



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc
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The 2025 Annual Report of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on the 11 February 2026. It is available via the club website at www.hboc.org.au.

1. 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.

HBOC maintained excellent relationships and collaborations with a wide range of private and public organisations throughout 2025. Promoting these cooperative efforts is an important aspect of the Club. The benefits of these collaborations are evident in almost every aspect of the Club and we acknowledge the contributions of collaborative organisations and those members who have been involved in this regard. The Club continues to be highly respected as one of the peak environmental organisations in the Hunter. Members are to be congratulated for consolidating this reputation. The immense volunteer time and effort that goes into helping the Club function is also recognised.

Management Committee: The following people volunteered their time by holding positions on the Management Committee during 2025: Louise Williams (President), Drew Garnett (Vice President), Helen Horne (Hon. Secretary), Helen McCall (Hon. Treasurer), Marg Clarke, Judy Little, Rob Kyte, Andrew McIntyre, and Mick Roderick. Helen Horne and Andrew were new to the committee in 2025. The Club gives thanks to Marg, who retired from her position on the Management Committee at the end of the year. Marg will continue to support the Club with the Education Sub-committee.

Website: The Club's website continues to be a key administrative and communication tool. Membership applications and renewals are handled through the website, information regarding upcoming Club activities is communicated, and many Club publications are freely available to members on the Club website.

A new HBOC website has been developed and will go live in the coming months. Training will be provided to several Club members who will be able to maintain content on the site. Thanks goes to Rob Kyte who has been instrumental in driving this process.

Club Membership: Our Treasurer, Helen McCall, continued the recording responsibilities of membership during 2025. She communicates with new and renewing members and maintains a membership skills register to help find matches between the needs of the Club and capabilities that the membership has to offer. Helen also provided a comprehensive monthly report from the membership register to the Committee.

As of 31 December 2025, there were an estimated 473 financial memberships of HBOC, which represents an increase on the previous year. Note that family memberships are counted as two members and the totals consider changes in membership type and members leaving the club.

2. Activities

This includes the planning, organisation and participation in the leisure-based birdwatching and social activities of the Club.

Club Nights: Club Nights were very well attended by members. Throughout 2025 Club Nights occurred monthly except for January. Each Club Night featured a Guest Speaker and a shorter *Bird of the Evening* talk. In 2025, *What Bird is That?* and quiz segments were introduced. The monthly speakers at Club Meetings continued to be recorded to enable access to members that are unable to attend. The recordings are hosted on the Club's YouTube Channel (https://m.youtube.com/@hunterbirders/videos?view=0&sort=dd&shelf_id=3). Thanks go to Lene Parashou for continuing to manage this task.



The crowd at July's Club Night. Ann Lindsey was awarded the Hobbs Medal from BirdLife Australia at this Club Night – the 5th HBOC member to receive this honour!

The earlier 'supper' refreshments have continued to be enjoyed by the membership for social networking and, whilst not a Club-run activity, many members continue to gather at the Shortland Hotel after the monthly Club Nights. This is a beneficial aspect of attending the meetings, as it enables further social engagement and discussion about all things 'birding' between members.

During Club Nights members have access to the HBOC library. The library comprises more than 450 books, 66 reports and issues of journals related to Australian birding. New additions to the library are often received.

Outdoor activities: A full schedule of Club outings was offered throughout the last 12 months. These activities included monthly Sunday outings, monthly mid-week outings, and long weekend camps.

Unfortunately, many camps and a few outings had to be cancelled due to inclement weather. Outings to diverse locations were enjoyed by several members. Outing locations included Tocal Homestead, Thornton, Cardiff, Mount Vincent, Cold Tea Creek, Walka Water Works, Taylors Beach, and Stockton Sandspit. Many thanks goes to Dave Stuart for coordinating the activities calendar and to all those who led an outing.

Photography: Images contributed to HBOC's Bird Image Library (BIL) are managed by the collection manager, Rob Palazzi. Most of the images held are now on display In the BIL section of the SmugMug website (<https://hbo-birdgallery.smugmug.com/>), which can be accessed via the Club's website. The BIL contains over 24,000 images, with the overall level of quality being excellent.

Hunter 300 Club: A fun component of the Club where those keen birders who have seen more than 300 species in the Hunter Region publish their tallies on the website. Badges are currently available for those reaching the 300, 350 and 400 species milestones.

3. Study and Conservation

This section encompasses the collection of data, monitoring and study of birds and the protection of birds and their habitat in the Hunter Region and beyond.

Field Studies: This part of HBOC is particularly strong and underpins many of the conservation efforts and published work in The Whistler and the Annual Bird Report. The Club continues to run many regular systematic surveys across the Region for a range of stakeholders. These include:

- Hunter Wader Surveys – conducted monthly
- Port Stephens Wader Surveys – conducted every six months
- Surveys for Landcare groups (Luskintyre, Martindale, McCullys Gap, Maitland Earthcare Park)
- Other regular surveys (Walka Water Works, Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works, Grahamstown Dam)
- Broughton Island Surveys – conducted quarterly
- Rufous Scrub-bird Surveys – conducted in September 2025
- Latham's Snipe Surveys – conducted to align with national surveys
- Australasian Bittern Surveys – conducted to align with national surveys.



Surveying shorebirds (and rainbows) at the Kooragang Dykes.

In addition to the systematic surveys, all records from Club outings and camps are entered into Birdata.

Records appraisal is undertaken by a Records Appraisal Committee that oversees the assessment of rare and unusual reports of birds in the Region. The RAC reviews records of species that are vagrant to the Hunter Region but are not within the remit of the state (ORAC) or national (BARC) committees. These species are assigned as "Category 3" in the Annual Bird Report and an annual report from the RAC is provided as an appendix to the ABR.

Drone Surveys: The Club has a Drone Sub-committee to manage use of the two Club drones (with one having thermal imaging capability). In 2025 the Club undertook some additional training of members to further our capabilities in drone surveys. The maintenance of appropriate qualifications and training for pilots and procedures for correct use of the drones for the purposes of Club surveys is no small undertaking. Thanks is given to Rob Kyte for his efforts in getting our house in order in this regard.

Much of the drone survey effort this year has been for the monitoring of breeding Black-necked Storks in the Hunter Estuary. It is expected that future uses will include further Australasian Bittern surveys and shorebird monitoring.

Conservation: HBOC continues to take part in campaigns against overdevelopment that impinge on important bird habitat in the Hunter Region and elsewhere. These campaigns are time-consuming

and sometimes frustrating, and we thank our conservation sub-committee for their efforts. Tom Kendall stepped back from the Conservation Sub-committee coordinator role mid-2025 and we thank him for his time and effort. Steph Owen has since taken on the coordinator role – thank you.

Key submissions/letters in 2025 included:

- A review of the NSW Companion Animals Laws.
- Hunter Offshore Wind Zone
- Bloomfield Mine Expansion

All submissions are available on the HBOC website under the Conservation tab. Members of the conservation committee have shown dedication and perseverance and the Management Committee thank them for the time they have invested in the interests of the welfare of Australian birdlife and their habitats. Conservation is a core activity of the Club and requires dedicated effort from volunteers to fight on behalf of the community for a better future for our birds.

Since 2003, under Tom Clarke, Club members have maintained a constant volunteer effort with to restore shorebird habitat within the Hunter estuary. Currently the combined projects cover over 150 ha of the Hunter Wetlands National Park.

To do this, permission from NPWS and Department of Primary Industries and Environment (DPIE) is required. A renewed permit (PN20-194) under Part 7 of the Fisheries Management Act 1994 allows “harm to marine vegetation associated with mangrove management at Hunter Wetlands National Park, Hunter River, multiple sites”. This latest permit has been issued for five years and is in force until 30th June 2026.

Much of the Club’s field work and survey efforts are now registered in the NPWS VIP program, allowing volunteers’ hours to be tracked and providing insurance cover for them.

Separate supporting annual reports are produced for the Club’s conservation efforts, and these should be referred to for further detail.

4. Education and Communication

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

The Education and Promotion Sub-committee is one of the largest growth areas of the Club. Thanks go to Marg Clarke and her team for their dedication to this field. Some highlights from 2025 include:

- Fledglings activities
 - World Wetlands Day at the Hunter Wetlands Centre
- Public bird walks:
 - Hunter Region Botanic Gardens
 - Seniors Week Walk at Walka Water Works
 - McCullys Gap Bird Walk
 - Muscle Creek Bird Walks
 - Belmont Bird Walks
 - Landcare Muster at Earthcare Park
- Public Events
 - Lake Macquarie Living Smart Festival
- HBOC member events
 - New Members Day
- School visits

- Maitland Environmental Youth Day

Wilma Barden Memorial Grant: In 2025 two Wilma Barden Memorial Grants were awarded. The first was to Katy Robinson of the University of New South Wales for their project *Northward East Australian Songbird migration – a poorly known* phenomenon, and the second to Maxime Marini of the University of Newcastle for his shorebird tracking project – congratulations, Katy and Maxime!

Sue & Ed Hamonet Memorial Award for Excellence: In 2023 the Sue & Ed Hamonet Memorial Award was established. It is to award groups or individuals in the participation of community education of birdlife and its conservation. This award has still yet to be given to any recipients and members are encouraged to promote the availability of the award to local schools.

E-news: The eNews continues to be a quality publication and an important means of communication, which links members within the Club through its news reports and other birding articles. The monthly digital format allows us to be flexible while at the same time encouraging members to read further.

The many members who contribute articles and photographs to the Newsletter are thanked for their interest, time and effort, and I thank the eNews team for their contribution. Copies of previous eNews publications are available on the Club's website:

<https://www.hboc.org.au/publications/newsletters/>

Social Media: The Club's Facebook and Instagram accounts continue to grow in both membership and content. The YouTube channel is being populated with recordings of Club Meeting talks. We look forward to improved cross-platform media sharing opportunities with the development of the new Club website.

The *Hunterbirding* online forum is mainly for sharing local bird information, reporting sightings and for general discussion. *Hunterbirding* is firmly established as the important go-to place where local issues, such as identification and interesting sightings are first disseminated to many within the wider Hunter birdwatching community, particularly those that are not active on social media.

The e-mail service continues to play a vital role in Club communications. This efficient means of distributing important messages and information keeps members informed, especially between Newsletters. It also provides the means through which members receive their eNews. Thanks go to Rob Kyte for his maintenance of this service to the membership.

5. Publications

To contribute to the scientific, birdwatching and broader community with the publication of important materials, documenting key findings of the Club's vast knowledge and experience base.

The Whistler: is the Club’s research-based, occasional periodical of refereed papers and notes that places on record observational details and analysis of HBOC members’ field studies. Articles produced for The Whistler are published on an individual basis when ready and access is provided to the public through the Club’s website. Once sufficient material is available, the editorial team produce a formal journal issue which is then made available in both digital and hardcopy formats. Volume 19 of The Whistler was finalised in late 2025. Congratulations to joint editors Neil Fraser and Alan Stuart, the production team, and all members that contributed articles.

Hunter Region Annual Bird Report: The ABR was published in 2025 thanks largely to several volunteers who stepped up to assist in the summarisation of records for individual species groups. The edition covers 1st Jan 2020 through 31st May 2021. Subsequent issues will span 1st Jun through 31st May. The process of volunteer assistant editors has worked well, and the plan is to release the most up-to-date edition of the ABR in 2026, followed by ‘catch-up’ editions.

Other Publications: In addition to The Whistler and ABR, the Club produces several other periodic publications, including the monthly ‘Featured Bird’ articles written by Alan Stuart and the ‘Birding Route’ brochures to which many members contribute. The quality of all material that the Club publishes is of the highest quality and we are indebted to Rob Kyte for his generous contribution of skill and time in this regard.

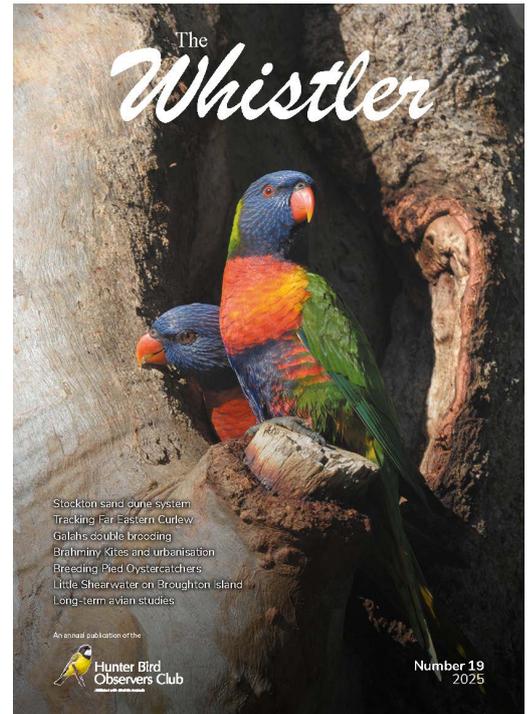
6. Concluding remarks

The Club continues to grow in many areas, including membership, social media, and community education. Through our consistent efforts in field studies and conservation, supported by high quality publications, the Club is well respected by its peers, industry, and the broader community. As we move forward into 2026, we can be excited about an imminent new Club website and the many opportunities that it will bring to further serve our members and raise our profile. 2026 also sees the Club celebrating its 50th anniversary! Throughout 2026 members can look forward to a variety of special events, with the main event being a 50th anniversary dinner at Newcastle City Hall on Wednesday 6th May.

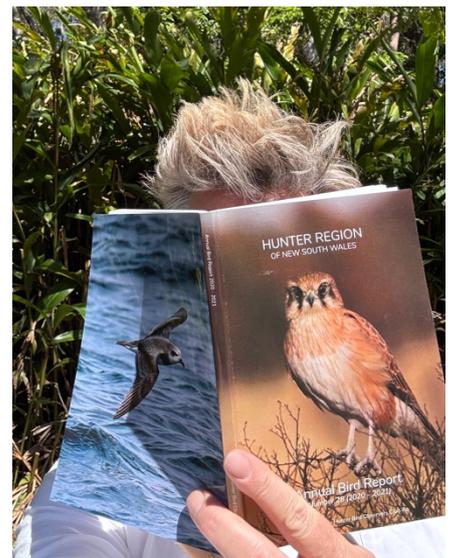
Thanks go to all members of the Management Committee for their continued support – they make my the job of President much easier. Thanks also goes to all sub-committee members, who do an immense amount of work in the background to reduce the discussion and decision-making required by the Management Committee. Finally, a big thank you to everyone that has otherwise not been acknowledged either directly or implicitly through the summary above.

Louise Williams

Hunter Bird Observers Club President – 11 February 2025



Volume 19 of The Whistler was published in 2025.



A member of the ABR production team engrossed in its content.