

NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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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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What a year that was.

As we move into 2003 it may be useful to look back to see what we have achieved. Our President usually gives the highlights of the previous year in his brief report at the AGM. This is based on the detailed Annual Report - available from the Library or Secretary.

Some cannot attend to hear Allan's pearls of wisdom so this article substitutes to a certain extent. It is based largely on Reports from Activities Officer, Di Johnson and Ann Lindsey, HBOC ATLAS coordinator.

The most obvious achievement of 2002 is the Activities Program. We have an almost bewildering array of opportunities to participate (70 at last count) and many, many members do just that.

During 2002, we had, monthly Field Outings, midweek outings, wader surveys and Club Nights. We took part in Surveys on Regent Honeyeaters, Beach Nesting Birds and Snipe (Painted and Lathams).

We held five camps at the Long Weekends and our seven pelagic expanded our knowledge eastward and provided many ticks.

Club atlasing excursions continued after the end of the main Atlas survey period with Birds Australia support. The program continues into 2003. Many members, as individuals continue to Atlas regularly and add to this great store of knowledge. (The new Atlas Book is due out March 2003.)

Birdwatching combines a fun social hobby with opportunities to contribute to the common good through conservation efforts based on knowledge. Our Atlasing and Survey work are obvious examples of how we usefully add to bird knowledge but potentially every piece of information helps.

I will in a future edition report on our direct conservation activities but the point I make here is that we have an integrated activity (or obsession?) that combines enjoyment with constructive effort -something to value in these troubled times.

Peter Phillips

THE PRESIDENTS'S COLUMN

Late last year came the great news that the Shortland Wetlands had succeeded in becoming a Ramsar site. It will be included with the Kooragang Nature Reserve into what will probably become known as the lower Hunter Wetlands. This ensures that we will always have the Shortland Wetlands with us, and their delightful birds. The fate of the Wetlands Centre itself is another issue however this Ramsar development must surely be good for the Centre's future too.

In late January, and representing HBOC, I went to a reception at the Wetlands Centre to celebrate the new Ramsar listing. Then, in early February, they had an open day for the public for further celebrations. HBOC set up a display there and several of us spent time meeting people who came along and showing them the birds that were around.

It felt good to be able to celebrate such a positive outcome with our friends at the Wetlands Centre.

In December, we completed the production of two brochures describing birdwatching routes around Lake Macquarie. Chris Herbert, in particular did a huge amount of work on this. 2000 of each of the brochures have been printed in colour, with the printing costs covered from a grant we were able to get from Lake Macquarie City Council. Mostly, these will be distributed at community and tourist centres around Lake Macquarie. However, if you would like copies of the two brochures, just ask.

These brochures we hope are only a beginning. Our aim is to have a series of them, covering self-guided birdwatching routes at many locations around the Hunter region. We'd all benefit from having these available, and knowing just where are some good places to go.

The two things that are needed are content and cash. You can help – by suggesting places worth including (and writing a paragraph about them) and, wherever you get the opportunity, trying to persuade you local council that they should be supporting such things.

I'm just completing my 5th year as President of HBOC and it's time for me to step down. "Regime change" is a much-used term at the moment, and now HBOC will be able to have one too! Seriously, though, I think it is healthy for organisations to have change on a regular basis. For HBOC five years is about the norm for the President –we've had five of them in 26 years.

In looking back over what's happened with HBOC over the past 5 years, there have been many achievements and many happy moments – and very few negatives, if indeed there were any. Certainly, I can't think of any of them as I write this. But what comes most strongly to my mind is what a wonderful lot of members that the Club has. So many people are prepared to pitch in and do things – whether it be helping out in some way at meetings, joining in on surveys, writing something for the newsletter, organising or leading an outing ... and so it goes on.

I consider it a privilege to have been the President of such a wonderful Club, and I would like to thank you all for your support over the years. I don't know what I'll do with the extra time I hope I will have but you can be sure that birds, and HBOC will feature strongly.

Happy birding

Alan Stuart
almarosa@bigpond.com

NSW/ACT TWITCHATHON 2002 RESULTS

The results of the 2002 Twitchathon are now final. As usual HBOC were enthusiastic competitors and our teams did pretty well. A personal report of one teams experience come later in this Newsletter.

Frances Czwalinna of Birds Australia did a great job of coordinating the event and the following words are based on her dispatches. Oh, for her energy!

In all 43 teams twitched over the Twitchathon weekend – five in the Main race, 16 in the Champagne section, 11 in the Little Curlews (under 10 years) and 10 in the Dollarbirds (children aged 10-16)

In the main race, it was very close. The winners, “Whacked Out Woodswallows” had two HBOC connections (David Geering, Michael Todd) out of three members – so we claim a moral victory again. They scored 197 species and the Hunter Home Brewers on 196 were close behind. The Hunter Thickheads did well too considering that they restrict themselves to the Hunter Region.

The Champagne Race was won by the Wonga Dongas (from CBOC) with 157.

A little over \$9000 was raised in total for the Cowra Woodlands Birds Program.

It was noticeable that species numbers were down but that some more unusual species were seen. Both effects presumably due to the drier season.

The Junior Twitchathon, (a new event) was, according to Frances, a wonderful experience. The Gould League became involved in the Junior Twitchathon and were an enormous help in promoting the event. There were telephone enquiries from 33 schools and 19 individual children leading to the great entry numbers achieved.

The Wildlife Preservation Society assisted also by offering some of the children’s prizes. It’s good to see these long established organisations still going strong and still relevant.

The Little Curlews category was won by the “Terns” team from Toorima and the Dollarbird category by The Plover Lovers from Wahroonga. The children’s teams were also serious about fundraising with “The Twitchers” from Fairlight raising \$61 (under 10s!) and the Scarlet Robins team from Oaklands raising \$170.50 in the Dollarbird Section.

As well as the heartening numbers of children involved, the Junior sections of the Twitchathon were popular in country NSW building bridges outside the main cities.

Frances Czwalinna is already thinking about the 2003 event. She seeks ideas on a suitable project for fund raising, donated prizes, and of course, in the fullness of time, entries to this fun event.

Frances can be contacted on 02 9872 4185 or at the marvellously named email address of secretarybird@bigpond.com.

Birds of Ash Island

Recently on behalf of HBOC, I produced a report about the birds of Ash Island. This has been sent to various organisations likely to have inputs into development plans for the Hunter Estuary. We need them to be aware of how important Ash Island is as bird habitat.

Since 1980, an arbitrarily chosen date, there have been 181 species recorded on Ash Islands. In the report, I have documented where and when each of these species has been present there. If you would like to have a copy of the report, please contact me.

Alan Stuart 4952 8569.

WALKA WATER WORKS

Field Outing 19 January 2003.

All birdwatchers need to treat themselves to a visit to Walka Water Works. I recommend at least once a year. Of course I can most likely think of a few other places that fit that prescription but not right at this moment. As I write, I'm still excited about the wonderful field outing that 13 lucky birdos enjoyed the other day. What a way to start the New Year.

Walka Water Works naturally features a large body of water that supports good numbers of a wide variety of waterbirds. Diving birds (Grebe, Musk Duck), 'suzzlers' (Black Duck, Pink Eared Duck, Black Swan) and fishers (Cormorant, Darter) all share the resource.

Great sections of the dam are deep but shallow margins away from the wall provide habitat for wading birds (egret, heron) as well. Most of the margins are deliberately left uncleared and this provides good habitat for fringe dwellers like reed warblers and fairy wrens. Surrounding the lake is mostly woodland typically of Spotted Gum, iron bark and a spiky thicket understorey - which Paddy is sure to know the name of.

As you walk around the Lake Trail the visitor has a constant view of the water and all its throng plus the added bonus of woodland treasures on the other hand.

First bird of the day for most of our group was Peregrine Falcon. As soon as we got out of the car our attention was drawn to a large brown bird calling loudly while flying rapidly around the main building., At that instant we were not sure what it might be - but for sure it was a raptor of some description.

Then there were two others, one large, one not so large, and they came charging around the same circuit. These were two adult Peregrine Falcons. It was exciting to watch them as they raced around the building at about roof height, taking rests in the branches of some large trees immediately behind.

The large brown raptor we eventually agreed was a juvenile Peregrine and perhaps (I would like to think) it was having lessons in capturing prey. A little while later one of the adults was seen carrying a bird that resembled a Common Myna.

Eventually we all left the excitement of the car park and headed for the lake to look at birds that forage with more subdued activity. What an amazing sight we saw! One hundred and fifty (yes, someone counted them) pairs of Pink Eared Duck swimming in 'doe-se-doe' circles with heads down, bills submerged, feeding on organisms stirred on by their partners paddling feet.

I couldn't help imagining that some hidden orchestra was playing music that only 'pink-ears' can hear and the ducks were waltzing to the melody. Not having ever witnessed this behaviour before, my first impression was that some kind of pair bonding was taking place or even courtship. But they were all at it! Referring to my field guide I discovered a description of this feeding arrangement. I would like to think that by feeding in pairs like that probably maintains established bonds in any case.

There were plenty of other things floating about and very quickly we discovered the Great Crested Grebe. This is the bird that you always want to see when you go to Walka Water Works. Every time I find them I think what amazing creatures they are and on this occasion there were enough of them to observe some interesting bits of interaction.

When one particular 'pair' approached each other they would hold their heads high on extended necks and circle very slowly.

Another time I was tickled by the actions of one individual as it swam quickly with head down low and held out in front. This grebe was covering the course of the second grebe that was resurfacing from a dive.

The first grebe timed its run to coincide with the second grebe's reappearance so well that its startled mate was forced into a half run, half fly scamper across the water. Laugh? Well you should have been there.

Then we thought we had found a couple of Hoary Headed Grebe but they wouldn't stop diving for even a few seconds so that we could get a proper look at them through the scope. After a bit of work we finally agreed that we had a pair. Later on, of course, we found twenty plus of these birds just sitting all together with some Australasian Grebe. Still, it was terrific to see all three grebe species represented so well on the one body of water.

Another duck that inspired some discussion was a mainly grey non-descript type sitting by itself. A casual look and I was happy to think it was a female Musk Duck. We had seen three individuals earlier and nothing else on the water looks much like it. A closer inspection of the bird revealed a scooped shaped bill and so it could not possibly be what we first thought it was. The Musk Duck bill appears as a strong triangular shape.

A process of elimination finally brought us to the conclusion that we had a female Blue-Billed Duck. Another great find but hardly spectacular as the duck simply tucked its head into its back and bobbed about on the water dozing.

By the time we had all circumnavigated the lake and sat down for late morning tea (that turned into a proper lunch) we had been entertained, delighted and satisfied by a total of 66 bird species. The bush birds included Yellow Thornbill, Pied Butcherbird, Silvereye and a juvenile Golden Bronze Cuckoo. This furtive individual was accidentally discovered when we were chasing down thornbill. It had only a mottled green on its wings and other markings were incomplete but the bird was advanced enough to be able to secure for itself a grub of some description.

After lunch a small group of bird watchers remained and we chose to follow the Bush Trail circuit around a hill at the back of the property. This was a new experience for me and actually I think that this is a section of a fairly recent innovation.

It was late in the day so we were not too surprised that the bush was relatively quiet. Keen observer, Grant Brosie gets the spot to award though for finding two Tawny Frogmouth in a tree 40 metres from the track. A patrolling Collared Sparrowhawk may have been partly responsible for the quiet bush and the subsequent discovery of a Brown Goshawk tells me that there is plenty of small perching birds to be found here. It might be worth the trouble to start a visit to Walka Water Works earlier in the day and to do the bush area first.

Tom Clarke

Stop Press. Since this report Little Bittern have been seen at the site – first by Dick Jenkin and later by Alan Stuart. Directions (as per Alan) are “head clockwise from the main picnic area, along the dam wall and past where the model boats are played with. Continue and after crossing a bridge you're in the general area. Between here and a lookout point where there is a park bench installed, there are a couple of inlets. Get yourself somewhere you can see across into an inlet and cross your fingers”. Worth a look?

GUIDE WANTED

Cumberland Bird Observers Club, from Sydney, is having an outing to the Hunter estuary on April 19 (Easter Saturday) They plan to start at Ash Island at 9.00am and later go on to Stockton Sandspit etc. If anyone would like to join them and show them around, please contact me. They're friendly people looking for a local who can point them to the right places rather than bird expert.

Alan Stuart 4952 8569

NO TRAINS FROM GUNNEDAH – THE BREWERS' STORY.

The Hunter Home Brewers 2002 Twitchathon campaign had a hard act to follow from the outset, following the marvellous efforts of 2001 – when we equalled the previous highest tally by any NSW team. The anticipation of potential victory was so great that it hastily brought Mick Brew back from a world tour of gathering overseas oil. As he arrived back in Oz news filtered of the retreat of the curiously named “CCC” Central Coast team. With their exit a major incentive was lost. So too the dipping of Lady Thickhead, apparently cohorting with the C’s captain on foreign shores. Most devastating of all, however, was the withdrawal of the Raptor Man from the Brewers entourage. What this meant was that that a raptor specialist needed to be recruited and in an ever-cruel twist of fate the other CCC, Farmplough joined the Brewers. Things were dim and all this on top of the heavy drought experienced in NSW at the time meant a dry route would have to be taken.

As is customary, the Brewers arrived at their starting point on the Friday and embarked on a ‘dummy run’ at 4pm. The tally was disappointing, although some key birds were found including Cockatiel, White-Browed Woodswallows, Blue Bonnet, Black Eared Cuckoo, Diamond Firetails and even a single Crimson Chat.

The lead up to 4pm on Saturday was intense, exacerbated by the attempted escape of Farmplough (obviously feeling the heat of the Brewers style) plus a close encounter with a rogue ram plugged tackle-up inside a dog bath. By 3.55 the Brewers were manic, staking out a Hooded Robin that was well-behaved enough to cling to the perch until 4pm. The local Rufous Songlark stopped calling at 3.58 and was never heard from again.

The Indian Peafowls about the homestead were called but obviously not ticked, although 2 NSW teams ended up recording this bird.

A very hard-earned Peregrine Falcon saw the Brewers on the road...but none of the aforementioned birds of the dummy run were to be found again. Constant comparisons with 2001 had the team anxious and was a true test of nerves. Some good birds such as White-Backed Swallow, Little Friarbird and Red-Capped Robin restored composure to the camp and by nightfall 76 species had been recorded. The long journey to night camp saw Tawny Frogmouth and Southern Boobook fall, as well as a flock of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers strangely enough, spotlighted in a puddle in a bare paddock.

The dawn chorus in the rainforest environs revealed the usual suspects including tormenting teases of Superb Lyrebirds! An early exit was made to the fourth consecutive annual targeted search for the Paradise Riflebird - without success. Leaving the rainforest on 106, the Torresian Crow from 2001 was thought to have been nailed to its perch ‘ugghing’ from the identical spot. The numbers were well down, but the “remember the drought” call provided reassurance.

The Brewers then slotted into the well worn path of roadside remnants, creeklines, wetlands and woodlands picking up key species such as Regent Bowerbird, Azure Kingfisher, Brush Cuckoo, Fuscous Honeyeater and White-Winged Triller along the way. A quick visit to a good oil spot saw Banded Lapwing fall (nice!). A first time visit to Pambalong Swamp paid dividends with nice additions such as Pallid Cuckoo, Pink-Eared Duck and a rascally Black-tailed Native Hen. The maiden record of long-time nemesis, Scaly breasted Lorikeet was also penned.....the Brewers were bouncing back!

Spinning into town the customary visit to Newcastle Baths had swimmers gazing in amazement at the bedraggled, binoculared Brewers setting up a tripod and scope and then in unison jumping in the air yelling "there it is!) and packing up and running off again. Ahhhh... nothing like public relations on the Twichathon. Steve's spy of the Little Tern was a masterful stroke and brought deserved recognition from the Farmlough who was heard to mutter "good birding".

Over to Stockton Sandspit where nothing unusual was found, except perhaps for the Thickheads who tried in vain to distract the Brewers attention from the 1000-odd noisy Avocets standing in front of them. Time was ticking (sic) away so the Brewers made for Ash Island where an extremely rushed visit reaped only 4 new birds, including the first Black Shouldered Kite - which was beginning to concern all involved. Another concern bird was to fall at a critically timed visit to the Shortland Tavern to charge the Brewers juices, when a distant calling Common Koel brought pandemonious rejoicing.

Poor timing saw the Brewers arrive at the Wetlands Centre with almost an hour to spare under the belt. Well-worked, some good birds did fall, although none of the three Rail species seen by every other team there on the day - a costly miss as it would turn out. Probably best of all here was the last species ticked, a pair of Freckled Ducks that had the team bursting at the seams to jump skywards but they resisted (*You see, other teams might have noticed, and that would never do. ED*).

Composure regathered, the Brewers joined the collection of teams at the tables for the tallies. Anticipation charged through everyone's veins as the scores were read out.

"The Hunter Home Brewers 196".

The Whacked-out Woodswallows ..197"

NO!!..one bird!!!

As news came to hand that the Rustle Crows from Bellingen had got 195, the Brewers were forced again to play bridesmaid to the Woodswallows. The Thickheads made an admirable 192 and rounded off an incredible cluster of teams at the top. The imminent post-mortems and birds missed were then volleyed about the BBQ area, but plans were already underway for the Brewers 2003 campaign... so be afraid, be very, very afraid.

Jacqueline Winter.

Editors Note

This is obviously a pen name. The habit of secrecy is so ingrained in this team that they won't even tell you who they are! A clue to identity may be gleaned from Pizzey and Knight's on the Jacky Winter "small, confiding grey-brown bird of much charm.....watches from dead trees, stumps, fence posts: wags tail....sings loudly from high branches" Look for this at Club Night. There is, incidentally, no mention in the Field Guide of the gender-confusion indicated by the use of the name Jacqueline.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

Articles for this Newsletter are always welcomed.

Closing date for the next (April/May) edition is 28 March 2003.

Dates for future editions :

June/July: 30 May.

August/ September: 1 August,

October /November: 27 September.

Dec03/Jan04: 30 Jan. 2004.

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OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHTS DECEMBER 2002/JANUARY 2003

2002				
Dec 1	Blue-faced Honeyeater	1	Edgeworth [garden]	Les Walker
	White-winged Triller	1	"	"
Oct 20	Superb Lyrebird	1	Mt. Vincent	P.Freeman
	Superb Lyrebird	1	1k Sth of Mt. Sugarloaf	"
	Spotted Quail-thrush	1	Mt. Vincent	"
	Spotted Quail-thrush	1	Mt. Sugarloaf	"
Oct 27	Brown Songlark	1	Arrowfield	D.Jenkin
	White-browed Babbler	6	White Box Camp	"
	Southern Whiteface	2	"	"
Oct 28	Western Gerygone	2	"	"
	Hooded Robin	Pr	"	"
	Diamond Firetail	1	"	"
	Spotted Quail-thrush	1	"	"
Oct 29	Black-necked Stork	1	Ash Island	N.Livanos
Nov 16	Pacific Baza	2	Nr. Stockrington	P.Freeman
Nov 23	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	187	Lenaghan's Flat	"
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	>100	Pambalong N.R.	"
Nov 23	New-Holland Honeyeater	>50	Nr. Stockrington	"
	White-cheeked Honeyeater	>25	"	"
Nov 22	Hoary-headed Grebe	36	Grahamstown Dam	M.Maddock
	Great Crested Grebe	127	"	"
	Eurasian Coot	342	"	"
	Hardhead	100	"	"
	Whiskered Tern	40	"	"
Nov 25	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	40	S.W.C.	"
Nov	Latham's Snipe	Up to 8	Glen Oak	"
Nov 28	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	25	Richardson Swamp	"
Nov 29	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	60	"	"
Nov 1	Black Bittern	1	Walka Water Works	J.Smart
	Baillon's Crake	2	"	"
	Great Crested Grebe	5	"	"
Nov 21	Golden Whistler	1	Whitebridge	C.Goodenough
Nov 28	Common Koel	1	Belmont	
Nov 16	Eastern Whipbird	1	One Mile Beach	
Dec 7	Dollarbird	1	Valentine	
Dec 17	Nankeen Kestrel	1+ 4dy	"	
Nov 25	Pheasant Coucal	1	Dudley	J.Powers
Dec 7	Latham's Snipe	3	Awabakal Lagoon	"
Nov	Pheasant Coucal	1	Tarro	J.Smith
Dec 4	Pheasant Coucal	1	Failford	"
Nov 24	Common Sandpiper	1	Stockton	G.Brosie
	Sooty Oystercatcher	5	Newcastle Ocean Baths	"
Dec 7	Black-tailed Native-hen	1	S.W.C.	"
	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	8	"	"
Nov 16	Zebra Finch	4+2dy	Bolwarra	"
Nov 20	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	3	Lenaghan's Drive	"
	Black-tailed Native-hen	1	Pambalong N.R.	"
Nov 23	Whiskered Tern	15	Ash Island	J.Goswell
Dec 10	Brown Honeyeater	6	Keinbah	"
Dec 2	Pacific Baza	1	Wangi	D.Johnson
Dec 6	Nankeen Kestrel	2 + 2dy	Newcastle Workers Club	M.Blanch
Dec 11	Buff-banded Rail	1	Shortland [garden]	W.Barden
Nov 12	Gull-billed Tern	35	Stockton Sandspit	A.Lindsey
	Red-capped Plover Nest 2 eggs	2	"	"

Dec 12	Red-caped Plover 2 nd Nest 2 eggs	4	"	"
Nov 6	Grey Plover	1	"	"
Dec 5	Beach Stone-curlew	1	"	"
Dec 7	Turquoise Parrot	1 juv	Pambalong N.R.	"
Nov 30	Black-tailed Native-hen	1	S.W.C.	"
	Wood Sandpiper	1	"	"
	Buff-banded Rail	1	"	"
Oct-Dec	Glossy Black Cockatoo	10+2dy	Wyee Point	V.Moon
Dec	Australian King Parrot	4	"	"
Aug 24	Australian Brush Turkey	1	"	"
Dec 8	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	~400	Pambalong N.R.	A.Morris
	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	20	"	"
	Eastern Curlew	200	Stockton Sandspit	"
	Red-necked Avocet	200	"	"
	Pacific Golden Plover	30	"	"
	Pied Oystercatcher	12	"	"
	Common Sandpiper	1	Stockton [wreck]	"
	Grey-Tailed Tattler	6	Stockton	"
	Whiskered Tern	10	Stockton [ferry wharf]	"
	White-winged Black Tern	1	"	"
Dec 8	Black Bittern	1	Walka Water Works	J.Smart
	Baillon's Crake	2	"	"
	Great Crested Grebe	5	"	"
Dec 4	Wood Sandpiper	1	S.W.C.	A.Lindsey
Dec 5	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	160	"	"
	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	10	"	"
Dec	Red-kneed Dotterel	40	"	"
	Black-fronted Dotterel	Pr + 2dy	"	"
	Buff-banded Rail	1	"	"
Nov 30	Black-tailed Native Hen	1	"	"
Dec 1-5	Red-necked Avocet	~15	Stockton Borehole Swamp	P.Freeman
Dec 7	White-winged Triller	1	S.W.C.	"
	Black-tailed Native-hen	1	S.W.C.	"
Dec 8	Glossy Ibis	32	Lenaghans Flat	"
Dec 26	Brown Songlark	1m	Hinton - Morpeth	"
Dec 27	Little Lorikeet	>50	Tomalpin Woodland	"
Nov 20	Spotted Harrier	1	Phoenix Park {Morpeth}	H.Tarrant
Dec 8	Spotted Harrier	1	Bolwarra	"
	European Goldfinch Nest 3 eggs		Lorn	"
Nov 15	Singing Bushlark	2	Phoenix Park	"
Nov 23	Singing Bushlark	1	Bureen	"
	Singing Bushlark	1	Yarrawa	"
Dec 8	Latham's Snipe	3	Bolwarra	M.Maddock
Dec 6	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	7	Richardson Swamp	"
Dec 5	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	6	Irrawang Swamp	"
Nov 29	Latham's Snipe	1	"	"
Dec 3	Grey-crowned Babbler	2	Glen Oak	"
	Latham's Snipe	4	"	"

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHTS – JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2003

2002				
Dec 5-9	Latham's Snipe	1 – 5	Glen Oak	Max Maddock
2003				
Jan 2	Black-necked Stork	1	Woodberry	A.Hamer
Jan 5	"	2	Grahamstown Dam	A.Stuart
	Freckled Duck	2	S.W.C.	W. Barden
Jan 6	"	2	Walka Water Works	D.Jenkin
	Spotless Crake	1	"	"
	Australian Spotted Crake	1	"	"
	Pink-eared Duck	340	"	"
	Australian Spotted Crake	1	S.W.C.	"
	Stubble Quail	1f	"	"
Jan 7	Gull-billed Tern	60	Stockton Sandspit	T.Clarke
	Pacific Golden Plover	14	"	"
	Common Greenshank	1	"	"

White Rock Camp Weekend 25th – 27th January 2003.

If you travel north through Gresford and continue along the Allyn River Road through Eccleston and into the Chichester State Forest then your getting close. And if you continue along that dusty road through the forest, always following the river upstream towards its headwaters you will finally get to White Rock Camp. It is as far as you are allowed without going through a locked gate. Here you are well and truly within the wet timber and rainforest south of the Barrington Tops and with a nice cool stream to soak in on a hot summer day. It is a wonderful place to wander about and appreciate the birds and other life that is typical of such habitat.

It is also, on a long weekend, very popular with the rest of humanity and we found it a packed and noisy camp area that had to be experienced to be believed. Best thing about that aspect of it was that outside the camp, "in the bush", was peacefully quiet, save the birds and the odd birdwatcher. And the birds were brilliant, of course, plentiful and resembled quite well all that you might expect to find in such a place.

Within easy walking distance from the camp grew three fig trees (3 separate locations) that seemed to be the center of much activity and a quiet sit for an hour at either would produce all manner of fruit eating pigeon and bowerbird. Excellent sightings of Wompoo Fruit-Dove, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Topknot Pigeon, Emerald Dove, Satin Bowerbird and Regent Bowerbird were to be enjoyed by all the fifteen HBOC members that went. Birds would come and go all day to feed on the fig (and other things close by) and interact. One interesting observation was the apparent non-presence of any "black" male Satin or Regent Bowerbirds. So where were they?

A magnificent and very obliging male Paradise Riflebird surely made up for that! This bird hung around for some considerable time while a lucky trio spent every moment admiring its form. It was agreed at the time that the bird was a young male as the iridescent breast and throat had not yet developed. A dull area traced the shape of things to come. I was most impressed by the apparent depth of the velvet black chest and belly of this bird and the way the crown changed colour from green to purple depending on the attitude of its head. That colour in the crown has me a little confused now I read my notes and I would expect this to be the last area of an immature to

gain its markings. So did we have an adult going through a moult? A hint of creamy gape was also discernable and I still need to look up some good texts on the subject to find if this is a clue to the bird's age.

Everything it seemed was eating fruit. If it wasn't fig then it was a variety of berry (black, red, yellow) from various trees and vines unknown to me. Not just the pigeons but King Parrot, Lewin's Honeyeater and Catbird got into the act. Really, I don't know why I just didn't go and set up camp next to one of those trees and had a completely quiet and lazy time of it.

Well I would have missed out on many an encounter with Superb Lyrebird for a start. These birds occupied most of the ground up and down the river wherever you went. Many birds were practicing (and some obviously needed the practice) renditions of all the usual bird calls like Grey Shrike Thrush, Whipbird, Pied Currawong, Crimson Rosella, Laughing Kookaburra etc interspersed with plenty of energetic rhythmic roaring punctuated with a penetrating "crik". Some birds managed the odd Satin Bowerbird, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Golden Whistler and Lewin's Honeyeater. I was most pleased with myself when by the end of the three days I had actually found real individuals representing all those mimicked calls. Also on my wanderings I couldn't believe my luck in finding three separate lyrebird arenas. All three were just over 1m in diameter and slightly mounded to the center. I know for sure that at one arena two (young?) males had been calling just prior to my discovery.

If you wanted to choose the most dominant bird call of the forest then you might not go past that of the Black-crowned Monarch. Although not always visible this bird seemed to be everywhere. Even back at the camp where its whistle had to compete with coughing kids and adults behaving badly. In the quiet time of pre-dawn, each morning chorus was ushered in with a few calls from a Noisy Pitta. This bird must have been so close to my camp because it woke me each morning. Well I missed out on actually seeing the bird myself but others (probably most of our group) managed a glimpse or two of an immature bird lurking in the forest immediately out of the camping area.

It wasn't the only immature bird sighted that weekend. Eastern Yellow Robin, Yellow-throated Scrub Wren, Large-billed Scrub Wren, Superb Fairy-wren and Regent Bowerbird all had young but independent individuals getting about the place.

Other birds that caught my imagination and some discussion were the thrushes. By the second day it became evident that the presence of both Russet-tailed and Bassian Thrush was a real possibility. There are two main patches of rainforest close to the camp and a sit down in either always produced a thrush. I was able to get quite a few good looks and many other doubtful looks at possibly five individual birds. It was a great opportunity to develop some identification skills with these species and after some discussion with other more experienced members of our group I was happy to report that both species can be seen at White Rock Camp.

Tom Clarke

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	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
Saturday Feb 15	Hunter Wader Survey	8.00am. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 <u>You must ring to confirm</u>
Saturday Feb 22	Atlassing Mt Royal National Park	7am Maitland Railway Station	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 <u>You must ring to confirm</u>
Sunday Feb 23	Field Outing Stanhope Creek	7.30am. Rutherford MacDonalds Car Park	Sue Hamonet 4958 1023
Sunday March 2	Clean Up Australia Day	9.00am to 1.00pm Stockton Sandspit	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday March 4	Mid Week Outing Waika Water Works.	7.30am. Car Park Waika Water Works.	Nick Livanos 4954 5739
Wednesday March 12	Club Night	7.30PM Shortland Wetland Centre	Speaker: Chris Herbert Digiscoping Birds
Saturday March 15	Hunter Wader Survey	7.00am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 c
Saturday March 22	Atlassing Bulga area	7:30am Broke Fire Station	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 <u>You must ring to confirm</u>
Sunday March 23	Field Outing Kooragang Island	8.00am Ash Island Car Park	Di Johnson 4975 1777
Saturday March 29	Pelagic Trip	6.00am Swansea Wharf	Richard Baxter 4954 0212
Tuesday April 1	Mid-Week Outing Colongra	8.00am Basford Road, Munmorah	Don Moon 4359 1670
Saturday April 5	Pelagic Trip	6.00am Swansea Wharf	Richard Baxter 4954 0212
Sunday April 6	Hunter Wader Survey	11.00am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 <u>You must ring to confirm</u>
Wednesday April 9	Club Night	7.30pm Shortland Wetland Centre	Guest Speaker: John Carpenter Newhaven Station
Easter weekend Friday April 18 th – Monday April 21 st	Easter Camp	Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve Honeyeater Flat	Diane Johnson 49575 1777
Anzac Weekend Friday April 25 th – Sunday April 27 th	Anzac Camp	Craven State Forest	Alan Stuart 4952 8569