

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB INC. 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

The Annual Report for 2005 was presented by the President at the Annual General Meeting on 8 February 2005. A copy of the report will be kept in the library for future reference.

The Hunter Bird Observers Group was formed on 12 May 1976 as a subsidiary of the Hunter Flora and Fauna Society. It became the Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) in 1981 and in 1988 HBOC became incorporated. The Club's objectives are:

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

This report documents the Club's progress in meeting these objectives during 2005.

1. STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITAT

Bird Sightings and Highlights

Everyone will have a bird sighting (or two) that is memorable for 2005 – and many of these are raised at Club Nights in that very special section of the meeting when we ask for members' observations. All those observations are collated by Alan Stuart for the Annual Bird Report, which lists all the birds that occur in the Hunter Region with notes on their status. Details of rare or unusual birds should be recorded on an "URRF" – an "Unusual Record Report Form" – and submitted to the Records Appraisal Committee for acceptance of the record. This forces us to be careful in our identification, especially if the bird is unusual. During the year there were many highlights, as listed in **Table 1**. At this stage, not all records have been submitted, and processing of reports is still in progress by the Records Appraisal Committee. There were only three pelagic trips in 2005 (in late autumn to winter), as ongoing boat problems prevented further planned trips. Consequently, there was less chance of finding some of the more uncommon seabirds.

Table 1 – Birding Highlights for 2005

Species	Place	Month
Plumed Whistling Duck	The Hunter Wetlands Centre	Several months
Blue-billed Duck	Deep Pond, Kooragang Island	September
Freckled Duck	The Hunter Wetlands Centre	June
Kermadec Petrel (3 birds)	Offshore – pelagic trip	April
White-fronted Tern (8 birds)	Newcastle Harbour	June
Black Bittern	Cockle Creek, Barnsley	Spring
Black-necked Stork	Lenaghans Drive, East Seaham and Coolongolook	Summer-autumn
Black Falcon	Maitland/Morpeth area	Several records
Black-tailed Native Hen (3 birds)	Ash Island	April-May
Red-chested Button-quail*	Widden Valley	October
Sanderling (29 birds)	Old Bar	January
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Stockton Sandspit	March
Bush Stone-curlew (breeding record)	Lemon Tree Passage	Several breeding attempts
Swift Parrot (maximum count 120 birds)	Pelton State Forest; also Werakata National Park	July
Budgerigar*	Homestead near Cassilis (12 birds); Mount Arthur Mine Site, Muswellbrook	February; September
Black-eared Cuckoo	Giants Creek	May
Masked Owl (breeding record)	Awaba State Forest	Winter
Grass Owl	Crowdy Bay National Park	January/ December
White-eared Monarch	Crowdy Bay National Park	January
Yellow Wagtail	Ash Island	Feb/Mar; Nov/Dec
Pilotbird	Mt Coricudgy	Spring
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Giants Creek and vicinity of Sandy Hollow	Several records

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

Table 1 – Birding Highlights for 2005 (continued)

Regent Honeyeater	Widden Valley (4 pairs nesting) Pelton State Forest (3 birds)	September/October June/July
Painted Honeyeater	Widden Valley (may have bred)	October/November
Plum-headed Finch	Muswellbrook (2 birds); Near Jerrys Plains (70+ birds – an exceptionally high count for the Hunter Region); Widden Valley (9 birds).	February July October

Note: * New species for the Hunter Region Annual Bird Report. Recorded in the Hunter Region by John and Elizabeth Gould in 1839/1840.

Bird Surveys

Bird surveys are an important contribution to knowledge about Australian birds. During 2005, Club members participated in the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot and Painted Snipe surveys organized by the Threatened Species Network. Steve Roderick coordinated the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys for HBOC.

The **Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot** surveys were conducted on 14/15 May and 6/7 August 2005. No Regent Honeyeaters or Swift Parrots were detected in the Hunter Region during the May survey. During the August survey, small numbers of Swift Parrots were recorded around Pelton and other State Forests around Cessnock.

Although there were over 1000 **Swift Parrots** recorded in Victoria during the May survey, with 60 birds in the ACT and 50 birds in southern NSW, it wasn't until a week after the survey that the parrots reached the Hunter, with 3 recorded at Pelton on 21 May 2005. Numbers at Pelton increased to 84 in June, and Steve Roderick recorded over 150 Swift Parrots in the Cessnock area in June, with lots of sightings around Pelton. Small numbers were also recorded at Medowie and Gloucester. The last records of Swift Parrots at Pelton were on 13 August 2005. There were at least 160 to 180 Swift Parrots in the Hunter during the winter. During winter, Spotted Gum was flowering profusely and the Swift Parrots were using this as their main food source. They also fed on lerps on Spotted Gum, Broad-leaved Ironbark, Narrow-leaved Ironbark and Grey Box.

Regent Honeyeaters were very sparse in the Hunter Region during 2005. Three birds were seen in June at Pelton and subsequently near Kitchener. Four pairs were seen nest-building in Widden Valley in early October and a pair with two nestlings was observed in Widden Valley in late October.

The **Painted Snipe** surveys can be frustrating when no snipe are located – and that was the result this year during the official survey days. Despite thorough searches, no Painted Snipe were found at Pambalong Nature Reserve or Irrawang Swamp on the January survey. Apparently, Painted Snipe 'freeze' for about 15 minutes when disturbed, becoming invisible due to their excellent camouflage, so snipe surveyors have to be very patient!

The **Annual Latham's Snipe Count on 5 December 2005** was well attended this year, with 9 members and one grandson participating in the count at Pambalong Nature Reserve. Max Maddock surveyed Irrawang Swamp on the same day. Following last year's annual count in December 2004, increased snipe numbers were observed in January 2005 and additional surveys of Irrawang Swamp and Pambalong were conducted in January 2005. Results of these surveys are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1 – Results of Latham’s Snipe Surveys

Wetland	Number of Latham’s Snipe				
	5/12/2004	6/01/2005	15/01/2005	23/01/2005	5/12/2005
Pambalong Nature Reserve	36			120	66
Newcastle Wetlands Reserve	22				6
Market Swamp	0				
Irrawang Swamp	35	35	47		12
Seaham Swamp	0				
Walka Waterworks	8				
Tenambit Common	0				
Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works	0				
Private Property, Seaham	0				
Private property, Woodville	4				
TOTAL	105				84

Surveyors on 23 January 2005 included Ross Carlton, Liz Crawford, Neil Fraser, Chris Herbert, Ann Lindsey, Terry Lindsey, Robert McDonald, Lorna Mee and Alan Stuart. About 79 Latham’s Snipe were counted in the usual survey area and an additional 41 in the northern part of the swamp that is not usually surveyed, making a total of about 120. Surveyors on 5 December 2005 included Liz Crawford, Pam Durie and her grandson, Neil Fraser, Chris Herbert, Keith Laverick, Ann Lindsey, Lorna Mee, Mike Newman and Alan Stuart at Pambalong NR; Tom Clarke and Robert McDonald at Newcastle Wetlands; and Max Maddock at Irrawang Swamp.

These surveys provide a snapshot of the numbers of Latham’s Snipe using Pambalong Nature Reserve. Multiple surveys between December 2004 and January 2005 show that numbers at each site change depending on water levels and availability of suitable foraging areas.

The sixth year of regular monthly **wader counts in the Hunter Estuary** continued during 2005, with three teams surveying simultaneously: one at Ash Island, one at Kooragang Dykes and the Big Pond, and one covering a variety of sites between Stockton Sandspit and Fullerton Cove. Mid-way through the year, Ann Lindsey organized inductions and access for HBOC members to Deep Pond, which is located on the waste-dumping area on Kooragang Island. This land is managed by the Regional Land Management Corporation (RLMC), which has been appointed by the NSW State Government to manage land within the Hunter Port Area. Deep Pond is a significant bird habitat that is now included in the regular monthly wader counts. Big Pond has dried up entirely and is seldom used by waders.

As in previous years, many people have assisted with the wader counts:

Alan Stuart, Robert McDonald, Neville McNaughton, Ann Lindsey, Jenny Powers, Nick Livanos, Terry Lindsey, Liz Huxtable, Mick Roderick, Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford, Mike Newman, Steven Cox, Keith Laverick, Jenny Spencer, Grant Brosie, Lorna Mee, Christine Eastham, David Eastham, Graeme O’Connor, Phil Hansbro, James Smart, Neil Fraser, Gillian Teddes.

Consistent efforts by core team members are greatly appreciated, as is the assistance of many other people from time to time. We are indebted to Ann Lindsey for consistently entering the data into a computer program so that it can be readily transmitted to interested parties. This is a tremendous effort from everyone involved and as a Club we can be very proud of the results of these surveys, which are published in the Annual Bird Reports.

On 12 March 2005, Mick Murphy of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), organized a second comprehensive survey of **waterbirds in Port Stephens** with assistance from six members of HBOC and representatives from NPWS and the Port Stephens Marine Park planning office. Although this survey was intended to replicate the survey conducted in February 2004, a boat breakdown and adverse weather conditions meant that one area was omitted from the survey and some areas were not fully surveyed. However, four different areas were surveyed essentially simultaneously at high tide. The February 2004

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

survey found a total of 4,470 waterbirds including nearly 1,900 migratory shorebirds. The March 2005 survey found a total of 1,438 birds including 639 migratory shorebirds (see **Table 2**).

Table 2 – Shorebirds Recorded at Port Stephens on 8 February 2004 and 12 March 2005

Species	8/02/04	12/03/05
Black-tailed Godwit	51	0
Bar-tailed Godwit	888	268
Whimbrel	218	248
Eastern Curlew	649	80
Common Greenshank	0	8
Terek Sandpiper	6	0
Common Sandpiper	1	0
Grey-tailed Tattler	44	9
Ruddy Turnstone	8	20
Red-necked Stint	20	2
Pied Oystercatcher	112	30
Sooty Oystercatcher	18	5
Lesser Sand Plover	5	4
Masked Lapwing	33	15
TOTAL	2,053	689

As with the 2004 survey, Alan Stuart compiled a report on the March 2005 survey, discussing the survey method and results, which is available from the Library. NPWS intends to continue annual surveys of the waterbirds in Port Stephens and welcomes HBOC participation in these events.

Monthly surveys are conducted by Mike Newman and Ann Lindsey at the **Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works** where the treatment ponds are being maintained for bird habitat.

Monthly surveys of the **Tank Paddock** were terminated in August 2005. Results have been sent to Newcastle City Council, and have contributed to the decision not to allow rezoning of this land for residential subdivision. The “Tank Paddock Survey Team” have transferred their monthly surveys to three other sites: Awabakal Nature Reserve; Blue Gum Hills Regional Park and Pambalong Nature Reserve; and a site in Garden Suburb. Each area will be surveyed once every four months.

Monthly surveys at ‘**Greswick Angus**’, a private property on the Williams River at East Seaham, commenced in 2004 and continued throughout 2005. The surveys aim to monitor the results of on-farm riparian restoration on the Williams River Best Management Practice Demonstration Site. Tom Clarke, Anthony Gooden, Neville McNaughton, Leonie and John Storm and Lyn Rayward are conducting these surveys, with enthusiastic support from the property owners. Results are sent to the Birds Australia Atlas Project.

The **Birds Australia Atlassing Project** is ongoing, after publication of *The New Atlas of Australian Birds* following 4 years of intensive atlassing between 1998 and 2002 by over 7,000 volunteers. Ongoing atlassing continues to provide data for assessing environmental change, as birds are an indicator of ecosystem health. Many HBOC members are also members of Birds Australia and the Club works in harmony with Birds Australia on many issues. During 2005, six special atlassing days were organized by Grant Brosie, Nick Livanos and Ann Lindsey. These outings are often exploratory, searching for birds in areas that are not necessarily regular haunts of birdwatchers. The atlassing locations and highlights are listed in **Table 3**.

Table 3 – Atlassing Sites and Highlights during 2005

Date	Location	Highlights
13 February	Lemon Tree Passage area	Bush Stone-Curlew Leaden Flycatchers with dependent young

Table 3 – Atlassing Sites and Highlights during 2005 (continued)

Date	Location	Highlights
28 May	Sandy Hollow	Black-eared Cuckoo Chestnut-rumped Heathwren Brown Treecreeper Speckled Warbler White-eared Honeyeater
17 July	Denman area	Plum-headed Finch Speckled Warbler Western Gerygone
6 August	Cessnock area	White-bellied Cuckoo- Shrike White-eared Honeyeater Brown Treecreeper Black-chinned Honeyeater Spotted Quail-Thrush Crested Shrike-tit
3 September	Gloucester Tops	Rufous Scrub-bird Red-browed Treecreeper Crescent Honeyeater Flame Robin
12 November	Myall Lakes area	8 Cuckoo species Southern Emu-Wren White-bellied Cuckoo- Shrike

Atlassing Participants: Grant Brosie, Robert McDonald, Liz Crawford, Neil Fraser, Anthony Gooden, Colin Goodenough, Sue Hamonet, Chris Herbert, Trevor Jurd, Ann Lindsey, Nick Livanos, Neville McNaughton, Mike Newman, Mick Roderick, Alan Stuart, Harold Tarrant, Lynn Vella, Judy Westphal.

In May 2005, Newcastle City Council (NCC) commissioned HBOC to undertake a survey and assessment of birds on the **Rock Platforms within Newcastle Local Government Area**, to assist with coastal planning and management. At the same time, Newcastle University was commissioned to survey the invertebrate benthic fauna on the rock platforms. The 15 kilometres of shoreline managed by NCC is at the northern end of the Hawkesbury Marine Biodiversity Bioregion, and is a known data-gap in regard to marine biodiversity assessment. HBOC's project included: documenting the diversity and abundance of bird species using the rock platforms; assessing the population status and breeding status of birds; assessing the significance of each site in terms of habitats and bird species present; assessing significant differences between sites; documenting threatening processes and/or causes of disturbances to birds; and providing management options and recommendations. Chris Herbert and Liz Crawford surveyed the rock platforms over 3 days in July 2005 and, in August 2005, Chris Herbert compiled a comprehensive report based on both current and historical bird observations. The report has been very well received by NCC, which has commissioned additional summer observations. These will be incorporated in the final report. The Club has benefited financially from this commission.

NPWS organized an **Australian White Ibis count** on 11 December 2005. Members of HBOC recorded nesting Ibis at Toronto Wetland and Muddy Lake near Dora Creek.

The Newcastle Speleological Society plans to publish a small booklet on the natural attributes of **Timor Caves** in 2006 and has invited HBOC to compile a bird list for the caves area. Timor Caves is located beside the Isis River, east of Murrurundi. The first bird surveys were conducted in November 2005. Additional surveys will be carried out during 2006.

University Studies

It is very exciting to see studies of migratory waders in the Hunter Estuary being undertaken by University students. HBOC supports these studies and maintains close links with the students involved. Two PhD studies continued during 2005:

Newcastle University

- Alice Howe – Estuarine wetland rehabilitation and ecohydraulics: the link between hydraulics, sediment, benthic invertebrates, plants and migratory wading bird habitat.

Australian Catholic University

- Jenny Spencer – Study of shorebird use of the Hunter Estuary

Members of HBOC have been involved in assisting these projects and encouraging these studies.

Conservation – Summary of Issues

The Conservation Committee, led by Ann Lindsey, Neil Fraser, Mike Newman, Max Maddock and Jenny Powers, has continued to address issues that threaten birds and their habitat in the Hunter Region, particularly developments proposed for the Hunter Estuary. The proposed expansion of coal loaders in the Hunter Estuary and the deepening of the South Arm are under constant scrutiny. Following the withdrawal of the Austeel Project, Ann Lindsey made representations to the Regional Land Management Corporation about rescinding State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) 74 across Ash Island, but the government wants to retain this policy to facilitate a future transport corridor across the area. Numerous letters have been written to the Premier, the Environment Minister and local members of parliament, with little response.

Energy Australia invited HBOC representatives to several consultation meetings to discuss their proposed upgrade of powerlines across **Ash Island**. Liz Crawford prepared a detailed submission on bird use of Ash Island and the high potential for bird collisions with powerlines which traversed wetland areas. It is likely that powerlines will be consolidated along one route on the western side of the main wader feeding areas and bird-deflecting devices will be placed on the powerlines.

Hunter Water Corporation is planning to upgrade a trunkmain which runs across Ash Island. HBOC answered a request to comment on the proposed project.

Government planning initiatives in 2005 that potentially affect bird habitat included the Hunter Estuary Management Plan and the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy. The Hunter Estuary Management Plan is being prepared by Consultants for Newcastle City Council. HBOC members attended Community Consultation meetings to ensure that birds and their habitat were being considered, and a formal submission detailing habitat used by migratory waders was made. HBOC joined with other “green groups” in criticising the lack of consideration of the environment in the Department of Planning’s strategy for future development in the Lower Hunter. This “Blueprint for the Future” recommended development areas based on Councils’ wish-lists, and was issued before the Department of Environment and Conservation had finalized their recommendations for conserving areas. The struggle to have the **Green Corridor** recognized and protected continues. The Green Corridor stretches from Stockton Bight, through the wetlands around the Hunter Estuary, across Kooragang and Ash Islands to The Wetlands Centre and the Hexham wetlands, through the Tank Paddock, Pambalong and Blue Gum Hills Nature Reserves to Mount Sugarloaf and the Watagans.

BIGnet, the Bird Interest Group Network, consists of representatives from bird groups throughout NSW. This over-arching organization is a useful melting pot for sharing conservation issues among a wider audience. Recently, it has encouraged member groups to nominate Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for inclusion in Birdlife International’s List of IBAs throughout the world. This project is supported by Birds Australia, which is endeavouring to gain funding for a Project Coordinator. The mining company Rio Tinto has been approached and has expressed interest in sponsoring the project. HBOC has been collecting information to nominate Hexham Swamp and the Lower Hunter Estuary as IBAs. Nomination as an IBA has no legal standing, however it does raise the profile of an area in terms of its importance for birds.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

Throughout the year, Tom Clarke continued to lead an active team of weeders (including Robert McDonald, Anthony Gooden, Neil Fraser, Paddy Lightfoot and Dorothy Pritchard) at Stockton Sandspit, maintaining this iconic birdwatching spot for the birds. In between working, they delight in watching fascinating bird behaviour at the Sandspit. Tom's regular observations of water levels in the lagoon resulted in his recommending that the weir be lowered to allow better flooding of the saltmarsh areas. Following consultation with NPWS, KWRP and Department of Commerce, the weir was lowered and the saltmarsh is now thriving. Well done Tom!

Since the start of the efforts to rehabilitate Stockton Sandspit in 2003, a record of volunteer hours has been maintained. These hours, and their dollar value, are required to help match the Envirofund dollars granted to HBOC to carry out shorebird habitat restoration work in the Hunter Estuary. They also record the ongoing commitment to the restoration and maintenance of the Stockton Sandspit site.

At the end of 2005 a staggering 1,684.5 volunteer hours have been recorded since 2003. Calculating the dollar value at bush regenerator rates over the last three years equals \$25,745.

The 2005 effort of 590.5 hours has come from 48 workdays and represents almost a weekly presence at Stockton Sandspit. Since 2003, 125 workdays represents not only a mighty effort, but also a very high profile by HBOC at the site.

Work on removing mangroves from wader habitat on Ash Island commenced in September 2005, funded by an **Envirofund Grant** gained by HBOC from the Natural Heritage Trust. This work was carried out by contractors. KWRP has approval from Fisheries NSW for mangrove removal in the vicinity of Wader, Swan and Milham Ponds on Ash Island. Following the opening of Fish Fry Creek to increased tidal flow, mangroves have invaded an area that was formerly saltmarsh and made it useless for foraging by waders. The initial mangrove removal will be followed by maintenance slashing of mangrove seedlings and recommendations for better control of tidal inundation.

Development pressures are being felt all over the Hunter Region, with proposals to: surround Ellalong Lagoon with residential development; subdivide saltmarsh near Taylors Beach (the Cromarty Sands Development); create an open-cut mine in bushland near Awaba and another at Anvil Hill near Denman; and provide housing for up to 120,000 people in the Lower Hunter over the next 25 years. There is plenty to keep the Conservation Committee focused!

Meanwhile, a pair of Bush Stone-curlews ignored residential development and nested beside a park at Lemon Tree Passage. This year they were protected from dogs and foxes by a substantial fence erected by NPWS and Port Stephens Council. With a little more fine tuning of protective measures, the birds may be successful in raising young to fledging stage.

Twitchathon

Four teams from HBOC participated in the Twitchathon in October: Dodgy Drongos, Hunter Home Brewers and Hunter Thickheads in the main race; Lesticum Phoradae in the champagne race. The Hunter Home Brewers recorded an incredible 227 species, smashing the previous record of 221 species, but were narrowly beaten to first place by the Whacked-out Woodswallows from Dubbo, who recorded 229 species! The Hunter Thickheads tied with the Black-necked Stalkers (from the North Coast) for third place, with 201 species, all found within the Hunter Valley. The Dodgy Drongos came fifth with 196 species. The competition is getting tough! Lesticum Phoradae recorded 147 species and won the champagne race! The rarest bird seen during the Twitchathon was a Little Bittern, seen by Hunter Home Brewer Steve Roderick. Altogether the Hunter teams raised over \$1500 for educational facilities at Birds Australia's Gluepot Reserve. A mighty effort!

Once again, the Twitchathon became a media focus. Claudia Taranto of ABC Radio National interviewed members of the Hunter Home Brewers and Hunter Thickheads before and during the Twitchathon and produced an amusing half hour radio program for "Street Stories" highlighting the delights of birdwatching, the passion of birdwatchers and the fun of the Twitchathon. A recording of the program, which was broadcast in November 2005, is available from the library.

2. ENCOURAGE BIRD OBSERVING

Program

As usual, HBOC ran a large program of activities throughout the year to encourage bird observing – a total of 55 activities in 2005:

- 12 Sunday outings (held monthly)
- 11 mid-week outings (held monthly)
- 12 Hunter Estuary wader surveys (held monthly)
- 1 Port Stephens wader survey
- 6 Birds Australia Atlas survey days
- 5 special surveys (2 for Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot, 2 for Painted Snipe, 1 for Australian White Ibis)
- 3 pelagic outings off Newcastle
- 4 camps on weekends/long weekends
- 1 mid-week camp

All of these activities were well attended and our thanks go to all those who helped organize and lead these events.

Club Nights

We held 11 Club Nights during 2005 at The Hunter Wetlands Centre, where the average attendance was 47, five more than last year's average. (Details of these nights are provided in **Appendix 1**). Guest speakers covered a wide range of topics: *Radio-tracking waders in the Hunter Estuary*, *Nostalgia and Solastalgia*, *Birds of the Riverina and Queensland Wet Tropics*, *Bird Song*, *Bristlebirds*, *Bush Stone-Curlews*, *Raptors and the Goulds in the Hunter*. In keeping with this increasingly digital age, powerpoint presentations are now more common than slide presentations and our thanks go to all the presenters for their excellent efforts. Our thanks also go to Umwelt (Australia) Pty Limited for providing a computer projector on Club Nights during the first half of the year. In May 2005, HBOC purchased a computer projector for Club use, using funds from the Alan Keating Bequest. This has encouraged members to embrace the digital age and allowed HBOC to present talks on birds to community organisations. Another improvement to Club Nights is the portable microphone system, upgraded and repaired by Rowley Smith and Ross Marshall – many thanks!

The Bird of the Evening segment was a lot of fun with members discussing their favourite bird or some aspect of avian development. A highlight was Jenny Spencer's audience participation session when everyone was given 30 seconds to count flying waders on each of a series of slides. Jenny used the results to compare the accuracy of novice and experienced counters and the results were included in her presentation at the Australasian Shorebird Conference in New Zealand in December. Our thanks go to all the presenters for their enthusiasm and entertaining presentations.

The Observations/Discussion section of each meeting provided valuable bird observations for inclusion in the bimonthly Club Newsletters and the Annual Bird Report.

As usual, the December Club Night was a lot of fun with members' digital presentations, a raffle with wonderful prizes, and a great supper.

Community

Waders in the Hunter Estuary were once more a focus of our community efforts this year, with tremendous efforts being put into **Stockton Sandspit** by a small band of dedicated workers led by Tom Clarke. These efforts included weeding, mangrove seedling removal (in our permit area), planting of the car park gardens and lowering the level of the weir, after consultation with representatives from NPWS, Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project and Department of Commerce. Lowering of the weir aimed to improve the extent and

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

frequency of tidal inundation of the Sandspit so that saltmarsh vegetation would be encouraged and weeds discouraged. So far, it appears to have been very successful.

Tom and his helpers also re-installed one of the Club's information signs at the Sandspit after vandals had torn it out from its concrete base. Fortunately the sign itself was not damaged.

Funding for three more **signs about migratory waders** has been provided by Newcastle City Council. The signs have been designed by Chris Herbert and will be installed at Kooragang Dykes boat ramp, Stockton boat ramp and Carrington boat ramp during 2006. Chris also designed a sign about birds in Toronto Wetland, which will be produced and installed by Toronto Rotary and Toronto Sunrise Rotary during 2006 to complement their rehabilitation efforts on the wetland margins.

As in previous years, HBOC mounted **displays** at The Hunter Wetlands Centre for *World Wetlands Day* in February, *Orchids in the Wetlands* in September, and *Catchment Day* in October. These are great opportunities to involve families in birdwatching and raise awareness of the Club. Additional displays were mounted for Lake Macquarie City Council's (LMCC) *Catchment Connections Day* in June, for LMCC's *Leisure Living Learning Information Days* and for *Morisset Community Festival*. Tom Clarke, Sue Hamonet, Anthony Gooden, Di Johnson, Robert McDonald, Val and Don Moon, and Alan Stuart all participated in various displays and our thanks go to all of them.

Talks to various community groups, including Dora Creek View Club, Raymond Terrace Probus Club and Kurri Kurri Aviculturalists, as well as the Hunter Wetlands Centre Christmas Celebrations and the Coastcare Summer Festival, were given by Chris Herbert and Tom Clarke.

Newcastle City Council (NCC) funded publication of **Newcastle Birding Routes 1 and 2**. Two thousand copies of each brochure were printed and distributed to NCC, KWRP, The Hunter Wetlands Centre and Club members. The Club retains a supply of brochures for future distribution.

During 2005, Anthony Gooden represented HBOC on the **Eraring Community Forum**. This participation facilitated a bird survey of Eraring Power Station's land, including the fly ash dam which provides habitat for Black-winged Stilts and Red-necked Stints!

Communication with the community was facilitated by our webmaster Dick Jenkin, who maintained our **website** with its new address: www.hboc.org.au; by Peter Phillips, who made sure that all of our meetings were well advertised in local press and radio; and by Marion Walker, who continued to be our telephone contact point.

GENERAL CLUB OPERATION

Membership

The Club had 234 members in December 2005, a decrease of 30 over the previous year's total. Membership consisted of 75 single members, 156 family members and 3 junior members.

Finances

Once again, we are indebted to our honorary treasurer, Rowley Smith, who has kept a firm hand on the purse strings and provided financial reports to the monthly committee meetings. He has been cheerfully assisted at Club nights by Lesley Marshall. Our thanks to Katrina Thornton for auditing our accounts.

During the year we received an Environmental Grant of \$2000 from Newcastle City Council for production of three information signs about migratory waders for installation at three boat ramps within the Hunter Estuary. The signs have been produced and will be installed in 2006.

Newcastle City Council (NCC) also provided a grant of \$2820 for a Survey of Birds on the Rock Platforms within the Council area. The surveys and report were completed in August 2005. NCC has since requested further surveys during summer.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2005

The \$30,000 Envirofund Grant originally obtained for a proposed Bird Hide at Stockton Sandspit was re-directed towards improving wader habitat on Ash Island by removing mangroves that had invaded saltmarsh. After prolonged discussions, this alternative project was accepted by the Department of Heritage and Conservation and work finally started on 1 September 2005.

Despite projected increases in our operating expenditure for 2006, the Committee decided to keep membership fees at the 2005 level for 2006.

Library

Grant Brosie took responsibility for the Library during 2005, and was ably assisted by Robert MacDonald. The Library currently contains 431 books. New acquisitions during 2005 included: *Hérons, Egrets and Bitterns*; the very popular *Birding on Borrowed Time*; and *The Gouldian Finch* by Mike Fidler. HBOC has also pre-paid for the final volume of HANZAB. Drew Morris presented the Club with a copy of his Honours Thesis about birdwatchers and birdwatching titled "*Observing the Observers*". Drew interviewed many Club members as part of his research and participated in several field outings.

General

HBOC continued to publish a bimonthly newsletter, which is issued to all members as well as to other clubs with whom we exchange newsletters. We are indebted to Peter Phillips for editing, to Phil Rankin for preparing the newsletter for email transmission and to Tom Clarke for printing and distributing it. And of course, we appreciate the literary efforts of all our contributors! Keep it up!

Car stickers, featuring our Golden Whistler emblem, were designed by Chris Herbert and printed during the year. They are available for decorating your car for \$2 each.

The Management Committee worked well together during the year, shouldering a variety of tasks as the need arose. Special thanks go to Tom Clarke for his Secretarial expertise; to Ann Lindsey for organizing Conservation Committee meetings; to Rowley Smith for maintaining the membership list and overseeing the collection of monies; and to Vice President Alan Stuart for maintaining regular email communications with the majority of the membership, keeping us all up to date with the latest exciting bird sightings. Committee members Grant Brosie, Anthony Gooden, Chris Herbert, Ann Lindsey, Robert McDonald and Michael Todd, helped keep the Club running smoothly. The Committee appreciated input from Sue Hamonet and Jenny Powers, who were regular attendees at the Committee meetings. Management Committee meetings are open to anyone from the Club to attend and participate.

Two special people help ensure Club Nights run smoothly: Pam Durie welcomes attendees at our meetings and Judy Westphal makes sure we all have a cup of tea and a biscuit at the end of them. A small army of volunteers helps set up and clear away chairs each Club Night. Sue Hamonet maintains our Club bird records and ensures that all our results are sent to the Birds Australia Ongoing Atlas.

So many enthusiastic people in the Hunter Bird Observers Club make it a joy to belong to a Club that continues to maintain its twin objectives.

Thank you all.

Liz Crawford
HBOC President 2005