

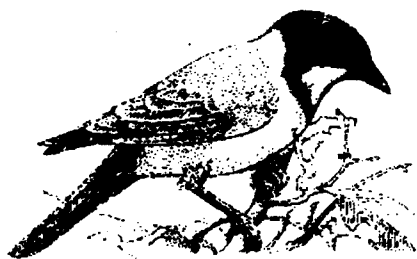
NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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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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Hunter Valley Invasion

It has long been suspected that Spotted Gum *Corymbia maculata* is capable of attracting Swift Parrots in large numbers, but this winter confirmed it. An April record of two birds by Edwin Vella was a clue, but it was Jenny Meynell, in the Hunter Valley, who provided the undeniable proof; she found a foraging flock of about 40 in the small town of Ellalong near Cessnock. The Ellalong site, which contains a small stand of large Spotted Gums on council land near the edge of the town, was soon converged upon by observers from around the district, much to the bemused delight of the locals. Simon Kennedy was studying Swift Parrots along the NSW central coast at the time (without much success) and visited the site in mid-June.

It turned out to be the tip of a fairly large iceberg. Over the next few days Swifties were recorded in Spotted Gum habitat in nearby Aberdare State Forest and Lower Hunter National Park. Some 35 Regent Honeyeaters were also present at Aberdare. A number of observers found several more Swift Parrot sites in the Hunter Valley over the following two months, with the species present until at least late August.

This Swift Parrot concentration is thought to be the result of good Spotted Gum flowering combined with poor flowering season on the NSW western slopes. It will be interesting to see how frequently this event occurs in NSW in the future. (See over for Swift Parrot Survey Results 1995-2000.)

Source: *Swifts Across The Strait, January 2001*

Articles for our newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for next issue: 30 May 2001

PLEASE NOTE FOR JUNE/JULY ISSUE ONLY Contributions should be sent to:

Tom Clarke, 28 Kokera St, Wallsend, NSW 2287 Telephone: 4951 3872 Email: tomidagajo@optusnet.com.au

Swift Parrot Survey Results 1995-2000

	Aug 1995	April 1996	Aug 1996	May 1997	Aug 1997	May 1998	Aug 1998	May 1999	Aug 1000	May 2000	Aug 2000
VIC	242	3	318	257	524	605	525	740	337	923	1105
Bendigo	0	0	87	45	57	87	153	15	23	133	257
Maryborough- Dunolly	0	1	180	121	200	378	182	8	110	581	776
Rushworth	12	0	9	27	80	76	162	25	61	57	59
St Arnaud	9	0	0	3	120	3	0	174	61	57	2
North East	209	0	38	32	67	51	10	518	82	95	1
Southern Vic.	12	2	0	12	0	0	18	0	0	0	10
Gippsland	0	0	4	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NSW	42	10	30	6	9	100	31	25	13	79	112
Central Coast	3	8	0	6	7	90	6	0	0	0	0
Sth West Slopes	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	4	0	20	0
Central West Slopes	33	2	20	0	2	10	25	21	13	31	47
Northern Tablelands	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Coast	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	65
South Coast	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central Tablelands	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
QUEENSLAND	0	0	0	0	0	0	40	0	0	0	30
S.A.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AUS. TOTAL	284	13	348	263	533	705	596	765	390	1002	1247

Tree planting at Capertee Valley - helping the Regent Honeyeater

The Capertee Valley Regent Honeyeater Recovery Group was established in 1993 to help conserve the Regent Honeyeater in the Capertee Valley. Since 1994 the Group and its many volunteer supporters have planted over 20,000 trees and shrubs at various strategic sites throughout the valley.

The next tree planting weekend has been scheduled for 5-6 May 2001. May is a particularly good time to visit the Capertee Valley as the weather will have started to cool down and the birds are active all day. It is planned to plant about 7,000 trees over the weekend, hopefully mostly on the first day, so that there is plenty of time for bird watching on the Sunday afternoon.

There are about 80 beds available in houses and cottages throughout the valley (cost to be advised, but expected to be around \$20 per night) and about 150 people are anticipated for the weekend. Camping is available at the Glen Davis Camping Ground, as well as on local properties. In addition, a shearing shed is available at one of the planting sites. Volunteers cater for their own breakfast and lunch, but a meal has been arranged for Saturday night at an expected cost of \$15. Alternatively, hotel or motel accommodation is available in Kandos or Rylstone.

An application form is available from David Geering (Freecall: 1800 621 056; Fax: 02 6884 9382; email: davidgeering@npsw.nsw.gov.au.)

President's Report

First up – a small correction to my column in the last newsletter. I spent some time singing the praises of a location that once we knew simply as Cedar Hill Drive Swamp, near Minmi, and which now has an official new name. Unfortunately, I told you the wrong new name. It was in fact gazetted as the Pambalong Nature Reserve, after a last minute change of plan by those responsible for these matters. The birds don't mind what it's called, of course, and you can still take my word for it that it is a great place to visit.

In the last newsletter, I also flagged that we would be discussing the deteriorating wader habitat in the Hunter estuary, at a meeting in March of the bird clubs of NSW ("BIGnet meeting"). The meeting took place at the Wetlands Centre over March 24/25, and much of the Saturday agenda was dedicated to waders and wader habitats – including a Workshop held on the Saturday afternoon. At the Workshop we heard seven presentations that collectively gave the audience good understandings of:

- the extent of the decline in wader numbers and wader habitat (especially, roosting site problems),
- the existing activities that were being done to rehabilitate habitats, and
- some possible additional initiatives and strategies.

All of the presentations were well prepared and presented, and they all contributed positively to the overall Workshop. To me, the three most significant talks were from HBOC's Chris Herbert and Liz Herbert, and Neil Saintilan of the Australian Catholic University. Many of you saw Chris' presentation in his "dress rehearsal" of it at our March club night. It is a compelling documentation of the decline in wader habitats in the Hunter estuary. Liz Herbert detailed the c75% decline in total migratory wader numbers since the 1970s, and how some of the smaller waders were even more severely affected. Neil Saintilan has been studying the spread of mangroves in estuaries of SE Australia. He showed us quite clearly that

the grey mangrove is a robust plant that is doing extremely well throughout coastal NSW. Since there would need to be selective removal of a small number of mangroves from around our wader roosting sites, it was pleasing to find out that mangroves are not a threatened species after all. This is contrary to the popular view, and Neil's results should help sway opinions of the public and the decision makers.

I was heartened by the unanimous response from the Workshop attendees, that the situation was very serious and that urgent actions were required. A motion to this effect was passed at the BIGnet meeting. The fact that the major bird clubs of NSW support our stance adds further credibility to our campaign for action.

Since the Workshop, things have started happening! Our news about the decline in wader numbers has been well publicised locally, with several radio, TV and newspaper articles appearing on the topic. Arrangements are in hand for Chris Herbert's presentation to be made to officials from various Federal and State departments, which I think will take our cause a long way forward. And, we've started discussions with Peggy Svoboda of the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project and with officers from National Parks & Wildlife Service, about some actions that could be taken in the short term, especially at Stockton Sandspit and at Sandy Island in the mouth of Fullerton Cove.

I think that there is a collective will locally now to do some positive things that will help our migratory waders. We need to keep the momentum up – and we will!

Incidentally, it's a good time now to go out to look at the waders. Although many have already departed to fly back to their breeding grounds, some are yet to leave and in the meantime they are developing into their breeding plumage – this is the best time to be able to identify them!

Happy birding

Alan Stuart

almarosa@hunterlink.net.au

Wily Wattlebirds as Watchdogs

Our home adjoins the southern side of the Awabakal Nature Reserve. This location provides us with lots of welcome visitors of the avian kind, and some not so welcome visitors of the reptilian kind. I have found that a backyard planted with native trees, shrubs and plants also provides excellent habitat for a variety of skinks, blue tongues, the occasional bearded dragon and of course snakes. Black snakes usually clear out as quickly as they can when disturbed, browns are a different matter. One just has to be careful in the backyard at certain times of the year. One occasional visitor is a green tree snake. This reptile must be one of our most beautiful animals. It glides fluidly and effortlessly along paths, and seemingly defies gravity when it encounters trees or pergola posts. A few years ago one spent most of the winter curled comfortably in the top of a very large staghorn on a pergola.

Last week I found one on the backdoor step peering through the flyscreen. It was between the hose and me, so I was unable to apply my usual remedy when they get too close to the house. After a short time it moved off into the garden and disappeared. About an hour later we heard a commotion coming from a large *Banksia ericifolia*. We noticed two Little Wattlebirds zipping around the canopy of the tree in an obviously agitated state, making far more noise than usual. I assumed they had

located the green tree snake, and sure enough, after almost an hour of their squawking, wing flapping and beak clattering the snake dropped to the ground and lost no time in disappearing into another part of the yard. As soon as it hit the ground, the Little Wattlebirds lost interest and left the tree.

Little Wattlebirds are a permanent fixture around our environs, and like sparrows and pigeons in parks, attract hardly a second glance. Over the years we have seen their aggressive and territorial nature displace Spinebills, White Cheeked honeyeaters, eastern Rosellas and even sparrows. We were initially surprised to find that they would also take on a snake successfully. We therefore applied some time carefully watching their comings and goings, and sure enough we discovered they are nesting in that *Banksia*, and have one partially fledged chick. As nestlings are on the green tree snake's menu the cause of their behaviour turned out to be protective, as well as aggressive.

[Green Tree snakes are non-venomous, but will bite if provoked. As their name indicates they spend most of their time in shrubs and trees. It is a slender snake, growing to about 1.8 m, with an olive-green back and greenish-yellow belly with brighter yellow throat. It feeds on frogs and nesting birds. (H G Cogger – Australian Reptiles)]

John Grebert.

Newcastle NSW Pelagic Trip Report 18 February 2001

Those on board: Richard Baxter, Phil Hansbro, Alan Stuart, Peter Alexander, Graeme O'Conner, Jim Smart, Al Gillies, Keith Laverick, Peter Phillips, Colin Goodenough, Damian Baxter.

Summary: We departed Nelson Bay about 7.30am and before passing the headland we saw Crested Tern and Arctic Jaeger. The morning was overcast, with a few showers around, but the day cleared to be fine and

sunny. As soon as we cleared the headland we started to slowly make our way into a strong easterly wind and a 1-2m swell. The trip out was slow and uncomfortable with very few birds seen. Apart from the usual Wedge-tailed and Short-tailed Shearwaters we also had Huttons/Fluttering Shearwaters 200m behind the boat, but too far away to determine what they were.

We started to Chum about 2hrs offshore and soon had 30+ Flesh-footed Shearwaters behind the boat and 1-2 Pomerine Jaegers. We took 3.5hrs to reach 52km offshore, which was to be

our main chumming location for the next two hours. For the first half-hour we had good numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Flesh-footed Shearwaters and Pomerine Jaegers around the boat. They were soon joined by a couple of Great-winged Petrels which circled the boat very closely, giving everyone good views.

The first special bird of the day came soon after, in the shape of a WHITE-NECKED PETREL. This bird cruised passed the boat about 100m away from us, had a quick look at the slick and promptly departed. Not all on board saw the bird and those that did got only poor views. Shortly afterwards there was the shout, "KERMADEC PETREL"; this bird also briefly appeared 50m from the boat and swiftly departed. Again not all on board saw it and those that did got only average views.

The next hour of chumming produced no new birds. Just prior to departure an adult and Juvenile SOOTY TERN flew passed the boat and it too quickly disappeared out of sight.

With the wind and swell at our backs, the trip home was far more enjoyable than the trip out. It was also half as long. Just prior to entering the heads we saw a raft of 5 Jaegers and several Crested Terns flying overhead.

Other critters: 4 Dolphin Fish; 1 Sun Fish; 1 Striped Tuna; several Bottle-nosed Dolphin.

Newcastle Pelagic Trips are organised by the HBOC and visitors are welcome to attend. All trips are organised as non-profit. The next trip is from Swansea on the 31 March 2001.

Richard Baxter

Pandurra

I'm funny about bird watching tours, having (like bird watching clubs) discovered them 28 years after I started bird watching at 8 years old. Because I've mainly watched birds on my own, I assume that there is a "way to behave" on a bird tour and that I'm in competition to see the birds first.

I'm on the phone to Peter Langdon booking my trip to Pandurra Station, west of Port Augusta. I was (of course) told about the trip by a birdo from Alice Springs during a pelagic trip off Sydney and I'm very excited about Thick-Billed Grass Wrens (apparently a possible highlight). So when Peter asks me what I'm interested in, I tell him "Nothing in particular, maybe the chats". You see the "way to behave" already creeping in... I don't like to mention the bird I'm really after and I'm desperate not to take anything for granted. I also don't want to be the person on the tour who puts the pressure on to find some "holy grail" bird ("Hey I've come all the way from Detroit to see a Little Kingfisher and paid my money and where is my god damn kingfisher?"). I think it's bad luck for the tour to talk about the "holy grail" so the words

"grass wren" couldn't be dragged out of me with torture.

Off to Pandurra (four hours from Adelaide) the day before the tour with Peter, and score an Australian Pratincole at Port Germein, which has to be a good omen (gee at this rate I'll be carrying a rabbit's foot). Sadly it's 39 degrees when I reach Pandurra, which is all red dust, saltbush and sheep bones (not quite so auspicious). Setting up my tent is like sitting in a sauna full of dust and ants. I spend the afternoon pursuing Singing Honeyeaters around the homestead and trying to work out if the Corvids are Little Crows or Little Ravens (I still have no idea).

Pandurra is still a working sheep station but it now has a caravan park (well maybe that description stretches credulity just a tad), cabins and a dorm for backpackers. The attractions are "life on a sheep station", horse riding and the birds. I had been planning to talk to the people who run the place for a radio piece for the ABC and have brought some expensive gear with me for the purpose (along with my snazzy new camera and binoculars I look like a caricature of an American tourist). My welcome from the owners isn't one at all... in fact I don't think I

ever actually met them, so I decide to focus on Peter instead. Eventually the sun starts to go down so I scamper around the dams and thorn bushes... yielding White-Winged fairy-wrens, Hoary Headed grebe, Banded Lapwing and more cryptic corvids.

I wake at 5am and three seconds later Peter knocks on my tent. He's off picking up the other passenger (a very experienced birdo) and the morning tea, by the time I've remembered which shoe goes on which foot. It's cold and only partially light. I wisely decide not to suggest that the birds won't be up yet, but as we drive down a track into the property it is about as "bird free" as you can get. I live in perpetual dread of the moment when the guide pipes up with "This is worst I've ever seen it, There has been something here every tour except this one" (this has actually happened to me, but of course I imagine that it's my fault and I've brought bad luck or something). But Peter, like all good bird guides has a flare for the dramatic and knows the country. He stops at a spot where Slender billed Thornbill normally are, but its cold and dim and there's not so much as a tweet from an LBJ. Peter doesn't seem worried (although I'm bracing myself for the "worst ever" comment) and it gets a little bit lighter. The drought breaks after half an hour with a Kestrel, yippee! (See, I don't take anything for granted.) I might add that to this point no one has mentioned Thick-billed Grasswrens (maybe I'm not the only superstitious one). We scare some kangaroos (Red, Western Grey and Euros) and Peter says (without indicating what he thinks on the subject) that there are large numbers because the kangaroo shooter in the area is a bit slack (I'm sorry there is one at all, but I keep it to myself. I always find it strange when people talk about such topics in front of me. Being a lefty-greenie-vegetarian I suppose I expect more politically correct conversation.) The 4WD reaches some sparse trees and we look back at a splendid view of the sun rising over low red hills. In quick succession we spot Black-faced Woodswallows (16), Singing Honeyeater (7) and Grey Butcherbird (7). You may be wondering why I count every bird I see (that's the number in brackets). Well, part of it is

obsessive behaviour... I gather its OK for an ornithologist to be a bit eccentric, although it often seems to disturb the people on trips I go on. I learned the habit from atlassing for the National Parks and Wildlife Service in New South Wales, which wants to know how many of everything you see, so I blame them. However as a special incentive to keep reading, I've decided not to include the numbers for EVERY bird, but I assure you I was counting the whole time.

We stop the 4WD and walk into the trees and within fifty metres encounter a Jacky Winter, Hooded Robin (4), Red Capped Robin (4), Masked Woodswallow, White Winged Triller, White browed Babbler (21) and White Browed Woodswallow, and we hear a Crested Bellbird which eludes us (that doesn't seem to worry the other two but, I've never seen one before and have to be restrained from sprinting off into the scrub after it). Despite this setback I'm already so excited I can hardly write everything in my note book (although I manage). I think what affected me so much is that these birds are all such dashing creatures, particularly in this clear early sun.

We press on to a series of dams that are low and muddy, but surrounded by vegetation. We add Mulga Parrot, Black Fronted Dotterel, Grey Teal, Australian Grebe, Spiny Cheeked Honeyeater and Crested Pigeon. Each time we come to an area Peter asks (for example) "Are you interested in seeing Blue Bonnets?". I quickly blurt yes each time because I've never been bird watching in arid areas before. The other two manage not to laugh when I ask them to stop so I can see yet another Southern Whiteface (24), and Peter chooses that spot for us to walk into the saltbush in search of Slender-billed Thornbills. I drag along the recording equipment (despite the fact that it makes it very hard to use binoculars) so that I have some sound effects of bird watching to put with the interview with Peter. After much crunching through scrub we manage to see 12 of the slippery little suckers, along with Redthroats.

We head off to another dam (still no mention of Grass Wrens, although they've been scampering about inside my head) and spot

Magpie, Zebra Finch and the first of 72 Pipits (this is beyond a joke, who in the heck would count 72 pipits?!... by the way the Pipits won the "most birds on the day" award). We are then greeted by the odd spectacle of a Black Tailed Native Hen sitting up a tree (I'm not sure it could get down actually). In more orthodox positions we spot Common Sandpiper, Hoary Headed Grebe, Willy Wagtail, Welcome Swallow and White Fronted Chat. Some Emus practically run at the 4WD and I (rather brilliantly I thought) spot a White Backed Swallow, while Peter responds with a group of Chestnut Rumped Thornbill.

There is still, sepulchral quiet on the subject of Thick Billed Grass Wren (I've resorted to singing songs in my head to stop thinking about them), which for three bird watchers together for three hours is pretty impressive. It's during yet another chorus of "Rain-drops Keep Falling on my Head" that Peter abruptly stops the car in amongst more dusty salt bush and samphire and says "What was that" before leaping out and into the scrub. As we scramble after him he uses the "G" word... apparently he's seen some Thick Billed Grass Wren. At this point I would normally say innocently "Oh are they around here? I didn't realise", but I'm too busy frantically negotiating the scrub and trying to hold the other two back to be disingenuous. Trying to spot them is like guerrilla warfare, they are fast and dark and as far as I saw they don't fly (even when pursued by three drooling birdwatchers, one with a somewhat over-utilised notebook and humming a really irritating tune). They bounce along the ground with their tails bobbing about over their heads and then hide beneath the next impenetrable bush. Fortunately they slip up and stop behind one with a hole in it and I manage to get a look at four of them. When we (by now quite sweaty) get back in the 4WD there's a torrent of pent up conversation about Grass Wrens. Q: Do you normally see them there? A: No. Q: Where do you normally see them? A: Several places, including some we have already been (a-ha now he tells us) Q: Do you always see them? A: No (Yippee!... I'd like to apologise for that outburst to everyone who has missed out on a

previous tour) Q: Are there Striated Grass Wrens as well? A: No (bloody typical birdwatchers, never satisfied).

I can relax now, no more worrying about Grass Wrens (or humming for that matter). We reach a dam which is amazing, despite the overwhelming odour of dung in the area. During morning tea (don't you just love this bit on a hot dusty tour? Maybe it's the excitement of the Grass Wrens that makes the biscuits taste so good) we watch Wood Duck, Magpie Lark, Pink eared Duck (21)...(can you believe that? And that's in a state which still allows nutters to shoot them), Hardhead, Banded Lapwing, Yellow Throated Miner and my first, and only, Blue Billed Duck. Our progress is slightly inhibited by a Western Brown Snake wrapped around a discarded Grebe's nest at the water's edge, so I retreat to drink tea and write in my silly notebook.

As we head off I (brilliantly again) spot a Crimson Chat and manage to restrain myself from celebrating when Peter tells us he's never seen a Grey Goshawk (I'm too dignified to mention the white-phase that used to perch in my back yard in Mayfield and he stops me in my tracks by mentioning that he HAS seen a Grey Falcon... drat). He then caps it off by showing us Red Necked Avocet, Greenshank, Masked Lapwing, Red capped Dotterel, Dusky Woodswallow and Orange Chat, including a male in the most brilliant plumage imaginable.

You'd think we'd be satisfied by now, it's close to mid-day, and at a guess its 40 degrees outside the air-conditioning and I'm still tired from the drive, sleeping in a hot tent, rising early and running after various unhelpful birds. These factors don't enter my head as Peter mentions a walk down a water course (he avoids the word creek or river because it might imply that there was actually water there, or even a patch of damp earth) to look for Pied Honeyeater. I drag myself out and start haring off after White-fronted Honeyeater. After about 20 minutes I'm trying to stand in what might laughingly be described as "shade" and I don't care if there are 200 Pied Honeyeaters there (actually there are none and I can't say I blame them).

We head back to the station and I interview Peter about the tours. It's then Peter informs us that I have paid for the full day tour while the other passenger has only paid for a half day. Now by this time I'm half dead and don't care about the money (though I think it puts to rest any suggestion that journalists get things for free if they do stories on people!). I was more interested in packing up my tent and getting back to Adelaide before dark. Looking back on my notes and remembering the excitement of the day I'm glad I didn't quibble - 54 species and 16 life-list birds, including one

of my holy grails, the mighty Thick Billed Grass Wren.

The great thing about Peter Langdon's tour is that he knows enough about everything we encounter to please even the most pedantic tourist (the guy can discuss sheep farming and gate construction!) On top of that he knows every bird species that's been seen on Pandurra for at least a decade and the best place to find them. He is also an entertaining talker... the Grass Wrens don't stand a chance.

Nick Talbot

News from Central Coast

Like most local places, the Central Coast has been a little quiet on the bird front for last month or two. However we are beginning to note some action as Double-banded Plovers move in with the cooling winds of autumn and the traditional summer migrants leave for their breeding grounds in the Northern Hemisphere.

Alan Morris recorded our first Double-banded Plovers (2) at Toowoona Bay reefs on 2 March. This is usual arrival time, almost to the day for the Central Coast.

The 'hot issue' on the Central Coast has been the significant breeding attempt of Little Terns at The Entrance.

When Faye & Don Moulton were taking part in the National Beachbird Survey on 10 November 2000, and saw a group of Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* on the shingled dunes of Karagi Point, The Entrance, little did they know then that they had stumbled upon a nesting colony which was to become the first successful nesting event for Little Terns on the Central Coast in thirty years! It was about 1972 when Little Terns last nested at The Entrance successfully and only once since then was nesting attempted, two pairs at Picnic Point 19 November - 23 December 1994, but this attempt failed.

Further investigation by Faye & Don revealed about 6-10 pairs courting with 3 or 4 clutches of eggs already laid! Following a quick survey of the area which confirmed two nests of Red-capped Plovers as well as the nests of

Little Terns, Alan Morris contacted both Wyong Council and the National Parks & Wildlife Service to alert them to the fact that an Endangered Species was nesting at Karagi Point and for them to implement the provisions of the *Draft Recovery Plan for the Little Tern*. I am pleased to say that both Wyong Council & the NPWS, through the Area Manager Bromyn Conyers, were very quick to act, and Council erected a fence around the nesting colony and the NPWS implemented a volunteer wardening system and regular ranger patrols to ensure that the site was protected. Ranger Dennis Brown who was responsible for the management of the colony recruited a number of volunteers including Bruce Holbert, who took it upon himself to do daily counts of the site and to report on the progress of the nesting event. Club members Don & Faye, Carole & John Carpenter, Janice & Don Hempstead, Robert Quinan, Ern Dunkley, John McLennan and Alan Morris, all took part in carrying out regular monitoring of the site both from a point of view of noting the progress of the colony as well as any unacceptable behaviour by members of the public. I am pleased to say that generally the public behaved very well towards the fenced off colony and there were only isolated reports of people walking through the colony and or disturbing the birds.

Because the colony was in such a public place and because of the presence of such a large number of Silver Gulls, it was decided not to band the chicks or disturb the birds in any way. All surveying was done outside of the

fence so that it was not possible to say with complete accuracy how many clutches were laid and how many eggs hatched! However Bruce Holbert and Alan Morris are of the opinion that 24 pairs had at least 27 nesting attempts and that from 27 to 30 chicks were fledged. The first clutch hatched on Sunday 27 November 2000 and the last around about 28 January 2001. Unfortunately on that date the colony came to an abrupt end as it was a wet day, the level of Tuggerah Lakes was very high and there was therefore no sandbars for the gulls to roost on so that they were all roosting within the fenced area. There were no trippers or fishermen because of the rain so that there were no food sources for the gulls either. There were only about 8 pairs left nesting in the fenced area, some with eggs and about 4 pairs with chicks, close to where the 50-60 gulls were roosting. The gulls therefore started to take the fish that the Little Terns were bringing for their young and eventually started to attack the chicks that were calling out to be fed. By the end of the afternoon there were only 2 pairs left with larger chicks, by the following Friday there were no terns, eggs or chicks in the

colony, although there were 5 fledglings in a flock of 85 Little Terns near the colony site.

Our Little Tern colony was one of 12 successful colonies on the NSW coast this summer. Colonies were located at Sawtell, Nambucca Heads, Boambee, Farquhar Inlet & Manning Point, The Entrance, Botany Bay, Lake Wollumboola, Tuross Heads, Wallaga Lake, Mogareka Inlet and Wallagoot Lake. Altogether it is estimated that about 367 chicks fledged, which is the most that have fledged for 20-30 years or more! A good part about this nesting attempt was that the Little Terns plus the fence enabled the Red-capped Plovers to have at least 8-10 nesting attempts too and raise at least 8-10 chicks. It was always a delight, when watching the Little Terns in the colony, to see the Red-capped either sitting on eggs or guarding their chicks.

Congratulations to Wyong Council and the Munmorah Staff of NPWS for their work in protecting this colony, and many thanks to our members for also contributing to the success of this venture.

Craig Arms

An interesting find....

A juvenile Crested Tern was found in Wangi on 2 February 2001 in an emaciated state and with a sore eye. The bird was handed in to a Native Animal Trust carer, where it was found to have a band on the leg. Subsequent enquiries of CSIRO reveal that it was banded on Phillip Island, Victoria, on 3 November 1999, when it was 4 weeks old.

Sue Hamonet

Atherton Tableland Trip

Just a reminder that there are a few places still available for Fred van Gessel's trip to the Atherton Tableland area from 2 to 9 November 2001. Anyone interested should contact Sue Hamonet, 4958 1023.

A milestone penguin

The following article was posted on the birding-aus discussion list

Dear Birding Aussers,

When I finished school I took a year off with the intention of becoming the youngest person to see 600 species in Australia. Lack of funds, a bout of illness and general slackness saw me fall woefully short of the magic figure. That was in 1987. I saw my 500th bird sometime in 1988. In the thirteen years since I had crawled my way through the five hundreds until last week I added up my list (following Christidis and Boles) and discovered that it now stood at 597.

The magic milestone was now close at hand. (Although admittedly, thanks to the efforts of uber-twitchers such as Carter, Lansley, Palliser et al, 700 is the new benchmark, for a mere

mortal twitcher, 600 still has a magical aura to it). Now that I was so close, the big question was, which species would be my six hundredth? Sure I could fly to Cape York or the Alice to guarantee it, but after waiting thirteen years, I wanted get there in style.

And then came Rohan Clarke's posting about the King Penguin in Tasmania. "Here's a go!" I thought. Having only been to the Bass Strait Islands, there were a couple of Tasmanian endemics I still needed and these combined with the King Penguin would get me over the line. So, after getting more info off Rohan and sacrificing funds for future trips (and by buying an airline ticket at such short notice sacrificing funds for future meals) I headed off on Friday night.

Arriving at Hobart just before dusk I didn't manage to see any lifers, but the Musk Lorikeets just outside the airport were new for my Tassie list. I stayed that night at the little town of Dover, about eighty kms south of Hobart. Up the next morning at six, fuelled by a hearty Twitcher's breakfast of beans on toast, I was off. Just out of town I came across several parties of Tasmanian Native Hen- bird number 598. Two to go.

To get to the Penguin I had to travel to the end of the most southerly road in Australia (it terminates at Cockle Creek) sign the hikers' book, and head off the eleven kilometres along the Great South West Walk to the beach where the bird had been seen. A local had said it had got to forty degrees the day before, so I was a bit worried our sub-Antarctic visitor might have expired. It was much cooler this Saturday morning, my flimsy jumper was sodden within the first half hour. Still, good weather for Penguins.

The path is relatively easy, though the first kilometre or so is quite rocky in places. It passes through hillside stringybark forests which had some confiding Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos and more Crescent Honeyeaters than I have ever encountered in the one spot. In one instance they were in a flock with Strong-billed

Honeyeaters, about twenty-five birds in all. I also got to refamiliarise myself with Black Currawong, Brown Scrubwren and Tasmanian Thornbill - the description of the latter's "white underpants" feature is one of the most amusing and most apt I have come across in birding. There is then a few kilometres of boardwalk through some swampy heathland which had good numbers of Southern Emu Wren and I suspect would be good for Ground Parrot too. Unfortunately I dipped on the Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters that Rohan had seen but the magnificent habitat and vistas made up for any disappointment. And the thought that this was just the very eastern edge of huge areas of similar habitat was simply awesome.

The track arrives at the coast just near South East Cape, the most southerly point of continental Australia. Looking out to sea, watching the rain squalls blow in (luckily for me only drizzle, not full-on storms) it was a humbling experience knowing that the next bit of land was Antarctica.

But enough philosophising. I had a lifer to twitch.

Onward across the first beach in South Cape Bay, west towards the South Cape itself. On that first beach was a pair each of Hooded Plover, Sooty Oystercatcher and a solitary Pied 'catcher. Rohan had said that at the end of the beach you could simply walk along the shoreline of the rocky headland to the next beach, however the force with which the breakers were ending their unimpeded journey from Antarctica convinced me to take the more arduous route over the headland. Just as I was cursing this route decision I came across a piping juvenile Pink Robin just near the summit. Unfortunately the parents were nowhere to be seen, but just beyond it was a pair of Scrub Tits. Great views of their grey cheek and white wing spots gave me my second lifer. Bird 599, only one to go!

Looking out over the vista of the next beach from the headland summit, I could see through the bins the outline of a large black and white

bird sitting on the middle of the beach. I had to restrain myself from hurtling down the remainder of the steep hill to get to it. And sure enough, ten minutes later, there it was, a magnificent King Penguin. Number 600! I spent half an hour watching it preening itself and snoozing, totally oblivious to my presence. The only time it showed any sign of disturbance was when a freak wave washed up on the shore and poured over its enormous, bulbous feet. The poor thing ran around the beach waving its flippers in agitation for a minute or so until it finally settled back to its slumber.

The moult was still at a fairly early stage, with the new feathers showing through only on its sides where the wings rest and on its lower back. Comparing it with the stage of moult that last year's Fiordland Penguin had, I would expect that it would take at least a week for this

bird to complete full moult and return to the sea. I guess this means I am saying that I would expect the bird to still be there by next weekend but I would like to add a disclaimer that I know naught about penguin moults so if anyone is considering a twitch next weekend, please don't rely on my uninformed opinion as the basis for deciding whether to go for it or not.

But it was a bloody great bird to get for my 600th. As I trudged reluctantly back the eleven kilometres to the car through the heavier rain, and the even heavier blisters, I realised had finally done it, after all these agonising years of major dips, I was finally in the Six Hundred Club, I was now in the Five Penguin Club, and I was now in the "I'll blow two weeks wages to go see a rarity club"!

God help me!

Sean Dooley

A Diary of Bird Behaviour

1 April

After cross country, the weather changed from being warm and sticky to cloudy, as rain was approaching. A flock of raucous Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were flying around the tree-tops. One of them hung upside down with wings out for about a minute. It was excited at the prospect of rain.

21 April

In the late afternoon, on the lake at Rathmines, a large flock of Little Corellas converged on a few tall pine trees. Many were playing by hanging upside down while clinging to the branches with their claws. A few hung from the branches with their beaks, leaving their claws to dangle down. One of them flew low over the water with a 15-centimetre pine branch in its claws. As the bird flew it transferred the branch to its beak, then back to holding it with its claws before finally dropping it into the lake and flying off.

25 April

In the morning a Grey Butcherbird flew onto our clothesline. After looking around unsuccessfully for food it regurgitated a marble-sized pellet. When it flew away I went to find the pellet. It contained moist dirt and bits of beetle shells.

26 April

In the morning a family of Wrens were foraging while constantly calling to each other to maintain contact near where I was weeding around young trees I had planted on the edge of bushland. There was at least one male in the group, but he was in non-breeding plumage. One bird kept watch above the others in a dead tree, while the rest of the family foraged in dense shrubbery near the ground.

In the afternoon, while looking out my window I saw three Magpies fly down onto the front lawn over the road. One was an immature bird and the other two were its parents. When they flew down the immature bird sat down on the grass as a female would sit on her eggs, and begged for food and/or remorse from the seemingly uninterested parents.

Colin Goodenough

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT – FEBRUARY/MARCH 2001

2000				
Aug 27	Southern Emu-wren	2	Freemans Waterhole	L. Herbert
Sep 3	Figbird	6	Toronto	"
Oct 23	Dollarbird [juvenile]	1	Glen Oak	M.Maddock
Dec 18	Buff-banded Rail	2	Ellalong [garden]	J.Meynell
Dec 25	" " "	1	"	"
Dec 1	Masked Owl	1	Medowie	D.Cooper
Dec 17	" " [Road Kill]	1	Fullerton Cove Rd	"
Dec 16	Banded Lapwing	1	Medowie	"
25/26	Banded Lapwing	15+2juv	Largs-Morpeth Rd	G.Brosie
Dec 29	Nankeen Night Heron	2	Beresfield	R.Smith
Dec 29	Peregrine Falcon	1	NewLine Rd. Seaham	M.Maddock
Dec 22	Buff-banded Rail	1-4	Coon Is. [Swansea]	J.Adams
Dec 30	Painted Snipe	Pr	Pambalong N.R.	D.Jenkin
Dec 14	Dollarbird	10	New Lambton	A.Stuart
Dec 17	"	5	"	"
Dec 29	Glossy Black Cockatoo	7	White Box Camp	"
	Turquoise Parrot	1	"	"
26/27	Painted Snipe	1m	Pambalong N.R.	A.Lindsey
Dec 29	Peregrine Falcon	1	Newline Rd. Seaham	M.Maddock
Dec 28	Powerful Owl	1	Wallingat S.F.	M.Roderick
	Masked Owl	2	"	"
Dec 29	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	4	Booti Booti N.P.	"
28/29	Glossy Black Cockatoo	8	Wallingat S.F.	"
2001				
Jan 2	Pacific Baza	1	Dudley	P.Rankin
	Southern Boobook	2	"	"
Jan 1	Spotless Crake	1	S.W.C.	A.Stuart
Jan 4	Caspian Tern	>30	Merewether Baths	J.Nicholls
	Sooty Oystercatcher	1	"	"
15/16	Dollarbird	2	Kotara Heights	J.Nicholls
Jan 6	Wandering Whistling Duck	Pr	"	D.Jenkin
Jan 11	Black Bittern	1	12k. Nth Dungog	"
Jan 20	Lesser Sand Plover	1	Hawks Nest	D.Jenkin
	Red-capped Plover	10	"	"
Jan 21	Spotless Crake	1	S.W.C.	"
Jan 26	Noisy Pitta	2	Main Creek Dungog	"
Jan 3	Black-necked Stork	2	Newline Rd.	M.Maddock
Jan 6	" " "	Pr	" Seaham	"
	Emerald Dove	1	Myall Lakes N.P.	D. & B. Kibble
Jan 5	Dollarbird	6	Barrington House	"
Jan 6	Whistling Kite	3	Irrawang Swamp	"
Jan 13	Royal Spoonbill Nesting	Pr	Morisset	M.Walker
Jan 28	Spotted Harrier	1	Wallarobba [Dungog]	C.Meadows
Jan 17	Powerful Owl	1	Kotara Heights	K.Gibson
Jan 29	Brown Quail	2+1dy	S.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
Jan 3	Channel-billed Cuckoo	4	Waratah	P.Paterson
Jan 12	Striated Heron	1	Harrington	M.Maddock
	Little Tern	3	"	"
	Whimbrel	13	"	"
	Brahminy Kite	1	"	"
	Grey-tailed Tattler	2	"	"
Jan 29	Y.T.B.C. [White markings]	3	Warners Bay	R.Thomson
Jan 31	White-necked Heron	4	Parkville	G.Newling

Jan	Swamp Harrier	1	Bayswater Colliery	"
Jan 7	Grey Goshawk	1	Green Wattle Creek	M. Newman
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	"	"
Jan 11	Spotted Harrier	1	Tenambit	"
Jan 13	Crested Shrike-tit	2	Warrakeilla	"
Jan 21	Hoary-headed Grebe	2	Lake St. Clair	"
	Hardhead	500	"	"
Jan 14	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	Martins Creek	"
Jan 4	Square-tailed Kite	1	Thornton	"
Jan 19	Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	Seaham bridge	M. Maddock
Jan 20	Dollarbird	1	Woodville	"
Jan 21	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	10	Heatherbrae	"
Jan 23	Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	Glen Oak	"
Jan 30	White-bellied Sea-eagle	1	Seaham	"
Feb 2	Brown Goshawk	1imm	Wingen Village	G. Newling
Feb 10	Black Falcon	1	Bayswater Colliery	"
Feb 13	Spangled Drongo	1	Kahibah	P. Paterson
Feb 7	Sacred Kingfisher	2	Waratah	"
Feb 12	Olive-backed Oriole	1	Broadmeadow	"
Feb 9	Yellow Wagtail	1	Ash Island	S. Roderick
	Red-necked Avocet	27	"	"
Feb 10	Yellow Wagtail	1	Ash Island	A. Lindsey
Feb 14	Rainbow Bee-eater	8	Swan Bay	M. Blanch
	Pied Oystercatcher	7	"	"
Feb 10	Grey Goshawk	1	Cardiff	J. Helman
Feb 7	Black-fronted Dotterel	19	S. W. C.	G. Brosie
Feb 11	Grey Goshawk	1	Wingen Village	G. Newling
	Black Kite	1	"	"
Feb 2	Latham's Snipe	1	S. W. C.	M. Maddock
Feb 5	Dollarbird	1	Newline Rd. Seaham	"
Feb 17	Square-tailed Kite	1	Morpeth S. T. W.	M. Newman
Feb 14	Sacred Kingfisher	1	Woodville	"
	Australian Hobby	1	"	"
Feb 23	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	2+2imm	New Lambton	A. Stuart
Feb 22	Spotted Quail-thrush	1	Ellalong	J. Meynell
Feb 24	Indian Ringneck [Lutino]	1	Thornton	G. Brosie
Feb 7	Red-capped Plover	1	S. W. C.	M. Maddock
Feb 10	Wedge-tailed Eagle	1	Glen Oak	"
Feb 8	Striated Heron	1	Stockton	"
Feb 11	Brown Goshawk	1imm	Glen Oak	"
Feb 8	Sooty Oystercatcher	1	Stockton	"
	White-bellied Sea-eagle	4	Ash Island [Moscheto	"
Feb 7	Black-fronted Dotterel	2	Glen Oak	"
Feb 17	Stubble Quail		Bureen [nr Jerrys Pl]	H. Tarrant
Feb 17	Black-tailed Native Hen	1	Martindale	H. Tarrant
Feb 20	Peregrine Falcon	1	E. Maitland	"
Feb 16	Glossy Black Cockatoo	8+2dy	Wyee Point	D. Moon
Feb 19	Aust. King Parrot	3	"	"
Feb 7	Pacific Baza	2	"	"
Mar 9	Spangled Drongo	2	East Seaham	R. Carlton
Mar 3	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2	Charlestown	J. Powers
Mar 11	Dollarbird	1	Nelsons Plains	M. Newman
Mar 4	Oriental Cuckoo	1	Green Wattle Creek	"

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
Wednesday 11 April	<u>Club Meeting</u>	7.30 pm. Shortland Wetlands Centre	<i>Speaker: Phil Rankin</i> <i>Topic: Bird Surveys in North Queensland</i>
Easter: Friday – Monday, 13-16 April	Camp at Borah Travelling Stock Route, Barraba	Anytime Friday	Liz Herbert 4959 3663
Saturday 21 April	Hunter Wader Survey	8.00 am. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Sunday 22 April	Chessenden, Gresford	8.00 am East Gresford Pub Carpark	Jim Smart 4933 7761
Tuesday 1 May	Bangalay Reserve / Jewells Swamp	8.00 am. Entrance to Reserve, Pacific Highway	Keith & Margaret Woods 4963 3070 Max Blanch 4961 1655
Wednesday 9 May	<u>Club Meeting</u>	7.30 pm. Shortland Wetlands Centre	<i>Speaker: Lars Knudsen</i> <i>Topic: Birds in Flight – An Artist's Perspective</i>
Saturday 12 May	Atlassing – Wollemi National Park	Camp at "Wongalee", Apple Tree Flat, Friday night or Meet 8.00 am corner of Jones Reserve Road and road into Apple Tree Flat	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Liz Herbert 4959 3663
Wednesday 16 May	Enviro Youth Forum	Tocal Agricultural College 8.30 am to 4.00 pm	Steve Roderick 4934 5601
Sunday 20 May	HBOC 25 th Birthday Lady Joy Boat Trip Hunter Estuary	9.00 am to 12 noon. Queens Wharf, Newcastle (\$15 per head) 12.30 pm Railway Sheds near Queens Wharf for lunch (bring your own everything – BBQs available)	Di Johnson 4975 1777
Saturday 26 May	Hunter Wader Survey	10.30 am. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Tuesday 5 June	Mid-Week Outing: Walka Waterworks	8.00 am. Walka Waterworks car park	Keith & Margaret Woods 4963 3070 Max Blanch 4961 1655
Saturday 9 June	Pelagic Trip	7.00 am. Swansea wharf near RSL Club, Chalmers St, Swansea	Richard Baxter 4954 0212 randrbaxter@yahoo.com
Saturday – Monday 9-11 June	Camp at Smiths Lake	Saturday to Monday	Liz Herbert 4959 3663
Wednesday 13 June	<u>Club Meeting</u>	7.30 pm. Shortland Wetlands Centre	<i>Speaker: Louise Duff</i> <i>Topic: Naturewatch Newcastle</i>
Saturday 16 June	Atlassing Area northeast of Singleton	8.00 am Maitland Railway Station car park	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Liz Herbert 4959 3663
Saturday 23 June	Hunter Wader Survey	9.30 am. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Sunday 24 June	Proposed Breakfast for New Members		Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday 24 June	Wetlands	10.00 am Morpeth Sewage Treatment Works, Butchers Lane, Morpeth	Phil Rankin 4946 0022

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Positions Vacant

(non paying but personally rewarding)

Nest Box Program Team Members

The Wetlands Centre has thousands of trees but very few old growth types with hollows for nests. The Wetlands Centre have proposed that a program of nest box building, installation and monitoring be conducted by members of HBOC as a means of alleviating this shortfall.

People (HBOC members and friends) with enthusiasm, a little time to spare and a love of nature are required to help out with planning and coordination, nest box building, nest box installation (up in trees) and regular monitoring.

All willing participants should contact Tom Clarke 4951 3872 or any of the HBOC Committee to register.

Ellalong Lagoon Has Its Future Assured

Just recently, fears that Ellalong Lagoon was in danger of degradation from sub-division and development have been removed.

HBOC has been notified by Cessnock City Council that a revision to its Local Environmental Plan 1989 will ensure that appropriate land use is upheld for the Ellalong Lagoon area.

In recognising the 423ha site as a significant wetland Cessnock City Council has planned to rezone from 1(a) Rural 'A' to 7(a) Environmental Protection (Wetlands).

This decision comes just six months after the same Council accepted and facilitated major changes to a proposed development at another significant wetland in its jurisdiction, John Browns Lagoon.

Both decisions are very welcomed by HBOC and by all the birds that depend on these habitats.

Membership Renewal Lethargy

Membership Report tabled at the April Committee Meeting revealed that HBOC had 131 financial members and **76 unfinancial members**.

Our astute Treasurer would like to see some renewed activity in the area of Membership Fees being paid to take the stress out of his life and ease the bank balance as well.

Fees can always be paid at Clubnights or by posting the appropriate cheque to PO Box 24, New Lambton, 2305.

HBOC To Celebrate 25 Years Of Birdwatching

This year HBOC will mark its 25th year with a birdwatching boat trip on the Lady Joy.

A date has been set, 20th May, and the Lady Joy will leave Queen's Wharf at 9:00am for a 3 hour river cruise. Along the way we will be able to observe plenty of estuary birds as well as the over-wintering migratory shore birds.

A lunch in the old Railway Sheds at the Foreshore will complete a great day out.

The planning for this event is well underway and members are urged to register their interest.

The most positive way this can be done is by coughing up the **\$15 gang plank charge** early to ensure your involvement in the celebrations.

See Rowley Smith at Clubnights or send cheque to PO Box 24, New Lambton, 2305.