



Hunter Bird
Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

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E-news

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The Club Aims: To encourage and further the study and conservation of Australian birds and their habitat, and to encourage bird observing as a leisure-time activity.

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Alan Stuart Awarded Hobbs Medal



For over 30 years HBOC member, Dr Alan Stuart, has been a dedicated advocate for birds and their habitat and has made a valuable contribution to ornithological knowledge through thorough research and documentation. This year, 2020, Alan was awarded the John Hobbs Memorial Medal, a national award conferred for outstanding contributions to Australian ornithology by an amateur ornithologist.

Summary of the Citation

Alan first became interested in birds when he moved from WA to the east coast in 1981. Initially he was interested only in putting names to the local flora and fauna but this led to his looking more closely at birds and before long he was hooked.

Alan's work has been focussed mainly on the Hunter, Port Stephens, Manning and Hastings areas in NSW and his research and data collection have contributed significantly to the knowledge and conservation of Australian birds. He has written at least 46 articles in journals such as *Stilt*, *Australian Field Ornithology*, *Corella* and *The Whistler*. He has written reports on seabirds, shorebirds and the monitoring and study of Rufous Scrub-birds in the Barrington and Gloucester Tops. He has been generous with his time presenting talks both locally and at conferences such as the Australasian Ornithological Conference and Australian Shorebirds Conference. On countless occasions he has promoted birds and the importance of their habitats through local and national media outlets.



Alan joined HBOC in 1984 and it was not long before he began to take a prominent role in Club matters. There is little doubt that he has had a significant influence on the development of HBOC's philosophy which is underpinned by the Birdlife Australia model of leadership and advocacy. He actively encourages people to participate in projects which benefit

birds and their habitat e.g. Shorebirds 2020, Bittern Project, Woodland Birds for Biodiversity, Key Biodiversity Areas monitoring, Atlas Project and Birdata. In order to promote the latter, Alan has conducted several workshops on bird atlassing and on how to use Birdata so that HBOC and its members are now regularly among the top contributors. The methodology used in all of Alan's projects is compatible with Birdlife Australia's Atlas project and all results are entered into Birdata.

Since 1987 he has held senior positions with HBOC. He was Treasurer from 1988 to 1996, President from 1998 to 2002, Vice President 2005 and 2006 and then again 2016 and 2017. He sat on committees during the intervening years and took on additional roles when required. He was joint Field Studies co-ordinator from 2011 to 2013 and Field Studies co-ordinator from then to current.

In 1993 Alan initiated the *Hunter Region Annual Bird Report* which he then edited for 25 years to the end of 2018. The Bird Report has evolved to become a product which is arguably the most informative regional account of birdlife in Australia.

He has retired from that post only to take on co-editorship of HBOC's annual journal, *The Whistler*. He was also actively involved in the initiation process of this most successful journal with volume 13 now available on-line.



A Born Leader

On a lighter note, in 2006, Alan started the Hunter Region 300/350/400 club in order to introduce some light-hearted competition into local birdwatching in the Hunter Region and he is the author of The Cross-bird in the quarterly magazine Australian BirdLife and, more recently, of the Penta Puzzles which he produced for HBOC members for entertainment during the Covid 19 lock-down.

Alan's contribution to Australian ornithology is differentiated by his ability to galvanise a regional bird community to commit to systematic bird study in a sustainable manner by fostering a culture that engages the spectrum of the birding community. This is exemplified by the 21 consecutive years of Hunter Shorebird monthly surveys which have involved over 150 participants with results disseminated annually in the HBOC Annual Bird Reports and the Shorebirds 2020 database.

Summary of Alan's projects

- Monitoring waterbird populations in the Hunter Estuary monthly since 1999
- Monitoring waterbird populations in Port Stephens – a boat-based operation – twice a year since 2004
- Monitoring waterbird populations in the Manning Valley since 2008
- Monitoring bird populations in Saltwater National Park since 2011
- Monitoring waterbird populations at Cattai Wetlands since 2011
- Terrestrial bird monitoring on Broughton Island, NSW. The project, studying changes in bird populations after the removal of feral animals, commenced in 2012 and is a collaborative effort between NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service and Broughton Island Conservation Society and BOC.
- A collaborative study of Grey-tailed Tattlers in Port Stephens with local and Japanese ornithologists. In 2013-2015 Alan went annually to Japan to study this species during its migration passage, with one outcome being to prove that Grey-tailed Tattlers foraged at night (contrary to the widely-held view that they were diurnal).
- Monitoring Rufous Scrub-birds in the Barrington Tops and Gloucester Tops Key Biodiversity Area which started in 2010 and is ongoing. The work generated by Alan on this species is the contemporary basis of its conservation status. What began as a simple monitoring exercise has led to additional studies such as investigating the calling behaviour of individual male birds and in 2018 he instigated a banding/radio-tracking project still in the early stages. With a team of local banders, Alan travelled to WA in 2018 to take part in the Noisy Scrub-bird Recovery Project to gain experience on how to catch Rufous Scrub-birds. To date two birds have been caught and colour-banded. This has already added information new to science about this little-known species which is so vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Ann Lindsey

From the Acting President

When I received word that Alan had just been awarded the Hobbs Medal I was initially filled with excitement spurred on by what felt like a 'pleasant surprise'. But the element of surprise wore off in a matter of seconds. Instead an overwhelming sense of realisation came over me:

"Of course..." I thought. *"...that's no surprise at all. He ought to get that medal!"*

Alan is incredibly untiring in his devotion to increasing our understanding and appreciation of Australian birds. We have been fortunate to have had Alan forge this devotion right here in the Hunter. The cornerstone of his work I think has been the production of the HBOC Annual Bird Reports; a remarkably detailed synthesis of birds in our region that evolved over time to become probably the best of its kind in the country. This will always be the "go to" resource for readily accessible and readable information about birds in the Hunter. That Alan saw this through from its inception through 25 years of improvements and innovations is testament to his commitment to documenting the bird life in the Hunter.

And documenting is what Alan does best. As a prolific author and current co-editor of *The Whistler*, along with being an unwavering advocate for field studies and data collection, he is ensuring that future generations will benefit from the observations we are making today. Of course, all of this has flow-on benefits for supporting conservation – if we understand it, we can better protect it. Few people have championed that cause as well as Alan has.

However, it is fair to say that the field studies and data collection side of Alan is the obvious one. From having an uncanny ability to create crosswords quicker than people can solve them to keeping many of the Club's cogs turning behind-the-scenes, the breadth of his contributions is formidable. For me personally Alan has been a mentor and I have always valued and welcomed his opinion on a myriad of issues that I have had to tackle.

Our Club, Australian ornithology and so much else in between are richer for Alan's contributions and acknowledgement through the awarding of the Hobbs Medal is befitting.

Mick Roderick

Comments from People Who Have Worked with Alan



Two Hobbs Medallists Confer

During my years in the Hunter Region it was a privilege to collaborate with Alan Stuart, a fellow spirit dedicated to the systematic study of birds. Alan continues to bring his many talents to the Hunter birding community. His leadership and scientific abilities are obvious, but equally important is his ability to work with others from different backgrounds and inspire them to become contributors to the many successful initiatives and projects that HBOC runs. What differentiates the Hunter is the timely analysis and local publication of results. Here Alan's hand in, either editing, or

nurturing, the Bird Report and Whistler are pivotal. Few, if any, regions of Australia have advanced the local knowledge of birds and its dissemination in the local community to the extent apparent in the Hunter. This fuels local interest and ultimately the conservation of bird populations and habitat. A very well-deserved honour.

Mike Newman

Alan's dedication to birds is clearly evident through his commitment to recording data, publishing written papers and promoting initiatives through which HBOC members can become actively involved. His altruistic and inclusive approach to ornithology appears to be driven by his enjoyment in seeing others experiencing the wonder of birds. I have had great pleasure working with Alan on a number of projects and look forward to learning more from him in the future.

Rob Kyte

Alan and I have worked together to organise the bi-annual Port Stephens Shorebird Survey for over 10 years. Alan organises the volunteers from HBOC and I coordinate the boats. Alan is a pleasure to work with, very professional and flexible. It is through Alan's efforts that the survey results are collated and presented. The data is extremely valuable to help guide shorebird conservation. Alan is also very helpful in answering any bird related questions that I may have. Any recognition of Alan's efforts for bird conservation is very well deserved.

Laurence Penman, NPWS

Alan worked tirelessly on editing the HBOC ABR for 25 years, setting the standard for such publications in Australia. Having supported these efforts with mapping products, I jumped at the opportunity to take up the reins when he hung up his hat. Alan established a clear framework for future editions of the ABR, and provided an impetus to strive for continuous improvement. The level of detail with which Alan reviewed my first edition of the ABR was second to none which ensured that the end product was much 'tighter' than it would have otherwise been. The dedication Alan brings to research into birdlife in the Hunter Region is unparalleled, being both an inspiration and aspiration for countless others. The HBOC ABR is just one showcase in a broad portfolio of Alan's contribution to Australian birding - which has now been given deserved recognition through the awarding of this prestigious prize.

Dan Williams

Over the years Judy and I have worked with Alan on various bird survey projects, the HBOC Committee and personally just watching birds. While Alan is an active proponent of bird study and conservation and always projects a deep fascination, knowledge and understanding of birds he also listens respectfully to the views, observations and knowledge of others. Alan has been a proud, long-term, hard-working and driving member of HBOC, contributing to its successes today, and is a deserving and worthy recipient of the Hobbs Medal.

Greg & Judy Little

For several years I participated in the water-based shorebird counts in the Port Stephens Estuary, organised by Alan, while also collaborating with him in a study of the estuary's Grey-tailed Tattler population. He was always very open to an exchange of ideas, which led to the generation of articles and papers. He encouraged me to continue studying and writing about birds in the estuary as a way of making a useful contribution to the understanding of its birdlife. Producing a scientific paper can test one's patience at times, but I have always found that I could bounce ideas off Alan, and in return receive constructive criticism and good direction. His energy, work ethic and friendly leadership style make him a very worthy Hobbs Medal recipient.

Lois Wooding

A huge congratulations from myself and all the staff at NPWS to Alan for this award. Alan and I have worked closely on bird monitoring projects for many years at Broughton Island, involving land birds, seabirds and shorebirds. Alan has been instrumental in developing and driving many of the projects himself, as well as being a key participant in undertaking the projects. Through these projects, and Alan's knowledge and experience, he has helped to inform positive management outcomes for many bird species on Broughton Island. A couple of notable

highlights include the recent discovery of / encounter with a Pycrofts Petrel, as well as the first Gould's Petrel chick to hatch in the nest boxes on the island. Thank you for your incredible contribution Alan, and I look forward to working with you for many years to come.

Suse Callaghan NPWS

Many other messages of congratulations were conveyed via Hunterbirding or directly to Alan. We could not publish them all.

Committee Announcements

New Members Day

The postponed New Members Day will be held on 19 July at 9.30am at Hunter Wetlands Centre, Shortland. For new members this includes free entry, BBQ lunch, a guided walk and the chance to meet other members. New members are asked to reply to Rob Kyte, robhboc@bigpond.com or phone 0420 821460 if they haven't already done so. Current members are invited to come along and make our new members welcome. It would help with catering if you could let Lorna Mee know if you are coming by ringing or texting her on 0499015500. It would also help if you could bring a salad or slice, without overdoing it.

HBOC President

At the AGM earlier this year we had received no nomination for club president and so that very important position was not able to be filled. We're pleased to announce that Neil Fraser has agreed to accept the role. Neil has been a very active supporter of the club's conservation and field studies activities for a long time, but all done in an unofficial capacity until now. Welcome Neil! And, thanks for stepping up.

A Note from Our New President

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the HBOC committee for placing their thrust in me to lead the club. I have no previous experience with the management of the club and going forward, I will be relying heavily on all of you for advice and support. HBOC has an enviable reputation as the pre-eminent organisation involved in the study and conservation of birds in the Hunter Region, while providing plenty of opportunity for members to indulge their passion for birds as a leisure-time activity. I hope to maintain that reputation and ensure we are engaging effectively with the community in advocating for the conservation of birds and their habitat in our region.

I joined the club around 2001 when I arrived in Port Stephens. I had acquired an interest in birds after becoming involved in surveying for the Second Atlas (1998-2002) around Roxby Downs, Andamooka and Woomera in South Australia. I was still very much a birding 'newby' when I started attending HBOC outings and was fortunate to be mentored by Ann Lindsey. As my interest in the study of birds evolved, I was further encouraged by Alan Stuart. Today, my main interest is the birds of the Port Stephens area including Broughton Island. Despite many

years observing and surveying, I still consider myself a 'learner' and I still have difficulty identifying some waders at times. As I live in Port Stephens, I have not been able to regularly attend many club events and consequently have not met many members. I hope to get to know a lot more of you in the future.

HBOC is a 'broad church' and caters for the interests of a diverse range of activities and interests associated with birding. The knowledge and skill of some members and their willingness to share with others continues to amaze me. I want to ensure that all members' interests are being adequately catered for and would welcome hearing from you about how you think the club is going and any suggestions you may have. You can contact me by email at scepticalgeologist@gmail.com or you can phone me on 49810197.

This newsletter includes a tribute to Alan Stuart who was awarded the John Hobbs Memorial Medal for 2020, a national award recognising outstanding contributions to Australasian ornithology by an amateur ornithologist. Alan joins the ranks of two other club members who have received this prestigious award, Mike Newman in 2012 and Dick Cooper in 2019. Alan has also made enormous contribution to HBOC over the years. Congratulations Alan, I consider you to be a National Living Treasure.

2020 has been a disastrous year for many people. As well as the summer bushfires, we now have the Covid-19 epidemic. We are currently living through unprecedented times. Many of us are in the more susceptible age group for the virus and have been socially isolating. Birding, however, can provide us with enjoyment at the worst of times. The club has now decided to recommence regular outings in line with state and national guidelines. If you intend to participate, I encourage you all to keep safe and continue to observe the hygiene and distancing guidelines. Safe birding!

Neil Fraser

Thank you to volunteers!

More than 150 people have taken part in Hunter Estuary Waterbird Surveys but life changes and this year has seen the retirement of some of our most valued surveyors.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read the full details.

HBOC Photo Badges.

The Hunter Region is home to over 450 species of wild birds and many HBOC members keep a separate list of Hunter birds seen. HBOC has a 300, 350 and 400 Club to reward members and non-members who reach these numbers of birds seen, with a badge. The Photography sub-committee has decided to add an additional challenge for HBOC members and will reward members for the *number of Hunter birds photographed*. [CLICK HERE](#) for more.

New Members

Hayley Boyce, Shortland
Jess & Libby Jones, Kurri Kurri

Colin & Lorna Edwards, Wallsend
Karynne Crump, Rutherford

Welcome. We look forward to seeing you at meetings and outings,
especially *New Members Day, 19 July*

Upcoming Activities

The Committee continues to gradually restart Activities using the current “Social distancing” guidelines. The activities file has been reinstated on the HBOC Website.

For a full list of Club Activities [CLICK HERE](#)

eNews

June Club Night

We held our second virtual club night in June using Zoom software. For a full report [CLICK HERE](#)

Explore your Local Wetlands: 3

Many members have been doing regular surveys of small local wetlands over many years. For those wetland areas available to the public, we continue our series of articles about small local wetlands that you might like to visit. They describe the locality and species likely to be seen there. [READ MORE](#)

Another HBOC Award

HBOC member, Rachel Klyve has been awarded the prestigious Scott Sisters Scholarship awarded by the Australian Museum. Rachel is a third year student in the University of Newcastle’s Bachelor of Natural history illustration course.

For the full announcement by the Australian Museum of Rachel’s award and some samples of Rachel’s outstanding work [CLICK HERE](#).

Broughton Island Report

A small, well-spaced, group stayed on Broughton Island over three days of the long weekend, 6-8 June 2020, for the purpose of conducting bird surveys and banding bush birds.

For the full report [CLICK HERE](#)

Blue Gums Park Field Outing

The first outing back after Covid lockdown was cut short because of storms, for the seven members who attended the Bluegum Hill Regional Park outing. We had good views of all 4 lorikeet species and a few other birds but it was generally a quiet morning with 39 species recorded.

Robert McDonald

External Links:

Regent Honeyeater Captive Bird Release:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-23/critically-endangered-regent-honeyeaters-released-hunter-valley/12384048>

Tribute to Peter Slater

<http://birdlife.org.au/media/vale-peter-slater-19322020/>

Your Observations

Some recent Observations

[CLICK HERE](#)