

NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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President: Alan Stuart

Secretary: Tom Clarke

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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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SEMINAR

Status and Management of Migratory Shorebirds in Sydney
19 July 2002, Novotel, Homebush Bay, Sydney Olympic Park

Presented by: Millennium Parklands for Sydney Olympic Park Authority, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Wader Study Group

Each year millions of migratory shorebirds (waders) fly to Australia from their breeding grounds in the Arctic Tundra of Alaska and Siberia as well as China and other parts of Asia. Many thousands make NSW their home for seven months of the year and many thousands more fly through the state on their way to summer feeding grounds in Victoria, Tasmania and New Zealand. We have no idea just how many shorebirds actually depend on our estuaries at some time during their migration. Shorebirds depend largely on intertidal mudflats and the muddy margins of wetlands in which to feed during their time in Australia. These are precisely the kind of habitats that have been targeted for land filling and development since European settlement. Sydney has probably experienced a greater loss than any other part of Australia, percentage wise, of shorebird habitat, and numbers of migratory shorebirds in Sydney have declined in recent decades.

Speakers will provide up to date information on subjects including: What are the habitat needs of shorebirds; What is causing their decline; Legislative mechanisms for conservation; and Case studies of habitat protection and management.

Further information and registration forms: Parklands Bookings, Ph: 02-9714 7300; Fax 02-9714 0140; email: shorebirds@sopa.nsw.gov.au. Fees \$110.00 per person (GST inclusive). Registrations close 12 July.



President's Column

One of the projects that the Committee has been working on is to produce some "Birding Routes" for the Hunter Region. Many of you no doubt are familiar with the efforts of towns such as Barraba and Baradine to produce brochures about self-drive birdwatching routes in their vicinity. I'm told that several towns in outback WA have something similar and I've certainly seen (and used) the one produced for the Kalgoorlie-Coolgardie area. These publications are really useful for touring birdwatchers, and I'm sure that nature-loving tourists and locals also benefit by learning about some interesting places that they can visit.

Last month we applied to Lake Macquarie Council for a grant under their Environment Small Grants scheme. If the application succeeds, we would have enough funds to publish and distribute two brochures – Birding Routes of Lake Macquarie East and Lake Macquarie West. Our fingers are crossed – it will be a few months yet before the grants are announced.

We already have two other Birding Routes in publishable form – covering the Hunter estuary and some of the lower Hunter wetlands. Chris Herbert has done great work in producing these, aided by several others who wrote text for places they often visit. We've been trying to find some way to get these published. The raffle we've just been running might help us towards the required funds. But it would be great to find a sponsor – and we're open to your ideas about who could be appropriate and how best to approach them.

In mid-May I attended a meeting in Sydney with representatives of several other bird clubs. The purpose was to start to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between bird clubs, with the aims of increasing cooperation and eliminating any unnecessary duplication of effort. There are many bird clubs, some like HBOC with a regional focus, some with a state-wide focus, and there are a couple of national clubs. Also, there are some specialist clubs – such as on waders, parrots,

or seabirds. In principle, all clubs offer complementary things. Inevitably though, there is sometimes dilution of valuable and limited resources through needless duplication. We hope that the MoU, when finalised, will help bird clubs to work together easily and productively on many things – such as providing better services to members through shared resources and achieving better outcomes on conservation issues. An example of what might become possible is a shared calendar of activities so that people can have a better chance to attend another club's outing, for example when travelling on holidays.

A draft MoU is being prepared based on the mid-May discussions. After a bit of further polishing, it will be presented and discussed at the next BIGNet meeting in September. My hope is that by the end of this year there will be an MoU that the major NSW and national clubs have signed. Maybe then it can roll out to other states too. It should be a good outcome for birdwatchers and for birds, if all this happens.

In an earlier newsletter, I let you know that we missed out on a Coastcare grant to try to fix up Stockton Sandspit for wader high tide roosting. Our next tactic is to try for an Enviro Fund grant for the same proposed rehabilitation project. These grants are funded through the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust. Our application went in on June 4 – again, our fingers are crossed.

Happy birding

Alan Stuart
almarosa@bigpond.com

Articles for our newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for next issue: 31 July 2002

**Please send your contributions to:
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Email: pcarlton@tpg.com.au

(please note new email address)

A Green and Birdy Diary (continued from last issue.....)

21st March, 2002

We knew it was going to be a grand day as Ann's 4WD was there ready for action. As we stepped out of the Green Machine, Davey looked at his keen, Green Team and sensed our enthusiasm. As the Team slip, slop, slapped, Ann focussed the telescope. As we approached, one deep breath, the Green Team proved their intelligence by correct bird identification, and Ann was astonished. The Nominees for Best Birdwatcher of the day were: Sean Plodder with his Greenshank, Jackie Courville with her Bar-tailed Godwit, and Trent McMurray with his Welcome Swallow.

The Green Team and Ann joined forces and spotted the following: 5 Bar-tailed

Godwits, 3 Australian Pelicans, 2 Common Greenshanks, 2 Silver Gulls, 5 Superb Fairywrens, 2 Welcome Swallows, 1 Golden-headed Cisticola, and 30-40 Common Starlings.

With the help of NPWS we removed the Juncus which had caused blood, sweat and tears to pour out of us. Then after a relaxed morning tea and the team addition of Chris, we decided to hit the mangroves. We split into three groups: the Juncies still hauling with NPWS; the Brave digging themselves and the mangroves out of the quicksand on the Point; the Wise and the Wimps digging mangroves on safe ground. All in all the 21st was an extremely productive day worthy of a beer or two.

Composed and written by Jackie and Seanie who fetched a pile of mangroves.

Liverpool Plains Woodland Bird Project – Final Update

A Birds Australia project funded by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and the Threatened Species Network (TSN)

In January 2001, Birds Australia commenced a study to assess the distribution of birds, targeting threatened and declining woodland birds, in the Liverpool Plains catchment (north-west slopes and plains of NSW). It was hoped that this study would assist in the conservation of woodland birds within the region. To achieve this aim, Birds Australia worked in partnership with local landowners, the Liverpool Plains Land Management Committee (LPLMC), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Threatened Species Network (TSN), the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), and the Tamworth Bird Watchers Inc.

An important first step in identifying what birds occurred in the region over the past 20 years, was to examine data from the Birds Australia Atlas Projects, (1st Atlas 1977-1981; 2nd Atlas 1998-2002). There were 204 surveys conducted during the 1st Atlas in the Liverpool Plains. Prior to October 2001, there were 202

surveys conducted for the 2nd Atlas across 103 separate locations (sites).

Commencing in October 2001, Birds Australia with the help of over 50 volunteer bird watchers, conducted a series of bird surveys across areas of private and crown land, public reserves, travelling stock routes, and State Forests within the Liverpool Plains. These surveys mainly occurred over weekends and incorporated over 30 separate landholders, who had expressed their concern in the decline of birds on their properties and allowed us to conduct surveys on their land. After January 2002, there were 521 surveys conducted across 397 sites in the Liverpool Plains. This meant that this project facilitated a 61% increase in the number of Atlas surveys and a 74% increase in the number of survey sites in the Liverpool Plains.

A comprehensive review of literature and other information indicated that the Liverpool Plains:

- contained a mosaic of habitat types including grassland and open woodland;
- held an Endangered Ecological Community that is listed under the

Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995;

- was the most productive agricultural area in the country, and that clearing and other habitat change had been widespread.

The data showed that the Liverpool Plains supports:

- 248 bird species;
- 32 species listed under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 and/or declining in woodlands across Australia;
- 18 guilds of birds;
- a relatively low incidence of introduced bird species;
- a number of woodlands, particularly State Forests, that support a high diversity of birds; and
- a number of sites that are of high conservation value for a number of threatened and declining woodland bird species.

The results also indicated that a number of threatened and declining woodland species have become locally extinct in the Liverpool Plains. These include the Crested Bellbird, White-browed Babbler, Painted Button-quail, Malleefowl, and Square-tailed Kite. Another species, the Hooded Robin, showed a substantial decline. Most of the guilds represented in the region showed a substantial decline, suggesting that a range of processes were affecting birds that are ecologically diverse.

Key areas for bird species in the Liverpool Plains include the State Forests within the region. By virtue of their relatively large size and a higher structural complexity, these areas support a higher diversity of bird species, including many threatened and declining species. Many of the sites on private land also supported a number of threatened and declining woodland birds, indicating that landholders will play a pivotal role in the conservation of biodiversity.

In addition to providing baseline data into the distribution of birds and the hotspots for birds in the Plains, data generated from these surveys are integral in the next phase of the

project, which is to deliver conservation outcomes on private land. Over the next few months, Birds Australia will continue to work with the Liverpool Plains Land Management Committee and the Department of Land & Water Conservation to survey birds occurring along watercourses, woodlands and cropping areas on low lying slopes and plains.

A special thank you to the volunteer bird watchers who travelled far and wide to participate in field surveys and campouts throughout the region.

The amount of data collected as part of this project was testimony to the dedication and enthusiasm of these keen bird watchers and naturalists. Special thanks also to the many landholders, who kindly allowed bird surveys and campouts to be conducted on their property, and as such contributed enormously to providing information on the birds of the region.

For those interested, the final report is available for loan from The Wetlands Centre (Newcastle). There are also limited copies available from the Birding Shop in Melbourne and from The Wetlands Centre.

Peter A. Ekert
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Blue Mountains Web Site

Members intending to visit the Upper Blue Mountains should visit Peter Shanks' Blue Mountains Bird Watching site on the Web:-

[<http://www.bluemountains.net/birds/default.asp>](http://www.bluemountains.net/birds/default.asp)

Tables of monthly bird sightings are a useful feature of the site.

Adrian Ryan

2002 Gould's Petrel Banding Program

In the first week of March Steve Roderick and Neil Fraser joined NPWS personnel Rob Gibbs, Michael Murphy and Nicholas Carlile to assist in the annual banding of Gould's Petrel nestlings on Cabbage Tree Island. The trip commenced at the Port Stephens marina where we boarded a charter boat from Pro Dive for the 20 minute trip. Cabbage Tree Island is about 4km off the Port Stephens entrance, and there is little time to gain your sea legs. Arriving at the island, all personnel and equipment was transferred to a NPWS zodiac equipped with landing wheels, an essential requirement for negotiating the rocky shores. All equipment and food was then carried up a steep boulder strewn path to the camp, hidden in the rainforest. A tarpaulin covered shelter covers the eating and cooking facilities and collects rain water, while sleeping accommodation was in swags and a fibreglass igloo from the Australian Antarctic Division.

Once settled in camp, we set off up the steep slope to the nearby nesting sites that are mostly restricted to two steep, boulder strewn gullies on the western side of the island. Here the habitat is dense rainforest with cabbage tree palms. The petrels nest in crevices in the rocks and occasionally in the hollow trunk of fallen palm trees, or even under a pile of Palm fronds. Great care was taken when moving around the area not to step on nesting sites or disturb any part of the habitat.

There are about 1025 breeding pairs estimated on the island this season, and most of these nest in marked sites that are monitored twice yearly. In December 2001, 538 of the monitored nest sites contained eggs. The petrels start to arrive on the island to breed from September. Following the laying of a single egg, there is a 49 day incubation period. Once a site is located, it is first checked to see if a nestling is present. The presence of grey down is a good indicator, although thorough inspection with a torch is usually required. The

young bird is removed, often with much difficulty as the nesting crevices are often deep, twisting or narrow. The birds have a strong bite and grabbing them by the bill is often the only way to remove them. They are then placed in a cloth bag and weighed on a Persola spring scale. The right leg is banded, the details recorded and the bird returned to the nest. Sometimes mature birds are also encountered, and they have a very strong bite! These are checked, banded if not already recorded, and returned to the nest. In the March program a record number of 360 nestlings and 63 new adults were banded. Fledglings for the season are estimated to be 488 which represents a Breeding Success of 48.7% (down from 53.6% previously). The fledglings leave the island for their Tasman Sea feeding grounds in April and May. They will return to breed from three to five years later.

The NPWS commenced the rehabilitation program for the Gould's Petrel in 1989 when it became obvious that numbers were decreasing rapidly and the species was listed as endangered. Since then, rabbits have been removed, avian predators have been controlled, pisonia has been removed from the nesting sites, and additional nest sites provided by installing nest boxes. The under story is now re-establishing and the breeding numbers have more than doubled. The bird's population and breeding performance has been monitored constantly since then.

In 1999 and 2000 a second breeding colony was established on nearby Boondalbah Island, where 100 nesting boxes were installed in a steep gully. Nestlings were removed from Cabbage Tree Island and reared by hand for about three weeks until they fledged. A trip was made to Boondalbah Island to check the nest boxes where two nestlings were recorded. These are from a small group of birds that have nested on the island previously. A treacherous, narrow landing site had to be negotiated to land on the slippery, rocky slope, and quite a few bruises were sustained slipping on the rocks and wrestling the boat in the

swell. Prickly pear growth is becoming a nuisance here and will have to be removed in the future.

Other notable birds that are nesting on Cabbage Tree Island include the White-breasted Sea-Eagle, Fairy Penguins, Great Cormorants and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters (Mutton birds). The latter have thousands of burrows all over the island and can be heard crashing through the rainforest canopy at night as they return to feed their own nestlings. They waddle noisily around trying to find their nests and can be seen wandering through the camp at times.

An ABC TV film crew and a reporter from the Sun Herald accompanied the banding crew out to the island for a day and the story was later presented on local and national TV, and in newspaper reports. Publicity is an essential part of raising and maintaining public awareness of the status of the Gould's Petrels and the work being done to rehabilitate it. This season's program is now complete and the NPWS personnel will not return until December when they will once again be

looking for volunteers from the HBOC. If you are interested, be warned - you must be fit for this work!

Steve Roderick

Lost Petrels

Goulds Petrels, Australia's rarest seabirds, have recently been found up to 130km inland. The birds have been recorded from the Mt Arthur North coal mine near Muswellbrook, Eraring power station and from Woodville, north of Maitland. The birds breed on Cabbage Tree and Boondelbah Islands off Port Stephens and are increasing in numbers following a successful 10 year recovery project. It is not known why the birds have gone inland although it has been suggested that they may have been confused by bright lights while flying at night. Fears are held for their safety, as they feed on surface fish, small squid and krill. They also may not be able to cope with unaccustomed predators. Any sightings should be reported to the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Source: Newcastle Herald 27/4/02

A Diary of Bird Behaviour

6th March

While birdwatching at Stockton sandspit at about 11am, hundreds of Silver Gulls were flying upriver. In the afternoon an Eastern Spinebill was observed drinking from Lantana flowers.

8th March

I was told by a lady that two white Cockatoos have been excavating a hole in a tree near her place for the past four months. At 9.30pm a Pelican was observed flying overhead on the north-western shore of Lake Macquarie. Tonight is two nights before the full moon, but there was cloud cover at the time of the sighting.

14th March

At the bird club meeting Chris Herbert gave an excellent presentation on the decline in wader numbers in the Hunter Estuary since 1970.

Chris believes this decline is due to the encroachment of mangroves which has forced the waders to roost on artificial structures like Kooragang Dykes. The limited space on these structures favours waders like Bar-tailed Godwits against smaller waders like the Broad-billed Sandpiper.

26th March

In the late afternoon on the lake foreshore hundreds of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets converged on half a dozen Fig trees from all directions. They arrived in twos, threes, fours and occasionally larger groups. They disappeared when they alighted in the trees, but the presence of the large flock was obvious due to the almost-deafening screech symphony. Each newly-arriving group of birds added their own screeches to the total. The Fig trees were fruiting, and the birds that were visible looked like they were feeding.

This kind of late-afternoon flocking behaviour was also observed in Corellas that congregated near the lake in a few Eucalypts in January. It is also observed in Common Mynahs and Ibis. Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, Corellas and Common Mynahs all share the same behaviour, being very noisy until nightfall. As Scaly-breasted Lorikeets do not breed in March, communal roosting may be common behaviour during non-breeding months in this species.

1st April

A Willie Wagtail was using a She-oak that was on the bank of a saltmarsh as an observation perch from which it periodically left to catch a flying insect.

2nd April

At Federal Park, Wallsend, an aerial squabble occurred between a flock of Peewees, a flock of Magpies and a few Ravens. Birds from all sides were swooping and being swooped. This may have been a dispute over non-breeding territory.

8th April

At about 9.30pm, a Wood Duck was heard quacking as it flew over. Tonight was the night of the full moon.

3rd May

In the afternoon a Raven swooped our Maltese dog on an oval at Wallsend.

9th May

It was reported at the Bird club meeting tonight that recently a White-bellied Sea-Eagle was seen flying with a Magpie in its talons and being angrily pursued by about 10 other Magpies.

29th June

After the wettest May for many decades, June has been quite dry. After seeing two separate Spotted Pardalote nesting holes in the past two days, each with birds flying out of them, I am wondering whether they are taking advantage of the dry weather and breeding at an unconventional time of the year. Of the last five Annual Bird Reports (1995-1999), only in 1995 were the birds recorded nesting in June. From these five reports, the species breeds mainly from August to October. These are relatively dry months. As Spotted Pardalotes nest at the end of tunnels pecked into muddy

banks, dry weather would eliminate the risk of the nest becoming waterlogged.

3rd July

An Eastern Whipbird was observed foraging through leaf litter in dense undergrowth.

5th July

This morning Mum threw a piece of bread onto the front lawn for the birds to eat. Four Eastern Rosellas and a Noisy Miner flew down. But before they could take a bite a Magpie swooped down and took possession of the bread. It helped itself for a while before confidently strutting away down a brick path. There was still plenty of bread left for the Rosellas and Noisy Miner that were standing indignantly a few metres away while the Magpie stuffed itself. The Rosellas then took possession of the bread, leaving the Noisy Miner to look on about a metre away. One of the Rosellas thought this was too close, and aggressively walked towards the Noisy Miner, causing it to fly away.

11th July

It was reported at tonight's meeting that recently a Wedge-tailed Eagle was observed perched with a tennis ball in its claws. A pair of Wood Ducks were recently inspecting chimneys in an area for possible nesting sites. Earlier on, while walking to the meeting, two Black Swans flew overhead. It was 7.30pm at night.

15th July

When the Regent Honeyeater is feeding in Eucalypts or Grevilleas with more dominant Wattlebirds and Friarbirds, it will repeatedly mimic the calls of these birds. This has the effect in many cases of preventing the larger birds attacking the mimicking Regent Honeyeater.

Colin Goodenough

Lost Property

A shell-shaped plate was left after the December club-night meeting. The owner can contact Judy on 4953 7241.

Swallows not welcome

A \$100,000 2-year research study has been instigated to find a humane way of discouraging the 1000+ flock of welcome swallows who have roosted in the huge machinery workshops at four Hunter open-cut coalmines. The swallows fly in after sunset, sit high up in the sheds and then defecate throughout the night on anything and everything until dawn.

The Australian Coal Association, Charles Sturt University and the NPWS are involved jointly

in the research, but help from the general public is also needed to find a solution. Project Principal Researcher, Brian Stone, described the problem as serious. Discouragement techniques such as broadcasting noise and using models of predators were being considered. He and his team will be studying the birds' behaviour, and would like to hear from anyone who has information that may help. Mr Stone can be contacted by email on bstone@csu.edu.au or phone 02 6338 4825.

Source: Newcastle Herald, 11/5/02

Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program

On the morning of Saturday 13 April, 130 eager volunteers converged on the property of John and Laraine Simpson in the Capertee Valley. The task was tree planting, in an attempt to reverse the destruction of woodland habitat and the consequent decline in numbers of Regent Honeyeaters and other woodland species. By 8 o'clock the workers had assembled on site in thick fog and were being marshalled and directed by David Geering, the coordinator of the Recovery Project. The ground had previously been ripped and an advance party had already laid out the trees to be planted, together with the bamboo stakes and plastic bags to provide protection in the early stages of growth. The trees were mainly White Box, with a few Mugga Ironbarks and other eucalypts, interspersed with acacias, mainly Hickory Wattle and Western Golden Wattle. The volunteers came from birding clubs, bushwalking clubs, a 4WD club, a trail bike club, 19 students from Colyton High School near Penrith, two Green Corps groups and local property owners. They were from as far afield as the Hunter, Dubbo, Canberra and the eastern suburbs of Sydney. Some had left home at 4am. There were also a Dutch backpacker on holiday, a Japanese physicist with his wife and two 2-year-old children and an 80-year-old retired teacher from Kandos.

As the long lines of workers moved steadily across the paddock the sun began to burn off the fog and previously unsuspected mountains began to appear. The site is at the lower end of the valley where it narrows down dramatically between soaring sandstone cliffs. Many of those who had arrived in the dark of the previous evening or in the early morning fog had no idea of the spectacular scenery surrounding them. A mid morning break saw large slabs of water melon handed out in the shade of a tree, before it was back to digging holes and planting. After lunch the rural fire brigade arrived and began the task of watering the new seedlings. By the end of the day 3500 trees had been planted and the volunteers, weary but satisfied, trudged off to the showers of the council camping ground, followed by a slap-up dinner provided by the locals of Glen Davis.

This work brings the total of trees planted in the valley since 1994 to 40,000, a great effort. Survival rates of between 68% and 94% were reported from previous plantings, with many of the losses attributed to kangaroos and wombats. David said that while landholders in the valley had initially been sceptical about the project, there was now a waiting list of ten properties. Several of the volunteers were locals whose properties had already been planted.

Ross Carlton

Dangerous food

On 7 March, a WIRES rescuer in Katoomba received a report of 'birds falling from the sky'. The birds were Red Wattlebirds and 24 were found, some on the ground and some in trees, in various states of distress. Their necks were twisted, wings spread, legs splayed and some were bleeding from the eyes and convulsing. Investigation revealed that the birds had been feeding on large red toadstools. One juvenile, observed pecking at a toadstool, was dead within two minutes. Twelve birds

died before they could be treated. The remaining 12 were slowly warmed and given tepid water with lectade. They were very thirsty and took the fluid readily from an eyedropper. They were kept on heat and given fluids throughout the night and by morning, all appeared fully recovered. They were given another drink and released and all flew well and dispersed. The rescue area was checked over the next few days but no other birds were found. Well done rescuers.

Source: FSCB Inc Mar/April

Alas poor Albatross

A team of scientists has set up a laboratory on windy Albatross Island, a kilometre-long ridge of granite, astride the roaring forties at the western end of Bass Strait. The island is a breeding ground for the Shy Albatross, the only Albatross to breed entirely within Australia. The problem is a mystery disease which is knocking over the young Albatrosses like ninepins. Apparently healthy chicks are about to fledge, on the threshold of years of soaring over the ocean. They are sitting pretty on their nests, a nape of down fluttering around elegant grey-mantled necks. Suddenly they keel over, long wings sprawled on the ground, eyes lifeless under distinctive black brows.

"You can look half an hour before and they're fine," said veterinarian Rupert Woods. "You come back and they are just lying there. Some years nearly all the chicks die."

Unpredictable outbreaks of this disease have been noticed for about 10 years. It seems to be confined to the one colony, which was once the species' stronghold. Death rates of up to 90% have been recorded. Up to now, the difficulty of working at the site and a lack of funding has prevented any proper investigation. However, this year, a grant from Melbourne's philanthropic Ian Potter Foundation has allowed an attempt to be made to solve the mystery.

Source: SMH 4/5/02

A little light relief....

A man holding a parrot came running and screaming into a veterinarian's office. The vet immediately brought him into an examining room and carefully examined the parrot, and then said to the man, "I'm sorry, but this bird is dead" The man began to cry, "No! No! That can't be true! I want another opinion" The vet thought a second, then said, "Okay," and left for the back office. He returned with a black Labrador retriever. The black Lab sniffed the bird and finally gave a low "woof" sound and looked up at the vet. The vet said to the man, "The dog thinks that the bird is dead too." The man said, "I don't believe it! I want another opinion!" The vet then left with the black Lab and

came back with a cat. He placed the cat on the examination table and the cat walked over to the bird and sniffed and nudged the bird again and again. Finally the cat shrugged its shoulders and walked away from the bird. The vet said, "The cat thinks it's dead too."

The man sighed and said, "I guess you're right. How much do I owe you?" The vet said, "That will be \$2,000 please." The horrified man said, "Two thousand bucks! Just to tell me my bird is dead? That's ridiculous! That's outrageous!" The vet then said, "Well, I was going to charge you just fifty bucks, but then I had to include the Lab fees and the Cat scan."

Source: The Internet via James Smart

Sub-adult Peruvian Boobies - Bird Update Numero Quatro...

Greetings again all.....yep, it's that time again! Go make a coffee, pour yourself a wine or even better - a Norfolk Street Pale Brown Ale! Having now crossed the border into Bolivia it's time for the Perú chapter of the journey. I never thought that the birding had in Ecuador would be surpassed on this trip, but alas, it's amazing what a venture to east of the Andes can do for one's trip list!

Crossing into the barren featureless desert-coast of northern Perú, it was slow going early on. After one week only 30 or so species had been seen (I now understand your frustrations Alan!), and only one new species, the White-winged Dove. The real birding started near Pisco (yes, of 'spiritual' fame) at the Islas Balletas. Touted as being another one of those "poor man's Galapagos", it really was a great experience (for about 20 soles, or less than \$10 Aus). The islands lie just south of Lima and are an important area for the collection of guano, a great deal of which was freshly deposited into our boat, no shit. Amongst the more common of the thousands of resident birds were Peruvian Boobies, Red-legged and Guanay Cormorants, Peruvian Gulls and the remarkably-plumaged Inca Tern (pretty cool name too). As the water is constantly cold here, Humboldt's Penguins are present for most of the year, although only a few were seen, including some young 'uns in moult.

Back on the land in the same area lies a shorebird area more utilised than Roebuck Bay. I forget the stats, but they were impressive. Unfortunately I didn't learn about this until I was pretty much leaving the place (poor research Michael!). Still, whilst every normal person ate lunch at cheap seafood restaurants, I walked the perimeter of a small inlet, which was fairly productive. Waders seen here included Semipalmated Plover, Western Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper and a lone Grey Plover (check those armpits!). There were also Grey Gulls, Royal Terns and Franklin's Gulls hangin' out.

From the fast, hot, hectic and often unenjoyable coastline of Perú, I got the imminent calling to return to the mountains. Crossing the frozen Puna country (4000m+) at daybreak was truly amazing, even through an icy bus-window. Andean Geese, Giant Coots, Andean Gulls and Chilean Flamingoes were commonly seen.

The decision was made in Cusco to go to Manú, a National Park and associated reserve areas that supposedly house one tenth of all plant species on the planet (not to mention over 1000 spp. of aves!). This is 'Poo Amazon'. Along the way we stopped at a high altitude wetland where there were Puna Ibis, Yellow-billed Pintail, Silvery Grebe, Puna Teal...and yep, some waders. Puna Plovers (Puna this, Puna that!), Greater Yellowlegs and Baird's Sandpipers again (following seeing them in Patagonia). Oh and I finally got my first look at Pectoral Sandpipers...my eye's in!

Every now'n'then we'd pull-up for quick tiss/pwitch stops, the best of which found a Giant Hummingbird perched on a dead branch of a Tassie Blue Gum (the most common tree in the Andes). In the dryer Puna we found Andean Flickers, a Woodpecker that lives where there are NO trees. It pecks dirt (why wouldn't you have a go?).

Descending down thru' the Cloud Forest I was (once again) mobbed by the good ol' ACofTRock (needed the peg on the nose!). Other good birds here included Long-tailed Tyrant, Barred Fruiteater, Emerald Toucanet, Masked Tanager, Green Honeycreeper and hundreds of Russet-backed and Crested Oropendolas.

Finally down to the Madre de Dios, a tributary of the Amazon, and a 8hr boat ride down to Boca Manu, in pretty remote Perú. The guide thought it was funny that I was keeping a "trip list" for the 8 days, but soon he was into it, getting updates on where we were at...and it was from here that things got hectic.

Mmmm...to think of the 'highlight' birds...well definitely King Vulture, Green Ibis, Limpkin, Cuvier's Toucan and the bizarre 5-stomached Hoatzin (that's not its name!). Then of course there were Eastern Kingbirds, White-necked Jacobins, Bluish-sided Jacamars, Black-faced Nunbirds, Masked Crimson-Tanagers y mucho mucho mucho mas.

The Ox-bow Lakes were really 'where it was at'. They reminded me fully of Top End billabongs, like the big one near Shady Camp (name anyone?). We would float out on sunrise, mist rising on the glassy water, on hardwood cats that were easily stable enough for our Kawa scope. Probably the most incredible bird experience was when two birds the size of Condors flew in slowly and perched on top of a prominent tree and proceeded to let forth the loudest, strangest noise I've ever heard emanate from an animal - like amplified donkeys - they were Horned Screamers.

Another good spy were Muscovy Ducks, yep, the real McCoy...and not a frisky Mallard in sight (Geoffry!). In all we saw 15 spp. of Parrot, including 5 spp. of Macaw, which just so majestically glide over the canopy with effortless wingbeats. The rarest spy for the trip was a pair of Rock Parakeets, which was the only new bird for the guide for the trip (he ticked up, but not in SR style, which we were grateful for).

There were Amazon Kingfishers, Chestnut-eared Aracaris, Swallow-winged Puffbirds, Great-billed Hermits, Ladder-tailed Nightjars, Sand-coloured Nighthawks, Red-capped Cardinals yeah yeah, bastante pájaros!

On the way out of the jungle I met a Finnish birdo who made me look Gummage on the Twitchathon! He was backpacking with scope, 3 field guides etc...the works. I gave him oil on the Sooty Owl, so he owes me.

When we got bogged on the way up the mountains (for 14 hours!) we put the scope on a perched Chestnut-breasted Coronet. More than 150 Peruvians bumped their life-list then!

Next mission was the Inca Trail. It was more of a frustration really, having to charge along, but hey - I wasn't exactly there for the birds. Spring had just sprung and wildflowers were abundant and varied. In turn they attracted visitors such as Great Sapphirewings, Amethyst-throated Sunangels, Giant Conebills, Red-crested Cotingas and the appropriately named Bronzy Inca. But the best-named prize must surely go to the Superciliated Hemisphingus. I got the oil - email from the Finticker - too late for the Lyre-tailed Nightjar, so dipped there...dang-gannet.



Then I vamoosed to the Colca Canyon, the deepest canyon in the world - I stood on one side and looked up to a summit of 5300m and looked down to the river below at 2000m, wow. The local Andean Condors were right on cue for us touros, as no less than 12 birds wheeled barely 30m above our heads at one point - an unforgettable sight. Dwarfed by them in tow were other raptors such as Mountain Caracara, Broad-winged Hawk, American Kestrels and Mr Reliable Peregrine (where's the raptor man?!).

*Top pic: this week's "put a caption to the photo" competition
Bottom pic: a Pale-winged Trumpeter (nice).*

On the ground some good endemics were spied, such as the Canyon Castanero and Straight-billed Earthcreeper. Despite Lake Titicaca's reputation for not being diverse in fauna, it was as much a spectacle for birds as it was for its pure show and existence. Literally thousands of high-country specialists lined its shores, not the least numerous being the Andean Lapwings - full of all the character of our familiar Spur-winged Plover (turn it up you oldies).

And so...to the numbers game (not that I'm counting or anything). Trip - 709; Year - 563; Perú - 395; Lifing - 1130.

For Perú and Ecuador: Tanagers - 71; Flycatchers - 52; Hummingbirds - 41; Finches

- 40; Raptors - 33; Parrots - 27. And the waders jump to 10!

So that also means that I unknowingly saw my 1000th bird somewhere in the Amazon. A thorough review of my notebook and diary has it somewhere in the vicinity of the Horned Screamer...and so..."there it is!". Hey, c'mon, it was either that or the Bran-coloured Flycatcher, so go figure!

By the way - at the red-flowering shrub near the 2nd set of stone tombs in the Pisac Archaeological Site I saw a pair of the stunning, rare and endemic Bearded Mountaineers. Now is that good oil or what!??

Mick B

Swamp Harrier attempting to take Pacific Black Duck

At Morpeth Sewage Farm on 19 May I watched a Swamp Harrier harass two Pacific Black Ducks. Conditions were very windy and the Harrier was able to hang almost stationary above one of the ducks, which submerged in defence. When the duck came up for air it would immediately submerge again and appeared very distressed. Pacific Black Ducks are dabbling rather than diving ducks and I presumed that its plumage was waterlogged. The duck's salvation was the presence of a second Black Duck, which was swimming nearby. Occasionally the Harrier had to reposition itself and as it executed this manoeuvre it switched its attention to the second duck, giving the other one time to "recover its breath". Eventually the Harrier gave up and moved off to continue quartering the marsh in search of easier prey.

On consulting HANZAB to see if Pacific Black Duck were known prey of Swamp Harriers I found the exact behaviour I had observed described except that the prey was a Eurasian Coot. In this case the victim was less fortunate and was eventually taken and

dragged to the shore of a pond at Werribee Sewage Farm in Victoria. There was no record of Swamp Harriers taking Pacific Black Duck.

Mike Newman

Great Bowerbird Collecting Wheelie Bin Hinges

On the morning of 18 May I was able to grab a few hours bird watching with Jo Wieneke in Townsville. One of Jo's consuming interests is the bowers of Great Bowerbirds. She showed me two, including one in the local cemetery.

Great Bowerbirds build bowers which are much larger than those of the Satin Bowerbird, which is common in the Hunter region. The sticks used are coarser and much whiter. Bower length varies from 30 to 100 cm.

A number of white, green and red objects had been collected and distributed around the bowers. These were quite often glass but included a red drinking straw. However according to Jo the Great Bowerbird stores its most prized possessions in a saucer shaped depression in the centre of the bower. In

viewing one of these collections I was amazed at the uniformity of a number of green objects in the central depression. They turned out to be "Wheelie Bin" hinge pins.

I immediately conjured up visions of Great Bowerbirds wrecking havoc in the Townsville streets as they somehow prised the hinge pins out of the bins. However, Great Bowerbirds are much smarter. Some enterprising birds raid the Maintenance Department at the Caravan Park adjacent to Townsville Common where there is (or was) a box of spare hinge pins ready for repair jobs. Other bower birds then raid the local bower and redistribute the hinges more widely around the Townsville suburbs.

My enthusiasm for Great Bowerbirds has not been appreciated by our local colony of Satin Bowerbirds who feel they have been slighted. Since I returned from Townsville they have deserted the bower in our garden and are in the

process of removing their collection of blue clothes pegs. Presumably they have found greener pastures and an appreciative audience who do not sing the praises of great Bowerbirds.

Mike Newman

New members

HBOC extends a warm welcome to:
Tony Adlide and Maggie Wall, Annandale;
Paul Freeman, Barnsley; Mark Dedman,
Maryland; Margaret McNeil, Swansea and
Karen Pearson, Weston.

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

Twitchathon 2002 NSW & ACT – 26/27 October, 2002

It gives me enormous pleasure to advise our members and all Birds Australia friends that the NSW and ACT Twitchathon 2002 fund raising theme will sing a slightly different song this year. The Cowra Woodland Birds (CWB) Program will use the 2002 *Twitchathon* proceeds to work closely with the Cowra local community with the aim of raising local awareness to the plight of the Cowra woodland birds and gaining local support for the CWB Program. This will be achieved through:

- Production and distribution of a Cowra bird list
- Production and distribution of a Birds of Cowra poster
- Development of a bird/biodiversity theme for the Cowra district
- Partnerships with local groups to undertake at least one (perhaps several – depending on the funds raised in the twitchathon) highly visible habitat restoration project.

There are terrific prizes to be won, including - yes my friends - a new prize category: **The Lucky Twitcher's Prize** for the team member whose name happens to be first drawn from the 2002 Lucky Twitchers' Hat! So here's a chance for a beginner birdwatcher to snatch up a tiny pot of glory! There are the usual prizes for the Main Race first, second and third teams and of course the Champagne for the winning team in our not-so-full-on Champagne Race, as well as the bird group/society whose members raise the most funds. **Are you going to beat me in raising the most funds this year so that you can whisk away with the greatest prize of all, as well as the Emu Tours fundraising trophy?** I do hope so!

If you've never tried a Twitchathon before - try it on for immeasurable fun! All you need do is form a team with at least one other person and find as many species of birds as possible over 24 hours commencing at 4 p.m. on 26 October. By sweet-talking your friends, family, employer corporations and colleagues into sponsoring your team with a few cents (or a few dollars!) per species seen or heard by

your team, you're helping us to raise a breathtaking amount of money (Yes, I know we will!) to get a country community involved in addressing the decline of our woodland birds. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible! So please, "Go for it Birds Australia friends" and ask me for your NSW & ACT Twitchathon Kit **TODAY!**

P.S. If you really cannot manage to participate in a team, we would welcome any donation to this wonderful cause!!!

Frances Czwalinna
NSW & ACT Twitchathon Coordinator, Box 1322, P.O. Crows Nest, NSW 1585. Tel: (02) 9436 0388 Fax: (02) 9436 0466. Email: secretarybird@bigpond.com

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT APRIL/MAY 2002

2002				
Jan 18	Brown Quail	3	Redhead	J.Grebert
Jan 11	Little Eagle	1	Cooranbong [Cessnock exit]	P.Freeman
Jan 22	Brown Honeyeater	1	Pelican Is. Reserve. Swansea	"
Jan 27	Spotted Quail Thrush	2	Mt. Vincent	"
Feb 4	Black Swan	>100	Belmont Bay - south Belmont	J.Grebert
Feb 10	Red-necked Stint	1	Ash Island	"
	Pacific Golden Plover	>40	"	"
Mar 3	Little Corella	75	Morisset	"
Mar 5	Curlew Sandpiper	8	Ash Island	"
	Brown Falcon	1	"	"
Mar 12	Hoary-headed Grebe	6	Lenaghan's Drive	"
Mar 28	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	Wangi	D.Johnson
Mar 18	Black Kite	10	Grahamstown Dam [nr Spillway]	A.Stuart
Apr 7	Kentish Plover	2	Old Bar	R.Stokes/ J.Valentine
Apr 13	Glossy Black Cockatoo	10	Eastern edge Coolah Tops N.P.	G.Newling
Apr 18	Black Falcon	1	4kms north of Scone	"
Mar 22	Whistling Kite	3	2 kms north of Scone	"
	Little Eagle	1	" "	"
Mar 21	Latham's Snipe	1	Bolwarra Lagoon	H.Tarrant
Mar 30	White-browed Woodswallow	1	Bolwarra	"
Mar 31	Diamond Firetail	1	Hands Lagoon, Bolwarra	"
	Zebra Finch		"	"
Mar 29	Wedge-tailed Eagle	3	Martindale	"
	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	4	"	"
	Nutmeg Mannikin	5	"	"
	Plum-headed Finch	4	"	"
	Zebra Finch		"	"
	Double-barred Finch		"	"
Mar 26	Little Raven	15	Belltrees	"
	Forest Raven	1	Moonan Flat	"
Feb 23	Stubble Quail	2	Fosterton Loop Rd. Dungog	D.Jenkin
Mar 4	Flame Robin	5	Polblue/Dilgry River Camp [K5]	"
	Red-browed Treecreeper	2	Dilgry River. Barrington Tops	"
	Olive Whistler	2	Polblue - Barrington Tops [K5]	"
Mar 29	Rockwarbler	3	Payne's Crossing	"
	Spotted Quail Thrush	1	"	"
	Glossy Black Cockatoo	2	"	"

Mar 22	Grey Goshawk'	1	Blackbutt Reserve	P.Lightfoot
	Rufous Fantail	1	"	"
Apr	Australian Hobby	1	Cardiff	J. Westphail
Apr 7	White-bellied Sea-eagle	1	Woodville	M. Newman
	Grey Goshawk	1	"	"
	Spotted Harrier	1	Hinton-Nelsons Plains	"
Mar 1	Yellow Wagtail	1	Ash Island	A. Lindsey
Apr 27	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	5	Woodberry	J. & R. Smith
	Red Wattlebird	1	"	"
May 1	Striped Honeyeater	1	"	"
Apr 30	Wedge-tailed Eagle	3	Dungog	J. Smith
	Wedge-tailed Eagle	1	Paterson	"
Apr 29	Wedge-tailed Eagle	1	Brandy Hill - [Seaham]	"
Apr 13	Spangled Drongo	3	The Junction	M. Blanch
Apr 6	Black Swan	>40	Swan Bay/Oyster Cove	"
Apr 27	Osprey nest	2	Woods Point [Morisset Hospital]	V. & D. Moon
	Scarlet Honeyeater	2	"	"
	Scarlet Robin	1	"	"
Apr 28	Spotted Quail-thrush	2	Woko NP. 3km south of campsite	G. Newling
Apr 28	Regent Honeyeater	2	Galgabba Point [Swansea south]	C. Gladwin
	Fuscous Honeyeater	6	"	"
	Musk, Rainbow, Scaly-breasted & Little Lorikeet		"	"
	Scarlet, White-cheeked H/E		"	"
Apr 20	Regent Honeyeater	2	Belmont Swamp	K. Laverick
Apr 20	Plum-headed Finch	4-6	Martindale	H. Tarrant
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	"	"
	Black-shouldered Kite	2	"	"
May 7	Flame Robin	1	19km east of Aberdeen	"
	Little Raven		6km North of Mt. Pleasant	"
Apr 15	Little Eagle	1	Tamilba Bay	C. Goodenough
May 2	Red-rumped Parrot	3	Broadmeadow	"
May 6-8	Crested Shrike-tit	3	Wyee Point	V. & D. Moon
May 1 & 7	Scarlet Honeyeater	2	"	"
May 2	Southern Boobook	1	Esplanade, Warners Bay	S. Hamonet
May 5	Regent Honeyeater	1	Galgabba Point	"
May 4	Eastern Reef Egret	1	One Mile Beach	D. Eiggins
May 6	Swift Parrot	34	Lemon Tree Passage	M. Kearns
May 3	Black-shouldered Kite	1	Cardiff	J. Westphail
May 3	Barn Owl	1	Morpeth-Hinton	M. Newman
May 7	Swift Parrot	4	Wyee Point	N. Livanos
May 1	Black Kite	2	East Maitland [Garbage Tip]	"
May 2	Satin Bowerbird	7	New Lambton Heights	P. Lightfoot
May 4	White-winged Black Tern	9	Grahamstown Dam	S. Roderick
May 6	White-throated Gerygone	1	East Maitland	"
May 3-8	Black Kite	6	East Maitland Tip	"
May 1	Rainbow Lorikeet	>50	Gwandalan	T. Langworthy
	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	35	"	"
	Musk Lorikeet	>40	"	"
	Little Lorikeet	>40	"	"

Coming Events

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

Date	Activity	Time and Place	Contact
Saturday 15 June	Wader Survey	11:30am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Saturday 22 June	Atlassing	Sandy Hollow/Giants Creek. Meet Jerry's Plains Shop 7.30am	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Chris or Liz Herbert, 4959 3663
Sunday 23 June	Field Outing Wetlands Day Morpeth	10:00am Morpeth Sewerage Treatment Works, Butchers Lane, Morpeth	Phil Rankin 4946 0022
Tuesday 2 July	Mid-Week Outing Islington Park	8.00 a.m. Car Park, Off Tighes Terrace, nr Liquor Store	Leader: Keith Woods 4963 3070
Saturday 6 July	Atlassing Day Yarrawa/Kings Gap area	8.00 a.m. Jerry's Plains Shop	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Wednesday 10 July	Club Night	7.30 p.m. The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Richard Major – Birds in Backyards.
Saturday 13 July	Wader Survey	10:30am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Saturday 20 July	Pelagic Trip	7.00 a.m. Swansea Wharf, nr RSL Club, Chalmers St, Swansea	Richard Baxter 4954 0212 Randrbaxter@yahoo.com
Sunday 21 July	Field Outing Swan Bay	8:00am McDonalds car park, Raymond Terrace	Sue Hamonet 4958 1023
Tuesday 6 August	Mid-Week Outing: Hunter Region Botanic Gardens	8.00 a.m. Main Gate, Pacific Highway, Heatherbrae	Leader: Ken Gibson 4955 9866
Saturday 10 August	Wader Survey	9:30am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Wednesday 14 August	Club Night	7:30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Peter Ekert – Rufous Scrub Bird
Saturday 24 August	Atlassing Day Doyles Creek/Jones Reserve Road	8.00 a.m. Jerry's Plains Shop	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Sunday 25 August	Field Outing: Awabakal NR	8:00am Car park at end of Ocean St, Dudley	Jenny powers 4944 7274
Weekend 24/25 August	Wild Flowers at the Wetlands	The Wetland Centre, Shortland	Co-ordinator: Tom Clarke 4951 3872