



## Hunter Bird Observers Club

# NEWSLETTER

Issue 2/05

April-May 2005

Newsletter articles welcome –  
contact Newsletter Editor  
Peter Phillips.  
34 McIntyre St, Cardiff 2285  
Tel: (02) 4956 9090  
Fax (02) 4954 7118  
Email:  
piper@hunterlink.net.au

**Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.**

**P.O. Box 24, New Lambton, NSW 2305**

**Telephone: (02) 4958 5942**

Website [www.hboc.org.au](http://www.hboc.org.au)

### Committee

**President:** Liz Crawford  
**Vice-president:** Alan Stuart  
**Secretary:** Tom Clarke  
**Treasurer:** Rowley Smith

#### Committee Members:

Michael Todd  
Grant Brosie  
Anthony Gooden  
Chris Herbert  
Ann Lindsey  
Robert McDonald

#### 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:

Ian MacKenzie,  
Charmain Eckersley,  
Andrew Taylor and  
Joan Natano

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

### NEWSLETTER DATES FOR 2005

#### **Edition**

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

#### **Copy Deadline**

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

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN – April 2005

As this is the first newsletter since the Annual General Meeting in February, I would like to thank the outgoing Committee for their enthusiastic commitment and support during 2004, and welcome the incoming Committee to an exciting year of involvement with birds, bird habitat and bird observers. HBOC provided a comprehensive activities program throughout 2004 and achieved an enormous amount of publicity for birds in the Hunter Region as well as maintaining regular surveys of various sites. Members' individual observations contributed important information to the Annual Bird Report, which Alan Stuart compiled and edited. The efforts of all members who contribute to smooth running of the Club are greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Funds raised from last October's Twitchathon will be used to purchase collapsible water tanks for use in watering tree plantings in the Capertee Valley. Capertee Valley is a prime breeding site for endangered Regent Honeyeaters and is the main focus for habitat restoration as part of the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program. The Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority has provided 3 years of funding for tree-planting in the Capertee Valley and it is imperative that regular watering of seedlings be undertaken to ensure successful growth. This is a very positive application of funds raised during the Twitchathon.

Important Bird Areas will be a focus for HBOC this year. The Important Bird Area (IBA) Programme of BirdLife International aims to identify, monitor and protect a global network of IBAs for the conservation of the world's birds and other biodiversity.

Birds Australia has a partnership with BirdLife International to facilitate identification of suitable sites in Australia. Local groups are being encouraged to identify areas that may qualify as IBAs, and provide documented evidence to support such claims. The process is being supported by BIGnet, the 'Bird Interest Group Network', which consists of representatives from bird observing clubs throughout NSW.

A site is recognised as an IBA only if it meets certain criteria, based on the occurrence of key bird species that are vulnerable to global extinction or whose populations are otherwise irreplaceable. An IBA must be amenable to conservation action and management. IBAs may have significant numbers of one or more globally threatened species, or they may hold a suite of restricted-range species, or they may have exceptionally large numbers of migratory or congregatory species.

The Lower Hunter Estuary and Port Stephens are being considered as IBAs because of the significant numbers of migratory species, such as Eastern Curlew, and non-migratory species such as Red-necked Avocets, present in these areas. As the criteria for identification of IBAs depend heavily on numbers of birds present, the Club's survey data and Annual Bird Reports will be essential supporting information.

More than 12,000 IBAs have been identified and documented in all regions of the world, including the oceans. Last year more than a dozen IBAs were proposed in Queensland and NSW is now starting to identify possible IBAs. HBOC aims to compile the necessary information to support the proposal of the Lower Hunter Estuary and Port Stephens as IBAs by the end of this year.

As I write, Rainbow Lorikeets are squawking noisily in the flowering Spotted Gums, and I keep listening for other calls that may herald the arrival of Swift Parrots or Regent Honeyeaters to the Hunter Region. Autumn marks the departure of migratory waders to their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere, but it is also the time to watch for other, more localised migrations – Spangled Drongos will be appearing soon and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters will migrate through in large numbers.

Happy birding!

Liz Crawford

## **Summary of Conservation Activities in 2004 by Jenny Powers (Conservation Officer)**

In 2004, HBOC members have been very active fighting potential threats to birds and their habitat throughout the Hunter. Most attention has focused on the Green Corridor that stretches from Stockton Bight, through the wetlands around the Hunter Estuary, across Kooragang and Ash Islands to The Wetlands Centre and the Hexham wetlands, through the Tank Paddock, Pambalong and Blue Gum Hills Nature Reserves to Mount Sugarloaf and the Watagans.

The conservation committee, led by Ann Lindsey, Neil Fraser, Mike Newman and Max Maddock, has continued to address bird-threatening developments proposed for the Hunter Estuary. Numerous letters have been written to the Premier, the Environment Minister and local members of parliament, with little response. However, both Protech and Austeel have withdrawn their proposals for developments on Kooragang Island and the Tomago site respectively and the groundswell of protest against these sorts of developments may well have contributed to their demise.

More recently there have been calls for port-related development at Kooragang Island and Tomago. In response, Neil Fraser has produced a well-written and researched submission highlighting the damage that this proposal could have on the Hunter Estuary in general and in particular, the migratory waders.

Along the same theme, Max Maddock proposed that the Hunter Estuary Ramsar site (Kooragang Nature Reserve) should be listed on the Montreux record. This is a way of alerting the international community that the Ramsar site is not being managed in a manner that protects its ecological sustainability. The arguments for listing are based on the fact that the site was originally listed as a Ramsar site because of its importance for migratory waders and since that time, the numbers of migratory waders and species have declined due to the degradation of the estuary as a result of development, such as dredging.

During the year, Tom Clarke, Anthony Gooden and Neville McNaughton have continued to lead an active team of weeders at Stockton Sandspit. In between working, they obviously manage to watch a bird or two as they often come up with some interesting observations about bird behaviour at the Sandspit.

A Coastcare Grant was used to provide some excellent migratory wader signs produced by Chris Herbert and installed at the Sandspit. After much discussion, an Envirofund grant, originally obtained for a bird hide on Stockton Sandspit, is proposed to be used to remove mangroves at selected places on Ash Island. Mangrove removal to improve wader habitat on Ash Island has been approved by NSW Fisheries.

Earlier in the year, the Green Biodiversity Corridor was launched at the Jubilee Room in Parliament House, Sydney. Chris Herbert produced a great poster, which Paul Baird, Max Blanch and Robert McDonald took down to Sydney. HBOC's poster was one of eight on display and it focused on birds and their habitat and the desirability of continuous habitat, not a patchwork of fragmented bits and pieces.

In further support of the Green Corridor, HBOC has actively participated in the draft plan of management for Pambalong Nature Reserve and continued to survey the Tank Paddock, which is located close to Pambalong. The bird species list for the Tank Paddock continues to grow. It now stands at 147 species, which is pretty impressive for a 160 hectare area. Recently, we have had wonderful views of Brown Quail, Leaden Flycatcher and Lewin's Honeyeater feeding their young and a poor little White-browed Scrubwren attempting to keep the food up to a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo.

Fortunately, Newcastle City Council has recognised its value and rejected rezoning the Tank Paddock for medium density development.

## AGM 2005

On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2005 HBOC held its AGM at The Wetland Centre.

Names of elected Club Committee members are on the front page of this newsletter.

In addition there was the usual throng of volunteers to fill the many vital roles that keep the Club going and make it the inclusive organisation that it is:

Activities Officer:	Paul Baird
Ass. Activities Officer	Nick Livanos
Mid-week Outings	Val & Don Moon
Conservation	Jenny Powers
Ass. Treasurer	Leslie Marshall
Librarian (books)	Grant Brosie
Ass. Librarian (Books)	Robert McDonald
Librarian (slides)	John Cockerell
Librarian (A/V)	Grant Brosie
Records Officer	Sue Hamonet
BA Atlas Recorder	Ed Hamonet
Public Officer	Tom Clarke
Public Relations Officer	Marion Walker
Publicity Officer	Peter Phillips
Membership Officer	Rowley Smith
Suppers Organisers	Judith Westphal
Club Night Assistants	Anthony Gooden
Auditor	Pam Durie
Newsletter Editor	Katrina Thornton
Newsletter Production	Peter Phillips
& Distribution	Phil Rankin
Annual Bird Report Editor	Tom Clarke
Website Editor	Alan Stuart
	Dick Jenkin

## Mid-week Outing- Green Point 1-Feb-05

### Report from Grant Brosie

There are two things I enjoy about mid-week outings. Firstly there is the great company and relaxed attitude, which is sometimes tested with twitchers like Robert and I in the group, and secondly all the new areas we get to explore such as Green Point, Valentine.

A fair-sized group were treated to some very nice birds during the first section of our walk. Highlights included Brown Cuckoo-dove, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Rufous Fantail and Black-faced Monarch. As usual the mob separated with the lead group seeing a male Leaden Flycatcher, and the trailers seeing a female Regent Bowerbird feeding a young one.

After morning tea we drove to the southern section of the park where we picked up White-throated Needletail, Sacred Kingfisher and two, well-camouflaged Tawny Frogmouths. The heat of the day eventually got too much so we called it a day with just over 60 species on the list. Thanks Anthony for a great morning.

## Atlas Day- Lemon Tree Passage 13-Feb-05

### Report from Grant Brosie

What a turn out for an Atlas Day, 10 observers met at the Lemon Tree Passage boat ramp ready for a good days birding. A quick walk along the foreshore revealed a stunning White-bellied Sea-eagle, Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit and a young Crested Tern.

Our next stop was Tanilba Bay, but not before we stopped to see the two nesting Bush Thick-knee. Here we found White-cheeked Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Variegated Fairy-wren, Common Ibis, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet and a very hungry looking Grey Butcherbird, which alarmed a pair of White-browed Scrubwrens.

After morning tea we visited the Osprey nesting site. This was a very nice walk with Mistletoebird, Brown Goshawk, Little Wattlebird, Blue-faced Honeyeater and Eastern Whipbird being seen.

Our last stop for the day was to Max Blanch's place for lunch overlooking the water. In the surrounding bush we located Sacred Kingfisher, Eastern Yellow Robin, Olive-backed Oriole, three Double-barred Finches, and the highlight of the day, a pair of Leaden Flycatcher feeding two dependant young.

A very good day with 66 species being recorded.

## Patience Rewarded With Fabulous Shorebird Observations.

Club outing to Stockton Sandspit  
Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2005.

Report from Tom Clarke.

By the time our outing officially got under way it was already 2.5 hours after the predicted high tide at Stockton Bridge. Except for those cunning birdos that turned up an hour early, most people missed the last great movement of waders off the lagoon onto the beach but as luck would have it there remained plenty of individuals representing most species. A great opportunity for everyone to get their eye in with shorebird identification presented itself and for nearly ¾ of an hour the group was happy to stand on the viewing mound and take it all in.

Black-winged Stilt could be compared with Red-necked Avocet, a Red-necked Stint was gaining some breeding colour and the Eastern Curlew stood about seemingly oblivious to anything that may have been going on. A family group of two adults and an immature Pied Oystercatcher prompted some discussion over the amount of colour in the immature bird's bill, legs and eye ring. Also, a dusty brown wash was still detectable in the folded wings of the young bird – another local breeding success?

By mid-tide and falling our group of 13, were ready to go look at the 3,000 plus birds we knew were out on the beach but till now had been hidden by the berm. Already some of the avocet had started to leave but plenty still remained (about 2000 birds) and it was fun to watch them march, in such an organised way, towards the receding shoreline. Gradually, each "squadron" took off up the river after doing wing-stretching exercises - or were they indicating who wanted to go next?

While birds were leaving and some individuals fed along the shore, the majority, were content to loaf about with heads tucked in, doing their best to make identification so hard. With patience and some expert guidance we all managed to work out the difference between Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits and why Red Knots are not Great Knots. Well they are great of course but not Great. And another thing, those Red Knots were not red. Believe it or ....! I think from memory it was 8 knots and anyway, that's the limit on the river.

Over the next hour we enjoyed the comings and goings of all sorts of shorebirds and wasn't it just brilliant to see at close quarters Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek Sandpiper and Whimbrel as they foraged about the oyster reef. Using the berm as a blind, you can get really close to some of these birds. What excitement then as a flock of about 50 small waders flew in and landed on the beach right in front of us. The majority of this mixed flock, were Red-capped Plover and Red-necked Stint but a couple of Curlew Sandpiper and a single Lesser Sand Plover provided an excellent opportunity to compare size and shapes. And those stint couldn't have cared less about observer types as they walked all over the beach with some heading in our direction.

It was a terrific morning all up; the sandspit behaved admirably and produced plenty of very satisfying observations for our group while people stayed together and quietly shared a little feast of shorebird magic. I thank everyone who attended, expert and novice, for their great interest and good company.

### BRIEF NOTES ON OTHER CLUB OUTINGS.

**Outing to Dungog ( Jindalee) 20 February 2005**  
16 people including two interstate visitors identified 61 species.

**Easter Camp** - foothills of the Kapatour Ranges out past Boggabri). A great time - beautiful sunshine every day with wonderful scenery and 98 species on the final list. Highlights were several Turquoise Parrot, several Painted Button-quail, 4 Wedge-tailed Eagles interacting, Hooded and Red -capped Robin and 30+ King Parrots in a tree together.

**Midweek Outing to Taylors Beach** on 1 March. 17 in attendance including some new members.

### GOULD EXHIBITION

The John Gould Exhibition has commenced at Newcastle Regional Library, Laman Street Newcastle. It will run until 14 May 2005. Worth a visit!

## LOCAL BIRD BEHAVIOUR NOTES

We have had a report of a Laughing Kookaburra beating the daylight out of a Sacred Kingfisher in a garden. The Kookaburra wasn't seen to catch the Kingfisher so it could well have been dead already, but the Kookaburra clearly intended to eat the morsel, as it had several tries to swallow but found the prey too large. The Kookaburra was first seen battering the Kingfisher on the ground, then flying up to a perch where it continued the battering before flying away with the hapless Kingfisher in its bill.

(From Martin Heffron – via Sue Hamonet)

On 3 February 2005 while observing the feeding behaviour of a Latham's Snipe at Irawang Swamp, Max Maddock noticed the following interesting interaction with an Australian Raven. The snipe was probing amongst exposed roots of a Casuarina protruding from the side of the steep bank of an island. The Raven flew down, carrying something in its beak, and landed beside the snipe on the log and proceeded to wash the item in the water. The snipe immediately became agitated, faced the raven, raised its tail in a vertical fan shape with spiky looking edges and exposed the bright rufous colour on the dorsal surface of the tail, apparently a warning display. The raven ignored the snipe, which then moved rapidly away. (Max Maddock)

It was a fine, sunny and hot day (30 degrees) on the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2005. Diane Rogers was sitting in the grounds of the Wetlands Centre. An Australian Raven (*Corvus coronoides*) was noted to be sitting in a nearby eucalyptus tree. Casually watching the bird Diane became aware of behaviour that she had never previously noticed.

The Raven was calling softly when a second Raven (the male) flew into the tree close to the first Raven (the female) and they touched bills tip to tip slowly and gently several times. This may have been the 'greeting' of mated birds. A baby Raven then appeared from behind the mother and begged food from the father. Whilst the baby's throat was stretched upward, mouth open and still begging, Diane noticed that the inside of the mouth was red and an unfeathered red line about 25mm long and 1mm wide ran along both sides of the throat.

Presumably this is one of the features that helps to guide the parent birds when feeding their offspring. The mother then leant across and slowly, but gently, cleaned the throat feathers of the young Raven. Diane watched these birds for about 15 minutes when they flew away.

From Wilma Barden – as reported by Diane Rogers)

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### And some local sightings via the Alan Stuart email information service

Yellow Wagtail, Ash Island 30 March between poles 23 and 24 along Wagtail Way. Used to be that they turned up at Pole 21 – so check there too. The tracks are quite cut up at the moment not helped by the recent rain. (Neville McNaughton)

A pair of Wandering Whistling Duck with dependent young at Pambalong NR over Easter plus a Square tailed Kite at Raymond Terrace – same period (both these sightings from Phil Hansboro)

An unusual bird seen recently at New Lambton in a gully near Curzon Road. Seems to have gone now. About flycatcher sized, glossy black quite long tail which had an unusual pattern especially the two outer tail feathers being splayed outwards. Alan speculates that it was an escapee (not a Spangled Drongo) Any suggestions from Caged Bird Experts?

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### PELAGIC TRIP OTWAY BASIN EASTER 2006

FROM RICHARD BAXTER

Simon Mustoe is organising a Pelagic seabird and cetacean trip for a week in the Otway Basin over Easter 2006. He has a 60ft boat and intends to stay at sea most nights. It is licensed to travel 100km offshore and the cost is less than \$2000 for a week which is excellent value. April is a calm weather period and is a great time for seabirds. I was on the March/April Port Fairy pelagic in 2004 and we had over 1000 Albatross at the back of the boat at one time. He is also organising the trip in the hope of finding some beaked whale species which inhabit the area. You will also be pretty much guaranteed to see Blue Whale on this trip.

Richard Baxter can be contacted re this trip on 0412 540212 or by email [randrbaxter@yahoo.com](mailto:randrbaxter@yahoo.com).

## A BACKYARD BIRD STORY

From Anthony Gooden

I regularly go walking around the lake front and meet people along the way. One of them told me this story recently – not knowing that I am a member of HBOC.

He lives in a two-storey house and has a big gum in the front yard. A pair of pee wees (ok, mudlarks) – (do you mean Magpie Larks? – ed) have nested in the tree for the last couple of years. The humans take great delight in watching the family develop.

Recently, they realized a baby had fallen out and was lying on the path below. He went and checked it out and it was still alive. He said it had some feathers on its wings but was too young to fly (not fully fledged).

He put it in a honey bucket with some bark and grass and put it in the top of a nearby bush for the parents. They weren't interested in feeding it although they did check it out once or twice.

So, our non-birdo birdo attached some thin rope to the bucket and with a rock attached successfully threw the rope over the branch that the nest was on (very high from the ground – needed some effort) and hoisted the bucket nest up to the branch. He secured the other end. The parents started to feed it.

They were having trouble feeding etc so he lowered the bucket and made the nest shallower by putting in more bark. That appeared to work as there was more feeding and the youngster started to get out and stretch a little.

One time, when he was out on the branch, a storm came and the bark he was holding onto came adrift and so did our poor bird.

Back up in the “nest” but nearer a horizontal branch. Parents again reacted positively.

Our human carers came home one arvo and bird was on the ground near the front door being attacked by common mynas.

Third time lucky? Sue Hamonet was phoned and she suggested a bird lady at Edgeworth. Our fragile but alive bird was taken there where he was diagnosed as having a dislocated knee. He was deposited there for safe keeping. The Edgeworth lady remarked that our bird had developed quite a personality. Is it little wonder??

**Clinical Update:** I spoke to Margaret at the Native Animal Trust Fund (which is where the bird was taken). She said that the young peewee had broken its leg rather than dislocated it and that won't mend as it was too long before the bird was brought in and it sticks out a little. However, it is now with some other young wounded and she feels he will be fine to release in the wild soon. She said that, being a young bird, it should adapt to its “new” structure as it hasn't got used to any other way. [I have the highest regard for these people. They do a wonderful, unheralded job for animals at all hours with very limited resources.]

This saga occurred over a period of about 9 days. It just goes to show how much people regard all sorts of life be it human or otherwise.

I enjoyed hearing about it. I hope you have too.

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### LETTER TO THE EDITOR from Zona Brown.

I wanted to let people know about a great birding spot I found just outside Taree about 15 minutes from town at CHILTERN LODGE, OLD BAR (02 6553 3190)

It is set on 27 acres of forest and across the road from the National Park. In the garden we found Tawny Frogmouth, Scarlet Honeyeater, White-winged Chough, White-headed Pigeon etc etc.

Ten minutes away is Saltwater National Park with a diversity of habitat -shorebirds, a lagoon, forest, heath, rainforest and creek. A great place for Regent Bowerbirds, Figbirds, Dollarbirds and Catbirds – to name a few.

If you go to the other side of Taree to Coonabakh NP you should find Glossy Black Cockatoos, Top Knot Pigeon and Wompoo Fruit Doves.

The Manning Valley has a lot to offer the birdo and CHILTERN is great for groups as it has 4 cabins accommodating 6 to each, also a recreation room for talks and film shows.

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**Update:**  
**Night Heron Mystery and Inland Waterbird Crisis**

From Max Maddock

Nankeen Night Herons at Wallbridge Reserve (Raymond Terrace) still continue to be a source of puzzlement as the Murray-Darling Basin water crisis deepens. It is impossible to provide comprehensive details in this space, but the following evidence supports the need for HBOC taking up the inland water issues as approved at the 2005 Annual Meeting

After counts of Nankeen Night Herons using the day roost at the Reserve of zero in December 2003, 4 in January 2004 and 1 in March, the number climbed to 7 in June and 14 in September. In October 2004, a sudden influx to 64 was recorded (Maddock 2005, pp.14-17). This continued into November, increasing to 85 on 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of November before beginning a sharp decline. On 3<sup>rd</sup> December there were 73, 11<sup>th</sup> December 28, 16<sup>th</sup> December 14. Counts recorded in 2005 were 26<sup>th</sup> January 6 and 2 only on 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> February and 4<sup>th</sup> March. The December onwards fall off followed a similar pattern to previous years.

During the influx, there was no evidence of any nesting behaviour. The questions still remain – where did the increase come from and where did they disappear to? Is there any relationship between this local pattern and the water crisis in the Murray Darling basin.

Maddock et al (2003) described the inward- outward migration pattern of Straw-necked Ibis in the Hunter. Evidence existed that the birds most likely came from inland nesting colonies in the Murray Darling. After steady increase in numbers in early 2001, over 13 thousand ibis were counted at the night roost at Irrawang Swamp in June, a subsequent decline to 196 by December, and then an increase from 647 up to 8024 during January – February 2002. Similar patterns but smaller numbers occurred at the other main Lower Hunter night roosts. During February, flocks of hundreds up to more than 1000 Straw-necked were regularly observed foraging throughout the Hunter-Williams Rivers flood plain (Maddock, Lindsey and Little unpublished data).

Although there was no systematic counting 2004–2005, I am sure, based on frequent visits and my recollections of the ibis roosting flocks 2001-2002, that no more than 5000 birds roosted at Irrawang during the peak period of 2004. Counts of foraging flocks during 2004-2005 have also been only 10-50 birds with an occasional flock of over 100. The pattern shows marked decline in the numbers of Straw-necked Ibis migrating in since 2002, corresponding with the long drought and the current water crisis in the inland.

The situations in the Macquarie Marshes and the Gwydir have significantly worsened since I wrote Maddock (2004a, b). I had reported Bill Johnson's (NSWDEC) comment that the amount of water allocated to the Gwydir under the Water Sharing Plans was insufficient and Intermediate Egrets and even Straw-necked Ibis may come under threat of extinction if rapid restoration of wetlands and breeding opportunities do not occur. Johnson (2001), made the following points:

- **In 1995-2001 the Gwydir experienced a wet period.**
- **This period coincided with provisions of environmental flows for the Gwydir under NSW water reforms.**
- **During negotiations on the Water Sharing Plans it was claimed that the environmental flow rules had “done their job” and there was no need for change.**
- **During the wet years a full volume was not needed.**
- **The current wet years will not continue indefinitely - climate change will result in lower rainfall and run off.**
- **Management of the Gwydir must anticipate drier conditions than those experienced.**

Recent events indicate very serious accelerated deterioration of the ecological characteristics of the Ramsar sites, making prospects for viability of wetlands and their waterbird populations very bleak indeed. They are classic examples of the results of the prevailing governmental attitude in ignoring repeated expert advice over the years and continuing with actions that are clearly not environmentally sustainable:



- Recent figures from Richard Kingsford, (formerly NSWNPWS, now University of NSW) of annual aerial surveys across 4 states provide clear evidence of continuous catastrophic decline in waterbird numbers. Average counts have declined dramatically from 850000 1982-1990 to less than 20000 since, with the five lowest years since 1998. The Macquarie Marshes pattern is similar, from 30000 in the 1980s to only 1000 birds in 2000 and in 2005 only 20 birds and 6 species. Richard said ***the birds have not gone elsewhere, they are dead*** (Woodward 2004).
- On February 9<sup>th</sup> 2005, the NSW Court of Appeal dismissed an appeal by the Nature Conservation Council challenging the validity of the Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Regulated River Water Source 2003, (which Bill Johnson judged as insufficient for the needs of the waterbirds).
- The environmental Defenders Office, on behalf of the NCC had argued that the plan should be declared invalid because it had failed to adequately address environmental necessities.
- A fire in the in the Macquarie Marshes has burnt out a major proportion of the nest trees for colonial waterbird colonies and extensive reed beds both inside and outside the Nature Reserve. There has been no nesting in the Marshes since 2000 (R. Kingsford pers. com) and future breeding events are jeopardised.
- A DIPNR (2005a) Media Release reported at least 20000 birds of over 20 species nesting after Christmas 2004, including Night Herons, Pied Cormorants, Intermediate and Cattle Egrets flooding. It was described as a significant event, ***a consequence of the heavy rainfall during December last year.*** It was described as ***critical to ensure that the water levels in the nesting site do not drop rapidly.*** Unfortunately, approximately 2000 pairs of Straw-necked Ibis completely abandoned their nests. A subsequent Media Release (DIPNR 2005b) actually claimed the credit for the “success” of the breeding event, attributing the loss of the ibis nests to ***a combination of factors.***

Information dated 18 February from Robyn Molsher (Conservation Ecologist DEC) via Tara Ure (Wetlands Centre CEO) indicates that DIPNR is releasing 250 ML/day into the Gingham Channel and sustaining the egret colonies, “which look healthy, some birds have already fledged”.

DEC would like a joint investigation with DIPNR, with an independent Chairman, and the NSW Ramsar Management Network is also seeking an investigation into the Ibis failure.

The risk is that this one-off saving of the egret colony will be touted as a reason for continuing with the current meagre and unreliable program of water allocations. The program represents the same flawed management philosophy soundly criticised by the Healthy Rivers Commission (2001 and 2003) Reports into the Hunter River system, equally applicable to the Murray-Darling. The 2001 Draft Report stated that management must be based on ***an understanding of the functions of key ecological systems, ensure that further impacts on ecological features and function must fall within the capacity of the ecosystems to tolerate such changes*** instead of merely ***protecting ecosystem components***. The Final Report (2003) also stated that planning must consider ***capacity to withstand impacts of inappropriate development or poorly managed land and to recognise the very real limits to which both land and rivers can be pushed.***

Ecological systems are highly complex and part of that complexity in the Murray Darling consists of interactive patterns of dry and wet seasons and their timing and the extent and size of flooding events. Over-simplistic views expressed by DIPNR staff give rise to concerns that this concept is not understood within the Department. In response to concerns that the Government had failed to its undertakings raised by Harold Blackburn, the landowner of one of the Gwydir Ramsar sites on private land, a DIPNR spokesman said: the new water sharing plan would consider the wetlands' needs. The Department shares Mr. Blackburn's concerns that the wetlands are dry but we are going through one of drought in living memory. It is important to note that wetlands are naturally transitory so they go through wet and dry phases. ***(Peating 2004)***

An ABC Country Hour item (Cobbe 2004) reported that DIPNR had rejected claims by graziers that Lower Gwydir, Gingham and Macquarie Marshes wetlands were dying. Minister Craig Knowles had so far declined to speak on this issue. ***However, DIPNR's deputy director general Peter Sutherland, says the wetlands have a lack of water due to natural cycle of drought and they will be replenished when it rains.***

Richard Kingsford explained in James Woodward's Sydney Morning Herald article that the Macquarie Marshes were being starved because water that would naturally flow into the swamps is now being stored for irrigation:

*Drought alone did not account for such a big collapse in the nation's waterbird numbers. What we are doing is imposing more and more artificial droughts on our rivers.*

Australia has failed its obligation to protect the functioning of ecological systems in Ramsar sites, as indicated by Resolutions and Recommendations 6.17.4 passed at the Conference of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention attended by more than 100 countries in Brisbane in 1996 (Ramsar Convention 1996, p 68). Australia was urged

- ***to consider providing water to a number of Ramsar sites in inland Australia in greater quantity and with timing more closely related to natural environmental conditions;***
- ***to consider prudent and feasible alternatives to proposed developments within a number of Australian Ramsar sites or their catchment, where these developments would have significant impacts;***
- ***to consider inclusion of sites in the Montreux record, where this would assist substantially in monitoring, maintaining or restoring the ecological character of Ramsar sites under serious threat.***

Murray Darling water is committed well beyond the ecosystem's capacity to cope, Ramsar site ecological characteristics are declining in the direction of total system collapse and prospect of species extinction cannot be dismissed. Impacts will extend beyond the inland and evidence is emerging that they may even be reaching the Hunter. Weakened new water reforms in NSW are functionally inadequate to support the ecosystem. Concerns of the 1996 Brisbane Ramsar Conference have not been addressed. The Federal Government has suspended \$26 million in national competition payments to NSW for failing to provide adequate environmental flows to stressed and over-allocated rivers.

A Murray Darling Basin Commission report covering 1996/97 to 2000/01 (Bryan and Marvanet 2004), showed significant increase in water requirements and area of irrigation land. Total water requirements of irrigated agricultural land increased by almost 29 %, the total area of irrigated land increased by 36 % and the area of irrigated cotton by 36 %. South Australian Conservation Council River Murray Campaigner described ***the sheer magnitude of this expansion*** as alarming, emphasising urgent ***need to reduce the amount of water being extracted from the MDB for irrigation*** (Owen 2005, p 11). The Murray Darling ecosystem is ecologically bankrupt because we continue destroy its ecological capital in an irresponsible splurge of "insolvency trading", a crime which would be prosecuted under the laws of financial trading.

## References

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## **THE WETLANDS CENTRE PROGRAM**

### **Autumn – Winter 2005**

#### **MOTHER'S DAY LUNCHEON**

Bring your family, enjoy entertainment, a delicious buffet luncheon and BYO wine. A children's play area is available for toddlers.

12 Noon start. Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May. \$30 adults, \$12 child.

#### **WORKSHOP**

Turn your Backyard Blitz into an Eco Twist. Join us for a half day practical workshop to get skills and knowledge from the experts on an eco makeover for your backyard. This will involve anything from bringing wildlife to your doorstep, to creating sensitive water features. Reducing and reusing all at a low cost.

Saturday June 25 10am-1pm \$10 per person

#### **BREAKFAST WITH THE BIRDS**

Stroll around the Wetland bird watching with an experienced guide. Then enjoy a delicious breakfast and slide show.

8.30am 8 May Mothers Day Breakfast

8.30am July 10

\$20 adults, \$10 child, \$60 per family (2+2)

#### **SPOTLIGHT PROWL**

Discover the secrets of the Wetlands after dark. Join the guide spotlighting creatures of the night, BYO torch. Check start time when you book.

April 16, May 21, June 18, July 16

\$10 adult, \$5 child. \$25 Family (2 + 2)

#### **CANOEING ADVENTURES**

Paddle and explore Ironbark Creek with our experienced guides, stop off at our coastal rainforest resort. Return to Caffi Jacana for a delicious lunch.

9.30 am. First Sunday every month.

May 1, June 5, July 3.

\$25 adults, \$12.50 child, \$70 per family (2+2)

#### **BOOKING ESSENTIAL** **FOR ALL PROGRAMS**

#### **FROM MICHAEL TODD**

I wanted to let you know that I've recently launched my website ([www.wildlifing.com](http://www.wildlifing.com) <<http://www.wildlifing.com>> on the Internet. It's a gallery of my photographs with some audio sounds of wildlife, mainly from Australia but with a section of photographs from Thailand.

I've tried to include many of the less photographed aspects and species of Australian wildlife. I've thrown a little bit of educational material into the site as well. My intent is to regularly update and rotate the content.

The sections include Birds, Mammals, Reptiles, Frogs, Flora, Insects and other invertebrates and Landscapes. There are two special galleries of photos and sounds of the Major Mitchell Cockatoo and the Red Lored Whistler.

Some of the other bird species included in the regular galleries are Striated Grasswren, Red Goshawk, Powerful Owl, Marbled Frogmouth, Southern Cassowary, Halls Babbler, Painted Honeyeater, Swift Parrot, Superb Parrot and Plains Wanderer,

Of the other animals I've included photos of Striped Possum, Northern Nailtail Wallaby, Spotted Cuscus, Green Python, Barking Gecko, Giant Barred Frog, Austrochaperina gracilipes and Spiny Leaf Insect among others.

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#### **CAPERTEE VALLEY TREEPLANTING**

30 April to 1 May 2005

If you would like to participate in this fun weekend please contact the following for details of the date and other information

David Geering – Regent Honeyeater Coordinator  
(and member of Once Were Woodswallows)

**Free call 1 800 621 056**

Whilst this event was advertised for CBOC members we're sure David will let you work as long as you don't bring your own Home Brew.

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# **OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT FEB/MAR2005**

<b>2004</b>				
Dec 5	Latham's Snipe	35	Irrawang Swamp	M.Maddock
Dec 3	Nankeen Night Heron	73	Wallbridge Reserv [Raymond Terr.]	M. Maddock
Dec 11	"	28	" [day roost]	"
Dec 16	"	14	"	"
<b>Dec 13</b>	Brahminy Kite	1	Taylors Beach [Mud Point]	N.Fraser
<b>2005</b>				
Jan 11	Nankeen Night Heron	4	"	"
Jan 11	Glossy Ibis	1	Irrawang Swamp	"
Jan 6	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	14	Irrawang Swamp	"
Jan 14	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	10	"	"
	Latham's Snipe	35	"	"
Jan 7	Musk Duck	10	Richardson Rd. Lookout [Medowie]	"
	Great Crested Grebe	10	"	"
Jan 15	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	10	Irrawang Swamp	"
	Red-kneed Dotterel	1	"	"
	Glossy Ibis	1	"	"
Jan 24	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	4	Jewells Swamp [heathland]	T.Clarke
	Brown Quail	5	"	"
Jan 28	Common Koel	1 dy	Corlett	"
Jan 16	Swamp Harrier	3	Bobs Farm	"
Jan 19	Barking Owl	1	Soldiers Point	"
Jan 21	Australian Hobby	1	Redhead beach	"
Jan 14	<b>Greater Sand Plover</b>	1	Stockton Sandspit	"
Jan 26	"	1	"	"
Jan 25	Regent Bowerbird	Pair	Green Point reserve	A. Gooden
Jan 23	Latham's Snipe	7	Lenaghans Drive	R.McDonald
	Latham's Snipe	34	Newcastle Wetland Reserve	"
	Black-necked Stork	1	Lenathan's Drive	"
Jan 29	White-eared Monarch	1	Crowdy Head NP [Fig Tree Reserve]	A.Stuart
	Crested Tern	82+10juv	"	"
Jan 30	Common Tern	>100	Old Bar	"
	Little Tern	>100	"	"
	Pied Cormorant	29	"	"
	Pied Oystercatcher	26	Harrington	"
	Varied Triller	1+	"	"
	Spectacled Monarch	1	"	"
	Sanderling	29	Old Bar	"
	Red-necked Stint	59	"	"
	Eastern Curlew	35	"	"
	Bar-tailed Godwit	113	"	"
	Pacific Golden Plover	93	"	"
Feb 7	Powerful Owl	1	Blackbutt Reserve	P.Lightfoot
	Wonga Pigeon	1	New Lambton Heights [garden]	G.Albrecht
Feb 3	White-backed Swallow	1	Bulga	G.Brosie
	Plum-headed Finch	2	Muswellbrook	"

Feb 8	Pied Oystercatcher	13	Harrington	"
Feb 9	Fork-tailed Swift	300+	Nobby's Breakwater	G.Brosie/R.McDonald
	Fork-tailed Swift	50+	Stockton Sandspit	G.Brosie
Feb 3	Spotless Crake	1	Walka Water Works	"
Feb 1	Regent Bowerbird	1f+1dy	"	"
	Latham's Snipe	47	"	"
Jan 21	Latham's Snipe	32	"	"
	Royal Spoonbill	16	"	"
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	40	"	"
Jan 22	Peaceful Dove	1	Near Richmond Vale	D.Jenkin
Jan 23	Emerald Dove	1	Chichester Dam	"
Jan 26	White-throated Needletail	~200	Fosterton Loop, Dungog	"
Jan 18	Barn Owl	1	"	"
Feb 7	Pied Oystercatcher	12	Marks Point	J.Westphail
	Caspian Tern	1	"	"
Feb 7	White-headed Pigeon	1	New Lambton Heights [garden]	P.Lightfoot
Feb 4	Rufous Fantail	1	Blackbutt Reserve	"
Feb 8	Channel-billed Cuckoo	1 juv.	Belmont South [Currawong host]	J. Cockerell
	"	2 juv	" [Australian Magpie host]	"
Feb 5	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	>50	Stockton Sandspit	M.Maddock
	Curlew Sandpiper	>17	"	"
Feb 28	White-breasted Woodswallow	8	Redhead [Landcare site]	D.Raine
Feb 1	White-bellied Sea-eagle	1	Scone	G.Newling
Feb 21/23	Striated Heron	1	Warners Bay	A.Gooden
Feb 23	Pheasant Coucal	1	Oyster Cove	N.McNaughton
	Buff-banded Rail	1	"	"
Mar 9	Black Bittern	1	Ash Island	"
Mar	Southern Boobook	1	Toronto [garden]	P.Durie
	White-bellied Sea-eagle	1	Five Islands	"
Feb 26	White-winged Triller	1fy	Doyle's Creek	H. Tarrant
	Dusky Woodswallow	1fy	"	"
	Diamond Firetail	1	"	"
Feb 11	Spotted Harrier	1	Maitland/Lorn	"
Mar 6	Grey Goshawk	1	Bolwarra	"
	Little Eagle	1	"	"
	Peregrine Falcon	Pr	"	"

## 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**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	<b>DETAILS</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>
Anzac Day weekend 23 - 25 April 2005	Camp on private property at Anvil Hill	Refer map and directions.	Robert McDonald 4967 4161
Sunday 24 April 2005	Club Outing Anvil Hill	As above	Robert McDonald 4967 4161
Sunday 1 May 2005	Volunteer day at Stockton Sandspit Plant native garden	From 12.30pm	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 3 May 2005	Midweek Outing to Bush Haven, 393 Italia Road Seaham	8.00am Jenny Musicka's Place	Leader Keith Woods 49633070
Saturday 7 May 2005	Regent Honeyeater & Swift Parrot Workshop	10.00am – 5.00pm Bateau Bay	David Geering 1800 621 056
Saturday 7 May 2005	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30am various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569 <b>You must ring to confirm</b>
<b>Wednesday 11 May 2005</b>	<b>Club Night</b>	<b>7.30pm The Wetland Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: Fred Van Gessel</b>
Weekend 14 – 15 May 2005	Regent Honeyeater & Swift Parrot Survey	Various locations by arrangement	Steve Roderick 4930 4800
Monday 16 May 2005	Volunteer day at Stockton Sandspit Weeding shorebird habitat	From 6.00am	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Sunday 22 May 2005	Club Outing Watagans	8.00am Boarding House Dam	Robert McDonald 4967 4161
Saturday 28 May 2005	Atlas outing Giants Creek		Nick Livanos 4954 5739
Tuesday 7 June 2005	Midweek Outing Wyee Point	8.00am 36 Bay Street Wyee Point	Leader Val Moon 4959 1670
<b>Wednesday 8 June 2005</b>	<b>Club Night</b>	<b>7.30 pm Wetland Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: Jack Baker</b> <b>The remarkably shy</b> <b>Bristlebirds</b>
Queens Birthday 11 - 13 June 2005	Camp at Callicoma (Near Mt Royal) Refer map & directions	Camp costs \$3 per person per day. Other on site accommodation available	Anthony Gooden 4946 9110