



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 1/05

February–March 2005

Newsletter articles welcome –
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Committee

President: Liz Crawford
Vice-president: Alan Stuart
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Paul Baird
Grant Brosie
Anthony Gooden
Ann Lindsey
Jim Smart

Conservation Officer

Jenny Powers

Life Members

Wilma Barden
Sue Hamonet
Ed Hamonet

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*

The Hunter Bird Observers Club welcomes the following new members:

Garth Cooksey of Cardiff Heights
John & Meg Gordon of Weetangera ACT

HBOC Annual Membership fees are \$25 Family or Single
and \$3 for Juniors. Fees for 2005 are now due.

NEWSLETTER DATES FOR 2005

Edition

April/May
June/July
August/September
October/November
December 2005/January 2006

Copy Deadline

2 April 2005
29 May 2005
30 July 2005
1 October 2005
3 December 2005

2004 – The Year of the Brew – The Story of the Hunter Home Brewers

from “Jacqueline Winter”

The Birds Australia 2004 Twitchathon will be remembered as the year the highly-prized trophy returned to the Hunter, thanks to the persistence and toiling of the most committed Twitchathon team, the ‘Hunter Home Brewers’. Note that ‘committed’ has two potential meanings in this context, as it has been suggested on many occasions that these boys may be a little on the fanatical side when it comes to their approach to birding!

Following a disappointing campaign in 2003 that saw The Brewers come home in third position, no horses were spared for the 2004 crusade, dubbed confidently by the team before the event as ‘The Year of the Brew’. Fortunately the humiliation faced at the end of the 2003 race has not yet been screened on national television. Hopefully we will soon be able to see exactly what happened during the 2003 event from the comforts of our own living rooms.

Needless to say, the 2004 preparation was a spirited one, albeit in the absence of Grenna Brew for two of the infamous ‘Brewer BBQs’. With the Green Hornet primed and eskies charged, The Brewers arrived at their starting point on Friday afternoon, in time for their customary ‘dummy run’, which had greater importance this year given the decision by organisers to commence an hour earlier on the Saturday afternoon.

The Brewers knew that they really had to take full advantage of this, as their Sunday afternoon run-home has always been their traditional weakness and the opportunity to work with an extra hour of ‘western birds’ needed to be used fruitfully.

Ironically, it wasn't until Saturday afternoon that the actual starting point was agreed upon. After

a great deal of ‘hoo-ha’, The Brewers unanimously resolved to return to a site that was half an hour ‘further west’ from their initial agreed starting point. The reason for this was that a group of at least 6 Painted Honeyeaters were busily guarding flowering Acacia mistletoe - from Singing Honeyeaters mind you. This was a big call, with a possible cost of 30 minutes for one or two birds...but The Brewers went out on a limb and staked the place out from about 1:30pm onwards, not letting those Painteds out of their sight.

The tension had reached fever-pitch as 3 o'clock ticked over and The Brewers briskly ticked up only 7 species before jumping into the Hornet at 3:01 for the run back to the original woodland starting point. The move paid off beautifully, as there was still plenty of time for a swag of quality Western birds back at the original site, such as Red-winged Parrot, Hooded Robin, Turquoise Parrot, Inland Thornbill as well as White-browed, Dusky and Masked Woodswallows.

The Brewers continued and were now twitching so frantically that they had reached their original 4 o'clock starting point (from previous years) not long after 4 o'clock, and had numerous ‘bonus’ birds ticked up – it was all coming together quite nicely...and Ando Brew made sure the team knew all about it. Hairs were bristling on the backs of The Brewers’ necks as other good birds like Southern Whiteface, White-backed Swallow, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill and Red-capped Robin fell at their respective haunts.

The ever-nervous Blue Bonnet also fell en-route, which lifted spirits even higher, as Mick Brew had earlier made a big call that ‘winning the thing’ hinged on getting Blue Bonnets (strange, considering they had seen them the previous 2 years!).

The twitching continued - and a calling Blackbird, not heard since 2001, obliged not long before dusk. The Azure Kingfisher seen on the dummy run did not oblige, however it did not diminish their jubilation at the Saturday afternoon score. Lists were cross-checked as the 'night-run' began...102 species had been ticked...the prospects were looking very good indeed. The Hornet was a-buzz with twitching Brewers! 4 night birds and Masked Lapwings playing a round of night golf had The Brewers arriving at camp on 107 species, a score that is akin to what they usually leave the rainforest the following morning with!

With a luxurious two hours sleep, the lads greeted Sunday morning with the rainforest dawn chorus, a literal tick-fest in between yawns and watery eyes. It was only a matter of minutes before The Brewers were back into full throttle, spurred on by quality wet-forest birds such as Spectacled Monarch, Russet-tailed Thrush and Noisy Pitta. The elusive Brush Turkey alas could not be scored, although this did little to dampen their enthusiasm as they left the forest to begin the rainforest remnants 'mop-up' run.

And it could not have been any better, with virtually every species that could reasonably be expected ticked up, including Wompoo Fruit-Doves and Brush Cuckoos perched in the same tree at one site. The next spot had a Cicadabird and a Regent Bowerbird in adjacent trees! When a Pheasant Coucal started calling at this same spot it became apparent that The Brewers were amassing a great score...and there was much rejoicing.

The brewing bunch then made their way back through the Lower Hunter, visiting a few standard 'one-or-two bird sites'. At the most predictable of these spots traditional rivals, The Hunter Thickheads, were observed approaching the Hornet. Without delay The Brewer's twitch-list was flung out the window for a drive-by flash to the unsuspecting opponents.

The list, awash with orange hi-liter, brought a look of dismay on the collective Thickhead faces, which brought pandemonium to the brewing crew...and there was much rejoicing.

Soon after, The Brewers encountered Hunter Champagne Race team, 'Lesticum phoradae', busily consuming early-morning brut 'n' bickies. There was no time for chit-chat as the quarry at hand, the Musk Duck, was quickly located. It was then back to the Hornet, although not before running into yet another Hunter team, the Dodgy Drongo's, who displayed severe Main Race inexperience by walking casually down towards the edge of the water and chatting with the bubbly-sippers. Time may teach this young team that 'selective socialising' is crucial to Twitchathon success!

It was then onto the Hunter Estuary, and it was exciting times as the team realised that they had 181 species under their brewing belt, and it was still morning! However, it was also nervous times, as there were strong winds and 'in-between tides' in the estuary...critical factors for the wader species that cost The Brewers so dearly in 2003.

Ash Island was more productive than in previous years, with good birds such as Black-tailed Godwit, Horsfields Bronze-Cuckoo, White-fronted Chat and White-bellied Sea Eagle ticked. The estuary itself was lacking in several small waders due to the weather, although, with the two larger Terns, a reasonable handful of other waders and Pied Oystercatchers capably spied from across the river, The Brewers left for Newcastle Baths.

This was a vitally important decision, as a run back out to the Lower Hunter woodlands may be needed to be factored in for crucial 'mopping-up'. The baths were disappointing, with neither Ruddy Turnstones nor Sooty Oystercatchers present (constant frustrations for bathing brewers!).

Then the real race began...and this was to be a turning point for the 2004 campaign. An awesome foundation had been laid, sitting on 210 species. But the intensity had to be maintained for victory to be a chance. And so the 'slight detour' back out to the Lower Hunter was embarked upon, rapido! Once there, the birding had to be done fast – and with a remarkable mix of good brewing-oil and pure good luck, 4 key woodland species (Yellow-tufted and Black-chinned Honeyeaters, Spotted Quail-thrush and Common Bronzewing) were found before the quick U-turn back eastward.

There was just enough time in the bank for a quick stop-off at Leneghans Drive, where (incredibly) both Whistling Duck species were seen shading under the same tree...quickly followed by a totally unexpected Jacana, seen on the drive out. At this, a reaction of atomic proportions erupted throughout the team...cries of potential victory were bounced around the walls of the Hornet...it was way beyond 'much rejoicing' now.

Arriving at The Wetlands Centre with 217 species, The Brewers were visibly shaking with anticipation, barely able to disguise their brimming confidence. Did they have enough to win? Attentions were drawn to what the key adversaries, the Whacked Out Woodswallows, may be sitting on. Much banter about droughts out-west etc were garbled among the crew, although at the end of the day, they had their best personal total, and practically as good as they could have got on this route. They knew that two species were guaranteed at TWC, taking their total to 219. A third species, the Red-kneed Dotterel, was also added soon after arriving...giving them a grand total of 220 species. With that, the Woodswallows would virtually need to equal or better their record of 222 species (set last year) to beat The Brewers.

Back at the counting corner, the top Twitchathon teams from previous years gathered for the results. Steve Brew had the forms, trying his level best to not give away what he already knew - he must have been twitching his brewed brain out inside!

"The Hunter Thickheads...198!". There was slight relief.

"The Whacked Out Woodswallows...218!"...The Brewers went up in glee...they had done it!

"The Hunter Home Brewers...220!!". The crowd went completely bananas!

After a pensive wait for results from other NSW teams, it was official - The Brewers had pipped the Woodswallows out for victory, bringing the perpetual trophy back to its rightful home in the Hunter. Despite the customary post-mortems, including unfounded accusations about soliciting for the extra hour on Saturday afternoon, The Brewers were the 'men-of-the-moment' at the often-gruelling BBQ on Sunday afternoon.

How important that Painted Honeyeater at the start, or the last minute decision to head back west to the Lower Hunter, or that Jacana with both Whistling Ducks at the one spot? Such is the dynamics of the Twitchathon...well done Brewers and good luck for 2005...I'm imagining there is going to be a hefty gauntlet thrown down by the Woodswallows this year! And a hearty well done to the Hunter Thickheads, who provide much incentive to keeping The Brewers competitive. Will they finally leave the Hunter this year?

For the brewing team it leaves the tough decision of whether to repeat the winning route...or to break new brewing ground...time will tell what the lads will do in 2005.

PROGRAM NOTES

From Peter Phillips

The December/January period is usually a bit of a recess in terms of birdwatching with members attending to their families and resting up during the hotter days.

On December 5 2004 there was the, by now customary, Lathams Snipe count at Pambalong Swamp where I am informed 36 of the species were found. Efforts at other locations – for instance Tom Clarke and Robert McDonald did Newcastle Wetland Reserve and Market Swamp – brought the total to 104 in the Lower Hunter Wetlands. With David Forster finding some of the birds in the Forster area too.

On January 23 2005 Pambalong Swamp was surveyed again – this time by nine HBOC members and they discovered 120 Lathams Snipe. It is speculated that the drying out of other lower Hunter wetlands may influence the increasing numbers at Pambalong.

Clearly there are other likely wetlands not covered by these counts and a greater effort next year will add to our knowledge.

Also, since our last report, we have had successful surveys at Greswick Angus (Tawny Frogmouth family and Lathams Snipe) at the Tank Paddock.

Alan Stuart is organising another shorebird survey for Port Stephens on Sunday 27th February. NPWS is providing boats. Precise details not yet to hand but Alan is looking for a limited number of participants – preferably with an ability to speciate waders from 50-200m away from a boat.

THE CLUB COMMITTEE at WORK

The latest minutes of HBOC Management Committee show the number of issues in which we as a Club are involved and the amount of work put in by people, particularly Tom Clarke our indefatigable Secretary.

Just as a summary there were discussions, letters and representations on the following on-going issues (in no particular order of importance)

- The Clean –Up Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Day (6/3/05),
- Green Corridor campaign
- input re possible compensatory habitat at Market Swamp,
- Stockton Sandspit cannon netting,
- Eraring Community Forum (power station land management)
- Mangrove removal at Ash Island,
- Coastcare work plans
- The Wetland Centre –continued consultation on land use and re HBOC display at Wetlands Day
- The Estuary Management Plan

And all this, in addition to the usual “routine” items of program organisation, camp toilet replacement, finances, and coping with blizzard of regular correspondence.

One good feature of our Club has been the number of people involved in some way in the running of the organisation. Club Committee meetings are open to all and through the year, you might want to attend a meeting (but, beware, they might rope you in for some work). Or, if you have some issue that you want dealt with raised talk to your favourite Committee member at Club night.

Ashmore Reef Trip Report

From Richard Baxter

After racing up to Broome in early October to twitch the Rosy Starling, I found myself again in Broome on the 23rd for another Ashmore Reef pelagic trip. The pelagic this year ran from the 24th to the 31st October and consisted of 5 days at sea and three days on Ashmore Reef with a brief visit to Scott Reef on the way north. A total of 70 species, including 32 species of seabird were also recorded over 374 Nm of observation during the five days sailing to and from Ashmore Reef.

DAY 1 - 24 October 2004 Departed Broome 8.30am. Headed into a north/west wind producing minimal spray. First non-bird was a **Golden (olive)Seasnake** not long after leaving Roebuck Bay. This was soon followed by **Stoke's Seasnake**, and **Olive-headed Seasnake** over the next 8hrs. The only cetaceans of the day were **Indo-pacific Humpback Dolphins** 2. Birds included **Brown Booby** 167, **Lesser Frigatebird** 4, **Roseate Tern** 130, **Bridled tern** 2, **Common Tern** 200 and **Little Tern** 2. The water depth most of the day was less than 30m and we traveled within 20km of the coast all day, heading north. Of other interest were about 6 **Lesser Wanderer** butterflies and several small flying fish. A **Lemon Shark** came near the boat early afternoon as did three **Flatback Turtles**.

DAY 2 - 25th October 2004 Rose early to start an eventful day's birding, continuing on the course from Broome to Scott Reef. A full suite of petrels were sighted including **Wilson's Storm Petrel**, **Matsudaira's Storm Petrel** (many), **Bulwer's Petrel** (mainly late afternoon) and other highlights included a **Long-tailed Jaeger** and **Pomarine Jaeger** within several minutes of each other. A **Leatherback Turtle** in the morning also proved a 'first' for many and there were three sightings of **Spinner Dolphins**, including a close view of a group of about 45 animals including a number breaching and spinning. A pleasant and exhilarating day made all the better for the hospitality of the crew of the 'Willie' and a welcome cold beer on a delightful sunset at 5:50pm.

DAY 3 - 26th October 2004 Sunrise was at Scott Reef and about 5.30am a small to medium, unmarked brown starling circled the vessel before heading off southwest. This caused great excitement but we were unable to ID it before it flew off towards OZ. Our best guess was **White-shouldered Starling**. Leaving Scott Reef at about 08:30, the vessel was quickly in deep water over a steep drop off. A group of dolphins were approached and eventually identified as **Rough-Toothed Dolphins**. Highlights of the day included singles of **Leach's Storm Petrel** and **Swinhoe's Petrel**, plus numbers of **Bulwer's Petrel** and a lone **Jouanin's Petrel**. Shortly out of Scott Reef, three **Cuvier's Beaked Whales** were seen.

DAY 4 - 27th October 2004 Arrived Ashmore Reef at dawn in splendid conditions after a good nights sleep on deck. Soon after mooring, we were approached by an Indonesian Prau (fishing boat) and we spotted a passerine on the rear deck. It promptly took off and flew calling towards our yacht. It was a wagtail, quickly identified by Mike Carter as a **Grey Wagtail**. With anticipation therefore we headed to west island. Birding got off to a quiet start then a few **Oriental Cuckoos** were found and at about 09:30 the group found two **Yellow Wagtails**. On the way back to meet the boat the **Grey Wagtail** was refound feeding on flies in rocks along the shore. A quick trip to middle island at high tide added another bird to the trip list - **Black Noddy** - as well as huge numbers of breeding seabirds such as frigatebirds, 3 x booby sp, common noddy and both tropicbirds.as well as lots of turtles and reef sharks.

DAY 5 - 28th October 2004 A balmy night with a full moon and an extremely calm sea. In the morning, after a slightly delayed departure on a very low spring tide, we arrived on West Island. Only after about an hour, we discovered an **Island Monarch** and within several minutes, everyone got good views. If as is expected, this is accepted, this would be the 'first for Australia' that many of the group were hoping for. After this initial excitement, the group visited Middle Island and a sand spit just to the east of Middle Island with very large numbers of waders.

Highlights included **Masked Boobys, Black Noddies**, about 100 **Little Terns**, an **Asian Dowitcher**, **Lesser Sandplover**, **Great Knots** and **Little Curlew**. On return to the vessel the group discovered a **Loggerhead Turtle** on a sandbar in the shallows. We returned to our yacht for lunch and our daily snorkel over the reef. Early afternoon we headed back to West Island and after about an hour on West Island Mark Taylor discovered an **Arctic Warbler!**

DAY 6 - 29th October 2004 A final morning visit to West Island yielded yet more rarities with two **Arctic Warblers** and two **Oriental Reed Warblers**. Whilst on the island the group also found two more nests of **Red-tailed Tropicbird** bringing the minimum number of nests to four. Departed Shmore Reef about 8.30am.

DAY 7 - 30th October 2004 Awoke to a pleasant array of birds including an early **Tahiti Petrel** before the sun came up to begin birding in earnest. Though bird numbers were generally low, today offered some of the best sightings with close views of **Matsudaira's Storm Petrel**, **Swinhoe's Storm Petrel** and two sightings of **Jouanin's Petrel**. The day was ruled however by **Streaked Shearwater**. An early sighting in deep water was an early forecast of the vast numbers that would be seen later in the day. Over three hundred individuals were seen including a single raft of over 250 birds.

DAY 8 - 31st October 2004 Final morning on the Willie began about five miles west of the Lacapedes and continued into Broome, to arrive at about 3pm. As expected the day was dominated by sightings of terns, mainly **Roseate Terns** but also some **Common Terns** (particularly as we approached Broome) and **Little Terns**. Several feeding flocks early in the day yielded a few **Common Noddies**, **Sooty Terns** and **Bridled Terns**, **Streaked Shearwaters** and **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters**. Should anybody like a full list of species seen as well as numbers I can email on request.

Richard Baxter

MIGRATING BIRDS

Two interesting recent research papers shed some light on how birds migrate over long distances in annual migrations. Both article summaries were printed in the **Birds Queensland Newsletter** - the source documents are cited in the text.

(1) Migratory Birds spy out Magnetic Field

(From: *New Scientist* No 2473 13 Nov. 2004.)

Some birds, especially those that migrate at night, use the Earth's magnetic field to find their way. They presumably sense the north-south direction of the field and use that as a reference to find the direction they need to fly. But no one knows how they do it, or even where the magnetic sensor is.

Now German researchers have shown that the European garden warbler turns its head to detect the Earth's magnetic field, adding to evidence that the birds detect magnetic fields with their eyes.

Henrik Mouritsen and colleagues at the University of Oldenburg in Germany filmed warblers during the period of restlessness that preceded their autumn migration. One group was shielded from the Earth's magnetic field, the other not.

Birds in the normal field turned their heads left and right horizontally, then point south --west, the direction in which they migrate. Birds that were experiencing no magnetic field performed three times as much head-scanning in a desperate attempt to tune into the magnetic field, then oriented themselves randomly (*Current Biology* Vol 14 p 1946)

Mouritsen has published evidence that molecules called cryptochromes in the bird's retinas, which undergo a chemical reaction that is sensitive to magnetic forces, allow the bird to literally see the magnetic field.

(2) Migrating Birds rely on sunsets

US Scientists believe that they have made an important breakthrough in the mystery of how migrating birds manage to navigate thousands of kilometres and arrive at exactly the same spot each year.

Laboratory experiments in the past have suggested that birds may use a number of cues, including sunlight, stars and the Earth's magnetic field, which they can detect inside their bodies.

This study, reported in the journal *Science*, (Volume 304 16/4/04 pp 405/408), involved tracking a group of thrushes across hundreds of miles of the American Midwest and finding out what happened when they were deliberately confused by a manmade magnet and knocked off-course.

The birds were captured during their northward migration and released at nightfall when they would normally continue their journey – having been fitted with tiny radio transmitters. Their flight path was then tracked by researchers chasing animals for six days, in a vehicle with an antenna mounted on top.

Just before setting off they birds were exposed to the artificial magnetic field pointing east. On the first night, the songbirds headed west, apparently knocked off course by the magnet. On subsequent nights, they managed to correct this mistake and continued northward towards their destination. The researchers concluded that each night the thrushes must have "recalibrated" their inbuilt compass from the position of the setting Sun.

This helps explain two enigmas surrounding the "flying by compass" theory. First, the position of the magnetic North Pole shifts significantly each year, so magnetic signals alone would not be reliable especially in higher latitudes. Also, bird compasses cannot distinguish between north and south so you would expect them to be confused when crossing the equator.

Amazingly then, this study does seem to suggest that birds can "reset" their navigation system daily by comparing the direction of the sunset with the magnetic signals they detect. The research was conducted at the Illinois Natural History Survey by William Cochran and colleagues.

COUNTING GLOSSIES WITH DUBBO FIELD NATURALISTS

Cumberland Bird Observers Club have organised a three day "weekend break" for their members on 18-20 March 2005.

The tour is organised commercially and does not appear to be exclusive to CBOC members.

The tour is run by Follow That Bird. Telephone 02 9973 1865. and costs \$455 per person twin share or double with a single supplement of \$70.00.

The focus is the staking out of eleven dams at sunset to count Glossy Black Cockatoos however there will be birding on the way out plus a trip behind the scenes at Dubbo Zoo. (And, I reckon a really good chance for a Malleefowl with the local experts on board).

Cost is inclusive of coach travel – presumably ex Sydney - accommodation and meals.

Website > www.followthatbird.com.au

The Best Time To See Shorebirds at Stockton Sandspit

By Tom Clarke

Stockton Sandspit (SSS) is famous for its shorebirds and for the fact that the shorebirds use it as a high tide roost. Its no wonder then, that many people believe the high tide is the time to go see shorebirds at Stockton Sandspit. I need to inform people that no matter what the tide is doing, high or low, rising or falling, shorebirds are reacting to it or taking advantage of it at SSS.

The truth is that the sandspit is a dynamic habitat, forever undergoing change, influenced by tides, river currents, weather, seasons and even the time of day. This is the case for many other features of the estuary, of course, but the sandspit is so accessible that the comings and goings of estuary flora and fauna is easily observed there. Our particular interest, shorebirds, are very much a part of all that.

Mid-tide and rising is an exciting time for observers, as flocks of shorebirds start to leave the low tide foraging grounds and head downstream. From the vantage of the sandspit you can witness these squadrons flying down the river as they make their way to staging points prior to roosting. Lots of these squadrons are seen disappearing over the dykes where mud flats will still be exposed and some additional feeding time is available.

Others make their way directly to the beach at Stockton Sandspit. During times when numbers of Red-necked Avocet are high (counts of several thousand have been recorded) the sight of these very visible birds streaming out of Fullerton Cove, flying so low over the river and rising in a final bank to land on the beach never fails to thrill. Depending on the numbers and the height of the previous low tide, this procession may last for 90 minutes as they arrive in groups of 50 to 250 birds.

About this time it is also fun to watch the Pelicans being slowly forced off the sand bar as the tide rises to their bellies.

Up to an hour before the high tide many other shorebirds can be seen on the beach or coming over the top of the berm to take up some space on the sandspit proper. If you are attentive you will have already seen the first scouts of each species take a turn or two around the lagoon before flying back to report to their mates. Just about any species of shorebird that is in the estuary can be expected to turn up; curlew, godwit, knot, sandpiper and stint certainly make up the bulk of the numbers.

Many assemble in the water of the lagoon, some will stand on open ground, while others will make for the salt marsh areas. This can be a busy time for any proportion of the shorebirds that go looking for further feeding opportunities around the margins of the lagoon. Also during this transition stage the shorebirds are often disturbed by raptors checking out the growing congregation and sometimes this leads to lots of rearranging between the sandspit and the dykes. A nervous time for shorebirds but a real spectacle for observers is quite often the result.

Over the high tide there will be a period when all is settled and most likely this is the least interesting time of all. It is now a good time for observers to go for a walk around to Fern Bay and see what those "grey birds" are doing. Either on the stone bank or out on the timber structures of the oyster lease you will find Terek Sandpiper and Grey-tailed Tattler. I don't know why they prefer to roost here, and not with the "brown birds" but it presents a convenient situation for wader survey types to easily count these birds. Also around at Fern Bay, you can always rely on finding several Whimbrel roosting in the mangroves and by the time you walk back things are starting to change again at the sandspit.

Two hours past the high tide there begins the movement of birds off the sandspit and onto the beach. The falling tide also calls birds from the dykes to join the others and follow the water's edge as it moves slowly off the beach and across the mud flats.

The last birds to leave are usually the Eastern Curlew and this is a great relief to the ground nesting birds that choose to breed at the sandspit, that now can relax for five or six hours before the next invasion. Out on the mud all the shorebirds are amassing and while most seem to be roosting still, several are getting an early start on the next session of feeding. Again this is an excellent time for observations and an opportunity to increase your skills at identifying shorebirds in flight.

By mid-tide and falling, the sand bar is exposed and lots of birds have migrated there. The total number of shorebirds has diminished as half of them have taken off in their squadrons for Fullerton Cove or wherever. Even at one hour prior to the next low tide there will still be scores of birds loafing; mostly godwit or knot and a hand full of avocet but at times hundreds of sandpiper types and stint. We have witnessed these birds "roosting" completely over the low tide after a short mid-tide feed.

Low tide the shorebirds that have chosen to stay are basically spread out over the mud flats and feverishly feeding. This is a terrific time to get close to some of these birds and the berm can be used as a very convenient screen to watch those feeding along the shoreline near the oyster reef. Usually there is a pretty good representation of the shorebirds seen over the high tide but look out for some extras. This will mean checking out every individual on the mud flats but quite often you'll get some high quality sightings.

Seasonally, it is probably the most rewarding time to see shorebirds at Stockton Sandspit from late July through to April. Shorebird numbers and range of species increase dramatically from September but ground-nesting birds have already begun breeding activities 6 weeks earlier. By April most of the migrants have left but winter still has its moments as the lives of the over-wintering birds continue to be controlled by the tides.

For the patient birdwatcher, it does not matter when you go to Stockton Sandspit; matter of fact, I think I'll go right now. Be sure to check the tides before you do, however, so that your observations carry more meaning and you will gain greater personal satisfaction from your birdwatching.

Clean Up Day at Stockton Sandspit 6th March 2005

Go check your diaries and mark **Sunday 6th March** and more importantly turn up on the day and help out. As it has been previously pointed out;

"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?" "Well don't just think about it, do it!"

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 instruction before you start cleaning up or weeding. If you plan to do some weeding, a small pick is sufficient to remove weeds from sand. We won't be touching anything huge. Also bring your own morning tea/lunch etc: there will be water available for drinking and washing up.

Clean Up Day officially starts at 9.00am but I will be there from 7.00am watching the waders fill up the beach (low tide at approx 12.47am) and leaving the sandspit for the weeders.

Hope to see you there.

Tom Clarke
4951 3872 or 0418 411 785 on the day.

BIRDS AUSTRALIA NEWS

Birds Australia Southern NSW & ACT Group (BASNA) is holding a Seminar and its AGM on Saturday 2 April 2005 between 12noon and 4.30pm,

The venue is the National Library Lecture Theatre in Canberra.

SEMINAR THEME

BUSHFIRES AND BIRDS

Registration: BA Members \$25, Non Members \$30, Students \$20.

Registration close 21 March 2005 .

Late Registration will incur an added \$5 fee.

The speakers are excellent and various and there are other events happening at the same time – eg birding interest trips.

If you're interested or for further information contact Lise at BASNA on;
Tel 02 9436 Fax 029436 0466
Email: rosella63@bigpond.com.

Birds Australia's Members Day and AGM will be held on Saturday 28 May 2005 in Cairns. Details are a bit sketchy but if you're considering going it might be a good time to book airfares and decide which old friend you are going to sponge off in FNQ.

The Birds Australia website is a useful source for events and project reports.
www.birdsaustralia.com.au

THE WETLANDS CENTRE ACTIVITIES

Breakfast with the Birds

7.00am March 13

8.30 am May 8 Mothers Day Breakfast

8.30am July 10

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Spotlight Prowls

Feb 19, Mar 19, April 16, May 21

Check start time when you book.

.....

Canoeing Adventures on Ironbark Creek.

9.30am first Sunday every month.

Feb 6, Mar 6, April 3, June 5.

Bookings essential for all programs
For more detail and prices ring TWC
on 4951 6466.

Magical Estuary Tours

Thousands of migratory birds visit the Hunter Estuary each summer: one of the best places to see them is from the water.

Three-hour tours on the Lady Joy depart from Queens Wharf.

9.30am Thurs.24 Feb

10.30am Sat. 12 March

9.30am Sat. 26 March

Bookings essential 4964 9308

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHTS DEC 2004/FEB2005

2004				
Nov 13	Bush Stone-Curlew	2 heard	Plumridge Cl. Warners Bay	Brian Chaffey
Nov 18	Pacific Golden Plover	206	Kooragang Is. [Dykes]	Jenny Spencer
	Grey Plover	3	"	"
Nov 12	Nankeen Night Heron	85	Wallbridge Reserve [Raymond Terr.]	M.Maddock
Nov 26	" " "	48	"	"
Nov 16	Buff-banded Rail	1	East Seaham	"
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	14	Newline Rd. Raymond Terrace	"
Nov 26	Great Crested Grebe	27	Grahamstown Dam	"
	Musk Duck	11	"	"
Nov 7	Latham's Snipe	5	Tenambit Common	G.Brosie
	Whiskered Tern	50+	Lenaghan's Drive	"
	Cicadabird	1	Tank Paddock	"
Nov 10	Common Blackbird	2heard	East Maitland	"
	Zebra Finch	2 nb	"	"
Nov 18	Dollarbird	10	Singleton	"
Nov 20	Banded Lapwing	3	Flat Road, Bolwarra	"
Nov 28	Grey Plover	1	Stockton Sandspit	"
Dec 4	Common Blackbird	1	Telarah	"
	Pacific Golden Plover	17	Scott's Point, Ash Island	"
Nov 27	Glossy Black Cockatoo	3	Camp Kanangra, Nords Wharf	T.Clarke
Nov 30	Powerful Owl	2	Flaggy Creek, Glenrock SRA	"
Nov 27	Little Eagle	1	Federal Park, Wallsend	"
Nov 29	Gang-Gang Cockatoo	4	Teralba [Metromix forest]	"
Nov 19	Latham's Snipe	2	Seaham [private property]	"
Nov 13	White-throated Needletail	2	Fassifern	"
Nov 10	Bar-tailed Godwit	1	Belmont Bay	"
Nov 23	Regent Bowerbird	1	Clarencetown [East Seaham Rd]	L.Storm
Nov 22	Glossy Black Cockatoo	6 + 1dy	Wye Point	D. Moon
Nov 28	Oriental Cuckoo	2	"	"
Dec 5	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	3	"	"
Nov 23	:Yellow Wagtail	1	Ash Island	R.McDonald
Nov 23	Painted Snipe	1	"	"
Dec 3	Painted Snipe	2	Ash Island	J.Smart
Nov 13	Grey Plover	3	Kooragang [Dykes]	M.Todd
Dec 1	Glossy Black Cockatoo	3	Dora Creek	"
Dec 8	Southern Boobook	3 +3dy	Toronto	"
Nov 25	Rufous Fantail	1	Belmont South	J.Cockerell
Dec 3	Musk Lorikeet	1	Toronto [Nursing Home]	"
Dec 3	Little Penguin	1	Bar Beach	R.McDonald
	Tropicbird spp.	1	Off Bar Beach	"
Dec 6	Scaly-Breasted Lorikeet	1	Merewether	K. & M. Woods
Dec 1	Black-fronted Dotteel	1 on	Ash Island	N.McNaughton
Dec 6	Glossy Ibis	1	Raymond Terrace [Newline Rd]	D.Cooper
Dec 7	Tawny Frogmouth	1+2dy	Mayfield	M.Chegwidden
Dec 17	Grey-tailed Tattler	>75	Pindimar	A.Stuart
	Pied Oystercatcher	10	"	"

	Striated Heron	1	“	“
	Eastern Curlew	38	“	“
	Bar-tailed Godwit	97	Mudbishops Point	“
	Red-capped Plover	18 +1 runner	“	“
	Lesser Sand Plover	2	“	“
	Sanderling	35	“	“
	Pacific Golden Plover	113	“	“
	Red-necked Stint	54	“	“
	Ruddy Turnstone	1	“	“
	Curlew Sandpiper	1	“	“
	Little Tern	>300	“	“
	Common Tern	>200	“	“
	Brahminy Kite	1	Manning River	“
	Forest Raven	2	Harrington	“
Dec 17	Varied Triller	2	Harrington Rain Forest	A. Stuart
Dec 28	Olive Whistler	1	Kerripit Rd. Gloucester Tops	“
	“	1	Pheasants Creekd. Barrington Tops	“
	Crescent Honeyeater	4	“	“
Dec 29	Flame Robin	Many	Barrington Tops	“
Dec 30	Red-browed Treecreeper	1	Pheasants Creek Rd.	“
Dec 31	Ruff [Reeve]	1	Singleton [cemetery Rd. swamp]	“
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	41	“	“

Breaking News – Pelagics are on again this year

It is looking like there will be a re-start to the pelagic trips. Richard Baxter is determined to organise two trips in April. If these work out then more will follow later in the year.

The April pelagics are set for

Trip 1 - Sunday 3rd April 2005

Trip 2 - Sunday 10th April 2005.

The vessel will depart the Brewery Wharf, Wharf Rd, Newcastle at 7am and the cost is \$80 (but may have to increase for the trips later in the year). It is BYO lunch and drinks - would-be attendees should note this change from the previous way they were run.

If you want to go on a pelagic, please contact Richard directly. His e-mail address is randrbaxter@yahoo.com

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
Sunday 13 February 2005	Atlas outing to Lemon Tree Passage	Meet 7.30am Salt Ash roundabout service station	Nick Livanos 4954 5739
Sunday 20 February 2005	Field Outing Dungog Area	Meet 7.00am Raymond Terrace Macdonalds Car Park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Saturday 26 February 2005	Hunter Wader Survey	10.30am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday 27 February 2005	Port Stephens Wader Survey	Meet 9.00am NPWS Teramby Road, Nelson Bay	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 You need to confirm a place on this survey.
Tuesday 1 March 2005	Midweek Outing Taylors Beach	Meet 7.30am Car Park Taylors Beach	Neville McNaughton 4951 1265
Sunday 6 March 2005	Clean Up Day	9.00am to noon at Stockton Sandspit	Tom Clarke 0418 411 785 on the day
Wednesday 9 March 2005	Club Night	7.30pm Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Speaker: Glenn Albrecht Solastalgia – ecosystem and human health in the Hunter
Saturday 12 March 2005	Hunter Wader Survey	10.30am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday 20 March 2005	Field Outing Stockton Sandspit and Ash Island	Meet 8.00am Stockton Sandspit car park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
25-28 March 2005	Camp on private property at Maules Creek near Gunnedah	Seek instruction from Alan Stuart for directions etc.	Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Tuesday 5 April 2005	Midweek Outing Blackbutt Reserve	Meet 8.00am Car Park Carnley Ave. Entrance	Margaret Stewart 4963 2029
Saturday 9 April 2005	Hunter Wader Survey	8.30am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Wednesday 13 April 2005	Club Night	7.30pm Wetlands Centre, Shortland	Speaker: Chris Herbert Birds of Queensland Wet Tropics

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