

Editorial

Welcome to Issue 14 of *The Whistler*. Here we present a wide selection of ornithological papers from the Hunter Region which will be of interest to readers, with six in-depth articles, seven short notes and a book review.

Three of the articles illustrate the importance of using long-term record sets to establish the status of species. Alan Stuart has presented a detailed analysis of 17 years of shorebird and waterbird surveys in Port Stephens. The article confirms decreasing national and international population trends for migratory waders that use Port Stephens. There is also some good news with increasing population trends for some threatened endemic species. The article further highlights the importance of Port Stephens to many shorebirds and waterbirds.

A second article by Alan Stuart uses a ten-year record set to establish Rufous Scrub-bird population trends in the Gloucester Tops. The article also addresses the impact of bush fires on the population of this little-known species which is predicted to be significantly impacted by future climate change.

An article by David Turner presents an analysis of records from surveys undertaken 27 years apart in Booti Booti National Park. This article fills an information gap for this area which has not previously been described in *The Whistler* articles and is under-represented in the general ornithological literature. A decrease in number of species over the period is documented as well as some changes in species diversity.

Three of the articles demonstrate how records from the Birdata database can be used in different ways to study the status of species in our region. The database was established over 20 years ago and provides researchers with a multi-generational time frame for assessing bird species population trends. An article by Mike Newman addresses the problem of determining changes in abundance for 17 uncommon woodland species with low reporting rates in the region. Mike has applied statistical techniques to a combination of Birdata record types to demonstrate their decreasing trends. This is a novel approach and we anticipate it will generate debate as to how to address the study of record-poor species.

Dan Williams has used Birdata records to develop time-variant distribution maps of the eastern range expansion of Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater within the region. This technique could also be used to demonstrate seasonal movements or sporadic irruptions of species. Neil Fraser has used historical records from Birdata and other sources to analyse the relationship between the occurrence of Australian Painted-snipe in the Hunter Region and weather-related events such as long-term drought, drought-breaking rains and floods. The article highlights the importance of permanent wetlands in the Lower Hunter as a refuge for the species during drought and for breeding when conditions are suitable.

An article by Chad Beranek also reports observations of Australian Painted-snipe in the region and describes a novel approach to detect them nocturnally. The article includes nocturnal observations of another cryptic species, Australian Little Bittern.

Over recent years, birdwatchers in the region have had the privilege of observing some previously absent species begin to reclaim their historically-lost habitat or extend their range in the region. Three articles in this issue describe such changes. A note by Kim Pryor reports a second successful breeding attempt by Black Kite in the region while an article by Ann Lindsey documents the third confirmed breeding record by Black-necked Stork in the Hunter Estuary. Both occurrences can be attributed in part to the rehabilitation of Hexham Swamp. The third article, by Neil Fraser, adds knowledge about the range extension of Beach Stone-curlew in Port Stephens, with a new breeding record of the species from Corrie Island, part of the Myall Lakes Ramsar site. The note also highlights the importance of this locality to other threatened species with reports of successful breeding by Australian Pied Oystercatcher and Little Tern.

Three short notes illustrate the importance of basic field observation to understanding behaviour of some species. Tom Kendall describes birds foraging on Fennel, probably for medicinal purposes. Backyard observations of juvenile Channel-billed Cuckoos by Adam and Rebecca Fawcett show that you don't have to leave home to undertake basic research. David Turner has documented the second

confirmed breeding record for Topknot Pigeon in the region.

In this issue we also review Volume 3 of the *Atlas of the birds of NSW and the ACT*. This is the final volume of this Whitley Award winning resource and includes an analysis of data from all three volumes. This shows that over 50% of resident or regional migrant species in NSW and ACT exhibited a significant population decrease over the 20-year Atlas period. This is most pronounced amongst woodland birds. The analysis reinforces the results of Mike Newman's above article. It also

reminds us that it is only through the recording, analysis and publication of information, that support for the conservation of threatened and declining species, and their habitat, can be achieved.

Thank you to the many individuals who have laboured to produce articles for this edition of *The Whistler*, or who have contributed in other ways towards its publication.

Neil Fraser and Alan Stuart
Joint Editors