



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 1/06

February-March 2006

Newsletter articles welcome –
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Committee

President: Liz Crawford
Vice-president: Alan Stuart
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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*

NEW MEMBERS

HBOC welcomes the following new members: -

Ray & Sue McLean
Maggie Hristov
Greg & Karen Douglas
John & Janelle Spearpoint

HBOC Annual Membership for 2006 remains at \$25 Family or Single and \$3 for Juniors. Fees are due.

NEWSLETTER DATES for 2006

Edition

April/May
June/July
August/September
October/November
December 2006/January 2007

Copy Deadline

2 April
4 June
30 July
1 October
3 December

30th Birthday Raffle will be drawn at the May 2006 Clubnight.

Meanwhile make sure you purchase tickets (only \$1 each) on sale at most HBOC functions. First prize is a fabulous weekend at "Callicoma Hill"

ED HAMONET – LIFE MEMBER

We regret to announce the passing of our life member, Ed Hamonet, at the age of 87.

Ed and Sue Hamonet joined the Hunter Bird Observers Group in its inaugural year 1975. From the beginning Ed distinguished himself by volunteering for the essential organisational (backroom) tasks. His early work transformed the group of keen birders, part of the Flora and Fauna Society, into the independent and properly organised Club we know today. He had the main carriage of the Clubs formal registration and at later stage he drove the incorporation process.

In much of what he did he was the original office-holder and shaped the various roles that we now take for granted. He was the Foundation Treasurer, Librarian and Newsletter Editor and to each of these positions he brought great organisational ability and energy at key moments in the Clubs history.

Ed was a productive member of the Club Committee for many years. Even in his last years when he was less active he continued the useful work of HBOC Atlas Recorder with his usual thoroughness.

As a person Ed was intelligent, kind, methodical and helpful to all. He had a quiet sense of humour and was unflappable. He went about his Club duties quietly and competently. For thirty years he and Sue were the very model of volunteers, doing what needed to be done willingly and without a thought for thanks.

Ed was an early keen camper drawing on his scouting experience. He always arranged the toilet transport and construction and could be relied upon to keep the campfire going.

As a birdwatcher, Ed was knowledgeable and keen in the field. As Librarian he built our collection on a limited budget. He was always available for literature enquiries and showed a comprehensive knowledge of the books in his charge. He had a particular expertise in the derivation of the scientific names of birds giving many erudite and entertaining short talks to the Club on the subject -at a time before there were relevant reference books.

It is impossible to write about Ed without also mentioning Sue Hamonet. Together they were a wonderful team. The Club recognised their many years of meritorious service in 1999 by making them Life Members.

Our condolences and best wishes go out to Sue and her family on their loss.

(Written by Peter Phillips with assistance from Sue Hamonet, Wilma Barden and Kay Imrie.)

JIM IMRIE

We regret to announce the passing of Jim Imrie, a long-standing member of HBOC.

While we saw less of him in recent years, Jim (with Kay) was a very regular and active member of the Club.

Jim filled the role of Atlas Recorder in the early years, especially during the production of landmark *Atlas of Australian Birds* -recording and transmitting Club observations. He was a familiar figure at Outings and Camps recording the bird list. He was a very intelligent man who had committed the Atlas Bird list to memory so that he could recall the relevant Atlas number for any species.

His intellect and bird knowledge were the reasons that he was invited to become a member of the Records Appraisal Committee. This body has the sometimes controversial duty of vetting claims to have seen the more unusual species and its members are held in great regard.

Jim was a member of the Club's small but enthusiastic camping group from the early days. He was also a regular participant in the "annual migrations" that were a regular part of HBOC activities. Jim was a great camping mate of Ed Hamonet: they died within two days of each other.

We like to imagine our two Atlas Recorders camped on some celestial Travelling Stock Route; Ed stoking the fire and Jim pouring the red wine. When the bird call takes place Jim will announce,

"Number 312, Night Parrot"

And they will reply, in unison, "Seen!"

Our condolences and best wishes to Kay Imrie and her family.

(Written by Peter Phillips with assistance from Kay Imrie, Wilma Barden and Sue Hamonet).

OUTINGS & PROGRAM NOTES

Allan Stuart reports that the Annual Latham's Snipe count on 4th December revealed 66 birds at Pambalong Nature Reserve – the best numbers since 2000. Max Maddocks counted 12 at Irrawang Swamp.

(to this we should perhaps add Mark Latham's autobiography – "Latham's Snipe" indeed!)

PORT STEPHENS SHOREBIRD SURVEY

Rachel Miller of NPWS (Dept of Environment) is looking for 7-10 expert HBOC volunteers to man the above survey on 26th February. They provide the boat: we provide the expertise and sunscreen,

Alan Stuart is coordinating our response to this so, if you are willing, contact him on 0409 978 171. He will have details of time and place.

(Incidentally, I find by the email exchanges over this issue that Alan is in Vietnam and Ann Lindsey in Singapore. But Alan will be back soon).

STOCKTON SANDSPIT

Tom Clarke reports that the wader sign has been ripped out of the ground again. He is in charge of replacing it.

In better news he reports from the saltmarsh front that a recent inspection shows that not only is sporobolus in seed but small outbreaks of suaeda Australia are popping up over the Scrape Saltmarsh as well. No triglochin or sarcocornia yet but its only a matter of time (translation: regeneration is going well)

Tom reported some interesting wader sightings but as this is a little dated I omit them however the good news is that Red-Capped Plover are continuing their brilliant breeding success this summer.

AVIAN FLEW

"I had a little bird, and its name was Enza,
I opened the window, and in-flew-Enza"

Paddy Lightfoot reports that the above rhyme was popular during the Spanish flu outbreak of 1918.

MINITWITCH Jan 2006

From Mick Roderick

The first 'Minitwitch' in nearly 2 years was held on Sunday 22nd January (as advertised in the last Newsletter). Four teams entered, being the **Square-tailed Quites** (Mick Roderick, Craig Anderson and Lucas Grenadier), the **Oil Barons** (Steve and Karer Roderick and Allan Richardson), **Frenzied Fantails** (Lorna and Graeme Mee) and **Grick Livasie** (a temporary name for Nick Livanos / Grant Brosie's team!).

The Quites came in with **138 species**, a new record for the '5 hour version' of the better-known 24hr Twitchathon. A good score, but would've been one-better had they found a Galah (what a dip!). Grick Livasie came in 2nd with **123 species** – a remarkable effort considering that they never left the confines of the Newcastle City Council area! The Barons came a close 3rd with **121 species**, but have vowed to improve markedly for the next round with an imminent review of their route. The Fantails recorded **104 species**, with which they were very happy, as this was their first attempt at a Twitchathon-style birding event (and only one team member had bino's!). A trophy has been created and will be presented to the winning team soon.

The results show that you don't need to race around madly to get a good score; in fact you don't even need to leave Newcastle. However, to top 138 would suggest that a well-rounded route would be necessary. It may sound funny, but the 5hr twitch does require as much thought as the 24hr twitch...it's not really enough time for complacency!

I hope to hold 2 Minitwitch's annually - one during Summer, the other in Winter or Autumn. One modification to the current rules will be to change the finishing point, as it is simply too difficult to get a park at the Brewery at 1pm on a Sunday.

Twitchathon 2005 – The Year of the Brew Mark II – “The Finch Factor”

The Hunter Home Brewers entered the 2005 Birds Australia Twitchathon in a guise that they had not experienced in the past – as defending champions. As a result, no stones were left unturned in the lead-up to the event, although in contrast to previous years, there was as distinct lack of mid-year Brewing by the now-solid squad of Mick and Steve Roderick, Lucas Grenadier and Craig Anderson. News of recent and winter rains in their “westerly” starting point had the Brewers feeling quietly confident, particularly as it was apparent that the rains would do little to favour the main rival team – The Whacked-Out Woodswallows.

A deviation was made on their way up to the customary “dummy run” on the Friday afternoon, with a possible ‘Bittern site’ scoped out as a potential nocturnal detour en route back over the Divide. They liked what they saw, and a handful of Blue-billed Ducks added extra weight for the decision to visit there the next night. The dummy confirmed that no changes to the winning 2004 route were necessary, although a new bird was found – White-winged Fairy-wrens (Craig Brew was *especially* happy with that). Meanwhile, a nice assortment of Finch species was found on a slight detour. Things were looking good for Saturday and the ‘Twitch Tab’ ran hot.

And so it came that 3pm Saturday was nigh, and the troops assembled at the Painted Honeyeater ‘shoe-in’ point. The countdown to 3pm ended and they picked up a rapid 20 spp., including the Painted HE and an obliging Black-eared Cuckoo. Onto the ‘ordinary habitat’, where Singing Bushlark and the WwFairy-wrens were added, missing the Brown Songlarks seen there the day before. A large wetland reaped all the Duck species they could reasonably expect, plus two Dotterels and Yellow-throated Miners.

Into the first woodland and things ticked over nicely, including a few target species such as Turquoise Parrot, Speckled Warbler and Inland

Thornbill, as were nice extras such as White-backed Swallow and Painted Button-quail.

The team then headed to a reliable homestead spot where the familiar call of the Singing Honeyeater was heard. Southern Whiteface and Brown Quail were also seen there. A visit to the ‘finch spot’ yielded Plum-heads, Double-bars and Diamond Firetails...but no Zebs! Back to the homestead to pick the Zebs up – which they eventually did, but soon a scream of “Diamond Dove!” came from Steve Brew, which had the lads tripping over themselves to reach and confirm.

The Brewers had a good tally at hand and happily ticked their 100th bird with still a good half-hour of light remaining. The usually reliable Robin yielded no new birds from a 10-minute twitch – quite costly. Cockatiels then fell (a new bird ‘On the Thon’ for the Brewers), and the crowd went completely bananas as a pair of Blue Bonnets flew in front of Larry Landcruiser. No Sea-eagles or Whiskered Terns at a regular site, although Blackbird, Little Eagle and Red-winged Parrot were worthy replacements nearby. It was too late for the Azure Kf ‘fly-by’ and with a last ditch effort back in the woodland had the tally at 117 by nightfall – very nice Brewing!

Then began a nocturnal bonanza, with the customary Barn Owl, Boobook and Tawny Frogmouth picked up on a known stretch. The Brewers then trundled to the wetland they’d oiled up the day before. Alas, no Blue-billed Ducks were visible, and a cacophony of frogs made listening difficult. However, within 10 minutes the distinctive monotonous ‘ooming’ of the Little Bittern had the Brewers rejoicing. Success. Scrambling for the only spotlight, the Brewing bunch got the beam onto the reeds for a peek...only to flush a large Bittern from the left...“look at that.. it’s an Australasian Bittern!” The Brewers went apricot and once it landed on the opposite bank it started its low pulsing ‘ooms’, almost sending waves across the water. A Double-Bittern stop.

How could they follow this? After picking up an Owlet Nightjar, there followed a tactical nocturnal reconnaissance of forested roadsides, which eventually yielded a Masked Owl that investigated Mick Brew's *Ninox* impersonations. But that wasn't enough, and soon after arrival at 'camp' a falling-bomb from a Sooty Owl was heard, their 8th nocturnal bird. 125 species as they lay their Brewing heads for a short kip...what a start to the 2005 campaign.

The dawn chorus at their rainforest camp contained all the usual suspects. The only 'bonus birds' picked from here were the Brush Turkeys that had never been seen by the Brewers at this spot and White-throated Needletails slicing the sky above the canopy. The next rainforest stop produced a calling Paradise Riflebird – another new bird for the Brewers on the Twitch. The team then motored on to their crucial rainforest remnants to begin their customary 'mopping-up'. This produced such luminaries as Wompoo Fruit-Dove, Topknot and White-headed Pigeons and Brush Cuckoo. A Pheasant Coucal was heard 'cooping' in the gully by Mick Brew, but refused to call again, despite a rare 3-minute silence from the Brewers waiting in earnest (3 minutes is a long time to 'wait' on the Twitchathon!).

It was at this point (sitting on an incredible 167 species at 7:30am) that the Brewers were to take on a hitch-hiker - Claudia Taranto of ABC National Radio, who was documenting part of their run. She did not prepare herself for either the inclement weather that immediately ensued, or the inclement conditions inside the Brewers vehicle (an obvious unease came over her face).

It was also at this point that a crucial decision had to be made, as high tide was less than an hour away in the Hunter Estuary, yet other woodland areas were en-route. After a vain attempt at the Banded Lapwings in torrential rain, the call went out..."let's do it!"...and off to the estuary they set, keeping in mind that rain shouldn't affect finding wading birds.

En-route they picked up Rock Dove, their 12th Dove species for the run. A quick detour onto Asl Island produced Common's Sandpiper and Greenshank, before the dash to the Stockton area. At the Sandspit, they encountered the Champagne team '*Lesticum phoradae*', sheltering from the drizzle. The move into the estuary paid off, with virtually every wader they could have reasonably expected (aside from Great Knot). However, the Brewer's nemeses – Caspian and Gull-billed Terns were not to be seen (and they felt a tad cheated by a jinking Crested Tern overhead).

As Larry Landcruiser rumbled away from the carpark, Claudia was nowhere to be seen apparently opting for the drier and saner confines of her support vehicle.

Leaving the estuary on 199, the team was brimming at the prospects of a stately total. An urban Novocastrian Figbird clocked them over to 200 before midday, and onto the ocean baths they went quite pleased with the lack of unscrupulous Sunday afternoon traffic.

At the baths things seemed fairly quiet, although on closer inspection, target species such as Common Tern, Ruddy Turnstone and Sooty Oystercatcher fell. Only the one species of ocean bird (Wedge-tailed Shearwater) was found, a frustrating result - although softened by the spying of a timely Eastern Reef Egret near Groper Rock, a very useful Twitchathon tick.

The Brewers then made their way back onto Asl Island, mopping up White-fronted Chat, Swamp Harrier and a very late Whistling Kite. With 6 Finches under their belt, the crew went one-better with an obliging Goldfinch. The call then bellowed from a deep..."The Finch Factor!"...

With still time on the clock and a break in the wet weather, they went back out to some very well-oiled woodland spots (as they did in 2004). The move produced Varied Sittella, Crested Shrike-tit and the ever-reliable Black-chinned Honeyeater rapidly. A Spotted Quail-thrush on the way to the next stop had the Brewers agreeing that it was a worthy detour. The Brewers were bristling on 219 species with an hour and a half to go...the record of 222 was looking very shaky indeed.

Pambalong was the next stop...yet it did not live up to expectations, with Pacific Heron being the only worthy addition. No Latham's Snipe and no Sea-eagle yet on their list, and a brutal blow was dealt as an Eagle was spied soaring above the ponds where a resident Sea Eagle often soars, alas another Wedge to their dismay.

There was enough time for a quick run to a virgin Brewer-patch in coastal heath. They mopped up the Variegated Wren as well as White-cheeked and New Holland Honeyeaters. The last good chance for Sea-eagle disappeared in the rear mirror as they headed for the SWC, via a brief stop for the legendary 'Geoffrey'.

Upon arrival at the SWC, still raining, and with 225 they knew they had 227 guaranteed. The final two species were ticked (Maggie Geese and Night Heron) with minutes remaining. The last throw of the dice was to stand in the rain and hope for an Azure Kf to fly by over Ironbark Creek. This was to no avail, and with 227 species, the sodden gang made their way back to the finish line. They were confident...*nervous*...but understandably confident. A quiet mutter came over the teams that assembled – The Thickheads, The Drongo's and the nemesis...The Woodswallows...they were all there...and nothing was given away through any of the dampened, exhausted facial expressions.

Steve Brew was charged with the responsibility of relaying the scores to the fatigued audience. The Drongoes got 196, whilst the Thickheads had tied with the Black-necked Stalkers on 201. Steve stumbled as only two teams remained...

"...the Hunter Home Brewers..."

And there it was...that meant they had come second.

"227!"..."Whacked Out Woodswallows...229!"

And so it was. Beaten by two species after breaking the previous record by five. The Brew crew hung their heads in disbelief...beaten with that score how high can this bar be lifted? What lengths do they have to go? Such a good run too.

The first thoughts (as always) were of birds missed – like the Coucal and Monarch that only one team member had heard, the two Robins out west that are usually consistent, the Sea-eagle, Latham's Snipe, Pallid Cuckoo and (as it turned out) two Shearwater species missed from the baths.

There were mixed feelings amongst the Brewers. The Thickheads offered commiserations at the Woodswallows paraded triumphantly – what an effort they had made. Soon the Brewers learnt that the Woods were on 104 at the start of Sunday, a full 21 species behind them. The customary post-mortems then went even riper.

But all in a year's work and taken in their stride, the loss by two species has confirmed to them that there is no room for even a smidgen of complacency or the Twitchathon – evident from the level of competition that now appears to surround the event. No doubt they will find that extra gear and be right up there again in 2006.

Jacqueline Winter

THE BIRDS IN STOBART CREEK
RESERVE 2005
ELEEBANA

From Anthony Gooden

Even though it is only about 3 hectares in size, our reserve has a generous diversity of bird life – many of which you probably look at in your day-to-day life. Also, being Spring, the birds are very active in nesting and breeding behaviour.

Regular inhabitants: **Eastern Rosellas** – they are multi-coloured and breed in nesting holes in larger trees and also utilize at least one of the nesting boxes erected by a couple of more senior stalwarts a few years ago. The rosellas have some beautiful calls.

Crested Pigeons – (also wrongly called topknot pigeons). They also nest in the reserve and, when they fly, they make a rattling noise. They are a very gentle, frighty bird.

Noisy Miners – a native bird (as opposed to the imported Common Myna). The noisy miner is a very territorial bird and scares off any little birds but also attempts to get rid of the bigger birds as well. However, when you see these birds rearing babies with the help of relatives from interstate, it is difficult to dislike them. And they appear to keep the common mynas out of the reserve – sort of a good result?

Magpies – getting into nest building and breeding. These birds have wonderful natures (most of the time) and their variety of calls (sometimes during the night) is wonderful to listen to.

White-browed scrubwrens – possibly the only little bird in the reserve (some people may also have seen fairy wrens??). These secretive birds survive in this area because they can hide in the dense undergrowth (yes, including the lantana).

Rainbow Lorikeets and King Parrots – sometimes the spectacular Kings visit us from other bushy regions and the Rainbows visit regularly to feed on blossom but don't seem to breed in the reserve.

Our night birds: Tawny Frogmouths – we have several families in the reserve. It is amazing the way they can blend in with the bark of the ironbark tree. At night, you sometimes hear them call with a deep, resonant, repeated OOM OOM.

Southern Boobook Owl – at least one family in the reserve and surrounding areas.

Seasonal visitors: Pacific Baza – a smaller raptor which can look like an oversized crested pigeon (on steroids??). It is grey with a crest but with bright orange stripes on its chest. It eats grasshoppers, stick insects etc and drops into upper canopy to catch them – amazing to watch.

Dollarbirds – noisy but colourful birds who still come to our reserve despite losing their main nesting tree (a dead tree in the middle of the upper reserve with several hollows which was unfortunately and misguidedly chopped down). [The dollar birds and the galahs used to have time – share arguments about their apartments!!]

Channel-billed cuckoos and Koels – both parasitic groups of birds. This means they come down to our area from Asia and Papua New Guinea in spring, lay their eggs in other birds' nests (often a currawong or magpie) – who then raise the chicks as their own. Then the real parents come and collect them and take them back north to become adults. Both these birds are very noisy during courting and breeding – sometimes all night. No doubt, you have heard them!

Wood Ducks – last year we even had a pair nesting in a biggish tree closer to the lake (yes, a couple of the duck family nest in trees).

Fruit Bats – come to eat the blossom and native fruits. You can hear them at night as they noisily feast.

You can see from the above list that we have a rich variety of birds in a small area. They are here because the environment (habitat, food and security) is there for them. It also means that the environment is "healthy". Hopefully, we can continue to look after our (officially declared) reserve and enjoy the results. I presume that is (at least partly) why we all live here.

If anyone has any bird questions or observations or sightings etc etc, I'd be happy to hear from them.

Anthony
49469110

THE BIG TWITCH: by Sean Dooley
(Allen & Unwin Sydney 2005) :

A Review by Peter Phillips

21st February 2001. Three Carloads of HBOC members drive to Old Bar near Taree to see the Kentish Plover. We arrive, and after a long search locate the extremely rare and rather boring visitor.

The kids in the party go into frenzy “Mike Carter is Coming! Mike Carter is coming!” Yes! The great birder arrives from Melbourne. Mob scenes.

15 minutes later Sean Dooley arrives from Brisbane (he and Mike have been in constant contact)

Sean Who? (The autograph crowd disperses.) Sean Dooley, the author of *The Big Twitch* and the man who saw 703 species in Australia in calendar year 2001. An all-time record. That’s who!

We were a small part of a small part of history for, as this book reveals we were witnesses to ticks 320 and 321 of the saga and also to a friendship between two obsessed twitchers. Based on fleeting meetings at rare bird sites, on the telephone and on the internet this evolving relationship is the sub-text of the book. Indeed a film version might be titled “Mike and Sean’s Excellent Adventures”.

As for the birding this can be dealt with briefly. Sean Dooley decides to spend his inheritance chasing around Australia in 2001 in search of the record, a meaning to his life and a girlfriend. He succeeds in the record by travelling 150,000 kilometres (including 80,000 by road) spending \$40,000 plus and burning up more fossil fuel than as small African country. The book details his journey; the mishaps, the triumphs and the obsessions, with the skill of a professional writer.

The usual rules applied. “Australia” is an ambit claim based on political happenstance rather than geographical logic. Lord Howe, Norfolk, Christmas Keeling and Saibai are in; Macquarie and Heard would be too but for lack of transport. The many pelagic trips encompass a “territorial” claim greater than that of Napoleon.

Birds must be seen – to the satisfaction of the sighter but a reliable witness is a good idea too. (and heard birds don’t count – hurrah).

Sean took full advantage of the vast competitive-cooperative birder network of which Mike Carter is a linchpin. And this is perhaps the most interesting part of the book – the relationships of this strange group of males as epitomised by Sean and Mike.

Sean first met Mike in his local Seaford swamp 22 years ago. Sean was 11 and already interested in birds. The two men took him seriously and invited him to join them for a Wood Sandpiper. He was hooked on twitching. Over the years the relationship progressed beyond master and mentor to comradeship but Mike was always the senior: the uber-twitch and the young master. And then in 2001 with Mike Carter’s help and encouragement, Sean decided to attempt what no one (not even MC) had achieved – 700 in one year.

One key point in that year is when the two of them spend time together on Christmas Island – longer than ever before - and run out of bird talk. They have genuine conversations in which Sean begins to understand what drives Mike and Mike perhaps appreciates Sean more.

The second key point is the Flycatcher/Wheatear incident. Two incredibly rare birds materialise at the same time: the Blue and White Flycatcher at Broome and the Isabelline Wheatear at Mount Carbine. Mike goes for the Wheatear first: Sean the Flycatcher. They cross paths at an airport with Mike going on to miss (dip) the Flycatcher and Sean become probably the only twitcher to see both birds in Australia. Is the torch passed at that airport? Does the old bull now share the paddock with the young one on equal terms? Wait for “Sean & Mike’s Excellent Adventures II” for the answer to that one.

Dooley defines a twitchathon as the “crack cocaine of birding” and the same could be said of this book. It is the story of an year of intense birding – the “rush” as we all experience occasionally when we see a new species or behaviour or even when we greet an old avian friend in the bush. And it is also a funny, yet serious exploration of what it is to be a man now that the kangaroo hunt is over and the shopping trolley is full.

Read carefully the book sheds light on the eternal questions. “Who are these idiots?” and “Why are

they doing that?" Read lightly it is a rollicking good read and well worth the purchase. And, yes, I think he might get a girlfriend in the end.

**Field Identification of the
DARTER, CORMORANTS and the SHAG**
prepared by Dick Cooper

for Hunter Bird Observers Club and New South
Wales Bird Atlassers.

Throughout my years of birding, I have noted that some people have difficulty distinguishing the species in this group. I believe this is because they have not familiarized themselves with the features that clearly separate these species. The result is that Little Pied Cormorants can be identified as Pied Cormorants; Darters can be identified as Great Cormorants or Pied Cormorants, Black-faced Shags are confused with Pied Cormorants etc. The following summarizes the key features of each species –

DARTER *Anhinga melanogaster*

A larger species, about 90cm long (including the long neck weighing between 1kg to 2.5kg)

Key features

-a fine pointed bill (about 73.5mm long =almost 3")
a slender head, the long neck often with a distinct kink halfway down, an elongated body and a longish tail.

NOTE: the stripe from the gape along the sides of the head and upper neck.

NOTE: also the legs and feet – which are pale (pink or yellow) –depending on whether it is Male, Female or Immature. The key point is that these parts are a light colour.

Males are generally black. Female and immature birds are paler above with white to buff under parts.

At a distance, this species can be mistaken for a cormorant, -Males can be mistaken for Black Cormorants whilst Females/Immatures are mistaken for Pied or Little Pied Cormorants.

CALL - is a diagnostic, repetitious "ack-ack-ack-ack-ack" – sounding like a machine gun.

GREAT CORMORANT, *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Another large species (80-85cm long. They weigh 2kg to 2.5kg) and also have a long bill, length between 60 and 69mm.

Males, Females and Immatures are generally black but have a light (whitish) patch on the throat and sides of face below and behind the eye. In front of this area, the facial skin and (especially) the throat are yellow (the colour varying in intensity according to age and time of year).

Adults have a greenish sheen on the back –obvious in good light; Immatures lack the sheen so appear duller, sometimes browner and really young birds appear mottled brown and white. Breeding males have a white thigh patch – most noticeable when the bird is in flight – no other species has this mark.

LITTLE BLACK CORMORANT

Phalacrocorax sulcirostris

The Little Black is a much smaller, all dark bird (55-65cm long) with a body that appears disproportionately large (compared to other cormorants) Little Blacks weigh between half a kilo and 1.2kgs, i.e. they have less than half the body mass of a Great Cormorant.

Little Blacks are more slender and their bill, which is wholly black, is quite thin. (The species lacks the white feathering around the face and the yellow facial/throat skin of the Great Cormorant). The tail appears long, relative to the body.

Their plumage is always a dull black or, sometimes a black-brown colour. The feet and legs are black.

PIED CORMORANT

Phalacrocorax varius

Another of the larger species (being 65-85cms long and weighing from 1.25kgs to 2.2kgs) with a bill that is 67-73mm. Although smaller than the Great Cormorant in length and weight, this species (on average) has a noticeably longer bill. (A key feature compared to the Little Pied Cormorant) Females are smaller than males and, at an average of about 67mm their bill length is shorter than the average males bill but is always significantly longer than the LPC. The

bill is pale, stout and has a prominent terminal hook.

(continued overleaf)

The upperparts of adult birds are black contrasting strongly with the white underparts, except for the black thighs { A key feature } The face is also pure white – to just above the eye.

Overall, my impression is that Pied Cormorants are almost always “Persil White” in contrast to the Little Pied or the Female/Immature Darter.

The bill is yellow whilst the facial skin (front of eye) varies from orange to yellow and the gular pouch can vary from red-pink to pinkish-purple or salmon.

The variation in the face/throat colours occurs during breeding season. Feet/legs are black.

Juveniles are brownish and can be confused with the black cormorants or the darter but look for black feet (which excludes the Darter) pale bill and sides of neck and shorter tail (which eliminates the LBC and Great Cormorants).

LITTLE PIED CORMORANT

Phalacrocorax melanoleucos

At 55-65cms long and weighing from 400grams to less than 900 grams, the Little Pied is the smallest cormorant. The bill length ranges from about 29mm to 31.6mm.

Little Pies are much smaller and dumper (squatter) than Pied Cormorants. They have a short stubby yellowish tail and a proportionately longer (wedge-shaped) tail. The upper mandibles of some birds seem to have some black on it.

The upperparts of the body are black whilst the underparts should be white but are often reddish-brown to orange due to iron-staining. Adults lack the black thigh patches of Pied Cormorants { A Key Feature }

There is a dark line (facial skin) running from in front of the eye to the bill { A Key Feature }. This skin is really dark grey but may appear black. Breeding adults can have an orange coloured gular patch. The feet and legs are black.

Immature birds can be confused with Black-faced Shags because they often have a black

face. However Little Pies always have some yellow on the bill – the Shag always has a black bill.

BLACK FACED SHAG

Phalacrocorax fuscescens

Shags frequent the marine waters of the southern oceans of Australia and adjacent estuarine waters only. (the Australian cormorants frequent inland waters as well as marine/estuarine waters). In NSW, Shags are usually found south of Latitude 36 degrees i.e. south of about Moruya.

Although the Black-faced Shag is similar in size to the Little Pied, being 61cm to 69 cm long, it does not have the dumpy appearance of the Little Pied. In addition, the Shag's bill length varies from around 48mm to about 55mm and, consequently, is obviously much longer than that of the Little Pied.

Adult Shags have black upperparts and strongly contrasting (pure) white underparts with black thighs.

Overall colouring combined with size and bill length means that a Shag can look like a small Pied Cormorant. However the Shags' bill is dark. As with the larger cormorants, the bill is stout with a prominent terminal hook.

The dark bill combines with the dark colouring of the face and gular area to give the appearance of the “black face” { A Key feature }. The feathering on the face is black in front of the eyes and white behind the eye. The facial skin and gular skin is black. In Pied Cormorants, the facial demarcation between the black and white starts above the eye and presents an entirely white face (as well as having a yellow bill and yellowish facial skin and pink/salmon gular skin)

The Shag's feet and legs are black.

Juvenile Shags are browner, with dirtier underparts; immature birds are also brownish but have cleaner white underparts.

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT DEC 2005/JAN 2006.

2005				
Nov	Bar-shouldered Dove	2	Wingen [garden]	G.Newling
	Peaceful Dove	1	"	"
Nov 13	Yellow Wagtail	1	Ash Island [Wagtail Way]	N. McNaughton
	Little Grassbird	2	Ash Island [Bittern Corner]	"
Nov 15	Regent Bowerbird	1m	Glenrock SRA [Yuelabah Track]	"
	Rufous Fantail	4	"	"
Dec 7	White-winged Triller	1m	Ash Island [Kite Swale]	"
Dec 13	Southern Emu-wren	2	Oyster Cove	"
Dec 12	Crested Shrike-Tit	Pr + dy	"	"
Nov 22	Pacific Golden Plover	25	"	"
	Striated Heron	1	"	"
	Leaden Flycatcher	Pr om	"	"
	Southern Emu-wren	3	"	"
	Osprey	1	Tanilba Bay	"
Nov 29	Black-eared Cuckoo	1	Ash Island [boardwalk area]	A. Gooden et al
Dec 14	Zebra Finch	2	Oakhampton	M.Maddock
	Rainbow Bee-eater	Numerous	"	"
	Spotless Crake	1	Walka Water Works	"
Dec	Common Blackbird		Aberdeen	J.Simmonds [Newling]
Dec	Common Blackbird	1	Scone	G.Newling
	Red Wattlebird	Pr + dy	Wingen [garden]	"
	Crimson Rosella	Pr + dy	"	"
	Yellow Thornbill	Pr + dy	"	"
	Magpie-lark	Pr + dy	"	"
	Australian King Parrot	Pr + dy	"	"
Dec 22	Regent Bowerbird	1m	Blackbutt Reserve	P. Lightfoot
	Rufous Fantail	Pr	"	"
	Cicadabird	1 heard	"	"
Dec 13	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	4	S.W.C.	"
Dec 8	Tawny Frogmouth	4	Green Point	T.Clarke
Dec 12	Australian Hobby	Pr om	Cardiff South	"
Nov	Collared Sparrowhawk	1	Bolwarra	H.Tarrant
Nov 26	White-headed Pigeon	1	"	"
Nov	Latham's Snipe	1	Bolwarra Lagoon	"
Nov/Dec	White-winged Triller	2pr om dy	Bolwarra	"
Nov 5	White-headed Pigeon	1	"	"
Dec 6	Figbird	1 fly	"	"
	White-plumed Honeyeater	1	"	"
	Large-billed Scrubwren	1	"	"
Dec 5	Figbird fly Pallid Cuckoo		"	"
Nov 26	Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo	1	Walka Water Works	"
Dec 4	Latham's Snipe	12	Irrawang Swamp	M.Maddock
Oct 20	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	5	"	"
Nov 24	" " "	17	"	"
Dec 5	" " "	5	"	"
Nov 3	Musk Duck	10	Grahamstown Dam	"
	Great Crested Grebe	4	"	"
Dec 15	Great Crested Grebe	4	"	"
	Musk Duck	7	"	"
	Hoary-headed Grebe	2	"	"
Dec 11	Latham's Snipe	5	Irrawang Swamp	"
2006				
Jan 2	Latham's Snipe	2	"	"
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	15	"	"
	Brown Quail	2	East Seaham	"
Jan 12	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	12	Morpeth	"
Jan 13	Azure Kingfisher	1	Wallbridge Reserve	"
Jan 9	Latham's Snipe	4	Irrawang Swamp	"
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	37	"	"
	Red-kneed Dotterel	1	"	"

Jan 15	Latham's Snipe	17	"	"
	Red-kneed Dotterel	1	"	"
Jan 15	Black-fronted Dotterel	5	Irrawang Swamp	M.Maddock
	Australasian Shoveler	3	"	"
	Glossy Ibis	1	"	"
Jan 18	Latham's Snipe	3	"	"
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	2	"	"
	Black-fronted Dotterel	2	"	"
Jan 6	Great Crested Grebe	3	Grahamstown Dam	"
	Musk Duck	3	"	"
Jan 9-18	Grey-crowned Babbler	2	Glen Oak property	"
Jan 16	White-throated Needletail	25	Mt. Arthur Mine	G.Newling
Jan 19	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	3	Parkville	"
	Fairy Martin	8	Wingen	"
Jan 20	Yellow Wagtail	4	Ash Island [Wagtail Way]	A.Lindsey
Jan 18	Glossy Ibis	4	Irrawang Swamp	L.Mee

Birds Australia Southern NSW & ACT Group

2006 Seminar

Birds in the Urban Landscape

Saturday 25th March 2006 starting at 1.00pm

Venue: Newington Armory, Sydney Olympic Park

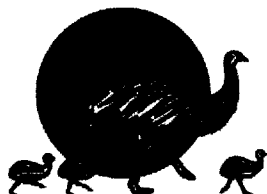
For further information and bookings contact Birds Australia Southern NSW & ACT Group (BASNA) office

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Post: PO Box 1322, Crows Nest NSW 1585



Birds Australia

CONSERVATION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

COMING EVENTS

Please check with contact person for each event. Details may change including weather, fire danger or suitability of venue. Some camps may attract a camping charge.

DATE	EVENT	DETAILS	CONTACT
Saturday 11 th February	Hunter Wader Survey	8.15am at various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Weekend 11 th & 12 th February	Timor Caves Survey	Ring to confirm camp site.	Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday 19 th February	Field Outing Taylors Beach	Meet 7.30am Pauls Corner, Salt Ash	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Wednesday 1 st March	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm Garden Suburbs Public School	All members are welcome
Sunday 5 th March	Clean Up Australia Day Stockton Sandspit	9.00am to Noon Register at the car park.	Tom Clarke 4954 9620
Tuesday 7 th March	Mid-week Outing Glenrock Reserve	7.30am Glenrock SRA Car Park Burwood Road	Garth Cooksey 49549620
Wednesday 8 th March	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Philip Hewitt – Newcastle Urban Forest
Saturday 11 th March	Hunter Wader Survey	7.15am at various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Weekend 1 st & 12 th March	Timor Caves Survey	Ring to confirm camp site.	Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Monday to Wednesday 13 th to 15 th March	Mid-week Camp Shoalhaven area	Staying at Leisure Haven Caravan Park, Huskisson	Margaret & Keith Woods 4963 3070
Sunday 19 th March	Field Outing to Ash Island & Stockton Sandspit (high tide at 12.04pm)	7.30am Ash Island Car Park (just off the bridge)	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Sunday 2 nd April	Stockton Sandspit Volunteer Day	8.00am to noon (high tide at 11.35am)	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 4 th April	Mid-week Outing Grahamstown Lake	8.00am Western end of Ferrodale Road, Medowie	Anthony Gooden 4946 9110
Wednesday 5 th April	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm Garden Suburbs Public School	All members are welcome
Wednesday 12 th April	Club Meeting	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Mike Todd Birding in New Zealand