

NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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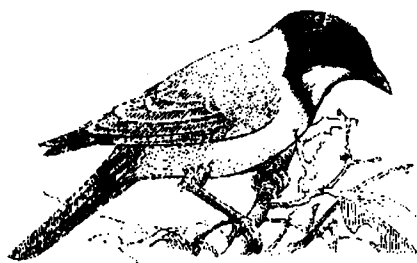
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Secretary: Tom Clarke

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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

2004 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

<u>Edition</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
April/May	3 April 2004
June/July	29 May 2004
August/September	31 July 2004
October/November	2 October 2004
December/January	27 November 2004

Newsletter articles are always welcome however, as a guide, could contributors try to confine themselves to 1000 words or less.

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Membership Fees

HBOC Annual Membership fees are \$22 Family or Single and \$3 for Juniors.

Fees for 2004 are due now.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN. 2

Summer storms are thundering the background as I write this column, and I wonder what the consequences of gale flows down the Darling will be for birds this year? Already the Red-necked Avocets have largely disappeared from the Hunter Estuary, presumably flocking inland to breed. They may not return for a while.

During February and March, many of the migratory waders will begin to don colourful breeding plumage, before flying off to their northern hemisphere breeding grounds from late March. Stockton Sandspit is an ideal place to view the waders; at high tide many waders roost within the lagoon on the sandspit, while the sandflats in front of the sandspit are important feeding and roosting areas as the tide falls. Recently, two small waders that have not been seen in the Hunter Estuary for several years, were spotted at the sandspit: the Broad-billed Sandpiper and the Lesser Sand Plover (formerly known as the Mongolian Plover). Only three individuals of each species were seen, but it's wonderful to know that they have returned.

During December, a Shorebird Conference was held in Canberra, following the Australasian Ornithological Congress. Speakers were invited from many places along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Russia and Alaska. Their illustrated talks provided fascinating glimpses of the 'other life' lived by our shorebirds when they head north, as well as some of the challenges they face as we continue to claim their habitat for human use. It was particularly thrilling to see the vast undulating hills of the Alaskan tundra where willow trees are only 10 cm tall and the Bar-tailed Godwits nest amidst dense stunted vegetation with snow drifts nearby! Insects and berries are important food sources during the breeding season. Volunteers are needed each year to help conduct surveys of the nesting birds – prerequisites are the ability to hike, tolerate intense insect activity and learn to identify the local species. If you're interested, I'll put you in touch with Bob Gill of the US Geological Survey who conducts the surveys.

The HBOC Conservation Committee, convened by Ann Lindsey last year as development pressures increased in the estuary, has met for a second time. The first EIS associated with the Austeel steel mill project, for proposed Dredging in the South Arm of the Hunter River, was released in November. Neil Fraser and Max Maddock wrote an excellent submission on the EIS, focussing on potential detrimental effects to birds and their habitat if the proposal goes ahead. Two more EIS's are expected in the near future, covering a proposed infrastructure corridor across Ash Island and the Austeel mill at Tomago. These will require lots more critical comment and review. If you want to be involved in conservation please contact Ann.

On a brighter note, Chris Herbert has prepared Newcastle Birding Route No. 1 for Ash Island. This brochure is being sponsored by the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project and is currently with the printers. Chris has also prepared two illustrated signs for Stockton Sandspit, on migratory and non-migratory waders. These are being reviewed by National Parks and funded by a Coastcare Grant.

Meanwhile, keep a lookout for Black-necked Storks in the Hunter Region and check them out for coloured bands on their legs – any reports will help Greg Clancy in his study of their behaviour and breeding success.

Another local site that often provides interesting bird sightings is Walka Water Works near Maitland. Recently, a Lewins Rail and a Spotless Crake were seen at the edge of reeds in sheltered bays at the Rutherford end of the water body. Very early morning is the best time to view.

As the new year arrives, I would like to thank the Committee for their hard work, enthusiasm and support during 2003. Phil Rankin, Tom Clarke, Rowley Smith, Ann Lindsey, Alan Stuart, Steve Roderick, Mick Roderick, Nick Livanos, Jenny Powers, Di Johnson, Chris Herbert and Sue Hamonet combined to keep this club running smoothly. Long may it continue!

Happy birding, Liz Crawford

More Than A Load Of Old Rubbish.

Clean Up Day at Stockton Sand Spit

7th March 2004

Stockton Sand Spit has become the weekly meeting place of three particularly lucky fellows who have developed a strong and caring association with the place and its birds. To date over 180 hours of work have been logged keeping the weeds at bay and observing the wader movements. Unfortunately, other people less caring have taken to degrading the site. Not only is occasional rubbish left lying about but the wholesale dumping of rubbish has increased. So what can we do about it?

Every Clean Up Day, HBOC gets working at Stockton Sand Spit and all previous efforts have been outstanding. I would be very pleased to see as many people as possible join in with us for this year's Clean Up Australia Day. Once you've made the commitment it's just so easy.

So check your diaries and mark **Sunday 7th March** and more importantly turn up on the day and help out. I've said it before:

"Where else can you do your bit for the environment (pick up rubbish), help maintain valuable habitat (pull weeds) and go bird watching all at the same time?"

Come dressed for work (you decide on how hard or how long) stay hydrated, wear a sun hat, gloves and strong shoes. You must register at the car park (under the bridge) and receive further instructions before you start. If you plan to do weeding, a small pick is sufficient to remove weeds from sand. Also bring your own morning tea/lunch etc but there will be water for drinking and washing up.

Clean Up Day officially starts at 9.00am but I will be there from 7.00am watching the waders come in to roost (1.81m high tide at approx 9.52am). Hope to see you there.

Tom Clarke

4951 3872 or 0418 411 785 on the day.

3. New Members

Hunter Bird Observers Club welcomes the following new members to the Club. We hope to see you often at Club Nights and at Outings and Camps.

Corey Hughes of Arcadia Vale
Hal Wootton and Gillian Cowlshaw
of Hawks Nest
Trent Bagnall of Rankin Park (welcome back)

Library – New Additions

The Club has recently acquired the following new books:

Parrots of Australia by M McNaughton

New Atlas of Australia Birds (Birds Australia)

Members are reminded that they are entitled to borrow books, videos, DVDs tapes and slides from the Clubs libraries at Club Nights. A few important reference books may have restrictions in terms of the duration of loans. If you are unsure of lending procedures ask the Librarian or a Committee member.

BLACK- NECKED STORK RESEARCH

As mentioned in the President's Column, Greg Clancy from the Coffs Harbour area is currently doing his Ph. D. on the biology and behaviour of Black-necked Storks in NSW. In early November, Greg colour-banded two nestling storks at Bulahdelah. He placed a blue band on each leg of one of the birds. On the other he put a blue band on the left leg and a yellow band on the right leg. The bands are on the tibia (above the "knee") Greg thought the storks probably wouldn't fledge until about Christmas time and then would probably stay in the vicinity of the nest for a couple of months. Greg would appreciate any sightings of colour –banded storks Sightings can be sent direct to Greg on gclancy@tpg.com.au or you can pass the information to a Committee member for forwarding.

COASTAL SALTMARSH

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Late last year, HBOC wrote to the NSW Scientific Committee of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in the following terms..

“Re: Coastal Saltmarsh – Proposed endangered ecological community listing.

The Hunter Bird Observers Club has an obligation to protect the habitat of the many migratory shorebirds that visit our area each year. For many years HBOC members have been involved in various actions to preserve or re-establish suitable shorebird habitat primarily in the Hunter Estuary. Several threatening processes have combined to alter the nature of this estuary and its ability to feed and shelter these birds.

One of the most important habitats for the shorebirds is saltmarsh in its various forms. Saltmarsh is used extensively for feeding as well as being the preferred night-time roost for several species. The saltmarsh areas of the Hunter Estuary have suffered greatly from industrial developments in the past and the threatening process of isolation and fragmentation continues.

It gives HBOC great heart to learn that the NSW Scientific Committee have made the preliminary determination to list coastal saltmarsh as an endangered ecological community. Points of particular focus to HBOC are listed in the Committee's findings, especially parts 4,6,8,9,10,11,12,17 & 18.

HBOC fully supports the proposed ecological community listing, as it will provide yet further evidence to the already strong arguments for the preservation of these dwindling saltmarsh areas.

Tom Clarke
Hon. Secretary”

HUNTER REGION BOTANIC GARDENS

An Invitation

Have you ventured inside the gates of the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens recently?

Here you will find 140 hectares of mostly preserved natural bushland. A non-profit company of volunteers is responsible for designing, developing and managing the Gardens. They have transformed the immediate surroundings of the Visitor Centre to display Australian as well as exotic plants. There are also Botanical Theme Gardens to explore. Devonshire teas, light lunches and refreshments are served daily or you may like to picnic on the lawns.

The Gardens were dedicated in May 1986 and the volunteers with the help of members and sponsors have achieved a pleasant tranquil place that is popular with visitors.

Of interest to Hunter Bird Observers Club members is the total of 99 bird species that have been recorded on the site. (help us reach the 100)

Volunteers are always needed to help in the development and maintenance of the Gardens. If you would like to participate and enjoy the bush surroundings while doing so please phone 4987 1655 any Monday or Tuesday for details.

Long-standing members of the Club may be interested to know that this information was sent by Dorothy Raine Director of Administration at the Gardens, who as Dot Bates was one of the original members of HBOC.)

NOISY MINERS

Recently, two people from the leafy Newcastle suburbs of Adamstown Heights and Merewether had letters printed in two separate newspapers. Both writers expressed dismay at the large numbers of Noisy Miners dominating their neck of the woods, and the negative effect these are having on bird diversity in their area. Why is this so?

The presence of Noisy Miners is ultimately due to the structure of the suburban landscape. In the more leafy suburbs, many yards contain a single large gum tree. On a larger scale, many yards containing a gum tree result in a rudimentary open woodland being created from a bird's perspective. Noisy Miners thrive in this habitat.

The suburb of Bar Beach also has many large trees, with a lot of open space in between. Because few of the trees are eucalypts, however, there are no Noisy Miners. I have observed Yellow-rumped Thornbills flitting around in parkland in this suburb.

With increased environmental awareness in the community, more people are planting natives in their garden. They go off to the nursery or plant section. They look for the natives section, and invariably it is saturated with long-flowering hybrid grevilleas like "Robyn Gordon" and "Honey Gem". Planting a row of these plants in an area that already contains Noisy Miners is

like opening a McDonald's for them: it's a year-round supply of cheap sugar.

In south-eastern Australia, small birds only like gum trees if they are part of a continuous canopy in a forest. Most small birds thrive in habitats where there are pockets of dense cover in which they can find refuge from predators and aggressive birds like Noisy Miners.

The letter writer from Merewether wrote that even though his garden is almost full of natives, he cut down a large thicket of lantana and lost his resident whipbirds, sparrows, wrens, thornbills and visiting silvereyes.

I cannot think of any native plants that provide a better refuge for Fairy-wrens, and are available in nurseries, than lantana. Native substitutes to lantana for small bird habitat include the Tuckeroo (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*) and the Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*).

Note: This was written with the assumption that Noisy Miners are "bad" and small birds are "good". This is not necessarily true. It all depends on what you like.

Colin Goodenough

Advocates Of Unpredictable Behaviour

Ever since the migratory shorebirds left the Hunter Estuary at the end of April last year I have had the pleasure of sharing many days of weeding at Stockton Sand Spit with a couple of great mates. Of course we have not spent the entire time, head-down arse-up, weeding – and many hours have been spent observing the movements of the waders as well as other behaviours that catch our eye.

One particular species that is almost impossible to go undetected is the Red-necked Avocet. These birds have become an integral part of Stockton Sand Spit and many non-birding people have demonstrated to me their excitement to see so many. People who travel over the Stockton Bridge regularly have been able to see the dramatic increase of these birds during the past winter and they are impressed with the news that the avocet roost on the sand spit after feeding elsewhere over the low tide.

Now only if it was always that simple - roost on the sand spit over the high tide and feed on the exposed mud flat of the estuary over the low tide. Down on the ground we have discovered that this simple notion doesn't always apply. Well certainly at the sand spit end of the equation in any case. The fact is that things are never the same on each visit and only time and many more observations will make it easier to predict these things. There are so many variables, it seems, and the story of the avocets to date is one of continuous change. By the way, it's the same for the sand spit itself but that's another story.

During the last winter a great influx of avocet occurred. In May we were quite happy admiring about 1300 birds that would fly down the river as the tide was rising and make their way to the sand spit. Around 6 major groups of birds would arrive over about 2 hours and land on the beach. Then in the same groups (it is presumed) they would come over the berm and land on the lagoon. This last leg would take about 30 minutes from first group to last group.

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After some settling down that would be that and it was roosting time over the high tide. That was what we saw and recorded and we were happy with it but over the weeks it dawned on us that other things were going on as well. Since July we have been keen to observe more comings and goings and our skill at observing is developing a more intimate knowledge of the sand spit in general.

What we could see now was that each group of avocet was not totally influenced by the behaviour of the next. Some groups would fly in to the beach, others would go direct to the lagoon and each would take their own time to settle. Occasionally a raptor might put all the birds up and then they would fly as a great swirling single mass but back on the ground each group had its own agenda. Back and forth from beach to lagoon each group would go with apparent jitters about the place. Eventually settling on the lagoon with some individuals making time to do some late feeding prior to roosting. This was the case until numbers increased to over 5000.

By the start of August we were recording about 7000 birds and things were extremely interesting. Early groups seen flying down the river would at this time give the sand spit a great big miss and go over the dykes. We presume they were going to feed at the still exposed sections behind the dykes where other waders are known to stage prior to roosting. Later groups flying down the river would come down to the sand spit beach. Later still, when the beach birds had completed their to and fro manoeuvres, those behind-the-dyke birds would be seen flying across the river to join them. I can imagine that with so many birds feeding in the estuary that some birds may need additional feeding time to be satisfied.

By mid-August the birds had changed their preference and basically chose not to roost on the lagoon at all. During this time all the birds would finally amass on the beach.

On at least one occasion we witnessed avocet swimming in front of standing birds rather than stand on the lagoon. Another day a small group (<200) were standing on the lagoon until a raptor put everything up. When all had settled they had all gone to the beach.

During the time of the great numbers the avocet became a target of the local Peregrine Falcon. We had witnessed this raptor previously buzzing the roosting flock as they stood on the lagoon. Reports of avocet feathers found at a known Peregrine nest site, confirmed that avocet was on the menu. It may be that the lagoon held bad memories for recent arrivals. On the other hand, we were recording the non-preference of the lagoon by other shorebirds (over wintering godwits) so who knows what was going on? Interference by weed gathering fishermen perhaps - lets see what happens next year.

The falling tide movements, on the other hand, were mostly predictable. First movement of the birds was from lagoon to beach (in groups) then later (in groups) they would take off and fly up the river. Whether they were roosting on the lagoon or the beach didn't matter; the take-off point was the beach. During August it was noted that several avocet were not flying up the river but choosing to hang around the exposed mud flats off the beach and around the mangroves. Not great numbers (<50) persisted and the interesting thing about these birds was that they were feeding in pairs. Was this also going on elsewhere in the estuary? No courtship or mating behaviour has been recorded but we may have missed it since we didn't get on site for the next two and a half months due to other commitments. Mid-December records show that nil avocet were hanging around over the low tide and that's been the case ever since.

Since then it has been apparent that avocet numbers are dwindling; 3000 birds only could be accounted for in mid-December, 2000 only on Christmas Eve and down to 1500 roosting in early January. By my reckoning that's possibly 2500 pairs off to breed somewhere in the outback.

Just recently, we witnessed some other swimming behaviour of these most interesting birds. As previously mentioned, some birds take time to feed at the lagoon when they first arrive. The method is straight forward enough – walk around the shallows and swish bills from side to side. So the other day we were entertained by avocet that chose to swim about, ducking like teal with tails (and legs) in the air. When these birds swim they float in a forwards attitude with the base of their necks and chests submerged - the tail end is already pointing higher than horizontal. To add to this lunacy two Black-winged Stilt (sensible birds) came walking past as they fed. So why couldn't the avocet do the same? They're just so unpredictable.

Tom Clarke

RECENT RESEARCH

(New Scientist 15/11/03 No.2421 Page 17)

Cassowaries produce calls at the lowest known frequency of any bird, emitting deep sounds similar to those made by whales. Biologist Andrew Mack of the New York based Wildlife Conservation Society teamed up with whale researcher Josh Jones of the Scripps Oceanographic Institute in San Diego to record the deep booming calls of wild and captive cassowaries in Papua New Guinea. They discovered that some of the sounds were barely audible to humans. At frequencies as low as 23 hertz the calls nearly dip into the infrasound range. The Cassowary's sonograms are very similar in structure to those of blue whales.

Low frequency sounds travel better than high-pitched ones over long distances and through dense wet rainforest. It takes a big animal to produce such deep sounds, and the cassowary stands up to 2 metres tall and can weigh as much as 58 kilograms. But the researchers suspect it is the bird's distinctive bony helmet or casque on its blue head that allows it to receive calls from others. The casque which is covered in keratin and filled with air pockets, may act like a microphone picking up low frequency sound waves, says Jones. "Its like a big microphone stuck on the top of this animal's head"

THE STORY OF LISA

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Lisa, a Freckled Duck duckling died not long after hatching – but was miraculously resurrected!

Before becoming involved with Lisa's story, the reader needs to know a little of the basic care (learnt from bitter experiences) given to newly hatched ducklings at The Wetlands Centre in Newcastle. One of the very first lessons we learned was that young fluffy ducklings bouncing about on top of the water like little bobbing corks, attract voracious eels intent on a gourmet meal of succulent tender ducklings. Although not ideal, we initially reacted to this very quickly by removing the ducklings after hatching and hand rearing them. Recently however, it has been our practice to remove the mother with her ducklings and placing them in an 'in care' situation in a restricted area. The mother is able to brood her ducklings and oversee their general care and ensure that they learn appropriate Freckled Duck behaviour.

As most of our ducklings in the early days, seemed to be mainly of the male gender and there were few females in the whole of the captive breeding program, it was decided to give feminine names to any ducklings in the hope our luck would turn (actually it did).

Another lesson learned was that when mothers are placed 'in care' in close proximity to other Freckled Ducks (albeit in another section of the enclosure) they do not settle nor brood their newly hatched young. Probably they are very unsettled in their new and unfamiliar surroundings, and are either aggressively trying to protect their new ducklings (to the detriment of the ducklings). Or so intent on joining others of their kind (they seem happier in small groups), that they pace back and forth along the separating fence-line. The ducklings (needing to be brooded and kept warm) are neglected, trampled and tumbled over time and again whilst the mother paces agitatedly and relentlessly up and down trying to rejoin her cohorts. To counter this behaviour of the mother, all other ducks are now removed from visual and vocal contact and relocated elsewhere so the new mother is able to settle and focus on her babies. That's the background – now to the story.

Vikki, one of our Shortland bred females, laid a clutch of 4 eggs and after stoically sitting for the 28 day incubation period, only **one** duckling hatched. Although it was raining, the knowledge that eels were lurking beneath the surface of the pond gave us incentive to capture both mother and her new duckling. Observations of both in their new restricted location gave us cause for concern as, still raining, the mother paced up and down the fence-line, stumbling over the duckling. The duckling was now getting quite wet, and as the main (human) carer had a meeting to attend, both mother and duckling were placed into an even smaller roofed brooder cage as a precaution.

Three hours later the mother was seen to be preening and alone. Where was the duckling? On the floor of the brooder was a dark smudge, which upon investigation, was a blob of saturated down – the duckling! When picked up the duckling was lifeless, hanging limply, unconscious and to all intents dead. Reflecting upon what to do next – whether to dispose of the body or keep it for a museum specimen, the little wing stub gave the tiniest of twitches which was thought to be a reflex movement.

For some reason I held the little body in both hands and felt the surge of a heart beat from its tiny heart. That must be its very last heart beat I thought. With nothing to lose (the duckling was dead in my opinion) it was wrapped up and placed under a brooder lamp without any expectations. Every time it was checked there was the barest sign of life. Several hours later, under the heat of the lamp, was a perfectly dry and downy, very much alive duckling.

The problem now was getting mother and babe together – the mother would have to accept the duckling after the separation and brood it for it to survive. Early next morning the duckling was placed in the same (now larger) enclosure with the mother to see what would happen. As soon as the mother heard the tiny peeping calls of the duckling she emerged from her shelter and swam straight over to the duckling giving her special call. All looked rosy as she took the duckling to the furthestmost section of the enclosure.

However, observations throughout the day revealed that she did not attempt to brood the duckling at all – a matter of grave concern.

The duckling was then removed for night care under the brooder lamp and returned again to the mother next morning. Vikki again went straight to the duckling and it was heart warming to see their interactions. A big sight of relief, as during the day, Vikki was seen to brood the duckling AT LAST. That night the duckling was left in her care and all has been well since.

Initially the duckling was to be called Lazarus (as 'in Lazarus back from the dead') –however, with our strategy of giving female names it was decided to name the duckling Lisa (after a young lass who was keenly involved in a study of the Freckled Duck for her University project). That's Lisa's story – the miracle duckling!

Footnote: At five months of age it was quite obvious that there needed to be a name change – to match the gender - so the duckling is now, once again, called Lazarus.

An update: Lazarus has turned out to be a most handsome male Freckled Duck and has recently been sporting his glowing red bill. He has also recently been relocated to a 'carer' in the far south along with a number of our Freckled Ducks. The Centre will now have a total of eight Freckled Ducks in their care.

Wilma Barden.

As noted by Wilma, the Wetland Centre is maintaining a small flock of Freckled Ducks for educational purposes whilst allowing the others to go South to another dedicated "carer"

This also marks the end of six and a half years voluntary supervision of the Freckled Ducks by Wilma. Although many others have helped, Wilma has been the mainstay and driving force in the project during that period, keeping the ducklings alive and breeding at all hours of the night and in all kinds of weather.

Thanks, Wilma.

Geoff Nichols and Sue Wright, grounds personnel at the Wetlands Centre now have responsibility for the reduced flock.

BOOK REVIEW

DEAD PARROT by John Huxley

A novel with a difference: a bird-watcher thriller set in largely in Sydney. It combines a suspenseful read with astute insights into the life of the city and the world of bird-watching.

When the partially –clothed body of a TV wildlife documentary-maker, popularly known as "The Birdman" is found by early morning birdwatchers on a notorious Sydney beach, it looks very much like he has fallen from the sky. But forensic tests show he was brutally bashed and then buried alive.

Police searching for his killer are drawn inexorably into the world of birdwatchers. There they are surprised to find some people with precious reputations, professional jealousies and passions that can still be aroused by long-ago rows over the existence of elusive birds, such as the mysterious Night Parrot.

John Huxley is associate editor of the Sydney Morning Herald and a senior writer for the paper, The Age and for the Good Weekend. He has written several books on subjects ranging from British industry to Australian cricket. Dead Parrot is his first venture into fiction. Proceeds from sales of this book will go to Birds Australia.

DEAD PARROT, 263 pp is published by Walla Walla Press price \$24.95. It will be available at selected bookshops and from the publishers at PO Box 717, Petersham 2049

For more details phone/fax 02 9560 6902 or email ascmail@zipworld.com.au.

This book review is now bleeding demised, bereft of life, its metabolic processes are now history, kicked the bucket, run down the curtain and joined the bleeding choir invisible, it has shuffled off its mortal coil, gone to meet its maker, ceased to be, fallen off the perch.....(apologies to Monty Python)

BIRDS AUSTRALIA

ADVANCE NOTICE OF MAJOR NEWCASTLE EVENT IN 2004

Members Day and Annual General Meeting
Saturday 29 May 9.am to 5.30pm.

General Purpose Building
Callaghan Campus
University of Newcastle

Conference Themes

“Managing the Lower Hunter Valley Wetlands
for Waterbirds”

and “Birds Australia:
Achievements & Future Directions”

Conference Dinner at University 7.pm.

Registration: Members \$50
Students/Concessions \$40,
Non-members \$60. Dinner \$40

Estuary Boat Tours, Swansea Pelagic Trip and
Bus Tours to Important Wetlands planned.

Jointly organised & sponsored by
SNAG and HBOC

For further information contact Lise Hobcroft,
Bird Australia (SNAG)
Phone 02 9436 0388. Fax 02 9436 0466
Email rosella63@bigpond.com.

A further update on this event will appear in the
next edition of HBOC Newsletter.

NB. The Snag AGM and Scientific Day will be
held 3 April in Sydney – see Flyer below

THE WETLAND CENTRE

A Sustainable Future for the Wetland Centre

Members will remember that the TWC Board is pursuing a three stage strategic plan involving the sale of 2 ha of surplus land, a possible partnership with NPWS and establishing TWC as the Gateway to a Lower Hunter Conservation Park.

I am now able to report that the sale of the land is complete. The exact price is dependent on the extent to which Newcastle City Council approves a Development Application but in any event is substantial.

The land will be developed into a residential, community-title subdivision with a mix of housing styles. The architect is an Award Winning well-known local firm who design environmentally sensitive housing with an “eco-feel.”

Sale proceeds will be used to pay off a large long term debt, conduct urgent maintenance and upgrades to onsite facilities and to pursue marketing opportunities. The remainder will be invested for a fixed term.

Interest from this investment will provide TWC with an additional income stream for many years to come, in effect diminishing our negative financial position.

We will still need the energy and assistance of our many members and supporters in the future but this sale means long term financial sustainability for TWC!

The other two issues – partnership and the Gateway concept are still on the agenda and require more thought and consultation in the future. Importantly, the financial health of the Centre will allow it to negotiate from strength if this is required.

LONG DISTANCE TRAVELLERS WAVING THE FLAG

Whenever you're watching waders, look out for flags or bands on their legs. They can be difficult to see as roosting birds often tuck one leg up out of sight, or mill around with lots of mates,

During the wader counts we sometimes spot a flagged bird and send details off to the Australian Wader Studies Group c/- Clive Minton email: mintons@ozemail.com.au. Clive sends back exciting news about these decorated birds. On Kooragang Dykes late last year we saw a Bar-Tailed Godwit with a green flag above an orange band. This bird had been flagged in Yalu-Jiang Reserve on the Yellow Sea in China in April 2002.

Curlew Sandpipers and Red Knots with bright orange flags have been banded in Victoria sometime since January 1990. It's always wonderful to have confirmation of the spectacular avian migrations that occur each year on our doorstep.

Liz Crawford

BACK FROM THE DEAD?

The New Zealand Herald has reported sightings of the New Zealand Storm Petrel (*Oceanites maorianus*). A flock of up to 20 were seen off Little Barrier Island in December.

The bird species was previously thought extinct – for over 100 years – and it is supposed that perhaps elimination of predators from one of the many islands in the Hauraki Gulf or off the Coromandel Peninsula may have resulted in a population surviving.

The sightings are not yet officially confirmed. The rare birds committee of the New Zealand Ornithological Society is examining evidence including photographs, comparing these with skins from museums, and attempting to exclude a colour variation of a similar species.

CUTTING BILLS

Q. How do puffins hold a dozen or so fish in their beaks? How do they get them all in a neat line and avoid cutting them in two?

A. Puffins can catch more fish when they already have some in their bills because they hold those already caught in place with their tongues. The fish are not severed because they are not gripped by the sharp edges of the bill.

Birds' tongues are more useful for this purpose than mammals' because they are stiffer. They are supported by a bony skeleton and are often adorned with spines and other protuberances that make it easier to grip food. As a result many species share the puffins ability to deliver several prey items to the nest in one visit.

Birds stiff yet flexible tongues are used in all sorts of other ways. The tongue is the basis of the pump action that flamingos use to filter feed. A woodpecker can push its tongue deep into tunnels in trunks to capture a grub. Watch a canary feeding on millet: it uses its mandible to crack the outer husk, then holds the seed between the edges of its mandibles and rotates it by using its tongue, so that the thick outer husk as well as the inner papery coat on the seed is removed.

J Greenwood. Director British Trust for Ornithology (New Scientist September 6 2003.)

PIGEONS TAKE THE ROUNDABOUT ROUTE HOME.

The Sydney Morning Herald(6/2/04) reports a British study that appears to show that many homing Pigeons follow roads rather than flying "as the crow flies" on routes covered before.

Their behaviour includes flying around roundabouts before choosing the exit that will lead them back to their loft. The scientists speculate that other urban birds – eg Crows -may also track man made features.



**The Birds Australia 2004
Sydney Seminar**



**“One of the greatest environmental challenges
facing humanity in the future will be the
integration of conservation with production in
the same landscape.....”**

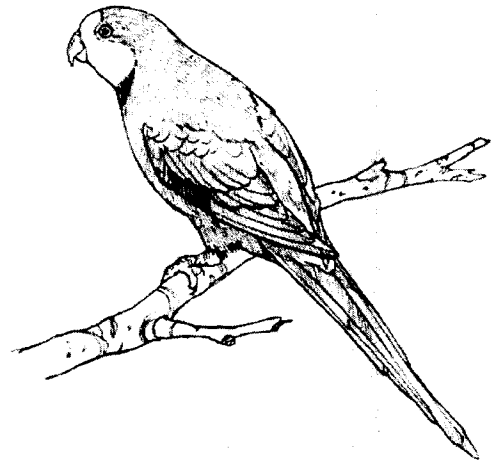
“Who’s a Pretty Boy then?”
Parrots and Cockatoos in NSW and beyond...

Parrots and Cockatoos are among Australia’s
iconic species and yet while some populations
increase others are threatened with extinction.

This seminar will look at some of the issues
affecting the parrots and cockatoos of NSW.

Discussion will include:

- ⇒ population trends and their meaning
- ⇒ case studies: Superb, Swift and Night Parrots
- ⇒ management strategies and the role of the volunteer
- ⇒ the integration of conservation with production in our
landscapes.



SPEAKERS:

Dr Walter Boles
Dr Jim Hone
Matt Cameron
Debbie Saunders
Adrian Manning
John Huxley

Australian Museum
University of Canberra
NSW Dept of Environment and Conservation
NSW Dept of Environment and Conservation
Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRESS), ANU
Associate Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald

CONCLUDING SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION:

Chair: Professor Henry Nix

National President, Birds Australia.

WHERE:

Norman Nock Lecture Theatre,
Royal North Shore Hospital, Pacific Highway, St Leonards, 2065

WHEN:

Saturday 3rd April, 2004 commencing at 1.30 p.m.

COST:

Birds Australia Members: \$25, Non-members \$30, Students/concessions \$20

CONTACT: Birds Australia Sydney Office: email: rosella63@bigpond.com

Ph: 02 9436 0388, Fax: 02 9436 0466, PO Box 1322, Crows Nest, 1585

Registrations and payment must be received by the 29th March, 2004.

Receipts will be issued at the seminar.

Sketch of Superb Parrot reproduced with thanks to the Birds Australia New Atlas of Australian Birds

Proudly sponsored by the Wildlife Preservation Society.

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	MEET	CONTACT
Saturday February 21	Atlassing Mt Sugarloaf area.	7.00am Top car park, Mt Sugarloaf	Leader: Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 You must ring to confirm
Sunday February 22	Field Outing Old Brush, Brunkerville \$5 per car entry	9.00am Mulbring Sports Ground	Contact: Di Johnson 4975 1777
Tuesday March 2	Mid Week Outing Cooranbong and Mandalong	7.30am Western Side Morrisset exit off Freeway	Leader: Don Moon 4359 1670
Saturday March 6	Hunter Wader Survey	9.00am Various Locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Sunday March 7	Clean Up Australia Day	9am to 1pm Stockton Sandspit	Site Supervisor: Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Wednesday March 10	Club Meeting.	7.30pm Wetland Centre	Speaker: Chris Herbert – Cape York
Sunday March 14	Singleton Group Outing. Hillsdale Orchard	10.00am Corner Putty & Thompson's Road, Milbrodale	Contact: Diane Lamb 02 6574 5205
Saturday March 20	Atlassing Tomaree wetlands. Come prepared to get wet.	8.00am Fingal Bay Surf Club car park	Leader: Neil Fraser Contact: Ann Lindsey You must ring to confirm
Sunday March 21	Field Outing Kooragang Island	9.00am Stockton Sandspit	Contact: Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday April 6	Midweek Outing Tarro/Woodberry area	8.00am Tarro Recreation Reserve Anderson Drive, Tarro	Leader: Robert Stewart 4963 2029
Sunday April 11	Singleton Group Outing Lake Liddell	10.00am Lake Lidell Recreation Area	Contact: Diane Lamb 02 6574 5205
Easter Friday – Monday April 9-12	Camp Carlton via Gunnedah	Please note that this may change to Borah TSR.	Contact: Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Wednesday April 14	Club Meeting	7.30am The Wetland Centre	Speaker: Greg Clancy – Black necked Stork .
Saturday April 17	Hunter Wader Survey	7.00am Various locations as Directed	Chris Herbert 49593663 Alan Stuart 49528569 You must ring to confirm
Sunday April 18	Field Outing Munmorah SRA	8.00am Munmorah SRA	Contact: Don Moon 02 4359 1670
Anzac Weekend Friday – Monday April 24 – 26	Camp Wongalee Apple Tree Flat		Contact: Liz Crawford 4959 3663

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT DEC. 2003

2003				
Oct 31	Brown Goshawk	1	Elmormore Vale	T.Clarke
Oct 10	Powerful Owl	4	Floraville	"
Oct 16	Powerful Owl	2	Rankin Park	"
	Powerful Owl [dead]	1	Rankin Park	"
Oct 18	Pacific Baza	2	Glenrock SRA [Yuelabah Track]	"
Oct 20	Mistletoebird	Pr	Teralba	"
Oct 23	Powerful Owl	2	Rankin Park	"
Nov 3	Grey Goshawk	1	Teralba	"
	Sacred Kingfisher	2	"	"
Nov 1	Black Falcon	1	Aberdeen	G.Newling
Nov 25	Brown Songlark	2	Mt. Arthur	"
Nov 26	Tawny Frogmouth	2	Scone	"
	White-winged Triller	Several	"	"
Nov 9	Regent Bowerbird	2	Stanhope Ck [Cranky Corner]	D.Lamb
Nov 8	Brush Cuckoo	1	Martindale	D.Jenkin
Nov 10	Powerful Owl	2	Rankin Park	"
Nov 8	Brown Treecreeper	2	Jones Res. Rd.	"
	Chestnut-rumped Heathwren	1	"	"
	Speckled Warbler	2	Martindale	"
	White-browed Babbler	4	Jones Reserve Rd.	"
	Restless Flycatcher	1	Martindale	"
	White-browed Woodswallow	3	Jones Reserve Rd.	"
	Brown Songlark	4	Martindale area	"
	Rufous Songlark	13	"	"
	Singing Bushlark	1	Martindale	"
Nov 10	Black Kite	2	East Maitland Tip	"
	Latham's Snipe	2	Seaham N.R.	"
	Peaceful Dove	A	Jones Reserve Rd.	"
	Pallid Cuckoo	1	Martindale	"
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	"	"
Nov 8	Stubble Quail	B	Martindale area	"
Nov 10	Freckled Duck	5	Warabrook Ponds	"
	Nankeen Night Heron	2	Seaham N.R.	"
Nov 8	Diamond Firetail	3	Jones Reserve Rd.	"
Nov 21	Peregrine Falcon	1	Ash Island	T.Clarke
	Swamp Harrier	1	"	"
	Whistling Kite	1	"	"
Nov 26	Grey Goshawk	1	Gateshead [Oakdale Rd]	"
Nov 14	Black Falcon	2	Morpeth STW	A.Lindsey/M.Newman
	Great Crested Grebe	1	"	"

Nov 13	Red-necked Avocet	2	Pambalong NR	G.Brosie
	Brush Bronzewing	2	Awabakal NR	Grant Brosie
	Brown Treecreeper	>2	King-s Gap	"
Nov 18	White-browed Woodswallow	50-60	Martindale	"
	White-browed Woodswallow	6	Yarrawa Road	"
Nov 25	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	9	East Maitland	"
	White-plumed Honeyeater	1	"	"
Dec 1	White-throated Needle-tail	~40	Teralba	"
Dec 2	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2	Gregson Park Hamilton	F.Thomson
Dec 8	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	21	Edgeworth	G.O'Connor
Dec 3	Plumed Whistling Duck	2	S.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
Dec 1	Nankeen Kestrel	1	Redhead Beach	J.Westphail
Dec 2	Powerful Owl	2+ 2 dy	Floraville	R.Walker
Dec 10	Whimbrel	4	Fern Bay	T.Clarke
	Terek Sandpiper	>35	"	"
	Grey-tailed Tattler	10	"	"
Dec 5	Brown Cuckoo-dove	1	Glenrock SRA	"
	Rufous Fantail	1	"	"
Dec 8	Brown Goshawk	1	East Maitland	G.Brosie
Dec 9	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	"	"
Dec 10	Grey Goshawk	1	East Maitland	G.Brosie
Dec 1	Great Crested Grebe	~250	Grahamstown Lake	D.Cooper
Dec 8	Eastern Curlew	353	Stockton Sandspit	"
Nov 29	White-browed Woodswallow	1	Doyle's Creek	H.Tarrant
	White-browed Babbler	4+ 2nests	"	"
	White-browed Babbler	5	"	"
	Skylark	1	Yarrawa Rd. [32°24/150°36]	"
Nov 18	White-winged Triller	2m+1f	Bolwarra	"
Dec 3	Australasian Bittern	1	Walka Water Works	"
Dec	Wandering Whistling Duck	3pr	Newcastle University	"
Nov 27	Satin Flycatcher	1	Vacy	"
Dec 13	Southern Boobook	1 + 1 fy	Glen Oak	M.Maddock
Jan 9	Royal Spoonbill	38	Robinson Rd. Swamp [Ray.Terr]	"
Jan 3	Musk Duck	6	Grahamstown Dam	"
	Great Crested Grebe	7	"	"