



Newsletter

Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Issue No. 2/18 April 2018

The Club aims: To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat, and To encourage bird observing as a leisure-time activity.



Photo by Rob Palazzi. Large-billed Scrubwren at Sunday Field Trip to "Tabbil Forest", Bingleburra Rd, Dungog (see report p.8)

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Please send Newsletter articles direct to the Editor
Judi Thomas at judnich20@gmail.com
Deadline for next edition 8th June 2018

HBOC postal address
PO Box 24 New Lambton
Website: www.hboc.org.au

President's Column

The last twelve months has been an exciting time for new bird sightings in the Hunter region. Only recently Michael Kearns and Alex Berryman found a Ground Parrot at Crowdy Bay National Park . The Ground Parrot had not been reported in the Hunter since 1935. There have been quite a few other new sightings. At our March committee meeting Mick Roderick gave us a rundown on the important species recorded in 2017. The highest ever total of species, 373, was recorded during 2017, three were of national significance, eight were of state significance and forty were of regional significance. There will probably be five new species for the Hunter Region list.

Sightings of some of these, such as the Oriental Pratincole at Hexham Swamp and the Common Gull-billed Terns at Stockton Sandspit were enjoyed by many club members. Those who were prepared to make the trek from Old Bar would have seen the Aleutian Terns at Farquhar Inlet. If confirmed this will be an Australian first. Interestingly enough, while waiting at Macdonalds car park at Hexham a woman noticed our binoculars and asked if we were twitchers. We admitted that we might be. She then said her son was a twitcher, his name is Liam Murphy. Liam is the person who first reported the Aleutian Terns. That's the closest I got to an Aleutian Tern.

Some sightings, such as the Soft-plumaged Petrel and Mottled Petrel were reserved for those intrepid

enough to go on pelagics. Even for those who were not so adventurous it was a very eventful year.

However we can't afford to get too complacent about the state of birds in the Hunter Region. As pleasing as some of these sightings have been they should not blind us to the fact that many species are in decline. A Local Land Services study has shown that in the last 200 years there has been a decline of 50% in shorebird numbers in the Hunter, not surprising when you consider that there has been an 80% decline in saltmarsh.

Alan Stuart and Mick Roderick in an article found on our web page indicated that 89 Species or sub-species found in the Hunter are endangered. These include some that we have become used to seeing regularly such as Eastern Curlew and Red Knot.

What does this all mean? It means that our conservation efforts to preserve bird habitat is an ongoing battle that never ends and we should do our best to support it in any way we can.

If you have enjoyed reading this Newsletter, thanks to our new editor, this will be the last one you will receive if you have not renewed your membership. Your membership and support helps the club continue its efforts to preserve our birds in the Hunter.

Robert Stewart

A Warm Welcome to New Members: We hope to see you at club meetings and outings.

Marion Anstis, Berowra Heights
Raymond Asimus, Merewether
John Erlich, Wallsend

Suzanne John, Fletcher
James Rees, Stockton
Shaun Pollington and Sonya Manzalini, Kotara

2018 Membership Fees are now due. Fees are:

Single \$35 Family \$40.

If you prefer to pay by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT).
Please include your NAME in the transaction.

BANK DETAILS:

INSTITUTION

Name: Greater Building Society
BSB: 637 000

ACCOUNT

Name: Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.
Number: 782260316

Health and Safety Awareness for Activities

When attending field outings, ensure you are wearing appropriate clothing, including wet weather gear in inclement weather, and suitable footwear. It is advisable to bring a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent and to carry water.

Please sign the attendance register at field outings and also at meetings. If you leave an outing early, please let the leader know before you go.

Participants attend at their own risk and should refrain from any behaviour that might put themselves or others at risk. That includes assessing whether they have the level of fitness required for the advertised outing. If in doubt, contact the leader beforehand.

Little Ravens in the Lower Hunter in Summer 2018

The Hunter Region is home to four species of ravens and crows (Corvids); a group of birds that are ubiquitous and familiar to us all. Perhaps the most common and easily recognised is the Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* as it is both resident and dominant in the places where most of the Hunter population live (e.g. Newcastle, Lake Macquarie etc). Forest Ravens *Corvus tasmanicus* are less familiar to us but that is probably because they have such a restricted range and habitat preference, being found along the beaches north of about Hawks Nest and in parts of the Greater Barrington Tops. There are two subspecies of Forest Ravens in Australia; ours being the New England Forest Raven *C. t. boreus* (also known as the 'Relict Raven'). We have one species of crow, the Torresian Crow *Corvus orru*, which is the dominant Corvid in many parts of the north-east of the region, including townships such as Dungog, Gloucester and Taree. This species is probably spreading south in its distribution, but more on that another time.

Probably the least understood Corvid in the Hunter is the Little Raven *Corvus mellori*. It is found generally in the north west of the region, well away

from the coast (refer to the map showing where Little Raven records have been noted in the Hunter, taken from the 2016 Annual Bird Report). However, it is not found easily/reliably and can be rather unpredictable. It's probably fair to say that there aren't any sites you could be certain to see them if you set off in search of them. Being quite fond of eating insects perhaps makes them more mobile than other Corvid species?

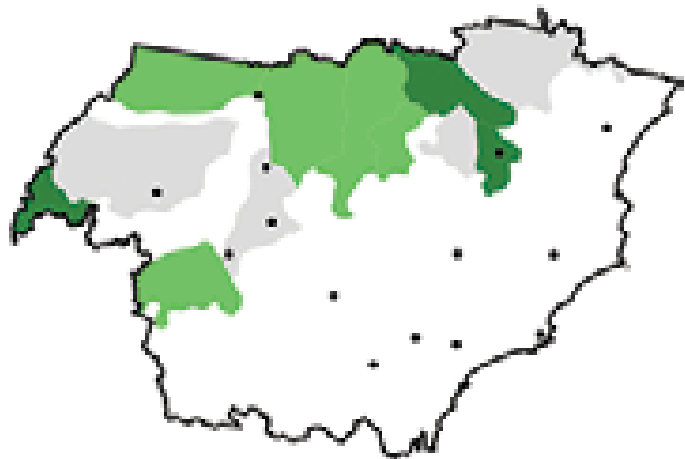
Of interest, this summer there were a couple of observations of flocks of ~100 Little Ravens in the Lower Hunter; one near Hinton (9th Feb) and one in the Congewai Valley, south of Cessnock (18th Feb). I am also certain that I heard Little Ravens at Pokolbin on the 17th Feb and there had been reports from Pokolbin in eBird in December 2017. It's difficult to say what drove these birds so close to the coast this summer – perhaps the dry conditions inland resulted in a lack of invertebrate food supplies? It is certainly an interesting species and one that we do not have a good understanding of.

Mick Roderick



Photo: Little Raven by Jill Wilson

Map: Little Raven distribution of records (Dan Williams)



Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca* Breeding Failure and Success

The drought through September and half of October in Gloucester was broken on 20th October with heavy rain followed by further rain to the end of the month. This caused a pair of Magpie-larks to build a nest in a gum tree in my neighbour's small woodland at the rear of my garden in direct view from the back deck. Both male and female worked on the nest and incubation started about the 1st November. All went well and on the 24th November chicks were being fed by both parents.

During this time a pair of Torresian Crows *Corvus orru* fledged two chicks nearby. These were very noisy and active in the woodland during the Magpie-lark incubation period. Curiously following fledging their two chicks, the adults built two further nests in the woodland but did not complete or use them, reusing the original nest and starting a second brood.

On 6th December late afternoon the Magpie-larks fledging commenced with one chick standing on the nest edge stretching its wings. On the 7th December, two chicks were out of the nest, No. 1 on a branch a metre above and left of the nest and No. 2 on the nest edge. Later that afternoon No. 1 chick was still on the branch above the nest but No. 2 was back in the nest and at dusk I saw two heads pop up when the female returned to feed. No. 1 chick then clambered back to the nest edge.

Next day 8th December two chicks were out of the nest and two heads could be seen in the nest but by 5.30pm all four were out perched about 2 metres from the nest.

On the 9th December one chick was still in the nest tree, a second was in a nearby tree but the other two out of sight. On the 10th December at dusk all four were with their parents in the Flame Tree *Brachychiton acerifolius* at the bottom of my garden, hidden by its large leaves. Next day 11th December they were nowhere to be seen or heard but at 8.15 am the male adult returned to the nest and began poking about in the bottom with his beak. Later that day, both parents appeared to be refurbishing the nest and there was still no sign of the four chicks.

During this whole fledging process, the two fledged and partly independent Torresian Crows and their parents were very active around the woodland.

On the 12th December both Magpie-larks were working on the nest and by the 15th the female was sitting. The weather was extremely hot throughout this period with electric storms and rain. They continued to incubate and on the 9th January I saw a single head pop up when the female returned to

the nest to feed it. Both parents continued to feed but I only ever saw one head.

On the 19th December a single chick was standing on the edge of the nest exercising its wings but remained there or in the nest for the next two days. It didn't seem in a hurry to leave. On the 22nd it scrambled out of the nest at 10.15am and up a sloping branch above, perching and preening about 3m away; there was no sign of other chicks in the nest. The male parent flew to the nest at 10.50am and looked in the base for no apparent reason. At 7.30pm that evening the chick and both parents were perched in the Flame Tree where I saw them again on the 24th December. Since then they have been frequently seen around the immediate area.

The Torresian Crows fledged two more chicks which were constantly harassed by Willie Wagtails *Rhipidura leucophrys* and other small birds that nest in this small woodland.

Penny Drake-Brockman



Bird & Nature Photography Tours

Amazing Destinations!

- *South Africa-Kruger Safari.**
- *Darwin, Kakadu, Katherine.**
- *Cairns, Daintree, Atherton.**
- *Flinders Ranges & Gluepot.**
- *Hunter Valley.**
- *Riverwood Downs Weekends.**

Contact: Dick Jenkin 0407 267207

E: richardnjenkin@bigpond.com

W: www.jenkinphotography.com.au

Volunteer Activities 3rd March Fifteen years of Port Stephens Waterbirds Surveys

The surveys began in 2004 and in February of this year we've just chalked up 15 years of doing them. Collectively, all those years of surveys have given us tremendous insights into the importance of Port Stephens for migratory shorebirds such as the Eastern Curlew and Bar-tailed Godwit, plus we know a lot more now about the many other migratory birds that are present in lesser numbers. We've also learnt how important Port Stephens is for Pied Oystercatchers and we've been recording good numbers of Sooty Oystercatchers in recent years as well.

In recognition of the 15 year milestone, Hunter Bird Observers Club celebrated the occasion at the Boatrowers Hotel in Fullerton St Stockton on Saturday 3 March. It was a great afternoon, with about 45 people turning up including many past and present surveyors. Here's hoping that we can celebrate lots more of these milestones!

Alan Stuart

Congratulations

I would like to congratulate Alan Stuart on the fine job he has done in organizing the waterbird surveys over the last 15 years. I have thoroughly enjoyed this bi-annual event and I am sure all who participated have also, while learning more about water birds and the Port Stephens area.

It is no mean feat organising 6 boats, skippers and observers to help collect this very valuable data. And thank you Alan for organising our Saturday afternoon at the Boatrowers to mark this anniversary.

Three cheers to Alan Stuart!!

Lorna Mee

Clean Up Australia Day at Stockton Sandspit



A small group of HBOC members attended the Sand Spit on an early March morning for the annual Clean Up Australia effort. Many bags of mostly paper and plastic rubbish were collected with not so many recyclables this year. Thanks to Julianna for her team leadership and to everyone else for the wonderful effort.

Photos and text by **Marg Clarke**



Future Club Activity

June Long Weekend camp at Appletree Flat: Directions

The June long weekend camp is at the private property, "Wongalee", via Apple Tree Flat. To get there drive through Jerrys Plains on the Golden Highway, but instead of following the highway around a sharp right hand bend (about 0.6 km past the service station) to go to Denman, go straight ahead for about 200 metres and then turn left onto Jones Reserve Road which may be called Queen Street at this point. From here it is about 4.2 km to Apple Tree Flat Road (left or south). This road ends at the "Wongalee" gate after a couple of kilometres and several bends. Make sure you close the gate and then follow HBOC signs to the camp site. There are a few dips but with care caravans should be OK. For further details contact Lyn or Andrzej on 4952 3458 / 0427483663 or email karpziel@bigpond.com

Reports on Club Meetings

February Meeting including AGM

Our first meeting for the year was the Annual General Meeting. President Allan Richardson gave a comprehensive Annual Report, followed by the election of the 2018 committee. Robert Stewart was elected President for 2018 and we were fortunate enough to have a nomination from the floor for the position of Treasurer, so the committee is almost full complement.

This was followed by a fascinating talk by Dr Walter Boles about the bird collection at the Australian Museum. He outlined the history of the museum and the changing habits of bird collection and preservation. There was no bird of the evening but Mick Roderick gave a summary of the new Hunter sightings in 2017. It was a good start to the year.

Dan Williams joins the 400 Club...officially at the February meeting



Seeing 300 different species of birds in the Hunter Region is considered somewhat of a challenge. So much so that badges are offered to people who reach that milestone. Some people continue on well past 300, seeing 350 species – another milestone worthy of an additional badge to complement the 300 one.

Then there are the ‘committed few’ who have managed to eyeball 400 species in the Hunter Region. Yes, of course there is another badge for this milestone – a very special “gold-plated” edition adorned with a rare visitor to our region – the Black Honeyeater. One needs to provide evidence to their peers to receive this badge and have every rare species signed off by the Records Appraisal Committee. So far there are 6 people who have received their ‘400 badge’.

At the February 2018 club meeting, the most recent of these 400 club members – Dan Williams – was to receive his badge from Alan Stuart. The only problem was that Alan had left the badge behind on his dining table! However, this was not to matter because Dan had come prepared.

Dan’s 400th species in the Hunter was a Red-backed Kingfisher that he saw at Turill in September last year (refer to the cover of the October 2017 newsletter). So taken was Dan with having Red-backed Kingfisher as his 400th Hunter bird, he decided to garnish his own self with an image of the species, as was revealed at club night. Now that’s commitment from one of the committed few!



Photos and text above by Mick Roderick

March Club Meeting



Regent Honeyeater photo by Mick Roderick

The highlight of our March meeting was an update about Regent Honeyeaters by Ross Crates. He is studying them for his PhD project at ANU. Ross is also a recipient of one of HBOC’s Wilma Barden Memorial Grants, to support his Regent Honeyeater studies. It is a species in dire trouble, numbers having declined massively and the threats to their long-term survival are many and serious. But there is a glimmer of hope, because Ross’s work has helped identify some of the keys to breeding success and how some of the threats might be managed. We certainly hope that the 300-500 remaining wild birds can survive and prosper.

The “Bird of the Evening” was the Spotted Whistling-Duck, presented by the ever-entertaining Paddy Lightfoot. We had another stimulating Observations session, with many interesting sightings being reported

Goodbye Shorebirds Eastern Curlew Day with Conservation Volunteers Stockton Sandspit Monday 19th March

Ellie Gillett who is the project officer for Conservation Volunteers Australia invited members of HBOC to join in "Good-bye Shorebirds Eastern Curlew day" event with Hunter River High School. We had 22 year 8 students and two teachers as well as two Conservation Volunteers and eight HBOC members armed with telescopes and binoculars. This was also the first time HBOC's new binoculars and telescopes have had an outing.



With so many members we were able to divide students into small groups of 5 or 6 which made it so much easier to engage with them when doing such activities as counting birds, species, identifying species and just learning how to use the equipment. Tom took groups for a walk down to the beach area so students could be closer but, of course, not disturbing any birds. Fortunately about 25 Eastern Curlews were present as well as 800 or so avocets, Bar-tailed Godwits flew in, Sharpies and Stilt stood around in the lagoon.

HBOC is providing assistance for the Threatened Species Recovery Fund project titled Community Conservation of Eastern Curlew which is a two-year federally funded project to be completed by 30 June 2019. Today was one of two Community Awareness events with the purpose of raising awareness, understanding and appreciation of Eastern Curlews and other shorebirds, and promote the message that shorebirds should not be disturbed. Thank you very much Marg, Joy, Peter, Greg, Lorna, Liz and Tom. And to the enthusiastic students who made this a happy event.

Ann Lindsey

Club Outing Reports: Field Outing to "Tabbil Forest", Dungog Sunday 18th February

Despite warnings of extremely dry conditions and high temperatures 20 hardened birders travelled to Dungog and out to Bingleburra Rd to the private property "Tabbil Forest" owned by Jane Richens and Brian Doherty. Jane and her father Des guided us down their 2 km driveway through dry rainforest habitat. However, despite the conditions and lack of obvious rainforest birds the group was able to come up with 42 species for the day.

Although not seen by all, highlights were Regent Bowerbird, Spangled Drongo, Rose Robin and Crested Shrike-tit. The birds that showed the most interest were Large-billed Scrubwrens showing off their tree creeper habits and in fact going very high into the canopy. We were able to compare these with Brown Thornbills and Brown Gerygones which also showed well. Test yourself with Rob Palazzi's photos from the outing at right.

Seven Dusky Moorhens were on a dam near the residence and are permanent residents. Unusual in that habitat.

At the end of the driveway Jane provided cold water and canapé's while Des handed around steamed bunya pine nuts. A good day out despite difficult birding conditions. Once again good company and nice to see some new faces.

Our thanks go to Jane, Brian and Des who are always happy to open their property to groups and would be happy to have HBOC back in a better season.

Dave Stuart

Photos by Rob Palazzi



Hexham, Ash Island and Stockton Sandspit

Sunday March 18

We had a successful morning visiting Hexham Swamp, Ash Island and Stockton Sand Spit, all achieved before it became too hot and windy about lunchtime. Eleven HBOC members were joined by 13 keen and cheerful members of Tamworth Birdwatchers. The Tamworth group was visiting Newcastle, and anxious to see waders in breeding plumage. They were also taken on a guided tour of the traditional roosting areas for the waders.



Highlight at Hexham Swamp was a brief sighting of the Eastern Yellow Wagtails. The Yellow Wagtails were at the end of the old pipeline track not far from where Michael Kearns saw them from a canoe the day prior to our visit. Thirty-four other species were recorded here including White-fronted Chats, White-breasted Woodswallows and an array of raptors.

We moved to Ash Island where Greg related the recent history of Area E, Wagtail Way. The tide was in at Fish Fry Flat and there was water in the Swan Ponds and Wader Ponds, however, there were not the large masses of waders we sometimes see here. Only 13 species were recorded on Ash Island after we had bumped our way along the corrugated road.



Next we moved to Stockton. At Stockton Sandspit the visitors were not disappointed, with 23 species recorded. The usual bunch of shorebirds were at the Spit, some already colouring ready for departure. Terek Sandpipers with the Grey-tailed Tattlers were in their usual roost, along the bank. A lovely morning in very agreeable company.

Photos by Marg Clarke: Terek Sandpipers

Greg Little

Field Outing to Myuna Bay

Tuesday April 3

Thirteen intrepid birdos were very pleased with 61 species on the walk to the Eraring Power Station outlet and round the edges of Lake Macquarie. A mystery raptor presented itself firstly, and Peter Weinstock's photo created some early discussion. After the photo was enlarged and lightened it was confirmed as a Square-tailed Kite. Before the outlet quite a motley collection of Black Swans, Pied Butcherbirds, Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, Pacific Black Ducks, Eastern Rosellas, Lewin's Honeyeaters, Little Wattlebirds, Grey Fantails, Magpie-larks, Magpies, a Great Egret and an Azure Kingfisher were seen.



Photo Peter Weinstock

At the Outlet lots of Silver Gulls and Crested Terns hovered over the swift currents with a Great Cormorant snapping up a fish before a cranky Pelican. We walked further on around Whitehead Lagoon with ubiquitous calls of Whipbirds and Bell Miners. In one spot Brown Thornbills, Silvereyes, Bar-shouldered Doves, Golden Whistlers, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes and an Eastern Spinebill were seen.

We had walked about 6 kilometres, straddled a log across muddy waters and felt that we wouldn't have to go the gym this week.

Di Johnson

Camp Report: Easter 2018 Camp at Borah Travelling Stock Route

Another wonderful Easter camp at Borah Travelling Stock Route (between Manilla and Barraba - outside Tamworth) with 37 campers at the peak (including 3 youngsters), in a variety of camps. We had everything from sleeping in car to various stages of tent to 5 Star caravans. Temperatures were hot, blue-sky 33 to 35C during the day but a comfortable 15 to 18 at night - almost justifying the campfire at Bird call and happy hour. The full moon progress gave us plenty of natural light each night.

We were worried that, with the dry conditions over the last year and the brown views on the way up, it would be dusty with few birds. That was certainly not the case. With some recent rain, it was green cover (made for more comfortable camping and walking) and some running water in the creek. It also meant that we got 97 seen, and 6 heard, birds in the "Camp Zone" and some more outside that area but in the nearby countryside. To explain, there is a prescribed area that is used to record the camp birdlist.



Turquoise Parrot (above) | photos by Rob Palazzi



Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (above) , Plumb-headed Finches (below)



I would suggest that the bird of the camp was the Brown Treecreeper, a beautiful bird with the "pink" call, lots of them and not worried about us. Sightings included Crested Shrike-Tit, Turquoise Parrots, Musk Lorikeets, White-Bellied Cuckoo-Shrike, Red-Winged Parrots, up to 20 King Parrots hanging around the camp, at least 12 Apostle Birds, Speckled Warblers, Fuscous, White-Plumed and Spiny-Cheeked Honeyeaters (as well as a few larger groups of yellow-faced honeyeaters flying over the camp- migrating?), a sole White-Throated Gerygone sighted at the same spot each day and a lonely Dollarbird. There were many Striated Pardalotes, several Restless Flycatchers, Jacky Winters and Rufous Whistlers.

Our waterbirds were a Little Pied Cormorant, several White-faced Herons and Black-fronted Dotterels. Our early morning alarm call was the raucous, echoing screech of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. At night, we heard Owlet Nightjars, Boobooks, Sugar Gliders and Brush-Tailed Possums

Outside "the Zone", some of us were very lucky with good views of 5 Ground Cuckoo-Shrikes (a tick for some) plus, at Tarpoly Travelling Stock Route, we saw Plum-Headed Finches, Diamond Firetails, Hooded Robins, a Little Eagle, White-Winged Choughs and still more Brown Treecreepers.

A special thank you to Denise and Chris Kane from Tamworth Bird Observers Club (also HBOC members) who came from Tamworth for Friday bird call and happy hour.

Also, huge thanks to Andrzej and Lyn for their organisation, to those who helped with camp set-up, and to Andrzej for his patience and humour at bird calls.

Anthony Gooden

Grey-tailed Tattlers score a dedicated website

In the summer of 2011-12, Lois Wooding and Alan Stuart began to take an interest in the Grey-tailed Tattlers in their local areas around Newcastle and Port Stephens in New South Wales. Initially they were driven by curiosity about population densities and feeding/roosting preferences. Little did they know that their interest would become a passion and lead to new insights into the behaviour of this understudied species and an international network of like-minded individuals especially in Russia and Japan.

Grey-tailed Tattler photo by Lois Wooding

Lois and Alan have accumulated lots of material about Grey-tailed Tattlers since they started their project six years ago. Recently they decided to put all that material onto a website so that it could be more easily shared with others. The new website www.tattlers.org is also intended to serve as a forum for information exchange throughout the entire East-Asian Australasian Flyway. An accompanying Facebook page has also been created.



Compared to many other shorebird species Grey-tailed Tattlers are currently listed as “stable” but their numbers are slowly decreasing and their range along Australia’s east coast appears to be gradually contracting northward. Observations by people on the ground regarding their numbers, stop-overs points, and behaviour is invaluable. By pooling our knowledge and understanding of the movements of Grey-tailed Tattlers throughout their entire migratory cycle we may be able to increase our ability to safeguard the future of this fascinating shorebird.

Clicker’s Corner

In this regular Newsletter section, we profile one of the Club photographers who use their skills to enhance the aims of the Club. The Grey-tailed Tattler study outlined above, is Lois’s work (with Alan), in studying Grey-tailed Tattler behaviour.

Lois Wooding

I have boundless admiration for photographers, but sadly, my attempt to become one remains steadfastly aspirational. Disappointing...yes! A problem...no! For me cameras are great learning tools, and nature photography is an endless source of enjoyment and extremely helpful in studying bird behaviour.

In 1970 I joined a natural history society and discovered birdwatching. It wasn’t exactly an epiphany, just a gradual recognition of something satisfying and worth doing. I didn’t know where it would take me, but I did know it was a place that I really wanted to go. Photography became a practical aid that brought an additional, engaging dimension to the journey.

Today birdwatching and photography are team players. Check out any group of birders and count the cameras. Back in the 70s it was different. Cameras, film and film-developing were all expensive, and failures were costly. I didn’t have much money so I didn’t have much of a camera, and my photos were rubbish. In a bid to improve my skills I indulged in a brief flirtation with a camera club. Now camera clubs are great, and I learnt a lot, but my photographic interests didn’t fit into the

programme, and I was a non-starter in the club’s enthusiastic predilection for competitions. My membership lapsed, but not my interest in birds and photography.

By the 90’s my full-blown birdwatching addiction coincided with the arrival of digital photography. Brilliant! I now had the freedom to play with ideas, and take countless photos of birds without being out of pocket, and by then I had recognised one of my major problems: a tendency to get over-excited in the heat of the moment. Shaky hands and brain short-circuits don’t produce sharp images. A photographer friend suggested using a tripod. It was a trade-off. More gear to carry and slower set-up time meant missed shots, but my photography improved. I am deeply indebted to several talented photographers for their kindness, tolerance and invaluable advice. Technical tips aside, they taught me the difference between “looking” and “seeing” and the importance of a trifecta of skills not listed in the manuals: stillness, quietness and patience. Like everyone else I take a lot of opportunistic shots. Birdwatching is a 24/7 compulsion, with the constant potential for surprise.



Puzzled Young Kookaburra with phasmid

Although the need to photograph that unexpected sighting is always there, it's the study of individuals within a species that has now become the force that motivates both my birding and my photography. Trying to understand what birds are doing, and more importantly, why they are doing it, is a fascinating business. Occasionally those observations may add to the knowledge base and possibly contribute to the conservation of a species and its habitat. Observations reinforced by photographs can be compelling.



Juvenile Brahminy Kite about to fledge

Bird-stalking with a camera is fun, but it takes a bit of preparation. The more you know about a species the more likely you are to find a good location from which to observe and photograph it. It can also be a solitary, self-indulgent activity. Bug spray takes care of things that bite and extract your blood, or ants that deposit stinging trails of formic acid across your feet, but it's not effective on people who interrupt your concentration at crucial moments by moving or talking. If you need company, choose carefully or risk jeopardising a friendship. Personally, I find that working solo increases my chances of fading into the background scenery and watching nature go about its business unaware of my existence, and I'm more relaxed when I know that the time I spend hunched over my camera is entirely my own.

Today, technology has made entry-level photography much easier. Your Smartphone comes with a great camera, even for birds if they are close, and carrying it isn't a chore. But like everything else, if you want to take it further you need to do the work and get the gear. Think carefully about the sort of photographs you want to take. Do some reading and ask around before you flash the credit card or darken the door of a camera shop. It's also important to understand your camera. Read the manual, experiment with the settings, and use built-in help devices like histograms to check your results and make adjustments in the field. More importantly if you've got a camera, use it, use it, use it!



Red-capped Plover at HBOC Smith's Lake Camp

Currently I have a Canon 7D Mk 11 which I use with a 100-400 mm f/4.5-5.6 lens, and there's a handy 1.4 mm extender in my camera box if I need it. I love using this camera. It's quick to focus, easy to adjust, and I feel like a machine gunner in the trenches when I fire it in "continuous" mode. I also have a Nikon P900. It's small and light with an 83X optical zoom, something worth considering if you are old and creaky and have a long walk ahead of you. Unfortunately the zoom is slow to focus when you have a fast-moving target, but in more predictable situations, where a bird is feeding along a shoreline or sitting on a nest, it's excellent, and its instant-one-touch, video button has helped me capture bird behaviours I would never have seen on still shots.

My binoculars and cameras have become my constant companions. After many years, many cameras, and many thousands of photographs I still have a lot to learn about photography, but photography has enabled me to learn a great deal about birds and birdwatching.

A difficult bird to see and photograph: Little Grassbird



I took the picture of the Little Grassbird when I was with a Gentleman from the Manning Bird Club. We were happy with ourselves because we had just captured some Large billed Corellas in our lenses. We were at Walka Waterworks and this bird was really shouting at us as we walked along the little railway track. I decided to stop, we usually do not as this bird is difficult to get to stop still at the best of times. So I did the whistle, sometimes I can manage to get the correct tone of the bird call itself.

Success!! out came the bird and looked at us from less than 2 metres away. We were both happy with our pics of the day.

Lorna Mee

Recent Observations : *Please report special observations*

Hunterbirding is an email group set up by HBOC that is run through the Google Groups. It is a great way to keep in touch with the latest goings-on in Hunter Region birding. Members are able to report sightings, post questions to the group and get involved with group discussions on bird related issues. The home page of the Hunterbirding group is located at <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/hunterbirding> Instructions for joining a Google Group to sign up for Hunterbirding to take part in these discussions and benefit from up-to-date birding news in the region, can be found at <https://support.google.com/groups/answer/1067205?hl=en> and follow the on-site instructions In addition to being a forum for interesting discussions on issues such as bird identification and behaviour it is also a great place to report your observations.

Bird records are obtained by the club through a variety of other means. Others are received through the BA atlas database, club outing sighting sheets, the club night observations forum and direct communications with the record officers. Of particular interest to the club are those records of regional significance, including sightings of the more unusual species, observations of breeding activity, early and late records of migratory birds and significantly large counts. A selection of records of this nature is provided below. Of special interest:

Ground Parrot and Yellow Wagtail

The discovery of a Ground Parrot in Crowdy Bay NP on 4 March by Michael Kearns and Alex Berryman represents the first confirmed record of this species in the Hunter Region since 1935. The species had been presumed locally extinct, although a couple of records exist from the intervening period, they have been unable to be validated. There had been hope that some birds may have survived the impacts of historic sand mining activities in the coastal heathlands, with a small remnant population clinging on. It is possible that such a population had remained intact but undetected in Crowdy Bay. However, the recent fire that devastated Limeburners Creek NP near Port Macquarie also presents the possibility of an alternative theory - that some birds may have been displaced from further north and are currently taking refuge within the Hunter Region. Whatever the reason, it is certainly an exciting discovery by the finders.



Photo from Michael Kearns

Michael's efforts were further rewarded later in the month, as he photographed a couple of Yellow Wagtails (ssp *tschutschensis*) from his Kayak whilst paddling up Fishery Creek at the southern end of Hexham Swamp. We are fortunate in the Hunter that Yellow Wagtails are regularly observed throughout the summer months at some of our coastal wetlands. However, observations have been few and far between in recent years. Maybe it has just been a quiet period for them, with lower numbers than normal visiting the region? Another factor influencing the dip in recent sightings could be the continuing restoration of saltmarsh habitat throughout the estuary. The works at Hexham Swamp and Tomago are gradually improving the habitat quality as the areas are restored to a natural tidal regime. However, we are currently in a state of flux as the spatial distribution of vegetation communities is shifting. It could just be that the areas certain species are frequenting have become less accessible to the keen eyes trying to spot them!

Dan Williams

The Aleutian Tern, developing breeding plumage, and Greater Sand Plover continued to be reported from Farquar Inlet. Other interesting observations follow:

Species	Number	Date	Location	Observer
Little Raven	120	09/02/18	Hinton	M. Kearns
Horsefield's Bushlark	5	09/02/18	Hinton	M. Kearns
Spangled Drongo	2	10/02/18	Mambo Wetlands	N. Fraser
Plum-headed Finch	3	11/02/18	Brush Fam Road	M. Clarke
Buff-banded Rail	2+3Y	14/02/18	Eleebana	A. Gooden
Wedge-tailed Eagle	2	15/02/18	Ash Island	B. Maitland
Musk Lorikeets	12	15/02/18	Hunter Wetlands	M. Roderick
Red-kneed Dotterel	70+	17/02/18	Whistler Pde, Maryland	D. Rushton
Large-billed Scrubwren	6	18/02/18	Tabbil Forest	HBOC outing
Little Ravens	110	18/02/18	Tilbatilla	M. Roderick
Pacific Baza	2+1y	19/02/18	Adamstown Hts	S. McKay
Spotted Crane	14	20/02/18	Whistler Pde, Maryland	M. Roderick
Black-necked Stork	2	21/02/18	On nest at Tomago	P. Weinstock
Beach Stone-curlew	2+1y	21/02/18	Dowardee Is, Soldiers Pt	T. Murray
Topknot Pigeon	7	21/02/18	Greenhills	G. Brosie
Square-tailed Kite	1	22/02/18	East Maitland	G. Brosie
Musk Lorikeet	30	23/02/18	Ellalong	M. Kearns
Singing Honeyeater	3	24/02/18	Ulan	M. Kearns
Black-eared Cuckoo	1	24/02/18	Durridgere Road	M. Kearns
Southern Whiteface	2	24/02/18	Durridgere Road	M. Kearns
Eastern Reef Egret	1	25/02/18	Kylie's Beach	A. Karpel
Ground Parrot	1	04/03/18	Crowdy Bay National Park	Berryman/Kearns
Australasian Shoveller	18	02/03/18	Hexham Swamp	B. Watts
Red-capped Robin	2	10/03/18	Doyles Creek Road	M&R Stewart
Diamond Firetail	6	10/03/18	Medhurst Bridge	M&R Stewart
Rose-crowned Fruit-dove	4	11/03/18	Harrington Rainforest	Benson, Berryman, Williams
King Quail	1	11/03/18	Crowdy Bay National Park	Benson, Berryman, Williams
King Quail	2	16&20/03/18	Minimbah Sand Plains	Benson and Williams
Yellow Wagtail	2	17/03/18	Fishery Creek, Hexham	M. Kearns
Paradise Riflebird	1	17/03/18	Barrington old guesthouse	D Bulbert
Powerful Owl	1+1H	18/03/18	Eleebana	K. Peters
Common Noddy	1	19/03/2018	Burwood Beach	D. Allen
Rufous Scrub-bird	1	19/03/2028	Gloucester Tops	A. Stuart
Sooty Oystercher	54	20/03/2018	Ocean Baths	R. Nicholas
Glossy Black Cockatoo	6	21/03/2018	Wallaby Scrub Road	M. Jolly
Gould's Petrel	1	22/03/2018	Off Fort Drive	M. Roderick
White-throated Nightjar	3	25/03/2018	Main Creek, Dungog	D. Stuart
Freckled Duck	1	26/03/2018	Fennell Bay	L. Bostelaar
Common Noddy	2	27/03/2018	Ocean Baths	R. Nicholas
Black Kite	6	01/04/18	West Wallsend	M. Simpson
Square-tailed Kite	1	01/04/18	Holmesville	M. Simpson
Plumed Whistling Ducks	66	02/04/2018	Doughboys Hollow	A. Stuart

Club Activities April to June 2018

Wed 11th Apr	Club Meeting	7.00pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Darren and Tahlia Broughton – BIBY TV Bird of the Evening: Eula McKane
Sat 14 th Apr	Hunter Wader Survey HT-7.02am, 1.69m	7.00am Ash Island and Tomago 7.30am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390 – Tomago Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
Sun 15 th Apr	Field Outing – Boys Walk Cooranbong	Meet – 7.00am, Cooranbong Park, Cnr Freemans Dve & Martinsville Rd	Lena Parashou 0435 557 653
Tue 17 th Apr	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Please ring to confirm
Fri 20 th – Sun 22 nd Apr (b'up 27-29 Apr)	Broughton Island bird banding	Nelson Bay NPWS TBA Fit only, numbers very limited: contact Alan for waiting list	Greg Little 0414 562169 Alan Stuart 0409 978 171
21 st -22 nd April	BIGnet	Hosted by BirdLife Southern NSW	HBOC rep (Secretary as contact) All members welcome
MAY 2018			
Tue 1 st May	Mid-week Outing – Green wattle Creek	Meet – 8.00am Seaham Wetland cnr Seaham & East Seaham Rds	Dinah Stehr 4933 2134 or 0402 091 951
Wed 2 nd May	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	President - All members welcome
Fri 4 th – Sun 6 th May	Total Field Days	9.00am – 5.00pm Visitors welcome	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171
Mon 7 th May	Sweep marshes for weeds - Stockton Sandspit	08:00 Stockton Sandspit	Tom Clarke 0418411785
Wed 9th May	Club Meeting	7.00pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Simon Griffith – “Australian birds: the challenge of breeding in a changing climate” NCIG report
Tue 15 th May	Tomago Wetlands Survey	7.30am Entry to Tomago House	Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 Please ring to confirm
Sat 19 th May	Hunter Wader Survey HT-11.36am, 1.50m	11.00am Ash Island and Tomago 11.30am Various locations as directed	Alan Stuart 0409 978 171 – Ash Island Dan Williams 0408 023 262 – Kooragang Jack Adams 4971 5334 – Swansea Jenny Powers 4944 7274 – Stockton Sue Hamonet 4958 1023 – Swan Bay Steven Cox 0409 848 390 – Tomago Ann Lindsey 4951 2008 - Hexham
19 th -20 th May	Regent Honeyeater/ Swift Parrot surveys	Various locations as desired or directed	Mick Roderick 0421 761237 mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au
Sun 20 th May	Field outing: Grahamstown Dam	Meet – 7.30am, Finnan Park, off Richardson Rd, Raymond Terrace	Ray Maclean 0428 874 512
JUNE 2018			
Tue 5 th Jun	Mid-Week Outing – Abernathy	Meet – 8.00am Poppethead Park, Kitchener	Brian Laut 4963 2029 or 0401 283 305
Wed 6 th Jun	Management Committee Meeting	6.30pm – 9.30pm Garden Suburbs School	All members welcome
Sat 9 th – Mon 11 th Jun	Long Weekend Camp – Appletree Flat	Meet at camp	Andrzej and Lyn Karpziel 4952 3458 / 0427 483 663
Wed 13th Jun	Club Meeting	7.00pm The Wetlands Centre	Speaker: Gisela Kaplan – talk/title to be confirmed Bird of the Evening: Rowley Smith