



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 1/07

February/March 2007

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.

(affiliated with the Bird Observers Club of Australia)

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*

NEWSLETTER DEADLINES FOR 2007

Edition

April/ May
June/July
August/September
October/November
December2007/January08

Copy Deadline

April 1st
June 3rd
July 29th
September 30
December 2

Membership Fees for 2007 are now due.

President's Column – February 2007

Summarising the year's activities and accomplishments for the Annual Report has highlighted again the commitment and passion of a great number of people involved in the Club. We have held more than 54 bird-watching activities during 2006, including mid-week and weekend outings, camps, surveys, atlassing trips and occasional twitches. We have raised the profile of birds by mounting displays at various community festivals, being interviewed on radio and contributing to articles on birds in the Herald, as well as giving talks to several Community groups. We have participated in surveys at the request of National Parks and Wildlife Service, Newcastle City Council and Hunter Water, and provided reports on the results of these surveys. We have made submissions on many development proposals that may adversely affect birds and their habitat and we have followed up those submissions with meetings and involvement on relevant committees. At Club Nights we have been impressed by stimulating guest speakers and delighted by members' presentations for 'Bird of the Evening'. We have shared the excitement of bird sightings and the joy of those reaching 600 Australian birds!

HBOC celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2006, with a cruise on the Hunter River aboard the Lady Joy, followed by lunch and a large birthday cake. Several founding members and past presidents came along as special guests and were presented with a collection of local Birding Routes. A splendid Club T-shirt featuring our emblem, the Golden Whistler, was designed by Alison Green for the 30th Anniversary and is now proudly worn by many members. We also have badges and car stickers to help advertise HBOC.

The joy of discovering birds and sharing those experiences continues to bind us together. I encourage you to share your passion and become involved in the Club this year – every contribution, no matter how small, helps to protect birds and their habitat for future generations to enjoy.

Thank you to all those who assisted with the successful running of the Club and participated in Club activities during 2006 – let's make it an even bigger and better year in 2007.

Liz Crawford

FIELD OUTING: Green Point
21 January 2007
from Di Johnson

On a very hot windy day, 15 birdwatchers headed along the concrete path at Green Point. We started off well with a Buff-banded Rail aimlessly wandering out in front of us in the car park. Further along we had good sightings of 2 Sea eagles majestically perched high on a dead tree branch. Before climbing up to the Lookout over Lake Macquarie we spotted a number of Dollarbirds hawking out revealing their distinctive underwing markings.

Along this walk there are a number of suitable nesting hollows in tall trees and we spotted 2 gorgeous Rainbow Lorikeets at the entrance to one. We enjoyed the walk to Valentine as the hot breeze sort of cooled us along the way. A very obliging Sacred Kingfisher enabled us to identify the male. Further along another one seemed to be in trouble (probably heat stroke) and stopped very still down on the ground giving us great photographic opportunities.

On the way back we had excellent views of an Osprey. A huge fig tree offered us shade for morning tea - and views of Figbirds of course. All in all a successful outing with 55 species heard or seen on an amazing day weather-wise.

Camp at The Glen Nature Reserve near Craven
26 – 28 January 2007
from Liz Crawford

Tall flooded gums grace the gravel road into The Glen Nature Reserve, 6 km east of Bucketts Way, where we gathered for the Australia Day long weekend camp. About 1.5 km into the Nature Reserve, grassy clearings from an old logging camp provide spacious flat campsites ranging from shade to full sun, with the adjacent forest hosting lots of Black-faced Monarchs.

The Glen offers several walks along old logging tracks that are now called "maintenance trails" by National Parks. These lead into rainforest along creeks or follow the boundary between rainforest and dry sclerophyll forest as they traverse slopes.

The rainforest suite of birds included Yellow-throated Scrubwrens, Green Catbirds, Superb Lyrebirds, Rufous Fantails, Logrunners and Pale Yellow Robins. Birds in the eucalypt forest included Leaden Flycatcher and Rose Robin. In all, 80 species were identified with 20 species observed feeding fledged young or feeding nestlings! A great time of year to see breeding behaviour.

On Saturday, half the group drove to "Yallambee", a private property west of Bucketts Way with access to the Gloucester Bucketts. From the farmhouse, we walked up the slope to "Thunderbolt's Cave" at the base of the Bucketts. This half-hour walk took an hour as we watched Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes feeding 3 fledged young and a pair of Leaden Flycatchers feeding a very recently fledged youngster. A great view across the Gloucester valley rewarded our climb.

We detoured via Gloucester markets on the way back to camp where we found shady places to doze through the scorchingly hot Saturday afternoon. Fortunately the southerly change released the heat and gave us a beautiful balmy night, complete with calls of Owlet Nightjar, Southern Boobook, Tawny Frogmouth and, in the pre-dawn, White-throated Nightjar.

Nineteen campers were well pleased with their Australia Day weekend!

Club Night 12 December 2006

A most convivial meeting featuring, as is usual for our Xmas meeting, slides and anecdotes from members followed by supper.

The Twitchathon Cup was presented to the Brewers by Alan Morris, organiser of the event. Over \$15000 was pledged to the fundraising. Another notable feature was the entry of 4 teams from Murrumbidgee. Alan Stuart reported on two Tasmania Pelagics organized by Richard Baxter. These were relatively comfortable as the birdwatching took place half an hour from shore and never out of sight of land. Michael Todd showed his latest slides. These are viewable on his website – wildlifing.com

And Ann Lindsey passed 700 sightings on Christmas Island – with several other lucky HBOC members in attendance.

**Midweek Outing: Hunter Wetlands Centre
Tuesday December 5th 2006**

from Judi Thomas and Margaret Stewart

Our final midweek outing for the year was held at Hunter Wetlands Centre on a pleasant sunny day. Twenty members arrived at the Wetlands for the 7.30 am start. We were pleased to welcome one potential new member who came along to experience a mid-week outing.

There had been rain prior to our visit so the ponds held more water than has been the case for quite some time. We were rewarded with good sightings both in number of species and, as it is breeding season for many birds, views of nests and young.

A total of 74 species were observed with another 5 heard but not seen. Nesting species observed were Cattle, Little and Intermediate Egrets, and Australian White Ibis. These were all in the vicinity of the Egret rookery which this year has an abundance of very colourful Cattle Egrets along with Intermediate and Great Egrets also in breeding plumage.

A Royal Spoonbill showing off its white breeding plumes at the nape was in the Water Ribbon Pond quite near the path. It stood in the pond for some time allowing us an excellent view. Two Wandering Whistling Ducks initially viewed on the water, climbed out onto the bank for better observation. Nearby two Hardhead huddled against the bank. Chestnut Teal and Dusky Moorhen were observed with young.

There were also raptors sighted by some participants: Whistling Kite, Swamp Harrier, Brown and Grey Goshawks and an Australian Hobby. Two Baillon's Crake occupied us for quite some time as they appeared and disappeared into the reeds.

Opposite the shelter at the end of the jetty we observed eighteen Black-winged Stilt and with them at least six Red-kneed Dotterel. Near the Magpie Geese in front of the Centre building there was a lone Black-fronted Dotterel. Other itinerant birds included Dollarbird, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and a Channel-billed Cuckoo was heard.

After our observations, seventeen stayed for our lunch in the Hunter Wetlands Centre Jacana Cafe, to

celebrate the end of another successful year of mid-week field outings.

**The Bolwarra Crepuscular Falcon
*Falco Pseudohypoleucos***

from Harold Tarrant 1/1/07

Spring 2006 brought a number of species into the Hunter River floodplain that would not normally be found there. The earliest and most obvious irruption was that of the Rufous Songlark, present at the beginning of October in numbers that enabled me to count up to 26 male birds within a few kilometres in about an hour. They could often be heard from my garden, stayed for November, but had mostly disappeared in December. With them, or at any rate by 2nd October, came Brown Songlark, a little shier and never heard or seen in quite the same numbers, but calling well into December. Also within a kilometre of my house were Singing Bushlark too, which could be located at a few other sites on the Hunter and Paterson floodplains. As if in response to these arrivals, the cuckoo population seemed for quite a while to contain more of the dry-country species like Pallid and Horsfield's than the coastal Koel, Shining, Fantail, Brush and Channel-Bills.

I think that it is also in response to drought conditions that Stubble Quail seek out the irrigated areas that offer them guaranteed low growth, if only until weedy fields are mowed or lucerne harvested. From September 13th until the end of the year their calls have often been audible from my garden, if at a greater distance than their bright three-note call would suggest. Mostly these calls are heard early in the morning or late in the evening, with a preference for overcast conditions when the birds feel more comfortable about revealing their positions. My impression is that the birds have been present both earlier and in greater numbers than in other recent summers. Once a pair obliging flushed, flying off to join the main chorus at a greater distance from me.

Quail in good numbers are a blessing for some of those raptors whose main diet consists of ground dwelling birds. Among these species one might include the Spotted Harrier and the Black and Grey falcons, although one would need a specialised study to be able to pinpoint the species most affected by quail numbers in the Hunter. It so happens that the Black Falcons that seem to have bred in 2006 in the Morpeth area had their young up and flying by

early October. Perhaps fledging had somehow been coordinated with a handy extra food supply.

I saw them only once, and I have not seen Spotted Harrier at all locally in 2006. Whether I have seen a Grey Falcon is a matter for debate, but the majority of my non-kestrel falcon sightings in the period from October to December have followed a strange pattern that I am not used to. This pattern will hopefully interest readers regardless of the species concerned.

During this period the only falcon species I have been able to identify locally have been Australian Hobby and Nankeen Kestrel until at least 5 p.m. each day. I have not seen Peregrines in the area once, even though I would once have expected a reliable sighting five to six months out of every twelve. My nearest sighting of a Brown Falcon has been at Woodville near the Paterson River.

A variety of other species has passed by, with the commonest being the Black-Shouldered Kite that occasionally adopted a dead tree, 80 metres away, as a vantage point. Most often Hobby, Kestrel, and Black-Shouldered Kite have been seen perched, identification has been easy even in poor conditions, and there has not been any observable pattern about their appearance.

Something, however, has been flying over or close to my property on a regular basis after 5 p.m., always as the light begins to fade a little, whether because of overcast conditions or the sun's setting.

Typically it appears from the west, south-west, or north-west, and then flies either due east onto the floodplain, or north-east along the scarp towards Largs.

What percentage of its visits I have witnessed I am unsure, but I have probably been outside at some suitable time of evening for about 70% of evenings (though usually missing 6.30-7.00 for the SBS News and another half hour or so at that part of a walk that would not enable me to see the this bird).

Hence I should think that I might have had about a 40% chance of viewing its fly-through. I am virtually certain that it does not appear every evening, but at intervals no less than three days apart, and probably every three to four days. A

'crepuscular event' has taken place on each of the following dates:

DATE	INTERVAL	TIME	SEX
15/10/06		c. 5.45pm**	F
27/10/06	12 days	6.00pm**	F
07/11/06	11 days	6.23pm	F
10/11/06	3 days	7.24pm	M
13/11/06	3 days	7.15pm	?
27/11/06	14 days	7.11pm	M
30/11/06	3 days	5.45pm	F
03/12/06	3 days	5.20pm	M
22/12/06	19 days	7.30pm	F
25/12/06	3 days	7.30pm	M
29/12/06	4 days	7.30pm	M

(** These dates precede the introduction of daylight saving in NSW)

The two biggest gaps are partly explained by my absence for 5 nights in Mid-November and 6 nights in mid-December. I estimate that I have missed approximately 3-4 appearances in October, 5 in November, and 4-5 in December, thus observing 11 out of 23-25 appearances since October 15th. That would mean that I had indeed witnessed around 40% of its appearances, perhaps almost 50%. I have been out for a walk quite a few mornings from about 5.45 a.m., and I have witnessed nothing similar at all at that or any other time of day before 5.20 p.m.

I have presumed that the species concerned is always the same because of the regularity of the pattern, but one could not exclude the possibility that a different species was involved on some of the occasions (particularly on Nov. 13th when only the commotion among friendlier species created by a raptor's breaking through foliage was noted). However, if one presumes a single species, then one is obliged also to postulate the involvement of a male and a female bird, since there was quite some difference in the sizes. That would mean that there was a breeding pair, which were presumably involved in a routine inspection of their territory or 'home range'.

I should be fairly sure that they were interested in the floodplain beneath or adjacent to their eventual path, perhaps checking on the continuing presence of Stubble Quail, which were likely to have started calling by the time of their flight. I am not sure that they were really hunting, and did not witness any attempt to flush the birds, so that I think that it is more likely that they rely on the periodic cutting of the crops to flush them mechanically.

I have twice witnessed falcons taking advantage of this process locally in previous years (Black Falcon, Jan 01; Black Falcon and possibly immature Grey Falcon, Nov. 02). It is of course possible that quail are not an important part of the diet until young have fledged.

We may now proceed to the trickier part of this report. What species could this be? It is always relatively heavy bodied for a falcon, with heavy shoulders, rather wide wings at base, tapering to the usual point, and a rather short tapered tail. The build can in most cases rule out not only Nankeen Kestrel but also Australian Hobby. Certainly in the case of the female one would far rather have believed that the bird was a Peregrine. Its busy nature and the size of the male rule out Brown Falcon, while the size and short tail easily rule out Black Falcon. With a female of c. 40 cm and a male of c. 35 cm, one should seriously consider only Peregrine and Grey Falcon, with the latter fitting rather better.

On several occasions there was enough light to affirm that the bird was not at all dark, and had no strong contrasting marks on the head and shoulders. On Nov. 7th enough of the underside should have been seen to rule out this species. The predominant colouring has always seemed greyish and comparatively light, and while individual birds of other species (such as the Brown Falcon) may look greyish and pale, aberrant plumages are unlikely to be found in both birds of a pair.

The question therefore remains: 'Is the Grey Falcon here with us in drought conditions in the Hunter? Does it breed? Does it adhere to strange territorial rituals? And is its presence largely unnoticed because it is not usually active between the hours of about 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (as unconfirmed Hunter reports suggest), and has a marked preference for showing itself in reduced light?' The cynic will retort that it may not be the Grey Falcon but misidentification that occurs most frequently in bad light.

Indeed, I cannot affirm that the Bolwarra Crepuscular Falcon is a Grey Falcon; what I can affirm is that it behaves in a very distinctive way, a way that I find interesting in its own right. To explain what goes on I need a working hypothesis, to which I shall adhere until other evidence questions it. I shall hypothesise as follows.

The Grey Falcon does not rightly belong in the Hunter, but, like its cousin the Black Falcon, it will come into the Hunter and breed there when conditions are correct. For a raptor much must depend on the ready availability of suitable prey. A key food-source is the Stubble Quail, and the presence of breeding Stubble Quail will give the raptor the confidence needed to breed too. Regular checks on the birds are required to make sure they do not move far undetected, and such checks are best done when the quail are calling best—at dusk. This is in any case a favourite time for activity, when the bird's soft plumage disguises it well.

Our bird is possibly a master of disguise, for I suspect that it was the female bird that was seen on 29th October at 5.15 p.m. tagging innocently along behind four Galahs at Walka Water Works, and synchronising its wing-beats with them. More importantly, it usually flies rapidly through an area so that our cynic's binoculars are unlikely to focus upon it until it has disappeared too far into the distance to pick key distinguishing marks.

For sure, there must be a fair few reports of a Grey Falcon that have in fact involved misidentification; not every falcon that appears grey is a Grey Falcon, just as not every very dark falcon is a Black Falcon and not every brownish one is a Brown Falcon.

What that means is that reports of the species in coastal NSW to which it is presumed to be unsuited are subject to a scrutiny that begins with the presumption that a mistake must have been made. Until the wretched bird changes its ways and poses conveniently on fence-posts (no doubt in imitation of the Brown Falcon!) we cannot look forward to the acceptance of many, if any, local records.

From now on, I'll just have my own private species, and call it *Falco Pseudhypoleucos*! I think I'll even give myself a 'tick' for it!

.....

CREPUSCULAR

Zool. ACTIVE IN LOW LIGHT. —used to describe fish and land mammals that are active at dusk and dawn when the light levels are low (from Latin crepusculum 'twilight')

Macquarie Dictionary

ED

Bird Atlas surveys at Greswick Angus during 2006

A team of Hunter Bird Observers Club members continued to survey the birdlife at the East Seaham property named Greswick Angus throughout last year. Surveys have remained at two-month intervals and in December 2006 the 14th survey was completed. Surveys began in September 2004 at the request of Hunter Water to add to the monitoring of a four-year demonstration project to improve water quality in the Williams River and to showcase sustainable farm practices.

Monitoring changes to bird life at Greswick Angus will be next to impossible to achieve over the period of the official project. It will be difficult to make any statements on change at all unless the monitoring continues for a long time (10 years plus) and without being in a position to survey prior to the project means that comparisons can never be made. Also, the property owners had started their own bank stabilisation efforts prior to becoming chosen as the Williams River Best Management Practice Demonstration Site.

What can be stated is that the Greswick Angus property does get managed very well and one great obvious benefit of that is the protection and enhancement of bird habitat and birds. At the end of the official project a report will be written on the birdlife observed at Greswick Angus. In quick summary now, however, it is proper to cite some aspects of the rich diversity that we have witnessed to date.

So far we have recorded 122 species representing 48 families of avifauna. The largest representation by species number are the honeyeaters (*Meliphagidae* - 9 species), a family of small bush birds (*Pardalotidae* - 8 species) and the raptors (*Accipitridae* - 8 species). The raptors are also represented by 4 species of falcon. Birds (and other life forms) of every foraging niche have been identified, indicating a complex food chain, and the fenced off sections of riverbank, wetlands, drainage lines and wind buffers will enhance this further. It can be predicted that as the riverbank forest diversity establishes that a larger representation of the small passerines will occur. The fencing that restricts grazing over the wetlands (except for short managed occurrences) has the most delightful result for birdwatchers. Each summer season so far, we

have been lucky enough to discover up to four Latham's Snipe within the sedges.

One aspect of the birdlife worth monitoring over the long term is the breeding effort. To date we have only recorded the fact that breeding is occurring; a good study would try to determine the level of breeding and the success or otherwise of it. From our notes we have witnessed breeding behaviour from 29 species representing 24 families of avifauna. Breeding behaviours witnessed include inspecting hollows, display, copulation, nest building, nest with eggs, nest with young, adults on or leaving nests, carrying food, dependent young and distraction behaviours. Breeding records indicate high quality habitat for those species.

Greswick Angus represents, very well, the larger East Seaham area. It has been generally cleared for grazing (currently for Black Angus stud) but it also contains 3km of riverbank that supports a thin line of remnant rainforest, some open wetlands and a remnant Spotted Gum/Grey Ironbark forest. These three habitats are covered by the Atlas surveys. Greswick Angus lies in a landscape of riparian, wetland and forest communities. Its ability to provide some connectivity between the large area of forest east of the Williams River around Nine Mile Creek (Wallaroo) to that of Mount Torrance, west of the river cannot be ignored. And despite the simplicity of the wetlands, the fact that the migratory Latham's Snipe can find refuge there demonstrates very well the benefit of protecting even the smallest wetland.

A report generated from the Birds Australia Atlas website, www.birdata.com.au lists 203 species for the 10 minute grid cell that contains Greswick Angus. Out of the 81 species not recorded (so far) at Greswick Angus it would be reasonable to expect 29 of these to be recorded at some time. A total of 43 other species are perhaps an outside chance but unlikely due to lack of suitable habitat and the 9 remaining species can be regarded as doubtful or contentious. By lack of suitable habitat I am referring to the non-existence of some specialised habitat (eg complex wetland with canopy, dry stony ridges, closed forest with well-developed shrub and herb layers etc) plus the great edge effect that prevails along the riverbank rainforest. These prevailing conditions are not going to change too much, of course, given the prime land use of the property.

On each survey day, five selected 2ha sites are Atlassed along with a general survey of the entire property. Various field notes and breeding records are recorded as opportunity allows. Atlas record sheets are completed for the five sites and sent to Birds Australia while an HBOC Record Sheet is completed for our own records. Additional to that, a computer spreadsheet has been devised to record the presence of birds observed on the survey days as well as other opportunities as they arise. Some of these records come from observations by the property owners or from other people working on the project. A total of 122 species have been recorded to date with 53 species marking an average day. After each survey day a diary page is written to record other observations such as bird behaviour, water levels in wetlands, food availability, habitat health etc. Finally an email message is sent to the team members acknowledging their efforts and celebrating some of the highlights of the survey.

The survey team has hardly changed from the outset in size or personnel. The team is made up of Greswick Angus owners, John & Janelle Spearpoint, their two sons Hayden & James, plus HBOC members Lyn Rayward, Leone & John Storm, Neville McNaughton, Anthony Gooden and Tom Clarke. What has changed is the level of interest and knowledge by the property owners and the development of stronger friendships within the team. All the Spearpoint family have taken on the birdwatching aspect of their rural life with zeal. The two young boys especially have impressed with their great desire to learn and participate. It was, therefore, no surprise at all when they became members of the HBOC last December. By that time, the whole team had become good friends and the survey days became more than just us getting on with the business of Atlassing.

Thanks to all the team for sharing some terrific birdwatching and being such great company.

Early in the year, a book written by John Spearpoint and sponsored by the project funding was produced. It is titled 'Striking the Balance' and chronicles the "family's quest for a sustainable future in agriculture". We were all very proud to see included a picture of the team busy surveying the birds along Quarry Lane and a nice mention of HBOC. From the outset we have known it to be a privilege to be a part of this project and it was very generous of the Spearpoints to give HBOC some free promotion.

In the book, John writes about birds as an indicator of habitat health;

"When we planned our revegetation activities, our focus was on erosion control. We didn't really consider any direct benefits to native plants and animals and the ecosystem services that they provide. Now that we are aware of their benefits, our plan is to maintain and improve bird habitat. A diversity of native trees and shrubs will encourage them to stay".

Greswick Angus was chosen as a demonstration site to inspire other land managers along the Williams River to carry out better sustainable farming. A series of field days, each with a slightly different focus, was started in 2006 and more are planned for 2007. We hope that these events will also inspire others to think about accommodating the native flora and fauna within their rural endeavours.

Tom Clarke

SHOREBIRDS COMPLETE MARATHON TRANS-PACIFIC FLIGHTS

Search launched for missing trans-Pacific godwits and curlews

from Bob Gill (Asia-Pacific Shorebird Network)

In 2006 between early August and late September the Network followed 5 Bar-tailed Godwits and 9 Bristle-thighed Curlews as they flew southwards from their Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta staging grounds. The birds were fitted with satellite transmitters.

All the Curlews were tracked to French Polynesia and the southern line Islands.

The Bar-tailed Godwits were also followed across the Pacific along almost their entire flight however battery failure prevented tracking to New Zealand or eastern Australia – their usual destinations.

This sub-species of Bar-tailed Godwits that nest in Alaska must complete the longest known single flight for a land bird – 11,000 kms to Australia and New Zealand.

Anyone with an interest in Bar-tailed Godwits can provide invaluable help by observing one or more of the marked godwits whose radios stopped prematurely. Each bird carries a black flag inscribed with a two-digit alphanumeric code and an antenna should be clearly visible extending from the birds lower back or from under its tail. Observing one of the birds in question will demonstrate that it did indeed complete its migration.

**Information should be sent to
Robert gill@usgs.gov**

He promises you will be profusely acknowledged in their writings and become an honorary member of the Alaska Shorebird Group and receive a handsome hat and patch.

Further study is happening in early 2007 to document the Northward migration.

This report has been edited. Fuller reporting will be in the Australian Wader Study Group newsletter *The Tattler* - well worth a read and available on the net.

THE WETLAND CENTRE PROGRAM

REGULAR EVENTS

Breakfast with the Birds

A nice easy stroll around the Wetlands observing flora and fauna with commentary from an experienced guide, Return to Café Jacana for a delicious continental breakfast

March 11. 7am

Cost \$20 adults. \$10 children

Spotlight Prowl

Join our experienced guide on this easy paced walk.

February 17, March 17.

Check starting times when you book

\$10 adults, \$5 children. \$25 /family

Canoeing on the A-maze-ing Iron-bark Trail.

Paddle and explore with our experienced guide. Stop off at our coastal rainforest and then return to Café Jacana for a delicious lunch.

9.30am on Sunday March 4.

\$25 Adults, \$12.50, Children,\$70 Family

Regular Events must be booked in advance.

Enquire about fees when you ring

02 4951 6466

New Year Resolution?

Why not join the Hunter Wetlands Centre!

Members get unlimited visits to the Centre for the year, publications, discounts, a vote at the AGM - plus the warm inner glow of supporting an excellent cause.

Annual Membership Fees

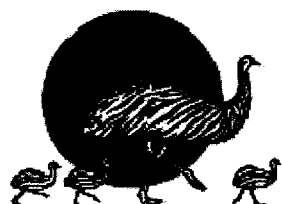
Concession \$16.50

Individual \$33

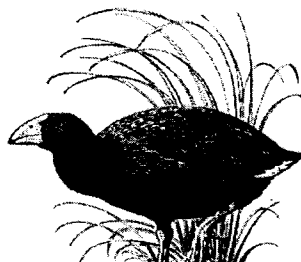
Family \$55

Fourth Biennial

AUSTRALASIAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONFERENCE



Birds Australia



Ornithological Society of New Zealand

Call for Papers and Expressions of Interest

The Fourth Biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference will be held in Perth, Western Australia on 3rd to 5th of December 2007. This conference provides a regular forum for the exchange of information and ideas between avian researchers and conservationists throughout the Australasian region. The venue will be the University of Western Australia, and the Western Australian group of Birds Australia (RAOU) will host the conference.

Post-conference field excursions will be available.

An Invitation

You are invited to express your interest in attending this conference, and presenting a paper by visiting www.birdswa.com.au/aoc2007 or by writing to the conference coordinator:

S. Mather

Birds Australia Western Australia

167 Perry Lakes Drive

Floreat, WA 6014 Australia

Email: aoc2007@birdswa.com.au

Telephone: +61 (08) 93896416

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT DEC 2006

Nov 23	Glossy Ibis	70	Hexham Swamp	M.Newman
	Black-winged Stilt	350	"	"
	Whiskered Tern	120	"	"
	White-necked Heron	30+	"	"
Nov 13	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	1 on	Newcastle University	M.Kearns
Nov 18	European Goldfinch	6	Tomago/Fullerton Cove	"
	Golden-headed Cisticola	1f cf + fs	"	"
Nov 20	Figbird	2nests+2y	Warabrook	"
Nov 21	Little Corella	~100	"	"
	European Goldfinch	7	Maitland	"
	Zebra Finch	6	Bolwarra	"
	Red-kneed Dotterel	2	"	"
	Rufous Songlark	5[1cf]	Flat Rd. Bolwarra	"
	Spotted Harrier [1 st year bird]	1	East Maitland	"
	Red-necked Avocet	~100	Thornton/Beresfield [rail line]	"
Nov 24	Common Blackbird	Pr+2juv	Merriwa	Kearns/Brosie/Livanos
	Little Eagle	1	Nr.Cassilis	"
Dec 2	White-throated Needletail	~40	Jesmond	M.Kearns
	Tree Martin	~40	"	"
	Fork-tailed Swift	1	"	"
Dec 6	Musk Duck	4	Grahamstown Dam	"
	Great Crested Grebe	4	"	"
Dec 11	Singing Bushlark	2	Bolwarra	H.Tarrant
	Brown Songlark	1	"	"
Dec 10	Brown Songlark	B	Largs,Phoenix Park,Woodville	"
	Singing Bushlark	3	Largs, Woodville	"
	Rufous Songlark	1 ffy	Largs	"
	Banded Lapwing	4	Phoenix Park	"
	Richard's Pipit	5	Wallalong	"
Nov 25	White-browed Woodswallow	Pr	Wallalong	"
	Black Kite	1imm	Burreen	"
	Painted Honeyeater	2+	Medhurst Bridge	"
Dec 8	White-browed Woodswallow	A	12k. from Jerrys Plains	"
	Hooded Robin	Pr	"	"
	Painted Honeyeater		10k. from Jerrys Plains	"
	White-browed Babbler	5	12k. from Jerrys Plains	"
	Singing Bushlark	2+	Burreen	"
	Brown Songlark	1	"	"
Dec 3&10	Pink-eared Duck	2	Walka Water Works	"
Nov 26	Little Tern	2	Stockton Sandspit	T.Clarke
Nov 29	Rufous Fantail	1	Coal Point	"
Dec 1	Rufous Fantail	1	Jesmond Park	"
Nov 13	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	2	Flaggy Creek [Charlestown]	"
	Rufous Fantail	2	"	"
Nov 22	White-throated Needletail	~50	Fingal Head	"
Nov 20	Osprey	1	Toule St. Bridge area	N.Fraser
Dec 10	Red Wattlebird	2 fdy	Shoal Bay	"
Dec 13	Freckled Duck	3	Bolwarra	L.Mee
	Pink-eared Duck	3	Walka Water Works	"
	Blue-billed Duck	1	"	"
	Baillons Crake	2	"	"
Dec 13	Latham's Snipe	3	HWCA	P.Lightfoot
	Buff-banded Rail	2	"	"
Dec 3	Square-tailed Kite	1	Cooranbong	A.Richardson
Dec 1	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	4	Wallsend [Minmi Rd]	R.Russell
Dec 6	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin	~20	Teralba [garden]	C.Mann
	Striated Heron	1	Cockle Creek	"
Dec 12	White-backed Swallow	2	Wingen	G.Newling
Nov 29	Red-capped Robin	1	Wingen [garden]	"

CORRECTION. Eastern Grass Owl Sighting by Penny Drake-Brockman (18/9/06) WITHDRAWN

HBOC COMING EVENTS - DETAILS

DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME	CONTACT
Saturday 17 February	Hunter Wader Survey	9.00am Various locations as directed	Chris Herbert 49593663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday 18 February	Port Stephens Wader Survey	7.00am Nelson Bay. Then to various locations around Port Stephens as directed	Alan Stuart 4952 8569 almarosa@bigpond.com You must ring or email Alan to book a place
Sunday 25 February	Field Outing "Amosville" on Wollombi to Broke Rd	8.00am Wollombi Pub	Sue Hamonet 49581023
Sunday March 4	Clean Up Australia Day Stockton Sandspit	9.00am to 1.00pm Sandspit Car Park.	Robert McDonald 4967 4161
Tuesday 6 March	Midweek Outing Stockton & Fullerton Cove	7.30am Stockton Sandspit Car Park	Anthony Gooden 4946 9110
Wednesday 7 March	HBOC Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm Garden Suburb School	All Members Welcome
Sunday 11 March	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon Sandspit Car Park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Wednesday 14 March	CLUB MEETING	7.30am. The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Chris Herbert Kimberley Birding Pt 2
Saturday 17 March	Hunter Wader Survey	8.00am Various locations As Directed	Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Saturday/Sunday 17/18 March	BIGNET Meeting Far South Coast	To be finalised	Rowley Smith 4964 1389
Saturday 24 March	Atlassing Wambo Colliery Bulga	7.00am Bulga Shop	Please ring to confirm Nick Livanos 4954 5739 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Sunday 25 March	Field Outing to Ash Island & Stockton Sandspit	7.30am Ash Island Car Park	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Tuesday 3 April	Mid-Week Outing Werakata NP	8.00am Bailey Park Abermain (War Memorial)	Robert Stewart 4963 2029
Wednesday 4 April	HBOC Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm	All Members Welcome
EASTER Friday 6/4/07 to Monday 9/4/07	Easter Camp Pilliga State Forest	Rocky Creek Bore (or Borah TSR if too dry out west)	Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Wednesday 11 April	CLUB MEETING	7.30pm Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Robert McDonald Great South Trek
Sunday 15 April	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon Sandspit Car Park	Tom Clarke 4951 3872

HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB INC. 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

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. This year we celebrated the Club's 30th birthday. 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 2006.

STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITAT

Bird Sightings and Highlights

Each Club night members have an opportunity to share their special bird sightings – from records of the first arrivals of migratory species to sightings of unusual or unexpected species, to records of more common species. All these observations are collated by Alan Stuart for the Annual Hunter Region Bird Report, along with sightings recorded during Club outings and surveys. Additional sightings may be sent to Alan by email. The Annual Bird Report 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 2006 there were many highlights, some of which are 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, so this is a taste of the possible highlights for 2006.

Table 1 – Birding Highlights for 2006

Species	Place	Month
Swamp Harrier *	Kooragang Island	November
Plumed Whistling Duck (200+)	Near Gloucester	
Blue-billed Duck	Warka Waterworks, Maitland	Several months
Freckled Duck (9 birds)	Ellalong Lagoon	May
Australian Shelduck (pair)	Ash Island	December
Radjah Shelduck (pair)	Mungo Brush, Myall Lakes	All year until August
Black Petrel (1)	At sea off Newcastle	March
Streaked Shearwater (1)	At sea off Newcastle	March
Little Bittern	Bolwarra	November
Red-backed Button-quail	Deep Pond, Kooragang Island	February
Red Knot (1669 birds)	Ash Island	October
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Stockton Sandspit	March
Cockatiel (4)	Warrah (near Willow Tree)	November
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove	Harrington	February and July
Grass Owl (3)	Ash Island	February to April, also December
Regent Honeyeater	Coolah Tops; and White Box Camp, Goulburn River National Park	September
Painted Honeyeater	Bulga	October
Masked Woodswallow*	Kurri	October
Yellow Wagtail (6)	Ash Island	February to March
Rufous and Brown Songlarks	Influx to Lower Hunter	September to December

Note: * First confirmed breeding records for the Hunter Region

Four new species will be added to the Hunter Region bird list if they are confirmed by the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC). These are: Inland Thornbill, White-bellied Storm-Petrel, Yellow-bellied Sunbird, and

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

Arctic Tern. NSW ORAC (Ornithological Rarities Appraisal Committee) has accepted the Sunbird as only the 4th NSW record (and 2 of the previous 3 records were old Hunter Region records).

Bird Surveys

Bird surveys are an important contribution to knowledge about Australian birds. During 2006, Club members participated in the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot 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 held on 20/21 May and 5/6 August 2006. Singleton Army Base was included in the May survey as Regent Honeyeaters had been recorded there a few years ago, but none were found during this survey. Although none were recorded in the Hunter during May, 25 Regent Honeyeaters were counted in the Capertee Valley and 27 at Joorilands in the Burragorang Valley during May. In September, after the official survey dates, one **Regent Honeyeater** was sighted at White Box camp in the Goulburn River National Park and another at Coolah Tops. Unlike the previous year, there was no major flowering of Spotted Gum to attract the Swift Parrots.

Painted Snipe are rarely recorded in the Hunter Region, possibly due to their excellent camouflage and their tendency to 'freeze' for about 15 minutes when disturbed. Although there were two official survey days during 2006, no Painted Snipe were recorded at these times. However, several were located on a swamp near Leneghans Drive in October, causing much excitement. At least one bird was still present on 17 December when the annual Latham's Snipe count was conducted.

The **Annual Latham's Snipe Count on 17 December 2006** was well attended this year, with 10 members participating in the count at Pambalong Nature Reserve. Surveyors included: Tom Clarke, Liz Crawford, Chris Herbert, Diane Johnson, Michael Kearns, Ann Lindsey, Robert McDonald, Mike Newman, Alan Stuart, and Michael Todd. Tom Clarke and Robert McDonald surveyed Newcastle Wetlands Reserve and Swamps off Leneghans Drive, while Lorna Mee surveyed Irrawang Swamp on the same day. Surveys commenced in 1997 and results of annual surveys are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2 – Results of Latham's Snipe Surveys

Date	Pambalong Nature Reserve	Leneghans Flat	Newcastle Wetlands Reserve	Market Swamp	Irrawang Swamp
20 Dec 1997	475	NS	NS	NS	NS
19 Dec 1998	230	NS	NS	NS	NS
18 Dec 1999	115	NS	NS	NS	NS
10 Dec 2000	66	NS	NS	NS	NS
8 Dec 2001	35	NS	NS	NS	NS
7 Dec 2002	7	NS	NS	NS	NS
7 Dec 2003	35	NS	NS	NS	NS
5 Dec 2004	36	NS	22	0	35
5 Dec 2005	66	NS	6	NS	12
17 Dec 2006	97	30	3	0	20

NS – Not Surveyed

The range in numbers of snipe counted at Pambalong Nature Reserve over the past 10 years reflects the changing conditions at this wetland, depending on rainfall, run-off and evaporation rates.

The seventh year of regular monthly **wader counts in the Hunter Estuary** continued during 2006, with five teams surveying simultaneously: one at Ash Island, one at Kooragang Dykes and the Big Pond, one covering a variety of sites between Stockton Sandspit and Fullerton Cove, one counting Deep Pond on Kooragang Island and one counting at Stony Point and Newcastle rock platforms. Big Pond, which has dried up and is no longer used by waders, and Deep Pond, which is a significant permanent wetland, are both located on

land zoned for industrial use. 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. RLMC has granted access to inducted surveyors to monitor Deep Pond. During 2006 the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project acquired a boat, thanks to the generosity of the Price Waterhouse Coopers Foundation. KWRP have generously provided the boat for our monthly surveys of Kooragang Dykes, increasing our comfort enormously!

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, Grant Brosie, Neil Fraser, Paddy Lightfoot, Sue Tiley, Michael Kearns, Maggie Hristov, Craig Arms, Di Johnson, Sue Rostas, Rob Henderson, Peggy Svoboda, Martin Heffron, Rachael Russell, Judi Thomas, Joan Wylie and Tom Wylie.

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. This database has been extremely important in providing hard evidence of the importance of the Hunter Estuary for migratory shorebirds and other waterfowl. The Conservation Committee has used the data on numerous occasions to justify objections to proposed development that would adversely affect the birds' habitat.

HBOC's report on bird use of the **Newcastle rock platforms**, compiled for Newcastle City Council by Chris Herbert, was finalised early in the year. This study highlighted the importance of the rock platforms for Sooty Oystercatchers as well as other shorebirds. Judi Thomas has continued daily surveys of shorebirds on the rock platforms, coinciding with monthly wader surveys whenever possible, to build up our database on bird use of these areas. This is providing interesting data on Sooty Oystercatchers, Ruddy Turnstones, terns and gulls.

Bi-monthly surveys at '**Greswick Angus**', a private property on the Williams River at East Seaham, commenced in September 2004 at the request of Hunter Water, as part of the monitoring of a four-year project in land management. The surveys aim to help monitor the results of on-farm riparian restoration on this Williams River Best Management Practice Demonstration Site. Tom Clarke, Anthony Gooden, Neville McNaughton, Leone and John Storm and Lyn Rayward are conducting these surveys, with enthusiastic support from the property owners, John and Janelle Spearpoint and their sons, Hayden and James. Recently, John Spearpoint published a book entitled "Striking the Balance", which chronicles the family's quest for a sustainable future in agriculture, and includes a section on birds as an indicator of ecosystem health:

"When we planned our revegetation activities, our focus was on erosion control. We didn't really consider any direct benefits to native plants and animals and the ecosystem services that they provide. Now that we are aware of their benefits, our plan is to maintain and improve bird habitat. A diversity of native trees and shrubs will encourage them to stay".

It is very gratifying for HBOC members to be involved in this project and to see the family develop their bird watching skills and awareness. Results are sent to the Birds Australia Atlas Project and are recorded by HBOC for ongoing assessment, with a detailed report to be written at the end of the project. Fourteen surveys conducted since September 2004 have recorded 122 species, with evidence of breeding activity for 29 species. A report on the surveys to date is provided in **Appendix 1**.

On 26 February 2006, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) organized a third comprehensive survey of **waterbirds in Port Stephens** with assistance from 12 members of HBOC (A. Stuart, G. Little, P. Brockman, B. Speechley, A. Lindsey, S. Hamonet, N. Livanos, L. Livanos, P. Hansbro, N. Fraser, N. McNaughton, T. Lindsey) and two kayakists. The first survey in February 2004 divided the estuary into six areas that were covered by bird observers in six different boats. During the second survey in March 2005, a boat breakdown and adverse weather conditions meant that one area was omitted from the survey and some areas were not fully surveyed. The February 2006 survey was executed successfully with all six

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

areas being surveyed and close approaches to Corrie Island made possible using kayaks. The February 2006 survey found a total of 3089 waterbirds including 1403 migratory shorebirds, whereas the previous February 2004 survey found a total of 4470 waterbirds including nearly 1900 migratory shorebirds (see **Table 3**).

Table 3 – Shorebirds Recorded on Annual Port Stephens Waterbird Surveys

Species	8/02/04	12/03/05*	26/02/06
Black-tailed Godwit	51	0	0
Bar-tailed Godwit	888	268	515
Whimbrel	218	248	424
Eastern Curlew	649	80	303
Common Greenshank	0	8	15
Terek Sandpiper	6	0	4
Common Sandpiper	1	0	1
Grey-tailed Tattler	44	9	32
Ruddy Turnstone	8	20	9
Red-necked Stint	20	2	6
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	0	0	40
Beach Stone-curlew	0	0	1
Pied Oystercatcher	112	30	77
Sooty Oystercatcher	18	5	9
Pacific Golden Plover	0	0	38
Grey Plover	0	0	1
Red-capped Plover	0	0	26
Lesser Sand Plover	5	4	15
Masked Lapwing	33	15	11
TOTAL	2,053	689	1527

Note: * Incomplete survey

As with previous surveys, Alan Stuart compiled the results. 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. Results of these surveys are included in the Annual Bird Report.

Monthly surveys of the **Tank Paddock**, an area owned by Coal and Allied on the margin of Hexham Swamp, were terminated in August 2005 and not restarted until August 2006. Results of the surveys were sent to Newcastle City Council in 2005, and have contributed to the decision not to allow rezoning of this land for residential subdivision. The Tank Paddock Surveyors, Liz Huxtable, Jenny Powers, Jenny Helman, Nick Livanos, Chris and Dave Eastham and Sue Tiley are sometimes joined by Di Johnson, Kathleen Straw (NPWS), Grant Brosie, Robert MacDonald and Rachael Russell. This team now conducts three-monthly surveys of the Tank Paddock, Awabakal Nature Reserve and Blue Gum Hills Regional Park /Pambalong Nature Reserve / Lenaghans Flat.

The Newcastle Speleological Society plans to publish a small booklet on the natural attributes of **Timor Caves** in 2007 and 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. Several additional surveys were carried out in different seasons during 2006, recording a total of 108 bird species in the Timor Caves area. Musk Lorikeets were a feature of the area, with large numbers feeding noisily on flowering eucalypts, especially in summer.

The ongoing **Birds Australia Atlas Project** follows publication of *The New Atlas of Australian Birds* in 2003, which recorded 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

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

ecosystem health. Many HBOC members are also members of Birds Australia and the Club works in harmony with Birds Australia on many issues. During 2006, seven special atlassing days were organized by Nick Livanos, Grant Brosie and Ann Lindsey, however two of these were cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. 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 4**.

Atlassing Participants: Grant Brosie, Liz Crawford, Chris Herbert, Michael Kearns, Ann Lindsey, Ken Lindsey, Terry Lindsey, Nick Livanos, Robert McDonald, Lorna Mee, Mike Newman, Alan Stuart.

Table 4 – Atlassing Sites and Highlights during 2006

Date	Location	Highlights
12 February	Timor Caves	Musk Lorikeets, Little Lorikeets, Diamond Firetails, Speckled Warblers.
18 March	Hexham Swamp	6 raptor species; Hobby hunting Brown Quail, 650 Straw-necked Ibis, Buff-banded Rail, Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, White-fronted Chat
6 May	Cessnock area	Tawny Frogmouths; White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike; many Honeyeaters (including Brown-headed and Yellow-tufted) at waterhole; Speckled Warbler.
15 July	Wambo Colliery, Bulga	Cancelled due to a security problem and adverse weather
5 August	Dungog area	Cancelled due to adverse weather conditions.
24 September	Gloucester Tops	Rufous Scrub-bird (calling, not seen), Crescent Honeyeater, Red-browed Treecreeper, Olive Whistler
11 November	Mungo Brush	Radjah Shelduck; 100s of White-throated Needletails, nesting Figbirds & Tawny Frogmouth; Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove (heard)

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 2006:

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

HBOC is widely regarded as a source of expertise on birds in the Hunter Region. This is largely due to the accumulation of survey data over many years by members, and the faithful recording and compilation of this

data in a form that is readily accessible. The Conservation Committee regularly relies on this data to justify our position on various proposed developments. The Committee is convened by Ann Lindsey and consists of Neil Fraser, Mike Newman, Max Maddock, Mick Todd, Liz Crawford, Chris Herbert and Jenny Powers. A few of the issues covered during 2006 are discussed here – more information is summarized in **Appendix 2**.

During 2006, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for **Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group's proposed coal loader** was placed on public exhibition. This will be the third coal loader for Newcastle and will require deepening of the Hunter River's South Arm to provide additional wharf space for loading ships. The coal stockpiles will be located on the once-important wader habitat of Big Pond while the rail line to deliver the coal will traverse wetland areas beside Deep Pond and a future rail spur is planned to cross Deep Pond. HBOC strongly objected to the proposed locations of rail lines across Deep Pond, which is a significant habitat for hundreds of waterfowl as well as an important feeding area for migratory shorebirds such as Curlew Sandpipers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Marsh Sandpipers. HBOC made a submission to the Independent Expert Panel assessing the project, calling for development of compensatory habitat on Ash Island and revision of the proposed rail line across Deep Pond.

Upgrading of the **railway line at Sandgate** to facilitate passage of coal trains to the port has led to filling in part of Market Swamp, which used to provide prime habitat for Latham's Snipe when water levels were allowed to fluctuate naturally. Representations by HBOC have resulted in a financial commitment from Australian Rail Track Corporation to Newcastle City Council to pay for an EIS on the effects of installing a leaky weir to reinstate suitable water levels for Latham's Snipe in Market Swamp.

HBOC supported community opposition to the proposed **Awaba Open Cut coal mine**, which threatened to affect the habitat of three owl species. Fortunately, Centennial Coal has withdrawn the proposal. However, the land is yet to be included in the region's conservation reserves.

A large area of continuous forest in the central part of the Hunter Valley will be destroyed if the **Anvil Hill Open Cut Proposal** goes ahead. Although the Environmental Assessment for this project includes large conservation offsets to protect biodiversity, there are no guarantees that these areas will be sufficient or successful in protecting local biodiversity. HBOC has requested that the project be declared a "controlled action" under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, so that the potential impacts on threatened species are assessed in a more rigorous manner.

Residential subdivision also threatens bird habitat – fortunately, **Ellalong Lagoon** south of Cessnock has been saved from development, thanks to a concerted community campaign and the presence of threatened species.

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 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. The international mining company Rio Tinto has provided funding for a Project Coordinator, as part of its commitment to the environment. HBOC submitted 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.

Habitat Restoration

Efforts to create shallow ponds on Ash Island, to **offset the loss of Big Pond** on Kooragang Island, were frustrated by the discovery of Grass Owls living in the proposed pond site. The Department of Environment and Conservation has decided to redirect the funds to the Tomago Wetlands project, on the northern side of the Hunter River North Arm. This project aims to re-introduce tidal waters to an area that was drained in the 1970s following establishment of a ring dyke around Fullerton Cove. Hopefully it will result in habitat suitable for shorebirds. However, HBOC is dismayed that

specific compensatory shallow water foraging habitat suitable for smaller shorebirds has not been created to replace the loss of Big Pond.

Throughout the year, Tom Clarke continued to lead an active team of weeders at **Stockton Sandspit**, maintaining this iconic birdwatching spot for the birds. Weeders include HBOC members Robert McDonald, Anthony Gooden, Paddy Lightfoot, Lyn and Paul Lambert, Judy Thomas, Win Warner, Ray McLean, Pat Poutney and Rachael Russell; and non-members Bill Murphy and Charles Harris. In between working, they delight in watching fascinating bird behaviour at the Sandspit. This regular maintenance has seen the saltmarsh regenerating beautifully and lots of breeding activity from Red-capped Plovers and Richards Pipits. In fact, rainy days are the best days to volunteer at the Sandspit – lots of fascinating bird watching happens from the comfort of the bird hide! **Appendix 3** provides a comprehensive report on rehabilitation at Stockton Sandspit.

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, have been used to help match the Envirofund dollars granted to HBOC and KWRP 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 2006 a staggering 2,247 volunteer hours have been recorded since 2003. Calculating the dollar value at bush regenerator rates over the last four years equals \$35,882.

The 2006 effort of 562.5 hours has come from 46 workdays and represents almost a weekly presence at Stockton Sandspit. Since 2003, 171 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 a \$30,000 **Envirofund Grant** gained by HBOC from the Natural Heritage Trust. KWRP has approval from Fisheries NSW for mangrove removal in the vicinity of Wader, Swan and Milham Ponds on Ash Island, to enhance the area for shorebirds. 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 by contractors was followed up during 2006 by teams of volunteers removing mangrove seedlings. Robert McDonald and Lyn Lambert were particularly diligent in coordinating and encouraging volunteers in the art of mangrove removal. Envirofund grants require work in-kind and HBOC was able to document \$43,810 worth of in-kind work which more than matched the \$30,000 Envirofund Grant.

At Lemon Tree Passage, a pair of **Bush Stone-curlews** again ignored residential development and nested beside their favourite park. This year they were again protected from dogs and foxes by a substantial fence erected by NPWS and Port Stephens Council. One young was raised to fledgling stage.

2006 Twitchathon

This year six teams from HBOC participated in the Twitchathon, held on the last weekend in October: Dodgy Drongos, Hunter Home Brewers and Hunter Thickheads in the main race; Lesticum Phoradac, Crested Shrike Twits and The Old Birds in the champagne race. The Hunter Home Brewers came first with an incredible 233 species, smashing the previous record of 229 species, set last year by the Whacked-out Woodswallows from Dubbo, who came in second this year with 227 species. The Dodgy Drongos came third with 214 species while the Hunter Thickheads came fourth with 201 species, all found within the Hunter Valley. The competition has moved to a new level of planning, strategy and expertise! HBOC teams scooped the first three places in the Champagne Race: Lesticum Phoradac recorded 162 species; Crested Shrike Twits came second with 159 species and The Old Birds came third with 145 species. Over \$15,000 was raised across the State to boost the research funds for the Australian Bird Study Association. A mighty effort!

ENCOURAGE BIRD OBSERVING

Program

As usual, HBOC ran a large program of activities throughout the year to encourage bird observing – a total of 54 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
- 5 Birds Australia Atlas survey days
- 6 special surveys (2 for Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot, 4 for Timor Caves habitat)
- 4 camps on weekends/long weekends
- 1 mid-week camp
- a special Grass Owl twitch
- a Mini-Twitch

In addition, regular volunteer days for habitat restoration occurred at Stockton Sandspit and at Ash Island.

The May field outing celebrated our 30th anniversary with a cruise on the Lady Joy, to view the shorebirds and raptors of the Hunter Estuary. We continued celebrating with lunch on the foreshore, presenting past presidents and founding members with collections of the Club's Birding Routes for Newcastle and Lake Macquarie.

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 2006 at The Hunter Wetlands Centre, where the average attendance was 55, eight more than last year's average. Guest speakers covered a wide range of topics:

Kimberley Birding, Avian Flu, Newcastle Urban Forests, Birds of New Zealand, Managing Biodiversity in State Forests, Birds of Chile, Hexham Swamp Rehabilitation, Godwits in the Hunter Estuary, Antarctica, Bees as Pollinators and Birds of Christmas Island.

Many members have embraced the digital age and are revelling in the freedom of PowerPoint and the remarkable resources available from the internet. Digital cameras are giving wonderful results too and our thanks go to all the presenters for their excellent efforts.

There were several innovative contributions for the "Bird of the Evening" segment, including a Bird Trivia Quiz, an exposé of Camping Habits, a discussion of Hunter Region boundaries and an update on Avian Flu from our local researcher. Feature birds were the vagrant at Burren Junction - a Grey-headed Lapwing - and Budgerigars. 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. Our thanks go to all the people who made such generous donations. The presentations covered Broome Bird Observatory, Tasmania, Cairns, and a wildlife photographer's favourite shots – making a very entertaining evening.

During the year, two more members joined the informal "600 Club" of keen list-makers, by recording their 600th Australian species. Their achievements were duly acknowledged with pomp and ceremony!

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), and maintenance of the car park gardens, as well as bird watching to see which species were making use of the rehabilitated habitat. Last year's lowering of the weir has improved the extent and frequency of tidal inundation of the Sandspit and saltmarsh vegetation is becoming established over a wider area. This is a great outcome, providing excellent roosting habitat for shorebirds such as Eastern Curlews and breeding habitat for Red-capped Plovers and Richard's Pipits.

Colourful signs about migratory waders have been installed at Kooragang Dykes boat ramp and Stockton boat ramp. A third sign will be installed at the revamped Carrington boat ramp during 2007. Two signs highlighting the birds in Toronto Wetland, designed by Chris Herbert, have been installed by Toronto Rotary and Toronto Sunrise Rotary 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, 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 and for *Morisset Community Festival*. Alan Stuart, Rowley Smith, Sue Hamonet, Kay Imrie, Paddy and Caryl Lightfoot, Di Johnson, Robert McDonald, Val and Don Moon, and Joan Natano all participated in various displays and our thanks go to all of them.

Talks to various community groups, including Coastcare Summer Festival, the Central Coast Field Ornithologists Club, Wollombi Landcare, Toronto Women's Probus Club and KWRP Volunteers were given by Chris Herbert, with some welcome remuneration for the Club. Tom Clarke addressed the St Lukes Men's Dinner Club. Pam Durie organised a successful birding course for the University of the Third Age (U3A), assisted by Chris Herbert, Judy Westphal and Sue Hamonet.

Lake Macquarie City Council funded reprinting of **Eastlakes and Westlakes Birding Routes**. Five thousand copies of each brochure were printed and distributed to LMCC, KWRP, The Hunter Wetlands Centre and Club members. The Club retains a supply of brochures for future distribution.

During 2006, Anthony Gooden and Di Johnson represented HBOC on the **Eraring Community Forum**. Eraring Power Station proposes to expand their fly ash dam, which provides habitat for Black-winged Stilts and Red-necked Stints. Unfortunately, this expansion will require removal of bushland, some of which contains hollow-bearing trees. Environmental assessment of their proposal continues.

Communication with the community was facilitated by our webmaster Dick Jenkin, who maintained our **website** with its new address: www.hboc.org.au. Upgrading of the website has commenced and we anticipate a much more user-friendly site will be available in 2007. Peter Phillips made sure that all of our meetings were well advertised in local press and radio and Marion Walker continued to be our telephone contact point. Our new Publicity Officer, Lyn Lambert facilitated contact with newspaper journalists, which resulted in several birding articles being published in the Newcastle Herald and locally distributed newspapers. Topics ranged from the importance of the Hunter as a drought refuge to the highest count of Red Knots seen on Ash Island for many years. Several radio interviews were also conducted, with Alan Stuart and Sue Hamonet fielding questions from interested interviewers, about the Port Stephens wader survey.

GENERAL CLUB OPERATION

Membership

The Club had 252 members in December 2006, an increase of 18 over the previous year's total. Membership consisted of 82 single members, 168 family members and 2 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 \$1703 from Lake Macquarie City Council for updating and reprinting the Eastlakes and Westlakes birding brochures, and a grant of \$1100 from Newcastle City Council for additional shorebird studies on the rock platforms.

Sales of HBOC records raised \$525 and interest on HBOC accounts was \$1028.24. Our December Club Night raffle raised \$242 and our mid-year raffle raised \$611 to assist with the cost of publishing our occasional journal, *The Whistler*. The first issue is expected in 2007.

HBOC purchased a slide scanner to digitize the Club's extensive slide collection, making it more accessible for present-day usage. John Cockerell is responsible for carrying out this initiative. Already it has paid off, with several Club images being used in a recent newspaper article.

Our affiliation with the Bird Observers Club of Australia has allowed us to advertise Club activities to a wider audience and to benefit from insurance cover arranged through BOCA. This represents a considerable financial saving to the Club.

Despite projected increases in our operating expenditure for 2007, the Committee decided to keep membership fees at the 2006 level for 2007.

Library

Grant Brosie again took responsibility for the Library during 2006, and was ably assisted by Robert MacDonald. The Library currently contains 445 books. New acquisitions during 2006 included: *Seabird Atlas of Southeastern Australian Waters*, *Why Birds Sing*, *Birding Babylon*, and the final volume of *The Handbook of Australian and New Zealand Birds* (HANZAB). It is pleasing to report that more books were borrowed in 2006 compared to the previous year.

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!

Club T-shirts, designed and screen-printed by Alison Green, to celebrate our 30th Anniversary Year, feature our Club emblem, the Golden Whistler. They have become a popular addition to members' wardrobes and are good way to advertise the Club. Printed T-shirts or polo shirts can be ordered for \$39 each or you can supply your own T-shirt for printing at a cost of \$22. Club badges were designed by Chris Herbert and produced during the year. They are available for \$10 at any Club Night. Along with colourful car stickers for only \$2, we have plenty of advertising material!

The Management Committee worked very 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, Di Johnson,

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

our Activities Officer, and Lyn Lambert our Publicity Officer, who were regular attendees at the Committee meetings. Management Committee meetings are open to anyone from the Club to attend and participate.

Four special people help ensure Club Nights run smoothly: Pam Durie welcomes attendees at our meetings, Lesley Marshall assists our Treasurer, Chris Herbert organizes the computer projector and facilitates PowerPoint presentations and Judy Westphal makes sure we all have a cup of tea and a biscuit at the end of the evening. 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. In a club with such diverse activities and interests, there is a role for everyone. Share the joy and become involved in the running of the club – your help would be greatly appreciated! And to all those enthusiastic people who contributed to maintaining our twin objectives during 2006 - Thank You.

Liz Crawford, HBOC President 2006

The Annual Report for 2006 was presented by the President at the Annual General Meeting on 14 February 2007. A copy of the report and appendices will be kept in the library for future reference.