

Editorial

The 13th Australian Shorebird Conference, held in Newcastle this September, was an unparalleled opportunity for Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) to highlight the importance of our region, and showcase the incredible work of members who for half a century have monitored, recorded and documented these remarkable birds. However, if you missed the event, you can make up for it with this 20th Edition of *The Whistler*. Of the 14 articles presented here, seven document aspects of the ecology and behaviour of local shorebirds and waterbirds. The articles vary in form within our usual presentation of a catalogue of long-term studies, single-species studies and short notes.

The distribution and abundance of the cryptic Latham's Snipe in the region has been reviewed by Ann Lindsey and Birgita Hansen. The article highlights the lack of knowledge of the bird's foraging ecology in the region which prevents proper investigation of local population dynamics. Despite changes to some wetlands, a number of sites in the region continue to support nationally significant numbers.

Although Beach Stone-curlew are distributed around much of the northern and eastern coastline of Australia, there are no detailed studies of the drivers of the birds' behaviour. Neil Fraser has provided insight into the species' nesting behaviour using trail camera data from Corrie Island, Port Stephens. He studied the relationship between both incubation time and frequency of egg rotation, and the prevailing temperature, relative humidity and wind speed. While some direct relationships were established, the study also highlighted the limitations of the use of this type of data for behavioural studies.

Ann Lindsey, in collaboration with other authors, has summarised the recent breeding success of Black-necked Stork, in Hexham Swamp. She describes how, in response to a lack of structural integrity of the trees supporting the large, heavy nests, an artificial nesting platform was designed, constructed and installed. This is the first instance of the use of such a structure for this species.

While most birdwatchers take the status of the Stockton sandspit as a shorebird roost for granted, it was not always this way. Tom Clarke documents the work of HBOC members and others to rehabilitate

the sandspit in 2002 by removing fringing mangroves, and the remarkable effect this had on its use by shorebirds.

Alan Stuart has reviewed summer and winter counts of Bar-tailed Godwits from the Hunter Estuary and Port Stephens to assess current population trends. While summer counts continue to decline, the winter counts reveal an increasing trend, offering hope that the population might eventually stabilise.

A short note by Andrew McIntyre describes a recently-recognised new shorebird roost site at Little Swan Bay, in close proximity to the existing Swan Bay roost site. The site provides roosting habitat for many of the same species that are observed at Swan Bay. At times, numbers of Far Eastern Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper represent a significant proportion of the Port Stephens population.

Christophe Tourenq, in conjunction with other colleagues, has provided a short note describing how Double-banded Plover in the Manning Estuary used human footprints in soft, damp, muddy sand to lower body temperature on a hot, humid day. While highlighting the detrimental effects of disturbance on shorebird species, the article identified that under some conditions, the birds take advantage of human presence.

Seven further articles describe the behaviour and distribution of woodland birds in mainly urban habitats. Darren Foster has presented the results of long-term observations of the cryptic Tawny Frogmouth in the Maitland area. The study provides new insights into the bird's roosting behaviour, their use of a wide range of tree species for nesting, construction of their nests, and interactions with other species. The article highlights the birds' adaptability to the urban and peri urban environment, and indicates that the species is more common than its relatively low reporting rate indicates.

A short note by Alan Stuart quantifies what many of us have already observed, the dramatic increase in the numbers and range extent of Rainbow Lorikeet, particularly within the urban environment. Alan speculates that this has been driven largely by the bird's ability to exploit a habitat niche and food

resource that did not exist 40 years ago, supported by large numbers of domestic feeding stations.

Kim Pyror has produced her fifth article documenting the nesting and parenting behaviour of Galahs at her backyard nest box. In this account she provides additional information on daily fledging times and new information on how parents use a nearby communal crèche for their newly fledged offspring.

Mike Newman and Joris Driessen have used a hybrid survey design, involving long-term quarterly surveys at an array of four 2 ha sites embedded in a larger survey area of remnant vegetation, on a cattle farm in the Paterson area. Linear regression analysis was used to differentiate between species with stable populations and those with indications of long-term change. Most of the common species were shown to have stable populations over the study period, despite short-term fluctuations. The study also showed high avian diversity, consistent with other studies in the Hunter Region.

The value of small-scale plantings and remnant vegetation within fenced pens amongst the manicured paddocks of a horse stud, has been documented by Andrew McIntyre. Observations of the pens showed a range of species used them for foraging, nesting, roosting and as stepping stones to provide connectivity through the area. Differences between utilisation of remnant and planted tree pens were demonstrated.

A short note by Mick Roderick and Michele Keith describes a nesting attempt by Spangled Drongo at the Shortland Wetland Centre. This report represents a significant southern extension of the species' known breeding range.

An article reviewing the results of pre-harvesting diurnal bird surveys in local State native forests by Adam Fawcett looks at the effectiveness of this legislated requirement to identify threatened species such as Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots. These results highlight the inability of this type of survey to effectively provide protection for these species in these forests. Adam advocates that a stratified and strategic landscape monitoring program would be more effective.

As HBOC celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2026, *The Whistler* is celebrating 20 years of publication. Neil Fraser has looked back at the journal's history and some of its remarkable achievements. In measuring the journal's success, he has documented the extent to which articles have been cited by other authors. While most of the citations are by other *Whistler* authors, a remarkable number have been cited elsewhere including the more prominent Australian journals *Emu* – *Austral Ornithology*, *Australian Field Ornithology*, *Stilt* and *Corella*. Around one half of the citations are in overseas publications. Articles have been cited in the theses of Honours, Masters and Doctor of Philosophy candidates in Australia and overseas. Check out the Appendix on the website to see who has cited your article and where the reference was published.

The publication of *The Whistler* would not be possible without the continued support of many individuals and organisations, to whom we extend our grateful thanks. Firstly, the many contributors who devote time and effort to collecting and analysing data and documenting findings. They are ably supported by the reviewers and editors who provide constructive feedback and ensure a high academic standard. Special thanks are extended to Liz Crawford who has now for 20 years tirelessly undertaken the painstaking task of cross-checking sources, correcting grammar and formatting the manuscripts. Rob Kyte's layout, publishing and printing skills are responsible for the final high quality publication. We also thank the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group for their continued financial support.

Neil Fraser and Alan Stuart
Joint Editors