

The *Whistler* - Editorial

Our latest volume of *The Whistler* is a tribute to the value of keeping consistent records of birds. What is common on your patch today may change rapidly. Thanks to people like Dorothy Raine we can make factual statements about how bird populations have changed over time. Dorothy's 33-year study of the birds of her property *Wirrumbirra* show many instances of decline and only one increasing species, the Bell Miner. *Wirrumbirra* is now covenanted for wildlife and continues to support a number of species that are threatened or restricted in range.

Systematic study of the shorebird populations of the Hunter Region is a cornerstone activity of the Hunter Bird Observers Club. Alan Stuart draws together information contained in historical publications on these species. His review unearthed unpublished archival material, providing the catalyst for placing this valuable material on record. Sadly comparison of past and contemporary shorebird populations indicates a dramatic decline in the migratory species, a trend being recognised throughout Australia and a matter of global concern. In contrast some Australian resident species, primarily the Red-necked Avocet, occur more frequently and in much greater numbers.

Recent surveys of the Worimi Conservation Lands, an extensive area of coastal dune system immediately north of Newcastle, provide an impressive inventory of coastal birds, but in small numbers. The area is both home to several threatened bird species and a popular recreational and tourism asset. This study provides a baseline against which the success of balancing the sometimes conflicting demands of recreation, protecting the cultural values of the Worimi, who are the traditional land owners, and wildlife conservation can be measured.

An article focussing on the status of an individual species in the Hunter Region has been a feature of recent issues of *The Whistler*. This time the spotlight is on the Fairy Martin. The paper questions whether the species is in decline. The answer is probably yes, but why and whether it will recover are challenges for future research and conservation respectively.

The final paper provides a catalogue of the birds of the Black Rock area of Martins Creek near Paterson. This study has similarities to Dorothy Raine's long-term study at *Wirrumbirra*, but in this case the records were compiled during walks along roads in an area of lightly vegetated farmland. Again a number of declining species were identified; again the Bell Miner increased. The positive message is that a very diverse population of birds continues to exist in a highly fragmented countryside.

At last *The Whistler* has a Book Review thanks to Neil Fraser. 'An Atlas of the Birds of New South Wales and the ACT' is an important addition to the library of any HBOC member with a serious interest in the birds of the Hunter Region. Congratulations to the authors. One, Dick Cooper, is an HBOC member and former Hunter resident.

As usual we have an eclectic range of short notes. Four are concerned with bird behaviour, in three instances photographs provided evidence. Many readers will already have seen Rod Warnock's spectacular images of Black-necked Storks. Steve Merritt captured fascinating insights into the courtship style of the Channel-billed Cuckoo. HBOC pelagic trip regulars have been thrilled when White-bellied Sea-Eagles have taken shearwaters following the boat into harbour. Mick Roderick captured the moment on camera. Mick also provides insights into the use of mimicry by Regent Honeyeaters to enhance its foraging success in competition with other honeyeater species. Penny Drake-Brockman provides another update on the remarkable Cattle Egret colony at Gloucester. The Editors would urge readers to be on the lookout for surprising or little-known bird behaviours that can be reported, and perhaps be written up for these pages.

Mike Newman and Harold Tarrant
Joint Editors