



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc
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BIGNet Report, April 2020

The Hunter Bird Observers Club has two objectives:

- *To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat*
- *To encourage bird observing as a leisure-time activity*

Between September 2019 to March 2020, these objectives were furthered through actions and activities as outlined below.

Conservation Efforts

HBOC continues to take part in campaigns against overdevelopment that impinge on important bird habitat throughout Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. These campaigns are time-consuming and sometimes frustrating, and we thank our conservation sub-committee for their efforts. Key submissions included:

- 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;
- Submission to Port Stephens Council regarding the residential development at Kings Hill;
- Request and subsequent meeting with Newcastle City council to define the extent of Horseshoe leash-free dog beach in Newcastle;
- Submission to Cessnock City Council providing comment on their Local Strategic Planning Statement;
- Submission to the second independent review of the Commonwealth EPBC Act;
- Submission to Port Stephens Council regarding widening of Italia Road, Balickera which will remove 21 mature trees and other vegetation. Over 200 bird species are found in the immediate area.

Monitoring and Data Surveys

- Expeditions to Broughton Island off Port Stephens continued monitoring and banding of terrestrial birds; this project is in its ninth year and is done in collaboration with the local NPWS office.
- Our other regular field studies projects also continued in late 2019 and early 2020 – e.g. the Port Stephens waterbirds survey, beach surveys of Worimi Conservation Lands, Rufous Scrub-bird surveys in the Gloucester Tops.
- In April 2020 we will publish our 2018 Annual Bird Report, the 26th edition of our ABR. The report is produced using Birddata and eBird records and from this data we have been able to generate distribution maps for most species and accurate timelines for migratory species. Thanks especially to Dan Williams, Alan Stuart, Rob Kyte and others, our Annual Bird Report is a high-quality document that is a valuable reference for our members.
- In December we published the 13th edition of our peer-reviewed annual journal *The Whistler*, with hard copies available for all Club members and sent to natural history focussed libraries worldwide. Since January 2019, every individual article is published online on our website as soon as it is finalised. Several articles for the 14th edition have already been accepted and are on the website.
- Club members also participated in Latham Snipe and Regent Honeyeater / Swift Parrot surveys.

Projects

Since 2003, HBOC members 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. Currently the combined projects cover over 150 ha of the Hunter Wetlands National Park. The combined volunteer effort in 2019 across all the projects amounted to 433 hours of willing contribution. Two long-standing projects, our surveys of Port Stephens and Broughton Island, are now registered in the NPWS VIP program, allowing volunteers' hours to be tracked and providing insurance cover for them.

HBOC has also become an active partner on a project focussing on Australasian Bitterns in the Hunter Region. The project is being run by Hunter Local Land Services funded out of the Commonwealth National Landcare Program. HBOC will be using drone technology to monitor bittern habitat initially in the Hunter River estuary, then potentially elsewhere in the Region. We are also likely to assist with other fieldwork and future community education programs.

Activities

- Once again HBOC implemented a successful programme of outings during late 2019 – early 2020. It included the monthly Sunday and midweek outings, camps and other events, primarily focussing on the recreational needs of members. The October long-weekend camp visited Munghorn Gap and the January long-weekend camp visited Smiths Lake.
- The weather however played a major role in our ability to run club outings during this period with drought, flooding and bushfires all impacting on and in some cases resulting in cancellation of some club activities.
- Club Night meetings were held at the Hunter Wetlands Centre monthly in 2019 (no Club Meeting is held in January) through to March 2020, with healthy attendances throughout the year. The Guest Speaker Program included local and national subjects covering conservation issues, research findings, travel and general interest.
- *Due to the rapidly escalating situation with the COVID-19 outbreak HBOC has cancelled all currently promoted club activities until further notice. The committee are considering some 'alternative ideas' for club member interaction while we all get through the difficult times ahead.*

Education, Media and Promotion

HBOC continued to raise awareness of birds and the importance of their contribution throughout the whole Hunter Region. Some highlights were:

- HBOC members continue to contribute to the promotion of birds in the 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.
- The appearance on Broughton Island in October 2019 of an Australian rarity, the Pycroft's Petrel, led to an ABC Radio feature story about that event. Then in early 2020 evidence of Gould's Petrel breeding (in the form of a chick inside a nestbox) was found for the first time, which led to multiple media articles.
- Biodiversity Day: This event is organised by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment 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 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.
- In January 2020 we launched a new initiative for club members, a monthly e-mailed "featured bird" information sheet focussed on birds of the Hunter Region. These information sheets draw on club resources such as our extensive bird image library and the distribution maps from our ABRs, and our local knowledge.

Organisational Matters

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. HBOC has continued to monitor and where possible gradually improve its operating procedures for the benefit of all members. We have formalised our sub-committee structures over the preceding six-month period to allow for more effective decision-making. Membership stood at 340 as of February 2020.

For more detailed information refer to the club's web site at www.hboc.org.au

Kristy Peters

On behalf of the Hunter Bird Observers Club Management Committee