

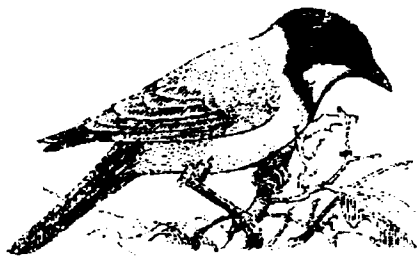
NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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

Telephone: (02) 4958 5942

<http://users.hunterlink.net.au/hboc/home.htm>



President: Alan Stuart

Secretary: Tom Clarke

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.*
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Comeback for Thickheads!

The Hunter Thickheads rocked into equal second place in the state with a total of **191 species** twitched in the **Birds Australia Twitchathon 2000**. As our efforts were confined to the Hunter Region this high number reflects the richness and diversity of our area, especially when you consider that some began the race from as far away as Macquarie Marshes and further.

Starting at Baerami Creek was a last minute decision based on sightings of Plum-headed Finches and a Spotted Harrier nearby. The Spotted Harrier stayed around, but the Plum-heads, unusual this side of the ranges, were not so obliging.

On the Saturday night we again enjoyed the generous hospitality of Barrington House and we thank owner, Brad Lewis, himself a keen birdwatcher, for his continued and enthusiastic support. New members on the team were Liz Crawford and Mike Newman, who both took up the challenge and set an exhausting pace. In all, we saw and heard some terrific birds including Diamond Firetails, Wompoo and Topknot Pigeons, Paradise Riflebird, Noisy Pitta, Hooded Robin, and Spectacled Monarch, and our raptor list soared with 12 species, including a Black Falcon and that cooperative Spotted Harrier. But how did we fail to see White-bellied Sea-Eagle?

The team is especially grateful for the support it received from members, friends and families. We have raised over \$1200 to date. This year, all money will go to Birds Australia for the purchase of Newhaven Station in the Northern Territory, where a number of endangered species live. Our other local Main Race team, the Home Brewers, who gave us encouragement of a dubious nature in the dawn mists at Barrington, were worthy opponents. The Thickheads will be more than happy to take up their challenge again next year. We shall, however, bypass the excellent Taj Mahal restaurant in Singleton with its fiery Vindaloo and seek less demanding fare to fuel our Sunday Twitch.

Ann Lindsay

**Happy Christmas Happy New Year Happy Birding Happy Christmas Happy New Year
Happy Birding Happy Christmas Happy New Year**

President's Column

In October, migratory waders became a significant focus of our activities.

At our meeting that month, we had a marvellous presentation covering the subtleties of wader identification and outlining the important areas within the Hunter estuary for waders. Our thanks go in particular to Chris Herbert and Liz Crawford for the great job they did in preparing and presenting the talk, and also to the several others who helped them. This meeting was followed up by a waders field study day, which was well attended and at which the identification tips from the meeting could be put into practice.

Also in October we conducted our regular monthly wader survey of the Hunter estuary. These surveys have been running for 20 months now, and are revealing important information that we send on to several other groups including National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Project, NSW Wader Studies Group and the two Atlas projects. We have now extended the surveys to include Swan Bay (Port Stephens), which is another important high tide roosting area.

Around 40 people so far have joined in on at least one of the wader surveys. Additional volunteers are always most welcome, and the surveys are a great way for you to develop up your wader ID skills.

Although the Hunter estuary remains of significant importance to migratory waders, the numbers of birds that come here each year have declined greatly. 30 years ago, there would be around 16,000 visitors each year. Now, the numbers are down to less than 4,000. It's important that we stop and reverse this decline, and recently we have resolved to try to do this. As a first step, we aim to begin constructive discussions with local NPWS officers. A workshop on waders is also being considered for early next year.

Moving from waders to seabirds, it's been tremendous to see the interest shown in the pelagic trips that Richard Baxter and Phil Hansbro have been organising. There have been 3 trips this year, each finishing around 60km SE of Swansea, and they have revealed a world of birds that previously most of us knew relatively little about. I was on board for two of the trips, and I had a wonderful time on both of them (and the seas weren't very rough, thankfully).

More trips are planned in 2001 including at least one that will depart from Port Stephens rather than Swansea. This will open up the seas further north to closer inspection.

This year's Twitchathon took place over October 27/28, and once again several teams planned their finish to be at the Wetlands Centre. I'm not sure how many teams did this – at least seven, but I might have missed some as not all the teams stayed for the BBQ and story telling that took place afterwards. Three of the teams were made up of HBOC members.

I and several others went along to watch the finish and enjoy the stories afterwards. Clearly, everybody had a lot of fun and I felt sure that most would do it all again next year. The best local effort was the "Hunter Thickheads" with 191 species, and a team in Sydney was the overall winner, recording 203 species in the 24 hours. Congratulations to all the teams involved.

The money raised from the Twitchathon (several thousand dollars) will be used by Birds Australia towards the purchase and maintenance of Newhaven Station in the N.T. I understand that the deal now seems certain to go ahead. That's good news!

Happy birding.

Alan Stuart
almarosa@hunterlink.net.au

Don't spare the horses!

One word could describe the Hunter Home Brewers 2000 Twitchathon campaign - 'anticipation'. But would the months of planning, pre-twitch BBQ's, beer-bribed sponsorship and heckling of the opposition pay off?

In contrast to last year, good weather prevailed and the journey up the valley was made in much appreciated sunshine. Searches for potential 'bonus birds' at Munghorn Gap failed to produce the goods, so the countdown to 4pm was made at ...well, somewhere near there. Bets were laid for the first bird of the Twitch. Both Magpie and Starling showed even odds, Rufous Whistler at a respectable 8-1, White-plumed Honeyeater was backing himself at 10-1, the Emu showed late mail to come in at 15's, whilst the Hooded Robin offered punters a decent rough chance at 33-1. The bookies laughed all the way back to the car, as Yellow-rumped Thornbill took the honour. Unfortunately, there were no place dividends, as the Hooded Robin snatched second place from the grasp of the Restless Flycatcher.

The Blue-faced Honeyeaters that were calling at Wollar earlier must have set-off on their own Twitchathon, though with no time to waste we headed for the promised land, Goulburn River NP. A clean sweep on all five Hunter Thornbills by 5:15pm had the Brewers set up nicely for a good Saturday tally. Quality birds such as Little Eagle, Bee-eaters, White-browed Babblers and Peaceful Dove (all missed in '99) fell more as a relief than anything. The call of 'Emu' from Lucas had Craig frantically focussing across the valley. Eventually, with birds like Diamond Firetail and White-eared Honeyeater safely secured, night fell and we began the long night-time sojourn. Efforts to tick up the Thickheads at various Chinese Restaurants in Singleton unfortunately resulted in a dip for the Brewers. Little did we know that their range had extended to Indian fare this year.

A couple of Barn Owls were spotted not far out of Singleton - and there was much rejoicing. Upon reaching our night stop, a short interlude was experienced when the Jackeroo stalled on a rocky river-crossing. While Steve locked in the hubs, the Williams River meandered its way through the car. With 87 species on the board we slept pretty well, although Craig made sure everyone heard the Boobook at around 3:30am. The resident campers must have wondered why people would arrive at a camp at 1am and then leave before 6am... but the dawn chorus was simply magic.

The Thickhead Welcoming Committee at Barrington House were looking skyward as the Brewers whirl-winded in. A literal 'flash' of our list was enough correspondence, as the morning was growing older. Surprisingly, Barrington produced only four new species for us, although the very vocal Logrunners were definitely a highlight. We left Barrington House with 115 species...and were feeling very confident at this stage. Unfortunately, this was to be the 'beginning of the end' for the Brewers. From this point, all the way to Newcastle (almost 5 hours), we picked up only 28 new birds. Among them were Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Great-crested Grebes, Long-billed Corellas and the apparent 'loose-cannon' of 2000, the Straw-necked Ibis - but it was to be a costly crawl.

Back in Newcastle, it was 'tick-up-a-team' time. There were people sporting bino's all over the shop. The *Lesticum foradae* (Tom Clark's *Lesticum phoradae* (ed)?) were seeing all sorts of wonderful things at the sandspit, having been on the bubbly all day - we could've told 'em they were looking through the wrong end of their scopes -but that would've been against the rules!

The Brush Wattlebird was a particularly difficult bird. But in the end it was worth the effort to see the bemused looks on the faces of the residents at the Bayway Caravan Village as a car-full of motley males did laps of their

home, staring at the trees and then going completely bananas when seeing a bird fly into a low-shrub. The waders came to the party too, but the Mangrove Gerygone - heard by only the one team member on two occasions - was a crushing dip. A Brown Quail was literally 'flushed' during a toilet stop at the Big Pond. With 168 birds, and Ash Island and SWC to go, we thought we were a good show. The short-cut key to Ash Island was not required, but the island was really only a 'one-bird detour' to the Wetlands Centre.

The main door to the Wetland Centre was like the opening of a David Jones half-yearly clearance sale. The Brewers managed to bustle out the Thickheads on their way to some good birds at the SWC, including Wandering Whistling Ducks and the popular Red-kneed Dotterels. It was amusing to watch the efforts of each group to keep these birds as 'their own'. Final counts were made, and although 175 species was an improvement on last year, it really wasn't competitive. A big congrats to the 'sparring partners' - the Hunter Thickheads - who with 191 species took out equal second in the state. But alas, it isn't about competition - it's about fun, feathers, fatigue and for the foremost, fundraising - there really is no competition involved.

One all.

Mick Roderick

Champagne Twitching

The alternate approach to raising money for Newhaven.

Lesticum phoradae, the champagne team that consumed the most champagne and twitched in comfort and style managed a leisurely 5th place in the non-serious event of Twitchathon 2000.

Our race (did I say race, change that to dawdle) started at a remote location only known by a handful of people in the hills west of Vacy. As a matter of fact, for the first two and a half hours of the event our team actually

covered a 'staggering' distance of approximately 100 metres. Seated and comfortable on fold out chairs, esky handy at arm's reach, in good company and surrounded by excellent habitat, the team were witness to a presentation of 38 species of Australian fauna (mostly birds). The team consisted of Bev Roderick, Di Johnston, Jenny Powers, Phillip Rankin and Tom Clarke.

For the Saturday evening section of the event we had a stand-in for Jenny who was taking in the ballet somewhere and couldn't make it. A visitor to Australia from Holland, a young student of the environment called Annamic (that's how it's pronounced) enjoyed the many encounters of Australian bush birds and mammals. By the time we left that place she had seen a Grey Fantail chick in its nest being fed by an adult, could recognise by sight and sound and pronounce Lewin's Honeyeater, and had taken plenty of photos of White-headed Pigeon, Eastern Yellow Robin and Red-necked Wallaby.

I can't reveal the exact location of this place (because it's a secret) but a description is necessary. An ancient land-slip has created a small and elevated flat halfway up a mountain. Above the flat in extremely steep and protected gullies is a wonderful brush that contains giant fig trees and stinging trees etc. Below the flat is remnant ironbark woodland. Perched up on this flat with the woodland an effective screen to the wide view of the Paterson Valley below you can easily feel quite remote from other matters. At the interface of the two main habitats lies a small dam thought to be in part naturally occurring but probably enhanced long ago by use of horse drawn scraper. This dam becomes a focus for local birdlife and other forms each evening before going to roost.

Best bird at this location would have to be our pet Emerald Dove that wandered about like some domestic chook just 20m in front of us for over 15 minutes. More champagne was called for to celebrate another tick and a life tick for Bev. At this point the curious property owner had arrived to witness champagne twitching (he'd never heard of it before) and

quickly decided that he could make a real go of it. Good thing there was plenty of champagne!

A hearty pub meal at the Farmers Hotel at Vacy rounded off a delightful evening before we headed home for our sleep (champagne rules).

Sunday was spent at various local birding hot spots around Newcastle and the team enjoyed many highlights. The morning tea-break at Dudley in view of the roosting Tawny Frogmouth was just great. Then there was extreme excitement as we negotiated, not one but two, giant Red-bellied Black Snakes in our successful quest for Latham's Snipe and Rufous Night Heron at Redhead Lagoon. DJ even surprised herself at her ability to do the back-pedal sprint. And wasn't it fun as we lounged about over at the Wetlands Centre while plenty of other teams came racing past, twitching to the max in a last gasp effort to get that elusive Marsh Harrier or Little Corella.

When the final list is looked at it is always surprising how many common birds, that you know should be easily found, remain undetected over the time limit of the event. This goes for all teams of both categories but I can tell you that even before the dust had settled and the post mortems had ended, great plans were being formulated for next year's assault.

Tom Clarke

Tops Twitchathon 2000 Target

Dear Members and Birds Australia Friends,

With the final total of 27 teams this year, the 2000 Twitchathon was the best ever effort for NSW and ACT members and friends of Birds Australia! Congratulations teams, and thanks a million for such great support both by participants and donors in this really fun event. Funds raised from this year's event will go towards the purchase and infrastructure required at "Newhaven Station", Birds Australia's second land acquisition. Teams came from as far north in NSW as Tenterfield, as far south as Eden and west to Dubbo, and also included two ACT teams.

The Grey Toilet Thrushes team (Keith Brandwood and Sacha Adin) won the Main Race first prize again this year with 203 species, a new record for them. Second prize was awarded both to The Hunter Thickheads (Ann Lindsay, Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford and Mike Newman) and the Whacked Out

Woodswallows with 191 species each, the former team having 192 species but withdrawing a rarity from their bird list after consultation with the NSW Rarities Appraisal Committee. The Central Coast Champions (Alan Morris, Allan Benson, Robin Benson and Craig Arms) won the third prize. David Geering from those Whacked Out Woodswallows first heard the rarest bird (an Australasian Bittern - Threatened Species List NSW) and, after confirmation of the species from the other team members, is eligible for the rarest bird prize.

The Champagne Race was won by the Eastern Whiplashers (Sue Proust, Peter West and David Kelley) with 132 species (my imagination runs wild at their team name - who thrashed whom to obtain the best result?!).

Thanks very much to our sponsors: **Envirobook** of 38 Rose Street, Annandale (for main race first prize of Australian key guide flora and fauna books), **Natural Learning** for the Simpson & Day CD Roms (main race second prize), **Barren Grounds Bird Observatory** at Jamberoo for accommodation (main race third prize), the **Wine Society** of 177 Cathedral Street, Woolloomooloo for the Champagne Race winners prize of very nice champagne and **Chorleywood B & B** at Bowral for a night's accommodation for the rarest bird prize.

The results are as follows:

MAIN RACE:

Grey Toilet Thrushes (first prize)	203
Hunter Thickheads (joint second prize)	191
Whacked Out Woodswallows (joint second prize)	191
Central Coast Champions (third prize)	189
Cheerful Drongos	180
Hunter Home Brewers	175
Bristleheads	155
Dead Parrot Society	121
Tarred and Feathered	65

RAREST BIRD PRIZE

Whacked Out Woodswallows Team - David Geering.

MOST MONEY RAISED BY AN INDIVIDUAL

To be advised.

The grand total of funds raised in this year's event will be published as soon as possible, together with the name of the winner for the most funds raised by an individual. Let's meet again next year and double the number of teams and dollars!

If you have thoughts - good or bad - on how the event was handled, or you would like to assist in the process of encouraging more birdwatchers - beginners to life time naturalists - to get involved by participating in a Twitchathon for the benefit of our native birds, please ring or drop me a line. I see great potential in raising funds for very worthwhile ornithological projects.

Frances Czwalinna

Secretary

Southern NSW & ACT Group, Birds Australia
Box 1322, P.O. Crows Nest, 1585
Tel. (02) 9872 4185 (home)

Field Outing...

"Waitui", October Long Weekend

The October camp was held from 29 September to 2 October at Anne Mannion's property "Waitui", near Hannam Vale north of Taree. People came and people went, but at one time or another 15 HBOC members were present. Alan Stuart holds the record for the shortest stay. He then left in a rush, minus his chair. The always enterprising Treasurer is rumoured to be auctioning this valuable item. Anne's property is surrounded by pockets of rainforest and this coupled with the areas of pasture and lagoons surrounding Hannam Vale produced an impressive array of birds. The total list for the camp was 106.

Highlights of the weekend included a Square-tailed Kite's nest near Coopernook. After much peering, we convinced ourselves finally that there was a bird on the nest when it stuck its head up to obtain a better view of this curious group of people with extended eyes.

One of the pleasures of camping among the birds is to listen to the dawn chorus. At Waitui it goes on all night. We learned that the three Noisy Pittas in the area call to each other at all hours. With a state petrol strike mooted, the "walk to work" call ringing out took on special meaning. The main chorus was started by the "chuck" of the Eastern Yellow Robin, soon to be joined by many other species including Brown Cuckoo-Doves and Bar-shouldered Doves. Other night birds heard included Boobook Owl, Australian Owlet-nightjar and Tawny Frogmouth.

The walk from "Waitui" up the valley to the Mustard Seed Valley Retreat was particularly rewarding with the visually elusive but very vocal Pittas competing with the duetting see-saw calls of two Russet-tailed Thrushes on either side of the track. Black-faced Monarchs called incessantly, confiding Yellow-throated Scrubwrens crossed the road in front of us and Logrunners hid their faces in the leaf litter avoiding eye contact most of the time.

The lagoons of Maynard Meadows, south of Hannam Vale village, turned up a pair of Wandering Whistling-Ducks. Hardheads were present and are apparently permanent residents. Little Wattlebirds were numerous in nearby gardens, which is different to the Newcastle area where they appear more restricted to the coastal belt. Equally surprising was the lack of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters though they are usually plentiful according to Anne.

Some luxury-seeking campers frequented the Hannam Vale coffee shop. They were privileged to see large numbers of White-winged Trillers which is a bit unusual for the area.

Anne Mannion's property with its native shrubs and dam made a delightful setting for our camp. We are all very grateful for her generous hospitality which included televising the Olympic closing ceremony with extra commentary by Ross and Rowley.

Mike Newman

Newcastle NSW Pelagic Trip Report

4 November 2000

Conditions: Departed 7.15am and returned at 4pm. Seas slight with winds from the S/W and S/E about 10knots. Reaching 60km S/E of Swansea. Water temperature. 18.5 degrees
Vessel: "OFFSHORE" from Lake Macquarie.
Those on board: Richard Baxter, Phil Hansbro, Alan Stuart, Alan Morris, Greg Newling, Craig Arms, Robin Benson, John McLennan,

Phillip Rankin, Al Gillies, Ross Carlton, Anne Lindsay, Mike Newman.

Summary:

Another good Newcastle Pelagic Trip, with most on board keen to see BLACK PETREL. It didn't take long to track one down and it proved to be a very obliging bird, staying with the boat for most of the day and affording all on board excellent views and photographic opportunities.

It was a typical November trip with a good sprinkling of recent summer arrivals and

a few winter species such as Cape Petrel and 3 species of Albatross still hanging about.

We departed Swansea at 7.15am and our first stop was only one kilometre offshore where we stopped to view a raft of over 100 Fluttering Shearwaters. Continuing on we quickly saw our only Hutton's Shearwater and over 500 further Fluttering Shearwater. Our first chumming location was the inner farms about 10km offshore. Here we had fewer Fluttering Shearwater as well as the ubiquitous Wedge-tailed and Short-tailed Shearwaters. A short wait resulted in our first Black-browed Albatross of the day, which was a juvenile. This was followed by 7 further birds of which most were also juveniles. At this location we also had 1 Arctic Jaeger, 1 Pomerine Jaeger, 2 Wilson's Storm Petrel, 2 A/Gannet, 6 Crested Tern and 1 Cape Petrel.

Our next stop was the outer farms which are 35km S/E of Swansea. Here we saw 5 Black-browed Albatross, 2 Pomerine Jaeger, 1 Gannet, 2 Wilson's Storm Petrel, 2 Crested Tern, 1 Common Tern and Wedge and Short-tailed Shearwater. We departed here on route to the shelf and travelled only a short distance; before there was the shout, "BLACK PETREL!". The bird was directly behind the boat and disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. We stopped the boat and commenced chumming and before long we had it feeding at the back of the boat. The cameras came out and everyone got excellent views before we continued out to the shelf.

At the shelf we had 1 Black-browed Albatross, 1 Pomerine Jaeger, 4 Arctic Jaeger, our first and only Yellow-nosed Albatross of the day and 4 Wilson's Storm Petrel. We decided to head out to the 60km mark and just before leaving our first Wandering Albatross came in and circled the boat for a few minutes before landing at the back of the boat for a feed.

At the 60km mark we had 1 Black-browed and 1 Wandering Albatross at the back of the boat as well as Black Petrel, 1 Wilson's Storm Petrel, 1 Pomerine Jaeger, 1 Gannet and the usual Wedge-tailed Shearwater. We had been at sea for about 7hrs and had not seen a single Pterodroma in this time. This situation

was soon resolved with the appearance of 1 Providence Petrel and shortly after that 3 Great-winged Petrel.

Other Critters: 2 Unknown Whale, 12 Bottlenose Dolphin, 1 Large Sunfish.

Newcastle Pelagic trips are organised by the HBOC and visitors are welcome to attend. All trips are organised as non-profit.

Richard Baxter

More Pelagic Trips.....

Following on the popularity of this year's Pelagic Trips, Richard Baxter has organised a number for next year. If you are interested you are advised to get in early, as these trips are filling fast.

- Saturday 27 January 2001 (out of Swansea)
- Sunday 18 February 2001 (out of Nelson Bay)
- Saturday 31 March 2001 (**fully booked**)
- Saturday 9 June 2001
- Saturday 21 July 2001
- Saturday 11 August 2001
- Saturday 15 September 2001

Each trip costs \$70, which includes light snacks, soft drink, burley, boat hire and guide (Phil Hansbro). Swansea trips are from Swansea weigh station, departing at 7 am sharp.

Enquiries and bookings to Richard Baxter, randrbaxter@yahoo.com or ph. 02 4954 0212.

Why not just stay at home?

Saturday 20 October. Don't know if my wife and I were lucky or unlucky today, as the day was cloudy, still, and trying to rain. A very good day for walking in the bush and observing birds.

But we didn't, as both of us were not in the best of health, we decided to sit on the back verandah and watch everything around. Now this year we haven't planted any vegetables because the Galahs eat the tops of the beetroot, King Parrots eat the green

tomatoes, Crows and Honeyeaters get the citrus, Wallabies eat the roses, Satin Bower Birds eat the grapes and everything else, including the buds off the beans so that we can't get a feed for ourselves.

But today would you believe it. A male black Bower Bird flew past with a stick in its beak, which brought us into action to follow him. There in the front garden was the bower, almost built, along with all the usual blue ornaments (was this luck, or an insult?).

The next thing that happened as he sat there, was for an echidna to go waddling across the lawn, and then spend most of the morning trying to dig up an electricity power pole for the ants around its base.

The show didn't stop there, as we had five Choughs with a nest in the cattle-camp with two young in it. They came to the house and were immediately attacked by two bush Wattle Birds which had two fledglings at foot, and this only stirred the Choughs up, who in turn put the kookaburras to flight.

Next, a Wattle Bird had an argument with another bird in the grevilleas, which turned out to be a juvenile Whip Bird that remained hidden for the rest of the day in the orange tree, learning to perfect his whip call.

And still it went on, with the arrival of three Yellow-tail Cockatoos into the spotted gum trees. But amongst all this, all the other species of birds were flitting about amongst the honey flowers.

But, as Tim Bowden would say, there's more! Just before dark a juvenile Nankeen Night Heron arrived in the back yard, walking up and down the wire netting fence, too stupid to fly over to the water in the dam.

These are only just a few things that one has to put up with if you live in the country. Tough, isn't it? Happy Birding, fellow members

Ted Wilson

P.S. The Whip Bird remained for over a week. The Nankeen Night Heron became two and is still here along with a Little Egret. The second male Bower Bird came and destroyed the bower, four days after we found it.



Having fun with birding

If you can see the funny side of birding
why not tap into
<http://www.camacdonald.com/birding/funstuff>.

There are links to:-

- You might be a birder if.....
- The Universal Laws of Birding
 - Faulkner's Birding Slang
- Tina's Ten Commandments of Birding
 - Birding Humour
- A Field Guide to Hollywood Bird Songs
 - Bird Jokes for All Ages
- You Know Your Parents Are Fanatic Birders when....
 - Bird Jokes for Your Kids
 - Animal Lovers Giftshop Jokes
 - Bird Records.

A Diary of Bird Behaviour

2 January

About 8 Dollarbirds were catching dragonflies on the wing in the late afternoon.

4 January

I went to Shortland Wetlands today. In the afternoon a storm was brewing from the west. I was sitting in the café which looks out over a pond. A Magpie Goose flew off the pond and headed in a westerly direction. Suddenly a bolt of lightning flashed in the distance, in the direction the bird was heading. It promptly did a U-turn and returned to the pond.

9 January

Me and three others were running along a track in Murdering Gully. We approached two Magpies that were foraging among the leaf litter on the side of the track. One of them ran away as we jogged past, but the other one did not move, and just sang at us.

12 January

In the morning I was alerted to the raucous screeching of Galahs out the front. They were two young birds darting and zig-zagging in a crazy manner. They were swooping a family (two adults and two babies) of Magpies that were foraging on the ground. One of the Galahs then landed a few metres from the family and indignantly began to feed.

19 January

Today was a hot day. Around 1.30pm I was walking to Charlestown when I saw an immature Magpie under a large shrub with its beak wide open. It was slowly walking around picking up and dropping dried leaves for no apparent reason.

On my way home I went through bushland and stopped at a creek crossing to watch some obscure small birds that were moving amongst the Lantana. A Red-browed Firetail and a Lewin's Honeyeater were drying themselves after their bath. The Lewin's Honeyeater then darted into the Lantana thicket. A few minutes later I noticed it peering at me from within the thicket. It uttered an unfamiliar short, soft whistle. I tried to mimic it and it whistled again. After my second whistle it got excited and flew to a vantage point a bit closer to me, before whistling again. I responded, and it flew off out of sight along the creek line.

21 January

In the twilight about 100 Corellas congregated in a few Eucalypts at Wangi. They continued

to call painfully until the last ray of daylight had gone.

22 January

During the day I spoke with a neighbour who said that a pair of Magpies have been nesting in his Eucalypt for five years. He said that when he walks around the backyard and pours soapy water down cricket holes to flush them out, one of the parents follows him and eats the crickets when they evacuate their hole. In the late afternoon I went fishing and saw two Artic Jaegers with about 20 Terns waiting for a school of baitfish to be attacked near the surface.

24 January

In the morning our cat Aleisha raced up our bottlebrush tree and sharpened her claws on the fibrous bark. A Noisy Miner that was in the tree did not like Aleisha's behaviour and began squawking angrily at her before swooping her and flying away.

27 January

Three immature Magpies were foraging around some mulch. One of them picked up a forked twig, walked over to a Eucalypt with deeply-furrowed fibrous, and tried to attach one end of the twig to the bark. It failed and so dropped the twig. But it picked it back up and tried again, but wasn't successful. It repeated this probable nesting behaviour a few more times before grabbing the end that it was trying to attach to the bark with one foot and pulling on the twig with its beak. After failing in this attempt to pull the twig apart it returned to attempting to attach it to the bark of a different Eucalypt. Neither of the other two Magpies were interested in what this baby was doing.

Colin Goodenough

Rufous Scrub-bird Surveys

National Parks and Wildlife Service and Birds Australia have combined forces to survey the cryptic Rufous Scrub-bird in northeastern New South Wales. The project

aims to monitor any changes in abundance of these birds during the five year survey period from 1999 to 2004. Although five areas were surveyed in 1999, only two of these, Barrington Tops and Border Ranges, will be surveyed this year. Both of these locations

were studied intensively in the early 1980s, resulting in a large amount of baseline data. An unexpectedly low number of Rufous Scrub-birds were detected in the 1999 Border Ranges surveys and ongoing surveys will indicate if bird numbers in this area are continuing to decline.

Surveys are conducted by volunteers who are thoroughly briefed and supervised by Peter Ekert. There is a strict survey protocol involving a 7.5 minute listening period at marked survey sites and completion of a habitat assessment form at each site. Listen to a tape of the Rufous Scrub-bird calls before attempting this survey because it is extremely rare to see one! Their calls, however, are loud and distinctive.

Five HBOC members joined about ten other birdwatchers at Gloucester Tops on 25 November to help conduct the first of two surveys in this area in 2000. The second survey will be held on 9 December 2000.

Although we listened carefully at 15 separate sites, we only heard the Rufous Scrub-bird twice! At one of these sites, the bird was within a metre of us (and its loud call was deafening) but the undergrowth was so dense and the bird's behaviour so cryptic that we had no chance of seeing it at all!

It is rewarding to participate in a survey which has statistically sound survey techniques and an overall goal of maintaining a viable population of this species.

This is truly an exercise for the ears – we heard lots of different birds in the forest, from Rose Robins to Satin Bowerbirds and Golden Whistlers – but we saw very few.

To participate in next year's surveys, contact Peter Ekert at Birds Australia, PO Box 1322, Crows Nest NSW 1585; phone 9436 1349; or email: peter_ekert@one.net.au

Liz Herbert

Notice

Richard Baxter is interested in buying any old copies of *Wingspan* or other birding magazines. Please contact him on 4954 0212 or randrbaxter@yahoo.com.

Welcome to New Members

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

*Andrew Hamonet of Merewether
Linda & Ted Clayton of Gwandalan
Sue & Ray McLean of Ramond Terrace
Terry Lindsey of Hamilton*

We look forward to meeting you at club nights and field outings during the year.

Articles for our newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for next issue: 31 January 2001

Please send to: Pat Carlton

29 Wallaroo Road, East Seaham 2324

Ph/fax: 02 4988 6026

Email: pccarlton@optusnet.com.au

We wish to apologise for the layout of the last newsletter, which was due to problems with email transference of data. Let's hope this issue is back to normal!

Australian Bird Study Association 2001 Scientific Day and AGM:
What's becoming of our woodland birds?

The 2001 ABSA Scientific Day, to be conducted before the Annual General Meeting in Dubbo on Saturday 17 March, will address one of the most worrying issues in bird conservation in Australia today, the decline of our woodland birds.

Inland of the Great Divide many birds generally thought of as common are being gradually lost from many areas. It comes as a great surprise to many coastal-based birdwatchers that familiar species such as the Jacky Winter, Brown Tree-creeper and even the Eastern Yellow Robin are in decline. The question has to be asked: will the Hooded Robin be the next woodland bird to join the Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot on the endangered species list?

The Scientific Day brings together speakers such as CSIRO scientist Julian Reid, treecreeper researchers Erik & Veronica Doerr and local naturalists Neville Schrader and Judie Peet. The day promises to be informative, provocative and, set in the grounds of Western Plains Zoo, enjoyable. The program has been specifically structured to allow participants to comfortably travel to Dubbo on the Saturday morning if need be. Dubbo is five hours drive from Sydney and Canberra.

Following the AGM participants are invited to join the local Dubbo Field Naturalist Club in a dam watch in nearby Goonoo State Forest to count Glossy Black Cockatoos as they partake in their evening drink.

Further details of the Scientific Day and AGM are available from David Geering, 26 Jack William Drive, Dubbo, NSW, 2830, Phone 02 6885 0038 (H) or 02 6883 5335 (W). David can also provide a full listing of accommodation options in Dubbo if required.

Following the AGM interested persons are invited to join the Dubbo Field Naturalists and Conservation Society in a dam watch in Goonoo State Forest. The primary purpose of this is to count Glossy Black Cockatoos as they come to the dams to drink. This is a long-term project of the DFNCS aimed at monitoring cockatoo numbers in Goonoo State Forest.

Registration Fee \$10- covers afternoon tea. There will be no admission charge to the zoo for attendees.

An informal BBQ or picnic will be held in Goonoo State Forest after the evening dam and cockatoo watch for a cost of \$10.

N.B. There will be food facilities at the zoo for lunch before the program begins. Alternatively, bring a picnic lunch and enjoy it in the zoo grounds.

A day of banding will be conducted at Burrendong Arboretum Cooperative Banding Station, near Wellington, on Sunday 18th March for those interested.

How to get there

Western Plains Zoo is on Obley Road, just off the Newell Highway two kilometres south of Dubbo. The Route is well signposted.

Once through the ticket booth inside the zoo, the Ibis Room is on the immediate right. Parking is available adjacent the Ibis Room.

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT –OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2000.

Jul 20	Spotted Quail-thrush	3	Summit Point [Sugarloaf]	K. Gibson
Jul 23	Golden Whistler	1	Jesmond Bush	"
	Yellow-Tufted Honeyeater	>4	"	"
Jul 29	Pacific Baza	2	Kotara	"
Jul 14	Swift Parrot	1	North Arm Cove	D.Hirst
Aug 22	Barn Owl	1	Bayswater Colliery	G.Newling
Aug 25	Barn Owl	2	Muswellbrook	"
Aug 11	Southern Boobook	1	Bayswater Colliery	"
	Barn Owl	1	"	"
Aug 16	Spotted Harrier	1	"	"
Aug 12	Eastern Curlew	9	Swan Bay	N.Talbot
	Bar-tailed Godwit	16	"	"
	Grey-tailed Tattler	5	"	"
	Gull-billed Tern	1	"	"
	Double-banded Plover	5	"	"
Aug 28	Glossy Black Cockatoo	3	Main Creek [Dungog]	D.Jenkin
Sep 12	Swift Parrot	3	North Arm Cove	D.Hirst
Sep 13	Swift Parrot	3	" " "	"
Sep 22	Swift Parrot		" " "	"
Sep 6	New Holland Honeyeater	1	Merewether	P.Gordon
Sep 15/17	Eastern Whipbird	1	"	"
Oct 3	Tawny Frogmouth	1+2dy	"	"
Sep	Tawny Frogmouth	1+1dy	Waratah [Christo Rd}	M.Little
Sep 3	White-headed Pigeon	2	Scone	G.Newling
Sep 5	Barn Owl	1	Aberdeen	"
	" "	1	Parkville	"
Sep 8	Tree Martin	~90	Bayswater Colliery	"
Sep 18	Spotted Quail-thrush	2	Kars Springs	"
	Little Friarbird	1	4km. South of Bunnan	"
	White-winged Triller	4	" " "	"
	Tree Martin	~60	Upper Dartbrook Rd.	"
Sep 12	Swift Parrot	2	North Arm Cove	D. Hirst
Sep 24/25	Rufous Scrub Bird	1	Gloucester Tops	M.Fidler
Sep 3	Spotted Quail-thrush	2	Pokolbin State Forest	N.Talbot
Sep 16	Banded Stilt	1	Swan Bay	W.Barden/ S.Hamonet
Sep 17	Pilot Bird	1	Kandos Weir	F.Van Gesell
Sep 30	Stubble Quail	1	Fosterton Loop	D.Jenkin
Sep 3	Hardhead	7	" "	"
Sep 21/22	Red-whiskered Bul Bul	Pr.	Swansea South [Nesca Park]	J.Adams
Sep 21	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	4	" " "	"
Sep 17	Royal Spoonbill	14	Tarro Swamp	K.Gibson
	Aust. Shelduck	2	" "	"
	Bailions Crake	2	" "	"
	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	4	" "	"
Sep 22	Ruddy Turnstone	2	Speers Point [Lake front]	R.Walker
Sep 26	Brown-headed Honeyeater	2	East Maitland	J.Smart
Sep 23	Satin Flycatcher	2	Salt Ash	M.Roderick
Sep 18	Sacred Kingfisher	1	Buttaba	R.Waymark
Sep 24	Common Koel	2	"	"
Sep 26	Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	"	"
Sep 28	Dollarbird	1	"	"
Oct 11	Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	"	"
Oct 2	Southern Giant Petrel	1imm	Newcastle Ocean Baths	"
Oct 9	Spotted Harrier	1	Salt Ash	"
Oct 1	Olive Whistler	~5	Gloucester Tops	"

	Red-browed Treecreeper	~10	" "	"
Oct 3	Magpie Goose	8	Cundletown	M.Langdown
Oct 2	Restless Flycatcher	1	Fosterton Loop	D.Jenkin
Oct 10	Australian Owllet Nightjar	1 + 2dy	Oyster Cove	M.Blanch
Oct 8	Buff-banded Rail	1	New Lambton Heights	P.Lightfoot
Oct 5	Powerful Owl	1	Blackbutt Reserve	"
Oct 8	"	2	" "	"
Oct 10	Australian Wood Duck	2+23dy	Warners Bay	R.Walker
	Striated Heron	1	Paterson	S.Roderick
Oct 8	Striated Heron	1	Speers Point [Lake front]	"
Oct 4	Emu	3	Merriwa [Wollar Rd]	J.Smart
Oct 2	Scarlet Honeyeater	2	East Maitland	"
Oct 3	Satin Flycatcher	1m	N'cle University	H.Tarrant
Oct 6	Spotted Harrier	1	" "	"
Oct 10	Pacific Baza	1	" "	"
Oct 3	White-winged Triller	4	Bolwarra [different locations]	"
Oct	Blue-faced Honeyeater	8	"	"
Oct 6& 10	Australian Hobby	1	Hands Lagoon [Bolwarra]	"
Oct 17	Common Blackbird	1	Wallsend	G.Harrison
Sep./Oct	Buff-banded Rail	1	Stockton [garden]	I. & T. Felton
Oct	White-necked Heron	1	Charlestown [St.John field]	C.Goodenough
Oct 10	Black Bittern	1	Paterson River [4kS.Paterson]	S. Roderick
Oct 16	Black Bittern	2	Paterson R. [2k N.Paterson]	"
Oct 20	Hardhead	3	Bulga [small dam]	J.Meynell
Oct 23	Gang Gang Cockatoo	12	Ellalong	"
Oct 26	Nankeen Night Heron	1 imm	"	"
	Masked Lapwing	~40	"	"
Oct 23	Spotless Crake	1	Kooragang Island	T.Langworthy
	Gull-billed Tern	2	Kooragang Is. Big Pond	"
	Brown Quail	1	Kooragang Island	"
	Marsh Sandpiper	54	Kooragang Is. Big Pond	"
	Curlew Sandpiper	15	" " "	"
	European Goldfinch	2	" " "	"
	White-fronted Chat	23	" " "	"
Oct 15	White-winged Triller	8	Bolwarra Heights	H.Tarrant
Oct	White-winged Triller 2 nests		Bolwarra	"
Oct 30	Wandering Whistling Duck	2	Hands Lagoon	"
Oct 21	White-headed Pigeon	1	" "	"
	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	Bolwarra	"
Oct 22	Spotted Harrier	1 imm	Hunter flats	"
	Spotted Harrier	1	Morpeth/Hinton	"
Oct; 28	White-backed Swallow	3	Martindale	"
Oct 26-28	Black-faced Monarch	1 imm	Islington	C.Anderson
Oct 29	Logrunner	2	Barrington House	"
Oct 29	Whiskered Tern	1	Ellalong Lagoon	"
	Short-tailed Shearwater	>20	Off Newcastle Baths	"
Oct 31	Shearwater [Short & Wedge T]	>2,000	Off Merewether Beach	"
Oct 15	Black-fronted Dotterel	3 nests	Heaton Rd. Wattagans	M.Newman
	Spotted Quail-thrush	1	Wattagan S.F. [north edge]	"
Oct 7	White-winged Triller	1m.	Warakeila [Allyn Valley]	"
Oct 6	Buff-banded Rail	1	Woodville	"
	Flame Robin	3 prs	Gloucester Tops	"
Oct 8	White-winged Triller	1 imm	Woodville	"
Oct 6	Bassian Thrush	1	Gloucester Tops [River trail]	"
	Russet-tailed Thrush	Pr.	Gloucester Tops Rd	"
Oct 2	Varied Triller	1	Harrington	"
Nov 2	Noisy Pitta Heard calling	1	Woko N.P.	"

Oct 26	Grey-crowned Babbler	5	Allandale	P. Durie
Nov 6	Laughing Kookaburra nesting	2	Belmont	"
Nov 5	Latham's Snipe	11	Seaham Swamp	"
	Cicadabird	1	Paterson	"
Nov 8	Powerful Owl	2	Blackbutt Reserve	P. & C. Lightfoot
Nov 1	Scarlet Honeyeater	3	Metford	P. Durie
Nov 3	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	4juv	"	"
Nov 2	Ground Cuckoo-shrike	1	10k. from Sandy Hollow	G. Brosie
Nov 5	Black-faced Monarch	1	Marmong Point [Awaba Bay]	B. & D. Kibble

Coming Events

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

Date	Venue	Meeting time and place	Contact
Saturday 20 January	Hunter Wader Survey	6.30 am. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Sunday 21 January	Belmont Swamp & Belmont Lagoon	7.00 am. Eastern end of George Street, Belmont.	Keith Laverick 4947 1304
Saturday 27 January	Pelagic Trip	7.00 a.m. Swansea weigh station, nr RSL Club, Chalmers St, Swansea	Richard Baxter 4954 0212 randrbaxter@yahoo.com
Tuesday 6 February	Mid-Week Outing Shortland Wetlands Centre	7.30 a.m. Car Park	Max Blanch 4961 1655 Keith or Margaret Woods 4963 3070
Saturday 10 February	Atlassing – Bulahdelah area	7.00am. Macdonalds Raymond Terrace	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Liz Herbert 4959 3663
Wednesday 14 February	Club Night/A.G.M. Nature Exhibition Photography – Neville Foster	7.30 p.m. The Wetlands Centre	
Saturday 24 February	Hunter Wader Survey	10.00 a.m. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Sunday 18 February	Pelagic Trip	7.00 a.m. Nelson Bay	Richard Baxter 4954 0212 randrbaxter@yahoo.com
Sunday 25 February	Copeland State Forest Camp overnight at The Common	8.00 am. Parking area for Mountain Maid Gold Mine	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 6 March	Mid-Week Outing: Stockton Sandspit	7.30 a.m. Car Park, under Stockton Bridge	Max Blanch 4961 1655 Keith or Margaret Woods 4963 3070
Saturday 10 March	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30 am. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Wednesday 14 March	Club Night. Cape York Threatened Birds Expedition – Phillip Rankin	7.30 p.m. The Wetlands Centre	
Saturday 17 March	Atlassing	To be advised	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Liz Herbert 4959 3663
Saturday- Sunday 24 – 25 March	BIGNET Field trip to see waders	9.00 am. Shortland Wetlands Centre	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 Rowley Smith 4964 1389
Saturday 31 March	Pelagic Trip (Fully Booked)	7.00 am. Swansea weighbridge, near RSL Club, Chalmers St, Swansea	Richard Baxter 4954 0212 Randrbaxter@yahoo.com