

# NEWSLETTER

## Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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President: Alan Stuart

Secretary: Tom Clarke

Newsletter Editor: Pat Carlton



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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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### Rehabilitation of Waterbird Habitat on Ash Island

Two years of monitoring wader and waterbird use of the Ash Island Ponds by Project Officer, Aimee Hutchinson, and Project Advisor, Alan Morris, ended in April 2002.

During January and February emphasis was placed on collecting data on the times migratory waders feed in respect to the state of the tide and in what habitats they feed and roost at the Ponds. Compared to the previous summer, last season showed that the Ponds have been more important for both endemic and migratory waders, with peaks of over 1000 Sharp-tail Sandpipers, 220 Marsh Sandpipers, 200 Curlew Sandpiper and 40 Greenshank present at any one time, and 600+ Black-winged Stilts and 400 Red-necked Avocets - not to mention over 1000 ducks, mostly Grey and Chestnut Teal and 80 Great Egrets and 20 Intermediate Egrets!

The Ponds have attracted many other interesting waterbirds, including a Lesser Yellowlegs that stayed several days last September, a Ruff that stayed slightly longer and another during March, an Australasian Bittern or two that were resident on the Ponds for several months, a Grey Plover in November, and two Double-banded Plover in February. Baillons Crake, Spotless Crake and many Australian Spotted Crakes, and regular sightings of Buff-banded Rails all contributed to making the Ponds a bird watchers' Mecca. From March to April, 4 Yellow Wagtails added to the importance of the site.

Concurrent with the surveys, the Project's Steering Committee has been involved in the commissioning of a report from a firm of environmental engineers to design a new hydrological control structure on Wader Creek. The current culvert has fallen in and is partly blocked, and the new design is such that will allow for the original footprint of tidal flow to enter the Wader Creek system (which ultimately flows through to the Swan Pond and the Duck Pond). However, the design will also allow for the opportunity to vary the tidal flow research purposes, and to control the spread of mangrove seedlings into the saltmarsh.

The report was presented to the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project Committee in March.

*Source: Bird Notes, No.43 June 2002*

## President's Column

In the last Newsletter, I mentioned that HBOC had applied to Lake Macquarie City Council for a grant to produce two brochures describing birdwatching routes – for Lake Macquarie East and Lake Macquarie West. I'm very pleased to tell you that we succeeded! In fact, they have already sent us the cheque. Now we just have to do the work – but that will be the fun part. By the way, we'd welcome any suggestions from you for locations to include into either of the brochures.

Also, some good progress is occurring on our efforts to have some of the degraded high tide roost sites for waders rehabilitated. If you've been to Stockton Sandspit recently, you'll have noticed how much better it is looking, with all of the young mangroves taken out including from the mudflat on the Fern Bay side of the Sandspit. Also, much of the weeds have been dealt with, and the sandy beach cleared of debris. We have a local Green Corps group to thank for all this, plus our own Ann Lindsey and Chris Herbert.

In addition, National Parks and Wildlife Service have completed a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) for removing the mature stand of mangroves beyond the sandy beach. The REF was positive, and now a recommendation has gone forward to the Minister for approval. Our fingers are crossed – we have been campaigning for the removal of these mangroves for a long while.

REF's have also been completed recently for rehabilitation of a former roost site on Sandy Island (at the mouth of Fullerton Cove) and for installing some floating platforms in Fullerton Cove as a trial to see if waders will roost on them. So, some good things are starting to happen for waders in the estuary.

On the other hand though, the proposal to develop the Tomago area for industry including a new steelworks, will have a serious negative impact for birds and for wildlife generally. Max Maddock has been assembling a series of powerful reviews and

assessments of the impacts that could occur and of the various state, national and international Acts and Agreements that would be infringed. As well as providing Max with information and moral support, HBOC is assisting to print and distribute the documents to all of the stakeholders. Of particular concern is the scheme to dredge the north arm of the Hunter river, which would significantly impact on Fullerton Cove and Kooragang Nature Reserve.

Getting back onto a happier note, hasn't the birding been interesting lately? Lots of rare or unusual sightings – including that Northern Shoveler on Ash Island and both Cotton Pygmy Goose and Blue-billed Duck in the Minmi area. The Hunter Region bird list now has about 385 species on it – there can't be too many other places in Australia with such a massive potential list within a travel radius of about 2 hours. And how about all the Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater sightings we've been having this winter? We're so fortunate to be living in such a great area for birds.

Incidentally, some time ago I set up an e-mail distribution list of many HBOC members, to whom I send occasional notifications about interesting birds that have turned up locally. If you have an e-mail address and would like me to add you to the distribution list, then contact me at the address below.

Happy birding

*Alan Stuart*

*almarosa@bigpond.com*

**Articles for our newsletter are  
always welcomed**

**Closing date for next issue: 30 September  
2002**

**Please send your contributions to:  
Pat Carlton, 29 Wallaroo Road, East  
Seaham 2324 Ph: 4988 6026**

**Email: [pcarlton@tpg.com.au](mailto:pcarlton@tpg.com.au)**

**PLEASE NOTE NEW EMAIL ADDRESS**

## **Birds in Abundance at Bootawah Camp at Ted Wilson's property north of Tinonee, June Long Weekend 2002**

I wasn't quite sure of the exact date when last I went birdwatching on Ted Wilson's property, Bootawah Road, Tinonee, but I certainly remembered being suitably impressed. Upon inspection of the visitors' book it turns out that HBOC last camped there on the Anzac weekend in 1994. I recall the creek was dry as a bone and the camp was in a shady area in amongst the melaleuca.

Now although the creek wasn't exactly running a torrent, this time there was at least a trickle between each pool of deep water and the lack of warmth in the mornings meant that no-one wanted to camp in the cool damp hollow. So was it any good for birds? Well I can emphatically say, yes it was. Winter is no deterrent around this area and a respectable tally of 90 species were positively identified by our group of 13 lucky birdwatchers.

Of course there just had to be plenty of birds, given the variety of good habitat that Ted has managed to maintain. Swampy creeks wind through stands of melaleuca that give way to casuarina and then dry woodland is typical of the natural habitat here. Open grazing land featuring large dams exist on both sides of a ribbon of woodland that is Bootawah Road. And a native garden around the Wilson house and driveway is exotic to the area but highly sought after by many of the small bush birds.

When you first arrive, and in leaving the road, roll down the hill to the house, the driveway is alive with tiny birds that push away like a bow wave. You quickly identify as many as you can, like Red-browed Finch, Yellow-rumped Thornbill etc but there are plenty more that have to be determined later on foot and with binoculars handy.

Some light rain on the Saturday morning basically ceased after a late lunch and by sunset the skies had cleared. That clear, fine, winter weather persisted for the remainder of the weekend. By the time we gathered for the first evening camp-fire circle, everyone had managed several hours of

wandering about and exploring. Most recalled slow going but noted several "hot spots" that had produced good views or moments of joy. My favourite "hot spot" was just 100 metres up the hill from the camp and near a couple of Ted's ostrich enclosures. Each day I went there and was always happy to find a great variety of small bush birds.

Most captivating was an active Spangled Drongo. This bird basically behaved in a Willie Wagtail manner only less energetic. It would have a long rest between bursts of activity catching insects in the air adjacent to the leafy crowns of young saplings. Sometimes the Drongo would follow prey down to just above the ground but always returned to one of three favourite perches to rest. Perching was always immediately followed by 2 or 3 outward tail flicks (fanning) that showed off the bent spades that is so characteristic of this bird. I witnessed this foraging behaviour for nearly half an hour without a whisper from the Drongo. Then as it rested once again the silence was broken with 5 minutes of continuous calling. Mostly the calling was a repeated series of rhythmic rasping sounds interrupted by a high-pitched single note whistle. When the calling finally finished, that was the end of it and the bird remained silent. The calling had produced no response from any other bird that I could detect.

Best result at this "hot spot" for me was the discovery of a pair of Peaceful Dove. I had been hearing their call on occasion over the weekend and while it wasn't that persistent it was heard often enough to suggest that they must be locally settled. These two birds flew over and landed on the ground just 15 metres away to feed. What beautiful creatures they are.

Waiting for the rain to stop and sitting under my fancy pergola was good enough to produce a couple of gems. Despite the weather, a white-faced male Grey Shrike Thrush methodically foraged in the crown of a nearby eucalypt. It did actually call once, a shortened version of the summer song, but mostly it remained silent. Invisible Torresian Crow and Fantail Cuckoo were also heard

from time to time as I sat enjoying a nice cup of tea and a ginger nut biscuit. Greatest delight came in the form of an Eastern Spinebill. I spied this bird flying straight toward me from a long way off. It arrived when it landed in a sapling right next to my camp. The bird sprang into a great rendition of its signature call then disappeared in a flash to some other place. I knew right then that this weekend was going to be very enjoyable.

Saturday and Monday people were basically left to their own devices and that probably resembled a random meandering as we dawdled about the place, exploring here and there as we rediscovered its treasures. I was tickled but particularly impressed with signs that Ted has placed about the bush. None of these signs tell you where you are going, they just indicate the quickest way back to camp. Most read like this – “Short Cut To Camp” – a great innovation.

Sunday was more organised, but no less enjoyable, as we all fell-in after breakfast

as per Ted's orders. Sunday was a once-off, you just had to be there, great day out. A guided tour around some of the better local dams produced a tremendous list of waterfowl and the like. Highlights were; an immature Nankeen Night Heron hiding in a willow over the road on the Weekes Brother's "Ainsley Park"; the adult Comb-crested Jacana (with a pale comb) trying to hide amongst the vegetation on a dam at Hill View; and four Great Crested Grebe sitting on the deep water of Bootawah Dam. The heron and the jacana were great rewards for persistent searching while the grebe were spotted basically as soon as we got out of the cars. The best thing about Tinonee Ted's Tours was that everyone got to see everything that the group found, thanks to Ted and to several birdos that had brought along their scopes.

*Tom Clarke*

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## **HBOC Raffle**

At the June meeting James Smart beamed as he was the lucky recipient of 1st prize in our raffle which was a lovely weekend for 2 at Kurrajong Retreat, near Manila and Barraba. Vinny Cook won 2nd prize, 2 framed prints of birds donated by Lars Knudsen. The 3rd prize, a very attractive quilting made by Jeanette Barnden, was won by Barbara Turner. Sincere thanks have to go to those who donated the prizes. The raffle was a huge success raising \$850, a sum that reflects the support of the members and is a fine testament to the strength of the H.B.O.C. The proceeds will go to worthwhile projects which are being considered by the Committee.

*Di Johnson*

## **A Green and Birdy Diary continued...**

March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2002

When Chris arrived we were all ready for a grand day of birdwatching. The birds observed were 21 Black-winged Stilts, 1 great Egret, 7 White Ibis, 6 Welcome Swallows, 1 Willy Wagtail, 2 Magpie-larks, 2 Cisticolas, 2 Starlings, 8 Rock Doves, 2 Superb Fairy-wrens, 1 White-faced Heron, and 1 Mangrove Gerygone. Since the tide was high and we could not work on the mudflat, the Green Machine removed bitou bush by hand and used mattocks for the larger ones. After lunch we removed the terrible *Juncus acutus* from the island.

*Allison Smith and Jacky Courville*

## Lead us into a Twitchathon temptation!

**26/27 October 2002 - NSW and ACT**

Don't tell anyone that we're having another SNAG Twitchathon! Tell everyone, including children! Lead them to a Twitchathon temptation! We'd like everyone to know we're driving towards another great bird race to raise funds for the Cowra Woodland Bird Program. This time we want to produce and distribute a Cowra poster and bird list, develop a bird/biodiversity theme for the Cowra district and undertake a highly visible habitat restoration project. So, check out the prizes below and join in the fun this year and ask for your Twitchathon kit today. We extend an enormous "thank you" to our wonderful prize sponsors for their most generous support in our SNAG 2002 Twitchathon. Without this extraordinary kindness, we would not be able to give the Cowra Woodland Bird Program all the support it so deserves.

### PRIZES:

#### Perpetual trophies:

**Children's prize for most birds seen (under 10 years)**

*First Field Guide to Australian Birds book*

**Children's prize for child raising most dollars (under 10 years)**

*Australian Birdlife Fun Activity Book*

**Children's Prize for most birds seen (10-16 years)**

*Morcombe's Field Guide to Australian Birds*

**Children's Prize for child raising most dollars (10-16 years)**

*"Australian Animal Atlas" or a book voucher to the value of \$30*

#### Main race: 1st prize:

*"Coracina" cottage accommodation over one weekend at Bawley Point - south of Ulladulla close to Lake Willinga and Murrumbidgee National Park, (beach habitat for Little Tern and Hooded Plover). Weekend covers a Friday to Sunday evenings for up to 8 people*

#### Main race: 2nd prize

*Weekend accommodation at 2306 Comboyne Road, Killabakh, 2429 (from a Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) for up to 8 people.*

#### Main Race: 3rd prize

*Zoo Friends Membership for one year for each member of the team*

#### Champagne race

*Champagne, of course!!*

#### Most funds raised by an individual in NSW/ACT

*One dozen bottles of quality Cowra wines as well as a set of four Key Guides to Australian Mammals, Wildflowers, Trees and Ferns.*

#### Special prize to the person who sees or hears the rarest bird!

*2 plates, 2 mugs, 2 coasters from Australian Fine China Feathered Jewels series - Crimson Rosella design*

#### Club/society/group prize:

*Cheque for \$100 to the club whose members raise the most funds.*

#### Lucky Twitcher's Prize:

*Binocular cleaning kit*

*Frances Czwaliema, Twitchathon Coordinator  
Birds Australia, P.O. Box 1322, Crows Nest, 1585  
Tel. (02) 9436 0388 Fax (02) 9435 0466.  
Email: rosella63@bigpond.com*

## It's on again!

.....And in second place overall are the Hunter Home Brewers! Well, what an awesome event the 2001 Twitchathon was for the Brewers. A record for our team of 211 species, which also was the first time a Hunter team has broken 200 and also equalled the state record, only being broken by the winning team last year (218)!

Our list of 211 species is only half the story though. The reason for the Twitchathon is to raise money for much needed funds for Birds Australia projects. The Hunter Home Brewers raised just under \$800 last year. We have been competing for 3 years now and as our total birds seen has increased, so to has our sponsorship monies.

This year's cause is once again worthwhile and needs our support. The Hunter Home Brewers will once again be entering a team in this year's Twitchathon. Team members are Craig Anderson (the brewer), Lucas Grenadier (the weaver), Grant Murray (the scribe), Mick Roderick (where is he?) and Steve Roderick (the driver-someone's got to do it!). As you would expect from The Brewers, we will be striving to beat last year's total and nail the competition. Our quest for the top spot can only be achieved with the support of many sponsors. We (the brewers) ask you to give generously to this great cause and sponsor The Hunter Home Brewers in this year's Twitchathon. Feel free to talk to any one of the team members about sponsorship details.

Bring it on Thickheads!

*Steve 'twitchy twitcher' Roderick.*

## Birdwatching at historic Wollombi

On Saturday 14 September, all members are invited to join the Wollombi Valley Landcare Group for a delightful outing of birdwatching. At this time of the year we should see many species along the river and at the millpond there. We will meet at 'Wollombi House' (turn into Narone Creek Road before the Wollombi village) at 7.45am. For further information please contact Di Johnson (tele. 49751777) or Evelyn Bloom (tele. 49983316).

## New Members



HBOC extends a warm welcome to  
Eula McKane of Bonnell's Bay and  
Anthony Gooden of Newcastle.

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

## Some good news....

The **Orange-bellied Parrots** breeding season of 2001-2002 was very successful, with over 72 chicks hatched at Melaleuca, in south-west Tasmania. This is more than double the previous year's effort.

Source: *Wingspan*, June 2002

## Kaki breeds in wild

One of New Zealand's rarest birds is proving adept at doing the wild thing, even after being bred and raised by humans. Young kaki (black stilt) are having no trouble forming pairs with wild birds and producing eggs, giving the Department of Conservation hope for the species' future.

Large numbers of captive-reared birds have been released in recent years as the Department continues its battle to help the black stilt back from the brink of extinction. Once eggs are produced by breeding pairs in the wild, they are immediately removed and taken to be hand-reared.

Source: *Anne Beston, New Zealand Herald, undated.*

## Little Terns

The Little Terns, *sterna albifrons*, returned to The Entrance again last summer to nest following their successful nesting last year, when 24 pairs fledged between 27 and 30 chicks. They were first seen on 27 October 2001 and the first nest reported on 14 November. The first eggs hatched on 14 December by which time there were 35 nesting pairs. Predation of eggs was very evident, by either Australian Raven, *cornus coronoides*, or Silver Gull, *larus novaehollandiae*. Some nests were trampled by the human holiday traffic. Wyong Council extended the fenced area to include all nests and creches of young birds. The last eggs were laid on 9 January 2002 and by 26 January the colony was deserted. On 20 January there were at least 29 flying young on the beach, with more offshore and at least 8 chicks inside the fences. Overall, 72 clutches were laid, 41 of which were lost, the other 31 presumed hatched. It is believed that at least 76 chicks hatched, with at least 37, and probably over 50, fledging. Twenty seven volunteers monitored the colony in rostered morning and afternoon shifts. Fourteen of the birds in the colony had been banded, most at Towra Point. The nesting at Towra Point, which has been successful in recent years, failed this year, possibly because no funds were provided for boat hire for wardens to check the colony regularly, nor were rangers available to patrol the site, carry out fox or bird control etc.

Source: *Alan Morris, reported in Birding NSW Newsletter, June 2002*

## And some bad news....

As the Great Barrier Reef continues to come under increasing pressure, fish, turtles and marine mammals are in decline, and Michaelmas Cay has seen a decline since 1980 of 25% in Crested Tern and Sooty Tern populations, and 45% in Noddy Terns.

*Source: GBR Marine Park Authority*

## Sooty Oystercatchers

The Sooty Oystercatcher appears to the uninformed observer to be common on the NSW south coast. This is because there seems to be a pair on every rocky headland and they sometimes congregate in flocks of up to 20. However, there are believed to be only about 200 individuals in NSW and they are listed as vulnerable on the NSW Threatened Species List.

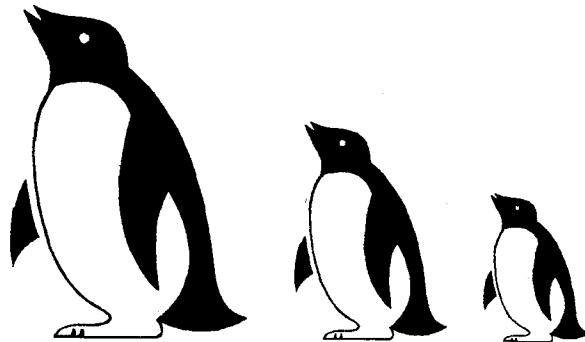
Sooty oystercatchers are specialist feeders, feeding only in the littoral zone between the high and low tide lines. The female has a longer bill than the male allowing a pair to exploit a wider range of feeding niches and provide their chicks with a greater variety of foods. They are generally only successful at nesting on offshore islands. The nest is located just above the high tide line and can be vulnerable in stormy weather. Although 2 eggs are sometimes laid, there is invariably only one chick.

*Source: Bruce O'Brien, IBOC News, June 2002.*

## Iceberg reduces penguins' food supplies

In March 2000 a giant iceberg broke off the Antarctic Continent and has since broken into four very large icebergs which are greatly restricting the Ross Sea pack ice from breaking up and drifting away. This ice has stopped the sunlight entering the water which has reduced the growth of phytoplankton, on which krill feed, by 40%. Krill is the main part of the penguins' diet. This has resulted in a major shortage of food for the penguins. Many have abandoned their chicks as they were unable to carry food the great distances to get back to them. About 30% of the world's Adelie and 25% of the Emperor penguins live in the vicinity. The longer journey to find food has produced longer periods away from the nests with greater opportunity for chick and egg predation by skuas.

*Source: The Australian, 27/4/02.*



## Curlew Sandpiper on the wrong flyway

A Curlew Sandpiper banded in north-west Australia has been seen in South Africa. Normally migratory waders consistently return to the same location and follow the same migration routes between Australia and their Arctic Siberian breeding grounds each year. This bird, however, appears to have looked at the wrong flight schedule when it left Siberia last July/August. It has transferred into the

African Flyway and finished up over 10,000 kms from where it should have been. Around 35,000 Curlew Sandpipers have been banded in Australia over the last 30 years and this is only the second to have been recorded moving outside the normal East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Interest now centres on whether this bird will return to South Africa next season, after its current visit to Siberia. There will be many eyes looking for it from September onwards.

*Source: Clive Minton, Wingspan, June 2002*

## Aggressive Magpies

Dr Darryl Jones and students from Griffith University in Queensland have completed a study of urban magpie attacks. They found that there is a distinct zone within 50 to 60 metres of a nesting tree in which magpies will attack pedestrians. There is a very specific period of attack – while the chicks are in the nest, and attacks are predominantly by males. Subjects attacked in the study areas were: postal workers 10%, cyclists 8%, pedestrians 52%, and non-specific 30%.

Translocation of aggressive magpies was also undertaken. The caught birds were released 6 to 25 kms away from their current territory. However, as one of these birds took only an hour to get back to its original territory, the distance was increased to at least 30 kms. Only a very tiny proportion of translocated birds returned. 12% of those re-sited were

found to be breeding and not aggressive, and only 3% of relocated birds were found to be still aggressive.

The question of what happens to the female and chicks left behind needs to be answered. There are 3 possibilities: 1) the female might tolerate a new male; 2) infanticide by a new male; or 3) care-giving.

The third option was found when a new young male fed the chicks at one nest site at twice the rate of the male that had been removed. This rouses some fundamental questions. Why would a new male feed chicks that were not his? Interestingly, DNA testing has shown that 32% of chicks were not fathered by the neighbourhood dominant male.

*Source: Dawn Muir, Birds Queensland Newsletter, June 2002.*

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## Beware - Another Internet Joke.....

A hotshot birder and his dog show up at the local bird club meeting. The bird is told by the club president that dogs aren't allowed in the meeting centre. The guy explains that his dog is an ornithological genius - and, in addition, that the pooch can talk. He asks if he and his dog can be given a few minutes at the podium after the guest speaker to prove his claim. The club president agrees.

After the guest speaker is finished, the guy and his dog take the stage. He explains that the dog is an authority on ornithology and can answer any question about birds. Various birders in the audience express doubt. The guy says, "Just watch. I'll throw a few questions at him, and you'll see. He really is a genius."

So the birder asks, "Dog, where does a White Throated Treecreeper find its food?" The dog scratches its head and says, "Bark!"

There are a few murmurings of disgust from the audience, along with a few boos.

The birder says, "Okay, okay. I know that was an easy one. Now get a load of this. Dog, what unusual structural feature is found on the nest of the Grey Crowned Babbler that isn't found on most other birds' nests?" Without hesitating, the dog says, "Roof!"

There are loud boos and hisses from the audience.

The guy says, "All right, just give him one more chance. Dog, what North American wader rarity showed up last year on Kooragang Island wetlands?" The dog says, "Ruff!"

The outraged birders in the audience start loud booing and laughter and storming the stage. The birder and his dog flee out the back door.

As the pair walk past the pond back to the parking lot, the dog looks up at his master and says, "Sorry, I should have said Lesser Yellowlegs"

*Courtesy of James Smart*



## Lake Wollumboola

Lake Wollumboola, located just north of Jervis Bay, at Culburra Beach, is an intermittently closing and opening lagoon – the largest on the NSW south coast. It is recognised internationally and nationally as a significant wetland habitat for at least 43 species of migratory birds, and bird numbers exceed 20,000 on the Lake from time to time.

NSW NPWS is considering the declaration of Lake Wollumboola as a national park, and is also developing a nomination for the Lake as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. The Original Lake Wollumboola Support Group is concerned that these proposals are being stalled by the approaching NSW State Election. The group suggests that there are many developers in the wings who want to exploit the area.

Anyone interested in this issue can contact Frances Bray on 02 4447 2185, em: [francesbray@bigpond.com](mailto:francesbray@bigpond.com).

Source: *NSW Regional Ripples*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Autumn May 2002

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## Winged wonders...

A Canadian ornithologist, Dr David Bird of McGill University, has produced a book called *The Bird Almanac*, containing a wealth of data on the world's birds.

"Australian magpies likely constitute the most serious avian menace for suburbanites in the world," said Dr Bird. "They have been known to take people's eyes out."

Other Australian birds, however, have more benign claims to fame, e.g. the Australian pelican's bill, at 47cms, is the longest in the world. The zebra finch has raised more broods in one year – 21 – than any other bird. An 80

year old sulphur crested cockatoo has the record for the longest living bird. And Australia was home to the largest bird that ever lived – the 454 kg dromornis, a long-extinct relative of the emu. The world's smallest bird, the bee hummingbird of the Caribbean, weighs just 1.6gms.

Other record holders from Australia (but also found elsewhere) include the peregrine falcon, clocked diving at 257 kmh. Crows are the most intelligent birds. "I cannot think of any other bird that is smart enough to place nuts under the wheels of cars rolling to a stop at traffic lights," Dr Bird said. "Then they wait until a pedestrian presses the walk button before dashing out to retrieve the nuts' contents."

The African grey parrot comes a close second, with a recorded human vocabulary of 800 words.

A south polar skua has been spotted in Antarctica at a temperature of -90C. Male emperor penguins incubate eggs in Antarctica for up to 134 days in a single sitting.

Some birds are amazingly prolific. One wild duck laid 146 eggs consecutively. The world's most numerous bird is the finch-like, red-billed quelea of Africa, with an estimated population of 10 billion.

The biggest bird colony ever recorded was when 136 million passenger pigeons nested together in 1871 in Wisconsin (not a single one survives today). The highest flying bird, a ruppell's vulture, was found soaring at 11 kms above the ground. The bird with the greatest number of feathers? The whistling swan, with 25,216.

Dr Bird said that, after gardening, bird-watching was the fastest-growing recreational activity worldwide.

Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20-21 July 2002.

## Who's cleverest?

Betty, a female crow from New Caledonia, has stunned Oxford scientists by repeatedly bending a piece of wire to make a hook to get food in a laboratory experiment (report in the latest edition of journal "Science").

In an experiment to test the cognitive skills of Betty and another New Caledonian crow, a male called Abel, the Oxford group gave them a choice between a straight piece of wire and a bent wire to retrieve a small bucket containing meat from inside a pipe.

Abel took the bent wire, but Betty would bend the straight wire herself – either wedging it against the bottom of the tube or using her feet. Though never shown how to bend the wire, Betty did it nine times out of ten.

A postscript from the scientists points out that while Abel never tried to bend the wire, three times he watched Betty doing the task and then stole the food she recovered.

"It's up to you to judge who is cleverer," said the scientist.

*Source: Weekend Australian, 10-11 August 2002*

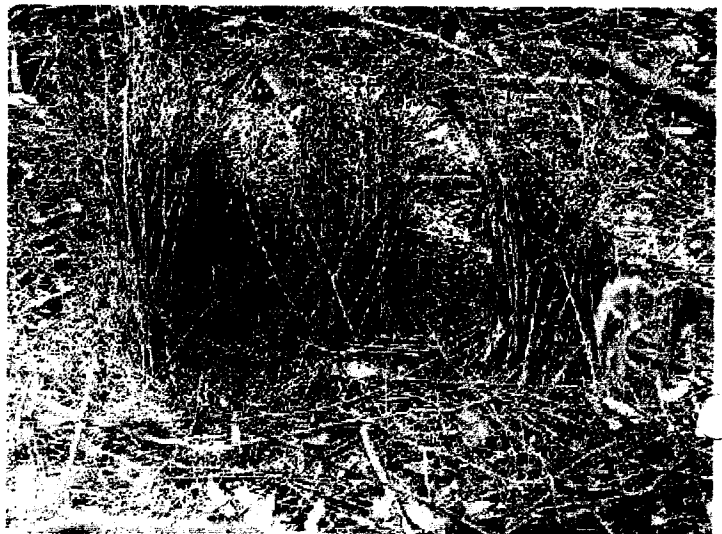
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## Upwardly mobile Bower Bird

As home to the largest collection of sub-tropical birds in Australia, World Heritage-listed Lamington National Park in south-east Queensland is a magnet for dedicated birdwatchers. In recent months, however, even the most casual of observers has become fascinated by the behaviour of one particularly inventive satin bower-bird.

Last year, guides and guests at Binna Burra Mountain Lodge were amazed to see him build not one but two bowers, right next door to each other. This year, he has taken the construction evolution to the next level by building a 'duplex' bower. The two bowers share a central wall, creating a twin avenue W-shaped construction.

Taking into consideration A.J. Marshall's theory that the male birds build their bowers as a means of working off their sexual frustrations while they wait for the females to show an interest, one can only assume that this particular fellow has built up quite a head of steam! We'll all be waiting with bated breath to see what happens when the breeding season starts in November.



We would certainly be interested in hearing from anyone who has an alternative theory. Could this be a significant step forward in the evolutionary process? Has anyone observed this sort of behaviour elsewhere? Your comments can be forwarded to [kransome@technet2000.com.au](mailto:kransome@technet2000.com.au)

The duplex bower can be found in the Bellbird Clearing on Binna Burra Mountain Lodge's property which borders the National Park. Our resident guides can direct you to the exact spot and, of course, overnight accommodation is available at the Lodge or the Binna Burra campsite. For further information or reservations, phone 1800 074 260.

*Linus Bagle, Lodge Manager, Binna Burra Mountain Lodge.*

**OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT JUNE/JULY 2002**

**2002**

Mar 3	Stubble Quail	1	North of Gloucester	B.McKay
Mar.	Regent Honeyeater	1	Morisset	Maureen Ash
Apr 25	Regent Honeyeater	2	Warkworth [off Wallaby Scrub Rd]	Will Introma
Apr 30	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	15	Gloucester	B.McKay
	Topknot Pigeon	5	"	"
	Richard's Pipit	3	Kia Ora Lookout – Gloucester	"
May 2	Topknot Pigeon	10	Gloucester Park	B. McKay
	Black-necked Stork	1	Gloucester	"
Apr 16	Spotted Harrier	1	East Maitland	H.Tarrant
Apr 20	Spotted Harrier	1	Hands Lagoon – Bolwarra	"
Apr 21	Black Kite	4	Maitland Garbage Tip	"
Apr 20	Plum-headed Finch	5	Martindale	"
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	"	"
	White-browed Babbler	2	Doyle's Creek	"
Apr 18	Peregrine Falcon	2	Bolwarra	"
May 15	Regent Honeyeater	6	Wyee Point	D. & V. Moon
May 16	Regent Honeyeater	9	"	"
May 17	Regent Honeyeater	11	"	A.Morris
	Swift Parrot	12	"	"
Mar 30	Black Kite	4	East Maitland [Rathluba]	M.Maddock
Apr 4	Black Kite	>20	"	"
May 26	Wandering Whistling Duck	37	Market Swamp [Steggles Pond]	S.Hamonet
Apr 6	Noisy Friarbird	300	Seaham Swamp	L.Crawford
Apr 7	Regent Honeyeater	10	Coal Point	"
Apr 4	Glossy Black Cockatoo	1	Medowie	D.Cooper
Apr 11	Square-tailed Kite	1	"	"
Apr/May	Grey Goshawk	1	FullertonCove/Nelson Bay Rd. Cnr.	"
May 31	White-headed Pigeon	1	Dora Creek	Not recorded
	White-necked Heron	1	Morisset	"
May 28	Nankeen Night Heron	12	Beresfield Gold Course	R.Smith
May 29	White-necked Heron	6	Tarro Swamp – Woodberry Rd	"
May 25	Black-necked Stork	1	Raymond Terrace	P.Rankin
May 6	Swift Parrot	33	Lemon Tree Passage	"
May 4	Plumed Whistling Duck	93	Doughboy Hollow	H.Tarrant
	Flame Robin	1	Rouchel Brook	"
May 11	Square-tailed Kite	1	Bolwarra	"
May 22	Australian Hobby	1	"	"
May 19	Pink-eared Duck	170	Walka Water Works	"
	Australasian Shoveler	B	"	"
May 28	Hoary-headed Grebe	B	"	"
May 18	Black-fronted Dotterel	60	Morpeth STW	M.Newman
	Red-kneed Dotterel	6	"	"
	Red-capped Plover	3	"	"
	Double-banded Plover	1	"	"
	Black Tailed Native Hen	1	Woodville	"
May 11	Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	Woodberry	J. Smith
	Spangled Drongo	1	"	"
May 15	Torresian Crow	3	Dungog High School	"
Jun 30	Torresian Crow	2	Ash Island	A.Lindsey
	Australasian Shoveler	150	Ash Island [Deep Pond]	"
Jun 26	Osprey	1	Stockton Sandspit	"
Jun 22	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	~6	Giants Creek	"
Jun 30	Masked Owl Road Kill	1	Nr. Ash Island turnoff. Hexham	"

Jul 3	Cotton Pygmy Goose	1	Minmi STW	"
Jun 30	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	<6	Jesmond Park	K.Gibson
	Rose Robin	4	"	"
	Golden Whistler	2	"	"
	Striated Pardalote	4	"	"
Jun 12	Rose Robin	1	Wangi	D.Johnson
Jun 12	Olive-backed Oriole	1	Wangi	D.Johnson
Jun	Osprey	2	Taylor's Beach	C.Anderson
Jul 5	Pacific Baza	1	Adamstown Heights	"
<b>May 28</b>	<b>Yellow Wagtail</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Morisset</b>	<b>P.Durie</b>
Apr 24	Black Kite	1	Allandale	"
May 23	Musk Lorikeet	>50	Toronto	"
May 25	Black Bittern	1	Paterson [.5km downstream]	R.Carlton
May 24	Spangled Drongo	2	East Maitland	P.McLauchlan
May 26	Square-tailed Kite	2 juv	"	"
Jun 6	Pacific Baza	2	Green Hills Shopping Centre	M.McLauchlan
May 31	Barn Owl	2	S.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
Jun 7	Grey-crowned Babbler	21	Wingen Stock Route	G.Newling
Jun 6	Royal Spoonbill	6	Belmont South	B.Cockerell
Jun 12	Regent Honeyeater	4	Wyee Point	V.Moon
May 19	Regent Honeyeater	15	"	"
May 9-22	Glossy Black Cockatoo	2 m	"	"
May/Jun	Spangled Drongo	2	Belmont South	J.Cockerell
Jun 11	Buff-banded Rail	1	Blackalls Park Reserve	J.Westphail
Jun 11	Pink-eared Duck	180	Walka Water Works	J.Goswell
	Australasian Shoveler	6-8	"	"
May 28/29	Swift Parrot	8-10	Nelson Bay [Galoola Drive]	D.Eggins
Jun 17	Pacific Baza	2	Speers Point	S.Hamonet
Jul 6	Pied Butcherbird	4	Adamstown Heights	P.Pountney
Jul 3	Black-shouldered Kite	1	"	"
May-Jul	Regent Honeyeater	15ma x	Wyee Point	D. & V. Moon
May 7-10	Swift Parrot	Flock s	"	"
May-Jul	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	5	"	"
May-Jul	Fuscous Honeyeater	Flock s	"	"
Jul 6	Freckled Duck	2	Lenaghan's Drive - Minmi	D. & C. Herbert
Jun	Eastern Spinebill	>10	Dungo High School	J.Smith
Jun 26	Restless Flycatcher	1	"	"
Jul 2	Richard's Pipit	3	"	"
Jun 26	Major Mitchell Cockatoo	1	New Lambton	M.Simkus
Jun 19	Caspian Tern	2	Stockton Borehole Swamp	K. & M. Woods
	Little Black Cormorant	>200	Edgeworth STW	"
Jul 1-10	Pacific Baza	2	Eleebana	A. Gooden
Jul 2-10	Tawny Frogmouth	2	"	"
Jun 26	Spangled Drongo	1	Cook's Hill	"
Jul 1	White-headed Pigeon	1	Whitebridge	C.Goodenough
Jul 6	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	2	Ash Island	J.Nicholls
	Osprey	2	"	"
	Brown Quail	1	"	"
Jul 1	Restless Flycatcher	1	East Seaham	P. & R. Carlton
Jul 4	Osprey	1	Belmont South	J.Cockerell
Jul 8	"	1	"	"

## 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 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.	Leader: Jenny Powers 4944 7274
Weekend 24/25 August	Wild Flowers at the Wetlands	The Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Co-ordinator: Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 3 September	Mid-Week Outing: Toronto Area	8.00 a.m. Outside 178 Excelsior Drive, Toronto	Leader: Margaret Woods 4963 3070
<b>Wednesday 11 September</b>	<b>Club Night</b>	<b>7.30 p.m. The Wetlands Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: Keith Davey – Crabs in the Hunter</b>
Saturday 14 September	Pelagic Trip	7:00am Swansea Wharf	Richard Baxter 4954 0212
Saturday 21 September	Hunter Wader Survey	8:10am. Various locations as directed.	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You <b>must</b> ring to confirm
Sunday 22 September	"Ferndale Park", Chicester	8:30am. Rotary Park on rhs of road entering Dungog.	Contact: Rowley Smith 49641389
Tuesday 1 October	Mid-Week Outing: Ash Island	8.00 a.m. Car Park, over Ash Island Bridge	Leader: Max Blanch 4961 1655
Long weekend 5,6, 7 October	Camp at "Myall View"	Violet Hill Road, Myall Lakes	Leader: Alan Stuart 49528569
<b>Wednesday 9 October</b>	<b>Club Night</b>	<b>7.30 p.m. The Wetlands Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: Alan Richardson – Wildlife Photographer</b>
Saturday 12 October	Pelagic Trip	6:00am Swansea Wharf	Richard Baxter 4954 0212
Saturday 19 October	Hunter Wader Survey	8:10am. Various locations as directed.	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You <b>must</b> ring to confirm
Sunday 20 October	Allworth area, Bucketts Way	8:30am End of Allworth Road	Leader: Sue Hamonet 4958 1023
Saturday 26 & Sunday 27 October	<b>TWITCHATHON</b> Join a team and help raise money for Cowra Woodlands	4:00pm Saturday 26 <sup>th</sup> through to 5:00pm Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> .	See article in this newsletter for details.
Sunday 27 October	Twitchathon BBQ – bring your own everything. All HBOC members welcome.	5:00pm The Wetlands Centre, Shortland.	Co-ordinator: Steve Roderick 4930 4800