

NEWSLETTER

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

P.O. Box 24, New Lambton, N.S.W. 2305

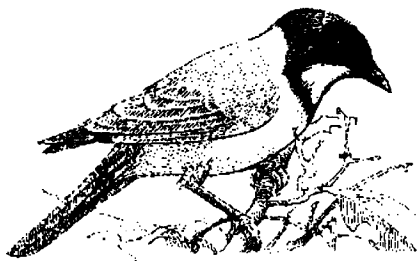
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President: Liz Crawford

Secretary: Tom Clarke

Newsletter Editor: Peter Phillips



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*

HBOC COMMITTEE 2004

President:	Liz Crawford
Vice –Pres.	Allan Stuart
Secretary	Tom Clarke
Treasurer	Rowley Smith
Committee Members	

**John MacAdam, Grant Brosie
Anthony Gooden, Ann Lindsey
James Smart, Judith Westphal**

Newsletter articles are always welcome, however, contributors should try to confine themselves to 1000 words or less.

Next Newsletter Deadline is 29 May 2004

Newsletter contact details.

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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.

APRIL 2004

Crisp autumn air heralds the season for migration. The Dollarbirds have headed north already to spend the winter in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia and the migratory waders will be leaving soon for their breeding grounds in Japan, Siberia, Mongolia, northern China and Alaska. Drongos will be reappearing during their southward migration and Double-banded Plovers have begun to arrive from New Zealand. An exciting time to watch for first arrivals and last departures.

Recently, the Austeel proposal, for developing a new steel mill on a greenfields site at Tomago in the Hunter Estuary, was withdrawn by the proponents. The NSW Government had been facilitating this development, with proposals to deepen the South Arm of the Hunter River, to create a port near the Tourle Street Bridge, and to construct a corridor across Ash Island for transporting raw materials and finished products to and from the proposed steel mill.

HBOC has been intensely involved in monitoring progress on this project and participating in every opportunity for community consultation. Numerous letters of concern about the potential for this development to adversely affect wader habitat in the Hunter Estuary have been sent to politicians and the media.

Phil Ashley-Brown interviewed Ann Lindsey for local ABC radio about the proposed infrastructure corridor across Ash Island. Ann emphasised that "the wonderful bird life on Ash Island is not just for birdwatchers, it's for everyone." This statement was used as a radio promo on numerous occasions, gently promoting the conservation message amongst the general community. Another opportunity for reaching a new audience arose when Ann was invited to speak about development pressures on the birds in the Hunter Estuary at "Politics in the Pub", along with Michael Osborne and Darryl Harris.

Ann focussed on the impact on wader habitat of the proposed infrastructure corridor across Ash Island.

It's a relief to see the withdrawal of the Austeel proposal, as it means that the estuary can continue to provide adequate feeding grounds for the thousands of migratory and endemic waders that congregate here each year. NPWS is continuing its efforts to enhance shorebird roost sites at Stockton Sandspit, Sandy Island and Smiths Island at the entrance to Fullerton Cove. Hopefully we'll see even more waders spending the summer in the Hunter Estuary in future.

The Conservation Committee of the club will continue to monitor proposed developments in the Hunter Estuary – there is no doubt that these will arise in the future as pressures increase on Botany Bay and our human population continues to grow. We will continue to press for ecologically sustainable development.

A colourful Birding Route brochure for Ash Island has been produced by Chris Herbert and was sponsored by the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project. Ash Island is also the focus of two new PhD studies on the ecology and eco-hydraulics of the area. HBOC will be assisting the PhD students with wader identification and locations based on five years of surveys.

Birds Australia Members Day will be held at Newcastle University on Saturday 29 May 2004 and will feature several talks on pelagic and shorebirds of the Hunter Region. The status of Australian birds, Superb fairy-wrens, Black-necked Storks, and rehabilitation of Botany Wetlands will also be discussed. It promises to be a fascinating day and I encourage everyone to attend. Several post-conference excursions are proposed. Registrations close on 1 May 2004 – details are provided on pages 11 & 12 of this newsletter.

Happy birding.

Liz Crawford

Club Outing – Walka Water Works, Sunday 18th January, 2004 From Nick Livanos

At 8am on a warm sunny, morning 10 HBOC members gathered for a look around this excellent bird location. In an attempt to see more of the bush birds, we decided to do the bush circuit first. Though it was cool in the shady areas, it was hot in the sun, though this was alleviated by intermittent cloud. As if on cue one of the first birds we saw on setting out was a Peregrine Falcon at its usual vantage point - the top of the chimneystack

As it turned out we were probably still a bit late for the bush birds which were very few and far between. Also by this time the cicadas were in full voice which may also have contributed to the relative absence of small birds – it certainly made it difficult to pick up calls. As if to compensate for the paucity of birds we encountered lots of Kangaroos which allowed us to approach very close. Quite a number had joeys in the pouch. As we walked we saw Black-faced Cuckoo-strike with young, Satin Bowerbirds, Figbird, Olive-backed Oriole, Pied and Grey Butcherbirds and Little Corella. Then, on our way back to the starting point for morning tea, we saw one of the highlights of the day, a pair of Australian Hobbies performing an aerobatic display.

After morning tea, we headed off along Lake Trail. There were the usual array of waterbirds, including Musk Duck and the always spectacular Walka speciality, the Great-crested Grebe. We had no luck with Crakes and Rails, not totally unexpectedly as it was rather late. However they are there as a Lewins Rail and Spotless Crake were seen at the eastern end of the lake in the early morning a week later.

Some of the other birds seen included Reed Warbler, Black-fronted Dotterel, Richards Pipit, Brown Yellow and Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Red-browed Finch, Silvereye, Mistletoebird, Sacred Kingfisher and Red-rumped Parrot.

Apart from the ubiquitous Noisy Miner only two honeyeaters were seen – Red Wattlebird and Yellow-faced Honeyeater. Surprisingly we failed to see any Gerygones, Pardalotes, Robins or Whistlers. Generally most of the species seen were in unusually small numbers with the unfortunate exception of Common Mynas (which had dependent young) and Starlings.

We completed the circuit at about noon, by which time it was quite hot, so, thankful for the shade, we settled in for lunch bringing to and end a pleasant morning's birding with a total of 65 species. To cap it all off we then had the pleasure of seeing a Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo feeding near the entrance and a pair of Willy Wagtails busily brooding and feeding their young in a nest just a few metres above our lunch spot.

PORT STEPHENS WADERS

Inaugural Survey 8 February 2004.

Thirteen HBOC members joined NPWS to conduct the first comprehensive survey of waders in Port Stephens. Mick Murphy, NPWS Ranger and Site Manager for the Kooragang Nature Reserve Ramsar Site, arranged five boats complete with chauffeurs so the birdwatchers could concentrate totally on the birds. The entire shoreline west of Nelson Bay on the south side and west from Winda Woppa on the north side yielded 221 Whimbrel, 649 Eastern Curlew, 887 Bar tailed Godwits, 51 Black-tailed Godwits, 44 Grey-tailed Tattlers, 111 Pied Oystercatchers, 18 Sooty Oystercatchers, 1056 Black Swans and 461 Pied Cormorants plus other species.

The survey was highly successful from the organisation to the final high tally of high numbers of several species. We are hopeful that this will become a biannual event.

MID-WEEK OUTING REPORT

by Val Moon

Shortland Sewerage Works and
Shortland Wetland Centre 3 February 2004

Our first outing for the years was to the Shortland Sewerage Works where the Water Board staff made us most welcome. Highlights of the visit were 90+ Masked Lapwings, many Magpies, Intermediate, Great and Cattle Egrets, both Sacred and Straw-necked Ibis, Black-faced Cuckoo Strike feeding young, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Reed Warblers and King Parrots. There were only small numbers of ducks compared to our visit last year. A total of 54 species were sighted at the Sewerage Works.

We then proceeded to The Wetland Centre for morning tea and to continue to walk around there. A total of 76 species were identified which included the usual good mixture of birds. Highlights were 11 Plumed Whistling Duck, 3 Latham's Snipe, many Black-winged Stilts and a Sacred Kingfisher.

The most amusing sight for the morning was seeing 70+ Purple Swampheens scurrying to hide in the reeds when a Sea Eagle flew over the swamp and then to see them slowly venturing out again when it had passed by.

The morning was enjoyed by 20+ birdos. Good birds seen and there was plenty of companionship between everyone.

Special thanks to Ken Gibson for arranging and leading our visit to the Sewerage Works.

WANTED: ACTIVITIES OFFICER

Most positions for 2004 were filled at the AGM but there is still a vacancy for someone (or two) to coordinate the Club Program. Training and assistance is offered. Apply Tom Clarke or any Committee member at Club Night.

MIDWEEK OUTING REPORT

by Don Moon

Mandalong/Cooranbong area 2 March 2004.

On an overcast and drizzly morning, seventeen members met at Morisset on the western side of the Freeway. Along Mandalong Road we saw 200+ Straw-necked Ibis feeding in the paddocks. At our first stop- a lagoon on the left side of the road - we saw woodswallows and swans. Flying overhead were a flock of Yellow-tailed Black- Cockatoos and some Cattle Egrets.

We then drove into the edge of the Mandalong State Forest where we saw a good variety of birds including Jacky Winter, Red-browed Finches, Yellow-faced, Lewins and Scarlet Honeyeaters, an Azure Kingfisher and, on a small dam, Little-black and Little-pied Cormorants.

We then continued to Cooranbong Park for morning tea where we observed Rainbow Lorikeet feeding young in the hollow of a tree. After exploring this area we moved on to the Cooranbong Equestrian Centre but there were not a lot of birds in this area. A good friendly time was had by all with a total of 58 species sighted in a morning's outing.

TWITCHATHON 2003 -Rarest Bird Prize

Allan Morris, Records Officer for Birding NSW and the Judge in this keenly contested element of the 2003 Twitchathon has announced that four Painted Snipe seen by the Central Coast Champions at Carmel Lagoon Baradine are considered to be the rarest birds seen during the Twitchathon. The species is Nationally Threatened and the population exceptionally low. No previous sightings had been recorded from this district and only two records for the whole of NSW in 2003. (Raymond Terrace and South West Rocks)

ATLAS OUTING –TOMAREE NATIONAL PARK -SATURDAY 20TH MARCH 2004.

From Nick Livanos

At 8am, after a foggy start to the day, Ann Lindsey, Robert MacDonald and I, guided by Neil Fraser, set out to do an Atlas around Neil's patch at Tomaree National Park in clear sunny conditions. As we started out at Fingal Bay, we were welcomed by the carolling of Pied Butcherbirds and the rather less melodious calls of Rainbow Lorikeets and Red Wattlebirds feeding in the Banksias. The walking was easy as we followed the car-width tracks through various habitat types in the park. Some of the smaller bush birds such as Brown and Striated Thornbills, Superb and Variegated Fairy-wrens, White-throated Treecreepers and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were in evidence, the highlight being the groups of Varied Sittellas we came across during our two hour walk. Another interesting sighting was a group of Brown-headed Honeyeaters -more usually reported away from the coast.

After a short break, we proceeded around to Shoal Bay to explore the wetlands on the southern side of Shoal Bay Road. Initially we didn't see much in the way of waterbirds, as the swamp is quite heavily vegetated. As we worked our way around, as well as the bush birds such as Thornbills, Grey Fantails, Spotted Pardalotes and White-naped Honeyeaters, we again encountered groups of sittellas, obtaining very good views of them. Later we were able to see further into the swamp allowing us to obtain views of Little Pied Cormorants, Black Ducks and White Ibises, as well as an immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle. We then walked into the shallows amongst the Melaleuca, where there were a number of White Ibis nests. At this point, two of us discovered quite quickly that our galoshes had reached their use-by date. By then it was quite hot so we squelched our way back to our starting point and headed off for lunch.

In all 48 species were seen during the morning.

TWITCHATHON 2003 –THE FINAL RECKONING. From Frances Czwalinna NSW/ACT Twitchathon Coordinator.

Dear members of Bird Clubs and Birds Australia

Congratulations to everyone involved in the 2003 Twitchathon. You helped to raise a net amount of \$13,448 towards Birds Australia's Murray catchment bird monitoring program which will begin in Spring 2004. This was the second highest amount ever raised in a NSW/ACT Twitchathon. I extend a big thank you to everyone who worked so hard to raise this grand sum. (*and thank you, Frances*)

We have achieved some wonderful things for birds by running Twitchathons since 1990 and I list below the projects we have established, contributed to and still contribute to by our tree planting, bird surveys and voluntary efforts. The support of everyone in the birding community is very much appreciated.

- 1990 Mallee Research
- 1991 Black Eared Miner
- 1992 Regent Honeyeater & Star Finch
- 1993 Endangered Species nationally
- 1994 Regent Honeyeater & Seabird Appeal
- 1995 Barren Grounds & Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo
- 1996 Barren Grounds Bird Observatory
- 1997 Black Eared Miner & Birds in Backyards Project
- 1998 Glossy & Red-tailed Black Cockatoos
- 1999 Albatross Research
- 2000 Newhaven Station purchase
- 2001 Cowra woodland Bird Program
- 2002 Cowra woodland Bird Program

Over \$140,000 in 14 years!! Isn't this a wonderful outcome for our birds?

For what should we raise the funds from the 2004 Twitchathon? If you or your Club has a very worthy cause for our birds please contact the NSW/ACT Group of Birds Australia with your ideas.

CAUSES FOR ALARM FOR BIRDLIFE IN THE LOWER HUNTER ESTUARY

HBOC has good reasons to be alarmed at proposals to expand industry in the Lower Hunter Estuary. This area may be of substantial economic and industrial value: the fact is, however, it is also of vital biological, ecological, conservation and community importance.

The Hunter Estuary with its systems of wetlands and mudflats is by far the most important area for **migratory waders** in New South Wales. In addition, thousands of non-migratory shorebirds, ducks, egrets and other waterbirds use the wetlands. In 2003, for example, 5000 of Australia's Red-necked Avocets stayed here most of the year in response to drought conditions inland. Most of these species are protected by State and Federal laws and by international agreements such as the Japanese and Australian Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA), the Chinese and Australian Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA) and the Bonn Convention.

The Hunter Estuary is important for other wildlife and is a significant breeding ground for fish and prawns.

Most of the original aquatic ecosystems have already suffered major modification. The number of islands has decreased from twenty-one to six which in turn has decreased the shoreline and hence the mudflats. Much of the existing shoreline has been modified by bank protection works. Roads and railway lines traverse the wetlands, interrupting the natural flow of water, and a factory sits on a former egret colony site. The total number of migratory waders using the area has declined considerably, from around 10,000 in the 1970s to around 3,000 today.

The State Government is intent on expanding industry in the Estuary. This has led to proposals and plans to develop remaining wetland habitat or habitat adjacent to wetlands. In allowing such proposals to be considered, the Government is ignoring the advice and recommendations in a

multitude of reports on river and estuarine systems, many of which have been initiated by the Government itself.

We acknowledge that some industrial expansion is necessary. We contend, however, that such expansion must take place in areas already severely degraded and that such expansion should not threaten remaining viable wetland habitat important to wildlife. State and Federal laws support this contention. If the proposed expansion becomes a reality, in whole or in part, then these laws will have been broken. Thousands of protected birds will die. They will not merely fly off to find another suitable area: there is only one Hunter River Estuary.

Our overall concern is that MAJOR FEEDING AND ROOSTING SITES ARE AT RISK

In the 1990s, the Tomago Buffer Lands, immediately adjacent to the Kooragang Nature Reserve, on the North Arm of the Hunter River, had been earmarked for wetland rehabilitation to partly compensate for previous losses of wetland in the Estuary. The NSW Government has since bought this land for an industrial complex. Its purchase was carried out in an atmosphere of secrecy. This represents a significant loss of vital wildlife habitat.

In order to service this site, an industrial corridor was gazetted as State Environmental Planning Policy 74 – Newcastle Port and Employment Lands (SEPP 74). Planning for SEPP 74 was conducted in absolute secrecy. This corridor will link the Tomago industrial site to a new port on the South Arm of the Hunter River by crossing Ash Island with its large salt marsh, (Swan & Wader Ponds) and other sensitive wetlands (Teal Waters, Phoenix Flats). The Corridor is immediately adjacent to Kooragang Nature Reserve and will destroy vital feeding and roosting sites.

Migratory waders flock here in summer and native shorebirds and waterfowl abound throughout they year. It is also a vital temporary refuge for those migratory waders too young, ill or injured to attempt the journey to Siberia.

The NSW Government has also called for expressions of interest for the sale of highly degraded and contaminated land formerly owned by BHP. Deep Pond on the edge of this land supports thousands of waterfowl and large numbers of shorebirds. In addition, the manner in which this land has been subdivided implies the existence of a different corridor route which stops abruptly where it connects with the Port Waratah Coal Services railway line.

Persistent attempts to clarify these proposals have been fruitless.

Despite government denials, we are aware that consideration has been given to the annexation of part of the Kooragang Nature Reserve north of the Stockton Bridge. The Kooragang Dykes are a major high tide roost for migratory waders and behind the Dykes, the mudflats exposed at low tide are a prime feeding area.

Despite our diligent cooperation, HBOC has found that community consultation, a concept so popular in matters of the environment, has in this matter proved a farce. Correspondence from Government departments barely pays lip service to our enquiries. "Your concerns have been noted" is a popular response.

The Stockton Sandspit, near Stockton Bridge, is part of the Kooragang Nature Reserve. It is therefore protected from development, but its exposed position makes it vulnerable to the pressures of urban life. It has been highly successful as a shorebird roost site but it requires a commitment to ongoing maintenance.

Hunter Bird Observers Club asks that you tell as many people and organizations as possible about the risks to bird habitats in the Hunter Estuary. We need to show the Government that not only birdwatchers, but also the general community

cares about birds. HBOC would like you to write letters to the Federal and State government departments for the Environment asking that the various conservation Acts protecting birds be upheld.

HBOC members have been monitoring the estuary monthly for four years the results of which are reported annually in the HBOC Bird Report. Statements about the above outlined situation can be verified through background material which will be available on our website <http://users.hunterlink.net.au/hboc/home.htm>

or by contacting
The Secretary,
Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.
PO Box 24
New Lambton NSW 2305.
Phone: 02 4958 5942.

The addresses for the Federal and State Ministers are:

The Hon Dr David Kemp MP
Minister for the Environment and Heritage,
House of Representatives,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Robert Debus MP
Minister for the Environment
Level 36 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Ann Lindsey
For and on behalf of the Hunter Bird Observers Club.

This letter was written against a background of the proposed Austeel venture. Whilst this particular threat appears to have gone the way of the Kooragang airport the challenges keep coming and we need to insist on the value of birds and the environment, not just in a crisis but proactively, so that future proponents of over-industrialisation will hesitate before dreaming up any more schemes.

WANDERING WOODSWALLOWS

By Harold Tarrant.

Up until 2003 I had seen only one White-browed Woodswallow in the Hunter. Seemingly lost on migration, this bird had conveniently decided to perch on my television aerial. This spring and summer has changed all that. I still have not seen any of the large flocks that occasionally appeared a year ago during the drought, but have been privileged to encounter small parties that have stayed around in three locations, probably breeding there. I first came across them on 8th November in one of my 20-minute survey sites 10.4 kms along Jones Reserve Rd past Jerry's Plains. I guessed there were about half a dozen birds, but it is very difficult to keep count of a mobile species in open woodland. I checked as I returned about three hours later and they were still there.

I was then surprised to read in Alan's circular the following week "White-browed Woodswallows (3 birds, one an immature) along Jones Reserve Road 12.5 km from Jerry's Plains – seen by Dick Jenkin on Saturday and then by Phil H., Peter Phillips and me yesterday. We also found another 5 of them along Flags Rd between Gungal and Merriwa (approx 2/3 of the way along it). Dick found a Chestnut-rumped Heathwren and a party of White-browed Babblers at the first of these locations and some Diamond Firetails which we also found' I could tell from the species list as well as the distance that Dick had been at another of my survey spots also on the 8th, so I naturally asked myself whether this was a single group of birds which had moved between sites or not. Both sites regularly have Dusky Woodswallows present, and one wondered whether it had been their cousins that had attracted them.

The answer would seem to be "no". A few weeks later I checked at 10.4 kms again and again recorded this species only here. But then came Boxing Day morning, with no commitments and the rest of the family happy to stay in bed. This time I again had a very few birds at 10.4kms but there were quite a few, double figures surely, at 12.3 –12.6 kms past Jerry's Plains. I watched intently a couple of times as birds brought cicadas they had caught on the ground and proceeded to 'tenderise' them like a

meaty steak. To get such a close view of the antics of a species incidental to the Hunter is a rare pleasure and I counted myself very happy to have watched that much.

Next, on the 28th we decided to have a family trip over the Barringtons along the Scone to Gloucester road. We were not happy that the Polblue Track had been closed, and that the weather was scarcely ideal for spotting Flame Robins (only one brown bird noted) but 6kms west of Moonan Flat and 11kms east of Belltrees Rd, I spotted another White-browed Woodswallow at the side of the road, undisturbed as I passed it. I stopped (of course) and we had a brief look around. This was enough to confirm that Duskiees were also at that site: so I had now found White-browed at three sites, all of them also inhabited by Duskiees!

I was fairly predictable that I should find the time to return to Moonan Flat the following month. This was to happen on 14th January and I was able to determine that the place was called Challis Cutting. Duskiees were spotted before the car had come to a halt, and eventually I saw two adult White-browed with what seemed to be a young, heavily spotted, rather immobile immature. It seemed reasonable to regard this as dependent young, though I had not actually seen it being fed. There were other reasons to be glad that I returned, a good species list and Diamond Firetails.

The following week I returned to more familiar haunts at Doyle's Creek, and 10.4 kms from Jerry's Plains and found some twenty woodswallows, of which only about four would have been Duskiees and the rest White-browed. This time I watched an adult bird approach a perched immature and clearly feed it something confirming what I already knew from their prolonged spring-summer residence – that this species was breeding here. The only slight disappointment was that I never came across a Masked Woodswallow, which often associates with White-browed, even though I had seen a single bird once in the Doyle's Creek area, probably on autumn migration. But the Masked is the rarer bird in the eastern states. One final question: will any of these birds have enjoyed the Hunter enough to return next spring?

Postscript on woodswallows

Others have been reporting this species from the Martindale and Yarrowa area in Mid-November, and more recently from the Cessnock area. In fact the Martindale flock was reported to be between 50 and 60 birds and from another of the sites that I regularly monitor, better known for the breeding Painted Honeyeaters found there in 2001. According to Grant Brosie these birds were flying low and feeding around the grasses, no doubt responding to a plentiful hatching of insects.

CASUARINAS and COCKATOOS

This is a shortened version of an article in Far Coast Birdwatcher Newsletter (July/August 2003) by Jim Shields

The Glossy Black Cockatoo is an interesting bird, by any account. And the Casuarina is an interesting and useful tree. Glossy Black Cockatoos are simply attractive with red patches on the tail, yellow patches on the female's head and a haunting querulous call. Another reason the Glossy Black is interesting is because it is totally dependent on the Casuarina – it feeds almost exclusively on the seeds of this tree. In fact, most of the Glossy Black's life is spent in, or looking for, appropriate feed trees. A pair, threesome of adults and young of the year or small flock will fly across the landscape, locate a stand of or an individual Casuarina, and stop to sample the seeds, which are found in a hard nut.

Holding the nut in one foot (almost invariably the left foot, perching on the right) the nut is cut open and the seeds inside extracted with the bill, which is specifically adapted for this task. If the seeds are suitably nutritious, the birds settle down to feed quietly and persistently – they are very determined and unflappable whilst feeding and not easily disturbed by humans. I once watched three birds feeding on the edge of a sports ground while a track and field day was being held with dozens of primary school children – the birds didn't take any notice, even when the starting gun was fired for the races.

Other features of interest with this species are related to its feeding habits. Because it is hard work to find enough seeds to feed a large bird, reproduction is a slow and laborious procedure. Usually only one young is fledged every two years, with both parents working hard to find enough seeds to feed the young (by regurgitation)

They require a large tree hollow in which to nest. The casuarinas in which they feed, however, can be relatively small – the main criteria is that seeds contain a high concentration of nitrogen. This factor makes it possible to improve habitat for Glossy Blacks fairly quickly.

The Casuarina is an interesting tree because it is an 'early succession specialist' that is, it sprouts and grows rapidly after a disturbance, particularly fire. Part of this adaptation is the tree ability to 'fix' or produce nitrogen with its roots and thus contribute to soil fertility. Although not widely used today, it has a lovely red timber suitable for furniture, and produces good firewood when properly dried – it was a favourite of bakers in the old days when wood fired ovens were used because it produced a steady (relatively) low temperature heat just right for baking. They are well suited to Landcare tree planting projects and will grow in almost any conditions.

A final note of interest about the birds – there is another species of black cockatoo with red in the tail, the not-so-cleverly named Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. It is a bird of more open, dry country and is common in the centre and far north of Australia. A larger and "shinier" bird than the Glossy, the female's head is characteristically covered with tiny spots of yellow – males are difficult to tell from the Glossy, as size is a relative thing and both are black cockatoos with red tails. Fortunately both species form permanent pairs, and there is usually a female present.

Ph.D STUDIES FOCUS ON HUNTER ESTUARY WETLANDS

The University of Newcastle and the Australian Catholic University have recently received an ARC industry linkage grant for two interlinked PhD projects to study wetlands in the Hunter Estuary and Ash Island in particular. One of the PhD projects will focus on estuarine wetland hydraulics and sediment transport, whilst the other will focus on the ecology of vegetation, invertebrates and waders that utilise these wetlands.

The hydraulics PhD candidate, Ms Alice Howe is located at the University of Newcastle and will study under the supervision of Dr Jose Rodriguez. The ecology PhD candidate Ms Jennifer Spencer, is based at the Australian Catholic University in Sydney and will be supervised by Dr Neil Saintilan. Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority is the industry partner, with funding from Energy Australia.

A project orientation workshop, which was attended by HBOC members Ann Lindsey and Terry Lindsey was held on 26 March at the Wetland Centre. At that workshop Jennifer and Alice expressed a keen interest in the activities of HBOC. The students would appreciate the opportunity to provide HBOC with regular updates on the projects, to participate in monthly surveys and receive feedback regarding wader utilisation of the estuary. They would also gratefully accept any volunteers for field surveys over the next two wader migratory seasons.

If you would like any further information. Jennifer and Alice can be contacted at the following email addresses.

Jaspen003@student.mackillop.acu.edu.au
and
alice.howe@studentmail.newcastle.edu.au

NEW MEMBERS

Hunter Bird Observers Club welcomes the following new members. We know you will enjoy your association with the Club. We hope to see you often at Club Nights, Outings and Camps.

Penny Drake-Brockman of Gloucester
Betty Baker and Brian Keegan of New Lambton
Henry & Theresa Sabella of Hamilton
Henry Egerton of Cooks Hill
Leone Beagley of Charlestown
Judy Thomas of Kotara South

(also, welcome back to Dorothy Pritchard of New Lambton)

SIGNIFICANT BIRD EVENT

From Jim Downey , CEO Birds Australia

Arguably one of the most extraordinary events associated with migratory waders in Australia in recent years has occurred in North Western Australia.

On 7th and 8th February 2004 members of Birds Australia and our special interest group The Australasian Wader Studies Group led by Dr Clive Minton counted between 2.4 and 2.8 MILLION Oriental Pratincoles at Eighty Mile Beach (Anna Plains Station). The previous estimate of the total Australian population of this bird was 60,000!!!

The birds fed all over the grasslands of the station and further inland from dawn and as the day heated up gradually moved down to the coast where they collected in huge aggregations on the upper mud flats. Dr Minton reports that this staggering increase of previous estimates of the population would be difficult to believe by anyone who had not seen this phenomenal sight of beaches densely packed covered with pratincoles a kilometre or so wide for stretches tens of kilometres long



Events

Birds Australia is the oldest bird research and conservation organisation in Australia. **Members Day** is an opportunity for you to attend the **Annual General Meeting**, hear our president outline the national activities of Birds Australia, meet members of Council and, be updated on some of our conservation projects. Also hear talks by senior members of Birds Australia and by post-graduate students presenting results of their ongoing projects, some of which have been supported by the Southern NSW and ACT Group grants.

The Southern NSW and ACT Group and Hunter Bird Observers Club are delighted to host this year's meeting and look forward to welcoming you on the 29th May.

Venue Details

GP2.1 Lecture Theatre
General Purpose Building
The University of Newcastle
Callaghan Campus
Callaghan, NSW 2308

- Getting There ~

Road: Free parking in the university grounds on weekends. The C2 car park is your closest parking to the theatre.

Rail: From Newcastle station take a connecting train direct to Warabrook, the university station.

For further information on Members Day please contact the Sydney office
Ph: (02) 9436 0388
Fax: (02) 9436 0466

Email: rosella63@bigpond.com

Several outings have been arranged surrounding Members Day. See the scheduled list below for details and bookings are essential. If you wish to participate in any of these events, please complete the registration form and forward payment to the Sydney office.

Swansea Pelagic Trip, Sunday 30th May (weather conditions permitting): An opportunity to see the best seabirds in NSW. Leader Dr Philip Hansbro. Cost \$80 pp.

Wetlands Tour, Sunday 30th and Monday 31st May 9.30am-5.30pm: An all day tour to Pambalong Nature Reserve, The Wetlands Centre, Ash Island and Stockton Sandspit. Includes AM tea, lunch and entry to Wetlands Centre. Cost \$55pp

Gloucester Tops and Gloucester District, Sunday 30th May 7.30am-5pm: An all day tour to these areas including AM tea, lunch and PM tea. Cost \$90pp.

Day to the Box Woodlands, Monday 31st May 7.30am-5pm: Includes Cessnock, Quarrobolong, Wollombi and Ellalong. Includes AM tea, lunch and PM tea. Cost \$90pp

Members Day Dinner at 7pm 29th May: This evening is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy a meal, a glass of wine, and of course the great company of other members. Join us on this occasion to relax and laugh with friends! Some complimentary drinks may be available. Cost \$50 pp + drinks.

During the Members Day Program there will be a range of books and her products available for sale, and great prizes to be won in the Members Day raffle!
Event Bookings Close 1st May 2004

Birds Australia Members Day Program

- 8:30 Registration.
- 9:00 Welcome by Chairperson, SNAG and Professor Henry Nix, President Birds Australia.
- 9:05 Welcome by Liz Crawford, HBOC.
- 9:10 Keynote: To be announced - New Developments in the Hunter
- 9:30 Liz Crawford - Status of Hunter Estuary Waders - Past and Present.
- 9:55 Chris Herbert - Stockton Sandspit Restoration - Impact on Waders
- 10:20 Aimee Hutchinson - The Importance of Ash Island Saltmarsh for Migratory Waders.

10:45 Morning Tea.

- 11:15 Greg Clancy - Breeding behaviour of Black-necked Stork in Coastal NSW.
- 11:40 Kim Wilson - Rehabilitation of the Botany Wetlands.
- 12:05 Dr Philip Hansbro - Pelagic Seabirds of the Hunter Region.

12:30 Lunch.

- 1:30 Keynote: Or Michael Weston - The Status of Australian Birds.
- 1:55 To be announced - Future Directions for the Birds Australia Research Committee.
- 2:15 To be announced - The Continuing Birds Atlas.
- 2:35 Holly Parsons - Studies with Superb Fairy-wrens - A Birds in Backyards Project.
- 3:10 Speaker or book/project launch.

3:15 Afternoon Tea.

- 3:45-5:30 Annual General Meeting.
- 7:00 Members Day Dinner - Bookings Essential!

Members Day and AGM

Registration Fee: Members \$50, Students \$40, Non-members \$60 *includes morning and afternoon tea and a light lunch.*

Dinner: \$50 + drinks *venue within the Uni TBA.*

Name(s):.

Address:.

Phone/Email:.

Events Register

Excursion	Names Attending
Swansea Pelagic	
Wetlands Tours	
Gloucester (30th or 31st)	
Box Woodlands	
Dinner on the 29 th	

Payment Details

Please accept my cheque or money order made payable to Birds Australia for \$----- OR

Please debit my Bankcard/Mastercard/Visa

Card.....

Expiry Date:.....

Name on card:.....

Signature:.....

Send To: Members Day
Birds Australia Sydney
PO Box 1322, Crows Nest, NSW 1585
FAX: (02) 9436 0466

Registrations Close 1st May 2004

DRAFT HUNTER ESTUARY GATEWAY PROJECT – CONCEPT & FEASIBILITY PLAN. CALL FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

. From Tara Ure. CEO The Wetlands Centre

The Hunter Estuary Gateway Project is coordinated by The Wetland Centre Australia (TWC) and supported by funding from the Australian Government under its Regional Partnerships programme, in collaboration with the Hunter Area Consultative Committee.

The Hunter Estuary Gateway Project: Concept and Feasibility Plan (Gateway Plan) is a key component of this project and we are seeking public comment for the Draft Gateway Plan which will be on display from 5th April to 23rd April 2004. Alternatively the plan is available from the TWC website www.wetlands.org.au or email a request for a copy of the plan to twc@wetlands.org.au

The draft plan was developed in consultation with TWC Board, Staff Volunteers and other key stakeholders through workshops.

The document focuses on identifying a sustainable and feasible approach for the Wetlands Centre to position itself as the information and geographical Gateway to the Hunter Estuary in partnership with Estuary stakeholders.

Comments are requested on the following

1. Overall comments on the content and structure of the Draft Gateway Plan.
2. Do you believe, based on the Draft Plan that the Gateway Concept is feasible and that this feasibility is clearly identified in the plan
3. Other general comments

Comments should be addressed to Leanne Cherry c/- The Wetland Centre PO Box 292, Wallsend 2287. or by Fax 02 4950 1875 or by email project@wetlands.org.au Further information from Leanne on 0429 818 006.

THE WETLAND CENTRE

Annual General Meeting

The 2004 AGM will take place from 7.00pm on Thursday 20th May at the Wetland Centre. Nominations for Director (three positions available) should be directed to the Secretary, Rod Caldwell by May 19.

WETLAND CENTRE PROGRAM

Wetland Wiggles (children 5-9)
Games, arts, crafts, dip netting and adventure walks
9am – 1 Tues and Wed April 13, 14, 20, 21

Wet & Wild (children 10-15)
Fun canoeing adventure
9 – 1. Thursday April 15 & 22

Arts Alive (children all ages)
9-1 Fridays April 16 & 23

Mother Day Luncheon
Buffet luncheon BYO Wine. Children's play area available for toddlers
May 9. 12 Noon start.

Breakfast with the Birds
8.30am Sunday June 13

Spotlight Prowl
Wetlands after dark with guide. BYO torch.
Sat evening May 22
(check start time when you book)

Canoeing Adventures
Experienced guides. First Sunday every month commencing 9.30am.

Bookings are essential for all events. Prices, bookings and further details from the Wetland Centre on 02 4951 6466

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT FEB/MAR 2004

2003				
Nov 16	Pacific Baza	2	Cardiff South	L.Huxtable
Nov&26/1	Little Eagle	1	Mayfield	M.Chegwidden
Dec.	Tawny Frogmouth	Pr + dy	"	"
Dec 4	Glossy Black Cockatoo	2	Wingen	G.Newling
Dec 14	White-plumed Honeyeater	1	Gillieston Heights	G.Brosie
Dec. 20	Black-necked Stork	1	Lenaghan's Drive	"
	Cockatiel	1	Minmi	"
Dec 26	White-browed Woodswallow	12-20&imm	12k from Jerry's Plains	H.Tarrant
Dec 28	Flame Robin	1f	Barrington Tops	"
2004				
Jan 11	Peregrine Falcon	1	Scone	G.Newling
Jan 14	Buff-banded Rail	1+6dy	Belmont South	J.&B. Cockerell
Jan 20	Nankeen Night Heron	1	"	"
Jan 24	Plum-headed Finch	2	Tarro	G.Brosie
Jan 18	Azure Kingfisher	1	Tenambit Common	"
Jan 23	Plumed Whistling Duck	3	Pambalong NR	"
Jan 24	Wonga Pigeon	1	Minmi	"
	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2+ 1dy	East Maitland	"
Jan 25/26	Lewin's Rail	1	Walka Water Works	"
Jan 25	Spotless Crake	1	"	G.Brosie/N.Livanos
	Broad-billed Sandpiper	2	Stockton Sandspit	"
	Dusky Woodswallow	1	Awabakal N.R.	"
Feb 10	Sooty Oystercatcher	21	Newcastle Ocean Baths	G.Brosie
Feb 2	Wandering Whistling Duck	2+8dy	Lenaghan's Drive	G.Brosie/R.McDonald
Feb 3	Wandering Whistling Duck	2+9dy	S.W.C.	"
	Magpie Goose	3dy	"	"
Jan 24	White-browed Woodswallow	~20	10k from Jerry's Plains	H.Tarrant
	Dusky Woodswallow	3	"	"
	Chestnut-rumped Heathwren	1	"	"
	Crested Shrike-tit	1+1dy	"	"
	White-plumed Honeyeater	1fy	12k. from Jerry's Plains	"
	Nankeen Kestrel	5	Martindale	"
Jan 24	White-winged Triller	1F+ 2dy	Jones Reserve Rd. [1kmalong]	"
	Red-capped Robin	1m	" [3km along]	"
Jan 9	Satin Flycatcher	2	Vacy	"
Jan 25	Square-tailed Kite	1	Bolwarra	"
Jan 14	White-browed Woodswallow	2+ 1dy	Moonan Flat [11k past Belltrees]	"
Jan 14	Diamond Firetail	Pr	"	"
	Musk Lorikeet	1	"	"
Jan	Brown-headed Honeyeater	2+3dy	Seaham [garden]	L.Mee
Jan 31	Pacific Baza	1	Branxton	D.Lamb

Jan 24	White-winged Black Tern	16	Stockton	E.Vella
	Common Tern	85	"	"
	Broad-billed Sandpiper	2-3	"	"
	Terek Sandpiper	16	"	"
	Great Knot	4	"	"
	Red Knot	20	"	"
Feb 6	Darter	2nests+5dy	Stoney Creek	P.Durie
	Tawny Frogmouth	Pr + 2dy	"	"
	Australian Wood Duck		"	"
Feb 6& 9	Musk Lorikeet	1	Buttaba	G.Charlton
Feb 18	Plumed Whistling Duck	Pr + 3dy	Pambalong NR	G.Brosie
Feb 16	Yellow Wagtail	1	Ash Island	"
	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	1	"	"
Feb	Long-billed Corella	5	Ashtonfield	D.Lewis
Feb 17	Cattle Egret [wing-tagged]	1	Tocal	B. Murton
Feb 11	Common Koel	1	Cardiff	J.Westphail
Feb 11	Tawny Frogmouth	2	Cooks Hill	H.Edgerton
Feb 7	Great Knot	7	Stockton	E.Vella
	Red Knot	10	"	"
Feb 7	Black-tailed Godwit	200	Stockton	E.Vella
	Eastern Curlew	280	"	"
	White-winged Black Tern	7	"	"
	Broad-billed Sandpiper	1	"	"
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	>300	"	"
	Curlew Sandpiper	>200	"	"
Feb 13	Rainbow Bee-eater	8	East Maitland	G.Brosie
Feb 18	Plumed Whistling Duck	2+3dy	Pambalong NR	"
Feb 21	Budgerigar [blue]	1	S.W.C.[Ironbark Ck.]	P.Lightfoot
Feb/Mar	Cockatiel	1	Eleebana [Landcare reserve]	A.Gooden
Feb 14	Yellow Wagtail	1	Ash Island	E.Vella
	Broad-billed Sandpiper	1	Stockton	"
	Terek Sandpiper	50	"	"
	Common Sandpiper	1	"	"
Feb 21	Double-banded Plover	8	Ash Island	"
	Yellow Wagtail	1	"	"
Feb 14	Black Falcon	1	"	"
	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	1	"	"
	Double-banded Plover	1	"	"
Feb 21	Black-necked Stork	Pr.	Lenaghan's Swamp	"
Feb/Mar	Peaceful Dove	1	Green Wattle Ck. Rd. Woodville	M.Newman
Feb 25	Noisy Pitta	1	Main Creek [32°17'/151°48']	"
Feb 20	Brush Cuckoo		Woodville	"
Feb 27	Black Falcon	1	"	"
Feb 29	Black-necked Stork	1	Nelsons Plains	"
Mar 2	Little Lorikeet	1	East Maitland	G.Brosie
	Whiteplumed Honeyeater	2	"	"

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	DETAILS	CONTACT
Saturday April 17	Hunter Wader Survey	7.00am. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Sunday April 18	Field Outing Munmorah SRA	8.00am Opposite Kanangra Drive turn-off, Pacific Highway, Fraser Park	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Saturday April 24 to Monday April 26	Anzac Day Weekend Camp "Wongalee" Apple Tree Flat	Follow HBOC signs from Apple Tree Flat Road, west of Jerry Plains	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Tuesday May 4	Mid Week Outing Walka Waterworks	8.00am Car Park Walka Waterworks	Leader: Nick Livanos 4354 5739
Saturday May 8	Hunter Wader Survey.	11.00am Various Locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Wednesday May 12	Club Night	7.30PM Wetland Centre, Shortland	Speaker: David Geering Regent Honeyeater movements.
Sunday May 16	Singleton Group Field Outing to Wambo Road area	10.00am Bulga General Store, Putty Road	Diane Lamb 02 6574 5205
Saturday May 22	Atlasing Gloucester Tops	Meet MacDonalds Raymond Terrace 7.00am	Grant Brosie 4933 4725 Nick Livanos 4954 5739 You must ring to confirm
Sunday May 23	Field Outing Morisset area	8.00am at big round-a-bout south of Morisset	TBA
Tuesday June 1	Midweek Outing Wangi Point/Myuna Bay	Meet 8.00am Picnic Area Opp Wangi Point Caravan Park, Watkins Drive	Val Moon 4359 1670
Saturday June 5	Hunter Wader Survey.	10.00am Various Locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You must ring to confirm
Wednesday June 9	Club Night	7.30 PM Wetland Centre	Speaker: Allan Benson Cruise to Ashmore Reef – Rarities & Refugees
Saturday June 12 to Monday June 14	Queens Birthday Weekend Camp at Howes Valley	Private property	TBA
Sunday June 13	Singleton Group Field outing to Youngville	10.00am Lake St Claire then Youngville Picnic Area	Diane Lamb 02 6574 5205
Saturday June 19	Atlasing TBA	TBA	Grant Brosie 4933 4725 Nick Livanos 4954 5739 You must ring to confirm
Sunday June 20	Wetlands Day & Welcome New Members BBQ	The Wetland Centre	Alan Stuart 4952 8569