



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER

Issue 3/07

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(affiliated with Bird Observers Club of Australia)

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Committee

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Lorna Mee

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:

- Lois Wooding of Salamander Bay
- Joan Fried of Belmont North &
- Valerie Owen

NEWSLETTER DEADLINES FOR 2007

Edition

Copy Deadline

August/September

July 29th

October/November

September 30

December2007/January08

December 2

Membership Fees for 2007 are now overdue.

Club Night Report: May 2007

The May Club Night was as usual entertaining and informative. It made me regret my irregular attendance at Club Nights nowadays.

The main speaker was member Jim Smart who spoke on the Birds of Walka Waterworks. Jim, Lorna Mee, Paul Baird and others have been regularly surveying this splendid birdwatching site near Maitland.

As a result Jim was able to make an illustrated presentation to the Trustees of Walka in defence of the area for bird habitat. It seems there are possible moves to develop part of the site for a caravan site plus proposals for more "active" use of the area (e.g. speedboats!) The management structure of the Trust may also be changing with Maitland City Council taking a larger role.

Jim repeated his presentation to the Club Night demonstrating the great value of the site famous for its occasional crakes, rails and bitterns but also known for abundant numbers of grebes (all three species) ducks, swans and bush birds.

His action in approaching the Trustees shows the value of regular long-term birdwatching by local informed people. How swiftly our innocent pursuit turns into rearguard actions! At the very least the Trustees and proponents of development now realize that there is a well-informed and rational group of people monitoring proposals at Walka Waterworks.

On the same program, Paddy Lightfoot described his adventures on Artemis Station, Cape York successfully finding the Golden Shouldered Parrot. As we have come to expect from Paddy he also presented well-researched information about the species in a relaxed yet enthusiastic manner.

NOTICE: NEW ACTIVITY

The HBOC midweek group is holding another camp.

The Camp will be based at Harrington Beach Holiday Park at Harrington from Monday 17th to Wednesday 19th September.

This will provide a great base to explore the varied habitats of the Region and its associated bird species.

Contacts: Don and Val Moon: 4359 1670

All Welcome.

The Grey-crowned Babblers of Gloucester.

By Penny Drake -Brockman

(This article by a HBOC member was first published in Birding NSW Newsletter Issue 220 of April 2007)

Since my article in the December 2005 {Birding NSW} Newsletter, the friends of the Gloucester Babblers have been continuing with surveys and collecting reports of babbler movements. We are also hoping to set up a Masters project with a student to conduct a three year scientific study of the family groups in the Gloucester Basin and Dungog/Clarencetown areas. This will be supervised from the University of New England. One of the aims of the project is to trace local movements of the babbler, breeding success, and confirm if our Gloucester birds intermingle with those of in the Lower Hunter Valley. The only way this can be done is by mist-netting and banding family groups and nestlings and followed up over the years with recoveries or sightings of banded birds.

Last year action was rather slow after August, due to my partner in the project having to leave Gloucester for a job in Cowra with the threatened Species Network and Lachlan River Authority, thus no longer able to help with the survey and then to my having to undergo total reconstruction on my right knee (left was operated on in 2005)

What can I say about our achievements so far? We've had articles in the local paper and the Newcastle Herald. The Gloucester Council put a caveat on domestic cats on a new housing estate near the cemetery babbler family home territory. We made a submission to Council on enlargement of the industrial estate which would have destroyed some valuable babbler habitat, with the result that a natural corridor has been left connecting remnant woodland and new trees planted. In our searches we have located 15 active sites with clusters of nests around Gloucester, four in the Dyers Crossing area, four near Bunyah, six in Dungog area and a string of nest sites down the Branch Lane, Booral. Single nests which appear no longer to be in use, have also been noted but are most likely outliers from the main home territory. When we had rain in our area in 2005/2006, several active nests were found and now fledglings being fed by adults at two sites. A breeding attempt was made by two babblers on the edge of the 7th fairway of Gloucester golf course but this failed.

We have also found very old nests, falling apart and not used for many years, in places where the birds used to be seen. Around these areas, when one looks at the surrounding paddocks, bare with a few tatty old trees, it is not surprising they have gone - there are also very few small birds such as thornbills and wrens. The most productive babbler areas are those on the slopes of cleared valleys, near large gum trees with native shrubs and grasses and fallen timber. However the birds don't totally ignore exotic trees building roosting and breeding nests in pine trees and in summer, in liquid ambers. They also do well close to housing if there are no cats and the garden is large and has unkempt areas with a good mix of native and exotic vegetation.

A SMALL BIRD QUESTION from Ross Carlton

Nine years ago, when my wife and I moved into our present abode, we were pleasantly surprised by the number of birds around, including small birds. However, as time went by we noticed a marked reduction in the numbers of small species. Puzzling over this, we came up with three possible suspects.

In October 2001, a pair of grey butcherbirds moved in and took up residence around the house. We had had butcherbirds before as occasional visitors but now they were there permanently. Although we never observed any aggressive behaviour by them, they are known predators of small birds and had to be considered as suspects.

Around the same time, we noticed an increase in the number of noisy miners. These too had always been present but in lesser numbers. They showed plenty of aggressive behaviour, especially towards the spinebills, so they too became suspects.

We also got a dog. He is certainly a bird-chasing dog, but not small birds. Anything from babbler size up is his meat: magpies, galahs, ducks, eagles, Boeing 737s. We didn't really think he was responsible, but included him too.

So time passed till, in August 2006, we found one of our butcherbirds dead and the other disappeared. There followed what could only be described as an explosion of little birds in our garden. After 5 glorious weeks, the butcherbirds returned; whether a new pair or the survivor of the original pair returning with a new mate I can't say. Since then, the small birds have again declined. Caution is always needed in jumping from a correlation to an assumption of cause and effect, so I went back over my records and produced the following analysis. Each week, I record the species seen or heard that week. The figures represent the percentage of weeks when we were at home in which each species was recorded.

	Prior to 10/01 Some BB	10/01 to 8/06 BB permanent	Sept 2006 BB absent	10/06 to 3/07 BB permanent
Grey butcherbird	19	93	0	100
Blue wren	44	0.5	100	0
Grey fantail	75	7	75	4
Double barred finch	19	2	0	0
Red browed finch	6	0.5	50	0
White throated Gerygone	38	27	50	21
Lewins honeyeater	75	10	75	8
Yellow faced honeyeater	81	8	100	21
Jacky winter	81	49	50	17
Spotted pardalote	25	20	75	13
Silvereye	31	0	50	4
tella	13	1	0	0
Spinebill	75	17	100	63
Yellow thornbill	13	2	0	0
Yellow rumped thornbill	31	1.5	0	0
Willie wagtail	100	45	75	38
Welcome swallow	100	63	80	75
Rufous whistler	25	21	40	4
Average no. of species per week (all sizes)	29	25	33	25

This appears to be fairly damning for the butcherbirds and in fact, the numbers do not tell the whole story. Because I record only species and not numbers of birds, they do not show that in the period when the butcherbirds were absent we had at least a dozen spinebills and 20 or so silvereyes flitting around the garden. A complicating factor is the increasing maturity of the native plants in the garden, which includes 80-odd grevilleas. The butcherbirds' absence coincided with spring when they were flowering well and attracting the honeyeaters. In addition, some now offer shelter for small birds that was not previously available. But this growth has been a gradual thing and can hardly be held to explain the suddenness of the return of the small birds.

Our butcherbirds (Fred and Freda) were personable friends. When we were working in the garden they were forever at our elbow waiting to pick up grubs. But if they really are responsible for the drought of small birds then I'm sorry they have returned. So I will continue to observe and record and make guesses as to what it all means. If the answers to all our questions were obvious, birdwatching wouldn't be half as interesting, would it? But I think we can exonerate the dog. Six years on, he still hasn't conceded that he is never going to catch a bird. He still chases the large birds but he and the small birds just ignore each other. His best success has been with the F18s. They always leave in a hurry when he barks at them.

The Changing Ways of the pale Bolwarra Falcon from Harold Tarrant

In an earlier issue I spoke of the regular evening appearances, along a fairly predictable flight-path, of either one of a pair of pale falcons. While individual sightings sometimes allowed one to consider the possibility that the bird was a hobby or peregrine, overall it seemed to me impossible to explain the whole phenomenon without postulating a single pair of *something* breeding locally, probably within six kilometres, and that pair could not be either Hobbies or Peregrines, let alone Black or Brown Falcons or Nankeen Kestrels. During this period I sighted no certain Peregrines locally, a Black Falcon only once, no Kestrel very close to home, and Hobbies that mostly kept to the other end of the village.

While fairly sure that 2007 would bring another sighting or two, I did not have much confidence that the same pattern would continue. The next sighting was of the smaller male on January 2nd at the usual hour. In rather good light Judith and I were agreed on the very pale underside, which was a good indication bearing in mind that a hobby was easily identified at about the same distance some twenty minutes later that evening. Then there were only tantalising falcon glimpses until the evenings of January 19th and 27th and February 3rd, when the big change was that the bird (now the female) was actively hunting, trying to flush birds around my neighbours' gardens. Again the light was pretty good, and the extra movement gave us good views of mid-grey upper parts. It may conceivably have been the same species that flew fast and high in the opposite direction (E to W) on the evenings of January 14th and February 2nd. The next we saw was of two inelegant birds answering to the general description of immature grey falcons on 17th February, after which adult birds were seen around Bolwarra just twice *in the morning* (8.35, 28th Feb.; 7.25, 5th Mar.). While their behaviour had been changing, other raptors, including the occasional peregrine had been returning.

Curiously enough, my next glimpse of the offending birds was on the one occasion in the last five years that I have visited Awabakal N.R. At last I saw the female bird in bright light at about 4.00 p.m. on 10th March. Even though there had been reports of a pale falcon being seen twice along the coast in mid-

January this still came as a surprise. The coast was the last place I had expected to see it. The colours were compatible only with grey goshawk and grey falcon, the pale underside different from a grey goshawk's in texture and streaked rather than barred. While the wings, in leisurely flight, were not as pointed as I had sometimes seen, they still had the long and tapered appearance that the grey goshawk would be hard pushed to imitate. The underside of the wings also showed rather darker at the edges, while the tail of moderate length was held straight or slightly tapering. For most of the brief observation the head was being obscured by the beat of the wings, and just a hint of yellow flashed from the legs. But not enough, I thought.

So even here there was still one obstacle to calling the bird a grey falcon. I could not record the *bright* yellow legs or cere which outback observers find so striking. That has applied to all my putative sightings of the grey falcon in the Hunter, and I cannot find anybody else who thinks that they have seen the species here *and* were able to confirm such features—even though there are one or two around who are pretty confident about what they saw. In fact on 13th May 2001 I was quite happy that I was looking at a male grey falcon perched high in a eucalypt, but the cere was simply yellow, not bright yellow and I could not make out a yellow eye-ring at all from that far below. Had it been a younger bird? It showed no other sign of immature plumage. Or does climate or diet affect the development of the yellow bare parts? Or again, is there some genetic difference in birds reaching this far east?

Alas, I do not have the credentials to offer any solution. The birds have been pretty unhelpful, masters of disguise perhaps. Falcons answering the same general description have been the source of considerable frustration to me ever since November 2000, but particularly this spring and summer. However, they have also been a huge source of pleasure, and we hardly want half of Sydney invading the Hunter looking for a twitch, do we? I suspect that nobody will now be able to suggest where the bird is to be found until a nesting-site is detected here. Hopefully, if that is ever the case, its location will not be broadcast far and wide. And it really does sound like a long shot, unless perhaps this pair were to try the same place again next spring. And that too sounds like a remote possibility,

given that these sightings have only occurred in the most extreme conditions.

2006-2007: Another Egret Nesting Season has Come and Gone, Leaving Questions and Mixed Messages - from Max Maddocks.

(The original article by Max Maddocks can be found in The Wetlander Volume 23/1 April 2007 (available from The Wetlands Centre) It includes two graphs which have been excluded from this version for reasons of space.)

The 2006-2007 egret nesting season at the Hunter Wetlands Centre and at Seaham Nature Reserve is now over. It is good news that both colonies were functioning again this season. It was the 26th year in succession for The Hunter Wetlands Centre and the 29th year for Seaham since the colonies were first established in 1981 and 1978 respectively. The not so good news is that there no sign yet of reversing the trend of decline since the late 1980's

HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

When I visited the colony on 27 October there were indications that nesting was getting underway. White Ibis nests were present with advanced chicks, 14 on the fallen trees in Middleton's Swamp, indicating that they had started nesting early, and about 50 Cattle Egret nests were already established. A pair of Intermediate Egrets performed courting displays in Middleton's and a number of Great Egrets were displaying in the tall melaleucas along the southern shore. No Little Egrets were present in the colony but one adult in breeding plumage was seen feeding in Brambles Pond.

When I returned on 28 November to do the annual nest count, things were more promising. Fifteen Great Egret pairs were established at nests (11 less than last season) 6 Intermediate (3 less) and 3 Little (one more than 2005-2006). There were 190 Cattle Egret nests, an improvement of 129 over last season. Fifty-five White Ibis nests, most with chicks, as well as a large number of non-nesting Ibis milling around in the colony area gave the overall impression of intense colony activity

The total of 214 egret nests was 116 higher than 2005-2006, the best result for 5 seasons. However the result is nowhere near enough to raise optimism. The overall trend since 1988-89 is still a matter for concern.

About 30 Nankeen Night Heron had been present in the colony area on 27 October, but only 4 on 28 November, all with breeding plumes, but no sign of any nestling was visible. The Herons present something of an enigma. There are always some present each season and juveniles have been seen in the colony area after the end of the nesting seasons. However in the 26 years since the colony was established, no confirmation of actual nesting

has been forthcoming, despite a number of very careful searches.

The Hunter Wetlands Centre colony suffered a major setback in early November when a severe hail storm struck the colony. Site Manager Benjie Williams reported that the large hailstones created havoc and at least 15 egrets had been injured and killed. With the help of Centre staff he was able to retrieve 2 Intermediate and 3 Cattle Egrets alive but badly wounded. Three of the birds were too badly injured and were humanely put down by a vet, a Cattle Egret was sent to the Native Animals Trust Fund for care and the other died within two days. Benjie estimated that there could have been many more casualties.

Thunderstorms have always been a hazard to the colonies over the years, some resulting in fallen nest trees and destruction of nests but I do not recall any hailstorms as severe as this. With the prospect of increasing numbers and more severe storms in future, as a result of global warming, small colonies such as Shortland will be increasingly vulnerable.

ARE THE IBIS A PROBLEM?

The Ibis have now become a permanent feature of the breeding colony. Wilma Barden expressed her anxiety to me that the nesting population of White Ibis might eventually grow to dominant proportions with potential to have a detrimental effect on egret breeding. It will be important to carefully monitor ibis numbers in future seasons to assess their impact.

Both Straw-necked and Sacred Ibis have regularly nested with egrets at other coastal NSW colonies for many years without any obvious negative impact and in the Murray Darling colonies thousands of ibis nest alongside thousands of Intermediate Egret. The White Ibis have generally different nest site preferences to the egrets which tends to avoid competition. The decline in egret nesting at Shortland began long before the ibis expressed and interest and is more likely to be the result of the malaise in wetland environment due to human impact along the migration routes and on their feeding grounds in other Hunter wetlands.

One factor which may cause future rapid increase in White Ibis numbers locally is the lack of balance between the egret and ibis nesting populations is the ibis capacity to scavenge from human waste dumps.

When the Shortland dump was active in the 1980s hundreds fed there daily but they still did not attempt to breed at the colony. In subsequent years Summerhill and Maitland dumps became the favoured ibis restaurants. However increasing failure of the Murray Darling Basin to provide ibis breeding conditions may cause more to stay in the Hunter permanently with significantly

increase in numbers nesting because of the ample food supply. Only time and vigilant monitoring will tell.

Continued from previous page

SEAHAM

Activity at Seaham started in early October, much earlier than in Shortland but growth of the colony was slow. By 19 October, a few nests had been established at the eastern end of Torrence St and nest building had started in the north-eastern corner of the swamp. However the Warren St trees which had been the mainstay of the nesting since 1985 did not have any nests.

By the time I carried out the annual nest survey on 13 November, Warren St was still empty and remained so for the rest of the season but the trees in the plantation area established in 1997 were full of nests. Only 284 nests were located, the lowest number since 1986-1987. This represents a continuation of the declining trend evident since 1996-1997, mirroring, but not as intense as the decline at Shortland.

Neville Foster found two wing-tagged Cattle Egrets in the colony. They had been tagged by Hunter Wetlands Centre's Egret Watch team which used tagging until 2004 to study migration patterns and breeding biology. Four year old Seaham No 409 was tending a nest of two chicks and Seaham No 292, a 6 year old, was also found nesting. Seaham 118, a 9 year old was found dead on a property at Seaham. It had lost its tag but was identified by the band on its leg, which was recovered by the finder Ms A Rea who had notified the Canberra's Bird and Bat Banding Office. This finding was a very important one. Very few birds have been recognized by the band after losing the tag over the years and very few birds as old as 9 years have been identified returning to nest. The cause of death was not known.

THE FUTURE?

Egret species are having to cope with increasing pressures affecting their viability. They have suffered from a continued history of declining nest numbers, paralleled by a steady decline in ecological characteristics of the Shortland and Seaham colony sites and of all the other wetlands in the Lower Hunter on which the egrets depend to support their search for food for the chicks. Loss of wetlands and habitat degradation due to the pressures of urban development, combined with the effects of prolonged natural and artificial droughts, create additional pressures along the migration routes during the autumn-winter non-breeding season. Negative effects arising from global warming have already been identified for many migratory species and may also become another factor that egrets will have to deal with in their battle for survival.

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Wetlands Prize by Paddy Lightfoot

The Swampies are in flower! Over the past twenty years we have planted many Swamp Mahoganies at the Wetlands Centre. This was done for several reasons. These magnificent trees occur on the margins of swamps in the lower Hunter so would have grown in the Shortland region in earlier times, they produce masses of attractive white flowers which are loaded with bird, and Flying Fox, attracting nectar and they are good Koala fodder trees. We hope one day to reintroduce a Koala population.

Many of these trees are now mature enough for good flowering. Honeyeaters are present en masse. Ann Lindsey spotted Musk Lorikeets and Little Friarbirds this past week in the trees behind her house.

I propose to give a prize to the first person to twitch a Swift Parrot or Regent Honeyeater within the Wetlands 45 hectares. This would be a first ever of either bird for the Wetlands. The sighting will require confirmation by another person or complete field notes to be appraised by Ann before the prize is presented.

VIEWING TV IN SYDNEY in JUNE or JULY

Our sister organisation, the Cumberland Bird Observers Club (CBOC) has taken a marvellous initiative. They are presenting a four part TV series on birds and birdwatching (series host and creator Andrew Patrick) throughout the greater Sydney region. Each episode is themed around different types of birds starting with backyard birds and moving on to waterbirds, seabirds and finally bush birds. The series is not a wildlife documentary but is more an instructional guide for beginners and anyone interested in birds. Each episode includes excellent footage of many of Sydney's birds accompanied by information and identification pointers. There are segments about binoculars, telescopes, field guides, birdwatching hints and tips and Sydney hotspots.

Now the bad news! The program is being broadcast on TVS (a free to air station) Channel 31 and can be viewed only in most parts of Greater Sydney. It is

shown thrice— once in the evening, once in the morning and once in the afternoon.

Worth watching if you are there and within range.

Further information and times www.cboc.org.au

The NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (NSWORAC) is the body that decides on whether claimed observations of “rare” species are accepted or not accepted. It consists of very experienced birders who make a judgment not on the truthfulness of the observers but the strength of the evidence. In the unlikely but welcome circumstance that you find yourself in a position of making a submission these guidelines will help in understanding how the Committee works and what it looks for. (they are also a pretty good standard approach for “ordinary” sightings)

Guidelines for completing a NSWORAC rarities submission.

With today’s digital technology the best approach to take when considering a submission to a rarities committee is to provide photographic evidence.

However, this is not always possible. The alternative is detailed descriptions from one or more observers. Certainly, rarities that are seen well, and documented, by a number of observers are likely to be accepted. But what if one is alone! A simple paragraph stating that, ‘it looked just like the one in the book’ will most likely be treated as one that got away and fall into the ‘Not Accept’ category.

How should one go about preparing a suitable description?

The majority of reports that get a “Non Accept” decision from NSWORAC do so because of inadequate descriptions. Many observers are guilty of this and most of it can be put down to inexperience in reporting an unusual species and inexperience when writing up a description of their sighting.

A key element is that many reports are written from memory; some of them hours, even days, after the sighting. This reduces the reliability and credibility of the report. The importance of carrying a notebook to write down the description of a bird while you are looking at it, or at least immediately afterwards, cannot be stressed enough. Use of a small dictaphone, mobile phone or MP3 player is other alternate methods of recording the details. Species which have only one or two key identification points separating them from similar species will require a

much more detailed description than a species where a couple of key features clinches the identity.

When writing the description enter as much detail as possible. As well as those features you are able to see, include notes on those features of the bird you cannot see or did not take in, e.g. “legs and bill covered in mud therefore unable to record the colour”; “bird facing me whilst under observation therefore unable to see the under-tail coverts”, etc. When practicable, try to get another experienced observer to observe the bird as soon as possible to confirm the sighting. In every circumstance, a photograph of the bird, even a distant one, can be very valuable in confirming identification.

Note carefully that once you have written and submitted your report it is very difficult -from a credibility point of view - to add later changes, so exercise care in recording the details of your submission. The following points are provided for your assistance.

Sequence of Description: Firstly describe the size of the bird. This should be followed by a plumage description generally in the sequence: head and neck, upperparts, tail, upperwing, underparts and underwing followed by the bare parts (bill, eyes, legs and feet). Complete the report by describing aspects of behaviour, feeding habits, interaction and comparison with nearby species and flight pattern when possible.

Size and Jizz: Size is very important and needs to be determined as accurately as possible. It is often hard to judge with a solitary bird so look for any birds nearby for comparison. If none are available try to picture a common bird in your mind to compare it with. When looking at a bird through a telescope the one furthest away always appears larger due to the shallow depth of field of a telescope. In a group of birds make sure the bird you are observing is standing on the same level as the others or it may appear larger or smaller.

Jizz is a birding term used to describe the general appearance of a bird, how it stands, flies, feeds and walks. For example, is it elongated, short, squat, broad-winged, long-tailed etc? Many of these aspects can be useful in confirming identification. Note that weather conditions and disturbance can influence a bird’s appearance e.g. from being crouched to standing upright and that often sea birds fly differently in high and low winds. Be aware of

the effect that the reflection off water can have in making a grey underwing or breasts appear white(r).

Plumage: Become conversant with the different feather tracts and body parts e.g. primaries/secondaries/coverts/tertiaries and breast/belly/mantle/rump etc. These are featured at the beginning of most handbooks and field guides. Describe these in as much detail as possible as they are important for identification and ageing. Tips for some key areas follow.

Colour: Colour descriptions are affected by the light in which they are seen. An added difficulty is that different people perceive colours differently. Names of colours in descriptions should be kept simple e.g. dark brown rather than burnt umber with a trace of cinnamon. Where two colours are combined the last named colour is the most dominant e.g. buffish yellow is more yellow than buff. Note that light is darker than pale.

Head: With some species, head patterns can be complex and it is important to describe individually the details of crown, forehead, cheeks, ear-coverts, lores, nape, chin, eye-stripes and supercilia. With the eye-stripe, note the thickness and length, whether it continues onto the lores or to the base of the bill and how far it extends behind the eye. Similarly with details of the supercilium.

Breast: When the breast colour is different to the belly make sure you state where the transition begins and ends, e.g. lower, upper or mid breast. Is it sharply cut off, irregular or do the colours merge? If streaked, is it dark streaks on a light background or light streaks on a dark background? Is the streaking heavy or light and of the same density across the breast? Does it extend on to the flanks?

Rump and Tail: Rump colour is an important ID point for many species, so ensure you know the difference between rump, upper-tail coverts and back. The rump is often hard to see on a perched bird and patience may be required until the bird either takes flight or these parts can be seen during preening. The same applies for observing the upper-tail coverts, tail, vent, under-tail coverts and flanks.

Wings: Note the length of the wings by observing where they lie in comparison to the end of tail e.g. base, mid tail, tip of tail or beyond. The same applies with the tertials. Sometimes determining the end of the tail from the wing tips is difficult but eventually they will separate and this can be observed. The underwing colour is diagnostic for some species and one must wait until the bird flies or stretches its wings. The median, secondary and greater coverts of the upper-wing are important areas in ageing and identifying birds so include as much detail on them as possible. The same applies to the edges of these feathers. Are they fringed, spotted, tipped; is there a sub terminal band?

Bill: Bill shape and size is often a crucial factor in identification especially with waders. To determine bill length, use the distance from the base of the bill to the front or back of the eye, or the back of the head. Does the bill curve up or down? If so, in which direction? Does it curve along the whole length of the bill or just at the tip? Is the tip blunt, bulbous or fine and is the bill of equal thickness for the whole length? Colour, or if bicoloured, is it the whole length or just at the base.

Eyes: Note the colour and size along with presence or absence of a complete or partial eye ring.

Legs: Judge the length by using the depth of the body or the length of the bill. Take into consideration that a bird standing in soft mud or water may have longer legs than you think. Record the extent to which the legs/feet/toes project past the end of the tail when the bird is in flight as this may be a crucial point of identification. In some species this projection is slight and difficult to detect. Be aware that if the feet are dangling it may be impossible to ascertain this aspect. Therefore in your report state how the legs are held in flight. Ensure that it is the feet that project and not the central tail feathers.

There are other helpful hints on the Birds Australia Rarities Committee website, you can find these on users.bigpond.net.au/palliser/pelagic and follow the links.

Wilma and the 50,000th Tree from Paddy Lightfoot.

The 19th of April saw the planting of the 50,000 Australian native plant, a tree, at the Hunter Wetlands Centre. The tree was planted by HBOC foundation member, Wilma Barden. Wilma has been a volunteer at the Wetlands Centre since the beginning of public assistance, during 1988, in the regeneration and revegetation of the site.

Wilma convenes two teams. The Wetland Wonder Weeders meet on a Thursday and work on Butcherbird Hill below Mort Street. This Group is a registered Landcare organization. Wilma also leads the SWWAT (Shortland Wetlands Weed Attack Team) attacking weed infestations anywhere on site.

After much deliberation Wilma chose to plant a Turpentine, – *Syncarpia glomulifera* – a member of the Myrtaceae family. Wilma made an excellent choice for our 50,000th!

Turpentine grow naturally on the site and are an important timber tree in NSW, growing northwards from around Ulladulla. The tree grows on a variety of soils sometimes including poorer soils, although it is more commonly associated with wet sclerophyll on moist better soils.

Turpentine form a fairly dense growth habit and make a good shelter belt tree. When cut at the base the tree coppices freely increasing its dense growth habit. It is generally free of insect, including termite, and fungal attack. Because of the resistance to insect attack as well as salt water the early construction of the wharves around the convict settlement in Sydney made use of Turpentine. Trees were harvested from the Gosford district and around Lake Macquarie before being shipped to Port Jackson.

The origins of the names are Syn meaning together and Karpos a fruit. This refers to the united carpels and looking at the fruit this becomes obvious. Glomulifera comes from the Latin glomus a small ball of thread. Turpentine because of the quality of oil in the leaves – using a hand lens pale brown oil dots are easily visible.

There are only three *Syncarpia* species in the world – two in Australia and one in Indonesia. The flowers are white and nectariferous attracting birds and bats. Congratulations and well done Wilma.

HUNTER WETLAND CENTRE

ACTIVITIES

SCHOOL HOLIDAY PROGRAM

Wetland Turtles!

(children 4-7 years) Fully supervised
Have lots of fun with games, arts and crafts, dipnetting and adventure walks with skilled and experienced leaders,
9am to 12.30pm Tuesdays and Fridays
JULY 3,6,10,13

Canoeing Adventures

(children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult)
9am – 12.30pm Thursdays
JULY 5 & 12

Arts Alive

Children 7-12, Fully Supervised
Learn all about birds, reptiles, tortoises and pond animals.
9am-12.30pm Wednesdays JULY 4 & 11

Wacky Tour

Get wild and wacky and take a peak behind the scenes. Learn more about wildlife on site, with hands-on demonstrations with our Wacky Professor. The Wacky Tour activities are fully supervised.
Thursday JULY 12.

REGULAR EVENTS

Breakfast With The Birds

8.00am Sunday JULY 15

Spotlight Prowl

June 16.
Check starting time when you book.

Canoeing the Ironbark Trail

9.30am Sundays June 3 & July 1

SPECIAL EVENT

Hansel & Gretel

A live outside theatre production hosted by Shakespeare et al
July 4 –14, 11AM

**Bookings are essential for all programs.
Ring 02 4951 6466 for times and prices.**

OBSERVATIONS FROM CLUB NIGHT APR/MAY 2007

Mar 10	Straw-necked Ibis	1,548	Irrawang Swamp	M.Maddock
Mar 11	Grey-crowned Babbler	11	Seaham Swamp	M.Samuel
Mar 2	Osprey	1	Belmont Lagoon	"
Mar 4	Great Crested Grebe	22	Mt. Arthur [main dam/wetland]	G.Newling
	Hoary-headed Grebe	129	"	"
	Australasian Grebe	9	"	"
	Pink-eared Duck	1	"	"
	Grey Teal	28	"	"
	Hardhead	12	"	"
	Australasian Shoveler	12	"	"
	Musk Duck	1	"	"
	Red-kneed Dotterel	3	"	"
	Black-fronted Dotterel	8	"	"
Apr 1	Australian Hobby	1	Mt. Arthur mine site	"
Apr 6	Plumed Whistling Duck	60+	Doughboy Hollow	A.Stuart
	Red-winged Parrot	14	Cassilis Sports Ground	"
Mar	Powerful Owl	1	New Lambton	"
Apr 11	Eastern Spinebill	1	Marmong Point	B.Kibble
Apr 3	Sanderling	3	Old Bar	L.Mee
	Red-necked Stint	6	"	"
	Lesser Sand Plover	6	"	"
	Red-capped Plover	25	"	"
Apr 10	Collared Sparrowhawk	2	Deep Pond	F. van Gessel
	Red-necked Stint		Stockton Sandspit	"
Apr 7	Musk Lorikeet	20+	Cardiff	N.Livanos
Apr 14	Wedge-tailed Eagle	4	Speers Point[over Munibung]	R.Walker
Apr 7/8	Peregrine Falcon	1	Bolwarra	H.Tarrant
Apr 6	Red-capped Robin	1	3km west of Jerrys Plains	"
	Diamond Firetail	1	"	"
	Diamond Firetail	1	Doyle's Creek	"
	Hooded Robin	1	"	"
	White-winged Triller	2m	"	"
Apr 11	Brown Quail	9-10	Ash Island	"
Mar 4	Osprey	1	Stockton Sandspit	M.Kearns et al
	Lesser Sand Plover	2	"	"
	Greater Sand Plover	1	"	"
Apr 22	Crested Shrike-tit	1	Werakata N.P.	J.Goswell
Apr 14	Powerful Owl	1	Garden Suburb	L.Huxtable
Mar 15	Musk Lorikeet	~30	Mt. Vincent [Sandy Ck. Rd]	P.&C.Fitzsimons
Apr/May	Musk Lorikeet	~50	"	"
Apr 24	Black-necked Stork	2	Bulahdelah to Legge's Camp	A. Gooden
May	Little Friarbird	1	H.W.C.	P.Lightfoot
May	Swift Parrot	1	Kurri Kurri	P.Hansbro
May	Musk Lorikeet	~20	Edgeworth	G.O'Connor
May 1	Musk Lorikeet	Flock	Tanilba Bay	R. & M Stewart
Apr 15	Spotted Harrier	1	Hand's Lagoon	H.Tarrant
May 12	Musk Lorikeet	~100	Vacy	"
May 9	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	3	Winten [garden]	G.Newling
May 13	Powerful Owl	1	McGregor Park	P.Lightfoot
May 13	Powerful Owl	1	Teralba [Rhondda Road]	L. & C. Herbert
May 4	Regent Honeyeater	1	Galgabba Point	W. Clark
Apr1/May	White-winged Chough	10	Mulbring	B.Clifton
May 7	Wedge-tailed Eagle	1	Mulbring	"
Apr 12	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	10+ 1 on	Wangi Wangi	C.Goodenough
Apr 9	Little Corella	30+ 3 dy	Sunshine	"
Apr/May	Little Friarbird	3	H.W.C.	A.Lindsey
	Musk Lorikeet	20	H.W.C.	"
May 6	Spangled Drongo	1	Wyee Point	V.Moon

May	Musk Lorikeet	50+	"	"
May 6	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	3	Wye Point	V.Moon
Apr 29	Straw-necked Ibis	1476	Irrawang Swamp [Night Roost	M.Maddock
DATE	EVENT	MEETING PLACE & TIME		CONTACT
Saturday 16 June	Hunter Wader Survey	8.30am Ash Island 9.00am Other locations as directed		Chris Herbert 4959 3663 Alan Stuart 4952 8569
Sunday 17 June	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon		Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 19 June	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am. Tomago House		Neville McNaughton
Sunday 24 June	New Members Day Club to provide BBQ Lunch	9.00am The Wetlands Centre. Entry Fee \$5.00 but free entry for New members		Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Tuesday 26 June	Ash Island Mangrove Removal	8.00am Ash Island Car Park		Robert McDonald 4967 4161
Tuesday 3 July	Midweek Outing Lake Munmorah	8.00am Elizabeth Bay Car Park		Margaret Woods 4963 3070
Wednesday 4 July	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm Garden Suburb School		All members welcome
ATURDAY & SUNDAY 7/8 JULY	Australian Shorebird Conference	Newcastle University		Liz Crawford 4959 3663
Sunday 8 July	Volunteer Day Stockton Sandspit	8.00am to Noon Sandspit Car Park		Tom Clarke 4951 3872
Tuesday 10 July	Ash Island mangrove removal	8.00am Ash Island car park		Robert McDonald 4967 4161
Wednesday 11 July	CLUB MEETING	7.30pm The Wetlands Centre		Speaker: Ann Lindsey - Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring in South Korea
Saturday 14 July	Hunter Wader Survey	8.00am Ash Island 8.30am Other locations as directed		Chris Herbert 49593663 Alan Stuart 4953 8569
Tuesday 7 July	Tomago Wetland Survey	7.30am Tomago House		Neville McNaughton
Sunday 22 July	Field Outing Walka Waterworks & Bolwarra	8.00am Walka Water Works		James Smart 4933 7761
Tuesday 24 July	Ash Island mangrove removal	8.00am Ash Island car park		Robert McDonald 4967 4161
Saturday 28 July	Atlassing Booral to Bulahdelah	7.00am at McDonalds Raymond Terrace		Please ring to confirm Nick Livanos 4954 5739 Ann Lindsey 4951 2008
Wednesday 1 August	Management Committee Meeting	7.00pm to 10.00pm Garden Suburb School		All members welcome
Saturday-Sunday 4/5 August	Regent Honeyeater & Swift Parrot Survey	Various locations from Coordinator		Coordinator Brett Shields 4930 5807
Tuesday 7 August	Mid-Week Outing Watagans area	8.00am Car park at Freemans Waterhole		Don Moon 4359 1670
Wednesday	CLUB MEETING	7.30pm		Speaker: Tony Burgin

8 August

The Wetlands Centre

Birds of Gluepot Station

You are cordially invited

to the

Dedication of lands in the Lower Hunter to the National Parks Estate

On Sunday 1st July 2007

at

Mount Sugarloaf Lookout

A celebration of the addition of almost 13,800 hectares of land being reserved in the National Parks Estate, much of it in the Green Corridor.

8.00 am	Bird watching
10.00 am	Bush Walk
12.00 noon	Dedication <i>performed by The Honorable Mr Phil Koperberg, Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water</i>

BYO picnic lunch to enjoy after the proceedings – sausage sizzle available

RSVP by 20th June to ourgreencorridor@planet-save.com – For enquires Ph 4953 8131

