

NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

P.O. Box 24, New Lambton, N.S.W. 2305

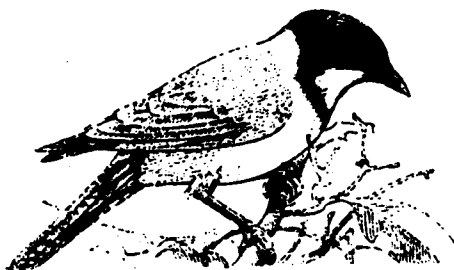
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President: Alan Stuart

Secretary: Peter Phillips

Newsletter Editor: Pat Carlton



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.*

Australian Bird Study Association (ABSA)

**2000 Scientific Day
Saturday 4 March 2000**

Location: CSIRO, Clunies Ross Street, Prospect, NSW

Theme: *The Contribution of Amateurs to Avian Research*

Time: 9.30 am to 5.00 pm, with an informal BBQ to follow the AGM

Cost: A cost of \$20 will cover the registration, morning and afternoon tea, as well as lunch. There will be an additional cost of \$5 for the BBQ.

There will be a range of speakers and presentations on Saturday 4 March, covering a wide range of topics, including:

- Durno Murray: *How do wanderers wander? (Albatrosses)*
- Andrew Fisher: *Amateurs, academics and avifauna: insights from the Bathurst's Bird Project*
- Iain Patterson: *Regent Honeyeaters*

- Mike Clark: *"Only amateurs, you must be joking."*
- Steve Debus: *Publishing bird studies*
- Tony Saunders: *Community participation in Avian Research*
- Other talks by: Iain Patterson, Judie Peet, Janice Hosking, Cherie Sammut, Colin Rich, Judy Harrington and Darriel Larkins.

Scientific Day: Sunday 5 March, will be a day of field outings, involving birdwatching and research activities such as censussing, behavioural observations and banding. To date there are two confirmed study sites. Scheyville and Castlereagh Nature Reserves.

The ABSA would like to extend an invitation to all those interested in birds to come and participate in this fantastic weekend. Not only will it give you an opportunity to hear about a wide range of current and interesting projects, it will provide an ideal venue for socially interacting with other bird lovers from many different organisations.

For additional information, please contact: **Cherie Sammut, 02 4733 1088**, or via email: www.birdsoul@hotmail.com

President's Column

It seems like only a few days ago that we were waiting expectantly, or even nervously in some cases, for the year 2000 to begin. Now all of a sudden it's February. I hope you've been having an enjoyable "new century" so far, and that the birds have been very obliging for you.

It's been a fairly unsummery summer to date, although as I write this the sun is shining and the forecast is for a warm weekend. This time of year, though, is when the chances of finding some less common or even rare birds are higher – vagrants seem to drop in at all sorts of unusual locations in the summer months.

This summer, in the Hunter, we haven't so far had many reports about vagrants. However, several of us were lucky enough to locate a Wandering Tattler during the December wader survey. When first seen, it was perched with a small group of Grey-tailed Tattler and we were able to look at both species closely and make comparisons between them. For all we know, the bird is still around and it's worth looking closely at tattlers if you get the opportunity. However, the chances are that it will be hard to differentiate amongst the sizable flock of tattlers that are present in the Hunter estuary right now.

Still on vagrants – in late January there was an unconfirmed report of an Eurasian Curlew at Picnic Point near The Entrance. The observer was from the U.K. and was familiar with the species as it is more common there. The bird was reported to have been with a small group of Eastern Curlew. Since the report, several people have been to the location but no curlews have been there at all. Again, it is worth looking closely at flocks of curlew in our area – you never know! Picnic Point is not all that far away. Look for a white rump and white underwing and a slightly shorter bill.

Two other rare vagrants that were in Australia in late January/early February

were a Hudsonian Godwit and a Fiordland Penguin. Unfortunately, not near us – they were at locations down in Victoria. Just the same, they reinforce the point that it's the time of the year for odd birds, and so we should look carefully at everything.

A few months ago, I raised the topic of life lists of birds. As I reported at the time, the highest tally is 760 species seen in Australia. I've yet to learn the definitive story on how HBOC members compare. However, I do know that we have at least 3 members (and probably more – they're a modest bunch) with tallies in excess of 600 species. Also, we have several members with tallies of over 500. So – plenty of experts to help the rest of us with our identifications.

Of course, for most of us, including those with the high tallies, the main pleasures of birding come from studying, either carefully or casually, the behaviour of the birds that we are already familiar with and from learning a little bit more about species that we don't know quite as well. I must admit though to a certain thrill in setting eyes upon a bird that I haven't seen before. I'll be keeping an eye out for that possible Eurasian Curlew!

Happy birding

Alan Stuart

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**Articles for our newsletter
are always welcomed.**

**Closing date for next issue:
31 March 2000**

**PLEASE NOTE: FOR NEXT ISSUE
ONLY, MAIL TO:**

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HBOC and John Browns Lagoon

John Browns Lagoon is a large permanent water body surrounded by a mixture of cleared to semi-cleared grazing land and some timbered country. At the southern end of the lagoon the habitat represents a winding wetland surrounded by woodland and is referred to by local people as "Poor Man's Kakadu". Situated to the north of the township of Mulbring the lagoon sits on property which had been "traditionally" owned by mining companies (Coal & Allied, then Rio Tinto) but was sold off to a developer (M&R Civil) about two years ago.

John Browns Lagoon is known by many birdwatchers in NSW. Often referred to as Colliery Dam, the area has provided great birdwatching over the years for members of HBOC as well as other bird groups. Over 110 species of bird have been recorded here but the two most notable are the threatened Comb-crested Jacana and Black-necked Stork. This site is the most southern location known to HBOC to have resident, breeding Comb-crested Jacana and is therefore regarded as extremely important habitat.

In May 1999, a proposal was announced to develop the place into a tourist resort with hotel, golf course, holiday units etc. At a subsequent Community Briefing the final concept of the developer's plan was made public. It was immediately confirmed that HBOC had an obligation to object strongly to the massive and overpowering development. No consideration had been made regarding the wetland or the birds to the extent that even the accompanying Flora & Fauna Assessment did not recognize the presence of Comb-crested Jacana. Over the last twelve months HBOC has been very active in highlighting the value of the existing habitat with particular focus on Comb-crested Jacana. Many phone calls (39) were made and letters written (9) to various people and organizations, as well as attendance at meetings (8) and site inspections. Our major achievements so far can be seen as two-fold.

To begin with HBOC has established links and been granted audience with many other stakeholders in John Browns Lagoon. These include M&R Civil and some of its key people, Cessnock City Council Environmental Services Department and its officers, Cessnock City Mayor and Councillors, Mulbring Progress Association, Mulbring Landcare, Mount Vincent Landcare, NSW NPWS - Sydney Zone Threatened Species Unit, Cumberland Bird Observers, NSW Field Ornithologists Club, Manning Valley Birdos and Shortland Wetland Centre. HBOC, as a result, is regarded by Cessnock City Council as a major stakeholder in this matter.

Secondly, and possibly the greatest achievement so far has been the August decision by Cessnock City Council to defer consent until certain environmental considerations were met. This included a Species Impact Statement for the Comb-crested Jacana, a full aquatic study and a shoreline habitat study. This has put the matter squarely at the developers' table.

For a couple of months it appeared as if the whole project went off the boil, but recently (December 1999) studies were being carried out and reports being written as a result. The New Year will reveal what has been offered as far as revised plans are concerned and HBOC will continue to be well represented in the process. Ultimately our aim is to see the establishment and implementation of a management plan that will care for the valuable habitat that supports the resident population of Comb-crested Jacana at John Browns Lagoon. If we can secure the Jacanas' future then most of the other more common birds will benefit as a result.

Tom Clarke

FOR SALE

Spotting telescope 25*65 GEOMA-65-A
\$360 (\$570 new). Contact Chris Herbert,
49593663 (home) or 0412 689845

What A Load of Rubbish

Clean Up Day at Stockton Sand Spit

5th March 2000

Stockton Sand Spit has undergone a major facelift and several subsequent touch-ups in an effort to resurrect it as a prime shorebird roosting site. Its very location means it is highly visible to all who travel over Stockton Bridge and it is truly a very easily accessible place for people to enjoy/learn about migratory waders.

So we have two very good reasons, perhaps conflicting but none the less valid, for looking after the place. HBOC has "adopted" this area as its Clean Up Day site over the past 4 years because of its significance as a bird watching place. Additional to that several Weeding Days have taken place in an attempt to get that problem under control as well.

Every Clean Up Day is well attended and plenty of rubbish is collected. Previous efforts seem to have knocked the larger stuff (furniture, building materials etc) on the head but not a year goes by

without a mass of small stuff (plastic bottles, styrene, paper etc) mounting up.

So check your diaries and mark Sunday 5th March and more importantly turn up on the day and help out. Where else can you do your bit for the environment (pick up rubbish), help maintain valuable habitat (pull weeds) and go bird watching all at the same time? Well don't just think about it, do it!

Come dressed for work (you decide on how hard or how long) and wear a sun hat, gloves and strong shoes. You must register at the car park (under the bridge) and receive further instruction before you start cleaning up or weeding. If you plan to do some weeding, a small pick is sufficient to remove weeds from sand. We won't be touching anything huge. Also bring your own morning tea/lunch etc but there will be water available for drinking and washing up.

Clean Up Day officially starts at 9:00am but I will be there from 7:00am bird watching.

Hope to see you there.

Tom Clarke, 4951 3872

Wallingat National Park

December 5, 1999

led by David Turner

Wallingat National Park has recently been created from state forests in the Sugar Creek area just north of Smiths Lake. It consists of a beautiful mix of wet and dry sclerophyll vegetation with palm thickets along moist stream flats. In many places trees are very tall inducing a severe case of 'birders neck'. The tallest NSW flooded gum, *Eucalyptus grandis*, is not far away!

David Turner, Chief Ranger based at Forster, led the excursion. He had hoped to divide us into groups to survey designated grid areas in the park. However, only one dedicated person turned up, namely me!! Well I'm not complaining - I had David all to myself and we had a delightful time to talk and observe without all you rabble to scare the birds away. But seriously, this was a terrific area and I encouraged David to suggest another time to repeat this survey and involve the club at perhaps

a more convenient date away from Christmas. He intends to continue a regular audit of birds in this new park to build up a bird list.

To make up for the lack of observers we covered the intended area all by ourselves intersecting all the grid areas on a 6km circuit following fire trails. Birds encountered were typical for this habitat mix. I've never seen so many Black-faced Monarchs, Leaden Flycatchers and Rufous Fantails on one excursion! The usual Yellow-throated, White-browed, and Large-billed Scrubwrens (ho-hum), Eastern Yellow Robins, Whipbirds, Crested Shrike-tits, Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, Orioles, and a smattering of honeyeaters such as Lewins, Yellow-faced, Black-chinned, White-naped and Spinebills.

Well worth a return visit. I hope David, who is also a club member, will not be deterred from leading another excursion, especially if we can guarantee a better roll-up next time.

Chris Herbert

Land of the White-backed Magpie

Last October and November, while travelling in Victoria, we had time to do a lot of very enjoyable birdwatching.

The first night we fortunately only reached as far as Dharug NP, near Wiseman's Ferry. That evening and early the next morning, we were treated to some close encounters with lyrebirds. A pair of maned wood duck with ten young were an added delight. We will

certainly visit Dharug again; it could be a good site for a club camp.

On to Wagga, where we saw blackbirds for the first time on the trip. We were to hear their song all over Victoria, only escaping it in the western desert parks.

After reaching the Murray River at Tocumwal, we spent four nights in the Barmah State Forest, camped on its banks. It is a peaceful spot with brown treecreepers hopping around the camp and flocks of long-billed corellas flying noisily overhead.

Yellow rosellas are also frequently seen. There were many waterbirds on the nearby lakes and river, although its level was unseasonably low. On an afternoon cruise up the river, we were able to get close to azure kingfishers and musk ducks, and find the nests of whistling kites, sea eagles and tawny frogmouths.

Our next camp was on Gunbower Island, where a striated pardalote called incessantly while nest building, and thousands of sacred and straw-necked ibis flew over every evening on their way to roost. A few days later, we visited an ibis rookery near Kerang. Here, observation towers gave an excellent view over the wetlands.

We travelled along the Murray through Swan Hill to Mildura. Both of these inland cities are well worth a visit. South of Mildura are four 'desert' parks in Victoria's mallee region. It was a great experience to camp in them - each slightly different; however, we were disappointed that we saw no mallee fowl in the wild; not even evidence of nest maintenance. Perhaps this was due partly to the three year drought in the area.

The four parks are:

- Hattah-Kulkyne NP - here we camped by Lake Mournpall and saw many waterbirds, such as banded and black-winged stilts, red-necked avocets and yellow-billed spoonbills, as well as emus, splendid wrens and regent parrots (for the first time). Here we also shared our 'van with a ningau, a small native mouse;
- Murray Sunset NP - we stayed at Pink Lakes, an amazing place, where salt was mined until the early seventies. Algae give the salt water in the lakes its pink colour. 'Interesting' birds were: crimson and white-fronted chats; pink cockatoos; masked, white-browed and dusky woodswallows; budgerigars and yellow-throated miners (black-eared form - we did not see the white-rumped form at all). The feral bees were a nuisance here, although not aggressive, thank goodness!
- Wyperfeld NP - a lovely park; no bees, but lots of warning signs. The rangers had destroyed numerous hives. Here we saw more of the 'western' birds we had already encountered, such as large flocks of galahs, pink cockatoos, cockatiels, mallee ringnecks and choughs, as well as little corellas and variegated wrens (our only sightings for these last two). We had been seeing white-backed magpies, but here were the only hybrids we noticed, with variable amounts of black mixed with white. Some of these birds looked very strange!
- Little Desert NP - another beautiful place. Our camp was near a tawny frogmouth's nest, with one large, fluffy young bird. There were New Holland honeyeaters and also the similar white-fronted honeyeaters; on a very windy day, which seemed to make the birds even more 'flighty', they were hard to distinguish at times. The yellow-rumped form of the spotted pardalote was another interesting bird.

On to the Lower Glenelg NP, near Nelson on the coast, close to the SA border. We had hardly stopped before male superb blue wrens were attacking the car's rear vision mirrors. Our camp on the river bank was quiet and peaceful; summer holidays would be different! We enjoyed the birds, especially two Australian ground-thrush coming almost to our 'van door, and the gang-gangs noisily feeding. Here, we also saw several forms of grey currawong.

A day trip into Nelson and Discovery Bay NP added the great crested grebe to our list. Two tiger snakes, one hundred metres apart on the walking track, were a less welcome sight! At the mouth of the Glenelg River, a swamp harrier singled out a coot, which dived repeatedly to escape it, but it was obvious that the coot was staying submerged for shorter and shorter periods. Fortunately for the coot, a raven and some magpies chased off the harrier.

We had been told there was a lot to do at Portland: seal colonies, scenery etc. but the weather was atrocious. We learned about a mainland gannet rookery, an overflow from nearby islands. Locals had built an electric fence and eliminated foxes from the area. We managed to have a quick look during a brief break in the weather.

The next day, at Port Fairy, we walked around Griffiths Island, home to thousands of short-tailed shearwaters, but 'wimped out' on staying until their return at dusk. It was just too cold and windy.

Warrnambool is an impressive city; the maritime museum at Flagstaff Hill is a 'must' and nearby Tower Hill, an extinct volcano crater, has wetlands, bird hides, walking trails and boardwalks.

Near Port Campbell we were able to redeem our 'fearless birdo' status when we watched fifty thousand shearwaters return to their nests at nightfall - a magical sight.

The next morning, as we drove into the carpark to view Loch Ard Gorge, we were thrilled to see the 'elusive' rufous bristlebird run across the road. A couple of minutes later, when we got out of the car, one was in view for several minutes and almost walked over Beth's foot. It appeared to be a young bird and rather curious.

Paddy had advised us to visit the Serendip Sanctuary, near Lara, on the road from Geelong to Melbourne. We were so glad we went there, even though it was raining (again!!) The birds were fantastic - bird hides give views over wetlands; many birds fly free (magpie geese, Cape Barren geese, various ducks and numerous other waterbirds); and the sanctuary is breeding Cape Barren geese, broilgas and bustards - these last two may be seen in large enclosures. We were able to see the male bustards displaying. We refrained (just) from adding them to our trip list!

Phillip Island was our next port of call. Of course, we had to see the fairy penguin parade - just us and a couple of thousand others! It *is* touristy, but the centre seems to handle things quite well and the birds do not

appear to be disturbed by all the interest. There is an extensive system of boardwalks and it was great to see the returning penguin greeting its mate.

On Phillip Island, there are also silver gull and short-tailed shearwater rookeries and several wetlands with boardwalks. At Swan Bay, looking out from a bird hide, we saw two swamp harriers diving into the water. One flew away, while the other was having difficulty rising from the water, because of the weight of what it was holding in its talons. After attempting several times to take flight, it eventually reached the shore about fifty feet away - frustratingly for us, the end of this little drama was hidden behind the bank.

Wilson's Promontory NP, which contains the southernmost point of mainland Australia, is much loved by Victorians. It is a beautiful wilderness area, however, the only vehicular camping ground (there are others for hikers) suffers from overuse. There are numerous birds to be seen on the many walks - we saw what appeared to be a creche of young yellow-tailed black cockatoos - and the crimson rosellas in the camp were very friendly.

From the Prom we travelled to Sale, via the Grand Ridge Road, which is scenic but narrow and winding. Sale Common is a RAMSAR site, with boardwalks and bird hides - a highlight was good views of golden-headed cisticolas. Large flocks of ibis soared high overhead and the swamps were teeming with other waterbirds.

We had a respectable bird list at Lakes Entrance, where we again saw Pacific gulls - we had previously sighted them at Anglesea. At Mallacoota, we camped with a wonderful view of the lake - it was quiet and peaceful, and again there was a variety of birds to

observe. A group of 23 royal spoonbills was the largest we had encountered.

Our holiday was almost over, as we left Mallacoota and travelled up the NSW coast. Just out of town, we stopped in the forest to check the car. There was something about the variety and clarity of the bird calls we could hear; then came the bird's tell-tale own call - yes, we were the lucky audience at a lyrebird concert.

We had seen white-backed magpies up to Merimbula, and somewhere during the next day, on the way to Sussex Inlet, we were back in black-backed magpie territory. As the title of this article indicates, we saw a lot of white-backed magpies in Victoria, literally everywhere we went.

We will end this account with a list of other birds which we encountered frequently, and hope we have encouraged you to go bird watching down south of the border.

Maned wood ducks (often with young)

Yellow-tailed black cockatoos

Red wattlebirds

Superb blue wrens

Masked lapwings

White-faced herons

Brown thornbills

Rufous whistlers

Southern boobooks (heard at almost every camp site).

John and Beth Cockerell

1999 BA Twitchathon - The Home Brewers' Experience

The Hunter Home Brewers' debut entry in the BA Twitchathon was eagerly anticipated by twitchers and bird enthusiasts from at least four households in the Hunter Region. What an experience! It is no secret by now just how wet the weekend was, but what remains a secret is where the Home Brewers picked up some early quality ticks, such as the Hooded Robin and Southern Whiteface. It was in this same spot that the group of Blue-faced Honeyeaters that were calling at 3.50 refused to call post 4.00 - and were not to be heard or seen again.

Wet weather made good conditions for a few car window ticks before traversing Goulburn River NP and picking up some

'target species' such as the Diamond Firetail and Fuscous Honeyeater. It was here that dusk fell, and with 58 species for the afternoon we reflected and talked tactics for the next day under the watchful and somewhat bemused eyes of the locals at the Royal Hotel in Merriwa. We must have been on the same rails as the Thickheads as we too dined at Singleton and headed for the Chichester hills. About 3 hours of night driving and stopping yielded no night birds until an obliging Boobook wished us 'Happy Twitching' as we put up our sodden tents.

Awoken by a rainforest chorus, we were ticking madly as we upped camp following about 3 hours' sleep. Inexperience saw the Brewers pass by the Barrington turn-off, thinking we'd got our rainforest birds already - probably a costly error in hindsight. Sunday was pretty much a 'wetland crawl',

with a quick Honeyeater twitch near Broke, where the Black-chinned Honeyeater had Steve notching one up on his life-list. A 37-second visit to the Walka Water Works had us dubbing the Great Crested Grebe there as the '\$2 bird'. We then worked some known 'hot-spots' and were generally rewarded (but where were the Sooty Oystercatchers?).

Arriving at the SWC, a number of missing duck species were gladly ticked before pure fatigue had the Brewers sitting indoors waiting for 5 o'clock to arrive, which was to cost us the Little Corellas that flew over the building as we reflected over the past 23 and a half hours. With 900kms and 170

species under our belts, we felt quite pleased with our efforts and pretty confident of giving the established teams a bit of a 'shake-up'. Post-mortems revealed that our scribe had forgotten to tick two species - including the Kookaburra! - giving us 172 birds. Our maiden venture had been a relative success (pipping the Thickheads by a single bird) and we aim to better the tally this year, as well as tripling our funds raised. Just as with any good Home Brew - we will get better with age!

Michael Roderick

SPOTTING SCOPES

Chris Presland, birding-aus

Last year Chris Presland was interested in spotting scopes, and is now the proud owner of a Swarovski AT80, with zoom lens and a Swarovski tripod, purchased from the Bird Shop. The following suggestions/comments are the product of his enquiries and discussions with knowledgeable people prior to the purchase, and may be of interest to readers.

- **Which brand?** Of 17 respondents, 11 owned a Kowa (including two with 60mm scopes), 5 owned Swarovski and 1 a Leica. Just about all recommended their particular scope as an excellent product. Owners of Swarovski AT80s were the most passionate about the quality of their scope. Retailers consulted identified the Swarovski and the Leica as superior to the Kowa. Choice is a matter of personal preference - with due consideration as to whether the approximately \$400 extra for a Swarovski or Leica is worth it.
- **Straight or angled view?** 13 out of 17 people opted for the angled view, primarily because it is more comfortable to use, easier to look up into nests in trees, and does not need as tall a tripod to maintain a steady image. If, however, you intend to use the scope for photography, the straight view is recommended.
- **Zoom or wide angle fixed lens?** Replies were 50/50, and very mixed. Some people

were passionate about the benefits of a zoom, particularly the flexibility, while others have both but use the wide angle predominantly because of the better image gained. Some have a zoom, but do not use it above 40X or 45X, while others regularly use the zoom at 60X, especially for identifying waders. Most 30X wide angles have a wider field of view than the zoom at 20X. The Swarovski zoom is reputedly the best zoom on the market, although the Leica zoom has been upgraded recently.

- **Fluorite or standard multi-coated glass?** 5 people had fluorite lenses (all on Kowa scopes). The common message was that the differences are only small, perhaps only distinguishable in 5% of situations, but fluorite or high definition lenses provide better clarity and colour, especially in low light situations. A fluorite was definitely recommended for photography, as it provided truer colour pictures.
- **Is a tripod needed?** Buy the sturdiest tripod you can afford.
- **More info needed?** Try the internet site Better View Desired (lightshedder.com). Chris also has a summary from a US-based bird chat group which provides good information for those who want more specific detail about scope performance.

Contact: Chris Presland

<cpresland@dlwc.nsw.gov.au>

Divided world



Take a good look at this bird. An undistinguished and blameless creature it may appear, but this young gull - which bathes and preens in the freshwater marshes of north Norfolk - may be a time bomb ticking away at the heart of ornithology. Certainly it is representative of a fascinating, potentially revolutionary set of ideas that could have consequences far beyond the borders of ornithology.

The creature in question is a yellow-legged gull, a bird from the Mediterranean. Yet until recently it was considered just a distinct form or subspecies of the herring gull, the large grey-backed seabird commonly found on north Atlantic shores. Some scientists have decided that differences in behaviour and appearance (notably the bright yellow legs, as opposed to the pink legs of the herring gull) warrant its reclassification as a separate species.

The divisions of the herring gull do not end with recognition of a Mediterranean counterpart. Birds from the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea regions have also been upgraded to species level by some authorities. Now moves are afoot to recognise North American herring gulls as distinct from their Old World relatives, and soon Asiatic populations may also be ranked as different species.

The issue of where one species begins and another ends is a problem as old as the system of classification itself, first devised by Carl Linnaeus in 1735. But it is acquiring fresh potency because of growing acceptance of a new approach to bird taxonomy.

The conventional view of a species centres on a group of organisms with common characteristics that are reproductively isolated from other similar forms, so that, for example,

they cannot interbreed. However, variations do occur between individual species, especially those with wide transcontinental distributions, such as the herring gull. Conventional systematics have taken account of this variation by redividing a species into a sequence of races or subspecies. But this has been shown to be extremely arbitrary and serves little more than administrative convenience.

The new approach, based on a concept known as PSC, or phylogenetic species concept, aims to identify the essential and irreducible building bricks of evolutionary change. Wherever one finds a cluster of organisms with constant and diagnosably distinct characteristics, then it is by definition a taxon, or species, on a separate evolutionary path. Thus, under PSC classification, the herring gull, instead of being a single organism exhibiting a spectrum of racial variation, becomes as many as eight separate species.

PSC aims to provide us with a more accurate interpretation of evolutionary processes. But its acceptance could have far-reaching implications that damage the creatures it seeks to interpret. Few dispute that if PSC were adopted then the number of bird species could rise dramatically from around 10,000 to 25,000. The higher total would automatically fragment species into smaller populations and potentially dilute conservation efforts by making the whole field more complicated in intellectual and administrative terms.

Simultaneously, few would dispute that this century our attachment to birds has been a key vehicle for encouraging concern for the environment. In Britain birds and their changing fortunes have recently been adopted by the Government as a measure for the quality of national life. Yet some fear that the adoption of PSC-based systematics might have the effect of turning people away from an interest in birds by making ornithology too technically complex. In effect, PSC systematics would give us many more bird species but cause us to lose the birds.

Source: *Guardian Weekly (UK)*, 16-22/9/99

Cape York Threatened Birds Expedition 4th to 19th December, 1999

I participated in the Cape York Threatened Birds Expedition in December. The purpose of the expedition was twofold. Firstly, to find out what happens to Star Finches in the wet season as no one has been able to find them at that time when food is short. Secondly, to perform Atlas surveys on Cape York in the wet season in Lakefield National Park and Princess Charlotte Bay.

Twenty volunteers participated over the two weeks and we stayed at Lotus Bird Lodge for only \$20 per day full board. We had to do our own cooking as the lodge is closed in the wet because it goes under water. The expedition was funded by the Cape York Natural Heritage Trust. Included in the funding for the two weeks was a helicopter that flew groups of four into very remote parts of Lakefield and Princes Charlotte Bay each day to do atlassing and to search for the Star Finches.

Small numbers were found on the Nifold Plains in Lakefield and some were caught in mist nets. These were banded and two had radio transmitters fitted. However, this was not a success. Significant numbers of Star Finches were then located in unburned grassland, near the mouth of the Kennedy River. There was little seed for finches and other granivores during the early wet season after the first storms caused most grass seeds to germinate. The birds were feeding on old grass seeds that had fallen to the ground at the end of the previous wet season. This dead grass was in the middle of samphire on the mudflats on the coast of Princess Charlotte Bay. Knowing how Star Finches cope with the period of low seed availability is likely to have implications for management of this endangered species.

Bird surveys were undertaken for the Atlas in over 300 sites in a wide range

of habitats during the expedition. 220 species were recorded. I managed 170 species that included 21 ticks. Highlights included a nesting pair of Red Goshawks with 1 young ready to fledge, Golden Shouldered Parrots, Black Bitterns, Lovely Fairy-wrens, 4 Australian Pratincoles with 2 downy young, Marbled and Papuan Frogmouths and Red-headed Honeyeaters. The numerous species and the sheer numbers of waterbirds in the lagoons and waders on the remote mudflats were breathtaking.

We also had the satisfaction of recording extensions of the official ranges of the Marbled Frogmouth, Yellow White-eye and Zitting Cisticola. Some of these sightings were contentious initially, however after they were sighted by the "experts" these species were confirmed.

Another expedition is proposed in December, 2000 to the western side of the Cape on the Gulf, should funds be available again. I for one will be a starter and I would recommend the trip to anyone who would like to get into remote and inaccessible places on the Cape.

Phillip Rankin

Australasian Wader Studies Group

NOTICE: NWA 2000

The next AWSG expedition to north-west Australia will take place from 13 May to 3 June 2000. The team will spend eight days at 80-Mile Beach between two periods based at Broome Bird Observatory. It is hoped that a further visit can be made to the Lacépède Islands to re-census the seabirds.

The main objective will be to count, catch and band the immature waders that have not migrated back to their Northern Hemisphere breeding grounds.

For cost and logistical reasons the maximum team size will be 15 people, so please contact me immediately if you are interested in participating: Clive Minton: Tel/fax: (03) 9589 4901 Email: mintons@ozemail.com.au

Source: Galah 41

**2ND SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE
ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS**

**Griffith University, Brisbane
27 June-2 July 2000**

Cost: Special Early Bird \$465; Early Bird \$495; Late \$595; Student \$285. Two-day registration: \$320; One-day registration \$200. Congress dinner: \$65.

Registration forms can be found on:
<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/shoc> or contact:

SHOC 2000 Congress Secretariat,
Conventions Queensland P/L, PO Box
4044, St Lucia South, Queensland 4067
(fax: 07 3371 9514).

*Note: the Australasian Wader Study
Group (AWSG) will hold a one-day
Conference on Sunday 3 July, in conjunction
with SHOC 2000. Interest can be indicated on
the SHOC 2000 registration form.*

**WEA Hunter Course: "Come Fly
With Me" - the world of birds**

Fred Van Gessel

4 Wednesdays from 23 February

Time: 7.00 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.

**Place: WEA 63 Union Street, Cooks
Hill, Newcastle**

**Cost: Full \$74; Senior \$69; Concession
\$64**

Topics covered include: identification, habitat,
and breeding (which includes mating rituals
and migration). Coloured slides collected over
many years illustrate lectures.

Enquiries: 02 4926 4066 or fax: 02 4929 6845.

AOC 2001

The inaugural Australian Ornithological
Conference will be hosted by Charles Sturt
University in Bathurst, NSW, from 25-28
September 2001. At present we are
interested in your suggestions for symposia
topics. To this end a web site has been
established to enable you to submit your
ideas and provide your details so we can
keep you informed as the conference takes
shape. The address is:

<http://clip.mtu.csu.edu.au/aoc2001>

**Birds Australia Atlas Project
continues in the Hunter, despite
other economic disasters**

Cool, cloudy weather drew seven
birdwatchers to the Tomalpin Employment
Zone near Kurri Kurri for our first
atlassing Saturday of the new century. We
atlassed six sites chosen on the basis of
different vegetation types, for example dry
open forest composed of Spotted
Gum/Ironbark/Grey Gum.

Two two-hectare areas, about 800
metres apart, yielded quite different results
with one having the Noisy Miner, Eastern
Rosella, Grey Butcherbird syndrome,
while the other had smaller birds such as
Varied Sittellas and honeyeaters (spp.).
We spent the twenty minutes surveying
these areas.

For the remaining four sites we
chose areas of within 500 metres of a
central point and spent up to an hour there.
One of the sites included Hebburn Dam,
behind Weston.

Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters were
conspicuous residents of the tall forest.
We found a nest and later adults with
dependent young. They not only raised
their own kind, for another pair was seen
feeding a young Pallid Cuckoo. Other
signs of successful breeding were young
Rainbow Bee-eaters and Dusky
Woodswallows. Our most endearing
discoveries were two separate Tawny
Frogmouths sound asleep, oblivious to the
world even with the Herbert's new,
fabulous telescope trained on one of them.
He was sleeping with his toes crossed. In
all we saw 67 species and enjoyed
excellent company.

The next atlassing day is to
Bingleburra Road west of Dungog.

Ann Lindsey



LOST:

50 Breeding Pairs of Little Terns



Over the past decade or so, extensive management by the NSW NPWS and local ornithologist Keith Egan has rescued the Botany Bay colony of Little Terns from the brink of extinction. Once down to a few breeding pairs, the population has for several years exceeded 50 breeding pairs. Laying, hatching and fledging rates have all been high. Excess young produced at the Botany Bay colony have established a new colony at Lake Woolumbolla, near Nowra. Management techniques developed at Botany Bay are now being used to protect and conserve other colonies along the east coast.

Alas, this year all is not well. It appears that the breeding site in Botany Bay has been abandoned, at least for the time being.

Good News for Crested Terns

Clive Minton, Ros Jessop and Pete Collins

It appears that the stocks of small fish in central Victorian waters may have recovered from the disastrous die-off and low populations of the last three years. This is a conclusion derived from a massive rebound in Crested Tern breeding populations and chick health.

The Victorian Wader Study Group has been monitoring tern colonies along the Victorian coast for the past 20 years. Since habitat remediation work was implemented on Mud Islands in Port Phillip Bay from the mid 1980s, the Crested Tern colony has generally been 1500-1800 pairs (maximum 1850 pairs), except for a dramatic reduction to 800 pairs in 1997 after the calamitous fish die-off.

This year the population has grown to an unprecedented 2600 pairs. Furthermore, the season is a month ahead of normal with some

Whereas at this time last year we had 42 nests containing eggs, today we have none.

We are desperate to know where these birds have gone, and whether they have set up a new breeding colony elsewhere along the east coast. If we can locate these birds we can then ensure they are adequately protected from predators (particularly foxes and silver gulls) and from disturbance by people. All the breeding birds are marked. Each bird carries a metal band and three colour flags. If you see any of these birds, or locate a nesting colony, please forward details (location, flag combinations, breeding or non-breeding plumage, etc) to me at the address below.
Many thanks.

Dr David Priddel
Senior Research Scientist
Biodiversity Survey and Research Division
NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service
PO Box 1967, Hurstville NSW 2220
Tel: 02 9585 6504. Fax: 02 9585 6606
Email: david.priddel@npws.nsw.gov.au

Source: Galah 41

chicks already half-grown by mid November. Food appears to be plentiful, with chicks full to bursting and adults returning to the colony with large, fat fish.

The Crested Tern colony at the Nobbies on Phillip Island has also grown to a record level - 1200 pairs, compared with the normal 700. Breeding is not quite as advanced as at Mud Islands, but food also appears to be available in good quantities.

The Corner Inlet Crested Tern colony has not yet been checked. It will be interesting to see whether it has also increased - or if the growth at Mud Islands and the Nobbies is in part due to birds which have relocated along the coast.

This is another good example of birds acting as indicators of what is happening in the environment.

Source: Galah 41

NEWS FROM "BUSHHAVEN"

Those who enjoyed the feast of birding on the field outing to Jenny & Ken Musicka's property "Bushhaven" at Seaham on November 21st will be pleased to hear of the successful outcome from several of the nests that were seen that day.

Members accidentally flushed two White-throated Nightjars, and one was seen to have a very cryptically coloured egg. Jenny has advised that the egg hatched successfully on or about December 25th. Assuming that the bird was sitting from the date of our visit this would equate to an incubation time of about

32 - 33 days. Information available in HANZAB states 22 - 28 days, which leads us to speculate about the reason for the difference. Could the unseasonably cool weather have extended the incubation time?

The Wonga Pigeon seen incubating hatched her chick successfully, and the Brown Goshawk reared two young from the nest in the *Angophora* tree near Jenny's caravan. These two youngsters were observed daily practising their aerial manoeuvres and their catch and kill skills, and now fully accredited, have left the parental home to try their luck in the wider world.
Sue Hamonet

OBSERVATIONS December/January

Aug 3	Topknot Pigeon	>20	Gwandalan	J. Stephenson
Aug 5	Buff Banded Rail	1	Hunter Botanic Gardens	"
Aug 22	Emerald Dove	1	Glenrock S.R.A.	M. Burgoyne
Sep	Pacific Golden Plover	2	Stockton Borehole	P. Freeman
Sep-Nov	Pink-eared Duck	2	"	"
Sep-Oct	Red-kneed Dotterel	2	"	"
Sep 4	Noisy Pitta	1	Barrington House	D. Jenkin
Sep 19	Restless Flycatcher	1	North Ck. Warners Bay	R. Walker
Oct 29	Glossy Ibis	40	Stockton Borehole	P. Freeman
Oct 1	Pheasant Coucal	1	Stockington	"
	Regent Bowerbird	1	"	"
	Dusky Woodswallow	1	Cedar Hill Drive	"
Oct 4	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	2	Hungerford Hill	"
	Australian Hobby	1	"	"
Oct 8	Cape Petrel	1	Off Port Stephens	"
	Wedge-tailed Shearwater	1000's	" "	"
Oct 20	Osprey	1	Teralba	P. Freeman
	Brown Goshawk on	1	West Wallsend	"
Oct 3	Ruddy Turnstone	4	Warners Bay	"
Oct 5	Common Tern	25	Newcastle Baths	"
	Crested Tern	>200	" "	"
Oct 13	Darter	1	Warners Bay	"
	Mangrove Heron	4	"	"
Oct 13	Square-tailed Kite	1	Big Pond	K. Brandwood
Oct 25	Pink-eared Duck	3	Seaham Swamp	D. Jenkin
Oct 28	Ruddy Turnstone	7	"	"
Oct 10	Sooty Owl	1	Boarding House Dam	M. Roderick
Oct 31	Black-chinned Honeyeater	4	Near Broke	"
Oct	Grey Goshawk [White]	2	Williamstown/Fern Bay	"
Nov	Ruddy Turnstone	4	Warners Bay	R. Walker
	Topknot Pigeon	25	Fosterton Loop	D. Jenkin
Nov 3	Southern Boobook nest 4 eggs	1	Shortland	B. Anderson
Nov 8	Southern Emu-wren	2	Chichester Dam	D. Jenkin
Nov 10	Pheasant Coucal	2	Whitebridge	C. Goodenough
Nov 13	Black-shouldered Kite	3	Melville Ford	H. Tarrant
Nov 18	Nankeen Night Heron		University of N'cle	"
Nov	Diamond Firetail	2	12k from Jerrys Plains	"
	Regent Honeyeater	2+	Widden Brook	"
Nov 24	Brahminy Kite	1	Sandgate	"
Nov 19	Spotted Harrier	1	Hands Lagoon/Bolwarra	"
Nov 23	White-winged Triller	1	Walka Water Works	"
	Great Crested Grebe	6	" " " "	"
	Brown Goshawk	Pair	" "	"
Nov 18	Nankeen Kestrel	2+ 3dy	Bayswater Colliery	G. Newling
Nov 20	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	2	Scone	"
	White-necked Heron	1	"	"
Nov 21	White-throated Needletail	~60	Wybong Rd Muswellbrk	"

	Little Friarbird	4	Bunnan	"
	Stubble Quail	>10	Wybong - Bunnan	"
	Singing Bushlark	1	Wybong	"
	Singing Bushlark	1	Bunnan	"
	Barn Owl	2	Wybong	"
Nov 22	Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo	3	Wingen Village	"
	Black-fronted Dotterel	4	Bayswater Colliery	"
Nov 26	Glossy Black Cockatoo	2A + 1Juv	Wyee Point	V. & D. Moon
Nov 13	White-winged Chough	5A + 1Juv	"	"
Nov 28	Masked Owl [Road Kill]	1	Wallsend Link Rd.	T. Clarke
Nov 18	Crimson Rosella	1	Woodberry	J. Smith
Nov 21	White-winged Chough	5	"	"
Nov 24	Australian Hobby	1	"	"
Nov 27	Rufous Fantail	1	Blackbutt Reserve	P. Lightfoot
	Pacific Baza	1	" "	"
Nov 28	Grey Goshawk	1	" "	"
Nov 30	White-winged Chough	8	Carey Bay	P. Durie
Nov 24	Mistletoebird	2	Metford T.A.F.E.	"
	Scarlet Honeyeater	1	" "	"
Nov 25	Sanderling	1	Stockton Beach	L. Herbert
	Pacific Golden Plover	98	Stockton	"
Nov 25	Pied Oystercatcher	7	Stockton Beach	L. Herbert
Nov 19	Pied Oystercatcher	2	" "	"
Nov 20	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	80	Oyster Cove	M. Blanch
Nov 3	Topknot Pigeon	6	" "	"
Nov 6 & 12	Satin Bowerbird	2	Stockrington	P. Freeman
" 12 & 15	Wonga Pigeon	2 & 3	"	"
Nov 12	Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo	1	Cedar Hill Drive	"
Nov 15	Bar-shouldered Dove	2	Stockrington	"
Nov 12	Intermediate Egret	11	Cedar Hill Drive	"
Nov 13	Mangrove Gerygone	1juv	Pelican Point N.R.	"
	Bar-tailed Godwit	65	" "	"
Nov 17	European Goldfinch	1	Walka Water Works	"
Nov 20	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	2	Shortland	"
Nov 5 & 6	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	3	Rankin Park	J. Stephenson
Nov 10	Pacific Baza	3	" "	"
Dec 3	Great Egret carrying sticks	1	Toronto Wetland	"
Dec 8	Brown Honeyeater	5	Metford T.A.F.E.	"
Dec 8	Spotted Harrier	1	Morpeth	M. Newman
Dec 3	Pacific Baza	1	Wyee Point	V. & D. Moon
Dec 5	Blue-faced Honeyeater	1	Riverwood Downs	D. Jenkin
	Buff-banded Rail	1	Shortland	A. Lindsey
Dec 6	Brown Falcon	1	Glenrock S.R.A.	M. Burgoyne
Dec 26	Mangrove Gerygone	1	Pelican Point [Swansea]	P. Freeman
Dec 31	Pacific Baza	1	Stockrington	"
Dec 30	White-winged Triller	3	Denman	A. Stuart
Dec 31	Red-winged Parrot	2	White Box Camp	"
	Western Gerygone	2	" "	"
	Turquoise Parrot	1	" "	"
	Glossy Black Cockatoo	2	" "	"
Jan 3	Black-necked Stork	2	Ash Island	"
Jan 1	Brown Cuckoo-dove	Pr	Stockrington	P. Freeman
Jan 5	Grey Goshawk	1	Stockrington	"
Jan 7	Red-kneed Dotterel	2	S.W.C.	"
Jan 9	Royal Spoonbill	~40	Cedar Hill Drive	"
	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Pr	" " "	"
	Dusky Woodswallow	Pr	" " "	"
Jan 10	Musk Duck	1	Walka Water Works	"
	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Pr	" " "	"
Jan 6	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2	Rankin Park	J. Stephenson

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

Date	Event	Meeting time/place	Contact
Saturday 19 February	Hunter Wader Surveys	9.00 a.m. (if poor weather, Sunday may be considered). Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert, 4959 3663 Intending participants must ring to confirm
Saturday 19 February	Camp: Copeland Common	Anytime, Copeland Common	Liz Crawford, 4959 3663
Sunday 20 February	Field Day: Copeland Common	8.00 am. Car Park, Mountain Maid Mine, Near Copeland	Ann Lindsey, 4951 2008
Tuesday 22 February	Extra Mid-Week Outing: Ferry Trip to breakwaters	10.00 am "Lady Joy", Queens Wharf	Sue Newman, Australian Plants Society, 4930 5564
Saturday 26 February	Atlassing Outing: Area along Bingleburra Road, via Dungog	6.30 am. MacDonalds, Raymond Terrace	Ann Lindsey, 4951 2008, Chris & Liz Herbert, 4959 3663, or Mike Newman, 4930 5564. Please ring first.
Sunday 5 March	Clean-Up Australia Day	9.00 am Stockton Sand Spit	Tom Clarke, 4951 3872
Tuesday 7 March	Mid-week Outing: Bangalow Reserve/Windale	7.30 am. Pacific Highway, near Ringal Chicken Shop, Bennetts Green	Keith or Margaret Woods, 4963 3070
Wednesday 8 March	Club Night Shortlands Wetlands Centre	7.30 pm	Speaker: Michelle Hall Topic: Magpie-larks
Sunday 19 March	Field Day/Hunter Wader Survey: Observing and counting Waders at Kooragang	8.30 am Stockton Sand Spit	Alan Stuart, 4952 8569 Chris Herbert, 4959 3663
Saturday 25 March	Atlassing Outing: Cessnock State Forest	6.30 am. MacDonalds, Hexham	Ann Lindsey, 4951 2008, Chris & Liz Herbert, 4959 3663, or Mike Newman, 4930 5564. Please ring first.
Tuesday 4 April	Mid-week Outing: Kurri Kurri (Aberdare State Forest)	8.00 am. Kurri Kurri Bowling Club, Tarro Road, Kurri Kurri	Keith or Margaret Woods, 4963 3070
Wednesday 12 April	Club Night Shortlands Wetlands Centre	7.30 pm	Speaker: Peter Phillips Topic: Birds of Western Australia
Saturday 8 April	Hunter Wader Surveys	11.00 a.m. (if poor weather, Sunday may be considered). Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert, 4959 3663 Intending participants must ring to confirm
EASTER: Friday 21 April to Tuesday 25 April	Camp at The Aloes, Pilliga State Forest	The Aloes, Pilliga State Forest, from Friday 21 April	Directions available from Liz Herbert, 4959 3663. **Take all drinking water.