



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 3/05

June-July 2005

Newsletter articles welcome –
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Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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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 MacDonald

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:

Ruth Barker,
Pam and Norol Hill,
Lyn Rayward,
Kim Bilham and
Frank Cosgrove

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

NEWSLETTER DATES FOR 2005

Edition

Copy Deadline

August/September

30 July 2005

October/November

1 October 2005

December 2005/January 2006

3 December 2005

Shorter days and colder nights prompt Powerful Owls to produce eggs and hopefully nestlings. We are fortunate to have a pair breeding in Blackbutt Reserve again this year – perhaps the presence of the large flying fox colony in the same patch of bush has something to do with their continued presence in the centre of this growing city!

Growth has been on the agenda for the last few months as information about the Lower Hunter Planning Strategy becomes available from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources. HBOC, along with many other community groups, has been involved in raising the need for conservation of green corridors and biodiversity while planning for a population increase of at least 90,000 and possibly up to 250,000 in the Lower Hunter over the next 25 years. A Community Forum was held in Newcastle recently to raise awareness of many issues connected to the projected growth, including the need to provide habitat for wildlife as well as for people. What would life be like without the freedom of flight and the joy of bird song?

HBOC continues to promote birds and birdwatching in the general community. The club provided displays at the Morisset Community Festival organised by Rotary and Catchment Connections organised by Lake Macquarie City Council. Val and Don Moon and Di Johnson manned the Morisset display while Sue Hamonet and Rowley Smith encouraged school students to watch birds as part of Catchment Connections, near Swansea Channel. Our thanks to these members for their enthusiasm and interactions with the public.

Tom Clarke has continued to organise weeding and planting efforts at Stockton Sandspit, and with help from Robert McDonald and Anthony Gooden, has made impressive improvements to the car-park garden. Thanks also to Tom for re-erecting one of our signs about migratory waders at the Sandspit after it had been vandalised.

Recently, HBOC Committee decided to use some funds from the Alan Keating Bequest to purchase a digital projector for use at Club nights and also for use in talking to community groups about birds. The projector will enable us to reach a wide audience with up to date presentations. A further improvement for Clubnights is the resurrection and repair of the microphone system in the theatre. Thanks to Ross Marshall and Rowley Smith for their technical expertise and persistence.

Our proposal to remove mangroves from Wader Pond, Swan Pond and Milham Pond on Ash Island, has finally been approved by Envirofund Australia. Mangroves have proliferated in these ponds in recent years as a result of widening of culverts on the tidal creeks feeding these systems. The resulting forest has encroached on saltmarsh and reduced available wader foraging and roosting areas in the ponds. Selective removal of mangroves on Ash Island has been approved by NSW Fisheries, who recognise the need for wader habitat enhancement in this area. The project aims to remove the encroaching mangroves within a specific area and place seed-collecting booms across inflowing creeks to prevent re-introduction of mangroves to these areas. Removal of fringing mangroves from Stockton Sandspit by NPWS in 2002 has

resulted in the return of large numbers of waders to roost at this site. We are hopeful that a similar increase in wader use of the Ash Island ponds will occur after the mangroves are removed.

Several years ago, HBOC mounted a concerted campaign to save Big Pond on Kooragang Island, which was zoned for industrial development. Big Pond, a shallow, saline to brackish water habitat, provided ideal habitat for small waders such as Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, and Pacific Golden Plovers. The State Government acknowledged the importance of Big Pond and made a considerable sum of money (\$1.2 million) available to provide compensatory habitat for the inevitable loss of Big Pond to industrial development. Some of this money has been spent by NPWS on rehabilitating former shorebird roost sites within the Hunter Estuary. Now construction of shallow ponds to provide compensatory habitat for Big Pond, is being considered on Ash Island.

The Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot survey day in May revealed up to 50 Swift Parrots in flowering Spotted Gum forest at Abermain and Pelton. We need to search more areas of flowering eucalypts for these endangered migrants. Please send any sightings to Steve Roderick, our survey co-ordinator – phone 02 4930 4800 or email Roddo75@hotmail.com.

Liz Crawford

Bird Observing at Greswick Angus

By Tom Clarke

Greswick Angus is a cattle stud farm located on the Williams River at East Seaham. The home property has been in the family since the early 1900's and is now being run and managed by John and Janelle Spearpoint. Being situated within the water catchment area for the Newcastle domestic water supply, the Spearpoints are conscious of the need to use sustainable farming practices and to protect the natural resource from suffering from increased stresses. Recently they have fenced off and revegetated sections of riverbank, provided stock shelter and installed off-stream watering points for stock in all the paddocks. The Spearpoint's involvement in river management is a key aspect of their operation.

In July 2004 Greswick Angus was selected as the **Williams River Best Management Practice Demonstration Site**; a unique 4 year trial aimed at helping to protect the quality of the Lower Hunter's drinking water supply. The \$350,000 project is a partnership between Greswick Angus, the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority and Hunter Water Corporation.

The project aims to demonstrate and trial methods for restoring riparian vegetation including streambank erosion control, fencing, weed control and planting techniques, as well as stock and pasture management within riparian areas. The property was selected because of its diversity of streambank issues (over 3 kilometres) which is adversely affected by wind and boat generated waves, slumping of banks and periodic flooding.

The project is also supported by, the Department of Primary Industries, University of Newcastle, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, Williams River Care Association, NSW Waterways Authority and local landholders.

Hunter Bird Observers Club became involved when asked by Hunter Water to monitor bird life on the property over the four years of the project. That was in August 2004 and our first look at the place took place a month later.

That day a small group of HBOC members met with John & Janelle Spearpoint and spent the entire day checking out the place and figuring out the best sites to survey. Since then there have been three survey days (five 2ha sites) and the results have been duly recorded on Birds Australia Atlas Record Forms.

Well all the above is the boring background stuff so that you all have a bit of an idea of what's going on at Greswick Angus. Meanwhile, our group has become very good friends with the Spearpoint family; John, Janelle and their two terrific kids, Hayden and James. Janelle has shown great interest in the birds on her property and attends every survey with us. In the background we have noticed that Hayden has been struck by the bird watching bug as well and so our April survey was a good excuse to miss the last day of school so he could tag along.

It is so exciting to observe the enthusiastic way that young persons allow themselves to be when they get totally involved in something. Hayden had a great day and so did all the cranky old types as well. The following is Hayden's own expression of his love of birds.

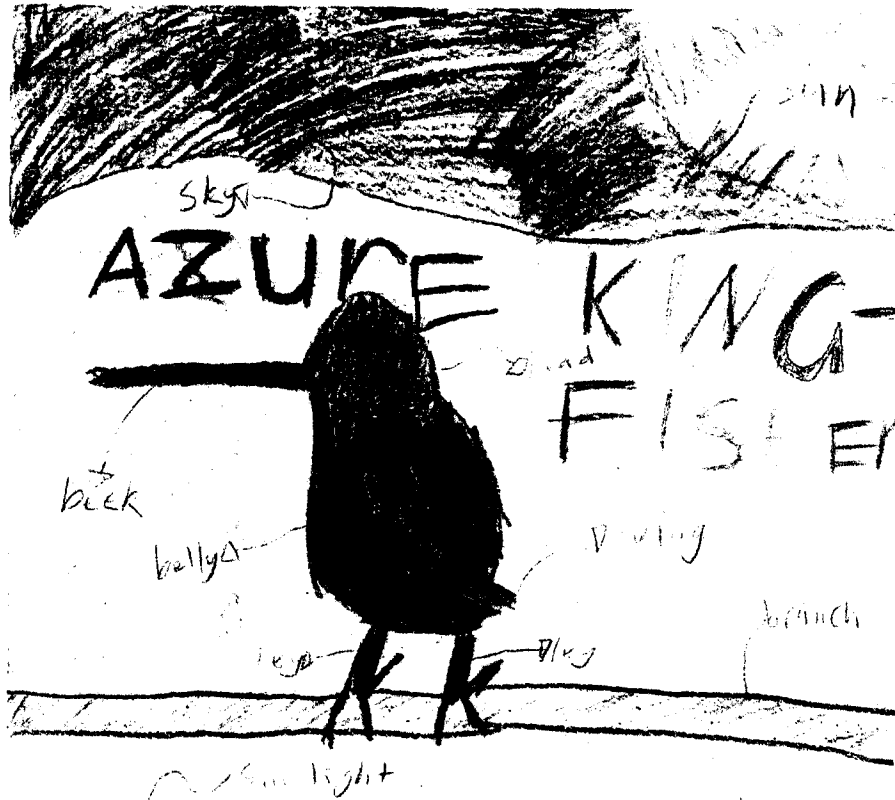
Dear Tom and the bird group,

On Friday I had lots of fun looking for birds with you. We found lots of birds and I wrote some of them in my pocket book. My favourite bird on Friday was the white necked heron because it looks like a plane when it flies. Mum also had a good day because she gets the day off working on the farm.

On Sunday Dad, James and I went for a canoe ride down the river. We saw the Azure kingfisher again along the river. I have been spotting lots of birds myself since Friday and telling Dad what they are. Me and dad also saw yellow thornbills, Willy wag tails, fairy wrens, Egrets, Ibis and lots more fabulous birds.

When we went canoeing we saw a Sea eagle catch a lizard with its feet and fly off with it. My favourite bird is still the Azure kingfisher and the Rainbow bee-eater.

*Thanks for letting me come along with you on Friday. I had lots of fun.
Thanks from Hayden.*



by Hayden Spearpoint

(The above picture is in colour. Those of you receiving this newsletter in person or by mail may not realise this. Another good reason to get your Newsletter by living colour email.)

MIDWEEK OUTING REPORTS

BLACKBUTT RESERVE 5th April 2005

By Margaret Stewart

A wet Monday caused a few members from outlying areas to check with me before they set out, but Tuesday dawned fine and clear and 26 members from as far away as the Central Coast and Tomaree turned up. We wondered if this was a record for a mid week outing.

The first bird of interest was a common bronzewing sitting by the pond, but Robert McDonald felt that this area is beyond its range and it was most likely an escapee from the aviaries on site. We walked up past the emus (again sadly we could not add them to our list as they were behind wire fences) and then along the very scenic Blueberry Ash walk. This goes along past a gully and we saw quite a lot of birds if not a great variety- lots of gerygones, thornbills and white-browed scrubwrens and some golden whistlers. We had heard whipbirds calling as we went along and finally we caught sight of some.

There is a sign up in the picnic area asking people not to feed the kookaburras, but unfortunately the kookaburras don't know this. As one member was peacefully eating his morning tea, in swooped a kookaburra and swept the food from his hand. Lots of other birds then arrived to help it demolish the spoils. The same thing occurred (twice) to another member in another picnic area. During the morning tea break members not familiar with the aviaries in the reserve took a stroll through them and were very impressed. It was nice to have morning tea watching the scrub turkeys wandering around.

After morning tea we moved on to the Mahogany Drive entrance and walked to the lily pond. There were lots of rosellas, both eastern and crimson, active in this area. Some of us enjoyed the sight of as many as six crimsons bathing in a pool in the creek. All together we saw 44 species and heard 4 others and enjoyed some very beautiful scenery.

SEAHAM 3rd May 2005

By Val Moon

On a very foggy morning, the midweek group visited Jenny and Ken Musicka's property Bush Haven at Seaham.

We were made most welcome and they shared with us their vast knowledge of the birds and flora of their property.

We saw 64 species which included large numbers of Pacific Black Duck, Australian Shoveler, Grey Teal, Hardhead, White-faced Heron and Straw-necked Ibis. Flying over were two Sea eagles, Whistling Kite and a Little Eagle.

The Honeyeaters seen were Lewins, Yellow faced White-naped, Scarlet and Eastern Spinebill. Other good sightings were Southern Emu-wren, Superb and Variegated Fairy-wren, Little Grassbird, Spotted Pardalote, Brown gerygone and Jacky Winter.

A very enjoyable morning was had by the 29 people who attended the outing.

OTHER PROGRAM NOTES

April Club Night. With 52 in attendance, Chris Herbert gave a PowerPoint presentation on Birds of Queensland Wet Tropics. This was followed by Mike Todd with his Bird of the Evening – the Painted Honeyeater.

Anvil Hill Anzac Day Weekend Camp was well attended with 30 members and 4 visitors present. It was reported as an excellent camp with 108 species identified.

STOP PRESS

(TV) Program. "Wetland Eco System" on Channel Ten 6 June at 4pm and 7th June 6am. Filmed at the Wetland Centre

PELAGIC TRIP REPORT

Sunday 10th April 2005

By Richard Baxter

Conditions: Departed 7.15am from Newcastle Harbour. Returned 6.30pm.

Sea Conditions: 1-1.5m swell early in day, easing slightly later in the day.

Weather: Fine and sunny all day.

Wind: 15knots from the N/E

Maximum distance from shore. 75km.

Those on board: Alan Stuart, Ann Lindsey, Alan Morris, Greg Little, Dick Jenkin, Robert Quinan, Inger Vandyke, Leanne Maffesoni, Joanne Natano, Phil Hansbro and Richard Baxter.

An excellent April Pelagic trip with FIVE pterodroma species seen. We exited Newcastle Harbour about 7.15am and headed North east towards the Northern Canyons and beyond. Our first stop was to scrutinize a flock of about 400 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters following two trawlers about to enter the harbour. Apart from the WTSW we observed 1 Arctic Jaeger and 2 Pomarine Jaegers. These would be the only Jaegers we saw all day.

After this short stop we once more headed out to sea. The sky was clear and it was warming up and looking like a nice day ahead. The further out we went the more the swell increased as we headed into a 1.5m swell coming from the N/E.

We crossed the shelf about 10am after a fairly slow trip out and commenced to burley, while we continued east at about 10knts.

Not long after crossing the shelf we encountered a lone Solanders Petrel and several Flesh-footed Shearwater. As we continued, we soon had several birds behind the boat and at 75km offshore a small white cookalaria type petrel was observed a long way from the boat. We immediately stopped but this bird remained elusive and was probably a Cook's Petrel.

Soon, Great-winged Petrels began to appear and 1-2 Wilsons Storm Petrels appeared on the emerging slick. We had only been stopped for a few minutes when Phil shouted "WHITE-NECKED PETREL".

We had all missed it fly in as it was now only about 30m from the boat and gave all on board great views. It stayed for a few minutes allowing some fantastic photos to be taken before departing to the north.

Over the next 30 minutes numbers of Solanders (Providence) Petrel and Great-winged Petrel grew and the Wilsons Storm Petrel count had grown to over 20 birds. The next bird of interest to arrive was an unseasonal Juvenile Wandering Albatross which eventually landed about 50m behind the boat. Not long after this a lone pale phase KERMADEC PETREL flew down the slick and circled the boat several times, coming quite close and giving everyone excellent views. This bird soon departed and was not long after replaced by a darker pale phase Kermadec petrel, which also came very close to the boat.

We had been at this location about 4hours and the Wilson's Storm Petrel count was now about 50, with no doubt many furt' along the slick, the end of which was now well out of sight. The next bird to arrive was a BLACK-BELLIED STORM PETREL, which fed in the slick and at times, came very close to the boat. It eventually disappeared further down the slick only to return 15minutes later and circle the boat allowing some great photos to be taken by those at the back of the boat with cameras.

Two White-faced Storm Petrel were found amongst the Wilsons but refused to come near the boat. Another Black-bellied Storm petrel also appeared briefly but soon departed just prior to a third Kermadec appearing. This Kermadec Petrel was also a pale phase but in between the two previous birds in plumage and definitely a third bird. Again this Kermadec came in close to the boat and some excellent photos were taken and all on board had good views.

We departed the 75km mark just after 3pm after 5hrs of chumming and headed in to shore. About 30minutes after crossing the shelf we yelled, "Stop the Boat!" as another cookalaria petrel was approaching from the rear and obviously darker than the possible Cook's Petrel we had seen before. The GOULD'S PETREL refused to come very close to the boat giving very frustrating views and soon disappeared.

Prior to entering the harbour we had a pod of about 50 Common Dolphins around the boat.

We arrived at the jetty in total darkness after a long and successful day at sea.

Birds seen on 10 April Trip

Wandering Albatross 1 juv
WHITE-NECKED PETREL 1
Great-winged Petrel 30+
Solander's Petrel 20+
KERMADEC PETREL 3 all pale phase
Possible Cook's Petrel 1
GOULD'S PETREL 1
Wedge-tailed Shearwater 500+
Flesh-footed Shearwater 100+
Wilson's Storm-Petrel 60+
White-faced Storm-Petrel 2
BLACK-BELLIED STORM-PETREL 2
Pied Cormorant 1
Intermediate Egret 1
Australian Gannet 10
Arctic Skua 1
Pomarine Skua 2
Silver Gull 50
Crested Tern 5

BIRD NOTES:

By Wilma Barden

Whilst bird-watching on 1st May 2005 I paused at the causeway of TWC between the Melaleuca and Middleton's Swamp. I became aware of a Spangled Drongo and thought 'Goodie – another species for my list'. As I watched it became apparent that the Drongo was flying swiftly and with **great intent**. I then realised that it was hot on the tail of a very small (and frantic) bird. Wherever the small (unidentified) bird flew the Drongo followed, both dashing here and there that my head began to spin. The vegetation was far too sparse for the small bird to dive into and hide – nor did it have time. The aerial acrobatics of the Drongo (and the smaller bird) dodging in and out of the trees was breathtaking.

Watching spellbound I noted that a second Drongo, then a third appeared. It seemed to me that they were working together. The birds all disappeared below the tree line and all action seemed to cease – then one Drongo flew off elsewhere. As the first Drongo was hunting so relentlessly I can only assume that the small bird became the victim rather than a triumphant escapee.

Most of the Field Guides state that the Spangled Drongo hunts insects, however Pizzey states '...insects (and small birds)..' and 'Takes nectar from blossoms'.

NATIVE ANIMAL TRUST FUND WORKSHOPS

Introduction to the Rescue and Rehabilitation of Raptors

Presenter: Jill Dean
Date: Sunday 7 August 2005
Time: Register 9.45. Start 10.00am Sharp
Venue: Shortland Wetland Centre
Cost: \$16.50
Registrations Close 2 August 2005

Introduction to the Rescue and Rehabilitation of General Birds

Presenter: Lyn Allaway
Date: Sunday 21 August 2005
Time: Register 9.45am. Start 10.00am Sharp
Venue: Shortland Wetland Centre
Cost: \$16.50
Registrations Close 15 August 2005

To Apply for either workshop contact:
Native Animal Trust Fund Workshop Officer,
PO Box 352, Warners Bay 2282
before the closing date.

ADVANCE NOTICE

OCTOBER CLUB NIGHT (October 12) will be held at the Lovett Gallery at Newcastle City Library in Laman Street, Newcastle

Our main speaker will be Jill Albrecht who will give an address on John Gould the famous – and Hunter connected – ornithologist and natural scientist.

The reason for the venue change is to allow the Library to provide a display of relevant books and to let members of the general public hear Jill's presentation – which should be of wide interest.

It is also a great opportunity to publicise the Club its activities and its concerns.

BAR TAILED GODWITS ON THE MOVE

From Ann Lindsey

We have received notification from the Australasian Wader Studies Group that two locally banded Bar-tailed Godwits have shown up in far-flung places after long migratory journeys. This kind of resighting is a great pay off for all the hard work of bird banders and adds to our knowledge of these incredible migratory sagas.

We quote the reports in full as received by email:

1. AWSG Ref 7510

Sighted by Kim Seog-min at Asan Bay, Republic of Korea (South Korea) 36deg 54min 0 sec N, 126 deg 4min,0sec E on 2/5/05 with flags as follows:

LEFT leg nothing/unknown. RIGHT leg: orange band on tibia (upper leg) above dark green band on tibia.

This bird was flagged at the Stockton Sandspit, Hunter River Estuary near Newcastle approx coordinates 32 deg 54 min S, 151deg 48min E which uses the flag combination Orange band/Green Band on 2 May 2004 – one of 15 Bar-tailed Godwit caught.

The resighting was a distance of approximately 8182 km with a bearing of 339 degrees, from the marking location.

2. AWSG Ref 7484

A Bar-tailed Godwit (*limosa lapponica*) was sighted by Gillian Vaughan et al at Taporu Wildlife Refuge, South Kaipara Harbour, New Zealand 36 deg 21 min 0sec S, 174 deg 15min 0sec E on 26 March 2005 with flag(s) as follows:

LEFT leg nothing/unknown on tibia (upper leg) above nothing/unknown on tarsus. RIGHT Leg: orange band on tibia(upper leg) above dark green band on tarsus.

This bird was flagged at Stockton Sandspit, Hunter River Estuary near Newcastle approximate coordinates 32 deg 54 min 0 sec S, 151 deg 48min 0Sec E which uses the flag combination Orange band/Green band on 2 May 2004 – one of 15 Bar-tailed Godwit caught.

The resighting was a distance of approx. 2085 km with a bearing of 107 degrees from the marking location.

MORE ON BANDING

Max Blanch has supplied the following exchange in Australian Geographic Jan-Mar 2005.

Letter from Trevor Lane of Toowoomba

Having been involved in bird-banding in Australia since its inception by the CSIRO more than 50 years ago I've seen the effects of the band on birds. The first major disaster was the use of aluminium bands on silver gulls. The bans acted as lure to surface feeding fish, this creating a generation of one-legged gulls. There have also been many hook-ups where tangled weeds or fishing line have been caught in bands. Luckily there haven't been many other examples of negative effects especially in the light of the benefits, not the least of which is the overall increase in environmental awareness.

However I was distressed at the sight of a southern emu-wren loaded down with four bands (Bush Telegraph AG 75). That, in my opinion, would be a really difficult addition to that poor bird's flight calculations. I don't know the weight but even the huge volume creating drag seems more than reasonably appropriate. This is science gone overboard without enough effort to code the information on one small device. Would you like a metal or plastic cylinder that covers half of both legs as a permanent attachment.

Response from Grainne Maguire, Australian Geographic Society sponsored researcher.

The practice of fitting four bands (one metal and three colour bands) to the legs of southern emu-wrens for field identification is authorised by the University of Melbourne Animal Experimentation Ethics Committee and used by the recovery team working on the critically endangered Mount Lofty Ranges southern emu-wren subspecies. The bands are extremely lightweight (1.67 per cent of an emu-wrens body weight) and are approved by the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme. Every aspect of my project has put the welfare of the emu-wrens first. I've banded and observed 120 emu-wrens during the past four years and know that their behaviour, flight and agility haven't been influenced by the bands. The birds move freely and nimbly through the vegetation and when they do take flight which is normally quite rare, they are capable of flying long distances, unencumbered by the slight weight on their legs.

BIRDS ARE BACK IN TOWN

The following is taken from Volume 23 Autumn 2005 edition of *Natural Heritage* the Journal of the Natural Heritage Trust.

When grazier Leon Garry – a fourth generation property owner on Wellora in the ACT – planned his tree planting he did not plan on any indirect benefits to native plants and animals.

Staggering results were obtained, not only for his property but also for some 44 bird species.

It all began when Leon, with a keen eye for the land and a natural ability to read the land made the following observation.

“Rainfall on the ridges and hilltops had infiltrated the soil and the underlying fractured rock”, he says: “sub-surface water then moved through these fractures and resurfaced further down the slope. During its passage, water-dissolved salts, which concentrate near the surface, reducing water quality in the creeks and affecting growth of mature trees on the slopes”

The Natural Heritage Trust is supporting Leon in the Marilba North Saline Discharge Control Project which saw the planting of a one-and-a-half kilometre by 50 metre-wide tree lot.

A consultation process with Greening Australia(ACT) saw a variety of local trees and shrubs planted through direct seeding across the slope.

Leon's plan was to plant intensively and intercept ground water before it reached the surface.

His plan worked. Leon had found an answer to sustainability on his farm.

Results were successful with a dense growth of shrubs and trees established. Buoyed by his early success, Leon has continued tree planting on his property.

The slow progression of salinity has been halted, pastures have improved, trees now offer protection for stock and protein supplements, and soil conditions has been enhanced.

The positive change has been monitored by Greening Australia, which now organises a birdwatch activity, counting all bird species occupying the tree lots.

During the four-year count, 44 species have been recorded, including thornbills, fantails, honeyeaters pardalotes, robins, scrubwren, flycatchers and weebills.

Of these groups four (Rufous Whistler, Red-capped Robin, Southern Whiteface and Restless Flycatcher) are considered declining in this area and two (Diamond Firetail, Speckled Warbler) are listed as vulnerable.

Visitors to Wellora have been treated to sightings of these birds and what Leon calls the “edge effect” where birds leave the cover of the trees to capture insects then retreat to more protective areas.

Small robins consume four insects a minute for the greater part of one day – a natural insecticide at work!

Leon is convinced of the dual advantages of his tree planting efforts and has plans for further work.

Another spin-off has been the publishing of *Bringing Back the Birds* by Greening Australia, a practical guide to landowners.

ONE FOR THE DIARY

The Wetlands Centre is hosting “**Orchids at the Wetlands**” from 23rd to 25th September. HBOC will man a display for at least part of the time and the event will be well worth a visit judging by previous years.

BIRDS AUSTRALIA

The Scientific Congress and Campout will be at La Trobe University Bendigo in October 2005.

Spoken and Poster presentations are invited. Presentations by Research students are particularly welcome. Program Committee contact Dr Andrew Bennett.
Email: Andrew.Bennett@deakin.edu.au

NEWS FROM THE WETLAND CENTRE

Anne Lindsey, who is the HBOC nominated Director on The Wetland Centre Board, advises on progress towards a residential development adjacent to the Wetland Centre.

Members may remember that The Wetland Centre sold this land, which was previously used for overflow parking, to developers. The Centre attempted to put in place sale conditions that would make it an environmentally sound development and a good neighbour to the Wetlands.

Newcastle City Council has now approved the Development Application which provides for 42 two storey attached houses to be built around a communal open space area.

The development has been designed as an environmentally sensitive housing development with features including:

Site planning for passive solar design,
north facing living and dining areas,
upper level balconies also facing north,
glazing to reduce heat gains in summer,
heat pump hot water systems,
landscaping for summer shade and winter sun,
limited grassed areas and maximised mulched garden beds,
permeable paving in courtyards,
insulated walls and ceilings and
cross ventilation across the site.

It will be interesting to see how this "Wetlands Estate" works in practice and how many HBOC members end up living there.

The Wetlands Children Activity Program

Fully Supervised. \$15 per child for all activities

Wetland Wiggles.(Children aged 5-9 years)

Join our leader for games, arts and crafts, dip netting and adventure walks

Tuesday and Wednesday July 5,6,12,13

Wet and Wild (Children 10-15 years)

Experience this fun canoeing adventure

9am-1pm July 7 & 14

Arts Alive (children all ages)

9am-1pm Fridays July 8 & 15

The Wetlands Centre Program Adults, Children and Families

Breakfast with the Birds

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

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. BYC Torch. Check start time when you book.

June 18, July 16

\$10 adults, \$5 child, \$25 per family (2 + 2)

Canoeing Adventures on Ironbark Creek

Paddle and explore with our experienced guides stop off at our coastal rainforest. Return to Café Jacana for a delicious lunch.

9.30am. First Sunday every month. (June 5, July 3)

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

WORKSHOP.

Turn your Backyard Blitz into an Eco Twist.

Join us for a half-day practical workshop to gain skills and knowledge from 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

BOOKINGS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR ALL WETLANDS CENTRE PROGRAMS

Ph. 02 4951 6466.

The Wetlands Centre

Off the Roundabout

Shortland

PO Box 292, Wallsend 2287

Get Back to Nature ...

Membership entitlements

The Wetlands Centre at Shortland offers members a host of activities and events for you to experience. Maybe your interest is Bird Observing, Flora and Fauna or just expanding your fitness regime and getting in touch with nature.

This tranquil environment has been listed as a wetland area of international significance and is well worth the visit. Entry Fees are \$5 adults, \$3 concession but **FREE** for members of the wetlands. Canoe hire starts from only \$7.50 per canoe.

Becoming a member will entitle you to unlimited **free entry** to the Wetlands throughout the year, two annual mailings of our programs, two issues of the Wetlands Newsletter, 10% discount on café meals and gifts, 20% discount on selected Events and Activities, free use of our reference library and voting rights at the annual AGM.

The Wetlands Centre is a community organisation, established now for almost 20 years. Becoming a member will have a positive impact on the work that continually happens restoring the wetlands and promoting conservation and education in the community. All monies raised go towards protecting these vital habitats.

As a special offer to The Hunter Bird Observers Club members who are not current members, The Wetlands Centre is offering a 50% discount on a "Wetlands Membership" but you only have until the end of June 2005 to take advantage. All you need to do is provide some form of identification to show you are a member of HBOC, and you could join as little as \$8.25!

The Wetlands Centre is open 7 days and located off the roundabout on Sandgate Road Shortland. Phone 49 516466 or visit www.wetlands.org.au

FROM NEW SCIENTIST.....

(items borrowed from Birds Queensland Newsletter)

(1) *Egg incubation temperature can affect the sex ratio of birds- at least in one Australian species*

Temperature -dependant sex determination is well known in reptiles, but most birds' sex is thought to be determined at fertilisation, before incubation

begins. Ann Goth of Macquarie University decided to investigate after hearing reports from Aboriginal elders that the number of male and female Australian Brush Turkeys differs according to whether the nesting season was hot or cold. Brush Turkeys belong to a group of birds called megapods which, like reptiles, use external heat sources to incubate their eggs. They cover the eggs with a mound of organic matter, which releases heat as it decomposes. Males control the temperature of the mound by adding or removing material daily.

The average incubation temperature in a mound is 34C. With colleague David Booth of University of Queensland, Goth removed eggs from mounds and incubated them at 31C, 34C or 36C.

At 34C equal numbers of males and females hatched. But significantly more males hatched at 31C. It is not clear why but male embryos could be more likely to die at higher temperatures and females at lower. However recent research on certain fish, salamanders and lizards has shown that incubation temperatures can override the influence of sex chromosomes. (New Scientist 4/12/04 p 21).

(2) *Its not just human males who seduce prospective paramours with expensive gifts while bringing home cheap trinkets for their long-term partners. Some male birds do it too.*

Great Grey Shrike mate for life and raise offspring each breeding season. But the males also sneak away and mate with other females. To charm both long-term partners and mistresses the males offer gifts of food.

To test whether the males put more effort into their dalliances than their "marriages" Piotr Tryjanowski at Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznan Poland) and Martin Hromada at the University of South Bohemia (Czech Republic) recorded gifts made by 22 male strikes to their partners and mistresses. They found that the average energy content of a gift to a mistress was 75 kilojoules while gifts given to partners averaged about 19 kilojoules. Males often caught lizards, voles and other birds for their mistresses which required six times as much effort to catch as the insects that they gave their partners. "It is like a saying in Polish," says Tryjanowski "Artificial jewellery to the wife and real diamonds to the mistress". (New Scientist 2493 2 April 2005.)

Bell Miners and Dieback.

(thanks to Max Blanch for spotting this)

This is an edited version of a NPWS article concerning activities in the Kyogle district by a group called The Bell Miner Associated Dieback Working Group.(BMAD WG) The group is trying to better understand dieback and to trial methods for stopping its spread and repairing damage already caused.

Tree dieback occurs in various forms, and affects our forest and woodlands to a greater or lesser extent across much of Australia. As the name implies the trees slowly die back from the tips and outer branches usually preceded by foliage discolouration.

Eventually despite some secondary or epicormic growth foliage is lost from the whole crown and the tree dies. The effect and timing varies between different species.

Readily observable characteristics of Bell Miner Associated Dieback is a dense understory (often lantana) and the presence of Bell Miners.

Bell Miners live in well-organised colonies and actively mob or chase out any birds that they see as a threat to either their nests or food sources.

A major food source for Bell Miners is the exudate covering or lerp of the larval stage of sap-sucking insects called psyllids found on the leaves of many trees particularly eucalypts.

In a balanced environment psyllid populations remain at low to moderate levels and a number of small birds and other predators feed on these sap suckers. In areas of BMAD psyllid and Bell Miner populations increase rapidly.

This increase results in the loss of abundance and diversity of other bird species, as Bell Miners are very successful at excluding all competitor bird species.

This attribute has been linked with the Bell miner's intra-specific aggression and feeding preferences together with the protection from prey afforded to the Bell miner by the dense understory.

Typically plague proportions of psyllids and Bell miners precede the eventual death of host trees.

The cause of this tree dieback is not completely understood. It is proving difficult to separate cause from effect. (my emphasis. Ed)

Bell miners, psyllids, overdevelopment of an understory (often associated with lantana development) drought, logging, forest structure change, road construction and changing fire and grazing regimes have all been suggested as being linked with dieback in the Kyogle region.

There are a number of remedies being assessed by members of BMAD Working Group. These include physical removal of lantana and other dense understory material. Encouragement of a forest structure middle storey and winter flowering species to increase the competitive ability of other bird species has also been suggested.

National Parks have established several trial plots focused on lantana removal, measuring subsequent regeneration and (with CSIRO) monitoring fungal ecology. State Forest is also doing trials along the same lines with the addition of "enrichment planting" and re-introducing low intensity fire regimes particularly into naturally grassy understory forest areas.

BMAD Working group is also enlisting the help of private landowners in the area to map and combat dieback.

It would be interesting to know of the extent of dieback in the Hunter Region and whether local research has been/is being done on the role of Bell Miners.

Further information on BMAD Working Group can be obtained on 02 66320000 or possibly through local NPWS offices.

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT APR/MAY 2005

Jan 31	Barn Owl	1	Fosterton Loop [Dungog]	D.Jenkin
	Australian Owlet-Nightjar	1	"	"
Feb 27	Grey Goshawk	1	Wingen	G.Newling
Feb. 21	White-throated Needletail	~20	Muswellbrook	"
Feb 23	Wandering Whistling Duck	30+	Charlestown Golf Club	T.Clarke
Feb 26	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	Warners Bay	"
Feb 27	Black-necked Stork	1	East Seaham [off Newline Rd]	"
Feb 21	Grey Goshawk	2+2dy	Whitebridge	C.Goodenough
Mar 26	Wandering Whistling Duck	Pr	Pambalong N.R.	P.Hansbro
	Square-tailed Kite	1	Raymond Terrace	"
Apr 17	White-headed Pigeon	6	Scone	G.Newling
Apr 2	Hoary-headed Grebe	74	Mt. Arthur [main dam & wetland area]	"
	Great Crested Grebe	15	"	"
	Australasian Grebe	8	"	"
	Pink-eared Duck	2	"	"
	Grey Teal	35	"	"
	Hardhead	12	"	"
	Zebra Finch	10	"	"
	Singing Bushlark	1	"	"
Apr 13	Brown Falcon	2	Wingen	"
	White-necked Heron	1	"	"
Apr 10	Sooty Oystercatcher	4	Merewether Baths	C.Goodenough
Jan 26 to Apr 13	Powerful Owl [male heard calling]	1	Garden Suburb	L.Huxtable
Mar	Sooty Owl	1	Wallingat S.F.	M.Todd
	White-throated Nightjar	1	"	"
Mar 2	Double-banded Plover	1	Stockton Sandspit	D.Cooper
Mar 4	Fork-tailed Swift	25+	Williamtown	"
Feb 26	Black-tailed Godwit	~18	Stockton Sandspit	"
Apr 12	Spangled Drongo	1	Myall Lakes N.P. [Johnsons Hill]	"
Apr 8	Latham's Snipe	1	East Seaham ["Greswick Angus"]	T.Clarke
	White-necked Heron	1	"	"
Apr 13	Grey Goshawk	1	S.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
Apr 11	Eastern Whipbird	3	Warners Bay [garden]	R.Baker
Apr 28	Osprey	1	Stockton Sandspit	T.Clarke
Apr 3	Osprey	1	Cockle Creek [Fie Islands]	"
Apr 5	Rose Robin	1m	Teralba	"
Mar 20	White-throated Nightjar	1	Brandy Hill	R.Carlton
Apr 7	Stubble Quail	1	Warakeila	M.Newman
	Southern Boobook	1	"	"
	Red-backed Fairy-wren	3	"	"
Apr 14	Black-winged Stilt	3	Hexham Swamp	T.Clarke

April 14	Green Catbird	1	Floraville Ridge	T Clarke
April 14	Brown Goshawk	2	Green Point	"
Apr 22	Azure Kingfisher	1	Kilaben Creek [Kilaben Bay]	"
Apr 26	Whistling Kite	7	Belmont Lagoon	"
Apr 29	Spangled Drongo	1	Salts Bay [Swansea Heads]	"
Apr 20	Red-kneed Dotterel	78	Ash Island [Milham Pond]	N.McNaughton
Mar 28	Rufous Fantail	1	Woodville	"
Mar 16	White-winged Triller	1f	Green Wattle Creek Rd	"
	Latham's Snipe	1 overhead	"	"
Mar 19	Little Friarbird	1imm	Jones Reserve Rd.	H.Tarrant
	Crested Bellbird	1f	"	"
Apr 3	Red-capped Robin	Pr	Jerrys Plains [3km out]	"
	White-backed Swallow	1	Jerrys Plains [12 km past]	"
	Hoary-headed Grebe	50+	Walka Water Works	"
May 1	Red-kneed Dotterel	5	Mt. Arthur	G.Newling
	Black-fronted Dotterel	12	"	"
	White-bellied Sea-eagle	1imm	"	"
	Red-capped Robin	3	"	"
	Grey-crowned Babbler	4	"	"
May 1	Wedge-tailed Eagle	6	Mt. Arthur	G.Newling
May 8	Red-kneed Dotterel	96	Ash Island [Milham}	N.McNaughton
May 10	Red-necked Avocet	16	Oyster Cove	"
May	Masked Owl	1	Awaba [3km west of]	M.Todd
	Spotted Quail-thrush	2	"	"
	Chestnut-rumped Heathwren	2	"	"
May 5	Spangled Drongo	1	Merewether [garden]	J.Hullick
May 1	Eastern Reef Egret	1	Merewether Baths	C.Goodenough
May 10	Spangled Drongo	3	Belmont	"
May 9	Sooty Oystercatcher	2	Caves Beach	"
May 3&4	Azure Kingfisher	4	Coolongolook S.F.	N.Fraser
May 4	Brown Cuckoo-dove	2	"	"
May 3	Black-necked Stork	1	Coolongoolook	"
May 3	Swift Parrot	3	Branxton [south of town]	S.Roderick
May 4	Zebra Finch	80	Bolwarra [Flat Rd. - Largs end]	N.Livanos
	Tree Martin	100	"	"
May 4	Flame Robin	16+	Barrington Tops NP [Polblue]	T.Clarke
May 5	Mangrove Gerygone	2	Taylors Beach	"
	Double-banded Plover	11	Hexham Swamp [Smithies Airfield]	"
May 6	Sooty Oystercatcher	1	Fingal Bay	N.Fraser
	Striated Heron	1	Coolongolook	"
May 8	Powerful Owl	1	Blackbutt Reserve	P.Lightfoot
May 4	Spangled Drongo	1	S.W.C.	"
May 10	Masked Owl	2	Taylors Beach	M. Roderick

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
Friday –Monday June 10-13	CAMP at “Callicoma” Private property near Mount Royal	Camping fee \$3 per head per day plus HBOC fee.	Anthony Gooden 4946 9110 Please ring to confirm
Sunday June 19	New Members Day	9.00am Wetlands Centre. Entry fee \$5 may apply.	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Monday June 20	Volunteer Day at Stockton Sandspit	From 10.00am	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Saturday June 25	Hunter Wader Survey	11.00. Various Locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday June 26 July 3	Regional Bitou Bush Campaign	From 9.00am at Stockton Sandspit each day.	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday July 5	Midweek Outing Minmi/Pambalong Nature Reserve	8.00am Car Park Minmi Cemetery Minmi Rd	Nick Livanos 4954 5739
Wednesday July 13	Club Night	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Phil Hansbro - Birds Around the Arctic Circle
Saturday July 16	Atlas outing Jones Reserve Road west of Jerrys Plains	7.30am Maitland Railway Station	Ann Lindsay 4951 2008
Monday July 18	Volunteer Day at Stockton Sandspit	From 9.00am	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Saturday July 23	Hunter Wader Survey	9.45am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 49593663 Alan Stuart 49528569
Sunday July 24	Field Outing Bulga	8.00am opposite General Store, Bulga	Ann Lindsay 4951 2008
Tuesday August 2	Mid-week Outing: Stockton Borehole area	8.00am Tulkaba Park. York St Teralba	Anthony Gooden 4946 9110
Saturday August 6	Atlas Outing Wambo area	7.00am Maitland Railway Station	Nick Livanos 4954 5739
Saturday-Sunday August 6-7	Regent Honeyeater & Swift Parrot Survey	Various locations by arrangements	Coordinator Steve Roderick 4930 4800
Wednesday August 10	Club Night	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Catherine Price - Bush Stone Curlew

HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB 2004 ANNUAL REPORT

The Annual Report for 2004 is presented by the President at the Annual General Meeting in February 2005. Copies of the report are tabled at the meeting and kept in the library for future reference.

HBOC was formed in 1981 with the following objectives:

- to encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat;
- to encourage bird observing as a leisure time activity.

This report documents the Club's progress in meeting these objectives during 2004.

1. STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITAT

Bird Sightings and Highlights

Everyone will have a bird sighting (or two) that is memorable for 2004 – and many of these are raised at Club Nights in that very special section of the meeting when we ask for members' observations. All those observations are collated by Alan Stuart for the Annual Bird Report, which lists all the birds that occur in the Hunter Region with notes on their status. Details of rare or unusual birds should be recorded on an "URRF" – an "Unusual Record Report Form" and submitted to the Records Appraisal Committee for acceptance of the record. This forces us to be careful in our identification, especially if the bird is unusual. During the year there were many highlights, as listed in **Table 1**. At this stage, not all records have been submitted, and processing of reports is still in progress by the Records Appraisal Committee. There were only two pelagic trips in 2004 (January and February), so there was less chance of finding some of the more uncommon seabirds.

Table 1 – Birding Highlights for 2004

Species	Place	Month
Black Noddy*	Pelagic Trip off Swansea	January
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Stockton Sandspit	January – March, and again in December
Little Bittern	The Wetlands Centre	February
Buff-breasted Sandpiper#	Ash Island	February
Freckled Duck	The Wetlands Centre	February/March
South Island Pied Oystercatcher*	Stockton Sandspit	February
Yellow Wagtail	Ash Island	February/March
Swift Parrot (up to 14 birds)	Lake Macquarie	May to August
Regent Honeyeater	Quorrobolong	August
Fluttering Shearwaters (about 10,000)	Offshore	Late August
Pale-yellow Robin	First breeding record since 1983	
Bush Stone-curlew (breeding record)	Lemon Tree Passage	Spring
Ruff (male in breeding plumage)	Stockton Sandspit and Ash Island	October
Musk Lorikeet (breeding record)	Blackalls Park park	November
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove	Harrington	November
Barred Cuckoo-shrike	Harrington	November
Grass Owl	Crowdy Bay NP	November
Grey Plover	Kooragang Dykes	November
Greater Sand Plover*	Old Bar	November
White-eared Monarch	Crowdy Bay NP	November/December
Ruff (male in non-breeding plumage)	Doughboy Hollow	December
Painted Snipe (pair)	Ash Island	December
Banded Stilt	Stockton Sandspit	December

Note: * New species for the Hunter Region

#Seventh confirmed Australian record for Buff-breasted Sandpiper

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The predominance of sightings in the summer months reflects the migratory habits of many of these special birds.

Bird Surveys

Bird surveys are an important contribution to knowledge about Australian birds. During 2004, Club members participated in the Regent Honeyeater and Painted Snipe surveys organized by the Threatened Species Network, and in the Beach-nesting Bird Survey organized by the NSW Wader Studies Group. Steve Roderick coordinated the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys for HBOC and Chris Herbert coordinated the Beach-nesting Bird Survey results for HBOC.

The **Regent Honeyeater** surveys in May and August were singularly unproductive this year, with no Regent Honeyeaters reported from the Hunter Region. These results confirm the nomadic habits of these birds, which search for blossoming trees. Only 14 Swift Parrots were recorded this year from Lake Macquarie – again their distribution is dependent on flowering trees.

The **Painted Snipe** surveys can be frustrating when no snipe are located – and that was the result this year during the official survey days. However, in December Neville McNaughton discovered a pair of Painted Snipe on Ash Island and many people have had good views of these birds over several weeks. They favoured an ephemeral wetland in a farmer's paddock. Apparently, Painted Snipe 'freeze' for about 15 minutes when disturbed, becoming invisible due to their excellent camouflage, so snipe surveyors have to be very patient!

The **Annual Latham's Snipe Count** was very well attended this year, with 16 members participating in the count at Pambalong Nature Reserve. Eight other members surveyed several other wetlands in the Lower Hunter for Latham's Snipe on the same day to try to get an idea of the overall population of these birds. A total of 105 birds was counted and the results of the surveys conducted on 5 December 2004 are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1 – Results of Latham's Snipe Surveys

Wetland	Number of Latham's Snipe	Observers
Pambalong Nature Reserve	36	Liz Crawford, Penny Drake-Brockman, Sue Hamonet, Phil Hansbro, Chris Herbert, Di Johnson, Paddy Lightfoot, Greg Little, Nick Livanos, Charlie Mann, Mike Newman, Jenny Powers, Alan Stuart, Fay Thomson, Doug Thomson, and Mick Todd
Newcastle Wetlands Reserve	22	Tom Clarke and Robert McDonald
Market Swamp	0	Tom Clarke and Robert McDonald
Irrawang Swamp	35	Max Maddock and Heather Maddock
Seaham Swamp	0	Brian Gilligan
Walka Waterworks	8	Paul Baird, Grant Brosie and Jim Smart
Tenambit Common	0	Paul Baird, Grant Brosie and Jim Smart
Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works	0	Mike Newman
Private Property, Seaham	0	Max Maddock and Heather Maddock
Private property, Woodville	4	Mike Newman
TOTAL	105	

In January 2005, Mike Newman noticed that the numbers of Latham's Snipe at Pambalong Nature Reserve had risen above the 36 counted in December, so another survey was organized for 23 January 2005. Ross

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Carlton, Liz Crawford, Neil Fraser, Chris Herbert, Ann Lindsey, Terry Lindsey, Robert McDonald, Lorna Mee and Alan Stuart counted about 79 Latham's Snipe in the usual survey area and an additional 41 in the northern part of the swamp that is not usually surveyed, making a total of about 120. This confirmed Mike Newman's observation and the fact that these birds congregate at sites where foraging conditions are optimum.

The **Beach-nesting Bird Survey** on 16 October 2004 was held a month earlier than in previous years. Jack Adams surveyed Nine Mile Beach north of Swansea Channel and found 4 Pied Oystercatchers and a couple of Masked Lapwings, along with several 4WDs, fishermen and dogs. Neil Fraser surveyed the beaches south from the entrance to Port Stephens and found Magpies, Silver Gulls, Australian Ravens and a couple of White-bellied Sea-Eagles. One Eastern Curlew flew overhead, but no beach-nesting birds were seen. Liz Crawford, Chris Herbert, Leila McAdam and John McAdam surveyed Stockton Beach and found more than 412 other people, more than 204 4WDs, 26 quad bikes, 10 motorbikes and several dogs. Despite this high human activity, they discovered two Pied Oystercatcher nests, one with two eggs in it, a total of 9 Pied Oystercatchers and 9 Red-capped Plovers. The Pied Oystercatcher nests were located some 300 to 400 metres inland from the shoreline, well away from the main traffic routes along the shore and just behind the foredune. However, when the young birds leave the nest, the adults will take them to forage on the shoreline and their route to the shore will have to cross the traffic zone. One wonders how many would survive the 4WD factor.

On a brighter note, Ann Lindsey confirmed that at least two pairs of Pied Oystercatchers nested on the Kooragang Dykes during the year and successfully raised young there.

The fifth year of regular monthly **wader counts in the Hunter Estuary** continued during 2004, with three teams surveying simultaneously: one at Ash Island, one at Kooragang Dykes and the Big Pond, and one covering a variety of sites between Stockton Sandspit and Fullerton Cove. As in previous years, a large number of people have assisted with the wader counts:

Alan Stuart, Mick Roderick, Stephen Roderick, Karen Pearson, Craig Anderson, Cassie Anderson, Keith Laverick, Nick Livanos, Paddy Lightfoot, Noelene Rutherford, Jenny Spencer, Robert McDonald, Grant Brosie, Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford, Ann Lindsey, Mike Newman, Jenny Powers, Terry Lindsey, Liz Huxtable, Alan Richardson, Michelle Foate, Chris Eastham, Steven Cox, Penny Drake-Brockman, Monica O'Wheel, and Brooke Corrigan.

Consistent efforts by core team members are greatly appreciated, as is the assistance of many other people from time to time. This is a tremendous effort from everyone involved and as a Club we can be very proud of the results of these surveys, which are published in the Annual Bird Reports.

On 8 February 2004, Mick Murphy of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), organized a comprehensive survey of **waterbirds in Port Stephens** and requested assistance from HBOC. Thirteen members with wader identification skills took part in the survey which involved 5 boats covering 5 separate parts of Port Stephens. The results of this inaugural survey were astonishing: 112 Pied Oystercatchers and 649 Eastern Curlew put Port Stephens on the map as home to more than 1% of the total populations of these two species. The total numbers of shorebirds counted are provided in **Table 2**. Except for the Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers and Masked Lapwings, all these shorebirds are migratory, breeding in the northern hemisphere and spending the 8 months from approximately September to April in the southern hemisphere.

Table 2 – Shorebirds Recorded at Port Stephens on 8 February 2004

Species	Total Number
Black-tailed Godwit	51
Bar-tailed Godwit	888
Whimbrel	218
Eastern Curlew	649
Terek Sandpiper	6
Common Sandpiper	1
Grey-tailed Tattler	44

Table 2 – Shorebirds Recorded at Port Stephens on 8 February 2004 (continued)

Species	Total Number
Ruddy Turnstone	8
Red-necked Stint	20
Pied Oystercatcher	112
Sooty Oystercatcher	18
Lesser Sand Plover	5
Masked Lapwing	33
Total	2,053

Significant numbers of other waterbirds included 1056 Black Swan, 458 Pied Cormorant, 30 Australian White Ibis, and 178 Crested Tern.

NPWS provided a grant to fund the publication of the results of the survey, which Alan Stuart undertook to compile. Alan researched historical records for Port Stephens and included the regular monthly wader counts conducted at Swan Bay by Sue Hamonet and her team. The result is a very comprehensive and interesting account of the *Shorebirds of Port Stephens – Recent and Historical Perspectives*, a publication that we are all very proud of. This is the second HBOC Special Report – the first being the *Birds of Ash Island*, which Alan also produced in 2002. Thank you Alan.

Monthly surveys are conducted by Mike Newman and Ann Lindsey at the disused **Morpeth Sewage Treatment Works** where the treatment ponds are being maintained for bird habitat. Survey results are forwarded to Hunter Water Corporation, to assist them with site management.

Results of monthly surveys of the **Tank Paddock** are sent to Newcastle City Council, and have contributed to the decision not to allow rezoning of this land for residential subdivision.

Monthly surveys have been initiated this year at '**Gresham**', a private property near Seaham, in order to monitor the results of on-farm Landcare activities. Tom Clarke, Anthony Gooden and Neville McNaughton are conducting these surveys.

The **Birds Australia Atlas Project** is ongoing, after publication of *The New Atlas of Australian Birds* following 4 years of intensive atlassing between 1998 and 2002 by over 7,000 volunteers. Ongoing atlassing continues to provide data for assessing environmental change, as birds are an indicator of ecosystem health. Many HBOC members are also members of Birds Australia and the Club works in harmony with Birds Australia on many issues. During 2004, seven special atlassing days were organized by Grant Brosie, Nick Livanos and Ann Lindsey. These outings are often exploratory, searching for birds in areas that are not necessarily regular haunts of birdwatchers. The atlassing locations are listed in **Table 3**.

Table 3 – Atlassing Sites and Highlights during 2004

Date	Location	Highlights	Observers
21 February	Mt Sugarloaf	2 male Spotted Quail-thrush	6
22 May	Gloucester Tops – Kerripit Road	Red-browed Treecreeper Large-billed Scrubwren Crescent Honeyeater Olive Whistler Bassian Thrush	3
26 June	Anvil Hill-Mangoola	Brown Treecreeper Rock Warbler Red-capped Robin Hooded Robin Diamond Firetail	3

Table 3 – Atlasing Sites and Highlights during 2004 (continued)

Date	Location	Highlights	Observers
31 July	Main Creek/Jerusalem Creek	Glossy Black-cockatoo Azure Kingfisher Large-billed Scrubwren Pale Yellow Robin Crested Shriketit	3
21 August	Bulga – Kings Gap	Speckled Warbler Western Gerygone Red-capped Robin Diamond Firetail	2
25 September	Watagan Mountains	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo Southern Boobook Scarlet Honeyeater Australian Owlet-nightjar	6
2 October	Anvill Hill – Mangoola	Australian Owlet-nightjar Brown Treecreeper Speckled Warbler Western Gerygone Red-capped Robin Hooded Robin	3

University Studies

It is very exciting to see studies of migratory waders in the Hunter Estuary being undertaken by University students. HBOC supports these studies and maintains close links with the students involved. The following projects were initiated in 2004.

Newcastle University

- Alan Richardson – Radio-tracking over-wintering Bar-tailed Godwits in the Hunter Estuary
- Michelle Foate - Radio-tracking Bar-tailed Godwits in the Hunter Estuary during summer
- Alice Howe – Estuarine wetland rehabilitation and ecohydraulics: the link between hydraulics, sediment, benthic invertebrates, plants and migratory wading bird habitat.

Australian Catholic University

- Jenny Spencer – Study of shorebird use of the Hunter Estuary

Members of HBOC have been involved in assisting these projects and encouraging these studies.

Conservation – Summary 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

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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.

Twitchathon

Four teams from HBOC participated in the Twitchathon in October: Hunter Thickheads, Hunter Home Brewers and Dodgy Drongoes in the main race; Lesticum Phoradae in the champagne race. The Hunter Home Brewers recorded 220 species and won the main race; Lesticum Phoradae recorded 156 species and won the champagne race! Altogether the teams raised over \$1600 for the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program. A mighty effort!

2. ENCOURAGE BIRD OBSERVING

Program

As usual, HBOC ran a large program of activities throughout the year to encourage bird observing – a total of 53 activities in 2004:

- 12 Sunday outings (held monthly)
- 11 mid-week outings (held monthly)
- 12 Hunter Estuary wader surveys (held monthly)
- 1 Port Stephens wader survey
- 7 Birds Australia Atlas survey days
- 5 special surveys (2 for Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot, 2 for Painted Snipe, 1 for beach-nesting birds)
- 2 pelagic outings off Swansea

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- 4 camps on weekends/long weekends

All of these activities were well attended and our thanks go to all those who helped organize these events.

Club Nights

We held 11 Club Nights during 2004 at The Wetlands Centre, where the average attendance was 42. (Details of these nights are provided in **Appendix 1**). Guest speakers covered a wide range of topics: *Development in the Hunter Estuary and at Dunns Creek*; *Birds of Cape York*; *Black-necked Stork*; *Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program*; *Up and Down the Amazon River*; *Tasmanian Robins*; *Dolphins in Port Stephens*; and *Birds of Mallorca*. Powerpoint presentations are now more common than slide presentations and our thanks go to all the presenters for their excellent efforts. Our thanks also go to Umwelt (Australia) Pty Limited for providing a computer projector on Club Nights.

The Bird of the Evening segment was a lot of fun with members discussing their favourite bird or some aspect of avian development. Our thanks go to all the presenters.

The Observations/Discussion section of the meeting provided valuable bird observations for inclusion in the Annual Bird Report.

As usual, the December Club Night was a lot of fun with members' digital presentations, a raffle with wonderful prizes, and a great supper.

Community

Waders in the Hunter Estuary were once more a focus of our community efforts this year, with two colourful and informative signs being installed at Stockton Sandspit, funded by a Coastcare Grant. Chris Herbert designed and organized production of the signs while Tom Clarke dug the holes and cemented them in place. The signs were installed in time for the Birds Australia Members' Day and AGM, held at Newcastle University in May. Chris Herbert and Liz Crawford presented talks on *Rehabilitation of Stockton Sandspit* and the *Status of Waders in the Hunter Estuary, past and present* at the Members' Day. Prior to Members' Day, Chris Herbert and Alan Morris were interviewed for ABC radio about waders in the Hunter Estuary and the rehabilitation of Stockton Sandspit. Earlier in the year, ABC radio in Newcastle conducted a series of interviews about developments in the Hunter Estuary and Ann Lindsey talked about the impacts of proposed developments on wader habitat on Ash Island. A short clip of this heartfelt interview was played repeatedly to advertise the series and helped to raise the profile of waders in the Hunter Estuary.

As in previous years, HBOC mounted displays at The Wetlands Centre for World Wetlands Day in February and Catchment Day in October. These are a great opportunities to involve families in birdwatching and raise awareness of the Club. Several members participated in these displays and our thanks go to all of them. Communication with the community was facilitated by our webmaster Dick Jenkin, who maintained our website with its new address: www.hboc.org.au; by Peter Phillips, who made sure that all of our meetings were well advertised in local press and radio; and by Marion Walker, who continued to be our telephone contact point.

GENERAL CLUB OPERATION

Membership

Membership has reached an all-time high with 264 members in December 2004, an increase of 23 over the previous year's total. Membership consists of 88 single members, 172 family members and 4 junior members.

Finances

Once again, we are indebted to our honorary treasurer, Rowley Smith, who has kept a firm hand on the purse strings and provided financial reports to the monthly committee meetings. He has been cheerfully assisted at Club nights by Lesley Marshall. Review of our finances in October led us to reluctantly consider raising the 2005 annual fees to \$25 per family or single member. Increased insurance premiums, and ongoing running costs for the Club have necessitated this rise. Our thanks to Katrina Thornton for auditing our accounts.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2004

During the year we received a grant from National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for publication of the Port Stephens Shorebird Survey Results and an Environmental Grant from Newcastle City Council for production and publication of two Birding Route brochures for Newcastle. The Shorebird Survey Results have been published and the Birding Route brochures are nearing completion.

Unfortunately, we were unable to provide an alternative project for the \$11,000 Envirofund Grant received in 2002 for removing mangroves from Stockton Sandspit and had to return this money during 2004. This grant was received a couple of months after the mangroves had been removed by NPWS. HBOC considered alternative projects and applied for additional grant money of \$30,000 to construct a bird hide at Stockton Sandspit. However, after detailed costing, we realized that we needed at least \$100,000 for this project. Despite applications to industry, we were unable to source additional funds and NPWS were not supportive of a bird hide at the Sandspit. Consequently, we have applied to change the project for the \$30,000 grant to removing mangroves from wader habitat on Ash Island.

Library

Grant Brosie took responsibility for the Library during 2004. The Library currently contains 420 books. Many of these were kindly donated by members and we thank them for their generosity. The library was moved several times during the year, as the space used by Community Groups at The Wetlands Centre was rationalised. Thanks to Tom Clarke for all his work during these moves. Borrowing was down early in the year but started to pick up by the end of the year. This was partly due to the library being housed in a small room off the main meeting room, out of general sight.

General

HBOC continued to publish a bimonthly newsletter, which is issued to all members as well as to other clubs with whom we exchange newsletters. We are indebted to Peter Phillips for editing, to Phil Rankin for preparing the newsletter for email transmission and to Tom Clarke for printing and distributing it. And of course, we appreciate the literary efforts of all our contributors! Keep it up!

The Management Committee worked well together during the year and kept things rolling when a large chunk headed off to the Kimberley for a few months. That's when the team effort really showed, with people stepping into roles they had not previously bargained on. My personal thanks go to all the members of the Committee for carrying on regardless and especially to Tom Clarke, our untiring Secretary who maintains that all important written contact with the outside world.

Committee members Paul Baird, Grant Brosie, Anthony Gooden, Ann Lindsey, John McAdam and Jim Smart, helped keep the Club running smoothly. The Committee appreciated input from Jenny Powers, Sue Hamonet, Chris Herbert and Robert McDonald, who were all regular attendees at the Committee meetings. Management Committee meetings are open to anyone from the Club to attend and participate.

Two special people help ensure Club Nights run smoothly: Judith Smith welcomes attendees at our meetings and Judy Westphal makes sure we all have a cup of tea and a biscuit at the end of them. A small army of volunteers helps set up and clear away chairs each Club Night. Sue Hamonet maintains our Club bird records and ensures that all our results are sent to the Birds Australia Atlas.

So many enthusiastic people in the Hunter Bird Observers Club make it a joy to belong to a Club that continues to maintain its twin objectives.

Thank you all.

Liz Crawford
HBOC President 2004