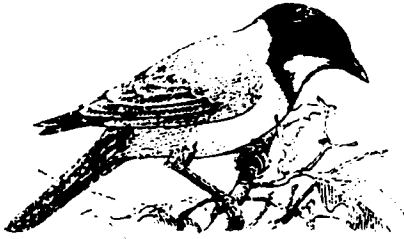


# NEWSLETTER



## 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.*

## International Visitors Using East Asia-Australia Flyway Land At Kooragang Island

Paddling about in a canoe one cool Saturday morning on the Hunter River with a couple of mad birdos proved to be more than just a good excuse to get out of the house. It was an opportunity to record the migrant population in the area.

There they all were, nearly three hundred visitors from eastern Siberia and Mongolia, sitting on the slag dykes not very far upstream from the Stockton Bridge. They were having a bit of a rest after working hard to secure their daily food requirements from the mud flats of the Hunter Estuary.

These particular visitors are going to stay here all through the winter this year and wait for thousands of others of their kind that will arrive later in early spring.

The HBOC has begun a survey style project referred to as the Hunter Wader Survey to gather observational data on shorebird numbers in the estuary. What we were looking at last month were the over-wintering Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Greenshank and Grey-tailed Tattler.

Numbers are low at the moment since most migratory types had left for the breeding grounds of the northern hemisphere by the end of April. However, as the monthly surveys continue the

influx of next year's birds will be recorded.

Our efforts to secure substantial information on our shorebirds is in response to the very real threat of this area becoming the site for an international airport. This type of survey has been carried out previously in years gone by but good recent data is lacking.

All members of HBOC are invited to take part in these survey days. It doesn't matter what level of expertise you think you have in wader identification; even experts get it wrong sometimes. Think of it as an opportunity to increase your skills as well as a chance to help.

Depending on how many members get involved each month, several different sites will be surveyed at the same time to gain a better understanding of what's happening. It is hoped that the Kooragang Island dykes can be simultaneously surveyed with Big Pond, Ash Island, Stockton Sand Spit and Fullerton Cove.

For further information contact Chris Herbert and look for the survey dates in this newsletter (see Coming Events).

Articles for our Newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for the next issue is 30th July 1999

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# President's Column

Every time I go out to Ash Island, I think what a wonderful place it is now and how marvellous it is going to become as a couple of rehabilitation projects come to fruition.

For those of you who don't know Ash Island, it is the part of Kooragang Island located to the west of the freight railway line. Access is by bridge over the Hunter River (South Arm) from the Pacific Highway just past Ironbark Creek at Hexham.

Less than three years ago, much of Ash Island was grazing land for cattle, except for some large pond areas at its eastern end where many wetland birds and waders would come to feed, sometimes in great numbers. Now, it is one of the focal points for the activities of the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP). The cattle are gone, hundreds of trees have been planted, walking tracks are being established, previously stagnant creeks are now regularly flushed by tides. And as a consequence, bird numbers are rising.

A supporting project has recently been initiated by Birds Australia. I am representing HBOC on the Steering Committee for the project, which aims to rehabilitate one of the major creeks of Ash Island and monitor the resulting changes in utilisation by waders.

Around Newcastle we already have two internationally renowned wetland areas - Kooragang Nature Reserve and Shortland Wetlands Centre. In a few years, as the rehabilitation projects come to fruition, Ash Island will make it a trifecta for us. All three locations will be different and special; together they will make Newcastle very special.

That's if we don't end up with an airport instead. If the Kooragang Island airport proposal were to succeed, there would be many environmental impacts - the loss of Ash Island being one of them. HBOC's position is to be totally opposed to the airport proposal. We will soon be sending out a detailed position statement to all members (enclosed in this newsletter) and to politicians and the local media, setting out our concerns and objections.

One thing that has become clear is that we need more data about birds and Kooragang/Ash Island. As a result, we've started two new surveys. One is focussed on all the large birds flying about in the areas immediately adjacent to where the

airport is proposed to be located. The other survey, which we hope to continue as a long term project, is to collect monthly records of the waders present at several locations around Kooragang Island, Fullerton Cove and Ash Island.

If you are interested in participating in either of these surveys, please give me a call. It's a way of combining your interest in birds with a very good cause (see Coming Events for survey dates etc).

Changing subjects - in a newsletter earlier this year, I vented my frustration at having missed quite a chunk of the series *The Life of Birds* when it was shown on ABC TV over the summer. I'm pleased to tell you that HBOC did buy a copy of the videos for the Club library, and that I was able to exercise my presidential perk and have the first loan of them. They were great! If you would like to borrow this set of videos, please contact our audio-visual library manager, Peter McLauchlan.

Happy birding  
Alan Stuart

## Black Swan Watch

The Black Swan is one of the most prominent and familiar birds of Australia. Remarkably, very little is known about the biology of the species. A recently started project at the University of Melbourne aims to fill in the gaps in our knowledge about its breeding behaviour, population structure, movements and habitat requirements. As the Black Swan is a key species in many wetlands, this information will also assist in the protection of these fragile habitats.

Over the course of this three year project, an estimated 600 swans will be individually marked at various wetlands in Victoria. Markings will comprise a blue plastic neck collar with a white inscription (a letter and two numbers) unique to each bird, a corresponding leg band and a metal band from the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme.

The inscriptions on the neck collars can be read in the field with a telescope at over 100 metres. Each collar is inscribed four times to allow the complete code to be read from any angle. It is vital that all movements and breeding attempts are known for each marked bird.

Observations by birdwatchers need to be sent to  
Ken Kraaijeveld  
Dept of Zoology  
University of Melbourne.

Each observer will receive in return a history of the bird they have observed.

# Camp At Borah Reserve One of The Best

HBOC Easter Camp - Borah Reserve, Barraba.

It rained, it was sometimes windy, tree branches frequently crashed to the ground. Despite these hardships we did not hear a single word of complaint; in fact many of the 33 HBOC members who braved the weather and the long drive said it was one of the best camps they could remember. Which prompts the question; why?

Could it be that Borah Reserve, with its creek meandering past the campsite, and its riverine woodland, was one of the most beautiful campsites that many of us had experienced? Could it be that the huge number of birds present provided a particular attraction to members of a bird observers club? Could it be the dozens of Turquoise Parrot that could be seen at will? Or could it be the two Regent Honeyeaters that seemed determined to provide many of us with our best sightings ever of this wonderful bird?

Whatever the reasons, the camp at Borah Reserve was a camp with a difference. Russ Watts, our energetic and committed host conducted several walks and took us on a long drive that included two very interesting geological sites; one just over Ironbark Creek some 16km from Barraba where we saw a rock type called schistose serpentine. Chris Herbert gave us a simple and interesting explanation of the underlying (pun intended) geology. Then Russ showed us an abandoned asbestos mine, dramatic but disturbing. We then proceeded to two 'bird' spots, Mille Creek Travelling Stock Route and the Nangahara Bird Route (and Plum-headed Finches). This outing culminated in a wonderful cello recital (two Bach suites) by international cellist Jenny Ward-Clark, in the Anglican Church back in Barraba followed by wine and nibbles at 'The Backpackers' where we sipped, nibbled and saw two Southern Boobooks in the backyard.

Now to the serious business. The 33 members who had such a good time, recorded 99 species, 4 short of the Borah Reserve record, but as we all know had the weather been good we would have shot past the 103 mark.

Bev & David Kibble

# Ground Parrot Census Barren Grounds Nature Reserve

8th August, 1999 - 9:00am (at the main carpark)

On the second Sunday in August of each year since 1982, Barren Grounds Bird Observatory has conducted a census on the population of Ground Parrot within Barren Grounds Reserve. The purpose of the census is not only to monitor the Ground Parrot population but also to assess the species' ecology, particularly in relation to areas of burnt and unburnt heathland. There has been no wildfire through the reserve since January 1983, thus enabling a unique kind of monitoring over these years from heathland less than knee height to its present 1.5m plus.

The census is a project requiring many volunteers, with no birding experience necessary. For those new to birding it is a unique opportunity to participate in a conservation project, a chance to meet the Wardens of Barren Grounds Bird Observatory, researchers from Wollongong University and other dedicated, happy people wanting to do their bit for the birds. The methodology used to conduct the survey is just simply walking in as straight a line as possible in a row and counting the birds as they fly up from the heath and to watch where they land so that they are not counted a second time. Simple as that!

Has that got you interested? Yes, I hear your reply! Bring warm clothes, rain gear, hat and sunscreen and above all a sense of humour and enthusiasm! So here's your chance to come to a special course about the cryptic species of the reserve, join in other projects and have a great weekend finding yourself not only a Ground Parrot, but Eastern Bristlebird, Beautiful Firetail, Southern Emu-wren and Chestnut-rumped Heathwren. See you there!!!

For more details call Jenny Smith or Raoul Boughton on 02 4236 0195.

## Reminder Annual Membership Subscriptions Overdue

If your copy of the Newsletter has been stamped with the reminder on the front page then you may have a problem - your subscriptions have not been received.

Please contact Rowley Smith (Treasurer) to ensure your continued membership of HBOC.

# Hidden Treasure Discovered At Mountain Maid.

Copeland Outing 18th April 1999.

How many times must I have travelled up the Scone Road from Gloucester through Copeland on my way to somewhere else and never even gave it a thought? It has never been my destination up until now but will surely be so in the future.

I "discovered" this place the other weekend on an HBOC field outing which was timed just right to coincide with a break in the recent wet weather. Mostly our group explored the Copeland Tops Forest Preserve on that day which is easily accessed by foot from the adjacent Mountain Maid Goldmine car park.

The carpark is right next to the small but running Back Creek and a lot of interesting birds can be seen without going to far at all. The creek at this point is overrun with lantana along its banks plus all sorts of other weeds, and is a bit of an eyesore, but being at the edge of the forest allows for some richness in bird species.

Bell Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, White-browed Scrubwren, Superb Fairy-wren and Red-browed Finch were all active and calling in the cool of the morning shadows. A group of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo were flying with lazy wing beats overhead, their calls heralding their approach well before they were seen on each occasion.

Silvereye moved along through a patch of introduced? *Cassia*, very interested in the black, ripened seed pods. Could they be feeding on the seeds? A female King Parrot called as it shared the top of a eucalypt with an Australian Magpie while lower down a pair of Crested Shrike-tit worked hard at removing bark from small branchlets. They called to each other with soft 'chut chut tee' sounds.

Pre-walk dawdling ended when everyone turned up and soon we were off up the hill along the "Hidden Treasure Walk". For other visitors to this area the treasure is the illusive specs of gold which can be panned from the creek; for our group the hidden treasures are the owners of those bird calls we can hear coming from the gloom of the rainforest.

First call is the strident alarm of a Logrunner but our only views of that bird is of a dark form moving away from the track. Better luck was had with Green Catbird, Large-billed Scrubwren,

Brown Gerygone and Spectacled Monarch all found in the same tree!

Looking up at the Green Catbird I was taken by the pattern of spots on its belly and the way they matched perfectly (in my mind) the spots of light penetrating the holes in the broad green leaves of the Giant Stinging Tree in which it sat. A wonderful study of bright green spotted with white; where's a camera when you need one?

It would have been just great to have seen (or even heard) a Noisy Pitta, but a few bursts of Ann Lindsey's sound recording only managed to call up Golden Whistler, Eastern Yellow Robin and White-throated Treecreeper. Still, it was three birds I had not previously seen on the day.

While pittas remained silent, a most noisy carry-on was observed from the Lewin's Honeyeaters. They really went on with it for some time with screeched scolding sounds and we presumed it was due to the presence of two Green Catbirds. The din subsided only when the intruders finally left the scene.

Hidden treasures continued to call but some remained out of sight. A Wompoo Pigeon called twice its 'wollock-a-woo' but shut up for good as I searched in vain and just as the sun finally came out from behind the clouds an invisible Spotted Pardalote began to chime.

Last bird for my note book was a Grey Shrike-thrush; all day they had been silent and furtive and it is a sign of the changing seasons as this fellow utters its 'winter whistle' rather than a call of great melody.

Tom Clarke

## NEW MEMBERS

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

Marilyn & Peter Chegwidden of Mayfield  
Barbara & Dick Cooper of Medowie  
Linda & Phil McGloin of Raymond Terrace

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

## OBSERVATIONS FROM MEETINGS – APRIL/MAY 1999

1999

|           |                              |       |                        |           |
|-----------|------------------------------|-------|------------------------|-----------|
| Feb 16    | Satin Bowerbird              | 3     | Wingen Village         | G.Newling |
|           | Noisy Friarbird              | 5     | "                      | "         |
| Feb 18    | Rainbow Bee-eater            | ~90   | Muswellbrook           | "         |
| Mar 2     | White-throated Needletail    | ~35   | "                      | "         |
| Mar 4     | Rainbow Bee-eater            | 26    | Wingen                 | "         |
| Mar 6     | Plumed Whistling Duck        | ~45   | Doughboy Hollow        | "         |
| Mar 20    | Black Kite                   | 1     | Aberdeen               | "         |
| Mar 23    | Great Crested Grebe          | 2     | Bayswater Colliery     | "         |
| Mar 6     | White-throated Needletail    | 7     | O'Sullivan's Gap       | "         |
|           | White-throated Needletail    | 24    | Taree                  | "         |
| Mar 13    | White-breasted Woodswallow   | 25    | Bungwahl               | "         |
| Mar 14    | Yellow-billed Spoonbill      | 1     | Broke                  | H.Tarrant |
|           | Black Kite                   | 1     | Mt.Thorley {J.8}       | "         |
|           | Yellow-billed Spoonbill      | 4     | 7km north of Lochinvar | "         |
| Mar 15-20 | Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo | 1     | Bolwarra               | "         |
| Mar 15    | White-bellied Sea-eagle      | 1     | "                      | "         |
| Mar 17    | Whistling Kite               | 1     | "                      | "         |
|           | Brown Goshawk                | 1     | "                      | "         |
| Mar 20    | Collared Sparrowhawk         | 1     | "                      | "         |
| Mar 27    | Wedge-tailed Eagle           | 1     | "                      | "         |
| Mar 29    | Spangled Drongo              | 4     | Newcastle University   | "         |
| Mar 15    | Australian King Parrot       | 40-50 | Ellalong               | J.Meynell |
| Mar 16    | Bar-shouldered Dove          | 8     | "                      | "         |

|              |                         |       |                                 |              |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Mar 5        | Rufous Fantail          | 1     | East Maitland                   | M.McLauchlan |
| Mar 13       | Black-necked Stork      | 1     | Irrawang Swamp                  | M.Maddock    |
| Mar 9-13     | Blue-faced Honeyeater   | 3     | Glen Oak                        | "            |
| Mar 13       | Common Sandpiper        | 1     | Bull's Island {Lemon Tree Pass. | M.Kearns     |
| Mar 21       | White-fronted Chat      | >40   | Big Pond                        | "            |
|              | Yellow-billed Spoonbill | 1     | "                               | "            |
|              | Pacific Golden Plover   | 46    | "                               | "            |
| 11 & 22      | White-necked Heron      | 1     | Nr. Williamtown                 | "            |
| Mar 12       | Black Swan              | 2+ ne | Kooragang Island                | "            |
| Mar 13       | Bar-shouldered Dove     | 8     | Bull's Is. [Lemon Tree Passage] | "            |
| Mar 21       | Curlew Sandpiper        | 1     | Big Pond                        | "            |
| Mar 29       | Pacific Baza            | 1     | Newcastle University            | H.Tarrant    |
| Mar 7        | Channel-billed Cuckoo   | 2     | Glendonbrook                    | R. Walker    |
|              | Tree Martin             | >80   | "                               | "            |
| Mar 31       | Wedge-tailed Eagle      | 1     | Ryhope                          | "            |
|              | Blue-faced Honeyeater   | 2     | Glen Oak                        | M.Maddock    |
| Mar 31/Apr 1 | Black-necked Stork      | 1     | "                               | "            |
| Mar 13       | Musk Lorikeet           | >10   | Speers Point                    | S. Hamonet   |
|              | Grey-crowned Babbler    | >5    | Pokolbin                        | P.Durie      |
|              | Noisy Friarbird         | >20   | "                               | "            |
|              | Olive-backed Oriole     | >2    | "                               | "            |
| Mar 27       | Blue-faced Honeyeater   | 1     | Woodberry                       | J.&R.Smith   |
| Mar 28       | Black-necked Stork      | 2     | Grahamstown Dam                 | "            |
| Mar 25       | Yellow-faced Honeyeater | 1     | Woodberry                       | "            |
| Apr 2        | Scarlet Honeyeater      | 2     | "                               | "            |

|           |                           |           |                               |                |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Mar 30    | Pied Butcherbird          | 1         | Jewell's                      | K.Laverick     |
| Mar 12    | Glossy Black Cockatoo     | 1         | East Maitland                 | J.Smart        |
|           | Grey-crowned Babbler      | 2         | Rutherford High School        | "              |
|           | Blue-faced Honeyeater     | 4         | " " "                         | "              |
| Mar 15    | Southern Boobook          | 1         | Telarah Public School         | A.Kelly        |
| Apr 1     | Great Crested Grebe       | 1         | Lake Liddell                  | M.Kearns       |
| Apr 12    | Torresian Crow            | 12        | Lemon Tree Passage            | "              |
|           | Nankeen Night Heron       | 4         | "                             | "              |
| Apr 13    | Darter                    | 2         | Warners Bay                   | R.Walker       |
| Apr 5     | Australian Hobby          | 2         | Edgeworth                     | "              |
| Apr 11    | Lewin's Rail              | 1         | Stockrington                  | A.Lindsey      |
|           | Brown Quail               | 4         | "                             | "              |
|           | Musk Lorikeet             | 2         | "                             | "              |
|           | Scarlet Honeyeater        | 50-100    | "                             | "              |
|           | Grey Goshawk              | 2         | "                             | "              |
|           | Glossy Ibis               | 2         | Cedar Hill Drive              | "              |
| Apr 14    | Spotted Quail Thrush      | 2 pair    | Mt. Vincent                   | G.O'Connor     |
| Apr 12-14 | Spangled Drongo           | 1         | Shortland                     | K.Gibson       |
| Apr 5     | Azure Kingfisher          | 1         | Bolwarra                      | H.Tarrant      |
|           | Mallard                   | 1         | "                             | "              |
| Apr 5     | Whistling Kite            | 1         | "                             | "              |
| Apr 6     | Brown Goshawk             | 1         | "                             | "              |
| Apr 1     | Peregrine Falcon          | 1         | "                             | "              |
| Apr 1-3   | Black-shouldered Kite     | 1         | "                             | "              |
| Apr 5&6   | Nankeen Kestrel           | 1         | "                             | "              |
| Apr 6     | Spotted Harrier           | 1         | Mulbring                      | "              |
|           | Wonga Pigeon              | 1         | "                             | "              |
| Apr 30    | White-bellied Sea-eagle   | 3         | Telarah Lagoon                | J.Smart        |
| Apr 17    | Spangled Drongo           | 2         | Belmont South                 | B.Cockerell    |
|           | White-bellied Sea-eagle   | 2         | " "                           | "              |
| Apr. 20   | Australian Hobby          | 1         | Adamstown Heights             | P.Pountney     |
|           | Pied Butcherbird          | 2         | " "                           | "              |
| May 8     | Olive-backed Oriole       | 1         | " "                           | "              |
| Apr 9     | Little Penguin            | 1         | Crowdy Head                   | T.Clarke       |
|           | Brahminy Kite             | 1         | " "                           | "              |
| Apr 21    | Striated Heron            | 1         | Hunter River - Port Waratah   | "              |
| Apr 18    | Australian Magpie         | ~40       | Elmore Vale                   | "              |
| Apr 21    | Grey-tailed Tattler       | 18        | Hunter River - Pt. Waratah    | "              |
| Apr 27    | Yellow-faced Honeyeater   | >50       | Summer Hill Waste Facility    | "              |
| Apr 29    | Swift Parrot [found dead] | 1         | N'cle Steelworks -Pt. Waratah | "              |
| May 3     | Sacred Kingfisher         | 1         | " " "                         | "              |
| May 10    | Superb Fruit-dove         | 1         | Cardiff                       | M.Maddocks     |
| May 10    | Common Blackbird          | 1         | East Maitland                 | J.Smart        |
|           | Azure Kingfisher          | 1         | Marmong Point                 | B. & D. Kibble |
| May 3     | Musk Duck                 | 1         | N'cle Wetland Reserve         | G.O'Connor     |
|           | Australian Magpie-lark    | ~40       | " " "                         | "              |
|           | Darter                    | Many + dy | " " "                         | "              |
|           | Cormorant [4 species]     | All + dy  | " " "                         | "              |
| May 2     | Australian Spotted Crake  | 6         | Ash Island                    | P.Rankin       |
|           | Buff-banded Rail          | 2         | " "                           | "              |
| May 11    | Pheasant Coucal           | 1         | Glendale                      | R.Walker       |
| May 1     | Great Crested Grebe       | 16        | Walka Water Works             | "              |
|           | Zebra Finch               | ~30       | Lochinvar                     | "              |
| May 9     | Darter                    | 1         | Warner's Bay                  | "              |

|        |                              |     |                    |               |
|--------|------------------------------|-----|--------------------|---------------|
| May 1  | Tree Martin                  | >50 | Lamb's Valley Road | R. Walker     |
| May 9  | Golden Whistler              | 1   | Morrisset          | P. Durie      |
|        | Rufous Whistler              | 1   | "                  | "             |
|        | Grey Fantail                 | 3   | "                  | "             |
|        | Yellow Thornbill             | 10  | "                  | "             |
|        | Yellow-faced Honeyeater      | 10  | "                  | "             |
|        | Red-browed Firetail          | 6   | "                  | "             |
| May 7  | Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo | 6   | Woodberry          | J. & R. Smith |
| Apr 22 | Rufous Fantail               | 1   | N'cle University   | H. Tarrant    |
| May 7  | Yellow-billed Spoonbill      | 2   | Melville           | "             |
|        | Red-capped Robin             | 2   | Nr. Vacy           | "             |

## Poor Man's Kakadu Lost In A Rich Man's Dream?

Saturday 29th May and the fog is thick on the west side of Mount Sugarloaf. The bushland through to the little country town of Mulbring is shrouded but the dark forms of Black Swan can be seen gliding over the water of John Brown's Lagoon (Colliery Dam). At the edge of the water, stepping slowly across the floating vegetation, two Comb-crested Jacana move silently; they are not much more than dark silhouette either but are identified by a small group of birdwatchers with practiced eyes.

Suddenly out of the mist a White-bellied Sea Eagle glides low overhead, across the water to the opposite bank where it lands on the ground. It has carried some captured prey (we think it was a lapwing) in its talons to a brown juvenile standing on the shore. This young bird had been invisible to the group of observers up until this moment. Neither bird seemed to be interested much in feeding straight away and both carried on with loud cries for some time before taking to the air and flying off into the gloom; the juvenile carrying the breakfast this time.

The natural value of this place surely couldn't be missed on anyone; no wonder many local people refer to it as Poor Man's Kakadu.

Well now to the business at hand; we have not necessarily come here today to stand in awe of nature but to be briefed on a proposed development of John Brown's Lagoon, namely the Hunter Lakes Resort! Our first look at the 'conceptual' plans is nothing short of extreme bad news. The 360 room hotel is to be built right on the waters edge (some of it over the water) and the 100 odd cabins form an enclosure around the

south end of the dam. Yes, you guessed it, the high value habitat area that supports the resident Comb-crested Jacana.

Later, we are given a copy of a Flora and Fauna Assessment which, it was hoped, would address the situation but again the news is not very good at all. The assessment concludes that since no Comb-crested Jacana could be found during the surveys done by the consultant biologist that the proposed development will not worry this Schedule 12 species.

The Comb-crested Jacana has been observed on almost every occasion that HBOC members have gone to John Brown's Lagoon. A quick look through our Annual Bird Reports indicates that on at least nine visits over the last six years, Comb-crested Jacana have been sighted at an average of seven birds. Regarded by HBOC as resident to this site there is also strong evidence that they have bred here as well. On three occasions (1993, 95 & 97) juvenile birds have been observed.

Letters have since been sent to the property owners (M&R Civil), Cessnock City Council, NPWS Threatened Species Unit and to other bird clubs alerting these people of our concerns. It is hoped that this may result in a Species Impact Statement being initiated and that such a document will recommend certain habitat management that will favour the birds.

The Development Application will be going on public display soon and HBOC will be making further submission in an attempt to have the conservation value of this area understood before the Cessnock City Council makes its final decision.

As individuals, please do not hesitate to make your own submission to Cessnock City Council before the end of June.

Tom Clarke

# Lord Howe Island Trip

## April 1999

During eight memorable days many HBOC members were awed by the natural beauty of this majestic island and its abundant birdlife. The island is only 11km long but led by the intrepid, fast walking Ian Hutton, our guide and professional naturalist, we covered most of it and "twitched" many a bird.

Before leaving we had read that 18 species of landbirds and 14 species of seabirds breed there in colonies of tens of thousands, but we were not prepared for the first sightings so quickly. Binoculars appeared instantly at the airport as Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Pacific Golden Plover and Double-banded Plover were feeding on the edges of the tarmac. The Ruddy Turnstone proved to be very common on the island whereas the others were in small numbers due to the time of year.

Probably the birds that stole most of our hearts were the beautiful little white terns with their unusual egg laying habits of finding a suitable branch on which to lay their eggs. We stood under tall pine trees watching them return to their chicks with one or two fish in their beaks. Delicately and oh so patiently they would pass these individually to their chicks. No screaming kids here squawking for a tasty morsel! I guess sitting on a narrow limb has led to these extraordinarily polite manners.

Ian proved to be an invaluable guide as we explored the many tracks around the island leading to good vantage points to observe many species closely. The Masked Booby and Red-tailed Tropicbird were two such species. There is nothing like climbing a cliff about 200 metres high and hanging yourself over the edge to get a closer glimpse at a chick nesting on a narrow ledge. If one could only read their thoughts, all of a sudden seeing a human face bob into view and upside down at that!

Lord Howe Island has a number of endemic species, one such bird being the Woodhen which was brought back from the edge of extinction through the concern of the islanders themselves. One might find it hard to believe that clapping and yodelling brings forth a bird but the Woodhens appeared on cue when Ian swaggered through their favourite haunts clapping his hands merrily and later yodelled a Providence Petrel down from the towering heights of Mt Gower. This bird was

quite unperturbed as we stroked and photographed it madly.

Another close encounter with a seabird was a torchlight inspection of a Flesh-footed Shearwater (Muttonbird) caught by Ian as it returned to the burrow at dusk. I might add this was after we had sampled delicious Italian style pizza, garlic bread and red wine on Ned's Beach as the sun set.

Other species we saw were Common and Black Noddies, Black-winged Petrel, Sooty Tern, Grey Ternlet, Sacred Kingfisher, Buff-banded Landrail and the ubiquitous Lord Howe Island Golden Whistler. All in all a total of 34 species.

The trip was very worthwhile as the food was great, the company interesting and the experiences made more enjoyable through Ian Hutton sharing his knowledge and expertise on the flora, fauna and marine life of the island. Thanks to Judith and Rowley Smith for suggesting it

Di Johnson

## OWLS 2000

### Challenging The Future

Don't miss the opportunity to become involved in Owls 2000, the Third International Symposium of Biology, Conservation and Cultural Significance of Owls.

The Australasian Raptor Association (ARA, Specialist Interest Group of Birds Australia) has proudly offered to host this major scientific forum of the owls of the world. The conference will be an excellent opportunity to present papers on owl research, conservation, rehabilitation and public education. The conference will also provide a forum to discuss topics of national and international significance, and thus contribute to conservation solutions and management.

Field excursions to local points of interest (ACT area) will be conducted providing an opportunity for participants to observe some of Australia's owls.

The ARA welcomes participation from all amateur and professional people with a desire to learn more about and conserve owls.

If you wish to find out more about this event contact;

Owls 2000 International Symposium  
C/- Conference Solutions  
PO Box 238 Deakin West ACT 2600  
Tele: 02 6285 3000 Fax: 02 6285 3001  
Email: office@con-sol.com

The ARA have also established an Owls 2000 website where you can register your interest and obtain information at:

<http://www.tasweb.com.au/owls2000/index.htm>



# 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.

|                                     |  |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| June Long weekend<br>12th-14th June | Campout:<br>Contact:   | Widden Valley (b.y.o. water, everything)<br>Liz Herbert 4959 3663   |
| Sunday 20th June                    | Field Day:<br>Meet:<br>Leader:   | Wetlands Day<br>Greenhills MacDonalds 8:00am<br>Tom Clarke 4951 3872  |
| Saturday 26th June                  | Hunter Wader Surveys - Kooragang Island, Ash Island, etc.<br>Meet:<br>Coordinator:   | Various locations as directed. 7:00am<br>Chris Herbert 4959 3663<br>Intending participants <b>must ring</b> to confirm.         |
| Tuesday 6th July                    | Midweek Outing:<br>Meet:<br>Contact:   | Hunter Region Botanic Garden<br>At the gate 8:00am<br>Margaret Woods 4963 3070  |
| Wednesday 14th July                 | Chubnight:<br>Main feature:  | Shortland Wetlands Centre 7:30pm<br>Sound Recording - for bird identification<br>Fred Van Gessel                                |
| Saturday 17th July                  | Hunter Wader Surveys - Kooragang Island, Ash Island, etc.<br>Meet:<br>Coordinator:   | Various locations as directed. 11:44am<br>Chris Herbert 4959 3663<br>Intending participants <b>must ring</b> to confirm.        |
| Sunday 25th July                    | Field Day:<br>Meet:<br>Leader:   | Pokolbin State Forest<br>Cessnock MacDonalds 8:00am<br>Alan Stuart 4952 8569  |
| Tuesday 3rd August                  | Midweek Outing:<br>Meet:<br>Contact:   | Gwandalan<br>Gwandalan turn-off 8:00am<br>Keith Woods 4963 3070   |
| Wednesday 11th August               | Chubnight:<br>Main feature:  | Shortland Wetland Centre 7:30pm<br>Kooragang Island Wetland Rehabilitation Project<br>Sue Rostas & Peggy Svoboda                |
| Saturday 14th August                | Hunter Wader Surveys - Kooragang Island, Ash Island, etc.<br>Meet:<br>Coordinator:   | Various locations as directed. 10:22am<br>Chris Herbert 4959 3663<br>Intending participants <b>must ring</b> to confirm.        |
| Sunday 22nd August                  | Field Day:<br>Meet:<br>Leader:   | Colongra Wetland<br>Opposite Gwandalan turn-off 8:00am<br>Diane Rogers 4976 1686  |
| Saturday/Sunday<br>28th-29th August | SGAP Wildflowers At The Wetlands - Shortland Wetlands Centre<br>HBOC volunteers required for display stand and/or Bird walks<br>Recruitment: | Peter Phillips 4956 9090  |
| Weekend<br>3rd-5th September        | Special event:<br><br>Organiser:   | Barren Grounds Bird Observatory<br>\$20 deposit to register.<br>Pay \$100 balance by August Clubnight.<br>Liz Herbert 4959 3663 |