

Editorial

This is the first issue of *The Whistler* after the joint retirement of long-term editors Harold Tarrant and Mike Newman. As the incoming editors, our aim is to maintain the high standards achieved in previous issues. We think we've done that with this issue, but readers can decide that for themselves.

We have introduced two policy changes, both aimed at increasing the impact of *The Whistler*. The first of those is on-line publishing of each article when it is finalised. In that way, the information in the article is immediately available for others to use. On-line articles are available at this link: www.hboc.org.au/publications/the-whistler/. The second change, with the support of HBOC's Management Committee, has been to remove the 64-page limit to the size of hard copy issues of the journal. Although printing and postage costs have risen as a result, the change has allowed us to include more articles into this issue, with obvious benefits to authors and to readers. It has also allowed more use of illustrative photographs, for which there previously was very little space. Note though that the policy eschews gratuitous use of images; they must add value to the article.

Two of the papers in this issue report on in-depth studies of the breeding biology of local species. Lois Wooding's study of a pair of Brahminy Kite at their nest at Lemon Tree Passage, spanning two breeding seasons, has added considerably to our knowledge about this species and is an excellent follow-up to her preliminary report published in Volume 11. Similarly, Ann Lindsey's study of a pair of Black-necked Stork across two breeding seasons documents many previously unreported behaviours by adult birds and their chicks. Ann's work is also a case study in Citizen Science; many local birdwatchers assisted with observations or followed with interest her regular updates on Hunterbirding.

Four other full-length papers make important contributions to our knowledge of well-known Hunter Region species. Lois Wooding's review of the status of the Sooty Oystercatcher highlights the importance of offshore islands for their breeding and confirms our region's overall importance for this little-studied species. Mike Newman's review of the Pallid Cuckoo identifies an alarming decline locally, and he contrasts this with the Tasmanian situation where the population appears to be stable. Mike's insightful paper suggests that the Pallid

Cuckoo has a large home range and is vulnerable directly (effects on adults) and indirectly (effects on host species) to changes in the status of the local habitat. Alan Stuart demonstrates the importance of the Hunter Estuary in the past decade for the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Internationally significant numbers of them have visited every non-breeding season since 2013 and the estuary has become one of the most important Australian sites. Trevor Murray's study of Beach Stone-Curlews has been spread over almost a decade. From his work it is now confirmed that a pair breeds in Port Stephens; he also has made valuable new observations about the transition from immature to adult plumage.

The final single species paper in this issue takes a different approach. Ross Crates challenges the accepted wisdom that the Regent Honeyeater is an accomplished mimic and presents solid evidence that its mimicry is a maladaptive outcome of the drastic population decline for this species. It is also noteworthy that part of Ross's study was supported by a Wilma Barden Memorial Grant from HBOC.

Three papers capture the contemporary status of the birdlife of a particular local area. Stuart Fleming documents his four-year study of the birds at Tahlee on the western side of Port Stephens, showcasing the high species diversity and importance for several threatened or migratory species. Alan Stuart and Mike Newman present a nine-year study of the Gloucester Tops, where six species are high altitude specialists and there is evidence of altitudinal stratification for many other species. Phil Reid documents the changes that have occurred at an area on Ash Island where mangroves have been removed and salt marsh habitat is re-emerging. Several shorebird species have now begun to utilise the area.

In this issue, we also present several short notes, on a variety of topics: Black-necked Stork dispersal; a new Cattle Egret colony; a colonial breeding colony at the Wetlands Centre; Grey Fantail foraging behaviour. We encourage more people to submit articles of this type – they are comparatively easy to write (and to read) and they capture aspects of bird behaviour that otherwise often go unreported. We would like *The Whistler* to become a forum for short notes about our local species.

We note two unifying themes for the articles in this issue: detailed field observations, and citizen science. Because of careful field work, we are much clearer now about the regional status of the Brahminy Kite, Black-necked Stork and Beach Stone-Curlew. And because of HBOC members ('citizen scientists') carefully analysing their own records or those in Birdata, we have learnt many things about other species at either a local or regional level. In particular, the efforts by Lois Wooding on the Sooty Oystercatcher and Mike Newman on the Pallid Cuckoo stand out as excellent examples of how to use records of multiple types to analyse the occurrence of a species at the local and regional level.

Many people must be acknowledged for helping this issue of *The Whistler* to see the light of day. Our particular thanks go to all the authors for their efforts; it takes time and commitment to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard). Mention must also be made of the referees, whose constructive comments invariably lead to an improved product. Liz Crawford, despite her peripatetic sailor's lifestyle, continues to proof-read each manuscript and turn it into an eye-catching final product. And then once again Rob Kyte has assembled the hard copy product and he also organises its printing and distribution.

Neil Fraser and Alan Stuart
Joint Editors