

## The *Whistler* – Editorial

The Editors are pleased to provide our members and other ornithological enthusiasts with the third issue of the club's emerging journal. From the coast to the ranges the Hunter Region and adjacent areas offer us a range of environments in which to study birds. For many people interested in birds, particularly visitors to our region, the coast and rainforests will be a prime attraction. While the Hunter's bird habitats have not always been exactly the same, they have always been there, with the same birds (for the most part) utilising them since before European settlement. Fewer people will develop a great fascination for the remaining remnants of valley-floor woodlands, let alone our mangroves and larger gardens. The last, of course, is a new phenomenon creating habitat for birds. The mangroves have altered, sometimes beneficially, following human control of the estuarial waterways. This stands in contrast to the woodlands, which have suffered constant fragmentation in the face of development. These thoughts set the scene for the latest issue of *The Whistler*.

We are delighted to be able to offer, in this issue, one article and one supporting note that document the bird population of the Hunter Region in the early twentieth century. It is difficult not to be struck by the differences from what we observe today and by the changes that have taken place, not only by the disappearance (or something close to it) of some of the western species in the course of a hundred years, but also by the influx of many species, not all of them introduced, which seem to have either escaped observation earlier or expanded into the Region. With the modification of environments, and the creation of others that are entirely new to the Region, bird diversity seems actually to have increased even though the security of some of the long-term resident species has diminished with habitat loss. There is no reason to suppose that the rate of change will slow and some reason to believe that it may actually accelerate with the effects of climate change and of the Hunter's economic growth.

Thus we are happy that this issue also provides useful snapshots of the bird populations of selected woodland, mangrove, and garden sites that will

hopefully make good reading now, but will certainly provide a useful point of reference for future Hunter ornithologists. These papers set out not so much to perform the standard scientific task of solving a problem, but rather to document what is occurring and to produce data-sets which need to exist even before the problems can become evident. These papers identify problems and offer tentative solutions, variously supported, upon which others may be able to build. The articles continue our efforts to look over time at a wide range of Hunter habitats. This will allow priorities for conservation and reservation to be proposed and future changes in bird populations to be quantified rather than rest on anecdotal evidence.

Particular species also receive special coverage in this issue: the Pacific Golden Plover and its preferred Hunter Estuary habitats are fully treated, while the Australian Painted Snipe is unfortunately not recorded enough to be closely associated with such specific sites. Problems are also raised about the seasonal distribution of the more familiar Grey Goshawk, a bird that we may in fact know rather less about than we thought we did—if the pattern of Hunter observations is anything to go by. On diurnal birds of prey, there are also two short notes which establish a culinary link between the raptors and small shorebirds. These articles all pose significant questions about bird behaviour, which is the particular focus of the remaining note on the way birds join forces in order to mob a rather unusual non-avian species. We hope that some of this material may inspire readers to contribute supplementary notes of their own, perhaps offering alternative explanations to those suggested here, or highlighting analogous problems.

We should like here to thank all those who assisted in the production of this volume, including the referees who must remain nameless, but with special mention of Liz Crawford, who, as Production Manager, finds yet another way to demonstrate her commitment to the birds.

Once again, we wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority, who have sponsored this

volume of The Whistler. Without their support it would be difficult for HBOC both to produce a journal of the standard set for The Whistler and to distribute it more widely than our membership. A wider distribution will ensure that it reaches and informs those charged with making decisions and taking actions which conserve birds and their habitat in the Hunter Region, and hopefully beyond. This is the primary purpose of our endeavours.

Mike Newman and Harold Tarrant  
Joint Editors