

HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB Inc.  
2008 Annual Report

The Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) was formed 27 years ago with the objectives:

- to encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat;
- to encourage bird observing as a leisure time activity.

The 2008 Annual Report shows how the club and its members have achieved this throughout the year. This report was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting held on the 11th, February 2009 at The Wetlands Centre, Shortland NSW.

### Observations / Highlights

HBOC has a very strong, active membership and this is reflected in the high number of reported species and highlights recorded during 2008. Members are given the opportunity to share their sightings at monthly club nights and through observations forms which are made freely available.

Highlights for 2008 include:

- Emu Dromaius novaehollandiae - two birds at Goulburn River NP 4 Oct
- Radjah Shelduck Tadorna radjah - a pair at Bulahdelah Jul-Aug and 1-2 birds in Myall Lakes NP Nov-Dec
- Blue-billed Duck Oxyura australis - up to 3 birds at Walka Waterworks Sep-Oct
- Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove Ptilinopus regina - two birds at Harrington 25 Jan
- Fork-tailed Swift Apus pacificus - at least 30 birds flying over Newcastle harbour 27 Dec
- Australasian Bittern Botaurus poiciloptilus - 1-2 birds often at Tomago Wetlands Sep-Nov and single birds at Hexham swamp Feb and Oct
- Black Bittern Ixobrychus flavicollis - single birds at Little Pelican 10 Feb, Lemon Tree Passage late Mar and Brimbin NR 16 Oct
- Grey Plover Pluvialis squatarola - a single bird at Stockton Sandspit 10-12 Sep
- Comb-crested Jacana Irediparra gallinacea - first records from John Brown's Lagoon Mulbring since May 2000!
- Sooty Tern Onychoprion fuscata - a single bird immature bird at Old Bar 22 Mar
- Cockatiel Nymphicus hollandicus - two birds near Merriwa 12 Jan
- Swift Parrot Lathamus discolor - 20 birds at Galgabba Point 16 Jun and 24 Jul and occasional records of lesser numbers from elsewhere
- Black-eared Cuckoo Chalcites osculans - a single bird at Warkworth 28 Aug
- Eastern Grass Owl Tyto longimembris - single birds at Ash Island Jan and Feb
- Regent Honeyeater Anthochaera phrygia - several pairs successfully completed breeding at Tomalpin in Jan, and small numbers of birds were at Clarencetown late Jan, Manning Point 1 May, Morisset 13 Sep and Quorrobolong Aug-Sep
- White-eared Monarch Carterornis leucotis - single bird at Crowdy Bay NP 25 Jan
- Plum-headed Finch Neochmia modesta - five birds were near Bunnan 8 Sep
- Eastern Yellow Wagtail Motacilla tschutschensis - Ash Island 11 Feb to 6 Apr, with peak counts of 3+ birds in late Feb, also single birds at Stockton beach early Jan and Hexham swamp 11 Jan and 15 Feb.

HBOC has a very active Records Appraisal Committee who have been kept busy in 2008 with a large number of rare sightings being reported. RAC members are Sue Hamonet, Ann Lindsey, Mike Newman, Fred Van Gessel, Phil Hansbro, Mick Roderick and Craig Anderson. The club thanks them for their efforts during the year.

Species under review (yet to be accepted) include:

- Great Frigatebird Fregata minor - single birds off Newcastle breakwater 7 Feb and flying over Ash Island 23 Mar

- Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* - a single bird was taken into care at Blacksmiths Beach 24 Mar and successfully rehabilitated
- Brolga *Grus rubicunda* - single bird at Mitchell Island Manning River 16 Jun
- Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana* - a single bird at Birubi Point from 24 Sep to 2 Oct
- Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* - a single bird at Lake Pokolbin 9 Oct
- Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* - a single bird at Ash Island 3-6 Apr
- Red-chested Button-quail *Turnix pyrrhothorax* - a female bird at Wingen (31 Oct)
- Little Button-quail *Turnix velox* - two birds at Cassilis 21 Oct
- Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* - a single bird off Manning Point 23 Mar
- Beautiful Firetail *Stagonopleura bella* - some birds were at Black Creek Rothbury early Jan and June

During the year two species were accepted onto the Hunter List with two more waiting acceptance:

- Red-footed Booby and Great Frigatebird - (to be accepted)
- Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* - a 1957 record at Broughton Island has been accepted
- Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* - a 1969 record at Kooragang Island has been accepted

If all are accepted this will bring the HBOC Hunter bird list to 428 species!

Two members, Sue Hamonet and Alan Stuart, need to be thanked for all their efforts in gathering and processing the huge amount of data reported through the club during the year.

## Surveys

HBOC and its members are extremely active when it comes to regular surveys of locations and specific bird species. These surveys have proven to be highly valuable in the conservation of bird habitats and furthering the knowledge of bird behaviour and distribution.

Members once again strongly supported threatened and endangered species by participating in the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys organized by the Threatened Species Network and coordinated by Brett Shields, and the Painted Snipe Surveys coordinated by Ann Lindsey. Both were held twice during the year.

The annual Latham's Snipe survey was once again held at Pambalong Nature Reserve and various other wetlands in the Lower Hunter Region. Unfortunately numbers recorded had dropped from previous years:

18 at Pambalong Nature Reserve  
 19 at Newcastle Wetland Reserve  
 7 at Teal Waters, Ash Island  
 4 at Hands Lagoon, Bolwarra  
 2 at Woodville  
 5 at Walka Water Works  
 34 at Pacific Dunes, Medowie  
 2 at Soldiers Point

Judi Thomas continues to regularly survey the rock shelf around Newcastle Baths and her observations and counts on Sooty Oystercatcher, Ruddy Turnstone and other species are extremely important to their conservation on this well used strip of coastline.

Quarterly surveys of Tank Paddock (owned by Coal & Allied), Awabakal Nature Reserve and Garden Suburbs were organised by Liz Huxtable and Jenny Powers and a dedicated troop of followers. Their records for Tank Paddock have proven invaluable to the hopeful protection of this site from development.

Neville McNaughton has been leading regular surveys of the Tomago Wetlands site and finding some great birds in the process like Southern Emu-wren and the threatened Australasian Bittern on a regular basis. This site was an important night time roost for waders back in the 1970's until a levy bank and flood gates were installed to create more agricultural land. This was catastrophic for the waders and they abandoned the site. However, on the 24th September 2008 Neville and Ann Lindsey represented HBOC

at the official opening of the new electronically operated smart flood gates, but the saga continued when salt water was found on nearby private land and the gates were closed again. Continued monitoring will see what effect this has on bird life.

In the Maitland area, Lorna Mee and Paul Baird have been monitoring Walka Water Works. Their data reflects how important this spot is to resident and visiting waterfowl and waders and how it should be managed as such. During the year over zealous employees removed much of the vegetation close to the waters edge directly impacting on bird habitat. As a result of this Paul and Lorna lobbied Maitland City Council and were rewarded with both receiving seats on the Walka Water Works management committee representing HBOC which is a great achievement.

Lorna Mee also coordinated the Australasian Bittern and Little Bittern Survey on 16th November. 6 members covered 5 sites in the Lower Hunter and managed to record Australasian Bittern at Tomago Wetlands.

On the other side of Maitland, Ann Lindsey and Mike Newman's monthly surveys of the Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works (MWTW) have added much needed data to an otherwise under surveyed area of the Hunter, and Grant Brosie continues to survey the surrounding areas of Ray Lawler Park (Morpeth Common) and Earthcare Park (Tenambit Common). These surveys have shown what a wide range of species utilise our suburban parks with over 80 species being reported within Ray Lawler Park in the past year.

Bi-monthly surveys of the working cattle property 'Greswick Angus' were lead by Tom Clarke with Anthony Gooden, Neville McNaughton, Leonne and John Storm, Lyn Rayward and the owners, the Spearpont family being regular attendees. Latham's Snipe were regularly reported on the property with a maximum count of 13 birds being a highlight. Many species were recorded courting and breeding.

The jewel in HBOC's crown are the monthly wader surveys which are now in their 10th year . Four locations are surveyed at once by a dedicated team of wader counters. These spots are Ash Island, Deep Pond, the Kooragang Dykes and Stockton Sandspit/Fullerton Cove. In conjunction to these surveys Sue Hamonet and Charlie Mann survey Swan Bay on the northern shores of Port Stephens and Jack Adams and his crew survey Lake Macquarie.

HBOC also participated in the Port Stephens Surveys on the 10th February and the 4th July. Several teams took to boats and surveyed the shorelines and waterways associated with the port. Large numbers of several species were pleasing whilst others were down from previous years. The number of Pied Oystercatchers was a highlight with the highest count being 154 on the July survey making the Port Stephens area an important site nationally for this species.

## **Conservation**

This is a brief summary of conservation matters HBOC and its conservation committee dealt with during 2008.

Letters of concern were sent in relation to the planned Anvil Hill Coal Mine, the Train Support Facility and industrial area near Hexham Swamp, the planned precinct 1 of the Hunter Economic Zone near Pelaw Main, and the construction of Tillegra Dam. These issues are either approved or still in the approval process.

Talks are under way with the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group in regard to the new coal export terminal and the committee has met several times with BHP Billiton representatives in regards to the effects of development on shorebird habitat and opportunities for habitat enhancement. Relations with such companies are a huge bonus for the club and the conservation committee has done a magnificent job in fostering these links.

HBOC also supported the banning of the Savannah Cat, the progression of Little Lorikeet onto the Threatened Species list and the retention of the Gould's Petrel on the Endangered Species list.

The HBOC conservation committee has been extremely busy throughout 2008 and members Mike Newman, Max Maddock, Neil Fraser, Mick Roderick, Liz Crawford and Chris Herbert have done a wonderful job as has the conservation officer, Ann Lindsey, who has made this her last year in her role. The club thanks Ann for all her hard work, her many letters and her genuine love for what she does.

Another important aspect of conservation is habitat restoration and the maintenance of existing habitats. Tom Clarke and a number of volunteers maintained Stockton Sandspit with monthly weeding days. This valued asset requires regular weeding to keep vegetation levels low so as to make the spit more appealing to local and migratory waders. All this hard work is rewarded with close up views of waders feeding on the changing tides and the breeding success of the resident Red-capped Plovers and Pied Oystercatchers.

Robert McDonald and his regular helpers worked along side the Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Project (KWRP) in relation to the removal of mangroves from salt marsh areas on Milham's Pond. Robert organised monthly work days and much work was done.

HBOC once again supported Clean Up Australia Day by clearing rubbish from around Stockton Sandspit and the Kooragang Dykes.

Full Conservation Report attached.

### **Other Club Reports**

#### **Finances**

Once again Treasurer Rowley Smith has done an excellent job keeping the HBOC finances in excellent order, and thanks to Katrina Thornton for auditing the club's accounts.

The club made a financial gain of \$8,148 in 2008 from the following:

- \$4,700 grant from Newcastle City Council for a Hunter Avian Study
- \$585 from sales of club records
- \$2,622.50 in interest
- and \$197.50 was raised from the December club night raffle.

Club fees will remain the same for 2009.

Family: \$30

Single: \$30

Junior: \$5

Full Treasurer's Report attached.

#### **Membership**

Membership fell slightly in 2008 from 250 to 248. The club welcomed 13 new members during the year but unfortunately 15 members left. Single memberships increased while family and junior memberships decreased.

Full Membership report attached.

#### **Library**

Robert McDonald continued on as librarian and has done a wonderful job at organising and maintaining the club's collection which now has over 500 books. His dedication to this position has made borrowing from the library much easier.

Grant Brosie also continued on with his role as audio-visual librarian, adding several DVDs to the collection. These include the Land of Parrots and the very popular Chasing Birds. Both were donated and we thank all members who donated books and DVDs to the club.

## **Club Activities**

HBOC offered a large selection of activities in 2008 to cater for all tastes and it is hoped that by providing such a range to members everyone can be catered for, from the beginner to the hardcore twitcher. Below is a brief summary of what happened during the year.

Eleven Sunday outings (held on the third Sunday of the month) to such places as: Corrabare State Forest, Richmond Vale, Galgabba Point, and Martinsville. 47 (37 of which weren't birdwatchers) attended the Bird Day at Bengalla near Muswellbrook. The Latham's Snipe survey in December is also classed as a Sunday outing.

Eleven mid-week outings were held on the first Tuesday of the month. These days have proven to be highly popular with members and counts of over 20 attendees are not uncommon. Ash Island, Morpeth, Glenrock Reserve, Tilligerry Habitat, Green Point and the Wetlands Centre were visited and a very successful mid-week camp to Lake Glenbawn was held in September.

Five well attended camps happened during the year to places like Timor Caves, Wollar, Wallabadah Rock and White Box Camp.

In between these 'main' outings there were also monthly wader surveys, Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys, Painted Snipe surveys, Stockton Sandspit and Ash Island work days, Tomago Wetlands surveys, Atlas days, Port Stephens surveys, Bittern surveys, the Mini-twitch and of course Twitchathon.

Twitchathon was held on 26th-27th October and the club was well represented in both the 24hr Main Race and the less rigorous Champagne Race, and with half the proceeds of money raised going to the removal of mangroves on Milhams Pond on Ash Island the 2008 race was a real Hunter affair. A record number of teams participated in what turned out to be a close race with the Hunter Home Brewers winning, just pipping the Hunter's Menacing Monarchs by one species! Two other HBOC teams, the Dodgy Drongos and Hunter Thickheads came fifth and eighth. In the Champagne Race, the Crested Shrike-tits thrashed the opposition and the Grumpy Frogmouths did very well for their first attempt. Money raised in 2008 was the highest ever which demonstrates the growing popularity of this event which was helped by the airing of 'Chasing Birds' on the 23rd Oct on the ABC. This doco was made several years ago and follows the Hunter Home Brewers, Whacked -Out Woodswallows and Hunter Thickheads in their pursuit of the holy grail. 'Chasing Birds' was first aired at the Sydney Film Festival in June to rave reviews and is now available to buy on DVD. Our members did particularly well on camera with a few lines that will go down in HBOC history.

## **Club Nights and General Business**

Eleven club nights were well attended during the year and gave members a chance to hear a variety of talks on various subjects, to report their sightings and to socialise with other birdwatchers.

HBOC thanks all the guest speakers who entertained members with talks on Madagascar, Macquarie Island, the Penguin Parade, Regent Honeyeaters, Gould's Petrel Recovery effort, Backpacker Birding and the Torres Strait. Bird of the Evening covered Spotted Harriers, Plains Wanderer, Yellow Wagtails, NZ Blue Duck, Navigation, Abbott's Booby and birding Far-east Russia.

The December Christmas meeting was attended by 53 people and was a great success with talks by Max Maddock, Dan Allen and Mick Roderick. Di Johnson once again organised the traditional xmas raffle and Lorna Mee kindly donated a quilt she had made.

As always coffee and food were available after the meeting and the club thanks Judy Westphal for her efforts throughout the year.

HBOC publishes a bimonthly newsletter and we thank editor Peter Phillips for this enthusiasm and hard work. Phil Rankin prepares the newsletter for email to members and printing the hard copies. Tom Clarke makes sure everyone who wants a printed copy receives one at the club nights or through the mail. The newsletter would be nothing without the continued support of members who donate their stories and reports. We thank everyone for their contributions.

The first edition of The Whistler was distributed amongst the membership during April 2008. The Whistler is a formal, journal style publication where members can report their significant observations, their regular surveys and their conclusions. Topics covered included Birds on Newcastle's rock platforms, Surveys of waterbirds in Port Stephens, Ecological adaptations for Large-billed, Yellow-throated and White-browed Scrubwrens and the Status of Black Falcon in the Lower Hunter Valley.

To produce such a publication required a lot of man hours and the club would like to thank editor Liz Huxtable and The Whistler committee: Liz Crawford, Chris Herbert, Ann Lindsey, Mike Newman, Jenny Powers, and Alan Stuart for all their hard work and commitment.

The Whistler was very well received and several more editions are planned with the next to be released sometime in early 2009.

HBOC is indebted to the many volunteers that keep the club running so smoothly. To everyone who lead an outing, gave a talk at a club night, reported their observations, showed their objection to a development issue or helped out at club nights we thank you.

I personally would like to thank the committee for their total support and devotion shown through 2008. Big thanks to secretary Tom Clarke, treasurer Rowley Smith, conservation officer Ann Lindsey and vice president Paul Baird. Other committee members who helped guide the club were Jack Adams, Colin Goodenough, Craig Anderson, Liz Crawford and Robert McDonald. Sue Hamonet, Lorna Mee, Alan Stuart and Mick Roderick were regular attendees and their contribution was extremely valuable.

In closing I'd like to thank Alan Sturt, Ann Lindsey, Rowley Smith, Anthony Gooden, Liz Crawford and Robert McDonald for their help in writing this report. Thanks to everyone who made my time as HBOC president an enjoyable one. 2008 was a great year for HBOC and I'm sure next year will be even more successful.

Yours in birding,  
Grant Brosie  
HBOC President 2008