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The aims of the club are:

To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat.

To encourage bird observing as a leisure time activity.

Up Past Kikkatinalong, On The Muddy Track To Weelabarraback.

*(Exerps of a letter from a birdo in Cape York -
HBOC member, Michael Todd)*

I'm currently living in Pormpuraaw, an aboriginal settlement on the west coast of Cape York about 250km west of Musgrave. I worked in Lakefield National Park for about five weeks and since early December I've been working here in Pormpuraaw. I decided that Pormpuraaw was going to be my best chance of getting data on both the Star Finch and the Crimson Finch during the wet season. No-one knows what happens to the Stars during the wet and it is VERY difficult to get around in Lakefield during the wet, even in a boat (which the DEH wouldn't give me). I'm cut off in Pormpuraaw as well but I can go about 1km east of town and I have about an 8km stretch along the coast that is accessible by foot or car.

So far I've banded about 100 Stars and 100 Crimsons. Most of the Crimsons that I banded in '98 have left the area, but since the wet began (early this year) most of the Crimsons banded have stayed put, paired off and some have started nesting. The Stars have proved a little less co-operative. There were hundreds on and just behind the beach in December but now there are only small flocks around and I am unsure whether they will stay around to nest or not.

The work has been great for my banding

and mist-netting skills. It was a bit like being thrown in at the deep end but I'm swimming now. I'm getting fairly good at choosing net sites and rarely have to use more than two nets to catch a good sample (except for the Stars, which are getting hard to find now). I'm also getting faster at putting nets up; it used to take me ages when I started but its no longer much of a chore. A problem now is the rising water levels. Most of the spots where I have been putting up nets are in shallow water, which is gradually getting deeper. I'm starting to get worried about crocodiles. Where I have nets out at the moment is adjacent to the Edwards River Crocodile Farm breeding enclosures. Every now and then there is a loud crash or growl which sends my heart leaping up out of my mouth until I realise that it is coming from the OTHER side of the fence. I've been told stories about wild crocs coming up to the fence to talk to the crocs on the inside. At the beach there has been a 17ft monster which has been seen a few times so there are some big crocs about. I'm told that it is unlikely that there will be big crocs in the water bodies away from the rivers or the beach but certainly crocs of the order of 6ft or more do get seen. Plenty big enough for me! I've also been told that a favoured nesting site is in Blady Grass which is where all the finches are feeding at the moment so its where I've got the nets. I hope my work insurance covers croc damage.

The birds are interesting up here but there aren't really all that many. Less species but different ones to those back home. I think the west

coast is a bit depauperate compared to the east coast. One bird which I am getting a buzz out of is the White-browed Crake. I see them occasionally but they are quite common and noisy up here at the moment. A pair of birds duetting sounds like about ten squeaky toys talking to each other. I'm also seeing Black Bittern fairly regularly, although it could well be the same bird that I'm seeing. There are supposed to be Chestnut Rails and Little Kingfishers up here also but I haven't come across them yet.

At the moment I've only got irregular access to email, probably once every week or so and I'm still waiting for my laptop computer to be sent up. Regular mail is VERY slow up here.

Best wishes

Mike

President's Column

Remember that exotic bird that was at Glendale Shopping Centre for about a week, last April. Many of us went to take a look at it. The Birds Australia Rarities Committee has just last month confirmed that it was indeed a Black-backed Wagtail (*Motacilla lugens*) as we reported to the world at the time of its visit. It is only the third confirmed record for Australia, which is why the Rarities Committee was so careful in its deliberations. Of course, the majority of the committee had come to Newcastle to see the bird in person, so the formal identification was reasonably straightforward compared to the usual cases.

It is very important, for developing our understandings of bird behaviour, that sightings of rare birds be reported, and it is equally important that the reports be considered by experts before being accepted. Sometimes, there may be other identification possibilities that did not occur to the person making the sighting. The Birds Australia Rarities Committee considers Australian rarities. Most states, and certainly NSW, have an equivalent of it for reports of species that are unusual for that state. There are also a number of regional versions, and most of you would know that HBOC has a rarities appraisal committee that considers unusual Hunter Region records.

Reports of rare birds are either accepted or

Experience Birds Of The Dry Country At Borah Reserve.

Easter camp this year will be at Borah Reserve, about 30km south of Barraba. The area generally is described as transitional country where animals and plants from both the dry interior and the coast can be found together.

The Barraba district is surrounded by a fine network of drover's trails, which include fenced reserves, and Borah Reserve is one of ten nominated 'hot spots' for birds. A flowing creek with mature River Red Gums is a feature of the camp site where there are plenty of birds. Birds to look for include Turquoise Parrot, Little Lorikeet and Regent Honeyeater.

Intending campers should know that they need to bring everything including water to this site. The HBOC will provide our own pit toilet. Talk to Liz Herbert for directions to this wonderful place.

not accepted by an appraisal committee; they are never "rejected". Only those reports where there is certainty in the minds of the experts about the identification can be accepted. If there is a change of opinion about a report that previously was not accepted, it is quite easy to make the necessary amendments (e.g. the opinion might change when extra detail about the sighting becomes available). By contrast, it is almost impossible to completely expunge a report from all the various places it gets to, should there be a change of opinion about its acceptability.

That's enough of birds and bureaucracy for the moment. I'm sure that most of you have been watching and enjoying David Attenborough's TV series *The Life of Birds* on the ABC on Sunday evenings. Attenborough's shows over the years have been characterised by tremendous filmwork and entertaining, informative voice-overs, and the current series is no exception.

My only quibble is with the ABC's timing for the screening. I've missed some of the episodes while away on holidays. I suspect that some other club members will be in a similar situation, and I'm hoping that HBOC will decide to buy a copy of the videos for the library, so that those of us who've missed out on episodes can catch up on them.

NB: I intend that my presidential perk will be to have the first loan of them!

Urban Behaviour Of Regent Honeyeaters.

Two years ago, a plan to make Barraba, 90km north of Tamworth, the most attractive town in Australia was submitted to Council. This plan featured "Welcome to Barraba" signs at each end of town and because the endangered Regent Honeyeater is seen in the area, this bird was used as a logo.

Local artist, Allan Lynch, chose to enlarge a drawing taken from Neville Cayley's "What Bird Is That?" to paint two meticulous pictures. This novel advertising has produced otherwise unlikely sightings of Regent Honeyeaters around the town.

From mid July to early October two birds fed on the blossom of the Paulownias at the Blue Gum Caravan Park. About 300m closer to town two birds (the same ones?) have been early morning visitors, again since mid July until early October, to a backyard where they challenged their images in the side mirror of a truck and fed upon a blossoming Calistemon species.

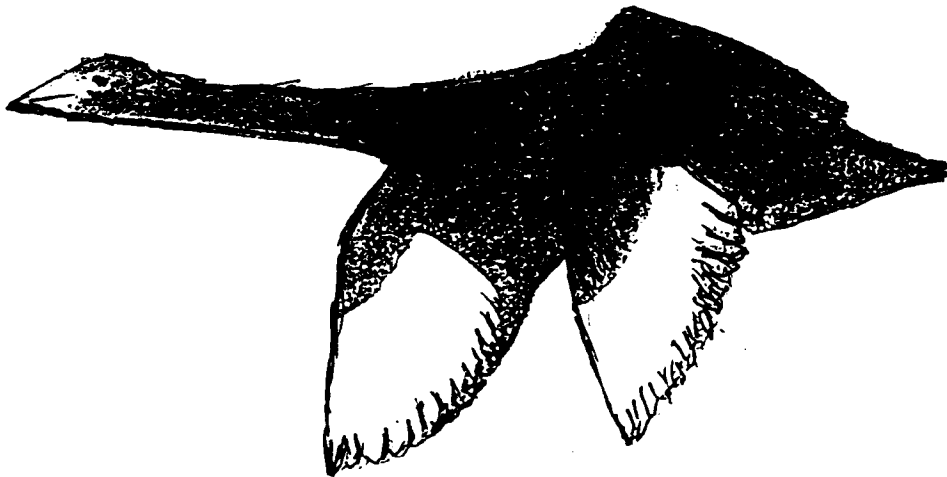
A cafe proprietor registered the name *Regent Honeyeater Cafe* and hung poster size pictures of the bird on the cafe's walls. Later he was able to identify a Regent Honeyeater 16km east of Barraba in an unnamed Eucalyptus species growing in the area of the abandoned Woodsreef asbestos mine.

A brochure of the Bird Routes of the Barraba district describes the best places to see birds (171 species listed to date). Access is via the network of drover's trails including the fenced reserves which are accessible to the public in accordance with the Rural Lands Protection Board Act 1989. Gates, ramps and laneways leading to these secluded areas are identified. It is possible to camp overnight, or longer, provided the Board's Ranger's permission is sought.

Birdwatchers from several clubs have visited the district, an area containing remnants of the once vast Grassy Whitebox Woodland especially along these travelling stock routes.

(Excerpt of a letter from Russ Watts of Upper Manilla)

*Wingtips glisten as
Black Swans split the summer sky.
Wonder fills our hearts.*



David Kibble

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 February	Field Day: Meet: Contact:	Main Creek via Dungog Raymond Terrace MacDonalds (the old one) Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Tuesday 2nd March	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Speers Point/Teralba Speers Point Park 8:00am Margaret Woods 4963 3070
Saturday 6th March	Atlassing Day: Meet: Leader:	Kooragang Island Stockton Sand Spit Car Park 7:30am Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Intending participants <u>must ring</u> to confirm.
Sunday 7th March	Clean Up Australia Day - Stockton Sand Spit Meet: Contact:	Stockton Sand Spit Car Park 9:00am Pick up rubbish and/or weed till noon. Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Wednesday 10th March	Clubnight: Main Feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30am Dr Richard Major - "Life on the Edge" Birds in the NSW wheat belt.
Sunday 21st March	Field Day: Meet: Leader:	Ash Island/Kooragang Island Ash Island Bridge, Hexham 7:00am Jim Perry 4943 2496
Easter weekend 2nd-5th April	Camp: Contact:	Borah Reserve, Barraba district. Bring your own everything. Liz Herbert 4959 3663
Tuesday 6th April	Midweek Outing: Meet: Contact:	Rathmines/Buttaba Rathmines turn-off 8:00am Keith Woods 4963 3070
Wednesday 14th April	Clubnight: Main Feature:	Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm Michael Murray Large Forest Owls in Lake Macquarie
Sunday 18th April	Field Day: Meet: Contact:	Copeland Common via Gloucester (two hours drive from Newcastle) Mountain Maid Mine, Copeland 8:30am Ann Lindsey 4951 2008