

# HBOC 2001 Annual Report

It's my pleasure tonight to present the 2001 Annual Report – the 21<sup>st</sup> such report for HBOC. Also, the full report including Appendices from the Treasurer, Activities Officer and so on, is available for you to look at after the meeting tonight if you wish, and it will then be housed in the Club's library.

In previous of these reports I've attempted to find a phrase to summarise the year gone by. In that vein, I'd nominate ***"Raising the Profile"*** for 2001 on account of the very successful year we had in terms of making the broader community aware of the Club and of local bird conservation issues. More on all that later on in this Report.

2001 was also the year that HBOC celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and it is very pleasing that this momentous occasion coincided with the Club recording yet another year of positive outcomes and remaining a robust and viable organisation.

The objectives set for HBOC from when it was formed are:

- to encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat;
- to encourage bird observing as a leisure time activity.

As I have done in previous years, I will review our performance in 2001 against these two objectives.

## **1. STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITAT**

### BIRD SIGHTINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS

We had another very successful year for bird sightings in 2001, and once again there will be some additional species in the Annual Bird Report when it is finalised later this year. The total number of species recorded in the Hunter Region in 2001 will probably end up at around 320 species, once all the reports are received and assessed.

Once again our Records Appraisal Committee was kept busy with lots of reports to consider. There have been 15 submissions to the RAC thus far, in relation to birds seen in 2001, and the usual pattern means that several more relating to 2001 are still likely to come in. I thank the members of the RAC – Sue Hamonet, Wilma Barden, Ann Lindsey, Fred van Gessel, Jim Imrie and Terry Lindsey – for their efforts. Towards the end of the year, Jim Imrie stood down and Phil Hansbro took his place on the RAC.

There were many observation highlights for 2001. In many cases, the birds in question were able to be seen by many HBOC members (and often by a host of visitors too). To single out some examples of these – we had Black-tailed Native-hen and Painted Snipe at Pambalong Nature Reserve early in the year, Yellow Wagtail back again briefly at Ash Island in February, Ruff and then Lesser Yellowlegs at Ash Island in October, Painted Honeyeater breeding at Martindale in December, one and then two Banded Stilt for a couple of months on Ash Island, up to 25 Banded Lapwing roosting out near Bolwarra for a couple of weeks in December. The Lesser Yellowlegs sighting was of particular significance – it's one of only a handful of Australian records for this species. Also worth mentioning was a sighting of 4 Pectoral Sandpiper together at Swan Bay in December.

### BIRD STUDIES

As always, HBOC had a considerable involvement in studies that help increase knowledge about Australian birds. We can all be very proud of our Club's contributions in this regard.

We were very much involved in the now finished Birds Australia Atlas project – how could this be otherwise given that Ann Lindsey was the Regional Organiser for the Hunter Region and Mike Newman is on the Birds Australia Council? Routinely, all of our Club records were forwarded to Birds Australia, and we also carried out several specific Atlassing surveys, focussing particularly onto locations in the Hunter Region that were under-surveyed. A considerable number of our members were dedicated private Atlassers too. The Atlas formally is finished now, but we are very much part of the discussions about how it might continue in some fashion.

Throughout 2001, we continued the monthly surveys of the wader populations in the Hunter estuary, which we started in early 1999. Also, we did matching surveys in most months at Swan Bay, an important wader roost site in Port Stephens. These surveys are generating a wealth of information about seasonal movements of waders and about their roosting habitat requirements. The information goes to all the interested parties – National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP), NSW Wader Studies Group, Birds Australia Atlas.

From February we started a monthly survey of the birds at Morpeth sewage works, with Ann Lindsey and Mike Newman the principals. The data are sent to Hunter Water each month, helping them to develop better management plans for the site, which now utilises different treatment technology.

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We also continued to support the long-standing NSW Bird Atlassers project, by sending them copies of all of our Club records. We participated in the two national surveys for Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot. In December, for the 5<sup>th</sup> successive year, we counted the numbers of Latham's Snipe at Pambalong Nature Reserve. Our 2000 Annual Bird Report was published in August 2001, with 112 reporters supplying data about the 334 species that were recorded for the year. The total number of species confirmed to have been in the Hunter Region in recent times now stands at 376 – about half of Australia's total.

## CONSERVATION

As usual, there were a number of development plans/proposals about which we made comments during the year, including to do with steel plants and also waste dumps on Kooragang Island, Ellalong lagoon/surrounds, the Tank Paddock at Minmi, Hands lagoon at Maitland, Morpeth sewage treatment plant, and the widening of the railway line on Ash Island. We were also involved in the development of the draft coastal management plan for Newcastle. We now seem to have quite positive relationships with certain organisations – Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils and Hunter Water are good examples of this.

The major focus for our conservation efforts in 2001 was the declining wader numbers in the Hunter estuary, which we have linked to deterioration in their habitat especially the high tide roost sites. Thanks in large part to a very powerful presentation put together by Chris Herbert and Liz Crawford, we have begun to make some inroads. The presentation was made at a BIGNet meeting that HBOC hosted at the Wetlands Centre in March. We organised a wader workshop in conjunction with that meeting. This was very successful with 7 speakers and involvement by all the key stakeholders. Following out of this, our links with KWRP and NPWS have progressively strengthened all year. For example, we are now represented on the Steering Committee for the Lower Hunter Estuary Rehabilitation Program.

Also, Chris and Liz have made the presentation to several other interested parties including the KWRP management committee, Environment Australia in Canberra and some other bird clubs – all to good avail. We were also able to use the visit by Iolo Williams and BBC TV crew in October as a means to reinforce our message about wader habitat deterioration. And in the specific case of Stockton Sandspit we submitted a Coastcare grant application to remove mangroves and undertake a rehabilitation program. We still await news of the fate of this grant application, but in the meantime it has spurred KWRP, NPWS and NSW Fisheries to agree to some shorter term actions there. By such small steps, progress is made!

I don't believe there is any doubt that in 2001 we were able to significantly raise the profile of the problems to do with wader habitat in the Hunter estuary.

There were lots of other conservation related activities in 2001. We had four teams enter into the 2001 Twitchathon, raising well in excess of \$1500 in sponsorship monies which went towards a project associated with rehabilitation of dry woodlands near Cowra. On Clean-up Australia Day we tackled the area around the Kooragang boat ramp near Stockton Bridge. We continued our association with the NSW Bird Interest Groups Network (BIGNet) which has a strong conservation theme amongst the topics covered. As well as hosting one meeting, Club representatives attended the other meeting for the year, held this time at Batemans Bay. One very important outcome in 2001 was that the NSW Scientific Committee agreed with a submission out of a previous BIGNet meeting that the clearing of native vegetation was a key threatening process. This means that such clearing is likely to be included in the Threatened Species Conservation Act. And we continued to work with Max Maddock who is preparing a report relating to bird strike dangers. This well researched study, to which we provide some funding, will have implications for any future thoughts of airports in the lower Hunter.

There are many people who deserve our thanks in regards to HBOC's significant activities in conservation, but particular mention should go to Jenny Powers, Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford and Ann Lindsey.

## **2. ENCOURAGE BIRD OBSERVING**

### PROGRAM

As usual, we had a massive program of activities – a total of 53 of them, as in 2000 when we thought this was exceptional. In summary, the program for 2001 comprised:

- 12 Sunday outings, held monthly
- 11 mid-week outings, held monthly
- 12 wader surveys, held monthly
- 6 Birds Australia Atlas survey days

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- 3 special surveys – twice for Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot and also another Latham's snipe survey at Pambalong Nature Reserve.
- 5 pelagic outings (two in summer, one in winter, two in spring)
- 4 camps on weekends/long weekends

Except where weather intervened, all of our activities were well attended. Our thanks go in particular to: our Activities Officer, Liz Crawford, for organising the main program; Keith and Margaret Woods and Max Blanch for taking care of the mid-week outings; Chris Herbert for coordinating the wader surveys; Ann Lindsey for coordinating the Atlassing and Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys, and Richard Baxter for arranging the pelagic trips.

### CLUB NIGHTS

We held 11 meetings during the year, all of them at the Wetlands Centre as usual. The average attendance was 50.2 people. As usual, the participation rate at the meetings was just tremendous, and the meetings were always loads of fun. The *Observations/General Discussion* segment continued to grow in popularity and value and the *Bird of the Evening* segment was successfully resurrected – thanks to convenor Di Johnson and the volunteers/conscripts! We also had a number of updates about the Birds Australia Atlas project, courtesy of Ann Lindsey and Mike Newman who both have prominent roles with it.

We had main speakers at 9 of the meetings, and we were addressed on a wide range of topics: *Maitland Photographic Exhibition*, *The March of the Mangroves*, *Cape York Atlassing*, *Movement – an Artist's Perception*, *Newcastle NatureWatch*, *Australian Bird Fossil Record*, *Birds of the Lower Gwydir Wetland*, *World Petrel Shortage*, *Hunter Region Nature Photographs*. We are very grateful to all of our speakers for the efforts they went to in preparing some truly excellent presentations.

The main feature at our November meeting, due to late withdrawal of a speaker, was an interesting National Geographic video about the Striped Caracara. Our December meeting was the usual fun of members slides and videos, a raffle, and a wonderful supper, and this time we were also entertained with an amazing close harmony rendition of a re-worked Bob Dylan classic.

### COMMUNITY

A highlight for the year was the visit in October by Iolo Williams ("The Birdman of Wales") and a BBC film crew. Out of a 2 week tour around NSW, they spent 4 days in our area interviewing people and filming local scenes, which certainly confirms the significance of our "patch". They were filming to produce two TV shows – a English language natural history program and a Welsh language travel documentary. Peter Phillips and I helped set up the itinerary and spent the 4 days with them, and many other Club members were involved at various times, either in front of the camera or lending support.

Both programs will go to air in the UK this year, and then we hope to see them here. And the visit certainly helped raise the profile of the Club and of some local bird issues. There was a TV interview on NBN (screened in Newcastle and Gosford news bulletins), an ABC radio interview and 6 articles in various local newspapers. As well, local MP John Mills became involved (twice) and the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, John Tate, held a Civic Reception to which several Club members were invited.

I was interviewed on NBN news in conjunction with the wader workshop in March and also twice on ABC radio during the year about the wader habitat issue. Both Chris Herbert and Liz Crawford also had interviews about waders on ABC radio. Peter Phillips used the visit of some Freckled Duck to the Wetlands Centre to get an article into the Newcastle Herald. The Twitchathon event led to an interview of Ann Lindsey on ABC Radio.

Once again in September the Club had a display booth at the Wildflower Spectacular held at the Wetlands Centre and also provided bird walks around the site. A number of members assisted with this activity – our thanks go to all of them. Also we had a display booth at the Environ Youth Forum at Tocal in May – thanks to Steve Roderick and Tom Clarke for this. And after an offer from Louise Duff of the Wetlands Centre, we designed and produced two posters that were displayed at the Centre for 4-6 weeks and that we can use again on many more occasions.

We didn't lose sight of our regular activities either: Marion Walker continued to be our telephone contact point and fielded many calls, while Adrian Ryan continued to be the master of our Website and Peter Phillips made sure that all of our meetings were well advertised in local press and radio.

All in all HBOC certainly had a successful year of publicising our existence and our causes.

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## GENERAL CLUB OPERATION

### *Membership*

Our membership increased by 12 in 2001, to a record total of 213 members. This is tremendous news, but even so the turnover rate is higher than we would prefer and we'd definitely welcome thoughts from anyone as to how to retain members and also how to attract new ones. It is a challenge to all of us to find ways to keep the numbers up – for one thing, it helps to keep fees down since our operating costs then are shared over a wider base. Also, we want to be spreading the word about the pleasures from studying the behaviours of birds, and the importance of preserving suitable habitat for them.

We continued the initiative of 2000 to have a special breakfast for new members, although this time it was a lunch not a breakfast and all Club members were invited – and this is probably how we will do it in future. The venue in 2001 was the property Bush Haven following on from our November outing there. Our thanks to hosts Jenny and Ken Musicka for making facilities available and to Di Johnson for organising it all, with help from Brian Derrick and Sue Hamonet.

### *Finances*

For the first time in 3 years, we made a profit for the year – a modest but happy \$28.58. This is despite some significant expenditure items, including grants of \$500 from the Alan Keating Memorial Fund, \$190 to sponsor a section in the next volume of HANZAB (most aptly, the Golden Whistler section), \$218 for some PR posters, \$303 nett costs for production of the Annual Bird Report and \$134 towards the NSW Birdline costs. Income included \$265 in interest and \$500 of recouped financing to do with the Iolo Williams visit. Our reserves stand at \$8,465.50, although this includes \$2291.10 in the Keating Fund (which is dedicated to activities that will provide benefit to Hunter Region birdlife). Although our Public Liability insurance costs will rise significantly this coming year, the healthy bank balance has encouraged the Committee to decide that the membership fees for 2002 will be unchanged.

Our healthy financial situation is largely due to the efforts of our Treasurer Rowley Smith. We thank him, and also Lesley Marshall who so ably assists Rowley at club nights. Our thanks also go to Katrina Thornton who once again has audited our accounts.

### *General*

In 2001 HBOC reached the important milestone of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We celebrated this with a boat trip on the *Lady Joy* exploring the Hunter river – its birdlife and its history (from the well informed skipper). Then we adjourned to the old Newcastle Railway Sheds for lunch, lots of reminiscing, and a special cake. We were pleased that Founding President Fred van Gessel was able to be present, and he and I cut the cake together. Thanks very much to Di Johnson for helping to organise everything.

The Club continued to publish a bi-monthly newsletter, which is issued to all members as well as an exchange program with many other clubs. Pat Carlton consistently produced a high quality production, and Tom Clarke maintained the standard when he filled in while Pat was away. Tom also continued to look after the printing and distribution of the newsletter. We thank Pat and Tom for their efforts.

Our three libraries – books, slides, tapes & videos – continued to expand in 2002 and they are terrific resources for all members to access at no cost.

The Management Committee worked well together all year and I thank everyone involved for their efforts – and our meetings were always both constructive and enjoyable. Vice-President Liz Crawford filled in admirably in my absences, while Rowley Smith and Tom Clarke have the Treasurer's and Secretary's job well under control. Tom's efforts are largely done "behind the scenes" for most members and perhaps are a bit unthanked at times. It's my pleasure to acknowledge them here tonight.

Committee members Di Johnson, Chris Herbert, Ann Lindsey and Phil Rankin continued to make their very positive contributions, and new member Steve Roderick quickly settled in too. Changed work requirements meant that our other Committee member Neil Granter had difficulties in being able to participate for much of the year. The Management Committee meetings are open to anyone from the Club to attend and participate. In 2001, both Sue Hamonet and Jenny Powers attended most of the meetings, where their contributions were greatly appreciated.

Many other members have done their bit to help with the smooth running of the Club. Judith Smith is the welcoming person to attendees at our meetings, and Judy Westphal makes sure we all can have a cuppa and a biscuit at the end of them, and a small army of volunteers helps out with setting up and clearing away each time. Ed Hamonet reformats all of our records and sends them to the Atlas project, while Sue Hamonet just does so many things for the Club all the time.

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Finally, I'd like to thank all members for their involvements with the Club during 2001. The enthusiasm you show at our meetings, outings and camps is infectious and is the major factor in HBOC being the great club that we know it to be.

I don't think there can be any doubt at all that we met out two objectives in 2001 and that it was another successful year for the club.

Thanks everyone.

Alan Stuart  
HBOC President, 2001