



Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.

Affiliated with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia

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2009 Annual Report

Introduction.

The 2009 Annual Report of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on the 10th February 2010. It is also available to members via the Club website.

The report is organised according to the recently formulated structure for HBOC. It consists of the main body of the report and attached appendices.

Acknowledgement is given to all members for their personal involvement and contributions to furthering the aims of HBOC in 2009.

1. Activities:

Includes the planning, organisation and participation in the leisure -based bird watching and social activities of the Club.

Outings: HBOC implemented a successful program of outings including the monthly, midweek outings, camps and annual twitchathon. The program was subject to the vagaries of the weather which, according to trip reports influenced, not only attendance, but also provided members with many memorable experiences.

Monthly outings covered a range of locations and habitats including; Homebush Bay, Jerusalem Creek, "Wattlewood" Seaham, Bulga, Werakata National Park, Martin's Creek, Ellalong, Awabakal, Hawk's Nest and Mogo.

Mid-week outings continued to be very well patronised with a record 37 members attending the Greswick Angus outing in February 2009. Other locations included Walka Recreational and Wildlife Reserve, Catherine Hill Bay, Myuna Bay, Blue Gum Regional Park, Pambalong / Lenaghans wetlands, Stockton Sand Spit, "Wattlewood" Seaham, Kilaben Bay and Jesmond Park.

The *long week-end camps* attracted good attendances at Myall View, Macquarie Marshes and Denman. The planned Swan's Crossing camp was cancelled due to poor weather and conditions. The extension of the Easter camp at Macquarie Marshes to include Bowra Station was successful and this concept warrants further exploration to enhance the camping program.

The *mid-week camp* to Nundle was a great success with 32 members attending. The recent suggestion for "off-peak" camping to become part of the camping program also warrants investigation by the committee in 2010 especially in light of positive feedback, which at this stage, indicates a preference for week day camps.

Seawatch outings provided valuable opportunities for members to increase their sea-birding skills by observing from a stable vantage point.

HBOC members participated in the BASNA annual Twitchathon fund raising event with distinction in 2009. Club teams, the Menacing Monarchs and Hunter Home Brewers, achieved 1st and 2nd place in the main event while the Varied Wrenegades and the Crested Shrike Twits were successful 1st and 2nd place getters in the champagne

event. HBOC members should be proud of their significant contribution to the funds raised by this event. As recorded elsewhere HBOC received \$10000 from 2008 Twitchathon funds for the Shorebird Roost Rehabilitation Scheme which is currently being implemented on Ash Island in conjunction with KWRP.

In addition to the leisure and social benefits enjoyed by everyone, these outings are also a source of valuable observational data for the Hunter Region.

The many members including, the Club Activities Officers, members who coordinated and organised outings, leaders and all who participated in Club activities in 2009, are thanked for their involvement.

2. Club Night:

The monthly Club Night is one of the feature activities of HBOC.

Eleven Club Night meetings were held at the Hunter Wetland Centre in 2009, each of which was well attended. The average attendance was 57 members per meeting with a maximum number of 67 (March, May, August) and a minimum of 43 (November). This represents approximately 20% of the membership attending monthly meetings. This is a pleasing attendance figure when factors such as the widespread distribution of members and the distances needed to be travelled to meetings are considered. These numbers at times stretched the seating capacity of the HWC lecture theatre and some concerns have been expressed regarding ventilation especially on warm evenings.

The Guest Speaker Program covered a range of topics including travel, bird distribution and abundance, history, bird behaviour and conservation issues. These high quality presentations included ; the Galapagos Islands, Birds of Lamington National Park, the Tanami Track and Pilbara Region, Back -Packer Birding, Birds of Bowra Station, Grass Owls of the Hunter, Birds of the Hunter-100 Years Ago, Australian Pied Oyster Catchers-A Most Ingenious Species. Congratulations and thank you to all presenters for their time, and effort in preparing and presenting these informative and interesting talks.

Similarly, thank you to everyone involved in the popular Bird of the Evening segment which continued to be enthusiastically embraced by members.

The "Observations" segment continued to provide a valuable avenue for reporting and discussing bird local sightings, the atmosphere of the meeting complementing the newly developed Hunter-birding e-mail group discussion forum. The Newsletter in 2009 reported an average 105 sighting records, arising primarily from these Club sessions, for each bimonthly period of the Newsletter.

The December Christmas meeting, with the changed procedure for the raffle was most successful with members enjoying a wonderful supper and much friendly socialising.

Thank you to all members that cheerfully perform the many tasks associated with Club Night, phone calls, open up, lock up, setting out and packing chairs, distributing badges, attendance books, the library, technical assistance and providing that much needed cup of tea. Thank you all.

3. Management & Administration

This section of HBOC includes management and administrative areas that facilitate all aspects of Club operations through its committee structure and other appointed positions.

Club Organisation: In 2009 revisions were made to the organisational structure of HBOC. These revisions arose from member feedback, a climate of increasing demands, and a perceived need to sharpen the focus on membership and increase visibility. A working party was established whose proactive approach developed a structural model that was well documented and distributed to members via the Newsletter, Club Night presentation and mail out. The model was endorsed by the Committee and supported by the membership. The challenge for 2010 is to implement the model in a balanced and inclusive manner to the best advantage of members, HBOC and the community. Gratitude is extended to the working group, Committee and the membership for their time, effort and experience regarding this initiative.

Finances: The audited Annual Financial Report for 2009 and the Treasurer's Report for 2009 are presented as Appendix A. Additional aspects of these reports are raised as follows:

HBOC has enjoyed valued relationships with The National Coal Infrastructure Group, (NCIG) and the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (HCRCMA) in 2009 with both organisations extending substantial sponsorships to the Club. NCIG sponsored the publication of the Annual Bird Report in 2009 and has indicated its preparedness to continue its sponsorship in 2010 and beyond. HCRCMA again sponsored the publication of the Whistler in 2009. HBOC thanks both NCIG and HCRCMA for their generosity and their investment in the club, thank you also to members for establishing and fostering these relationships for the benefit of HBOC.

Recognition is given here to an often over-looked aspect, that is, the goodwill of members. Members absorb costs in the course of their volunteer activities and in doing so they make considerable financial contributions to the operation of the club. Thank you.

HBOC, as a result of foresight and hard work by many in previous years, is in a sound financial position in an environment where some other not for profit volunteer organisations are undergoing financial stress.

The invested funds held by HBOC provide financial security and act as a source of income from the interest generated. However careful consideration needs to be given, as a matter of priority, by the membership and the incoming 2010 Committee to developing strategies that ensure the financial security of HBOC *and* importantly make best use of the funds to support the needs of the membership and the long term welfare of Hunter Region birds. It is envisaged that implementation of the revised structure will facilitate the setting of goals and subsequent development of a financial plan to meet those goals.

4. Membership Matters

Administrative, personal matters and services related to the membership.

Membership Report: The membership officer's report is attached in Appendix B

HBOC showed a growth rate of fractionally over 10% in 2009 with a total membership of 276 (cf.248 in 2008). Family membership increased by 12.2%, single membership 6.3% increase and junior membership static. Attrition was 24 members in 2009. A successful "New members' Day" was held at the alternative venue of the Hunter Wetland Centre to welcome members who had recently joined the club.

Hunter 300 &350 Club: This group is a testament to the fine bird watching skills of its members and five additions were made to the prestigious 300 & 350 Club Roll of Honour in 2009 hence bringing the total to twenty one (see HBOC website for list of members).

Services: Library: The extensive book and A/V library continued to be well used by members each Club Night.

Digital Photo Library: HBOC moved further into the digital age in 2009 with the establishment of a digital photograph library with over 1200 images as a resource for members. Images are donated by members and are available for use in presentations, and non-commercial community education. Thank you to the organisers and to the photographers for this initiative of an increasingly valuable and accessible asset.

E-mail Service: The e-mail service continued to play a much needed role in Club communications. This efficient means of distributing special messages, bird sightings and other interesting information keeps members informed, especially between Newsletters.

Hunter-birding: The sharing of information is vital to the birding community and so the development of the Hunter-birding internet group is a welcome initiative and it is to be commended. This forum for discussion and reporting Hunter Region bird sightings is a valuable addition to the services offered to members and their participation is encouraged. In addition to contributing to the quality of leisure time activity Hunter-birding also provides a significant source of bird sighting data for the HBOC data base and the Annual Bird Report.

Hunter Site Guide: The framework for a comprehensive electronic resource of Hunter birding sites is in the design stage and will be developed further in 2010.

Tribute is paid to members and their technological skills in assisting HBOC to move forward in this increasingly electronic world.

The appointment of a Membership Secretary in 2010 will not only rationalise tasks previously carried out by the Secretary and Treasurer but also allow HBOC to better address issues such as membership communication, recruitment, and coordinate the development of member services.

5. Conservation

This section is primarily concerned with issues relevant to the protection of birds and their habitat in the Hunter Region and beyond. It helps link the areas of HBOC endeavour and the community through its collaborative partnerships, networking and advocacy.

A fundamental aspect of conservation is that of regulation and legislation regarding the protection of birds and their habitats and, as in the past, this has been the major work of the Conservation Committee in 2009. This role of the Conservation Committee was re-iterated in 2009 and it complements other aspects of HBOC (e.g. Field Studies & Data Management, Projects, Education) to provide HBOC with a comprehensive/holistic approach to the protection of birds and their habitats in the Hunter Region.

Summary of Issues:

HBOC is pursuing the establishment of cooperative working relationships with government authorities and corporate stakeholders in the Hunter Estuary.

BHP Billiton and HBOC entered discussions regarding the Kooragang Island Waste Emplacement Facility which threatened Blue-billed Duck Pond and Australasian Bittern habitat. DECCW and HBOC input contributed to the subsequent reduction in the footprint of the waste facility saving valuable habitat.

HBOC has negotiated and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG) encompassing mutual issues regarding ongoing access to Deep Pond and data acquisition. As an issue separate from the MOU, NCIG agreed to the ongoing sponsorship of the HBOC Annual Bird Report.

HBOC wrote submissions: to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 review, (this submission evaluated the operation of the Act relative to development in the Hunter region including comments on perceived short comings of the efficacy of the Act in protecting wildlife and habitats.); to the NSW State Policy on Sea Level Rise; against the Game and Feral Animal Control Bill; in support of the proposed listing of Pied Oystercatcher as Endangered and Varied Sitella as Vulnerable under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995; to the proposed development of a gas pipeline between Queensland and the Hunter whose route will traverse Ash Island; in opposition to the proposed development of woodland habitat at Glen Alice where Barking Owls are known to roost.

HBOC has active ongoing representation on: The Hunter Estuary Technical Working Party investigating priority actions for rehabilitating habitat in the Hunter Estuary; the Travelling Stock Routes Stakeholders Group evaluating the future utilisation of the TSR resource; the Green Corridor Coalition working for the connectivity of the landscape; Maitland City Council 355 Committee as an advocate for the ecological restoration of bird habitat at Walka Recreational and Wildlife Reserve.

HBOC made recommendations to the Department of Lands regarding hazard reduction burning in the Green Wattle Creek Area. This initiative, also involving the National Parks and Wildlife Service, has resulted in the proposal of substantial conservation gains for the area generally and for woodland birds specifically.

HBOC supported the review of the Hunter Wetlands Centre Draft Strategic Management Plan especially with regard to site management, the promotion and implementation of RAMSAR guidelines and sustainability issues and fostered relationships between HBOC and HWC with positive outcomes.

Thank you to all members of the Conservation Committee for their continued efforts, for their expertise and experience in providing a necessary service, not only for HBOC, but also for the community at large, as they strive for better environmental outcomes.

In 2010 it is envisaged that the members of the Conservation Committee will again have a full to overflowing agenda especially in light of the looming challenge to the principled governance of environmental off-sets and the task of developing HBOC priorities for bird and habitat protection in the Hunter Region.

6. Field Studies and Data Management

Comprises those issues concerned with collecting data, monitoring bird populations and maintaining data records which underpin the HBOC research and conservation effort while at the same time making a worthwhile contribution to members' leisure-based bird watching.

The HBOC Annual Bird Report No 16 2008 Ed A. Stuart indicates that the total number of species for the Hunter Region is 428 species. Generally, 2009 appears to have been one of the most productive years on record for Hunter Region Bird sightings. Speculative reasons could include inland drought with rain in some parts of the Hunter, increased reporting activity by members or just natural variability.

Individual member's observations, both planned and opportunistic, continue to provide all-important data for the inventory of Hunter Region birds and for increasing our knowledge of abundance, distribution and behaviour. Sightings reported at Club Night and subsequently noted in the Newsletter show an average of 105 records per bimonthly period. Other reports are submitted personally to the records officer and through survey activity (see below). The advent of Hunter-birding is expected to be a positive influence on the number of reports received from individual members in 2010.

A preliminary listing of sighting highlights for 2009 is provided below and it is noteworthy for the number of HBOC Category 3 birds listed. At the time of this report these records have not been accepted by the very busy Records Appraisal Committee.

Preliminary List of Highlights for 2009 (Submitted by A.Stuart).

- Dead Superb Fruit-Dove in suburban Newcastle
- Pied Imperial-Pigeon at Bulahdelah (new bird for Hunter list, if accepted)
- 10 x Blue-billed Duck at Walka Waterworks (largest count ever)
- 500 x Plumed Whistling-Duck at Doughboy Hollow (largest count ever)
- Australian Shelduck at Minmi
- 150+ Providence Petrel off Port Stephens
- 2 x Black-bellied Storm-petrels off Port Stephens
- ~8000 dead Short-tailed Shearwaters on Stockton Bight (as part of a major wreck of the species in SE Australia)
- Lesser Frigatebird at Newcastle Harbour
- 2 x Masked Booby off Seal Rocks (new bird for Hunter list, if accepted)
- Many records of Black Bittern
- Australasian Bittern at Kooragang Island
- Many Black-tailed Native-Hen records
- 8 x Wood Sandpipers at Hexham Swamp
- Painted Snipe at Hexham Swamp
- 1 x Greater Sand Plovers at Mudbishops Point Old Bar and at Stockton Bight
- 2460 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Morpeth Treatment Works
- 3 x Pectoral Sandpipers at Ash Island

- Australian Pratincole at Ash Island
- 6 x White Tern off Seal Rocks
- Pacific Gull at Harrington
- Several records of Common Noddy
- Large numbers of both Musk and Little Lorikeets at many locations in Spring
- A flock of Black Honeyeaters at Sandy Hollow
- Many Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater records
- Several Painted Honeyeaters at Martindale and also records from elsewhere
- Yellow-throated Miner at Seal rocks
- Singing Honeyeater near Cassilis
- Many (~40) Regent Honeyeaters at Werakata NP and nearby areas; also some Swift Parrots there
- A rare coastal (Myall Lakes NP) record for Pale-yellow Robin

Some important breeding records:

- Nankeen Night-Herons at Shortland and Snapper Island (first records for several decades, although long suspected)
- Bush Stone-curlews in Port Stephens area (mostly unsuccessfully)
- Beach Stone-curlew at Mudbishops Point Old Bar (breeding success uncertain)
- Caspian Tern at Wallis Lake (rare record for NSW)
- Little Terns established a colony in the dunes near Fern Bay (but the Mudbishops Point colony shrank)

Members were also very active in 2009 as part of the regular, systematic field studies conducted within the Hunter Region. The constant effort approach provides raw data for analysis and monitoring of bird populations, processes which allow HBOC to pursue its conservation goals supported by reliable and objective information.

The following list summarises HBOC survey activity the results of which are reported through other avenues.

Hunter Estuary Shorebirds, Tomago Wetlands, Lake Macquarie Shorebirds, Port Stephens Waterbirds, Worimi Nature Reserve, Swan Bay, Newcastle Rock Platform, Kooragang/Ash Island Wetlands, Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works, Walka Recreational and Wildlife Reserve, Blackbutt Reserve, Irrawang Swamp, Hexham Swamp, Greswick Angus Seaham, Muralla Vacy, Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot Survey, Ibis Count, Latham's / Painted Snipe Count, Bittern Survey.

Marine Park Survey: The National Parks and Wildlife Authority enlisted HBOC expertise for the survey of the marine park for pelagic and other species.

HBOC members participated in the "ground truthing" associated with the aerial surveys conducted as part of the National Water Birds Survey.

The Important Bird Areas program was launched by Birds Australia, in conjunction with Birdlife International, in October 2009. As there are five Important Bird Areas within the Hunter Region HBOC will be called upon to adapt its long term monitoring program to fully incorporate these areas.

Observational data from HBOC members continues to be submitted to the Birds Australia Atlas and the NSW Atlas. The attached BA Atlas Coordinators' report (Appendix C) highlights HBOC'S acquisition from Birds Australia of ten years of summary data for the entire Hunter Region. Access to this data will increase our current state of knowledge and facilitate future planning of surveys and data collection. An enthusiastic group is working with this data to produce distribution maps that will not only increase the usefulness of this data but will also help encourage members to appreciate the value of increasing their level of participation in the Atlas project in 2010.

Regardless of the source, leisure time observation or systematic study, the importance of reporting observational records should not be underestimated. Also, the role of the Annual Bird Report, the Newsletter, the Whistler and Special Reports, in publishing and ensuring the records are put to good use is significant.

HBOC is indebted to the many core members and their off-siders, who organise and participate in survey teams, juggle tide times, trudge through mud and dry scrub while thoroughly enjoying themselves, for their expertise,

dedication, and persistence in the pursuit of knowledge and better environmental outcomes for Hunter Region birds.

7. Projects

Comprises the “hands on” conservation projects that restore selected areas of bird habitat in the Hunter.

A comprehensive report of the Milham's Pond Saltmarsh and Shorebird Rehabilitation Project is attached Appendix D. This project represents a partnership between KWRP and HBOC, with HBOC being responsible for project design, site supervision and volunteer effort. KWRP is responsible for administration, community education and liaison with Government departments. The project is funded through a Caring for Country Coastcare Grant (\$18.000) and 2008 Twitchathon funds (\$10.000).

The rehabilitation work is both contractor and volunteer based with HBOC volunteers contributing 200 hours of work in 2009. An estimated 80.000 mangrove plants, predominately seedlings, have been removed under licence. The resultant establishment of saltmarsh will benefit shorebirds in the long term.

A comprehensive report of the Stockton Sandspit Shorebird Roost Rehabilitation Project is attached Appendix D). This project continues to meet its objectives with flying colours resulting in positive outcomes for the shorebirds of the Hunter Estuary. The volunteer effort for this ongoing project since 2003 is 3500 hours equating to over \$60.000 work-in-kind.

The success of these projects has been dependent on the drive, dedication and experience of the project managers and the team of volunteers all of whom are to be commended for their efforts. A challenge for HBOC in 2010 is to ensure that the planned program of works for both these important projects is well supported by members participating in the volunteer effort not only to consolidate the progress already achieved ,but also to ensure the future viability of these habitats for shorebirds.

8. Education & Promotion

To equip club members, the organisation and the broader community with the knowledge, skills and capacity to not only enhance the bird watching experience, but also to support the conservation of Hunter birdlife and its various habitats; and

This section includes avenues for members to champion birds, the environment and HBOC to the broader community.

For the purpose of this report these two aspects are linked as many HBOC activities have shared outcomes.

The diverse activities and events indicated below show HBOC's involvement in educational and promotional activities during 2009.

HBOC Website: The HBOC website continues to evolve as an important “front line” source of information for the community and as a promotional tool for the Club. In 2009 the website underwent considerable refinement thanks to the skills of the website managers, the addition of the Newsletter link being advantageous.

Wader Awareness Day: A very successful Wader Awareness Day was held on the Kooragang Dykes to showcase shorebirds and assist members to develop shorebird monitoring skills. The extension of the Awareness Day concept to other areas warrants future development as exemplified by the recent field studies day in Cumbury State forest where members were guided in the use of appropriate woodland sampling techniques. This sharing of experience and skills by experienced members is commended.

Wader Information and Identification Workshop-Shorebirds 2020: This highly successful event at the Hunter Wetlands Centre attracted a wide audience which enjoyed a most informative and expertly delivered presentation program and field excursion. HBOC organised the event and delivered presentations in conjunction with the Shorebirds 2020 team.

HBOC collaborated with the HCRCMA to develop an educational publication and program, including a bird walk open to the public, designed to raise awareness of woodland birds, threatened species and their habitat in the lower Hunter Valley. HBOC also presented to the Hunter Aviculture Society on the Threatened Birds of the Hunter Region.

Publications: HBOC publications such as the Annual Bird Report, The Whistler, The Club Newsletter, Special Reports and Birding Routes pamphlets continued to provide educational and promotional benefits in 2009. The Special Report "Newcastle Council Hunter Estuary Study" was published and distributed in 2009. Hunter Bird Check List: A useful Hunter bird checklist has been developed for use by various local agencies to raise awareness of the diversity of birdlife in the Hunter Region.

BIGnet: HBOC hosted the March meeting of BIGnet and was represented at the September meeting in Mittagong. The March meeting provided a valuable learning experience for members participating in the "Advocacy Workshop" where, under the guidance of well credentialed Lyn Goldsworthy, they developed pertinent campaigning skills.

Hunter Estuary Working Technical Working Party: HBOC holds a position on this body to provide technical advice regarding the development of primary actions for habitat rehabilitation and to promote birds in the estuary. HBOC also represented on the Rocky Shores Working Party.

CEN Field Days: HBOC and Hunter birds were promoted to property owners at the CEN Field Days conducted in conjunction with the CMA at Wentworth Swamp to raise awareness of birds and the need for connectivity across the landscape. Connectivity was also highlighted through HBOC's continued involvement in the Green Corridor Coalition.

Bengalla Bird Day: HBOC again represented at the Bengalla Bird Day organised for employees and their friends at the Bengalla mine. As in the past this event was most successful in raising awareness of the local birds amongst those people attending.

Catchment Connections Field Day: A display and series of short talks to school children at the Lake Macquarie venue proved successful resulting in one very keen youngster joining the Club as a junior member.

KWRP World Wetlands Day: HBOC conducted a well attended series of talks and mounted a display at the popular KWRP Field Day.

Flagship Species: HBOC was represented at a workshop to discuss various "flagship" species that may represent each major habitat in the Lake Macquarie area.

Belltrees: HBOC forged a relationship with Belltrees by introducing 20 non-birders to the wonders of bird watching and in the process gained access to important historical bird data.

HBOC participated in the Clean Up Australia Day campaign and the Walk Against Warming event in Newcastle.

Hunter River Open Day: HBOC participated in this event at Singleton

Murrurundi School Day: HBOC conducted talks about birds to Murrurundi school children at an event organised by the CMA

Various bird related talks, accompanied by photographs, were given to organisations such as service clubs much to the delight of those attending. Positive feedback always results from these occasions. Presentations were also made to the Hunter Environment Institute and the Swansea Sustainability Group.

In general, many audiences of HBOC presentations included non-birders ranging from interested citizens to consultants and government agencies. All members who gave presentations are to be commended for their contributions to championing birds, the environment and HBOC to the broader community.

In 2010 strategies for promoting birds and the environment through the local print media will be explored.

9. Newsletter

HBOC's regular newsletter, that communicates club news, the event calendar, interesting sightings, Club outing and other reports and birding articles of general interest, to members, selected birding organisations and the public, either directly or via the HBOC web site.

The bimonthly Newsletter continues to be a vital link in Club communication as it is distributed to every member and selected birding organisations.

The Newsletter is evolving as members' digital photography and use of upgraded publishing software enhance the publication and add to its interest and visual appeal.

Technology has allowed the Newsletter to be placed on the HBOC website resulting in a potentially wide readership with the added effect of promoting the Club and increasing the awareness of Hunter birds.

The Club is indebted to the dedicated editor, the publication and distribution teams for their contributions to this vital, although at times, arduous task. Methods of distributing the Newsletter were under consideration in 2009 in order to overcome a few "hiccups" and to streamline the process. It is expected that on 2010 any problems will be rectified.

The many members who wrote articles for the Newsletter are the lifeblood of its existence and they are to be congratulated for the quality of their reports whether they are outing or trip reports, observation records, articles about bird studies and general interest, news, or photographs.

Late in 2009 the suggestion was made that the Newsletter should have a name, perhaps one that reflects the history of the Club, this suggestion will be explored in 2010.

10. The Whistler

HBOC's research-based, occasional periodical of refereed papers and notes that places on record observational details and analysis of HBOC members' field studies.

Volumes 2 and 3 of this quality publication were issued in 2009 due to the dedication and drive of the joint editors, the publications manager and the Whistler committee. The Report from the Joint Editors is attached Appendix E.

Although the Whistler is in its infancy it is a credit to the Whistler team and the contributing authors that this publication, with its record and analysis of systematic bird studies, is already having a potential impact on the development of local conservation policy.

As reported earlier the HCRCMA is recognised for its generous sponsorship of the Whistler in 2009.

In 2010 the Whistler Committee aims to produce two volumes, one of which will be dedicated to Hunter Region threatened species.

11. Special Interest

At present, this section offers the opportunity for members with a special interest in bird photography to develop their bird watching and photographic knowledge / skills while promoting birds and the environment.

This grouping resulted from membership need and at this stage it has bird photography at its focus. Photographers have been valuable contributors to Club Night, the Newsletter, digital library and general club promotion.

It is envisaged that the group will play an important role in mounting the Club photographic exhibition proposed earlier in 2009 as an important means of raising awareness of Hunter birds, HBOC and the environment.

The Hunter-birding discussion group (mentioned earlier in this report) could be seen as part of the Special Interest Group.

12. General

Several items of a general nature are noted below:

There is a trend to better utilise computer based technologies, e.g. Newsletter publication and distribution; Club Night presentations; information sharing through a developing web-site, e-mail service and Hunter-birding; digital photography; Hunter Site Guide; record keeping; data management and mapping. Although some may see the phasing out of slides, overhead projectors and even snail mail as regrettable, there are benefits such as ease of access, quality, usefulness, efficiency and effectiveness of communication.

HBOC has actively engaged in cooperative relationships with many other organisations. This is a desirable situation which broadens HBOC's area of influence for the benefit of Hunter Region birds. HBOC's area of influence has also expanded through members' dedication to field studies and the increasing ability of the Club to make the knowledge gained more accessible and useable through its various publications. This work is an investment in the future of birds in the Hunter Region. The benefits may be hard to measure and may not be readily apparent in the short term, but in the long term, the publication of objective knowledge which potentially influences conservation decisions, is a goal worthy of pursuit.

Arguably there is an implied emphasis in the Annual Report on areas dealing with the conservation aims of the Club and this is perhaps a necessary reflection of the environmental pressures characteristic of the times in which we live. However HBOC has another aim which relates to birdwatching as a worthwhile leisure activity and it is imperative that a balance between the two aspects of HBOC endeavour is preserved. The challenge, therefore not only for the Committee, but also for each member, is to find ways of balancing, or integrating both leisure and conservation into their birdwatching experience.

Acknowledgements

Several members of the Management Committee have foreshadowed that they will not be available for re-election when positions are declared vacant at the 2010 Annual General Meeting and it is appropriate that their contributions are acknowledged in this Annual Report.

Tom Clarke: HBOC owes a debt of gratitude to Tom for his exemplary service as Honorary Secretary for ten years. The Club pays tribute to his thoroughness, diligence and dedication to his secretarial role in serving the members of HBOC. Although not available for re-election as Secretary, Tom has indicated his availability as a Committee Member and Club Night Coordinator and will continue to drive the important habitat rehabilitation projects that promote the conservation of Hunter Region birds in a significantly practical manner. Thank you Tom!

Rowley Smith: Rowley has indicated that it is time for a change and is not seeking re-election as Honorary Treasurer. Rowley has overseen the financial affairs of HBOC for more than ten years and through discipline and acumen has seen HBOC develop a sound financial position. Rowley has also been Membership Officer keeping track of the subscription status and the comings and goings of members through his comprehensive membership lists and reports. HBOC thanks you Rowley, for your administrative services over the past decade.

Ann Lindsey: Ann is not available for re-election to the Management Committee in 2010. As a Past President and stalwart of the Committee for many years her vast experience, drive and obvious passion for birds will not be lost as she intends to expend her considerable energies in other areas of HBOC activity. Thank you! Ann has been nominated for Life Membership of HBOC in recognition of her contributions to HBOC and the conservation of birds.

Liz Crawford: Liz has foreshadowed her preference for contributing to the HBOC Committee as a club member rather than as an elected Committee member in 2010 and will focus her efforts on her role as Editor of the HBOC Newsletter. This is indeed fortunate for HBOC as Liz's experience, dedication and multi-faceted skills are all-important inputs to HBOC management and organisation. Thank you!

Robert McDonald: Robert will not be available for the Committee in 2010 as he is now employed doing conservation project work at Willie Retreat in the Macquarie Marshes near Warren NSW. HBOC wishes to thank Robert for his contributions as Librarian and Committee member and for his tireless work and input to the rehabilitation of habitat so necessary for the future of Hunter Estuary Shorebirds. I wish Robert every success in his new position. Thank you!

Craig Anderson: Craig has indicated that he is unavailable for Committee in 2010 due to changes in his work situation and other commitments. While serving on the Committee Craig has made valued contributions to the TSR Reference Group and especially to the working group set up to revise the HBOC organisational structure. His clear thinking and considered opinion regarding the issues involved resulted in much improved result.

Thank you also to the 2009 Management Committee and other committees and groups for their enthusiastic support of the Club in 2009. Thank you to Vice-President Grant for stepping into the breach when needed. I also extend my gratitude to the mentors, and advisors who, through their wise counsel, eased my passage through this year as President.

Finally and importantly HBOC is indeed fortunate to have so many supportive and cooperative members who work willingly for the Club. Appreciation is expressed to each of these members, who through their time, effort, expertise and goodwill ensured that, in 2009, HBOC continued to move toward the achievement of its aims.

Paul Baird

(HBOC President 2009)