



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc
PO Box 24, New Lambton, NSW 2305
www.hboc.org.au
ABN 62 415 889 446

Hunter Bird Observers Club 2018 Annual Report

Introduction

The 2018 Annual Report of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on the 13th February 2019. It is available via the club website at www.hboc.org.au. This Annual Report consists of an overview of 2018 in the main body of the report along with detailed reports from appropriate co-ordinators attached as appendices.

1. Management & Administration

This section of HBOC includes management and administrative areas that facilitate all aspects of Club operations through its committee structure and other appointed positions.

The Annual Financial Report for 2018, printed and presented separately as Appendix A, forms part of this section of the Annual Report.

As has always been the case, HBOC was represented by an enthusiastic committee that met monthly, along with other devoted members that also attended and took part in discussions on management matters between meetings. There is such a range of issues and responsibilities that the committee handles that it is easy to underestimate the workload that the committee (and supporting roles) deals with. The committee and other contributing members are thanked for their support and input throughout the year.

HBOC has continued to monitor and where possible gradually improve its operating procedures for the benefit of all members. So far this year we have developed our approach to the use of call playback at club outings and finalised our Working with Children's Policy.

Locally, HBOC has continued to maintain excellent relations with private and public organisations. The promotion and undertaking of cooperative efforts is an important aspect of the role of Club management and that of the membership in general. The benefits of these collaborations are evident in virtually every aspect of the Club and we acknowledge the contributions of collaborative organisations and those members who have been involved in this regard. The Club has a deserved and highly respected position as one of the peak environmental organisations in the Hunter. The members are to be congratulated for consolidating this reputation and the vast amount of volunteer effort that goes into helping the Club function is also worthy of recognition.

2. Membership

Administrative, personnel matters and services related to the membership.

Membership Secretary: Rob Kyte, our Membership Secretary, continues to introduce initiatives to better serve our membership and increase our supporter base. A diversity of initiatives, including discounts at retail outlets, were enjoyed again by the membership throughout 2018. The Membership Secretary working in collaboration with the Treasurer (Helen McCall) has produced a comprehensive and regularly updated database of the club membership which facilitates reliable communication with club members.

Club Membership HBOC has again seen a continued growth in membership numbers with 68 new memberships in 2018 (19 family, 30 single). As of 31 December 2018 there were 369 financial members, an increase of 9 from 31 December 2017. There were 52 memberships from 2017 not renewed in 2018 (16 family, 20 single). Note: family memberships are counted as two members and the totals take into account to changes in membership type and members leaving the club.

Hunter 300 & 350 Club: A fun component of the Club where those keen birders who have seen more than 300 species in the Hunter Region publish their tallies on the website (though only following peer review for those with more than 350 species on their list). 2018 saw the continuation of a peer-review process for 350 Club members and once settled, tallies on the website will be amended. Badges are available for those reaching the 300 and 350 species milestones. There were no additions to the 300 Club in 2018. There were several people 'teetering' on the brink of reaching a significant milestone in 2017, so let's go over the brink and submit your tally in 2019.

Library: The extensive library continues to be well used by members each Club Night. The thorough stocktake of the library as carried out during 2016, together with the adding of an updated computerised list on the website have facilitated greater accessibility and accounting of the Club's media resources. Printed lists remain available in author, title and subject order. As of 2018 the library comprises more than 450 books, 66 reports and issues of journals related to Australian birding. Some older material has been culled and new books, including donations from Phil Straw, have been added.

Bird Image Library: Our digital library saw continuing refinement through 2018 overseen by the Photography Sub-committee. The role of overseeing the digital library was continued by Rob Palazzi during 2018. The HBOC's diligence in providing safe and secure usage of contributor's photographs for bird promotion and conservation has continued.

Currently the BIL (Bird Image Library) includes some 6,900 images from Australia wide, and a sub-folder of images/species photographed in the Hunter Region (as defined by HBOC) which has approximately 3,300 images covering about 75% of the species listed for our Region. The Hunter collection is missing images for 108 species. A list of those missing is available from the Manager at the address below. Hopefully as we progress this number will reduce steadily. Any photographer interested in helping fill the gaps, please contact Rob Palazzi (BIL Manager birdimages@hboc.org.au) - he is most welcoming of suggestions and photos at any time. Thanks to Rob for his efforts.

The online Bird Image Gallery (SmugMug) which contains many images from the BIL, has continued to grow and is available for all members to view online, through a link on the HBOC website. This is a good place to select images for your projects and to enjoy the many beautiful images contributed by members.

E-mail Service: The e-mail service has again continued to play a vital role in Club communications. This efficient means of distributing important messages and information keeps members informed, especially between Newsletters. It also provides an important link to those who receive their Newsletter electronically. Thanks go to Rob Kyte for his maintenance of this service to the membership.

Electronic social media has become an increasingly popular means for birders to share and catch-up on what is occurring locally in regard to the Hunter's birds. This is reflected in the growing numbers of people joining the *HBOC Facebook page*. By the end of 2018 the numbers following the HBOC page increased to 713.

'Hunterbirding': This online forum for sharing mainly local bird information, reporting sightings and for general discussion continued to grow in interest during 2018. Hunterbirding has become firmly established as the important go-to place where local issues, such as identification and interesting sightings are first disseminated to the wider Hunter birding community. Members are encouraged to join the forum, either with a view to read posts or to contribute to discussions. Contributors to identification threads are encouraged to explain why they arrived at an identification, to add to the educational benefit of this chat group. If, on the other hand, you want to make an enquiry to only one member please click on *Reply* rather than *Reply List*. Additionally, an archive for all emails sent to Hunterbirding exists, thus allowing cross-referencing to previous discussions on all topics.

The Club recognises the efforts of the Hunterbirding moderator (Dan Williams) and also thanks all contributors that make Hunterbirding happen.

3. Activities

This includes the planning, organisation and participation in the leisure-based birdwatching and social activities of the Club.

Outings: Once again HBOC implemented a successful programme of outings during 2018. It included the monthly Sunday and midweek outings, camps and other events, primarily focussing on the recreational needs of members.

Monthly Sunday outings: 11 Monthly outings covered a range of locations and habitats, with attendances varying in association with either the location of the outing, other activities happening at the time or, in some instances, the weather. The annual 'New Members Day' occurred again in June and was a popular day and good way to make new members feel welcome.

Mid-week outings: Similarly, 11 Monthly mid-week outings were held in 2018. Attendances were very good, with a diverse range of habitats visited. These outings are popular with retirees, shift workers and stay at home Mums.

Each outing has a leader who plans and runs the day. As a club we are fortunate that there are enough people who volunteer to fill this important role and to them we say "thank you".

Long weekend camps: 4 successful camps were held in 2018. All of them were on Private property and we are most fortunate to have access to these areas which protect us from the crowds that pack the public places. Noise at night is not a problem and more importantly the birds are not scared away. We started at Myall View in January and then Borah TSR for Easter. June was at Appletree Flats followed by Martindale for the October weekend. Many of the campers are regulars but at each camp we are joined by new members. In the last 3 years more than 70 individuals have attended at least 1 camp.

Mid-week camp: This camp is slightly different as the location has access to Cabins / Motel accommodation as well as camping. Activities are planned for each day and a group dinner is organised at a local Hostelry. This year the camp was held at the Old Bar campground and trips were organised to Saltwater NP, Farquhar Inlet and Cattai Wetlands.

Once again it is volunteers who organise and lead the camps as well as provide the necessary facilities (including a lot of digging). Thank you.

One of the pleasures of these camps, besides the company and the birds, is that the properties are left as they are found – rubbish free.

Finally all club members are kept up to date with the outcomes of each event by postings to Hunterbirding, Facebook and the club newsletter.

The *Annual Twitchathon* fundraising birdwatching event had its second year as a national event organised by Birdlife Australia and some of the bugs were ironed out in 2018. It is always a very popular event with HBOC members and an increased number of teams connected with HBOC took part in the various race categories in 2018. Again, the winning team from the Main Race went to a HBOC team, the Hunter Brewers. It was also a Hunter team, the Back o' Bourke Buzzards, who took out the prize for the Rarest/Best Bird, the Halls Babbler. NSW funds raised in 2018 will go to Regent Honeyeater conservation work on their breeding grounds.

To the many members, including the 2018 Club Activities Officer (Andrzej Kerpeil, ably assisted by Lyn), those organising, coordinating and leading outings and to all those attending, thank you for your involvement. The generosity of the landholders of private properties is also acknowledged.

4. Club Night

The monthly Club Night is one of the feature activities of HBOC.

Club Night meetings were held at the Hunter Wetlands Centre every month in 2018 except January, with healthy attendances throughout the year

The Guest Speaker Program included local and national subjects covering conservation issues, research findings, travel and general interest. In formulating the speaker program the committee seeks to establish a balance of topics and a range of speakers. Thank you to all presenters for their time, expertise and effort in preparing and presenting these informative talks. I would like to thank Steve Merrett who has ably taken on the role of technical assistant at our meetings

Bird of the Evening is a short, 5-10 minute piece (sometimes longer by arrangement) that usually precedes the main speaker at Club nights. Members are encouraged to present a 5 minute Bird of the Evening segment in any format (be it pictures, poetry, powerpoint or prose).

The “Observations” part of meetings is a good opportunity for people to share their local sightings and contribute to the knowledge-base of our birds.

The July Club Night was again aimed at raising funds for a conservation issue of relevance to the Club. In 2018 it was the ‘use of geolocators in tracking Ruddy Turnstones’ that was chosen to be the recipient of funds raised at the July Club Night and the December raffles.

The December *Christmas Meeting* was again popular, with a diverse array of speakers as well as a fantastic spread of food and drinks and even a visit from Santa.

Many thanks to all of the people that chip in to ensure that Club Nights happen smoothly – it is a great team effort every month.

5. Newsletter

HBOC’s regular newsletter communicates Club news, the events calendar, interesting sightings, Club outings and other reports and birding articles of general interest, to members, selected birding organisations and the public, either directly or via the HBOC web site.

The Newsletter continues to be a quality publication and an important means of communication, which links members within the Club through its news reports, and other birding articles. There is always a good supply of articles and photographs submitted to the editor ensuring a high quality and sizeable Newsletter. The many members who contribute articles and photographs to the Newsletter are thanked for their interest, time and effort. Thanks go to editor, Judi Thomas, who has overseen the transition of the newsletter to a monthly edition. I would like to thank members for their forbearance as we moved to make email notification the predominant form of distribution and I hope they will be equally patient as we transition to an electronic newsletter format in 2019.

6. Special Interest Group

At present, this section offers the opportunity for members with a special interest in bird photography to develop their bird watching and photographic knowledge / skills while promoting birds and the environment.

There continues to be a growing interest in bird photography. A very successful initiative this year has been the introduction of member-controlled Smugmug Galleries, where images not available in the BIL can be viewed. Participating members can upload and remove their own images, or even videos. So far more than eleven HBOC members have taken advantage of this initiative and our thanks go to Alwyn Simple for his work in this area. Our newly-invigorated Photography Sub-committee will continue to explore ways to cater to our photography enthusiasts.

7. Conservation

This section is primarily concerned with issues relevant to the protection of birds and their habitat in the Hunter Region and beyond. It helps link the areas of HBOC endeavour and the community through its collaborative partnerships, networking and advocacy.

There are now more than 90 species or subspecies of birds in the Hunter Region that are listed as threatened under either State or Commonwealth threatened species legislation. Further, those habitats that provide home for a diversity of currently non-threatened bird species are also under threat; thus, the conservation arm of the Club remains vitally important. Fortunately, in 2018, no new species occurring in the Hunter were added to any threatened species legislation.

HBOC is always on the front foot with environmental policy and in 2018 the Club wrote to the government on matters such as the Senate Inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis, as well as keeping abreast of the ongoing changes in the conservation status of Travelling Stock Reserves in NSW.

In terms of local conservation issues, HBOC was involved in making submissions and/or having representation on projects including, but not limited to:

- Newcastle Wetlands Reserve / Shortland Waters Golf Club (Water Hyacinth issue)
- Mambo Wetlands, Port Stephens
- Little Tern breeding at Winda Woppa, northern shore of Port Stephens

Further afield, HBOC wrote to Environment Minister Frydenberg regarding the proposed development at Toondah Harbour, part of a Ramsar-listed wetland in Queensland.

Regent Honeyeaters were found to have bred successfully in the Hunter Economic Zone (HEZ; Tomalpin Woodlands) late in 2018. In fact, this was the only location in the entire Regent Honeyeater range where evidence of breeding was found in the 2018 spring/summer. HBOC continues to work with BirdLife Australia, Cessnock Council and landholders in the Cessnock area in promoting the significance of the area, as well as monitoring birds in areas affected by severe bushfires.

HBOC also continued to manage migratory shorebird habitat in the Hunter Estuary (see 'Projects') and provide advice on the management of the dynamics that make the estuary such an important place for shorebirds. HBOC members were involved with several strategic planning workshops, including the hydrological management of the estuary and continued to advise the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG) on their habitat restoration of Fish Fry Flats on Ash Island.

8. Field Studies, Data Management and Records Appraisal

This section of HBOC addresses collection of data, monitoring of bird populations and maintenance / appraisal of records which underpin the HBOC research and conservation effort while at the same time making a worthwhile contribution to members' leisure-based bird watching.

Field studies and data management are inherently linked - no field studies program has any significant value unless the data from it are appropriately managed (including storage, analysis, and dissemination of results). Records appraisal is undertaken by a Records Appraisal Committee that oversees the assessment of rare and unusual reports of birds in the Region.

This part of HBOC is particularly strong and underpins many of the conservation efforts and published work in *The Whistler* and the Annual Bird Report.

Field Studies:

In 2018 we continued to do monthly surveys of the Hunter Estuary and have now almost completed our 20th year of those surveys. It was wonderful to welcome some newcomers to the survey teams in 2018 - those fresh faces have helped rejuvenate any hints of flagging enthusiasm amongst the long-standing survey team members. Our other regular field studies projects also continued in 2018 - the Port Stephens waterbirds survey, Tomago Wetlands surveys, Rufous Scrub-bird surveys in the Gloucester Tops, land bird surveys and bird banding on Broughton Island. Three new club projects for 2018 were to commence monthly surveys at Earthcare Park in Tenambit, quarterly surveys in the Martindale Valley, and to join the national Latham's Snipe monitoring project.

As always, those official club field studies projects were supplemented by survey efforts from many dedicated individual Club members. Special mention should be made of the monthly surveys, usually involving multiple members, done at Gir-um-bit NP / Swan Bay, Shortland Wetlands Centre, Walka Water Works and Swansea Channel / southern Lake Macquarie. Each of those projects has been running for more than at least a decade, producing valuable databases about our local birdlife. Many other sites were surveyed regularly (usually monthly) by individual members, with the data they generate being published in our annual bird report.

We continued to emphasise Birddata as the preferred way for the Club and individual members to archive their records. Birddata is a national database managed by BirdLife Australia and with a key use of the data being for purposes of conservation of Australian birds and their habitat. It was pleasing to note that for 2018 we had a record number of Birddata surveys submitted for the Hunter Region (more than 4,500 surveys) and also a record number of active observers.

Our field studies program was bolstered through our interactions with other organisations, which are continuing to grow. As always, we worked closely with all the local offices of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and in 2018 we initiated moves to formalise that relationship through better recognition of the efforts of volunteers. We also continued to work closely with Hunter Local Land Services in the Hunter Estuary and in 2018 our interactions with them began to spread to Port Stephens and the Manning Valley, where bird monitoring projects and education/promotion activities are beginning to be formulated. We were involved with various of BirdLife Australia's projects including their woodland bird program, and also began to work with the Landcare group at Martindale.

Data Collection and Management:

Important ways for us to document our field studies program include the annual Hunter Region bird report and our journal *The Whistler* (See Point 10 below). Results with a clear national significance were published elsewhere (Australian Field Ornithology, three Hunter-related papers in 2018, and *Stilt*, one paper in 2018). The latest issues of the bird report and *The Whistler* were published in late 2018. That included the 2017 bird report, which is the 25th in the series and for which we had the highest ever number of species recorded for any year. Our long-term bird report editor Alan Stuart has now stepped down from the role. The two long-term *Whistler* editors Harold Tarrant and Mike Newman have also announced their retirements

Records Appraisal

Records Appraisal: Records appraisal committees are an important part of modern birdwatching. As our knowledge of the status and distribution of birds increases, there is also a need to 'manage' the reliability of the information that contributes to that knowledge. This is done within HBOC by the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC). The RAC assigns categories to each bird species and decides whether records of Category 3 (and some Category 1 and 2) species can be accepted. For 2018, the RAC members were Mick Roderick (Records Appraisal Officer), Ann Lindsey, Dan Williams, Phil Hansbro, Dick Jenkin, Craig Anderson and Allan Richardson. A comprehensive outline

of the roles and responsibilities of the RAC was published in the February 2014 HBOC Newsletter and is available for download on the website.

In some cases, the rarity of a bird can be such that it needs to be assessed by a higher authority. There are two records committees that assess such species and when they are recorded in the Hunter Region, their review is deferred to them. For nationally rare birds, the BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) is the authority, whilst for state-significant birds, the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (ORAC) is the authority. Both committees maintain a review list of species required to be submitted when a sighting is claimed.

2018 was not as busy for records appraisal as 2017, though approximately 20 cases were reviewed by the HBOC RAC during the year. Perhaps the most significant records that were assessed were those of Ground Parrots, from two separate locations where they had been recorded during the early part of 2018 (at Crowdy Bay NP and Minimbah Nature Reserve). An intriguing report of a Ground Parrot from the Great Lakes area in 2002 was also assessed during 2018. All of these Ground Parrot records were accepted and is the first evidence of the existence of Ground Parrots in the Region in more than 80 years.

The other highlight was the acceptance by BARC of the well-documented Aleutian Terns at Farquhar Inlet (Old Bar) found during December 2017, representing a new species for the Australian list. The Ringed Plover found on Stockton Beach during August 2017 was also accepted by BARC during 2018. One species was added to the official HBOC checklist from sightings made in 2018. A family group of Apostlebirds were seen by a group of experienced birdwatchers at Timor Caves Reserve, in the north-western corner of the Region at the end of July. This is a species that was an expected addition to the HBOC list, with historical accounts from the Merriwa region noted in some literature. A Little Stint found at Farquhar Inlet in late 2018 will be assessed by NSW ORAC during 2019 and if accepted would also be a new species for the Region.

A detailed account for each species assessed by the HBOC RAC, as well as cases reviewed by BARC and ORAC for birds seen in the Hunter Region, will be found in the Records Appraisal Committee Report for 2018 (which will appear as an appendix to the 2018 Annual Bird Report).

9. Projects

Comprises the “hands on” conservation projects that restore selected areas of bird habitat in the Hunter.

Since 2003, members of Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) have maintained a constant volunteer effort with various restoration works in the Hunter Estuary. These projects all focus on shorebird habitat and the project sites have been chosen for their strategic importance to the birds.

Project sites exist at Stockton Sandspit, Ash Island (Milham Pond, Phoenix Flats, Wader West, Wader Pond and Swan Pond) and a collection of remote sites (Smith Island, Sandy Island, Fullerton Cove Beach and Dyke Pond #4) within the estuary.

Currently the combined projects cover 150 hectares of the Hunter Wetlands National Park and since early 2003, more than 9,500 hours of volunteer effort has been accrued in these endeavours. We will surely break the 10,000 hour mark in another twelve months.

The combined volunteer effort in 2018 across all the projects amounted to just over 500 hours of willing contribution.

Remote Sites

Previously reported as Threatened Species Recovery Fund (TSRF 06) project, this area of endeavour continues to be serviced as an ongoing volunteer program. The funded component of this project was successfully completed by June.

Since the completion of the funded section, regular visits to Sandy and Smith Islands have occurred to attend to the remote camera and carry out high tide roost surveys.

Fullerton Cove Beach

This small beach has been a significant shorebird roost for many years but was suffering from late invasion of mangroves and was not attracting great numbers of birds. It was successfully argued that this area be added to the

schedule. A single visit on 29th January was all that was necessary to clear the beach of mangroves. 1.5 hours work using a brush cutter proved very efficient.

Ash Island

The main focus over the Ash Island sites is the treatment of mangrove seedlings. Since all the primary felling of the trees several years ago it is solely the detailed picking of each subsequent season's seedlings that form the bulk of the work. The combined aggregate of almost 114 hectares was covered this year in the astoundingly short time of 46.8 hours across 5 visits.

Stockton Sandspit

This site is the most visible to the general public and probably one of the most visited. Restoration work at this site takes on several facets but the underlying focus is that of maintaining a shorebird roost. The volunteer effort here over the past twelve months amounted to 293 hours on this 4ha site.

Acknowledgements

These estuary projects continue to succeed because of the input of many people with a common interest in estuary health and shorebird habitat restoration.

All the works planning and implementation are the result of enduring partnerships that provide the organisational structure to make it all happen. The contributions of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hunter Local Land Services and Hunter Bird Observers Club are ceaseless and much appreciated.

Many thanks to all those individuals that have volunteered their time and effort in the field and gone home with a feeling of achievement and some sense of the issues confronting our shorebirds.

Particular acknowledgement is due to Boyd Carney (NPWS) for his constant availability and interest in the estuary. The in-kind service provided by NPWS through his support has proved to be crucial at times.

Special thanks must go to Tom Clarke for his untiring efforts as Project Co-ordinator

A comprehensive run-down of works undertaken as part of the Ash Island and Stockton Sandspit Habitat Restoration Projects is available in Appendix B.

10. The Whistler

HBOC's research-based, occasional periodical of refereed papers and notes that places on record observational details and analysis of HBOC members' field studies.

The 2018 issue of The Whistler included articles summarising multi-year studies by the authors at several local sites, and also several articles describing important or interesting behavioural observations. The two long-term editors Harold Tarrant and Mike Newman have announced their retirements

11. Education & Promotion

To equip club members, the organisation and the broader community with the knowledge, skills and capacity to not only enhance the bird watching experience, but also to support the conservation of Hunter birdlife and its various habitats. This section includes avenues for members to champion birds, the environment and HBOC to the broader community.

The effectiveness of displays and activities directed to community education is always difficult to evaluate, however in 2018 HBOC efforts were rewarded by an increase in public exposure and a pleasing increase in the number of members volunteering their expertise to inform the community about recreational birdwatching and conservation issues.

A small selection of our participation includes:

Tocal Field Days: We once again had a display stall at Tocal Field Days, inside the Hunter LLS marquee which they provide free of charge for community groups. There was a steady stream of visitors all three days and our very professional display elicited some interesting discussions about birds in our region. Our display won the prize for Best Exhibitor Award in the Education and Information Section. The Judge's Comment: *beautiful photographs, engaging information for all ages. 'vote for your favourite bird' is very popular.*

Biodiversity Day: This event is organised by the Office of Environment and Heritage in conjunction with NPWS and held at the Blue Gum Hills Reserve in Minmi in late September. In 2018 the event was again a great success with a good number of people attending.

Cessnock Woodlands Bioblitz: HBOC participated in this inaugural event as part of a long-running relationship with this project.

Aussie Backyard Bird Count: This national week-long event, organised by BirdLife Australia, is aimed at getting broader participation in birding from the non-birding community. The club was heavily involved in this event, especially through co-operation with many of our local councils.

Bird Identification Signs at Hunter Wetland Centre: Six signs were erected at the Wetlands Centre with assistance from Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group.

Media and Talks: Many members gave talks to community groups throughout the region and contributed regularly to local media.

HBOC wishes to thank the many members who helped raise the profile of birds and enhance public environmental awareness in 2018. Special thanks also to the Club photographers whose work makes these displays possible and to Rob Kyte for his time and skills in preparing the stimulating and visually appealing posters. Resources such as “handouts” were augmented by materials courtesy of BirdLife Australia.

Very pleasing in 2018 was the increase in the number of members participating in the organisation and running of these club events and the community relationships we have developed especially with local councils in our region and I hope this will continue into the future.

Website: The HBOC website continues to be an indispensable interface between the Club, its members and the rest of the world and again saw much activity during 2018. Our server provider capably delivered this last year under the watchful eye of our dedicated ‘Webmaster’ (Steve Merrett) who works tirelessly behind the scenes to not only enhance the security of the website, but to make improvements and facilitate updates as required. We began a review of our website in 2018 which resulted in some minor changes but also revealed what a comprehensive professional site we have. The efforts of Steve, Rob and Alan continue in keeping the website running and up-to-date, which is an ongoing task and crucial for the trouble-free service it provides.

Facebook: Our facebook page is a less formal interface between the club and the general public. We now have more than 700 followers and we maintained a healthy frequency of interesting postings in 2018.

Publications: As previously mentioned, the Hunter Region Annual Bird Report No. 25 (2017) was published and was once again a high quality publication, now containing many colour photographs and illustrations along with the remarkable amount of closely reviewed records and analyses. Alan Stuart (who has been editor for each of the 25 years that the bird reports have been published), the production team and field observers are to be congratulated for this respected publication.

Several members have authored or co-authored papers dealing with regional birds that have been published in periodicals such as *Australian Field Ornithology* and *Stilt*.

Birding Routes: Two new birding routes were produced in 2018 - one covering the northern part of Port Stephens and the other the Old Bar area. Also, the preparation work was done for one completely new one (for the Harrington area) and for updating out-of-date brochures for Ash Island and the eastern side of Lake Macquarie (which will be expanded and split into two birding route brochures). Work also started on a Cessnock birding route (which eventually will become one of a series of four).

In 2018, as for previous years, the birding route brochures were the most frequently downloaded of any of the items available from our website. They have become one of the important ways by which we engage with local and visiting birdwatchers.

12. Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for the assistance I have received during my first term as President. As always there are too many individuals to mention, but rather I will express a collective thanks goes to those many people who have assisted in making this wonderful club function as effectively as it does.

Robert Stewart (HBOC President 2018) 13 February 2019