

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

HUNTER BIRD OBSERVERS CLUB INC. 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

The Hunter Bird Observers Group was formed on 12 May 1976 as a subsidiary of the Hunter Flora and Fauna Society. It became the Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC) in 1981 and in 1988 HBOC became incorporated. This year we celebrated the Club's 30th birthday. The Club's objectives are:

- to encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat;
- to encourage bird observing as a leisure time activity.

This report documents the Club's progress in meeting these objectives during 2006.

STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITAT

Bird Sightings and Highlights

Each Club night members have an opportunity to share their special bird sightings – from records of the first arrivals of migratory species to sightings of unusual or unexpected species, to records of more common species. All these observations are collated by Alan Stuart for the Annual Hunter Region Bird Report, along with sightings recorded during Club outings and surveys. Additional sightings may be sent to Alan by email. The Annual Bird Report lists all the birds that occur in the Hunter Region with notes on their status. Details of rare or unusual birds should be recorded on an "URRF" – an "Unusual Record Report Form" - and submitted to the Records Appraisal Committee for acceptance of the record. This forces us to be careful in our identification, especially if the bird is unusual. During 2006 there were many highlights, some of which are listed in **Table 1**. At this stage, not all records have been submitted, and processing of reports is still in progress by the Records Appraisal Committee, so this is a taste of the possible highlights for 2006.

Table 1 – Birding Highlights for 2006

Species	Place	Month
Swamp Harrier *	Kooragang Island	November
Plumed Whistling Duck (200+)	Near Gloucester	
Blue-billed Duck	Warka Waterworks, Maitland	Several months
Freckled Duck (9 birds)	Ellalong Lagoon	May
Australian Shelduck (pair)	Ash Island	December
Radjah Shelduck (pair)	Mungo Brush, Myall Lakes	All year until August
Black Petrel (1)	At sea off Newcastle	March
Streaked Shearwater (1)	At sea off Newcastle	March
Little Bittern	Bolwarra	November
Red-backed Button-quail	Deep Pond, Kooragang Island	February
Red Knot (1669 birds)	Ash Island	October
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Stockton Sandspit	March
Cockatiel (4)	Warrah (near Willow Tree)	November
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove	Harrington	February and July
Grass Owl (3)	Ash Island	February to April, also December
Regent Honeyeater	Coolah Tops; and White Box Camp, Goulburn River National Park	September
Painted Honeyeater	Bulga	October
Masked Woodswallow*	Kurri	October
Yellow Wagtail (6)	Ash Island	February to March
Rufous and Brown Songlarks	Influx to Lower Hunter	September to December

Note: * First confirmed breeding records for the Hunter Region

Four new species will be added to the Hunter Region bird list if they are confirmed by the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC). These are: Inland Thornbill, White-bellied Storm-Petrel, Yellow-bellied Sunbird, and

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

Arctic Tern. NSW ORAC (Ornithological Rarities Appraisal Committee) has accepted the Sunbird as only the 4th NSW record (and 2 of the previous 3 records were old Hunter Region records).

Bird Surveys

Bird surveys are an important contribution to knowledge about Australian birds. During 2006, Club members participated in the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys organized by the Threatened Species Network. Steve Roderick coordinated the Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot surveys for HBOC.

The **Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot** surveys were held on 20/21 May and 5/6 August 2006. Singleton Army Base was included in the May survey as Regent Honeyeaters had been recorded there a few years ago, but none were found during this survey. Although none were recorded in the Hunter during May, 25 Regent Honeyeaters were counted in the Capertee Valley and 27 at Joorilands in the Burragorang Valley during May. In September, after the official survey dates, one **Regent Honeyeater** was sighted at White Box camp in the Goulburn River National Park and another at Coolah Tops. Unlike the previous year, there was no major flowering of Spotted Gum to attract the Swift Parrots.

Painted Snipe are rarely recorded in the Hunter Region, possibly due to their excellent camouflage and their tendency to 'freeze' for about 15 minutes when disturbed. Although there were two official survey days during 2006, no Painted Snipe were recorded at these times. However, several were located on a swamp near Leneghans Drive in October, causing much excitement. At least one bird was still present on 17 December when the annual Latham's Snipe count was conducted.

The **Annual Latham's Snipe Count on 17 December 2006** was well attended this year, with 10 members participating in the count at Pambalong Nature Reserve. Surveyors included: Tom Clarke, Liz Crawford, Chris Herbert, Diane Johnson, Michael Kearns, Ann Lindsey, Robert McDonald, Mike Newman, Alan Stuart, and Michael Todd. Tom Clarke and Robert McDonald surveyed Newcastle Wetlands Reserve and Swamps off Leneghans Drive, while Lorna Mee surveyed Irrawang Swamp on the same day. Surveys commenced in 1997 and results of annual surveys are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2 – Results of Latham's Snipe Surveys

Date	Pambalong Nature Reserve	Leneghans Flat	Newcastle Wetlands Reserve	Market Swamp	Irrawang Swamp
20 Dec 1997	475	NS	NS	NS	NS
19 Dec 1998	230	NS	NS	NS	NS
18 Dec 1999	115	NS	NS	NS	NS
10 Dec 2000	66	NS	NS	NS	NS
8 Dec 2001	35	NS	NS	NS	NS
7 Dec 2002	7	NS	NS	NS	NS
7 Dec 2003	35	NS	NS	NS	NS
5 Dec 2004	36	NS	22	0	35
5 Dec 2005	66	NS	6	NS	12
17 Dec 2006	97	30	3	0	20

NS – Not Surveyed

The range in numbers of snipe counted at Pambalong Nature Reserve over the past 10 years reflects the changing conditions at this wetland, depending on rainfall, run-off and evaporation rates.

The seventh year of regular monthly **wader counts in the Hunter Estuary** continued during 2006, with five teams surveying simultaneously: one at Ash Island, one at Kooragang Dykes and the Big Pond, one covering a variety of sites between Stockton Sandspit and Fullerton Cove, one counting Deep Pond on Kooragang Island and one counting at Stony Point and Newcastle rock platforms. Big Pond, which has dried up and is no longer used by waders, and Deep Pond, which is a significant permanent wetland, are both located on

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

land zoned for industrial use. This land is managed by the Regional Land Management Corporation (RLMC), which has been appointed by the NSW State Government to manage land within the Hunter Port Area. RLMC has granted access to inducted surveyors to monitor Deep Pond. During 2006 the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project acquired a boat, thanks to the generosity of the Price Waterhouse Coopers Foundation. KWRP have generously provided the boat for our monthly surveys of Kooragang Dykes, increasing our comfort enormously!

As in previous years, many people have assisted with the wader counts:

Alan Stuart, Robert McDonald, Neville McNaughton, Ann Lindsey, Jenny Powers, Nick Livanos, Terry Lindsey, Liz Huxtable, Mick Roderick, Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford, Mike Newman, Grant Brosie, Neil Fraser, Paddy Lightfoot, Sue Tiley, Michael Kearns, Maggie Hristov, Craig Arms, Di Johnson, Sue Rostas, Rob Henderson, Peggy Svoboda, Martin Heffron, Rachael Russell, Judi Thomas, Joan Wylie and Tom Wylie.

Consistent efforts by core team members are greatly appreciated, as is the assistance of many other people from time to time. We are indebted to Ann Lindsey for consistently entering the data into a computer program so that it can be readily transmitted to interested parties. This is a tremendous effort from everyone involved and as a Club we can be very proud of the results of these surveys, which are published in the Annual Bird Reports. This database has been extremely important in providing hard evidence of the importance of the Hunter Estuary for migratory shorebirds and other waterfowl. The Conservation Committee has used the data on numerous occasions to justify objections to proposed development that would adversely affect the birds' habitat.

HBOC's report on bird use of the **Newcastle rock platforms**, compiled for Newcastle City Council by Chris Herbert, was finalised early in the year. This study highlighted the importance of the rock platforms for Sooty Oystercatchers as well as other shorebirds. Judi Thomas has continued daily surveys of shorebirds on the rock platforms, coinciding with monthly wader surveys whenever possible, to build up our database on bird use of these areas. This is providing interesting data on Sooty Oystercatchers, Ruddy Turnstones, terns and gulls.

Bi-monthly surveys at '**Greswick Angus**', a private property on the Williams River at East Seaham, commenced in September 2004 at the request of Hunter Water, as part of the monitoring of a four-year project in land management. The surveys aim to help monitor the results of on-farm riparian restoration on this Williams River Best Management Practice Demonstration Site. Tom Clarke, Anthony Gooden, Neville McNaughton, Leone and John Storm and Lyn Rayward are conducting these surveys, with enthusiastic support from the property owners, John and Janelle Spearpoint and their sons, Hayden and James. Recently, John Spearpoint published a book entitled "Striking the Balance", which chronicles the family's quest for a sustainable future in agriculture, and includes a section on birds as an indicator of ecosystem health:

"When we planned our revegetation activities, our focus was on erosion control. We didn't really consider any direct benefits to native plants and animals and the ecosystem services that they provide. Now that we are aware of their benefits, our plan is to maintain and improve bird habitat. A diversity of native trees and shrubs will encourage them to stay".

It is very gratifying for HBOC members to be involved in this project and to see the family develop their bird watching skills and awareness. Results are sent to the Birds Australia Atlas Project and are recorded by HBOC for ongoing assessment, with a detailed report to be written at the end of the project. Fourteen surveys conducted since September 2004 have recorded 122 species, with evidence of breeding activity for 29 species. A report on the surveys to date is provided in **Appendix 1**.

On 26 February 2006, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) organized a third comprehensive survey of **waterbirds in Port Stephens** with assistance from 12 members of HBOC (A. Stuart, G. Little, P. Brockman, B. Speechley, A. Lindsey, S. Hamonet, N. Livanos, L. Livanos, P. Hansbro, N. Fraser, N. McNaughton, T. Lindsey) and two kayakers. The first survey in February 2004 divided the estuary into six areas that were covered by bird observers in six different boats. During the second survey in March 2005, a boat breakdown and adverse weather conditions meant that one area was omitted from the survey and some areas were not fully surveyed. The February 2006 survey was executed successfully with all six

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

areas being surveyed and close approaches to Corrie Island made possible using kayaks. The February 2006 survey found a total of 3089 waterbirds including 1403 migratory shorebirds, whereas the previous February 2004 survey found a total of 4470 waterbirds including nearly 1900 migratory shorebirds (see **Table 3**).

Table 3 – Shorebirds Recorded on Annual Port Stephens Waterbird Surveys

Species	8/02/04	12/03/05*	26/02/06
Black-tailed Godwit	51	0	0
Bar-tailed Godwit	888	268	515
Whimbrel	218	248	424
Eastern Curlew	649	80	303
Common Greenshank	0	8	15
Terek Sandpiper	6	0	4
Common Sandpiper	1	0	1
Grey-tailed Tattler	44	9	32
Ruddy Turnstone	8	20	9
Red-necked Stint	20	2	6
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	0	0	40
Beach Stone-curlew	0	0	1
Pied Oystercatcher	112	30	77
Sooty Oystercatcher	18	5	9
Pacific Golden Plover	0	0	38
Grey Plover	0	0	1
Red-capped Plover	0	0	26
Lesser Sand Plover	5	4	15
Masked Lapwing	33	15	11
TOTAL	2,053	689	1527

Note: * Incomplete survey

As with previous surveys, Alan Stuart compiled the results. NPWS intends to continue annual surveys of the waterbirds in Port Stephens and welcomes HBOC participation in these events.

Monthly surveys are conducted by Mike Newman and Ann Lindsey at the **Morpeth Wastewater Treatment Works** where the treatment ponds are being maintained for bird habitat. Results of these surveys are included in the Annual Bird Report.

Monthly surveys of the **Tank Paddock**, an area owned by Coal and Allied on the margin of Hexham Swamp, were terminated in August 2005 and not restarted until August 2006. Results of the surveys were sent to Newcastle City Council in 2005, and have contributed to the decision not to allow rezoning of this land for residential subdivision. The Tank Paddock Surveyors, Liz Huxtable, Jenny Powers, Jenny Helman, Nick Livanos, Chris and Dave Eastham and Sue Tiley are sometimes joined by Di Johnson, Kathleen Straw (NPWS), Grant Brosie, Robert MacDonald and Rachael Russell. This team now conducts three-monthly surveys of the Tank Paddock, Awabakal Nature Reserve and Blue Gum Hills Regional Park /Pambalong Nature Reserve / Lenaghans Flat.

The Newcastle Speleological Society plans to publish a small booklet on the natural attributes of **Timor Caves** in 2007 and invited HBOC to compile a bird list for the caves area. Timor Caves is located beside the Isis River, east of Murrurundi. The first bird surveys were conducted in November 2005. Several additional surveys were carried out in different seasons during 2006, recording a total of 108 bird species in the Timor Caves area. Musk Lorikeets were a feature of the area, with large numbers feeding noisily on flowering eucalypts, especially in summer.

The ongoing **Birds Australia Atlassing Project** follows publication of *The New Atlas of Australian Birds* in 2003, which recorded 4 years of intensive atlassing between 1998 and 2002 by over 7,000 volunteers. Ongoing atlassing continues to provide data for assessing environmental change, as birds are an indicator of

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

ecosystem health. Many HBOC members are also members of Birds Australia and the Club works in harmony with Birds Australia on many issues. During 2006, seven special atlassing days were organized by Nick Livanos, Grant Brosie and Ann Lindsey, however two of these were cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. These outings are often exploratory, searching for birds in areas that are not necessarily regular haunts of birdwatchers. The atlassing locations and highlights are listed in **Table 4**.

Atlassing Participants: Grant Brosie, Liz Crawford, Chris Herbert, Michael Kearns, Ann Lindsey, Ken Lindsey, Terry Lindsey, Nick Livanos, Robert McDonald, Lorna Mee, Mike Newman, Alan Stuart.

Table 4 – Atlassing Sites and Highlights during 2006

Date	Location	Highlights
12 February	Timor Caves	Musk Lorikeets, Little Lorikeets, Diamond Firetails, Speckled Warblers.
18 March	Hexham Swamp	6 raptor species; Hobby hunting Brown Quail, 650 Straw-necked Ibis, Buff-banded Rail, Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, White-fronted Chat
6 May	Cessnock area	Tawny Frogmouths; White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike; many Honeyeaters (including Brown-headed and Yellow-tufted) at waterhole; Speckled Warbler.
15 July	Wambo Colliery, Bulga	Cancelled due to a security problem and adverse weather
5 August	Dungog area	Cancelled due to adverse weather conditions.
24 September	Gloucester Tops	Rufous Scrub-bird (calling, not seen), Crescent Honeyeater, Red-browed Treecreeper, Olive Whistler
11 November	Mungo Brush	Radjah Shelduck; 100s of White-throated Needletails, nesting Figbirds & Tawny Frogmouth; Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove (heard)

University Studies

It is very exciting to see studies of migratory waders in the Hunter Estuary being undertaken by University students. HBOC supports these studies and maintains close links with the students involved. Two PhD studies continued during 2006:

Newcastle University

- Alice Howe – Estuarine wetland rehabilitation and ecohydraulics: the link between hydraulics, sediment, benthic invertebrates, plants and migratory wading bird habitat.

Australian Catholic University

- Jenny Spencer – Study of shorebird use of the Hunter Estuary

Members of HBOC have been involved in assisting these projects and encouraging these studies.

Conservation – Summary of Issues

HBOC is widely regarded as a source of expertise on birds in the Hunter Region. This is largely due to the accumulation of survey data over many years by members, and the faithful recording and compilation of this

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

data in a form that is readily accessible. The Conservation Committee regularly relies on this data to justify our position on various proposed developments. The Committee is convened by Ann Lindsey and consists of Neil Fraser, Mike Newman, Max Maddock, Mick Todd, Liz Crawford, Chris Herbert and Jenny Powers. A few of the issues covered during 2006 are discussed here – more information is summarized in **Appendix 2**.

During 2006, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for **Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group's proposed coal loader** was placed on public exhibition. This will be the third coal loader for Newcastle and will require deepening of the Hunter River's South Arm to provide additional wharf space for loading ships. The coal stockpiles will be located on the once-important wader habitat of Big Pond while the rail line to deliver the coal will traverse wetland areas beside Deep Pond and a future rail spur is planned to cross Deep Pond. HBOC strongly objected to the proposed locations of rail lines across Deep Pond, which is a significant habitat for hundreds of waterfowl as well as an important feeding area for migratory shorebirds such as Curlew Sandpipers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Marsh Sandpipers. HBOC made a submission to the Independent Expert Panel assessing the project, calling for development of compensatory habitat on Ash Island and revision of the proposed rail line across Deep Pond.

Upgrading of the **railway line at Sandgate** to facilitate passage of coal trains to the port has led to filling in part of Market Swamp, which used to provide prime habitat for Latham's Snipe when water levels were allowed to fluctuate naturally. Representations by HBOC have resulted in a financial commitment from Australian Rail Track Corporation to Newcastle City Council to pay for an EIS on the effects of installing a leaky weir to reinstate suitable water levels for Latham's Snipe in Market Swamp.

HBOC supported community opposition to the proposed **Awaba Open Cut coal mine**, which threatened to affect the habitat of three owl species. Fortunately, Centennial Coal has withdrawn the proposal. However, the land is yet to be included in the region's conservation reserves.

A large area of continuous forest in the central part of the Hunter Valley will be destroyed if the **Anvil Hill Open Cut Proposal** goes ahead. Although the Environmental Assessment for this project includes large conservation offsets to protect biodiversity, there are no guarantees that these areas will be sufficient or successful in protecting local biodiversity. HBOC has requested that the project be declared a "controlled action" under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, so that the potential impacts on threatened species are assessed in a more rigorous manner.

Residential subdivision also threatens bird habitat – fortunately, **Ellalong Lagoon** south of Cessnock has been saved from development, thanks to a concerted community campaign and the presence of threatened species.

BIGnet, the Bird Interest Group Network, consists of representatives from bird groups throughout NSW. This over-arching organization is a useful melting pot for sharing conservation issues among a wider audience. Recently, it encouraged member groups to nominate **Important Bird Areas (IBAs)** for inclusion in Birdlife International's List of IBAs throughout the world. This project is supported by Birds Australia. The international mining company Rio Tinto has provided funding for a Project Coordinator, as part of its commitment to the environment. HBOC submitted Hexham Swamp and the Lower Hunter Estuary as IBAs. Nomination as an IBA has no legal standing; however it does raise the profile of an area in terms of its importance for birds.

Habitat Restoration

Efforts to create shallow ponds on Ash Island, to **offset the loss of Big Pond** on Kooragang Island, were frustrated by the discovery of Grass Owls living in the proposed pond site. The Department of Environment and Conservation has decided to redirect the funds to the Tomago Wetlands project, on the northern side of the Hunter River North Arm. This project aims to re-introduce tidal waters to an area that was drained in the 1970s following establishment of a ring dyke around Fullerton Cove. Hopefully it will result in habitat suitable for shorebirds. However, HBOC is dismayed that

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

specific compensatory shallow water foraging habitat suitable for smaller shorebirds has not been created to replace the loss of Big Pond.

Throughout the year, Tom Clarke continued to lead an active team of weeders at **Stockton Sandspit**, maintaining this iconic birdwatching spot for the birds. Weeders include HBOC members Robert McDonald, Anthony Gooden, Paddy Lightfoot, Lyn and Paul Lambert, Judy Thomas, Win Warner, Ray McLean, Pat Poutney and Rachael Russell; and non-members Bill Murphy and Charles Harris. In between working, they delight in watching fascinating bird behaviour at the Sandspit. This regular maintenance has seen the saltmarsh regenerating beautifully and lots of breeding activity from Red-capped Plovers and Richards Pipits. In fact, rainy days are the best days to volunteer at the Sandspit – lots of fascinating bird watching happens from the comfort of the bird hide! **Appendix 3** provides a comprehensive report on rehabilitation at Stockton Sandspit.

Since the start of the efforts to rehabilitate Stockton Sandspit in 2003, a record of volunteer hours has been maintained. These hours, and their dollar value, have been used to help match the Envirofund dollars granted to HBOC and KWRP to carry out shorebird habitat restoration work in the Hunter Estuary. They also record the ongoing commitment to the restoration and maintenance of the Stockton Sandspit site.

At the end of 2006 a staggering 2,247 volunteer hours have been recorded since 2003. Calculating the dollar value at bush regenerator rates over the last four years equals \$35,882.

The 2006 effort of 562.5 hours has come from 46 workdays and represents almost a weekly presence at Stockton Sandspit. Since 2003, 171 workdays represents not only a mighty effort, but also a very high profile by HBOC at the site.

Work on removing **mangroves** from wader habitat on **Ash Island** commenced in September 2005, funded by a \$30,000 **Envirofund Grant** gained by HBOC from the Natural Heritage Trust. KWRP has approval from Fisheries NSW for mangrove removal in the vicinity of Wader, Swan and Milham Ponds on Ash Island, to enhance the area for shorebirds. Following the opening of Fish Fry Creek to increased tidal flow, mangroves have invaded an area that was formerly saltmarsh and made it useless for foraging by waders. The initial mangrove removal by contractors was followed up during 2006 by teams of volunteers removing mangrove seedlings. Robert McDonald and Lyn Lambert were particularly diligent in coordinating and encouraging volunteers in the art of mangrove removal. Envirofund grants require work in-kind and HBOC was able to document \$43,810 worth of in-kind work which more than matched the \$30,000 Envirofund Grant.

At Lemon Tree Passage, a pair of **Bush Stone-curlews** again ignored residential development and nested beside their favourite park. This year they were again protected from dogs and foxes by a substantial fence erected by NPWS and Port Stephens Council. One young was raised to fledgling stage.

2006 Twitchathon

This year six teams from HBOC participated in the Twitchathon, held on the last weekend in October: Dodgy Drongos, Hunter Home Brewers and Hunter Thickheads in the main race; Lesticum Phoradae, Crested Shrike Twits and The Old Birds in the champagne race. The Hunter Home Brewers came first with an incredible 233 species, smashing the previous record of 229 species, set last year by the Whacked-out Woodswallows from Dubbo, who came in second this year with 227 species. The Dodgy Drongos came third with 214 species while the Hunter Thickheads came fourth with 201 species, all found within the Hunter Valley. The competition has moved to a new level of planning, strategy and expertise! HBOC teams scooped the first three places in the Champagne Race: Lesticum Phoradae recorded 162 species; Crested Shrike Twits came second with 159 species and The Old Birds came third with 145 species. Over \$15,000 was raised across the State to boost the research funds for the Australian Bird Study Association. A mighty effort!

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

2. ENCOURAGE BIRD OBSERVING

Program

As usual, HBOC ran a large program of activities throughout the year to encourage bird observing – a total of 54 activities in 2005:

- 12 Sunday outings (held monthly)
- 11 mid-week outings (held monthly)
- 12 Hunter Estuary wader surveys (held monthly)
- 1 Port Stephens wader survey
- 5 Birds Australia Atlas survey days
- 6 special surveys (2 for Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot, 4 for Timor Caves habitat)
- 4 camps on weekends/long weekends
- 1 mid-week camp
- a special Grass Owl twitch
- a Mini-Twitch

In addition, regular volunteer days for habitat restoration occurred at Stockton Sandspit and at Ash Island.

The May field outing celebrated our 30th anniversary with a cruise on the Lady Joy, to view the shorebirds and raptors of the Hunter Estuary. We continued celebrating with lunch on the foreshore, presenting past presidents and founding members with collections of the Club's Birding Routes for Newcastle and Lake Macquarie.

All of these activities were well attended and our thanks go to all those who helped organize and lead these events.

Club Nights

We held 11 Club Nights during 2006 at The Hunter Wetlands Centre, where the average attendance was 55, eight more than last year's average. Guest speakers covered a wide range of topics:

Kimberley Birding, Avian Flu, Newcastle Urban Forests, Birds of New Zealand, Managing Biodiversity in State Forests, Birds of Chile, Hexham Swamp Rehabilitation, Godwits in the Hunter Estuary, Antarctica, Bees as Pollinators and Birds of Christmas Island.

Many members have embraced the digital age and are revelling in the freedom of PowerPoint and the remarkable resources available from the internet. Digital cameras are giving wonderful results too and our thanks go to all the presenters for their excellent efforts.

There were several innovative contributions for the "Bird of the Evening" segment, including a Bird Trivia Quiz, an exposé of Camping Habits, a discussion of Hunter Region boundaries and an update on Avian Flu from our local researcher. Feature birds were the vagrant at Burren Junction - a Grey-headed Lapwing - and Budgerigars. Our thanks go to all the presenters for their enthusiasm and entertaining presentations.

The Observations/Discussion section of each meeting provided valuable bird observations for inclusion in the bimonthly Club Newsletters and the Annual Bird Report.

As usual, the December Club Night was a lot of fun with members' digital presentations, a raffle with wonderful prizes, and a great supper. Our thanks go to all the people who made such generous donations. The presentations covered Broome Bird Observatory, Tasmania, Cairns, and a wildlife photographer's favourite shots – making a very entertaining evening.

During the year, two more members joined the informal "600 Club" of keen list-makers, by recording their 600th Australian species. Their achievements were duly acknowledged with pomp and ceremony!

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

Community

Waders in the Hunter Estuary were once more a focus of our community efforts this year, with tremendous efforts being put into **Stockton Sandspit** by a small band of dedicated workers led by Tom Clarke. These efforts included weeding, mangrove seedling removal (in our permit area), and maintenance of the car park gardens, as well as bird watching to see which species were making use of the rehabilitated habitat. Last year's lowering of the weir has improved the extent and frequency of tidal inundation of the Sandspit and saltmarsh vegetation is becoming established over a wider area. This is a great outcome, providing excellent roosting habitat for shorebirds such as Eastern Curlews and breeding habitat for Red-capped Plovers and Richard's Pipits.

Colourful signs about migratory waders have been installed at Kooragang Dykes boat ramp and Stockton boat ramp. A third sign will be installed at the revamped Carrington boat ramp during 2007. Two signs highlighting the birds in Toronto Wetland, designed by Chris Herbert, have been installed by Toronto Rotary and Toronto Sunrise Rotary to complement their rehabilitation efforts on the wetland margins.

As in previous years, HBOC mounted **displays** at The Hunter Wetlands Centre for *World Wetlands Day* in February, and *Catchment Day* in October. These are great opportunities to involve families in birdwatching and raise awareness of the Club. Additional displays were mounted for Lake Macquarie City Council's (LMCC) *Catchment Connections Day* in June and for *Morissey Community Festival*. Alan Stuart, Rowley Smith, Sue Hamonet, Kay Imrie, Paddy and Caryl Lightfoot, Di Johnson, Robert McDonald, Val and Don Moon, and Joan Natano all participated in various displays and our thanks go to all of them.

Talks to various community groups, including Coastcare Summer Festival, the Central Coast Field Ornithologists Club, Wollombi Landcare, Toronto Women's Probus Club and KWRP Volunteers were given by Chris Herbert, with some welcome remuneration for the Club. Tom Clarke addressed the St Lukes Men's Dinner Club. Pam Durie organised a successful birding course for the University of the Third Age (U3A), assisted by Chris Herbert, Judy Westphal and Sue Hamonet.

Lake Macquarie City Council funded reprinting of **Eastlakes and Westlakes Birding Routes**. Five thousand copies of each brochure were printed and distributed to LMCC, KWRP, The Hunter Wetlands Centre and Club members. The Club retains a supply of brochures for future distribution.

During 2006, Anthony Gooden and Di Johnson represented HBOC on the **Eraring Community Forum**. Eraring Power Station proposes to expand their fly ash dam, which provides habitat for Black-winged Stilts and Red-necked Stints. Unfortunately, this expansion will require removal of bushland, some of which contains hollow-bearing trees. Environmental assessment of their proposal continues.

Communication with the community was facilitated by our webmaster Dick Jenkin, who maintained our **website** with its new address: www.hboc.org.au. Upgrading of the website has commenced and we anticipate a much more user-friendly site will be available in 2007. Peter Phillips made sure that all of our meetings were well advertised in local press and radio and Marion Walker continued to be our telephone contact point. Our new Publicity Officer, Lyn Lambert facilitated contact with newspaper journalists, which resulted in several birding articles being published in the Newcastle Herald and locally distributed newspapers. Topics ranged from the importance of the Hunter as a drought refuge to the highest count of Red Knots seen on Ash Island for many years. Several radio interviews were also conducted, with Alan Stuart and Sue Hamonet fielding questions from interested interviewers, about the Port Stephens wader survey.

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

GENERAL CLUB OPERATION

Membership

The Club had 252 members in December 2006, an increase of 18 over the previous year's total. Membership consisted of 82 single members, 168 family members and 2 junior members.

Finances

Once again, we are indebted to our honorary treasurer, Rowley Smith, who has kept a firm hand on the purse strings and provided financial reports to the monthly committee meetings. He has been cheerfully assisted at Club nights by Lesley Marshall. Our thanks to Katrina Thornton for auditing our accounts.

During the year we received an Environmental Grant of \$1703 from Lake Macquarie City Council for updating and reprinting the Eastlakes and Westlakes birding brochures, and a grant of \$1100 from Newcastle City Council for additional shorebird studies on the rock platforms.

Sales of HBOC records raised \$525 and interest on HBOC accounts was \$1028.24. Our December Club Night raffle raised \$242 and our mid-year raffle raised \$611 to assist with the cost of publishing our occasional journal, The Whistler. The first issue is expected in 2007.

HBOC purchased a slide scanner to digitize the Club's extensive slide collection, making it more accessible for present-day usage. John Cockerell is responsible for carrying out this initiative. Already it has paid off, with several Club images being used in a recent newspaper article.

Our affiliation with the Bird Observers Club of Australia has allowed us to advertise Club activities to a wider audience and to benefit from insurance cover arranged through BOCA. This represents a considerable financial saving to the Club.

Despite projected increases in our operating expenditure for 2007, the Committee decided to keep membership fees at the 2006 level for 2007.

Library

Grant Brosie again took responsibility for the Library during 2006, and was ably assisted by Robert MacDonald. The Library currently contains 445 books. New acquisitions during 2006 included: *Seabird Atlas of Southeastern Australian Waters*, *Why Birds Sing*, *Birding Babylon*, and the final volume of *The Handbook of Australian and New Zealand Birds* (HANZAB). It is pleasing to report that more books were borrowed in 2006 compared to the previous year.

General

HBOC continued to publish a bimonthly newsletter, which is issued to all members as well as to other clubs with whom we exchange newsletters. We are indebted to Peter Phillips for editing, to Phil Rankin for preparing the newsletter for email transmission and to Tom Clarke for printing and distributing it. And of course, we appreciate the literary efforts of all our contributors! Keep it up!

Club T-shirts, designed and screen-printed by Alison Green, to celebrate our 30th Anniversary Year, feature our Club emblem, the Golden Whistler. They have become a popular addition to members' wardrobes and are good way to advertise the Club. Printed T-shirts or polo shirts can be ordered for \$39 each or you can supply your own T-shirt for printing at a cost of \$22. Club badges were designed by Chris Herbert and produced during the year. They are available for \$10 at any Club Night. Along with colourful car stickers for only \$2, we have plenty of advertising material!

The Management Committee worked very well together during the year, shouldering a variety of tasks as the need arose. Special thanks go to Tom Clarke for his Secretarial expertise; to Ann Lindsey for organizing Conservation Committee meetings; to Rowley Smith for maintaining the membership list and overseeing the collection of monies; and to Vice President Alan Stuart for maintaining regular email communications with the majority of the membership, keeping us all up to date with the latest exciting bird sightings. Committee members Grant Brosie, Anthony Gooden, Chris Herbert, Ann Lindsey, Robert McDonald and Michael Todd, helped keep the Club running smoothly. The Committee appreciated input from Sue Hamonet, Di Johnson,

Hunter Bird Observers Club Annual Report for 2006

our Activities Officer, and Lyn Lambert our Publicity Officer, who were regular attendees at the Committee meetings. Management Committee meetings are open to anyone from the Club to attend and participate.

Four special people help ensure Club Nights run smoothly: Pam Durie welcomes attendees at our meetings, Lesley Marshall assists our Treasurer, Chris Herbert organizes the computer projector and facilitates PowerPoint presentations and Judy Westphal makes sure we all have a cup of tea and a biscuit at the end of the evening. A small army of volunteers helps set up and clear away chairs each Club Night. Sue Hamonet maintains our Club bird records and ensures that all our results are sent to the Birds Australia Ongoing Atlas. In a club with such diverse activities and interests, there is a role for everyone. Share the joy and become involved in the running of the club – your help would be greatly appreciated! And to all those enthusiastic people who contributed to maintaining our twin objectives during 2006 - Thank You.

Liz Crawford, HBOC President 2006

The Annual Report for 2006 was presented by the President at the Annual General Meeting on 14 February 2007. A copy of the report and appendices will be kept in the library for future reference.