



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 2/06

April-May 2006

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

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

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

Telephone: (02) 4958 5942

Website www.hboc.org.au

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

Ann Lindsey

Life Members

Wilma Barden
Sue Hamonet
Ed Hamonet (dec)

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: -

Ann Low of Charlestown
Ashley and Louise Williams of Cardiff South
Lynne and Paul Lambert of Stockton
Brett Shields of Butterwick
Adam Fawcett of New Lambton
Barry and Deanne Clifton of Mulbring
Kristy Peters of Adamstown
and (welcome back) Marea and Philip Diemar of Singleton

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

NEWSLETTER DATES for 2006

Edition

Copy Deadline

June/July	4 June
August/September	30 July
October/November	1 October
December 2006/January 2007	3 December

President's Column

From Liz Crawford

As autumn settles in, occasional southerly changes are bringing cooler weather to the Hunter – the migratory waders are heading north to their breeding grounds, a few Spangled Drongos are heading south, and many of the owls will be courting in preparation for their winter breeding attempts. Hopefully, we'll soon see Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters foraging in blossoming eucalypts.

2006 is the thirtieth year of the Hunter Bird Observers Club, which was formed on 12 May 1976 as a subsidiary of the Hunter Flora and Fauna Society. To celebrate our 30th birthday, please join us for a cruise on the Hunter River in the Lady Joy on Sunday 28 May 2006, starting at Queens Wharf at 8.30 am and returning to the wharf at 11.30am. We will view waders on the Kooragang Dykes and explore the North Arm of the Hunter. Morning tea will be included in the cruise, which costs \$25 per person. Please bring your own lunch for a picnic afterwards on the foreshore. A birthday cake will be part of the celebrations!

Many of you will be familiar with Alison Green's fabulous bird-decorated T-shirts featuring well-known Australian species. Alison's studio is in Wallaby Gully Road near Ellalong. At our request, Alison has used the Club emblem, the Golden Whistler, to create a terrific design for printing onto Club T-shirts and polo shirts. Samples of the shirts will be available at Club Nights for ordering, and will be a great way to promote our Club.

Have you heard about Important Bird Areas? Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are key sites for bird conservation. They are identified by the presence of a specified number of birds belonging to:

- Globally threatened species (species on the IUCN Red List);
- Restricted-range species (birds with a global range of <50,000 square kilometres);
- Biome-restricted species (birds restricted to one of seven major biomes in Australia); or
- Congregations (>1% of the population of a flocking species).

IBAs are independent of political constraints and include any land used by the key bird species. IBA designation has no legal basis but has a strong scientific basis to justify conservation action. Bird surveys are the basis for defining IBAs – it is the number of a particular species inhabiting an area that is critical for meeting the criteria.

A partnership between Birds Australia and Rio Tinto is funding the Important Bird Area Project in Australia. Rio Tinto aims to have a "net positive impact" on biodiversity and sees the IBA project as helping to achieve this aim.

HBOC has submitted two IBAs for consideration by the IBA Project Manager, Guy Dutson: Hexham Swamp and the Lower Hunter Estuary. More details on IBAs are available from the Birds Australia website or from Chris Herbert.

Tom Clarke and his assistants continue to maintain Stockton Sandspit as optimal roosting habitat for shorebirds. The hours put in weeding and planting at the Sandspit, along with the hours spent on wader surveys and data entry, have added up to more than \$43,000 worth of in-kind work to be offset against the Envirofund Grant used to remove mangroves from Ash Island. Encroaching mangroves have been removed from Swan and Wader Ponds to improve wader habitat.

Don't forget to return your raffle tickets in time to be in the draw on Wednesday 10 May 2006 – the prizes are fantastic! Extra tickets are available from Tom Clarke or any other Committee member. Proceeds will help pay for publishing reports on Hunter birds and surveys.

See you on the Lady Joy!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Club AGM took place on 8 February 2006 with an amazing 59 members in attendance.

Liz Crawford was re-elected President for her fourth year without opposition. She presented a fantastic report for 2005 – full details of this report can be found in the Library or through Tom Clarke.

Full List of 206 Management Committee positions and other appointments.

President : Liz Crawford
Vice-President: Alan Stuart
Hon.Secretary: Tom Clarke
Hon Treasurer: Rowley Smith

Committee members

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

Appointments

Activities Officer	Di Johnson
Assistant Activities Officer	Robert MacDonald
Mid-week Outings Coordinators:	Val and Don Moon
Conservation Coordinator	Ann Lindsey
Assistant Treasurer	Leslie Marshall
Librarian (Books)	Grant Brosie
Asst. Librarian (Books)	Robert Macdonald
Librarian (Slides)	John Cockerell
Librarian (Audio /Video)	Grant Brosie
Records Officer	Sue Hamonet
NSWBA Recorder	Sue Hamonet
Public Officer	Tom Clarke
Public Relations Officer	Marion Walker
Publicity Officer	Lynne Lambert
Membership Officer	Rowley Smith
Suppers Organisers	Judith Westphal and Caryl Lightfoot
Club Night Assistants	Pam Durie and Tom Clarke
Auditor	Katrina Thornton
Newsletter Editor	Peter Phillips
Annual Bird Report Editor	Alan Stuart
Website Editor	Dick Jenkins

On the whole this represents the continuation of a competent and energetic team (flogging willing horses!) plus some new blood. New people (or old people in new roles) include Di Johnson returning as Activities Officer, Ann Lindsey as Conservation Coordinator (a role she took on mid 2005) Lynne Lambert as Publicity Officer and Sue Hamonet assuming Ed's role as NSWBA Recorder in addition to her Records Officer duties. Welcome one and all to another successful and enjoyable year.

CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

2006- 30th ANNIVERSARY of HBOC

BOAT TRIP AND LUNCHEON

To mark this occasion there will be a boat trip on the "Lady Joy" on Sunday 28th May followed by luncheon and birthday cake on the foreshore. The boat leaves Queens Wharf in Newcastle Harbour - meeting time 8.45am. The trip will be of two hours duration and the cost, which includes Devonshire Tea, is \$25 per head. Bring your own lunch if attending the foreshore luncheon (cake will be supplied)

Di Johnson is organising this event. If you are available contact her at April or May Club Nights or by phone (4975 1777). Any further announcements will be made at Club Nights or through Alan Stuarts email distribution.

(Incidentally, Alan reports that approximately two-thirds of Club members now receive Club news via his email list.)

The boat trip should be fun and repeats the event we did five years ago on our 25th.
Be there or be a square (-tailed kite.)

RAFFLE, RAFFLE, RAFFLE, RAFFLE,

To celebrate our birthday (and raise funds) we are holding a raffle with great prizes. You have probably received your 5 tickets in the mail but I am sure Di Johnson or Rowley Smith will have more for purchase at April and May Club Nights -at the bargain price of 5 for \$5.-if you ask nicely

Prizes:

1st Prize.

A 2 day weekend's accommodation for 5 people at fabulous "Callicoma" which is near Mt Royal National Park, north of Singleton

2nd Prize.

A \$100 voucher for Angus and Robertson

3rd Prize

A beautiful 114cm by 131cm Quilt kindly donated by Lorna Mee

4th Prize

A framed bird photograph by Chris Herbert

The raffle will be drawn at the 10th May Club Meeting. If you want to take part you need to return your money and sold butts to our postal address – PO Box 24 New Lambton 2305 by Monday 8th May or give them to Rowley Smith at the April or May Club nights

Profits from this raffle will go towards paying for the publication of Reports on Hunter birds and surveys. It is a great way to support the Club in its work.

TIMOR CAVES CAMP **JANUARY 2006 "LONG WEEKEND"**

Report from Anthony Gooden

The things birdos do for excitement!! HBOC has been invited to participate in a survey of the Timor Caves area together with cavers, batters and orchers. [NB For some people, Timor is apparently Tiemor not Teemor – sounds like bird names, doesn't it?]

The cavers are producing a book on the caves in the area and, in conjunction with that, they want a comprehensive review of the birds, bats, orchids and general plant life of the area. Naturally, we agreed to be involved – the chance to see birds in a different area, including on private properties, is too good to pass up. Tom C, Robert McD, Neville McN and myself set out in wet conditions on Australia Day morning for about a 3 hour drive. I mentioned the wet because for the 4 days it was hot (33 to 35 during the day) and cool in the evenings but no rain and it is dry territory.

Our first impression of the area was the apparent forests of young pine trees. Nope, they are acknowledged as significant stands of Xanthorrhoea or grass trees. They are so different and stunning. It was an immediate benefit for the weekend.

The birding was excellent but, I think we agreed that this was in part due to all the flowering mistletoe around the area. If that hadn't been there, it may have been a lot quieter – a point we are making in our report.

Liz C, Chris H, Ann L and Alan S had already been to the site for the first survey and we revisited a couple of their sites but with time available we explored some new sites as well.

A brilliant bonus for all of us was the opportunity to go caving. Jodie, our very personable project co-ordinator, offered to take us down into the Woolshed or Glen Dhu cave and we accepted. I hadn't realized that the caves were underground. I presumed they were limestone caves in the sides of cliffs and that we would climb and look for fossils etc in the open caves. After several hours in various chambers accessed by crawling on our stomachs through narrow gaps with damp mud, I realized this

wasn't so. One huge benefit was the coolness in the caves. The downer was having to go back out again into the light and heat.

We saw fossils of shells, plant life and bones, a white spider complete with delicate web, cave cockroaches and a feeble, little fern. There were several eastern horseshoe and lesser bentwing bats talking and clicking around us. We watched as stalactites were dripping into existence. If we hung around for a few thousand years, we would see the finished product. We had birds to see. We had also visited cave TR 44 – a different experience??

We had a great variety of birds but a couple of the highlights were watching 2 wedge-tailed eagles take off the ground in front of us as we walked back to the car. We were actually above them so had wonderful views of the designs/colour on the upper wings of the apparent subadult with an adult. A breathtaking experience. We also had excellent views of a juvenile rufous songlark – not too much rufous but definitely not a pipit. It hung around because it seemed distressed in the heat.

There were plenty of juveniles (channel-billed cuckoo, white-faced herons) and dependant young (rufous whistlers, yellow robin, red-browed finches, choughs, white-throated gerygones, olive-backed orioles, dusky woodswallows), several young eastern spinebills, plus a few birds on the nest (mistletoe birds).

Being true, serious birdos, our happy hours are strictly for 1 hour and purely to discuss the day's events over a cuppa and do a bird count. Unfortunately, on the Saturday evening, we had visitors who didn't understand this "law". As a result, 10 people (property owners and project people) had a riotous time with beer, wine, nibbles, poetry readings, joke telling and general mirth. We even had a visit from a tawny frogmouth who sat in our camp tree and checked us out. We birdos cooked dinner and ate at 11pm. Our bird count was at MIDNIGHT!! It IS accurate.

Other birds seen ranged from little superb fairy wrens and brown, striated, yellow and yellow-rumped thornbills to musk lorikeets (many), eastern and crimson rosellas, several pigeon types, welcome swallows, dusky woodswallows and needletails, rainbow bee eaters and leaden flycatchers to nankeen kestrels, brown goshawk, wedgetailed eagles and even a low flying white-bellied sea eagle.

A great weekend and all in a good cause. The worst part was driving home in the "end of holiday" and Tamworth Festival crowds.

MARCH CLUB NIGHT:GUEST SPEAKER

Report from Pam Durie

NEWCASTLE CITY GREENING STRATEGY

'Newcastle Greening Strategy' was the topic presented by our guest speaker, Mr. Philip Hewitt, at our March HBOC meeting. The address was presented with conviction and deep expert knowledge of the need to preserve, monitor and sustain our city's (or any city's) precious canopy cover. The speaker believes that 'Urban Forest is a city's natural heritage' and ' a window into the soul of the city '.

Our guest described two types of urban forest in Newcastle;

- 1). the public spaces such as parks, reserves, sports grounds and road verges,
- 2). the private spaces such as mines, quarries, ports, private gardens and yards, farms, derelict land and industrial land.

He would want our city to:

- plan for tree replacement,
- improve urban forest health
- identify what can realistically be done now
- educate and engage communities

Using a well structured power point presentation, Phil demonstrated some of the facts affecting our own city. He showed that "urban forest is too often taken for granted" and "too often overlooked, ignored, or threatened"

He went on to decry our addiction to lawn-growing and lawn-mowing, and added that 4% of our city's pollution comes from the lawn mowers Newcastle people insist on using. Phil reminded us that one tree=five airconditioners running over 20 hrs.

So of course, Phil's next plea was for trees: more, healthy, sturdy, well-managed and appropriate tree plantings. He emphasised the importance of canopy cover for physiological, sociological, economic and aesthetic benefits.

People need trees!

Phil demonstrated that a car park is an "Urban heat Island", with polluted run-off adding to the other ill effects.

To conclude, Phil emphasised that 'a wise community plans for the future of its urban forests.' I'm sure that this wonderful address will inspire us all to do our bit to foster a healthy, happy city population living with our gorgeous native birds, insects and animals among cool, calming urban forests.

Brief Program Notes

World Wetland Day at the Hunter Wetland Centre was great with many interesting people. Tom Clarke and Alan Stuart manned our stall

Islington Mid-week Outing on 7 February.

There was a good roll up (21 people) who experienced a quiet day of birding with the Striated Heron a feature.

Outing to Taylors Beach on 19 February.

Plenty of passerines in the forest including a Sittella family. The saltmarsh was quiet with an Osprey notable. In all 62 species identified.

Port Stephens Wader Survey with NPWS was rated a huge success. 12 people surveyed 6 sectors. Highlights included 424 Whimbrel, 77 Pied Oystercatcher and a Beach Stone-curlew. NPWS was very happy and were moved to release a press statement. ABC radio interviews with Alan Stuart and Sue Hamonet completed some excellent coverage of the event.

Grass Owls at Ash Island. This was a brilliant exercise with 35 people seeing at least 3

wonderful Grass Owls. Thanks to Phil Hansbro for his leadership.

Pelagic Trip 26th March 2006.

Report by Richard Baxter

Conditions: Departed 8.15am from Newcastle Harbour. Returned 6.30pm.

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

Weather: Ex-Tropical Cyclone "Wati" was situated between Lord Howe Island and New Zealand, nearly directly east of Newcastle. A high over the southern of south-western Tasman Sea was extending a ridge along the NSW coast resulting in East/South-east winds in the days preceding this trip.

Wind: 10-15knots

Maximum distance from shore. 37N/Miles

Those on board: Alan Stuart, Jim Smart, Dave Stewart, Mike Roderick, Greg Little, Dick Jenkins, Robert Quinan, Inger Vandyke, Phil Hansbro and Richard Baxter (Organiser).

Summary: With Cyclone Wati moving slowly south over the last few days, all on board were optimistic that some interesting birds would be seen on today's trip. The day started late after a discussion over whether we would actually leave port or not. At 7am skies were grey and uninspiring. It was still raining heavily and the swell was forecast to be rising to 3m. The decision to go was eventually made and we headed out to sea about 8.15am towards clearing skies.

As we cleared the heads our first seabirds were Wedge-tailed Shearwater followed by Pomarine Jaeger and Short-tailed Shearwater. Several large flocks of shearwaters were seen on the way out and we added Hutton's Shearwater, Australasian Gannet and Crested Tern to our day's sightings.

We crossed the shelf and positioned ourselves on the outer edge of the Northern Canyons and immediately began to burley. Flesh-footed Shearwater and Great-winged Petrel were soon added to the days list, as were several handsomely plumaged Solander's Petrels. Things remained quiet for the next hour as we were subjected to rain, then clear skies, then rain again. The first GOULD'S PETREL of the day appeared from the south and as

they usually do, refused to come any closer than 100m from the boat.

As the Gould's was disappearing from sight a Intermediate phase KERMADEC PETREL flew directly towards the stern of the boat giving all on board excellent views as it cruised close enough for some great photos and then circled for about five minutes before also departing.

Numbers of Wilson's Storm Petrel were beginning to grow and we now had 4-5 on the slick, the end of which was now out of sight. A further Intermediate phase Kermadec Petrel was sighted and a WHITE-NECKED PETREL flew in from the north and briefly past the bow before flying off in an easterly direction.

Over the next three hours we were visited by two dark phase kermadecs and had several sightings of further Gould's Petrels, all of which refused to come near the boat. Apart from these the only additional species added to the days list before 3pm were two Wandering Albatross. By 3pm we had been drifting for 5hrs when a WHITE-BELLIED STORM PETREL was sighted on the slick. As it flew towards the boat good views were had and black-bellied S.P. was quickly eliminated as a possibility. Several photos were taken and good views were had by all on board.

A lone White-faced Storm Petrel briefly appeared on the slick but could not be relocated. Not long after this sighting a BLACK PETREL was sighted. This was followed by two LONG-TAILED JAEGER which cruised by.

At 4.15pm and after drifting for 6hrs we decided to head for home under clearing skies and calm conditions. The trip home at 30knots didn't allow for the birds to follow us in and it wasn't until 3miles from the harbour that the call of "stop the boat" went out as a STREAKED SHEARWATER was sighted amongst a feeding flock of gannets, jaegers and Wedge-tailed SW's. The Streaked Shearwater proved difficult to relocate and we resumed our course for home. As we entered the harbour three WHITE-FRONTED TERNS flew along side the boat, finishing off an excellent day at sea.

(Bird list - see below)

Species List from 26/3/06 Pelagic

Wandering Albatross 3
(Wandering ssp -1)
(Snowy Albatross - 1)
(Antipodean Albatross -1)
WHITE-NECKED PETREL 1
Great-winged Petrel - 20
Solander's Petrel - 15
KERMADEC PETREL - 5
GOULD'S PETREL - 3+
BLACK PETREL - 1
Wedge-tailed Shearwater - 700
Flesh-footed Shearwater - 70
STREAKED SHEARWATER - 1
Short-tailed Shearwater -1
Hutton's Shearwater - 3
Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 10
White-faced Storm-Petrel - 1
WHITE-BELLIED STORM-PETREL -1
Aust. Gannet - 20
Pomarine Jaeger - 6
Long-tailed Jaeger - 2
White-fronted Tern - 3
Crested Tern - 2
Silver Gull - 100

Cetaceans

1 pod X 15 Bottlenose Dolphin

SOUTH COAST BIRD CAMP 12-15 March

Report from Margaret Woods

A very successful camp was enjoyed by a group of 20 HBOC and Tomaree Club members.

Our headquarters were at Wollamia Caravan Park situated on Currumbone Creek just outside Muski. Those camped along the creek bank were privileged to see numerous waterbirds, kingfishers and parrots on the tidal flats and wharves early in the mornings.

Our first day was a visit to Booderee National Park Botanic Gardens where we were joined by Norm and Stan from St Georges Basin Nature Club. Firstly we did the Heath Walk and then the Rainforest Walk. Many rufous fantails, spinebills and yellow robins were seen from the walkway looking into the cool green gullies.

In the afternoon we went to Greenfields Beach and did the Coastal Walk to Hyams Beach. Two intrepid members even had a swim (no, not starkers)

Day 2 we went to Bangalee Reserve at North Nowra. Here the birds were so numerous we were almost dizzy. There were red-browed finches, white-browed scrubwrens, weebills, eastern yellow robins, rufous fantails, golden whistlers, a bassian thrush and many more. For lunch we visited Margaret and Keith's daughter's house at North Nowra and had lunch on her verandah in a mini-rainforest.

The afternoon was spent doing "Bens Walk" - a very picturesque circular walk down a steep cliff on the other side of the Shoalhaven over a suspension bridge crossing a small creek entering the main river. We walked through a meadow, crossed the creek again via stepping stones (on our hands and knees), back through a paperbark forest and returned to the starting point at the cars where we saw a tree full of Australian King Parrots.

(Tuesday night we went to Vincentia Golf Club and had a very enjoyable Chinese Banquet.)

Wednesday morning was rather showery but we set off in 4WDs for Comerong Island to see waterfowl and seabirds.

We walked across tidal flats and were rewarded with flocks of bar-tailed godwits, eastern curlews, red-necked stints, sharp-tailed sandpipers, pied oystercatchers, little terns, straw necked ibis, black swans and many more.

Except for some sandfly bites we had a great time and fantastic birding.

PS. Dorothy was the first to see a Bristlebird and won a box of jellies. Garth received a consolation prize for failing to run over same bird.

Birds around Newcastle Ocean Baths at

7am:

Ruddy Turnstone and Sooty Oystercatcher

From Judi Thomas

My interest in visiting Newcastle Ocean Baths, at 7am daily, began in December. I was standing on the rock platform, near the baths when I saw several smallish birds, scurrying about like conglomerate-coloured chickens with short orange legs. Looking carefully, I saw fifteen. Not having seen the species before, I photographed them, then identified them from a guide as **Ruddy Turnstone**.

The name **Turnstone** describes the characteristic behaviour of overturning small stones, shells and weed to expose crustaceans and other organisms. A summer migrant-wader to our coastal rocky shoreline, some occasionally overwinter. But their breeding grounds are far away in the northern hemisphere. I noted from the **Annual Bird Report** for the Hunter Region and that only six had been reported in the area in 2004. I was on to something interesting.

My count in January rose to seventeen. Now there are between six and fifteen daily. Will the flock of seventeen gather before flying off to Siberia in April? A 22-24cm bird can travel such distances! At the moment the birds fly only under duress, conserving energy. Their colour is deepening and developing a ruddy look in sunlight. They are extremely buoyant and are quite happy on the ocean edge even when the ocean is rough. Or they bathe in a rock pool. They are a delight to watch.

Ruddy Turnstone camouflage amazingly well. If they hear you, they will turn their backs and snuggle into a rock hollow. This hides the shiny white colour that appears in varying patterns on the face and front. If they are hard to find, look for them near **Crested Tern**.

I went back daily to see the **Turnstone**. Then I heard that Liz and Chris Herbert were watching bird activity on the rock platform on behalf of the HBOC, for a report to Newcastle City Council. I joined their three-day intensive count in January.

We saw the seventeen **Ruddy Turnstone** waiting for the tide to go out along the Horseshoe Beach side of the Nobby's Breakwater.

About 20 **Sooty Oystercatcher** were also there.

It was then I realised the significance, through Chris's enthusiasm, of the **Sooty Oystercatcher**. Most of their breeding grounds, although probably locally offshore, are not yet known. I began to include them in my daily count. I realised it is possible to predict the behaviour of birds and where they will be at certain tides and in different weather. When a **raptor** put the **Oystercatcher** to flight they gave a loud call which attracted my attention, and I counted 21 after I had picked out only eight on the rocks. They blend so well. Then a few days ago I counted 26 **SOCs** roosting together on the sand in front of the Canoe Pool at an extremely high tide, more than have been recorded in the area before. In stormy weather you might find the whole flock on the platform behind the baths, braced against the wind.

In one of my photographs of the Ruddy Turnstone I found another bird I didn't know, a **Common Sandpiper**. They are infrequently seen in this area. There are lots of other birds on the platform too: **White-faced heron; Pied Oystercatcher, Welcome Swallow** - on the old pebbly steps and looking like pebbles until they moved. A wide range of frolicking, fishing **Cormorant**, one very tame **Little Pied**, at least four **Little Black** and seven **Great Cormorant** are mostly in the area. Up to eight **Pelican** wait behind the fishermen; 200 **Silver Gull** are fed by workmen and chased by dogs; and up to 87 **Crested Tern** have been counted.

These birds are all actively co-habiting in a small area, from the sand in front of the Canoe Pool, the rocks behind the pool, the rocks behind the Ocean Baths and the rock shelf on the Nobby's side up to the Soldiers Pool.

In amongst all this activity of the birds, there is human activity. In the Ocean Baths the **Little Pied Cormorant** sometimes swims with splashing people around. And along the shoreline there are walkers, some with dogs on or off the lead, surfers, fishermen and children. I point out the birds to anyone who gives me a chance, including friends and family, who enthusiastically report what they have seen.

And one lady who set two dogs on the gulls for their exercise, last week smiled at me and told me she doesn't do that any more!

HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS: Autumn -Winter 2006

SCHOOL HOLIDAY PROGRAM

WETLAND TURTLES (children aged 5-9)

Have lots of fun with games, arts and crafts, dipnetting and adventure walks, with skilled and experienced leaders.

9AM-1PM Tuesdays and Wednesdays
April 18, 19, 25 and 26

WET AND WILD CANOEING (children 10-15 years)

Experience this fun canoeing adventure with experienced guide.

9AM-1PM Thursdays
April 20 and 27

ARTS ALIVE (children 5-12 years)

Learn all about birds, reptiles, tortoises and other pond animals while being creative and having fun

9AM to 1PM Fridays
April 21 and 28

Bookings are essential for all the above activities which are fully supervised and cost \$15 per child.

All Children to wear protective footwear, hat, sunscreen and insect repellent. Also to bring a backpack with morning tea, lunch and water bottle.

REGULAR EVENTS

BREAKFAST WITH THE BIRDS

Next Dates: Sundays May 14 and July 9. Cost \$20 for adults and \$10 for Children

SPOTLIGHT PROWL

Saturday Evenings April 15, May 20 and Jun 17
\$10 Adults, \$5 Children

CANOEING ON A-MAZE-ING IRONBARK CREEK

9.30am Sundays May 7, June 4 and July 2
Cost \$25 Adults, \$12.50 Children.

Bookings essential for all regular events. Start times need to be checked. Special Family Rates apply. Talk to Reception for details.

SPECIAL EVENTS

EASTER BUNNY TREASURE HUNT

Children come along and help Easter Bunny's chocolate egg Treasure Hunt. Find the eggs hidden amongst the wetlands and enjoy the nature craft activities, dipnetting and other activities

Saturday 15th April from 10.30am
Adults Normal entry fee. Children \$7.50

WACKY WETLANDERS ADVENTURE TOUR

Get wild and wacky and take a peek behind the scenes at the Hunter Wetland Centre. Learn more about our wildlife on site, with practical hands-on demonstrations for everyone.

Saturday 6th May 2pm to 4pm
Children and Adults \$7. Wacky Members free.
Bookings Essential

MOTHER'S DAY LUNCHEON

Celebrate the day with a delicious buffet lunch prizes and entertainment at Café Jacana

Sunday 14 May 12 Noon. Adults \$35, Children \$15
Bookings Essential

CANOEING CHALLENGE

on A-MAZE-ING IRONBARK TRAIL

Go head top head---paddle to paddle. Quirky questions leading you from one destination to another on the canoe trail. Get together a team (2 or 3 people) for this annual fundraiser.

Sunday 28th May 9.30am start.
\$20 per person or \$50 per team of 3

Enquiries and further information on all programs and events 02 4951 6466 or www.wetlands.org.au

HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE AUSTRALIA

Members of the Centre are reminded that the AGM occurs on Thursday 20th April at the Wetland Centre

The Agenda will include the Election of three Directors and the Audited Financial Statements and Annual Report.

Enquiries about the AGM should be directed to the Secretary Rod Caldwell.

BIRDS AUSTRALIA

This vital organisation continues to research and lobby on important national bird issues. Following are some items from their email Newsletter for February 2006.

Newhaven Reserve.

A partnership has been formed with the well-regarded Australian Wildlife Consultancy to manage the reserve in the future.

Avian Flu

Birds Australia continues to maintain a watching brief on this scare. They have issued a statement emphasising the extremely low risk of migrating birds carrying the disease to Australia.

Rio Tinto funding of Important Bird Areas Project

Rio Tinto's Sustainable Minerals Foundation is funding this three-year project. It is part of a global program by Birdlife International and will identify, monitor and support Australia's IBAs. The Project Officer will travel and consult extensively over the next few months.

(See our Presidents Column for detail and local implications).

Recreational Waterfowl Hunting

Birds Australia has strengthened its stand against waterfowl hunting. Previously it put forward stringent conditions that should be met before hunting be allowed. Now it is communicating to Governments that recreational waterfowl hunting should no longer be considered an appropriate interaction between Australians and their natural environments.

Link with Bird Observers Club of Australia.

An historic memorandum of understanding has been signed between the two major bird conservation and education organisations in Australia. Separate identity will be maintained but a joint Communications Committee will deal with day-to day interactions and the CEOs will maintain regular contact.

AGM and Members Day.

This event will be held in Darwin on Saturday 27th May and members of Birds Australia will have the opportunity (excuse?) for some top end birding while contributing the governance and policies of the organisation.

If you haven't already you might consider joining Birds Australia. To this biased observer it seems to be the pre-eminent Australian bird research and lobby group with the necessary national and international connections and credibility based on over 100 years of scientific research.

Birds Australia
415 Riversdale Road
Hawthorn East Vic 3123
Ph 1 300 730 075

BIRDS AUSTRALIA ONGOING ATLAS NEWS

From Ann Lindsey

An enthusiastic group of atlassers from all over Australia continue to participate in surveys and to send in the results to the Project. Last year, HBOC conducted six Atlas outings and we submitted about 36 surveys sheets. This year we have already been to Hexham Swamp and later in the year we are off to Cessnock, Bulga, Dungog, Gloucester Tops and Myall Lakes – all fairly close to home.

In addition, there is an opportunity for people to make a major contribution to the Atlas project by adopting one or more two-hectare sites and visit it for twenty minutes on a regular basis, for instance four times a year according to the season. Some of the most valuable data collected so far have come from these Intensive Atlas Sites as they are called.

Several HBOC members are collecting data from these smaller areas and are finding great satisfaction in getting to know their sites well. Some of the most under-atlassed areas are those open spaces between the "good" birding areas i.e. agricultural land. And there is plenty of that in the Hunter within a few kilometres of the major centres.

Participating in surveying Intensive Sites means filling in a habitat form once only and knowing the coordinates for your site. Several people in the C' b have GPS's and could help you set up. Then every time you visit the site a pink survey form has to be completed. But this is not arduous and it will add to our knowledge. If you are interested in this aspect of atlassing, please contact me 49 51 2008 or polytelis@hunterlink.net.au and we can talk about it further.

The annual report called The State of Australia's Birds (SOAB) which Birds Australia members receive relies heavily on the efforts of volunteers and the Atlas Projects. It provides an overview of some aspect of birdlife. In 2004 it featured Water, Wetlands and Birds and in 2005 it focused on Woodlands and Birds. This report makes terrific reading even if alarming at times and, as you read,

you can bask in the warm glow which comes from the knowledge that you made a contribution.

Cont'd

(Atlas -Cont'd)

A copy of SOAB is provided to people and authorities who have influence over the management and conservation of the environment. By Atlassing you contribute to the conservation argument in a practical way.

The Atlas website, Birdata, is up and running. Birdata enables you to zoom in to specific locations and to access some data. Your surveys can be completed online if you are so inclined. Personally I have become rather fond of the pink sheets over the years. It also shows your Atlassing Lifelist - for the competitively minded.

Vell, good HBOC members, there is much to do for the welfare of birds and the challenge is to find the time to do it. Nick Livanos and I have organised some outings for 2006 which are printed below. Nick is a keen atlasser, an experienced birdwatcher and he is leading several of the outings. Incidentally atlassing is not the domain of the experienced, we greatly welcome beginners on these outings. I wish you a great birding year and lots of fun whatever you do.

HBOC ATLAS OUTINGS 2006

May 6 Saturday Cessnock area. Meet Abermain near Ridgely-Didge Pie shop 8am. Please ring to confirm. Nick Livanos 59 54 5739

July 15 Saturday Wambo Colliery, Bulga. Meet Bulga shop 7.30am Please ring to confirm Nick Livanos 4954 5739

August 5 Saturday Dungog area. Meet MacDonalds Raymond Terrace 7.30am Please ring to confirm. Nick Livanos 4954 5739

September 24 Sunday Gloucester Tops. Meet MacDonalds Raymond Terrace 7am. Please ring to confirm Nick Livanos 49 54 5739

November 11 Saturday Myall Lakes NP. Meet MacDonalds Raymond Terrace at 7am Please ring to confirm. Nick Livanos 49 54 5739

CONGRATULATIONS, DR PHIL.

Our member Dr Phil Hansboro, a Newcastle University microbiologist. has received a \$250,000 grant to research potentially deadly avian bird flu. .

He will lead a team of researchers in Newcastle, South Australia and Victoria to investigate the types of flu viruses migratory birds and wild ducks carry, whether they include strains of avian influenza that cause disease in other birds or humans and whether the viruses can be treated with current influenza drugs.

The study is an extension of the work he did last year on 173 migratory birds from Siberia in the Hunter Estuary. Ten birds were found to have viruses that did not cause human health problems

The research is part of a \$6.5 million avian flu and respiratory disease project funded by the Federal Government.

Dr Hansboro is quoted in the Newcastle Herald as saying that the virus could be brought to Australia by infected people, domestic or migratory birds.

He plans to test about 500 sharp-tailed sandpipers , red-necked stints, godwits and eastern curlews before the end of March and when the migratory birds return to the Hunter Estuary. About 200 Grey and Chestnut Teal living between Hexham and Stockton would be tested during winter.

COLLECTIVE NOUNS

The internet is currently alive with suggestions for new collective nouns for bird species. Some that took my eye:

- A sprig of wattlebirds
- A hive of honeyeaters
- A packet of fantails
- A choir of warblers
- A patter of pittas
- A jam of rosellas
- A carriage of rails
- and a round of robins

and what about (you heard it here first)

- a fistful of Dollarbirds?

BIRD –BRAINED

The following comes from the Canberra Ornithologists Group Newsletter and is a summary of an article first published in New Scientist on 1/10/05 - written by Matt Walker.

A new film {March of the Penguins} portrays penguins as paragons of virtue however modelling human behaviour on animals is fraught with danger.

This is getting out of hand. Or should I say out of a flipper-like wing. Penguins are being lifted off their little waddled feet and held aloft as shining examples of how people should lead a decent life.

Penguins may be models of upright social behaviour – in a biomechanical sense. But some members of the Christian right in the US are going much further. To them, penguins are not only upright but also the epitome of righteousness: loving caring parents who form lifelong monogamous relationships. They see the birds' arduous annual migration across the shifting ice-floes of the Antarctic as an allegory for the Christian spiritual journey and suggest that the birds should be held up as role models for human behaviour.

These are misguided musings at best. At worst they are dangerously misleading. For there is more to penguin society than is obvious at first sight. The latest wave of such anthropomorphic navel-gazing (an inappropriate metaphor perhaps considering penguin anatomy) has been triggered by the movie March of the Penguins. This masterly documentary follows the lives and struggles of the Emperor Penguin. Soothingly narrated by actor Morgan Freeman, it has been a surprise box office success in the US.

It has struck a chord with US evangelical Christian churches. Churches have block-booked cinemas for their members.

But should we seek religious symbolism in a colony of penguins? Penguins are not quite the straight-living creatures you might suppose. For a start around 15 per cent of adult Emperors change

partners every year and some penguins engage in homosexual activities.

They are a testament to the diversity of behaviour found in animals. But you can see the perils of marking out animals, even penguins, as paragons of morally spotless conduct – and even worse, supposing that animal behaviour can somehow inform our own morality.

A good example of this is the media's mild obsession over the past few years with two male Chinstrap Penguins called Roy and Silo living in New York's Central Park Zoo. Roy and Silo were a gay couple who successfully reared a chick from an egg donated by their keepers. To some the birds were a great advert for gay marriage and parenting. To others their behaviour was unnatural. In September, it was reported that Silo has left Roy for a young female called Scrappy. Leading to a round of self-congratulatory back-patting from anti-gay lobbyists and supporters of traditional family values.

There's a thing or two about penguins that it would be wise to bear in mind before embarking on moralising of this kind. For instance, while it is true that Emperor Penguins often adopt each others chicks, they do not always do so in a way that moralisers would approve. One study found that 53 percent of "adopted" chicks were in fact the victims of kidnapping. And a study published in Animal Behaviour (Vol 70, p527) on the Emperors close relative the King Penguin revealed that chicks in poor condition are routinely attacked by other birds and pushed to the periphery of the group, where they are exposed to hurricane force winds and temperatures of -30deg C. Female Adelie Penguins are known to prostitute themselves, exchanging sex for nesting materials.

All in all, adopting penguins as role models for human behaviour is a questionable practice to say the least. It highlights the broader point that justifying human actions with reference to animal behaviours "its natural so it must be right" is not only misguided, it is also illogical. Different animals have evolved different kinds of behaviour. Our own moral compass is a uniquely human construct. When it comes to finding reference points for that compass, only people will do.

parasitised by Diederik cuckoos, with those on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean and Hispaniola in the Caribbean where there are no cuckoos. The weaverbirds were introduced to the islands 100 and 200 years ago respectively.

MORE RESEARCH NOTES

These summaries were taken from the Birds Queensland Newsletter – Volume 37 Nos 1 & 2

GRIFFON VULTURES

There is now no reason why India's remaining griffon vultures cannot be saved from the mass poisoning that has already claimed millions of birds. Since the 1990s the large raptors have been dying off across south Asia. Initially the cause was thought to be a virus. In 2004, scientists found that the killer was a veterinary painkiller known as diclofenac. The vulture's kidneys failed when exposed to even small amounts of the drug which they ingest from the carcasses of cattle treated with the drug.

In March 2004, the Indian government said it would phase out diclofenac for veterinary use in six months. This didn't happen since the drug is cheap and very widely used. However, scientists in the UK, Namibia and South Africa published evidence that an alternative drug is available for cattle which would solve the problem. Rhys Green of the University of Cambridge and colleagues have shown that the painkiller meloxicam can be safely ingested by both griffon vultures in Africa and by those native to India. What's more the drug is made locally in India.

(New Scientist No 2537 4/2/06)

EVOLVING CUCKOO HOST'S DEFENCE

It is one of nature's most ruthless tricks. African village weaverbirds, like many other species, can be fooled into raising cuckoo chicks at the expense of their own. But unlike some others they fight back, evolving egg markings that help them resist being parasitised, while the cuckoos evolve better ways to trick them

Now a biologist has shown how some weaverbirds respond once the pressure is off. David Lahti of the University of Massachusetts compared populations of weaverbirds in South Africa, which are

In South Africa, weaverbirds lay eggs with family-specific patterns and colours. Because all the eggs in a clutch have the same pattern a cuckoo's egg will stand out. But it takes energy to manufacture the pigments needed to make eggs with complicated patterns and weaverbirds on Hispaniola and Mauritius have stopped doing it.

In the Hispaniola birds which have been isolated longer, the anti-cuckoo patterns have faded further.

“The work demonstrates the operation of natural selection very well” says author David Lahti

(New Scientist No.2528. 3/12/05)

SLEEPING BIRDS

In an article by Linda Geddes the nature of sleep is discussed. In attempting to understand how humans might do with less sleep, researchers are studying the sleeping behaviour of birds, particularly migratory birds. Bingman of Bowling Green University of Ohio has found that Swainson's Thrushes which migrate up to 5000 kms from Canada to Peru change from a normal nights sleep of 10-12 hours to 2.5 hours during migration.

The birds adapt in two ways, First they spend far more of their waking hours displaying sleep-related behaviour, such as drowsiness or napping. They also indulge in what is known as “unihemispheric sleep” in which they keep one eye open, taking it in turns to rest opposite sides of the brain while continuing to fly towards their destination. Second, their brain chemistry is adapted to keep functioning normally under long periods with only this sort of rest. This chemistry is still poorly understood but it might eventually lead to drugs to boost sleep-deprived brains.

The birds take micro-naps of about 10 to 20 seconds throughout the day during migration periods. Bingman is now trying to work out the optimum micro-nap period for humans.

(New Scientist No 2531/2. 24/31 December 2005.)

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHTS FEB/MAR 2006.

2005				
Aug-Nov	Figbird	14 nests	Swansea	J. Adams
Nov 10	Tawny Frogmouth	2+n 2fy	"	"
Dec 28	Dollarbird	2+n 2fy	"	"
Nov 2	White-breasted Woodswallow	2 nests	"	"
Aug 5	Australian Wood Duck	2+n6y	"	"
Sep 5	Australian Wood Duck	2+n8y	"	"
Nov 5	Eastern Rosella	2+nest	"	"
	Willie Wagtail	2+nfy	"	"
Nov 5	Rainbow Lorikeet	Pr + dy	"	"
	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	Pr + dy	"	"
Nov 5	Australian Shelduck	Pr	Green Wattle Creek	A.Badger[per Newman]
Dec 5	White-winged Chough	5	Tea Gardens	N.Fraser
Dec 13	Dusky Woodswallow	30-40	Bobs Farm	D. & M. Hatfield
Dec 17	Skylark	2	Deep Pond [Ash Island]	A.Lindsey/M.Newman
Jan 25	Glossy Ibis	1	T.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
	Buff-banded Rail	1	"	"
	Grey Goshawk	1	"	"
	Wandering Whistling Duck	10	"	"
	Red-kneed Dotterel	2	"	"
Feb 5-6	Dollarbird	2	Telarah	F.Humphreys
Jan 25	Pacific Baza	1	Medowie	"
Feb 5	Rockwarbler	1	Martindale	A.Richardson
Jan 27	Grey Goshawk	1	Freemans Waterhole	Richardson/S.Roderick
Feb 5	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	1	Awabakal N.R.	A.Richardson
Feb 22	Diamond Firetail	1	Warkworth	Richardson/Roderick
	Hooded Robin	1	"	"
Feb 2	Crested Shrike-tit	2	Taylors Beach	T.Clarke
Feb 3	Australian Hobby	3	Cardiff South	"
Jan 22	Rainbow Bee-eater	~30	Stockton Sandspit	"
Feb 1	Gang Gang Cockatoo	2 + 2dy	Kitchener	C.Goodenough
Feb 5	Pacific Baza	1	Garden Suburb	D.Johnson
Feb 2	Red-backed Button-Quail	2	Deep Pond [Ash Island]	M.Todd
	Grey Goshawk	1	Speers Point	P.Pountney
Feb 7	Pheasant Coucal	2	Eleebana Reserve	A.Gooden
Feb 8	Spotless Crake	2	Walka Water Works	J.Smart
	Latham's Snipe	2	"	"
	White-bellies Sea-eagle	1	"	"
Feb 4	Brown Quail	2	Beresfield	R.Smith
Jan 9	Pied Oystercatcher	13	Harrington	L.Mee
	Beach Stone-Curlew	1	"	"
Jan 20	Black Falcon	2	South of Scone	G.Newling

Jan 26	Little Eagle	1	Mt. Arthur Mine site	"
Jan 20	Southern Emu-wren	5+	Crowdy Head N.P.	G.Brosie, et al
	White-eared Monarch	1	"	"
	Glossy Black Cockatoo	3	"	"
Jan 14	Brown Quail	2+7dy	Ash Island	G.Brosie/N.Livanos
Jan 15	Spotless Crake	1	Walka Water Works	"
	Zebra Finch	10+	Flat Rd. Bolwarra	"
Jan 20	Red-browed Treecreeper	3+	Gloucester Tops	"
	Green Catbird	2	"	"
	Logrunner	2	Copeland Common	"
Mar 1	Western Gerygone	1	Bulga	G.Brosie
	Crimson Rosella	1	"	"
	Hooded Robin	1	"	"
	Little Raven	40+	Widden Valley	"
	White-throated Needletail	50+	"	"
Jan 20	Great Crested Grebe	15	Grahamstown Dam	M.Maddock
Jan 23	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	20	Irrawang Swamp	M.Maddock
	Latham's Snipe	2	"	"
Feb 11	Square-tailed Kite	1	Weston	S.Roderick
Feb 14	Spotless Crake	1	Walka Water Works	P.Hansbro
Feb 13	Singing Bushlark	8	Bayswater Colliery	G.Newling
	Richard's Pipit	15+	"	"
Feb 14	Plumed Whistling Duck	150-200	Craven [farm dam]	P.Drake-Brockman
Feb	Brown Quail	7	T.W.C.	R.Walker
Feb 20	Common Blackbird	1 imm	Branxton	T.Clarke
Mar 3	Fairy Penguin	4	Off Fingal Head	"
Mar 5/6	Cicadabird	1	Smith's Lake	F. van Gessel
Mar 6	White-headed Pigeon	2	"	"
Mar 7	Eastern Grass Owl	1	Ash Island	P.Lightfoot
	Rufous Fantail	3	Blackbutt Reserve	"
	Glossy Ibis	22	Lenaghan's Swamp [North]	A.Richardson
	Australasian Shoveler	6	Lenaghan's Swamp [North]	"
	Australasian Shoveler	9	Lenaghan's Swamp [South]	"
Mar 4	Powerful Owl	1	Sandy Beach Reserve	N. Hamby
Mar 8	Australian Hobby	1	Cardiff	J.Westphal
Mar 5	White-breasted Woodswallow	~20	Jewell's Swamp [Redhead]	D.Raine

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	ACTIVITY	DETAILS -TIME & PLACE	CONTACT
EASTER April 14-17	Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve Camp	Sharing with COG	Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday April 23	Spring Dam Laguna. Field Outing	8.00am Pub at Wollembi	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
ANZAC DAY WEEKEND 22-25 April	Camp Spring Dam Laguna	752 Yengo Creek Road Laguna	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Saturday April 29	Hunter Wader Survey	9.15am. Various Locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Tuesday May 2	Midweek Outing Sugarloaf Mountain	8.00am Meet at top car park	Robert Stewart 4963 2029
Saturday May 6	Atlassing Cessnock Area	8.00am Meet at Abermain, near Ridgey-Didge Pie shop	Nick Livanos 4954 5739 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Please ring to confirm
Sunday May 7	Stockton Sandspit Volunteer Day	8.00am to noon (low tide 10.49am)	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Wednesday May 10	CLUB NIGHT	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Guest Speaker Adam Fawcett Managing Biodiversity in State Forests
Saturday May 13	Hunter Wader Survey	9.00am. Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Saturday/Sunday May 13 & 14	Regent Honeyeater & Swift Parrot Survey	Various locations by arrangement, especially White Box Camp	Co-ordinator Steve Roderick 4930 4800
Sunday May 28	Field Outing: Hunter Estuary "Lady Joy" HBOC 30 th birthday	Queens Wharf 8.30am to 11.30am, \$25 per person Bring own lunch	Di Johnson for bookings 4975 1777 \$5 deposit required
Sunday June 4	Stockton Sandspit Volunteer Day	8.00am to noon (low tide 8.58am)	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday June 6	Mid-week Outing Toronto/Blackalls Park	8.00am Paddock, Cook Street, just before Bridge over Stoney Creek	Max Blanch 4961 1655
Wednesday June 14	CLUB NIGHT	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre	Guest Speaker TBA
QUEENS BIRTHDAY WEEKEND June 10 -12	Camp End of Baerami Valley, Near old shale oil mines	A Lindsey to advise re directions	Ann Lindsey 49 51 2008
Sunday June 18	Field Outing (Wetlands Day) plus New Members BBQ. Club will provide BBQ lunch	9.00am The Wetlands Centre Entry Fee \$4.50 – but new members free entry	Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Saturday June 24	Hunter Wader Survey	7.30am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB INC. 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

The Annual Report for 2005 was presented by the President at the Annual General Meeting on 8 February 2005. A copy of the report will be kept in the library for future reference.

The Hunter Bird Observers Group was formed on 12 May 1976 as a subsidiary of the Hunter Flora and Fauna Society. It became the Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) in 1981 and in 1988 HBOC became incorporated. The Club's objectives are:

- 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 2005.

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 2005 – 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 three pelagic trips in 2005 (in late autumn to winter), as ongoing boat problems prevented further planned trips. Consequently, there was less chance of finding some of the more uncommon seabirds.

Table 1 – Birding Highlights for 2005

Species	Place	Month
Plumed Whistling Duck	The Hunter Wetlands Centre	Several months
Blue-billed Duck	Deep Pond, Kooragang Island	September
Freckled Duck	The Hunter Wetlands Centre	June
Kermadec Petrel (3 birds)	Offshore – pelagic trip	April
White-fronted Tern (8 birds)	Newcastle Harbour	June
Black Bittern	Cockle Creek, Barnsley	Spring
Black-necked Stork	Lenaghans Drive, East Seaham and Coolongolook	Summer-autumn
Black Falcon	Maitland/Morpeth area	Several records
Black-tailed Native Hen (3 birds)	Ash Island	April-May
Red-chested Button-quail*	Widden Valley	October
Sanderling (29 birds)	Old Bar	January
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Stockton Sandspit	March
Bush Stone-curlew (breeding record)	Lemon Tree Passage	Several breeding attempts
Swift Parrot (maximum count 120 birds)	Pelton State Forest; also Werakata National Park	July
Budgerigar*	Homestead near Cassilis (12 birds); Mount Arthur Mine Site, Muswellbrook	February; September
Black-eared Cuckoo	Giants Creek	May
Masked Owl (breeding record)	Awaba State Forest	Winter
Grass Owl	Crowdy Bay National Park	January/ December
White-eared Monarch	Crowdy Bay National Park	January
Yellow Wagtail	Ash Island	Feb/Mar; Nov/Dec
Pilotbird	Mt Coricudgy	Spring
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Giants Creek and vicinity of Sandy Hollow	Several records

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

Table 1 – Birding Highlights for 2005 (continued)

Regent Honeyeater	Widden Valley (4 pairs nesting) Pelton State Forest (3 birds)	September/October June/July
Painted Honeyeater	Widden Valley (may have bred)	October/November
Plum-headed Finch	Muswellbrook (2 birds); Near Jerrys Plains (70+ birds – an exceptionally high count for the Hunter Region); Widden Valley (9 birds).	February July October

Note: * New species for the Hunter Region Annual Bird Report. Recorded in the Hunter Region by John and Elizabeth Gould in 1839/1840.

Bird Surveys

Bird surveys are an important contribution to knowledge about Australian birds. During 2005, Club members participated in the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot and Painted Snipe surveys organized by the Threatened Species Network. Steve Roderick coordinated the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys for HBOC.

The **Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot** surveys were conducted on 14/15 May and 6/7 August 2005. No Regent Honeyeaters or Swift Parrots were detected in the Hunter Region during the May survey. During the August survey, small numbers of Swift Parrots were recorded around Pelton and other State Forests around Cessnock.

Although there were over 1000 **Swift Parrots** recorded in Victoria during the May survey, with 60 birds in the ACT and 50 birds in southern NSW, it wasn't until a week after the survey that the parrots reached the Hunter, with 3 recorded at Pelton on 21 May 2005. Numbers at Pelton increased to 84 in June, and Steve Roderick recorded over 150 Swift Parrots in the Cessnock area in June, with lots of sightings around Pelton. Small numbers were also recorded at Medowie and Gloucester. The last records of Swift Parrots at Pelton were on 13 August 2005. There were at least 160 to 180 Swift Parrots in the Hunter during the winter. During winter, Spotted Gum was flowering profusely and the Swift Parrots were using this as their main food source. They also fed on lerps on Spotted Gum, Broad-leaved Ironbark, Narrow-leaved Ironbark and Grey Box.

Regent Honeyeaters were very sparse in the Hunter Region during 2005. Three birds were seen in June at Pelton and subsequently near Kitchener. Four pairs were seen nest-building in Widden Valley in early October and a pair with two nestlings was observed in Widden Valley in late October.

The **Painted Snipe** surveys can be frustrating when no snipe are located – and that was the result this year during the official survey days. Despite thorough searches, no Painted Snipe were found at Pambalong Nature Reserve or Irrawang Swamp on the January survey. 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 on 5 December 2005** was well attended this year, with 9 members and one grandson participating in the count at Pambalong Nature Reserve. Max Maddock surveyed Irrawang Swamp on the same day. Following last year's annual count in December 2004, increased snipe numbers were observed in January 2005 and additional surveys of Irrawang Swamp and Pambalong were conducted in January 2005. Results of these surveys are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1 – Results of Latham’s Snipe Surveys

Wetland	Number of Latham’s Snipe				
	5/12/2004	6/01/2005	15/01/2005	23/01/2005	5/12/2005
Pambalong Nature Reserve	36			120	66
Newcastle Wetlands Reserve	22				6
Market Swamp	0				
Irrawang Swamp	35	35	47		12
Seaham Swamp	0				
Walka Waterworks	8				
Tenambit Common	0				
Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works	0				
Private Property, Seaham	0				
Private property, Woodville	4				
TOTAL	105				84

Surveyors on 23 January 2005 included Ross Carlton, Liz Crawford, Neil Fraser, Chris Herbert, Ann Lindsey, Terry Lindsey, Robert McDonald, Lorna Mee and Alan Stuart. About 79 Latham’s Snipe were counted 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. Surveyors on 5 December 2005 included Liz Crawford, Pam Durie and her grandson, Neil Fraser, Chris Herbert, Keith Laverick, Ann Lindsey, Lorna Mee, Mike Newman and Alan Stuart at Pambalong NR; Tom Clarke and Robert McDonald at Newcastle Wetlands; and Max Maddock at Irrawang Swamp.

These surveys provide a snapshot of the numbers of Latham’s Snipe using Pambalong Nature Reserve. Multiple surveys between December 2004 and January 2005 show that numbers at each site change depending on water levels and availability of suitable foraging areas.

The sixth year of regular monthly **wader counts in the Hunter Estuary** continued during 2005, 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. Mid-way through the year, Ann Lindsey organized inductions and access for HBOC members to Deep Pond, which is located on the waste-dumping area on Kooragang Island. This land is managed by the Regional Land Management Corporation (RLMC), which has been appointed by the NSW State Government to manage land within the Hunter Port Area. Deep Pond is a significant bird habitat that is now included in the regular monthly wader counts. Big Pond has dried up entirely and is seldom used by waders.

As in previous years, many people have assisted with the wader counts:

Alan Stuart, Robert McDonald, Neville McNaughton, Ann Lindsey, Jenny Powers, Nick Livanos, Terry Lindsey, Liz Huxtable, Mick Roderick, Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford, Mike Newman, Steven Cox, Keith Laverick, Jenny Spencer, Grant Brosie, Lorna Mee, Christine Eastham, David Eastham, Graeme O’Connor, Phil Hansbro, James Smart, Neil Fraser, Gillian Teddes.

Consistent efforts by core team members are greatly appreciated, as is the assistance of many other people from time to time. We are indebted to Ann Lindsey for consistently entering the data into a computer program so that it can be readily transmitted to interested parties. 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 12 March 2005, Mick Murphy of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), organized a second comprehensive survey of **waterbirds in Port Stephens** with assistance from six members of HBOC and representatives from NPWS and the Port Stephens Marine Park planning office. Although this survey was intended to replicate the survey conducted in February 2004, a boat breakdown and adverse weather conditions meant that one area was omitted from the survey and some areas were not fully surveyed. However, four different areas were surveyed essentially simultaneously at high tide. The February 2004

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

survey found a total of 4,470 waterbirds including nearly 1,900 migratory shorebirds. The March 2005 survey found a total of 1,438 birds including 639 migratory shorebirds (see **Table 2**).

Table 2 – Shorebirds Recorded at Port Stephens on 8 February 2004 and 12 March 2005

Species	8/02/04	12/03/05
Black-tailed Godwit	51	0
Bar-tailed Godwit	888	268
Whimbrel	218	248
Eastern Curlew	649	80
Common Greenshank	0	8
Terek Sandpiper	6	0
Common Sandpiper	1	0
Grey-tailed Tattler	44	9
Ruddy Turnstone	8	20
Red-necked Stint	20	2
Pied Oystercatcher	112	30
Sooty Oystercatcher	18	5
Lesser Sand Plover	5	4
Masked Lapwing	33	15
TOTAL	2,053	689

As with the 2004 survey, Alan Stuart compiled a report on the March 2005 survey, discussing the survey method and results, which is available from the Library. NPWS intends to continue annual surveys of the waterbirds in Port Stephens and welcomes HBOC participation in these events.

Monthly surveys are conducted by Mike Newman and Ann Lindsey at the **Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works** where the treatment ponds are being maintained for bird habitat.

Monthly surveys of the **Tank Paddock** were terminated in August 2005. Results have been sent to Newcastle City Council, and have contributed to the decision not to allow rezoning of this land for residential subdivision. The "Tank Paddock Survey Team" have transferred their monthly surveys to three other sites: Awabakal Nature Reserve; Blue Gum Hills Regional Park and Pambalong Nature Reserve; and a site in Garden Suburb. Each area will be surveyed once every four months.

Monthly surveys at '**Greswick Angus**', a private property on the Williams River at East Seaham, commenced in 2004 and continued throughout 2005. The surveys aim to monitor the results of on-farm riparian restoration on the Williams River Best Management Practice Demonstration Site. Tom Clarke, Anthony Gooden, Neville McNaughton, Leonie and John Storm and Lyn Rayward are conducting these surveys, with enthusiastic support from the property owners. Results are sent to the Birds Australia Atlas Project.

The **Birds Australia Atlassing 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 2005, six 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 and highlights are listed in **Table 3**.

Table 3 – Atlassing Sites and Highlights during 2005

Date	Location	Highlights
13 February	Lemon Tree Passage area	Bush Stone-Curlew Leaden Flycatchers with dependent young

Table 3 – Atlassing Sites and Highlights during 2005 (continued)

Date	Location	Highlights
28 May	Sandy Hollow	Black-eared Cuckoo Chestnut-rumped Heathwren Brown Treecreeper Speckled Warbler White-eared Honeyeater
17 July	Denman area	Plum-headed Finch Speckled Warbler Western Gerygone
6 August	Cessnock area	White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike White-eared Honeyeater Brown Treecreeper Black-chinned Honeyeater Spotted Quail-Thrush Crested Shrike-tit
3 September	Gloucester Tops	Rufous Scrub-bird Red-browed Treecreeper Crescent Honeyeater Flame Robin
12 November	Myall Lakes area	8 Cuckoo species Southern Emu-Wren White-bellied Cuckoo- Shrike

Atlassing Participants: Grant Brosie, Robert McDonald, Liz Crawford, Neil Fraser, Anthony Gooden, Colin Goodenough, Sue Hamonet, Chris Herbert, Trevor Jurd, Ann Lindsey, Nick Livanos, Neville McNaughton, Mike Newman, Mick Roderick, Alan Stuart, Harold Tarrant, Lynn Vella, Judy Westphal.

In May 2005, Newcastle City Council (NCC) commissioned HBOC to undertake a survey and assessment of birds on the **Rock Platforms within Newcastle Local Government Area**, to assist with coastal planning and management. At the same time, Newcastle University was commissioned to survey the invertebrate benthic fauna on the rock platforms. The 15 kilometres of shoreline managed by NCC is at the northern end of the Hawkesbury Marine Biodiversity Bioregion, and is a known data-gap in regard to marine biodiversity assessment. HBOC's project included: documenting the diversity and abundance of bird species using the rock platforms; assessing the population status and breeding status of birds; assessing the significance of each site in terms of habitats and bird species present; assessing significant differences between sites; documenting threatening processes and/or causes of disturbances to birds; and providing management options and recommendations. Chris Herbert and Liz Crawford surveyed the rock platforms over 3 days in July 2005 and, in August 2005, Chris Herbert compiled a comprehensive report based on both current and historical bird observations. The report has been very well received by NCC, which has commissioned additional summer observations. These will be incorporated in the final report. The Club has benefited financially from this commission.

NPWS organized an **Australian White Ibis count** on 11 December 2005. Members of HBOC recorded nesting Ibis at Toronto Wetland and Muddy Lake near Dora Creek.

The Newcastle Speleological Society plans to publish a small booklet on the natural attributes of **Timor Caves** in 2006 and has invited HBOC to compile a bird list for the caves area. Timor Caves is located beside the Isis River, east of Murrurundi. The first bird surveys were conducted in November 2005. Additional surveys will be carried out during 2006.

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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. Two PhD studies continued during 2005:

Newcastle University

- 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 of Issues

The Conservation Committee, led by Ann Lindsey, Neil Fraser, Mike Newman, Max Maddock and Jenny Powers, has continued to address issues that threaten birds and their habitat in the Hunter Region, particularly developments proposed for the Hunter Estuary. The proposed expansion of coal loaders in the Hunter Estuary and the deepening of the South Arm are under constant scrutiny. Following the withdrawal of the Austeel Project, Ann Lindsey made representations to the Regional Land Management Corporation about rescinding State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) 74 across Ash Island, but the government wants to retain this policy to facilitate a future transport corridor across the area. Numerous letters have been written to the Premier, the Environment Minister and local members of parliament, with little response.

Energy Australia invited HBOC representatives to several consultation meetings to discuss their proposed upgrade of powerlines across **Ash Island**. Liz Crawford prepared a detailed submission on bird use of Ash Island and the high potential for bird collisions with powerlines which traversed wetland areas. It is likely that powerlines will be consolidated along one route on the western side of the main wader feeding areas and bird-deflecting devices will be placed on the powerlines.

Hunter Water Corporation is planning to upgrade a trunkmain which runs across Ash Island. HBOC answered a request to comment on the proposed project.

Government planning initiatives in 2005 that potentially affect bird habitat included the Hunter Estuary Management Plan and the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy. The Hunter Estuary Management Plan is being prepared by Consultants for Newcastle City Council. HBOC members attended Community Consultation meetings to ensure that birds and their habitat were being considered, and a formal submission detailing habitat used by migratory waders was made. HBOC joined with other “green groups” in criticising the lack of consideration of the environment in the Department of Planning’s strategy for future development in the Lower Hunter. This “Blueprint for the Future” recommended development areas based on Councils’ wish-lists, and was issued before the Department of Environment and Conservation had finalized their recommendations for conserving areas. The struggle to have the **Green Corridor** recognized and protected continues. The Green Corridor 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.

BIGnet, the Bird Interest Group Network, consists of representatives from bird groups throughout NSW. This over-arching organization is a useful melting pot for sharing conservation issues among a wider audience. Recently, it has encouraged member groups to nominate Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for inclusion in Birdlife International’s List of IBAs throughout the world. This project is supported by Birds Australia, which is endeavouring to gain funding for a Project Coordinator. The mining company Rio Tinto has been approached and has expressed interest in sponsoring the project. HBOC has been collecting information to nominate Hexham Swamp and the Lower Hunter Estuary as IBAs. Nomination as an IBA has no legal standing, however it does raise the profile of an area in terms of its importance for birds.

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Throughout the year, Tom Clarke continued to lead an active team of weeders (including Robert McDonald, Anthony Gooden, Neil Fraser, Paddy Lightfoot and Dorothy Pritchard) at Stockton Sandspit, maintaining this iconic birdwatching spot for the birds. In between working, they delight in watching fascinating bird behaviour at the Sandspit. Tom's regular observations of water levels in the lagoon resulted in his recommending that the weir be lowered to allow better flooding of the saltmarsh areas. Following consultation with NPWS, KWRP and Department of Commerce, the weir was lowered and the saltmarsh is now thriving. Well done Tom!

Since the start of the efforts to rehabilitate Stockton Sandspit in 2003, a record of volunteer hours has been maintained. These hours, and their dollar value, are required to help match the Envirofund dollars granted to HBOC to carry out shorebird habitat restoration work in the Hunter Estuary. They also record the ongoing commitment to the restoration and maintenance of the Stockton Sandspit site.

At the end of 2005 a staggering 1,684.5 volunteer hours have been recorded since 2003. Calculating the dollar value at bush regenerator rates over the last three years equals \$25,745.

The 2005 effort of 590.5 hours has come from 48 workdays and represents almost a weekly presence at Stockton Sandspit. Since 2003, 125 workdays represents not only a mighty effort, but also a very high profile by HBOC at the site.

Work on removing mangroves from wader habitat on Ash Island commenced in September 2005, funded by an **Envirofund Grant** gained by HBOC from the Natural Heritage Trust. This work was carried out by contractors. KWRP has approval from Fisheries NSW for mangrove removal in the vicinity of Wader, Swan and Milham Ponds on Ash Island. Following the opening of Fish Fry Creek to increased tidal flow, mangroves have invaded an area that was formerly saltmarsh and made it useless for foraging by waders. The initial mangrove removal will be followed by maintenance slashing of mangrove seedlings and recommendations for better control of tidal inundation.

Development pressures are being felt all over the Hunter Region, with proposals to: surround Ellalong Lagoon with residential development; subdivide saltmarsh near Taylors Beach (the Cromarty Sands Development); create an open-cut mine in bushland near Awaba and another at Anvil Hill near Denman; and provide housing for up to 120,000 people in the Lower Hunter over the next 25 years. There is plenty to keep the Conservation Committee focused!

Meanwhile, a pair of Bush Stone-curlews ignored residential development and nested beside a park at Lemon Tree Passage. This year they were protected from dogs and foxes by a substantial fence erected by NPWS and Port Stephens Council. With a little more fine tuning of protective measures, the birds may be successful in raising young to fledging stage.

Twitchathon

Four teams from HBOC participated in the Twitchathon in October: Dodgy Drongos, Hunter Home Brewers and Hunter Thickheads in the main race; Lesticcum Phoradae in the champagne race. The Hunter Home Brewers recorded an incredible 227 species, smashing the previous record of 221 species, but were narrowly beaten to first place by the Whacked-out Woodswallows from Dubbo, who recorded 229 species! The Hunter Thickheads tied with the Black-necked Stalkers (from the North Coast) for third place, with 201 species, all found within the Hunter Valley. The Dodgy Drongos came fifth with 196 species. The competition is getting tough! Lesticcum Phoradae recorded 147 species and won the champagne race! The rarest bird seen during the Twitchathon was a Little Bittern, seen by Hunter Home Brewer Steve Roderick. Altogether the Hunter teams raised over \$1500 for educational facilities at Birds Australia's Gluepot Reserve. A mighty effort!

Once again, the Twitchathon became a media focus. Claudia Taranto of ABC Radio National interviewed members of the Hunter Home Brewers and Hunter Thickheads before and during the Twitchathon and produced an amusing half hour radio program for "Street Stories" highlighting the delights of birdwatching, the passion of birdwatchers and the fun of the Twitchathon. A recording of the program, which was broadcast in November 2005, is available from the library.

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2. ENCOURAGE BIRD OBSERVING

Program

As usual, HBOC ran a large program of activities throughout the year to encourage bird observing – a total of 55 activities in 2005:

- 12 Sunday outings (held monthly)
- 11 mid-week outings (held monthly)
- 12 Hunter Estuary wader surveys (held monthly)
- 1 Port Stephens wader survey
- 6 Birds Australia Atlas survey days
- 5 special surveys (2 for Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot, 2 for Painted Snipe, 1 for Australian White Ibis)
- 3 pelagic outings off Newcastle
- 4 camps on weekends/long weekends
- 1 mid-week camp

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

Club Nights

We held 11 Club Nights during 2005 at The Hunter Wetlands Centre, where the average attendance was 47, five more than last year's average. (Details of these nights are provided in **Appendix 1**). Guest speakers covered a wide range of topics: *Radio-tracking waders in the Hunter Estuary, Nostalgia and Solastalgia, Birds of the Riverina and Queensland Wet Tropics, Bird Song, Bristlebirds, Bush Stone-Curlews, Raptors and the Goulds in the Hunter*. In keeping with this increasingly digital age, 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 during the first half of the year. In May 2005, HBOC purchased a computer projector for Club use, using funds from the Alan Keating Bequest. This has encouraged members to embrace the digital age and allowed HBOC to present talks on birds to community organisations. Another improvement to Club Nights is the portable microphone system, upgraded and repaired by Rowley Smith and Ross Marshall – many thanks!

The Bird of the Evening segment was a lot of fun with members discussing their favourite bird or some aspect of avian development. A highlight was Jenny Spencer's audience participation session when everyone was given 30 seconds to count flying waders on each of a series of slides. Jenny used the results to compare the accuracy of novice and experienced counters and the results were included in her presentation at the Australasian Shorebird Conference in New Zealand in December. Our thanks go to all the presenters for their enthusiasm and entertaining presentations.

The Observations/Discussion section of each meeting provided valuable bird observations for inclusion in the bimonthly Club Newsletters and 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 tremendous efforts being put into **Stockton Sandspit** by a small band of dedicated workers led by Tom Clarke. These efforts included weeding, mangrove seedling removal (in our permit area), planting of the car park gardens and lowering the level of the weir, after consultation with representatives from NPWS, Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project and Department of Commerce. Lowering of the weir aimed to improve the extent and

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frequency of tidal inundation of the Sandspit so that saltmarsh vegetation would be encouraged and weeds discouraged. So far, it appears to have been very successful.

Tom and his helpers also re-installed one of the Club's information signs at the Sandspit after vandals had torn it out from its concrete base. Fortunately the sign itself was not damaged.

Funding for three more **signs about migratory waders** has been provided by Newcastle City Council. The signs have been designed by Chris Herbert and will be installed at Kooragang Dykes boat ramp, Stockton boat ramp and Carrington boat ramp during 2006. Chris also designed a sign about birds in Toronto Wetland, which will be produced and installed by Toronto Rotary and Toronto Sunrise Rotary during 2006 to complement their rehabilitation efforts on the wetland margins.

As in previous years, HBOC mounted **displays** at The Hunter Wetlands Centre for *World Wetlands Day* in February, *Orchids in the Wetlands* in September, and *Catchment Day* in October. These are great opportunities to involve families in birdwatching and raise awareness of the Club. Additional displays were mounted for Lake Macquarie City Council's (LMCC) *Catchment Connections Day* in June, for LMCC's *Leisure Living Learning Information Days* and for *Morisset Community Festival*. Tom Clarke, Sue Hamonet, Anthony Gooden, Di Johnson, Robert McDonald, Val and Don Moon, and Alan Stuart all participated in various displays and our thanks go to all of them.

Talks to various community groups, including Dora Creek View Club, Raymond Terrace Probus Club and Kurri Kurri Aviculturalists, as well as the Hunter Wetlands Centre Christmas Celebrations and the Coastcare Summer Festival, were given by Chris Herbert and Tom Clarke.

Newcastle City Council (NCC) funded publication of **Newcastle Birding Routes 1 and 2**. Two thousand copies of each brochure were printed and distributed to NCC, KWRP, The Hunter Wetlands Centre and Club members. The Club retains a supply of brochures for future distribution.

During 2005, Anthony Gooden represented HBOC on the **Eraring Community Forum**. This participation facilitated a bird survey of Eraring Power Station's land, including the fly ash dam which provides habitat for Black-winged Stilts and Red-necked Stints!

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

The Club had 234 members in December 2005, a decrease of 30 over the previous year's total. Membership consisted of 75 single members, 156 family members and 3 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. Our thanks to Katrina Thornton for auditing our accounts.

During the year we received an Environmental Grant of \$2000 from Newcastle City Council for production of three information signs about migratory waders for installation at three boat ramps within the Hunter Estuary. The signs have been produced and will be installed in 2006.

Newcastle City Council (NCC) also provided a grant of \$2820 for a Survey of Birds on the Rock Platforms within the Council area. The surveys and report were completed in August 2005. NCC has since requested further surveys during summer.

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The \$30,000 Envirofund Grant originally obtained for a proposed Bird Hide at Stockton Sandspit was re-directed towards improving wader habitat on Ash Island by removing mangroves that had invaded saltmarsh. After prolonged discussions, this alternative project was accepted by the Department of Heritage and Conservation and work finally started on 1 September 2005.

Despite projected increases in our operating expenditure for 2006, the Committee decided to keep membership fees at the 2005 level for 2006.

Library

Grant Brosie took responsibility for the Library during 2005, and was ably assisted by Robert MacDonald. The Library currently contains 431 books. New acquisitions during 2005 included: *Herons, Egrets and Bitterns*; the very popular *Birding on Borrowed Time*; and *The Gouldian Finch* by Mike Fidler. HBOC has also pre-paid for the final volume of HANZAB. Drew Morris presented the Club with a copy of his Honours Thesis about birdwatchers and birdwatching titled "*Observing the Observers*". Drew interviewed many Club members as part of his research and participated in several field outings.

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!

Car stickers, featuring our Golden Whistler emblem, were designed by Chris Herbert and printed during the year. They are available for decorating your car for \$2 each.

The Management Committee worked well together during the year, shouldering a variety of tasks as the need arose. Special thanks go to Tom Clarke for his Secretarial expertise; to Ann Lindsey for organizing Conservation Committee meetings; to Rowley Smith for maintaining the membership list and overseeing the collection of monies; and to Vice President Alan Stuart for maintaining regular email communications with the majority of the membership, keeping us all up to date with the latest exciting bird sightings. Committee members Grant Brosie, Anthony Gooden, Chris Herbert, Ann Lindsey, Robert McDonald and Michael Todd, helped keep the Club running smoothly. The Committee appreciated input from Sue Hamonet and Jenny Powers, who were 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: Pam Durie 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 Ongoing 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 2005