



Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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Report to BIGnet September 2017

During the mid-year 6 month period all HBOC interest and activities groups continued strongly while our presence as an important conservation organisation in the Hunter Region continued to build through collaborative initiatives with local development groups and government agencies.

HBOC has continued to be active due to the club's commitment to regular monthly meetings, surveys, camps, outings and the finalising of publications, while continuing to support the Hunter's birds and birding community.

The club continues to promote the enjoyment of birds as a pastime, with the encouraging recruitment of first time members during the period. Newer members continue to keenly explore remote corners of the Hunter turning up interesting observations while honing their identification skills. The regular collection of data about the region's birds continues to support important research and conservation initiatives locally, and the 11th edition of the HBOC's Journal, *The Whistler*, is progressing toward completion for distribution before the end of the year.

Throughout the mid-2017 period ongoing wader and waterbird surveys continue within the region, including estuaries of the Hunter River, Manning River, Lake Macquarie and Port Stephens. The surveys blend the appreciation of birds with the gathering of important population monitoring counts, while continuing to build liaisons with local land management bodies and key development groups.

Membership

Membership Secretary: Rob Kyte, the club's Membership Secretary, continues to be dedicated to his role by inventing creative initiatives to benefit the membership, while increasing opportunities for local businesses to be involved in HBOC support. Inventive initiatives (which include discounts at retail outlets) have again been a benefit to the membership throughout the mid-2017 period.

Club Membership: HBOC membership by August 2017 was 331 financial members.

Constitution

New legislation for incorporated bodies in regard to constitution structure and content has been introduced during 2017 and HBOC's constitution has had to be amended. The HBOC Management Committee updated the previous constitution to comply with the new protocols, which was accomplished with a considerable amount of background work by our Secretary Margaret Clarke and Treasurer Bob Stewart.

Activities

HBOC has continued to run both Sunday and midweek outings on a monthly basis since the last BIGnet meeting and two camps have also been run in the intervening period. The Easter long-weekend camp was to the Durrigere State Conservation Area in the west of the region, which is frequented by drier country birds. Over the June long-weekend a cracker of a camp was organised at Sandy Hollow in the region's west, with a most enjoyable time had by all who attended. The upcoming October long-weekend camp is planned for Windy Station, which provides habitat for some of the Hunter's most westerly species, including the only patch of Hunter forest where Inland Thornbills are known to be in residence.

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Conservation

The Lower Hunter forests have again provided a critical winter refuge for Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots with up to 10% of the entire population being found in the woodlands of the Cessnock area from about mid-May. The key attractant has been the flowering of Spotted Gum trees that, interestingly, have flowered over two seasons during this 'event' (2016/17). HBOC assisted with surveys that recorded up to 200 Swift Parrots during the May surveys, mostly in the Ellalong/Paxton area, whilst a flock of 20 Regent Honeyeaters have spent the entire winter on a property at Quorrobolong. A second flock of around 15 Regent Honeyeaters were found in August. At the time of writing the Quorrobolong birds are still present and nest-building has been observed, so we are very hopeful for some breeding to occur there. Further, additional Regent Honeyeaters have been found by ANU researchers on an Upper Hunter property where they bred successfully during the 2016/17 season.

BirdLife Australia has very recently run a two day Beach-nesting Bird / Shorebird workshop in the Hunter on the 6th and 7th of September. The workshop was funded by the NSW Environmental Trust.

HBOC continues to manage migratory shorebird habitat in the Hunter Estuary (see 'Projects') and has recently developed an information sharing agreement with Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG), which have undertaken active rehabilitation of shorebird habitat in the estuary.

A Christmas in July event was run this year coinciding with the July club meeting. A raffle was run for charity and raised an excellent contribution of funds, which will contribute to the excellent work being undertaken by Tom Clarke on the rehabilitation of wader habitat, particularly Eastern Curlew habitat in the Hunter Estuary.

In recent years there has been a growing presence of Black-necked Stork activity on the Hunter River floodplain. A number of young birds have been observed with what is assumed are parent birds at Hexham Swamp, but breeding within the Hunter has not been confirmed until very recently. An active nest was reported to the club, which was subsequently followed up by Ann Lindsey, and who confirmed that the nest was indeed active. Over a month or two the progress of the chick was watched, although land holders would not permit a close approach, which dashed hopes of banding the chick prior to vacating the nest. But vacate the nest it did, adding to the growing number of storks locally.

Monitoring and Data Collection

Field Studies programs organised by HBOC and those conducted by individual Club members continue to make important contributions for learning more about the region's birds.

Banding of terrestrial birds in a collaborative effort with the NPWS at Broughton Island commenced during the mid 2017 period. Continued survey works are planned later in the year.

The Club's work in surveying the Barrington Tops and Gloucester Tops IBA is planning to collect more specific data about habitat usage by Rufous Scrub-birds this season.

The monthly surveys of the Hunter Estuary continued, with a host of dedicated teams surveying Ash Island, Stockton Sand Spit, the Dykes, Big Pond and relatively newly tidal wetland sites at Tomago Wetlands and Hexham Swamp.

The new initiative introduced in 2016 to increase the numbers of members monitoring the waterbirds at their local/favourite wetlands has continued to grow. Many of these are important second-tier wetlands in the

region, sometimes hosting sizeable populations of waterbirds and some having breeding colonies of cormorants etc. This will lead to new tables in the 2017 bird report.

In August 2016, BirdLife Australia released its new Birddata portal and this reinvigorated our efforts to encourage local birdwatchers to submit records into the BLA Atlas. HBOC has hosted a workshop to enable greater fluency with the Biodata app. to encourage local bird data collection and another workshop is planned later in the year.

Once again during the year we received a complete data set of Hunter Region records from BirdLife Australia, which has been used to inform our annual bird report analyses as well as analyses of individual species (e.g. in publications such as *The Whistler*).

A GIS based method for showing species distribution maps based on Atlas data was again refined in mid 2017. The maps and timelines will enhance the accuracy of presented distribution data used in the 2017 bird report, for which publishing has commenced.

Rehabilitation Projects

During the mid year period HBOC were the recipients of a grant to rehabilitate saltmarsh habitat for Eastern Curlew in the Hunter Estuary. Work has commenced on restoring previous roosting habitats to again offer roosting areas close to the most important foraging areas in the estuary.

In July the Better Earth Team completed the allocated 2017 raking of the shelly sand areas of Big Island at the Stockton Sand Spit, and undertook a thorough rubbish collection throughout the sand spit habitats resulting in many bags of rubbish removed.

Education, Media & Promotion

During mid 2017 HBOC again anticipated raising the awareness of birds within the communities of the Hunter Region, and these initiatives have been successful through a number HBOC programs and bird promotion activities, including:

New Members Day: was once again a success with a number of new members and supporting members attending.

Total Field Days: Over the May 5-7 weekend 2017 HBOC again had a display stall with a steady stream of visitors interested in our bird routes guides.

Biodiversity Day: Again being organised by the Office of Environment and Heritage in conjunction with NPWS and planned for the Blue Gum Hills Reserve at Minmi on September 28 2017, the 2016 the event was a great success and hopes are for a great event this September as well.

Website: The HBOC website continues to be an indispensable interface between the Club and the rest of the world and again saw much activity during mid 2017.

Facebook: The number of followers of HBOC's Facebook page has increased to 436 during mid 2017.

HBOC is excited about a collaboration with Wallsend Library to set up a display and present a program about birds of the Hunter to the library's patrons later on in September this year.

HBOC members continue to contribute to promoting birds in the local media with interviews on radio and a regular column in the Maitland Mercury.

Keith Eastwood a member of the HBOC has embarked on a video project that will celebrate the birds of the Hunter, with background musical contributions provided by club members.

Publications:

The Hunter Region Annual Bird Report No. 26 (2016) has been reviewed and is being prepared for publication. The latest report will benefit from increased data collection and mapping.

HBOC's bird journal The Whistler (Number 11) is also in the final stages of production with page setting underway and artwork to commence soon.

General Business

The HBOC Management Committee decided it would be a good idea to define the responsibilities of the different organisational roles for the club. The definitions will represent a practical resource for incoming leadership volunteers and serve as a guide for role expectations.

The HBOC Photographic Image Library has grown considerably over the years and an influx of new contributors since the dawning of the digital age has required that we develop a revised image usage protocol. The input of a number of contributors was sort, so that their images can benefit the promotion of birds through the club's initiatives while being assured that the security and origin of their images is not compromised.

Recently the HBOC have been required to formally acknowledge licensing and protocols for its members to undertake bird watching activities on lands under control of government organisations, most notable the Hunter Water Corporation. The liability laws and due diligence for the safety of visitors have led to more formal visitation procedures being introduced by land managers.

The HBOC will be represented again at the upcoming Australasian Bird Fair, and we hope our contribution will encourage more Australians to appreciate our wonderful bird life and care about their conservation.

For more detailed information on HBOC (including upcoming activities), refer to the club's website at <http://www.hboc.org.au>

Allan Richardson

President, HBOC

September 2017