



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 2019 Annual Report

Introduction

The 2019 Annual Report of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. (HBOC) was presented to members at the Annual General Meeting on the 12th February 2020. It is available via the club website at www.hboc.org.au. This Annual Report consists of an overview of 2019 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 2019, printed and presented separately 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. In doing so we have always kept in mind the key objectives of this club and this year we have formalised our sub-committee structures to allow for more effective decision-making. I thank all members of the committee for their efforts and support.

Locally, HBOC has continued to maintain excellent relations with private and public organisations. The promotion 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, continued 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 2019. 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. This is Rob's final year as Membership Secretary and I would like to thank him for his outstanding work for the club.

Club Membership As of 31 December 2019 there were 352 financial memberships of HBOC, a decrease of 17 from 31 December 2018. Note: family memberships are counted as two members and the totals take into account changes in membership type and members leaving the club. This year we introduced a student membership at a reduced rate.

Hunter 300 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 400 species on their list). In 2019 the 300 Club web page was revamped to include each member's total number of species, the date of their latest addition and their prediction for the next new Hunter species. Badges are available for those reaching the 300, 350 and 400 species milestones with a 425 species badge coming soon as we have had one member (Ann Lindsey) achieve this remarkable count. There has been a real revival in the 300 Club in 2019 with 27 members, so get with the trend and submit your tallies in 2020.

Library: The extensive library continues to be used by members each Club Night, with the HANZAB volumes the most popular items. An updated computerised list on the website has facilitated greater accessibility and accounting of the Club's resources. Printed lists remain available in author, title and subject order. As of 2019 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 Keith Laverick, have been added.

Bird Image Library

Our digital library saw continuing refinement through 2019 overseen by Rob Palazzi. The collection of images has been refined and expanded and there are approx. 11,400 images in the folder covering the whole of Australia and its territories. The images in the collection from the Hunter Region (at present totalling just under 4,600) cover 355 species with a further 97 yet to be sourced. There has been a steady demand throughout the year for ideas, information, advice and supply of selected images and the feedback obtained from the various users was very positive both for the product and the service. A more detailed report can be found in Appendix B, HBOC Photography Sub-committee Report

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.

Facebook: Electronic social media has become an increasingly popular means for birders to share and catch up on what is occurring locally regarding the Hunter's birds. This is reflected in the growing number of people joining the HBOC Facebook page. By the end of 2019 the number following the HBOC page increased to 870 and we maintained a healthy frequency of interesting postings.

'Hunterbirding': This online forum for sharing mainly local bird information, reporting sightings and for general discussion continued to grow in interest during 2019. 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 birdwatching 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 explaining 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 person 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 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 2019. It included the monthly Sunday and midweek outings, camps and other events, primarily focussing on the recreational needs of members.

However, the weather played a major role. The Easter camp was nearly cancelled due to the drought and a lack of water at Macquarie Marshes. Then the Anzac camp was cancelled due to torrential rain which made the access road impassable. Next 2 outings were cancelled in November and December because of bushfire threats.

Monthly Sunday outings: 11 Monthly outings were planned and covered a range of locations and habitats. Attendance varied 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 a good way to make new members feel welcome.

Mid-week outings: Similarly, 11 Monthly mid-week outings were planned in 2019. Attendances were very good, with a diverse range of habitats visited. These outings are popular with those members who are flexible in their work arrangements or retirees.

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 2019. Many 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 Smiths Lake in January at the UNSW research centre. Macquarie Marshes was the location for Easter whilst June was at Baerami. This was followed by Munghorn Gap for the October weekend. Many of the campers are regulars but at each camp we are joined by new members. In the last 4 years more than 70 individuals have attended at least one camp and in 2019 this number was increased.

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 Gloucester campground and the attendees visited the usual spots as well as being taken to new properties.

Once again it is volunteers who organise and lead the camps as well as provide the necessary facilities. 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 via the club newsletter. Thank you to Andrzej and Lyn for organising the Club's activities program.

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 2019 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 Mick Roderick for arranging guest speakers.

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 2019 it was the ‘Australasian Bittern Research’ that was chosen to be the recipient of funds raised at the July and December Club Night 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 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 editorial committee ensuring a high quality and sizeable Newsletter. In 2019 we changed to a fully digital format e-News. This was not without its teething problems, but these have been worked through and we now have a more immediate and varied means of communication with our members. The many members who contribute articles and photographs to the Newsletter are thanked for their interest, time and effort.

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.

The HBOC Photography sub-committee was formed in 2018 and has been meeting regularly since then. In 2019, two meetings were held at the HWC in March and September.

The enthusiasm of the various members of the sub-committee has continued to grow and the participation of HBOC members in the initiatives developed by the sub-committee have been very encouraging.

SmugMug Website:

Work on setting up the Website was completed last year (2018), and it has been running without any problems or issues during 2019. A couple of changes have been made when we have split bird species into two sub-species galleries. A list of the photographers who have supplied photographs to the BIL, along with an initial coding system that matches the information on the photographs, has been put on the Homepage.

Members Galleries:

The introduction of Members Galleries early in 2019 to allow Club photographers to display their photos has been a success. Twenty Club photographers now have Galleries on the site. There is a total of 37 Members Galleries in this section of the Website.

Exhibition:

The Photography Sub-committee initiated an exhibition of members' photos on the site for the latter part of 2019 with the theme that the photo should tell a story. This Exhibition had 4694 photos viewed. As a result of the success of that exhibition, more will be planned for 2020.

Photography Print Collection:

The club has a reasonably up to date set of the full HBOC BIL which is used for generating sets of print images for specific HBOC displays at various community days. During 2019 the activities concerned were Tocal Field Days, Cessnock BioBlitz and Biodiversity Day. In addition, 110 prints of members' bird photographs are produced each year for the foyer displays at HBOC meeting nights.

Thank you to all members of the photography sub-committee. A more detailed report can be found in Appendix B, HBOC Photography Sub-committee Report

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. Only one species that occurs in the Hunter Region was added to threatened species legislation during 2019. This was the White-throated Needletail, which was listed as Vulnerable under the EPBC Act in July.

HBOC is always on the front foot with environmental policy and in 2019 the Club's concerns mainly revolved around the loss of habitat through various planned developments, including:

Submission to Maitland City Council regarding White-bellied Sea-Eagle nest on a residential subdivision at Chisholm. Request to ensure adequate buffer zone around the nest. The nest is known to have existed for at least 18 years. The buffer zone is currently inadequate. Many mature trees with large hollows will be removed to make way for this development.

Request and subsequent meeting with Newcastle City council to define the extent of Horseshoe leash-free dog beach in Newcastle. The problem is that dogs run over the rock shelf at Stony Point in Newcastle Harbour where threatened shorebird species forage and roost. It turned out that Stony Point is not included in the off-leash area. HBOC request for signage was granted but action has not taken place.

Submission to National Parks regarding the Tomago Precinct of Hunter Wetlands National Park to repair the Eastern Swing Gates which would again allow tidal water onto the eastern side of the mudflats. The mudflats have dried out and shorebirds are now not using these areas. Ann Lindsey followed this up with phone calls to DPI Fisheries as no action was being taken. According to Fisheries the Eastern Swing Gates will be repaired by January 2020.

Submission to Port Stephens Council regarding the residential development at Kings Hill. Concerns about Irrawang Swamp being encircled by various developments and the destruction of mature Endangered Ecological Communities. Both areas provide habitat for threatened species of water and woodland birds.

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.

A letter was sent to Office of Local Government re legislation on the confining of cats to owners' property.

Submission re alienation of land in Arcadia Park in Central Newcastle.

On a more positive note our submissions in 2018 about growth of Water Hyacinth at Shortland Waters Golf Club had some success and the HBOC helped the Golf Club successfully apply for a grant to control this noxious weed. We now have cordial relations with the golf club, but we still need to remain vigilant. The Club is collaborating with BirdLife Australia in a trial of artificial roosts for migratory shorebirds within the Hunter Estuary. HBOC also supported state and national campaigns.

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 2019 we celebrated our 20th year of monthly surveys of the Hunter Estuary, with a party at the Shortland Waters Golf Club for past and present surveyors and other club members. Our other regular field studies projects also continued in 2019 - 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, monthly surveys at Earthcare Park in Tenambit, quarterly surveys in the Martindale Valley, and the national Latham's Snipe monitoring project. A regular monthly survey at Shortland Waters Golf Club was initiated in 2019.

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 well over 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 2019 we had a record number of Birddata surveys submitted for the Hunter Region (more than 5,000 surveys) and a record number of active observers (188 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. We also continued to work closely with Hunter Local Land Services in the Hunter Estuary and in 2019 our interactions with them have spread to Port Stephens and the Manning Valley, where bird monitoring projects and education/promotion activities are being formulated. We were involved with several of BirdLife Australia's projects including their woodland bird program and began to work with the Landcare group at Martindale.

Data Collection and Management:

These are important ways for us to document our field studies program include the Hunter Region Annual Bird Report and our journal *The Whistler*. Results with a clear national significance were published elsewhere

(*Australian Field Ornithology*, one Hunter-related paper in 2019, and *Corella*, one paper in 2019). Our new Bird Report editor Dan Williams has re-vamped the data collection process to reflect the growing tendency for observers to report their records solely into electronic databases, and now publication of the 2018 bird report is imminent. The latest issue of *The Whistler* was published in November 2019 with 15 separate articles about Hunter Region birdlife.

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). In 2019 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 referred 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.

Approximately 18 cases were reviewed by the HBOC RAC during the year, with three cases assessed by NSW ORAC for birds recorded within the Hunter Region. One new species was added to the Hunter list during 2019, being South Polar Skua after a bird was seen and photographed off Forster on 4th April 2019. An old record of a Grey-headed Albatross photographed off Port Stephens 22nd June 2008 was accepted by NSW ORAC and becomes the first record of a live individual of this species (previously only beachwashed specimens had been recorded in the Region).

Other highlights included an “invasion” of Pied / Black Honeyeaters and Diamond Doves in the western parts of the Hunter early in the year, with a return of Black Honeyeaters during spring (along with Crimson Chats). In the western extreme of the Region late in the year was a family of Ground Cuckoo-shrikes, possibly representing a breeding record for the species. Banded Stilts were recorded at two distinct locations late in the year; at Stockton Borehole Swamp and Ash Island (the latter being two birds). A well-watched Brown Booby took up temporary residence at Stockton Breakwall in Jan/Feb, though there were concerns for the welfare of the bird as it had a fishing jig protruding from its chest.

A detailed account for each species assessed by the HBOC RAC, as well as cases reviewed by NSW ORAC for birds seen in the Hunter Region, will be found in the Records Appraisal Committee Report for 2019, which will appear as an appendix to the 2019 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. Much of the volunteer work carried out involves removing mangrove seedlings that invade beaches and saltmarsh areas within the sites. To do this, permission from National Parks and Wildlife Service and Department of Primary Industries is required. This report aims to highlight the successes of our efforts over the 2019 year and discuss some of the challenges for the future.

Currently the combined projects cover over 150 hectares of the Hunter Wetlands National Park and since early 2003, just over 9,960 hours of volunteer effort has been accrued in these endeavours. The combined volunteer effort in 2019 across all the projects amounted to 433 hours of willing contribution. We will surely break the 10,000 mark before another twelve months has elapsed.

Remote Sites:

(Smith Island, Sandy Island, Fullerton Cove Beach and Dyke Pond #4)

This area of endeavour continues to be serviced as an ongoing volunteer program since the funded component of this project was successfully completed in June 2018.

Recruitment of mangrove seedlings since 2018 in all the remote sites has been, by any standard, very low and the follow-up sweeps over all beaches and saltmarsh have been easily completed. All the nominated areas on Smith Island (two beaches plus large saltmarsh), Sandy Island (one beach plus small saltmarsh) and Fullerton Cove Beach were cleared of mangrove seedlings. The effort over the large saltmarsh (15ha) on Smith Island was completed with great efficiency by a team of volunteers from Hunter Local Land Services.

Regular monitoring at high tides of these sites continues with kayak access to the island sites and walking access to Fullerton Cove Beach. The beaches on Smith Island and at Fullerton Cove have shown good improvement in occupancy by shorebirds roosting over the high tides.

Ash Island :

(Milham Pond, Phoenix Flats, Wader West, Wader Pond and Swan Pond)

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 very reasonable time of just under 70 hours. This represents another below average yearly effort and anything under 100 hours is completely sustainable by volunteers.

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 246 hours on this 4ha site.

Another relatively easy challenge was this year's Clean Up which required only a small but dedicated crew of HBOC volunteers to collect the rubbish and marine debris.

Our ground-nesting birds continued to have very poor breeding success during 2019 and as the amount of available open sand continues to reduce this is hardly a surprising result.

HBOC appreciates the input to this project by many people with a common interest in estuary health and shorebird habitat restoration. A more detailed acknowledgment of their contribution will be found in Appendix A.

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

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 latest issue of *The Whistler* was published in November 2019, steered through by the new joint editors Neil Fraser and Alan Stuart. Its 93 pages presented 15 separate articles about Hunter Region birdlife and involved ten different authors. Copies of *The Whistler* are sent to libraries around the world and every article is now published separately on our website and hence publicly available.

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 2019 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:

Total Field Days: We once again had a display stall at Total Field Days, inside the Hunter LLS marquee which they provide free of charge for community groups. For 2019 HBOC exhibited two citizen science projects that members have participated in. The citizen science projects were Egret Watch, which was run by the late Max Maddock during 1980s and 1990s, and the Rufous Scrub-bird Monitoring Project, which is run by Alan Stuart. The display included information posters, photos of the two focal species, Cattle Egret and Rufous Scrub-bird, and soundtracks of scrub-bird calls. Some kids' activities were available in the form of a quiz about information on the posters, which included questions on the scrub-bird calls, and a Cattle Egret colouring sheet, which attracted some engagement. There was a steady stream of visitors all three days and our very professional display elicited some interesting discussions about birds in our region.

Biodiversity Day: This event is organised by the Office of Environment and Heritage in conjunction with NPWS and held at the Blue Gum Hills Regional Park in Minmi in late September/early October. HBOC exhibited jointly with BirdLife Australia and ran a backyard/school yard census-style activity for the school children who visited the club's display. In 2019 the event was again a great success with a good number of people attending.

Cessnock Bioblitz: HBOC participated for the second time in this event as part of a long-running relationship with this project. The popularity of the event is increasing, and some useful partnerships were formed.

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.

NAIDOC Week celebrations at Maitland Park: The club participated in this event for the first time this year.

Media and Talks: Many members gave talks to community groups throughout the region and contributed regularly to local media, with interviews with ABC local radio, and community radio, the Newcastle Herald and a regular column in the Maitland Mercury, as well as speaking to local community groups throughout our region. These included a talk about "waterbirds of the shoreline" at Karuah in May and about "birds of the Gloucester Tops" in Gloucester in October. Both talks were organised in conjunction with Hunter Local Land services and Mid Coast Council and were well attended. The appearance on Broughton Island in October of an Australian rarity, the Pycroft's Petrel, led to an ABC Radio feature story about that event.

HBOC wishes to thank the many members who helped raise the profile of birds and enhance public environmental awareness in 2019. 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 2019 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. 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 2019. Our website is also very popular, and we regularly receive positive comments about it from external parties. 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.

Publications: Our new bird report editor Dan Williams has re-vamped the data collection process to reflect the growing tendency for observers to report their records solely into electronic databases, and now publication of the 2018 bird report is imminent, the production team and field observers are to be congratulated for this respected publication. The latest issue of *The Whistler* was published in November 2019, and several members have authored or co-authored papers dealing with regional birds that have been published in periodicals such as *Australian Field Ornithology* and *Corella*

Birding Routes: Four new birding route brochures were produced in 2019. Two dealt with the eastern side of Lake Macquarie (an expansion and splitting of one of the first-ever birding routes that the club produced) and the other two brochures covered areas around Cessnock. The latter were produced in collaboration with BirdLife Australia, Cessnock City Council and Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council.

In 2019, as for previous years, the birding route brochures were the most frequently downloaded of any of the items available from our website. They are one of the important ways by which we engage with local and visiting birdwatchers.

12. Special Recognition

Two members of HBOC received special awards in 2019 in recognition of their contribution to the study and conservation of bird life:

Alan Morris became a member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List 2019 for “Significant service to wildlife conservation, particularly native bird life.”

Dick Cooper was awarded the J N Hobbs Medal for 2019 for outstanding contributions to Australasian ornithology by an amateur ornithologist.

13. Acknowledgments

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

Robert Stewart (HBOC President 2019) 12 February 2020