

Editorial

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the past year was very challenging for everyone. For birdwatchers, COVID-related travel restrictions added to the frustrations, because their birding activities were restricted for a considerable portion of the year. However, some used the additional available time productively, by analysing some of the long-term data sets that have been developed through regular surveys by HBOC members. The results of three long-term, multi-species studies of waterbirds in the Hunter Region are presented in this issue of *The Whistler*. Ann Lindsey and Alan Stuart present the results of a 22-year study of the population trends for large waterbirds in the Hunter estuary. The trend for most species was either stable or increasing – the authors relate this to the impact of local rehabilitation projects. Mike Newman, Ann Lindsey and Grant Brosie present the results from a 20-year study of *Anatidae* waterfowl at the Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works. They show the importance of the wetlands there as refuges for some species in times of drought and highlight the successful management practices. In the third long-term study, Ann Lindsey examines the utilisation of Tomago Wetland by waterbirds following the re-establishment there of tidal inundation as part of a major rehabilitation project. She compares results from an eight-year study with those from an earlier baseline study. Her analysis reveals increases in the number of waterbird species, including shorebird species, reflecting the success of the project. However, she also highlights the issues which arise when management practices do not adequately maintain water levels in the wetland.

In the fourth article about long-term studies, Greg Little presents the results of a five-year study of birds in the Blue Gum Hills Regional Park, which has been partially rehabilitated following historic coal-mining activities. The study identifies differences

in diversity and abundance of species between disturbed and undisturbed areas.

Two important themes are often repeated in the above articles – the importance of long-term studies in establishing population trends for species, and the positive impact that well planned and managed conservation projects have had on a wide range of species.

When contemplating possible content for this edition of *The Whistler* in early 2021, the editors decided to include a Broughton Island-themed focus, with the aim of documenting some of the results of the extensive studies undertaken by HBOC members on the island over the past 10 years. This has been achieved, with four articles covering different aspects of avian presence on the island. Collectively, the articles also demonstrate the positive impacts for bird populations on offshore islands from the removal of feral animals.

An article by Neil Fraser describes recently discovered instances of Sooty Oystercatcher breeding on Broughton Island. It reinforces the findings of an earlier study, presented in Volume 13, that identified the importance of the island for Sooty Oystercatcher. A second article by Neil analyses raptor records from the island spanning a 20-year period and compares the population trends with that of the Hunter Region. Broughton Island is arguably one of the best locations in our region to observe raptors. Typically, multiple species can be closely observed on any day. Twelve of the 16 raptor species found in the Hunter Region have been recorded on the island.

Alan Stuart documents the status of passerines on Broughton Island. From relatively few species present when surveys started in 2012, it is now evident that several new species have become resident or are regular visitors. The article

demonstrates that some species have benefitted from management changes on the island, while others have been adversely impacted. Of particular interest is the temporal variation in occurrence of the three Silvereye subspecies. The relationship of the change in some passerine populations to the changing habitat on the island is discussed.

The fourth Broughton Island Group article is a short note by NPWS Ranger Susanne Callaghan and ecological consultant Martin Schulz on the birds of Little Broughton Island. Due to the difficulty of accessing the island and its rugged topography, previous visits have been infrequent, and this is the first specific account of the island's land birds.

This edition of *The Whistler* includes two articles about threatened species that occur in the Hunter Region – Rufous Scrub-bird and Bush Stone-curlew. Both articles highlight the parlous state of the local populations of these two species. Rob Kyte and Greg Little present results from a detailed regional survey for Rufous Scrub-birds. They visited all parts of the region for

which there were past records of scrub-birds and/or which seemed might have suitable habitat for them. The result was a small extension to the known area of occupied habitat; however, they found no scrub-birds anywhere else. In the second article, Neil Fraser examines the population trend for Bush Stone-curlew in the Hunter Region and reviews the status of conservation efforts. Local extinction seems a real possibility. However, it is encouraging that Neil's article may be galvanising a re-start of local conservation activities for this species.

As with every edition of *The Whistler*, there are many people to be thanked – starting with the authors, of course, the referees whose constructive comments always lead to better articles, Liz Crawford who formats and proof-reads every article, and Rob Kyte who puts everything together for the hard copy and arranges its printing. We also thank the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group for their continuing financial support for publication of this journal.

Neil Fraser and Alan Stuart
Joint Editors