



Hunter Bird Observers Club

**NEWSLETTER**

Issue 405

August-September 2005

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**Committee**

*The aims of the club are:*

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

- *To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat*
- *To encourage bird observing as a leisure-time activity*

**Committee Members:**

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

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

HBOC welcomes the following new members

Ken & Jocelyn Hullick  
Rod & Andrew Wise

**Conservation Officer**

Jenny Powers

**Life Members**

Wilma Barden  
Sue Hamonet  
Ed Hamonet

NEWSLETTER DATES FOR 2005

**Edition**

**Copy Deadline**

October/November  
December 2005/January 2006

1 October 2005  
3 December 2005

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN – AUGUST 2005

Hunter Bird Observers Club began as the "Hunter Bird Observers Group" in May 1976, under the umbrella of the then Newcastle Flora and Fauna Society. Five years later the group changed its name to the Hunter Bird Observers Club, and became independent from the Flora and Fauna Society. Starting with thirteen foundation members in 1976, the Club has now grown to 250 members, but the original commitment to conservation of birds and their habitat remains unchanged. The Club's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary will be in May 2006 and we are planning a celebratory cruise on the Hunter River to mark the event. We also plan to have a bumper sticker ready for sale and hopefully a Club T-shirt! Wilma Barden's summary of the early years of the Club was especially useful in getting the history right.

Oh, and before I forget, thanks to Tom Clarke and Alan Stuart for promoting HBOC at the recent Wetlands Centre 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations

Over the last couple of months, Lake Macquarie Catchment Coordinator, Landcare and Toronto's Sunrise Rotary have done a marvelous job of removing lantana and other weeds along the margin of Toronto Wetland, and planting lots of native shrubs and grasses in their place. These efforts have made The Greenway that borders the wetland a more pleasant place to walk and opened up views into the wetland. Two viewing areas for birdwatchers have been subtly defined with gravel pathways. Toronto Wetland is an important roosting and breeding site for Australian White Ibis, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants, Cattle Egrets, Great Egrets and Little Egrets. Although only a remnant of its former extent, the wetland currently hosts over 300 Australian White Ibis every evening, along with dozens of Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants and Cattle Egrets. On behalf of HBOC, Chris Herbert gave a presentation to Sunrise Rotary on the importance of Toronto Wetland, and we offered to assist with educational signs about the birds.

Various activities around the Lower Hunter have caught our attention: Tom Clarke has raised pertinent issues about Forestry practices in the Watagans with NSW Forests. Neville McNaughton and I have attended a meeting convened by Energy Australia to discuss their proposed transmission line across Ash Island, and subsequently submitted a report detailing the importance of Ash Island for migratory waders and waterfowl and the high potential for bird collisions with power lines in this area. Useful information was found on the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee's website: [www.aplic.com](http://www.aplic.com). This Committee comprises energy utilities as well as the US Fish and Wildlife Service and has developed an Avian Protection Plan that includes a range of actions to minimize bird mortality, from training maintenance crews in observing injured or dead birds to retrofitting poles or power lines with bird deflecting devices. Energy Australia has placed bird deflecting devices and striped plastic tape on powerlines near the wind turbine on Kooragang Island, because pelicans were occasionally colliding with the lines and causing power outages. By defining areas of high bird use, we hope to minimize the potential for bird collisions and at the very least, have mitigating measures installed when the power lines are erected.

As part of its efforts to better manage the coastline, Newcastle City Council requested HBOC to investigate and report on avian use of the rock platforms between Nobbys Beach and Burwood Beach. Chris Herbert and I undertook this task and have collated information from HBOC records, the Birds Australia Atlas, NSW Bird Atlasers, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service Wildlife Atlas Database, as well as spending three days surveying the rock platforms over the last month. To our delight, we found 16 Sooty Oystercatchers on 4 July, but following rough weather there were only 2 on 15 July, and on the last survey on 21 July we found only 3. Where do they go? Four were roosting on the Kooragang Dykes on 15 July, but the remainder may have flown further south. These birds suffer repeated disturbance from people exploring the rock platforms and unknowingly wandering into the birds' foraging areas. Newcastle Baths is the place to roost for hundreds of Silver Gulls and Crested Terns. Five White-fronted Terns were also there on 21 July and a single, very cryptic Ruddy Turnstone, busily foraging over the craggy surface of the rock platform. It is fascinating to collate information on a particular habitat with a restricted suite of birds and try to understand their movements. Chris is currently compiling the report for Council and the Club will benefit financially.

"Put Wings to Your Heart", a celebration about migratory birds and featuring all sorts of creative activities, will take place at The Wetlands Centre on 10 September 2005. It is being organized by Joan McCarthy, who can be contacted on 4971 0945 or by email: [jilpi2@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:jilpi2@yahoo.co.nz). Joan is inviting people to create an exhibit (art work, song, dance etc) illustrating a bird story written by Inge Plater. Inge's story tells of a child watching a bird hatch and of the growing friendship between them. It lifts us to share in the joy of flight. Registrations are required by 19 August 2005.

BIGnet, the Bird Interest Group Network, will be meeting at The Wetlands Centre on 10/11 September. BIGnet consists of representatives from bird groups around NSW, from the Wader Studies Group and from the Department of Environment and Conservation. The concept of Important Bird Areas will be discussed at this meeting and more progress will be made in nominating areas suitable for recognition at this international level.

October is a focus for birds, with Bird Week and the Twitchathon well known events. This year, HBOC will celebrate birds with a talk on John Gould (one of the fathers of Australian ornithology) at the October Club Night to be held at the Lovett Gallery, Newcastle Regional Library. Some of Gould's fine publications will be on display and there'll be a special supper to encourage everyone to come!

Our monthly wader surveys have discovered a flock of Red-necked Stints over-wintering on Ash Island, along with a few Curlew Sandpipers – wonderful to know these small waders are calling the estuary home! There are other delights in the Hunter Region – a flock of Plum-headed Finches was seen recently just west of Jerrys Plains and thousands of ibis continue to fly into The Wetlands Centre to roost at night. About 120 Swift Parrots have been seen in the Pelton State Forest and a few Regent Honeyeaters are there as well.  
Liz Crawford

## TWITCHATHON

*This annual event will take place at the end of October as usual and will be coordinated on behalf of Birds Australia, by Alan Morris. Each year a conservation cause or activity is funded by the event and this year we have plenty of notice of where the money is to go. This should allow teams to start their fundraising efforts early. The following is from Birds Australia*

### TWITCHATHON 2005

#### Fund Recipient: Gluepot Reserve

#### Project Summary:

Gluepot Reserve is Australia's largest community owned and managed conservation reserve. Situated 64km from the River Murray in South Australia's Riverland, the Reserve is managed and operated entirely by volunteers. Some 54,390 ha in size, it is home to 18 nationally threatened species of birds 53 species of reptiles and 12 species of bats. There are few areas in the world, which support such a concentration of threatened species.

By successfully combining the elements of biodiversity conservation and land management, scientific research and monitoring and sustainable ecotourism, Gluepot Reserve has taken conservation management into a new era. The Reserve is providing an international 'model' to show that sustainable use of the landscape is both feasible and desirable. A highly successful program of this size and complexity is unique in Australian land management and serves to increase awareness of the environmental issues surrounding this highly endangered area of Australian Wilderness.

This project will provide vital facilities for the fourth crucial 'element' in the Reserve's long-term Plan of Management - the provision of **Environmental Education** courses, workshops and training at Gluepot Reserve.

#### Aims & Objectives:

Gluepot is being developed as a 'natural biological laboratory' with 11 universities and research institutes conducting ongoing projects at the Reserve. The Reserve's fifth PhD project commenced last spring and more than a dozen MSc and Honours projects on the vegetation, birds and reptiles have been completed since 1998. Visitors to the Reserve are encouraged to assist research workers with their projects and to participate in Reserve initiated projects such as the Water Points Survey and bird Atlassing - Gluepot has the highest concentration of bird Atlassing sites in Australia. Planning is in train for the Reserve (in partnership with the SA Museum) to become Australia's first permanent bat recording station.

By utilising and building on this established research base (in addition to the research and monitoring projects undertaken by Reserve managers) we intend to provide a series of workshops and courses that will centre on the mallee environment, and in particular, threatened species, of which there are 18 on the Reserve.

The beauty of having an environment education center at Gluepot is that course participants can spend a certain amount of their time in the 'classroom' and then move out into the mallee (the 'living' classroom) to put into practice what they have learnt in the centre. It is intended that the courses and workshops will initially be 1, 2 and 3 day live-in courses conducted during summer, autumn, winter and spring. Eighteen initial courses are presently being developed and will be run by some of Australia's most experienced facilitators (lecturers) and include:

- Reptile Identification, Pit Trapping & Handling
- Botanical Illustration & Painting
- Monitoring Australian Bats
- The Flight of Birds
- Birdwatching for Beginners
- Bird Calls of the Mallee
- Identifying Birds of the Mallee
- Birds for Biodiversity
- Bird Painting & Illustration
- Mallee Plants and Weeds
- Seed Collecting & Propagation of Mallee Species
- Tracks, Scats & Other Traces
- Understanding Your GPS
- Malleefowl Grid Monitoring
- Bird Photography
- Introduction to Bird Banding
- Drawing from Nature
- Nature Photography
- Bird Atlassing on Gluepot

**Please Note:** There will be three courses during second half of 2005 (which will enable us to complete the building of the Centre) six in 2006, building to 18+ in 2007 onwards.

#### Use of Twitchathon Funds:

Twitchathon funds will be used to purchase a limited amount of building material (particularly building insulation) and in particular, audio visual equipment such as a 35mm projector; overhead projector, data projector and laptop (for Power Point presentations); screen; desks and chairs; binoculars and identification books; course materials etc.

#### Additional Use of the Centre:

The Centre will also be used to train our Rangers and in particular Assistant Rangers. The Centre will be utilised to train Reserve volunteer groups such as the 'Friends of Gluepot' (100+ in number) in areas such as Malleefowl surveys, seed collection & propagation, pitline trapping, OH&S procedures etc. Training field personnel and researchers eg: the National Black-eared Miner Recovery Team Act as a venue for seminars and meetings eg: The Australian Bird Study Association held their AGM and Field Days at Gluepot; the Eastern District Soil Conservation Board and the Rangelands Natural Resource Management Board recently held two day board meetings at Gluepot. Birding tour groups from across Australia visit Gluepot, and we presently talk to them at night out at the camping grounds. With the Centre in operation, we will be able to have them come into the Centre and combine our talks with visuals. The Education Centre is located next to the Reserve's Visitor Centre.

**Atlassing – Sandy Hollow**  
**Saturday 28 May 2005.**

**From Anthony Gooden**

A small but hardy gang (Ann L, Rob McD, Harold, Neville and I) met in cool conditions at Maitland station at 7am.

We then 2 car convoyed to Giants Creek Rd at Sandy Hollow – up the road past our Anzac Camp turnoff at Denman.

A warm cuppa in cool, breezy conditions then spent the day at about 6 spots along the road and had some interesting sightings. As usual, the convoy leadership was impeccable. Coordinates were taken and each stop was at least 20 mins. Most of the property is privately owned but there was plenty of accessible bush and roadside viewing. It was very dry.

Some of the more interesting sightings included spotted and striated pardalotes; white throated and brown treecreepers; yellow, yellow-rumped, brown and buff-rumped thornbills; speckled warblers; a fearless juvenile golden whistler; good views of a black eared cuckoo; white eared, yellow faced and white plumed honeyeaters; red rumped parrots; large flocks of sulphur crested cockatoos; wedgetail eagles; excellent close overhead views of a brown falcon, nankeen kestrels; chestnut-rumped heathwrens; hooded and yellow robins; plenty of jacky winters; close views of grey crowned babbler; double barred and red browed finches and grey shrike thrush.

As well, there were several quail sightings. Can't tell you what types because they were too sneaky and fast – which frustrated the whatsy out of Ann and Neville.

There were several wallabies and young but the special sighting for me was a wombat in the entrance to its burrow. Yet another piece of wonderful nature.

A satisfying full day's "work".

**Midweek Outing – Wyee Point**  
**Tuesday 7 June 2005**

**From Don Moon**

On a sunny winter's morning 29 birds explored the bush on the western side of Wyee Point.

Firstly we walked down the track to the Lakes edge (which is opposite Morisset Hospital) where we saw White-faced and Striated Heron plus Little and Great Egret. We then continued along the tracks to the creek at the end of the bay – along the way many bird calls were heard and good sightings were had of White-cheeked, Yellow-faced, Scarlet and Lewins Honeyeaters, Golden Whistler, Silvereyes, Olive-backed Oriole, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Superb and Variegated Wrens, White-browed Scrubwren and Red-browed Firetails. Near the creek both the male and female Mistletoe bird were seen.

After morning tea we proceeded to walk to the Wyee Point Reserve and observed along the way Eastern Rosellas, King Parrot, Galahs, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and a large flock of long-billed corellas which have taken up residence in the area.

On the lake around the point were seen Royal Spoonbills, Little-pied Little –black and Great Cormorants and a Darter. On the reserve were Yellow, Striated and Brown Thornbills and Varied Sittella.

A good morning was had by those who attended which included four people from the Tomaree area and two visitors from Kariong.

A total of 63 species were identified.

**Watagans Outing (22 May)**

10 people in attendance with the best sightings being Red-browed Treecreeper and Glossy Black Cockatoo.

## Midweek Outing – Minmi, Tuesday 5th July, 2005

from Nick Livanos

The midweek outings have been very popular for some time and this one, covering some of the Minmi area, was no exception. Although at first the weather was not looking too promising, being cool and overcast, the rain held off as our group of twenty-four people met at the cemetery.

The first couple of hours were spent exploring the adjacent Bluegum Hills Regional Park. At first it was rather quiet, but as we moved on, the birds started to become active. A few Brown Thornbills and Superb Fairy-wrens were seen, then plenty of Variegated Fairy-wrens, Red-browed Finches and Spereyes, including some eye-catching Tasmanians with their chestnut flanks.

Not a lot of Honeyeaters, but Eastern Spinebills, Yellow-faced, White-cheeked and White-naped Honeyeaters were seen. White-throated Treecreepers were calling incessantly, and some of the group were sidetracked by a Male Satin Bowerbird making an unusual (distress?) call - didn't quite manage to work out why. In all, 54 species were seen here, including a group of King Parrots and a pair of Brown Cuckoo-Doves, both of which have a liking for the fruit of the Wild Tobacco tree. The park covers quite a large area, and we didn't cover it all so it would be easy to spend much more time here.

After morning tea, we moved on to Pambalong Nature Reserve, where we finally saw some raptors, including Whistling and Black-shouldered Kites, Swamp Harrier and an immature White-bellied Sea Eagle. After some discussion, it was agreed that the Corellas we were looking at in the distance were in fact Long-billed, as they obligingly moved, allowing the red front to be seen.

We obtained excellent scope views of Australasian Shoveler and Hardhead, as well as Chestnut and Grey Teal, illustrating the plumage and bill differences not so easily distinguished through binoculars in the grey conditions. The whole time we were there, a Little Grassbird could be heard calling, but a sighting eluded us until just before we left, when it finally came out into the open, still calling, and giving us good views. In all, 48 species were seen here.

We then proceeded across the freeway to Lenaghan's Swamp. An Intermediate Egret was feeding very close to our viewing point, and good close-up views were obtained. Having just had correspondingly good views of a Great Egret at Pambalong, the respective diagnostic features were clearly seen and able to be compared.

There were the usual Eurasian Coot, Purple Swamphen and Black Duck, and after some searching, the elusive Pink-eared Ducks were sighted loafing on the far shore. The diagnostic striping and bill were evident, but unfortunately for some who were not familiar with this species, the pink ear was even more elusive. However, they eventually stirred and started to preen and move off into the water, allowing the feature from which they take their name to be seen.

As well as the water birds, some small birds such as Yellow-rumped Thornbills (which advertised their presence by their pretty tinkling call) and Zebra Finches were seen.

Another successful outing then concluded with lunch by the water.

### Camp. (Queens Birthday Weekend) Callicoma Property near Mt Royal.

As it was rainforest, we had some rain on and off but not enough to interfere too much with the birding by day and we got about 55 species. And the nights were dry and mild; plenty of wood for the campfire and a good time was had by all. Highlights included Red-browed Treecreeper, Satin and Regent Bowerbirds White-headed and Topknot Pigeon and also the toasted marshmallows, done to perfection by a young fellow named Jesse

(Note from Alan Stuart email)

## Atlas Outing Denman Area 17 July 2005

from Nick Livanos

As we set out from our rendezvous at Maitland Railway Station, the day looked promising, being fine and sunny, though cold. However, as we headed further west, the weather deteriorated, becoming cloudy and windy.

Our first stop was at Pine Grove Road. Here we saw Golden Whistler and good numbers of Weebills, Brown-headed Honeyeaters and Buff-rumped Thornbills, as well as Speckled Warblers. The highlight here was Western Gerygone, seen by some of the group.

Next stop was along Jones Reserve Road, just past the Doyles Creek Bridge. Double-barred Finches, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters and Bell Miners were prominent here. There was plenty of evidence (fresh platelets) of Painted Button-Quail, though the birds were not seen.

By now the conditions were worsening, with intermittent sun and cloud, with a strong, cold wind. Our morning tea stop yielded King Parrot and some of the common bush birds, including Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Shrike-thrush, Grey Fantail, Weebill, Spotted Pardalote, Eastern Spinebill, Yellow and Brown Thornbills and Mistletoe Bird. However, most of the time was spent listening in vain for calls over the howling wind, with most of the birds being in only a few 'hot' spots.

We stopped for lunch just west of Denman, along Rosemount Road. Here we were accompanied by Varied Sittellas, Yellow, Brown and Buff-rumped Thornbills, Yellow-faced, White-plumed and Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Superb Fairy-wrens, White-throated Treecreepers, Speckled Warblers and a Striped Honeyeater. Someone had become a bit carried away with a chainsaw here, many trees (some quite large) having been felled.

Our final scheduled stop, near the cemetery at Denman, yielded a similar suite of birds, with the addition of White-eared Honeyeater and Brown Treecreeper, as well as great views of Sittellas, feeding near ground level.

In general, parrots, pigeons and robins were in short supply. The weather (in particular the strong wind), as well as the scarcity of flowering trees, contributed to conditions which were far from ideal for birding. Hence, the number of species and birds (with a few exceptions) seen was low.

Other than Wedge-tailed Eagles, few raptors were seen at our Atlas sites. However, Brown Falcons, Nankeen Kestrels and Black-shouldered Kites were regularly encountered along the road. One interesting and new (to me at least) aspect of bird behaviour was witnessed on the return trip, when we stopped to check out a raptor which turned out to be a Brown Falcon. The falcon flew from its prominent perch alongside the road and harassed an Australian Raven, eventually causing it to drop some food it was carrying, whereupon the falcon picked it up and took off. Not to be outdone, the raven gathered group of its mates and proceeded to mob the falcon in an effort to recover its meal.

The highlight of the trip was on the return journey, just west of Jerrys Plains, where one lucky carload saw an unusually large (for the Hunter) flock of about 70 Plum-headed Finches feeding with some Zebra Finches. Unfortunately a passing truck startled the birds, killing one Plum-head and one Zebra Finch.

### **News from The Club Committee**

The last of the **Keating Fund** monies have been committed. Firstly, on a welcome upgrade to a Digital Projector for Club Nights and lastly – the small change – on Display Boards for the occasions when a HBOC presence is needed at various events. This most generous legacy has been a welcome extra to Club finances and the research and equipment it has provided were greatly appreciated.

### **Queens Birthday Honours List**

Ann Lindsey, standing in for the Governor-General, was regally pleased to award the Order of the 600 to two stalwarts of the Club at a special ceremony at Mount Royal (where else). Alan Stuart and Michael Todd were the deserving members and will wear their "600 Club" badges with pride at all official Club functions. Well done.

How about a short newsletter essay, "my 600th bird" from these and other "birders who count"?

## The colours are stunning, at Wambo. HBOC outing 24<sup>th</sup> July 2005

from Tom Clarke

How good is it? I have just regained Sundays as a birdwatching day and the first outing on the calendar is to Wambo. As it turns out I have never experienced birdwatching at Wambo but I have been listening to some of the enthusiastic chat by atlassing types on the merits of this site and it all sounded like excitement plus. I am extremely happy to report that the Wambo site is more than just worth a visit; it's a must-go-back-again place for me now.

Floristically, the site doesn't have a lot going for it; typically dry country woodland of ironbark and allocasaurina with a spindly hakea shrub layer and buggler all herbaceous plants on the ground. But here there are occasional eucalypts and as these were budding heavily or in flower, they proved irresistible to our nectar feeding friends. Suffice to say that the otherwise drab bush was acting as prime foraging habitat for plenty of birds and this was all we needed for a great day of birdwatching.

Despite a chilly dawn, five HBOC members were soon warming to the birds and Red-capped Robin made a stunning first entry onto my note pad. Both male and female birds were found but the colour of the male was outstanding. Western Gerygone were calling well and once my ears had clicked onto their beautiful warble it was easily apparent that many birds were foraging through the tree tops. Then we were in for a real treat as a mixed flock moved past and the parade had us all going crazy trying to get a look at all the species present. Grey Fantail, Speckled Warbler, Western Gerygone, Jacky Winter, Golden Whistler, Striated Pardalote, Spotted Pardalote and Buff-rumped Thornbill were all the birds that I could manage to record.

Again we were so impressed with the colour of the warblers and pardalotes – so intense and beautiful in the otherwise dull landscape. How does it work? the light? the contrast? the low habitat? these dry country birds just seem to glow. If its an illusion then it worked on all of us – I'm wasn't the only one going mad. And there we were admiring the Grey-crowned Babbler that had obviously gone to so much trouble to look its very best.

It was good to see so many nests about the place too. While none were active it would seem that the area supports plenty of breeding opportunities at times. One large tree worth visiting again had at least three nests in it but for the present was providing nectar for Striped Honeyeater. A line of flowering gum at the base of a ridge proved superior to all we had looked at earlier in the day and was being visited by Scarlet, White-naped, Yellow-faced and Fuscous Honeyeaters while small mobs of Little Lorikeet screamed by below tree level. These birds proved too elusive with their speed so no real good binocular views were gained.

Not so the Turquoise Parrot and Diamond Firetail that were attracted to a small dam nearby. Again, stunning is the word for these dry country gems. The yellow of the parrot's bellies and the crimson of the diamond's rumps remain foremost in my mind. What a great day!

### Once were Predators

**Reseachers led by Professor Alan Cooper from Oxford's Ancient Biomolecules Centre extracted DNA from fossil eagle bones dating back about 2000 years and decided that the extinct giant eagle which was once New Zealand's main predator was closely related to the Australian Little Eagle. They estimated that their common ancestor lived less than a million years ago. An aim of the project was to prove some relationship between Haasts Eagle and the Wedge-tailed Eagle but to the surprise of the researchers they found that it was most closely related to the Little Eagle. Haasts Eagle weighed between 10kg and 14kg while the Little Eagle usually weighs less than 1 kg. Haasts Eagle was between 30% and 40% heavier than any living bird of prey and it was approaching the upper weight limit for flight.**

**It is believed that the size increase was driven by the size of available prey and the absence of other predators. Haasts eagle was big enough to rule its environment. It was driven to oblivion about five centuries ago just 200 years or so after the first humans arrived.**

**From the BBC web site via Bird Queensland Newsletter June 2005**

## COUNTING IBIS

In June and July, Alan Stuart has been reporting Club activity in counting Ibis – Straw-necked and Australian White – at The Wetland Centre and other nearby wetlands. On 14 July, 15,563 Ibis came in to roost. Nearly 13500 of them were Straw necked Ibis.

At the same time Max Maddocks reported about 12,000 Ibis at the Irrawang Swamp night roost and there were also large numbers at Fern Bay and at Pambalong Swamp. All up there appeared to be about 30,000 Ibis of these two main species in the Lower Hunter at that time.

Max was able to compare the Irrawang numbers seen between April and July 2005 with his records for the same site in April to July 2001. The counts for 6 June and 14 July 2005 are larger than the July 2001 tallies but they are still down on the peaks for 2001 but not by much.

In discussing the TWC figures this year, Max advises that the 14 July count is higher than any previous records with an estimated 7000+ in the early 1980's.

The Ibis count continues into August and it will be interesting to see how the trend progresses.

## NATIVE ANIMAL TRUST FUND WORKSHOP

There may still be time to enrol in the Native Animal Trust Fund workshop to be held on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> August at the Wetland Centre.

The Presenter will be Lyn Allaway and the title

**“Introduction to the Rescue and Rehabilitation of General Birds”.**

The Workshop starts at 10am, costs \$16.50 and registrations close on 15 August 2005

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

## INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR THE WETLAND CENTRE

Congratulations from HBOC to the Wetlands Centre for co-winning the prestigious International Ramsar wetland conservation Award for Education, the inaugural Evian Special Prize 2005.

The Wetlands Centre won the award for their “successful achievement of the goals and principles of the Ramsar convention, with particular focus on their work to rehabilitate Shortland Wetlands and shift perceptions of local communities about wetlands.”

## More Congratulations

**Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project** is the overall winner in the **Community Division of the Newcastle and Hunter Region Environmental Achievement Award** for work done by the Kooragang Landcare Volunteers. Also cited were KWRP's policy and planning attributes, research and community education roles.

## TREE PLANTING IN COWRA September 17-18 (rescheduled)

### VOLUNTEERS WANTED

At, last good rains in Cowra and the Cowra Woodland Birds Project's postponed tree planting is on!

If you can help please leave your name and contact details at BASNA office.

Phone 02 9436 0388

Fax 02 9436 0466

Email: [rosella63@bigpond.com](mailto:rosella63@bigpond.com)

(A Birds Australia Project)



## ATLASSING —ALIVE AND WELL and ONLINE

The following is taken from the May 2005 edition of *Volunteer* the Newsletter of the Threatened Bird Network and Atlas of Australian Birds

In May, a new Atlas website called birdata will be on-line. The site will promote the ongoing Atlas by supporting the work of existing Atlassers as well as raising the project's profile to non-Atlassers.

For Atlassers, the main features of Birdata are, it

- Allows new surveys to be entered
- Displays on a map where your surveys have been conducted
- Generates your Atlas species list
- Allows species distribution maps to be viewed
- Provides area bird lists

This is the first phase of Birdata and we intend to upgrade the facility in the future.

A feature of Birdata which may appeal to Atlassers who do not have a GPS unit, is an interactive map interface. Users will be able to locate their new survey location by zooming in on a Birdata map, add different feature layers to help them locate their survey's site, then simply click on the map to indicate where their survey has been conducted. Coordinates will then automatically be ascribed for that survey.

When the site is up and running, all BA members and Atlassers with email addresses will be notified by email. Birdata will be accessed via links on the Birds Australia website, [www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au)

Birdata has not been designed to replace the existing Atlas structure (Atlas Forms, electronic data submission etc) and, in future, all will work together. It is intended to give Atlassers an additional way of participating and we hope that it will attract many new Atlassers.

## Birding on Borrowed Time By Phoebe Snetsinger

(This is an edited version of a Tess Kloos Book Review in The Bird Observer Vol 835-11)

Just what makes a birdwatcher? What triggers a person's interest in birds and where does it lead? Is it a gradual awareness of the beauty and fascination of bird life? Something one has grown up with, surrounded by nature since childhood, perhaps influenced by parents or a teacher, and eased into the hobby almost imperceptibly?

Or is it a sudden single incident, as in Phoebe Snetsinger's case that sets of a lifelong passion. Something to be pursued relentlessly whenever the opportunity arose.

Phoebe Snetsinger began in Minnesota where, at the time, she lived with her husband and four children. Out one day with a neighbour, a dedicated birdwatcher, who naturally carried binoculars and a field guide, she was shown some plates in the field guide, and told a little about the spring migration of warblers. She was then handed the binoculars to try. "What an incredible gift! The first bird I saw through those binoculars was a fiery-orange male Blackburnian Warbler that nearly knocked me over with astonishment – and quite simply hooked me forever"

So wrote the author in this absorbing book. When first delving into its pages it appears as if Phoebe Snetsinger lived her life at breakneck speed. Yet, as one reads on, it is obvious that when at home she spent long hours fine tuning her lists and keeping up with the latest taxonomic revisions in ornithology. She evolved an elaborate and accurate card system to keep track of all her sightings. She constantly kept in touch with other birders, seeking advice, and the best places to find species – rare or otherwise.

She soon discovered the wisdom of researching, ahead of time, the birds that she might see on a particular trip. Careful preparation paid off, as did the mastering of scientific nomenclature. She studied ages, stages of moult and racial subtleties. She recognised the use and value of companies organising bird-oriented trips. Before her adventures were over she was willing to risk altitude sickness,

experienced an earthquake – 7.6 on the Richter scale- slogged through dense jungle and some areas now inaccessible due to politics and was in a shipwreck in Indonesia. She also endured some nerve-wracking experiences and physical injuries.

She freely admits to having independent funds that enabled her to travel widely. Once her family grew up he also had the time.

No “ticker” she. Each bird had to be clearly seen and identified before being listed and counted. She did not recognise call only...and openly battled with the American Birding Association on their position of counting heard birds” Her final list – an astounding 8000 + was, at the time of her death, the greatest bird list in the world.

All this did not come without a price. In the late 1970’s she was diagnosed with cancer but instead of sitting back and waiting for the end, she determined to pursue her hobby with even greater urgency, despite several recurrences of the disease. Also, at one stage, her hobby nearly destroyed her marriage. Happily this problem was resolved and she and her husband went on to enjoy many more trips together – he in connection with business, while Phoebe’s list of new birds gradually grew and grew.

Commencing as she did at the age of 34 in 1965, until her death in 1999, she was able to birdwatch in countless countries. It is not difficult to imagine the many places she must have visited to accumulate such a huge list of species. She returned to some places more than ten times and visited Australia seven times. The last chapter of her book tells of a visit to Australia.

The epilogue is written by her son, Thomas Snetsinger. Phoebe’s last trip was to Madagascar. A flat tyre along a road delayed part of the venture but it provided her with an opportunity to write up her notes on the newly discovered Red-shouldered Vanga – her last lifer. She also recorded sighting several Sooty Falcons. Then, writes her son “ a silence, a stark thick slab of empty pages in her field notebook”

She had sprained her ankle and was very tired so lay down on one of the middle seats of the bus for a sleep. When the bus crashed, Phoebe, binoculars in hand, was killed instantly.

Phoebe Snetsinger had birded all over the world, generally led by top ornithologists. Readers will

recognise many famous names. She acknowledged how competitive she had become, how disciplined and passionate about her obsession, but she left behind a wealth of detailed accurate notes on all the birds she was fortunate enough to see. I don’t think she would have wished for a different end.

Of course such birding isn’t for everyone even if we could afford the time and money but we can learn a great deal from others methods and experiences.

The book is illustrated and has appendices cataloguing all the birds she saw, the people she met and the places she visited. A fold-out map inside the back cover shows her travel destinations.

This Book is listed as being available for sale at the Blue Wren Gift Shop in Melbourne for \$60.00 plus \$5.50p & p.

### **The meaning of ‘bird’** (from Wingspan June 2005)

Bird, as a word, goes back a long way, but its original meaning was very different. A ‘bird’ was a baby animal – sometimes even a baby insect – although usually the young of something feathered. One might say ‘ a hen and her birds’. Shakespeare, in Henry VI, talked about ‘That Princely Eagles Bird’ meaning the young of the Princely Eagle. Between the years 1388 and 1591 ‘birds’ (as ‘byrdes’ or ‘briddis’) were sometimes described as the offspring of fish, serpents and bees.

‘Bird’ began to adopt its modern meaning during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, at first for small birds. Dr Samuel Johnson in the 18<sup>th</sup> century explained that ‘ in common talk fowl is used for the larger and bird for the small kind of feathered animal’ The progression was logical, songbirds matching in size the young of larger birds. The distinction still survives in some dialects in Britain where herons and birds of prey are still called ‘fowls’.

‘Fowl’ was the older word for ‘bird’ and dates back all the way to Beowulf in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (as fuzle) Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe saw ‘ a great fowl, like a hawk, sit upon a tree’ and William Caxton in 1485 talked about Faulcens and many other fowles of chace’. Fowl was applied at times to other winged creatures and we find Miles Coverdale in 1535 describing the honeybee (‘bey’) as ‘but a small beast among the foules’. The word was attached to farm chickens in 1580.

### OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT JUNE/JULY 2005

May 13	Great Crested Grebe	4	Grahamstown Dam	M.Maddock
	Australasian Grebe	115	"	"
	Hoary-headed Grebe	166	"	"
May 27	Hoary-headed Grebe	130	"	"
May 9	Straw-necked Ibis	4,292	Irrawang Swamp [night roost]	"
May 30	Straw-necked Ibis	8,196	Irrawang Swamp [night roost]	"
Jun 10	Striped Honeyeater	1	Swansea [Cole's Car Park]	D.Rogers
May 16	Stubble Quail	2	Stockton [Lavis Lane]	R.McDonald
May 23	Osprey	1	"	"
	Mangrove Gerygone	A+2dy	Stockton Sandspit	"
Jun 8	Fairy Prion	20+	Off Newcastle Baths	"
	Yellow-nosed Albatross	1	"	"
	Yellow-nosed Albatross	1	Off Bar Beach	"
May 14	Sooty Oystercatcher	21	N'cle Ocean Baths	A.Stuart
May 28	Powerful Owl	Pr nesting	Blackbutt Reserve	P.Lightfoot/A.Stuart
May 31	Black-tailed Native Hen	1	Ash Island	P.Hansbro
May 25	Barn Owl	3 road killed	5k South Wingen	G.Newling
May 31	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	3	Wingen	"
Apr 22	Masked Owl	1	Nelson Bay Rd.	D. Cooper
Nov 19	Straw-necked Ibis	12,00 - 15,000	Irrawang Swamp [Newline Rd]	"
Jun 7	Peregrine Falcon	1	Raymond Terrace	"
May 30	Blue-faced Honeyeater	2	Warners Bay [South Creek]	A.Gooden
May 31	Black Falcon	2	Morpeth	M.Newman
May 16	Peregrine Falcon	1	Bonnell's Bay	E.McKane
May 29	Spotted Harrier	1	Aberdeen	G.Brosie
	Little Eagle	1	"	"
Jun 2	Bar-shouldered Dove	10+	"	"
Jun 5	Barn Owl	1	Denman-Muswellbrood road	"
Jun 7	Grey Goshawk	1	Maitland	"
May 30	Brahminy Kite	1	Taylor's Beach	T.Clarke
Jun 2	Sooty Oystercatcher	2	Nelson Head	"
	Australasian Gannet	1	"	"
Jun 3	Swift Parrot	1	Sawyers Gully	Name omitted
	Speckled Warbler	2	Buchanan	"
	Gang Gang Cockatoo	2	Sawyers Gully	"
Jun 6	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	8	Stockton Sandspit	T.Clarke
Jun 2	Spotted Pardalote	1 on	Glenrock SRA	C.Goodenough
Jun 8	Ruddy Turnstone	2	Newcastle Ocean Baths	R.McDonald
	White-fronted Tern	8	"	"
	Silver Gull	200+	"	"
	Black-browed Albatross	1	Off Bar Beach	"
	Australasian Gannet	34	"	"
	Sooty Oystercatcher	22	Newcastle Ocean Baths	"
Jun 9	Wandering Albatross	1+1juv	Off Newcastle	"
	Crested Tern	50+	"	"
May 21	Swift Parrot	9	Pelton S.F.	S.Roderick
May 24	"	25	Abermain [Werekata NP]	"
Jun 1	"	7	"	"
Jun 4	"	10	"	"
Jun 7	"	63	Pelton SF	"
Jun 8	"	84	"	"
	Regent Honeyeater	3	"	"
May 24	Painted Button Quail	8	Werekata NP	"
Jun 1	"	5	"	"
Jun 7	"	3	"	"
May 24	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	2	"	"
Jun 7	:	2	Pelton SF	"
Jun 8	Crested Shrike-tit	1	"	"
Jun 13	Swift Parrot	20+	Pelton SF	"

Jun 15	"	5	"	"
Jun 15	Musk Lorikeet	2	Pelton SF	S.Roderick
Jun 16	Red-capped Plover	4	Stockton Beach [Sygna wreck]	"
	Double-banded Plover	53	"	"
Jun 21	Turquoise Parrot	2	Quorrobolong	A.Morris
	Gang-gang Cockatoo	4	"	"
	Red-capped Robin		Bulga	"
	Scarlet Robin		"	"
	Diamond Firetail	12	Warkworth [Wallaby Scrub Rd]	"
	Hooded Robin	2	"	"
	Painted Button-Quail	2	"	"
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	"	"
Jun 17	Square-tailed Kite	1	Wallbridge Reserve	M.Maddock
Jun 25	Freckled Duck	1	S.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
	Pink-eared Duck		"	"
	Swift Parrot	Several	Pelton S.F.	A.Lindsey
Jun	Brahminy Kite	Pr	Bulls Island [off Lemon Tree Pass]	N.Fraser
Jun 22	Red-necked Stint	20+	Ash Island	Wader Survey
Jun 4	Brown Treecreeper	5+	Quorrobolong	M.Roderick
	Turquoise Parrot	2	"	"
	Black-chinned Honeyeater	5+	Ellalong	"
	Brown Treecreeper	3	"	"
	Stubble Quail	3	"	"
Jun 2	Rose-collared Parakeet	1 <b>escapee</b>	The Junction	"
Jun 23	Barn Owl	1	Morpeth Manor	G.Brosie
Jul 6	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	1	Awabakal N.R.	"
	Grey Goshawk	3	"	"
	Crested Shrike-tit	1	Blackbutt N.R.	"
Jul 1	Brown Quail	3	Minmi Cemetery	Livanos/Brosie
	Rose Robin	3	"	"
	Zebra Finch	2	"	"
	Australasian Shoveler	>50	Pambalong N.R.	"
	Musk Duck	1	Lenaghan's Swamp	"
	Pink-eared Duck	>3	"	"
Jun 13	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	2	Near Glenbawn Dam	A.Stuart
	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1	Near Ellalong	"
	Dusky Woodswallow	>40	"	"
Jun/Jul	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	2+ <b>ffy</b>	New Lambton	"
Jul 6	Powerful Owl	1	New Lambton [heard calling]	"
Jun 14-29	Brahminy Kite	1-2	Lemon Tree Passage [Bulls Is.]	D.Cooper
Jun 14	Australasian Gannet	1	Lemon Tree Passage	"
Jun 25	Yellow-nosed Albatross	2	Off Newcastle Baths	R.McDonald
	Black-browed Albatross	3	"	"
	Australasian Gannet	>20	"	"
Jul 7	Lewin's Rail	Heard	S.W.C.	R.McDonald
Jul 12	Red-rumped Parrot	43	N'cle Wetlands Reserve	"
	Wandering Whistling Duck	9	"	"
Jul 8	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	Several	Awabakal NR [Redhead end]	P.Lightfoot
Jul 12	Swift Parrot	120	Pelton [55m South]	D. Saunders
	Regent Honeyeater	2	"	"
	Black-chinned Honeyeater	1	"	"
	Brown Treecreeper	3	"	"
Jul 16	Plum-headed Finch	70+	4km West of Jerrys Plains	A.Lindsey et al
Jun 9	Wandering Albatross	1	Off Newcastle Ocean Baths	McDonald/Livanos
	Wandering Albatross	1	Off Nobby's Breakwater	"

## COMING EVENTS

**PLEASE CHECK WITH CONTACT PERSON FOR EACH OUTING IN CASE OF CHANGED  
DETAIL OR SUITABILITY OF SITE FOR CAMP OR FIELD DAY.**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	<b>DETAILS</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>
Sunday August 14	Stockton Sandspit Volunteer Day	8.00am to noon (low tide 8.23am)	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Saturday August 20	Hunter Wader Survey	8.30am Various Locations As Directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday August 21	Field Outing Munmorah SRA	8.00am Cnr Pacific Highway & Blue Wren Drive	Don Moon 4359 1670
Saturday September 3	Atlas Outing Gloucester Tops	7.00am McDonald's Raymond Terrace	Nick Livanos 4954 5739 <b>please ring to confirm</b>
Tuesday September 6	Mid-week Outing Morpeth Area	8.00am Morpeth Cemetery	Grant Brosie 4934 7383
Saturday/Sunday September 10 & 11	BIGnet in the Hunter	10am The Wetland Centre Nardoo Room	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Sunday September 11	Stockton Sandspit Volunteer Day	8.00am to noon (high tide 1.43pm)	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
<b>Wednesday September 14</b>	<b>CLUB MEETING</b>	<b>7.30am The Wetland Centre</b>	<b>Speaker: Stephen Debus Raptors in the Hunter</b>
Saturday September 17	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30am Various Locations As directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday September 18	Pelagic Trip	7.00am prompt (return 6.00pm) The Brewery Wharf Newcastle \$80 pp BYO food & drink	Richard Baxter <a href="mailto:randrbaxter@yahoo.com">randrbaxter@yahoo.com</a> Limited places. You must book in advance
Monday to Wednesday Sept 19-21	Mid-Week Camp Camden Haven area	Caravan Parks at North Haven or Dunbogan	Robert Stewart 4963 2029
Sunday September 25	Field Outing Milbrodale	8.00am Broke RFS	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Saturday – Monday October 1-3	Camp Widden Valley	Camp on Private Property "Holbrook: for fee of \$5 /car/night	Liz Crawford 4959 3663 Please ring if you wish to stay longer.
Tuesday October 4	Midweek Outing Munmorah SRA	8.00am Cnr Pacific Hwy & Blue Wren Drive	Don Moon 4359 1670
Sunday October 9	Stockton Sandspit Volunteer Day	8.00am to noon Plant car park garden	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
<b>Wednesday October 12</b>	<b>CLUB MEETING</b>	<b>7.30pm Lovett Gallery Newcastle Library Laman Street, Newcastle</b>	<b>Speaker: Jillian Albrecht The Goulds in the Hunter Region</b>