



Pacific Golden Plover

5 PHOENIX FLATS/ RAMSAR ROAD

From Milham Road turn right into Ramsar Road. This road sometimes is badly pot-holed especially after rain – drive with great caution. On the right-hand side, a large area of saltmarsh (Phoenix Flats) has been re-created – it regularly in summer has 50 or more Pacific Golden Plover and sometimes Red-necked Stint and Red-capped Plover. Vehicular access is restricted

but there are good walking tracks. However, much of the saltmarsh can be scanned from Ramsar Road and there are tidal wetlands closer to the road where dotterels and sandpipers sometimes can be seen well using your vehicle as the hide. Further along on the left is Teal Waters, where a variety of waterbirds can be found; also look for White-fronted Chats in this area. Shorebirds such as Pied Stilt, Red-necked Avocet and Black-tailed Godwit are also present sometimes.

6 THE AREA E PONDS

The jewel in the Ash Island crown is the ponds bisected by Wagtail Way (which is named for the Yellow Wagtails that occasionally turn up). These ponds and the surrounding large expanses of saltmarsh sometimes host large numbers of shorebirds and waterbirds. There are records of 1,000 or more each of Red-necked Avocet, Pied Stilt, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Grey Teal and Chestnut Teal.



Chestnut Teal

Many other waterbirds and shorebirds have been found here including Black-tailed Godwit, Australasian Shoveler and Pink-eared Duck and rarities such as Australian Pratincole, Ruff, Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Wagtail Way can be accessed from Bell Frog Track (watch for Brown Quail, Golden-headed Cisticola and both grassbirds) or from Southbank Track (watch for Striated Heron in the mangroves). In the non-tidal wetlands nearby, Australasian Bittern sometimes has been recorded, and also various crakes and rails.

7 HUNTER WETLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Parts of the National Park are sampled as you drive around Ash Island but the main areas are found on the northern side of Wagtail Way and north of Bittern Corner. The walking tracks pass through areas of wetlands and saltmarsh, and tidal mangrove-lined creeks. Raptors are frequently seen in this area and keep a look-out for small plovers on the tracks.

Factfile Mangrove Gerygone (*Gerygone levigaster*)

A purely coastal small passerine living in mangroves as well as associated paperbark forests and thickets nearby mangroves. Mangrove Gerygones mostly feed in the canopy looking for insects and can be seen either individually or in small groups.

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HBOC meets at 7:00pm on the second Wednesday of each month (except January) at the Hunter Wetlands Centre, off the roundabout at Sandgate Road, Shortland. Also, monthly outings on first Tuesday and third Sunday of each month – check our website for further details.

Design by Conservation Matters 0420 821460

HBOC gratefully acknowledge the following photographers: Steve Merritt, Rob Palazzi, Mick Roderick, Jim Smart and Alan Stuart.

Ash Island Birding Route



Ash Island Birding Route

This map is not to scale and is for illustrative purposes only



2 WETLANDS AND RAINFOREST WALK

Instead of turning into Schoolhouse Road, take the left-hand fork on the bend, onto Scotts Point Way. Drive to the locked gate, park so as not to block it, then take the track that starts from the right just beyond the gate. This leads to a boardwalk which crosses an attractive wetland that often has a good variety of waterbirds, sometimes in high numbers. The track continues through a rainforest until reaching a disused carpark near the corner of Cabbage Tree Rd. Many rainforest birds can be found, including Rufous Fantails and Black-faced Monarchs in summer and birds such as Golden Whistler, Red-browed Finch and Grey Shrike-thrush year-round. From the rainforest there are occasional views of other sections of the wetland.



Eastern Yellow Robin

3 ASH ISLAND WHARF/RIVERSIDE PARK

From Milham Road turn left into The Lane and drive to the parking area at the end. Check the paddocks on either side of the road carefully while you drive along, as they often hold waterbirds (including Latham's Snipe sometimes in summer). From the carpark there is a pleasant tree-lined walk to the west, towards Scotts Point. The walk stays close to the river; hence there are many opportunities to see bush birds, waterbirds and birds of prey. An Oriental Cuckoo was found here in 2017. Alternatively, head east from the carpark to where the City Farm loop track starts.



Buff-banded Rail



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

4 MILHAMS POND

This pond starts about 600m after the turn onto Milham Road. Good views of the front half of the pond are available from the roadside; it also is possible to walk to the back of the pond from the radar huts further along. Shorebirds such as Far Eastern Curlew and Pied Stilt often are found here, and sometimes there are good numbers of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Red-kneed Dotterel especially at the back of the pond.

In the 1960s, to facilitate industrial development, many Hunter River islands were amalgamated into one landmass, Kooragang Island. However, the western section is still referred to as Ash Island (it is named after the Blueberry Ash trees that once were abundant). Before European settlement, Ash Island was a mixture of coastal rainforest, saltmarsh and mangrove-lined creeks but subsequently, much of it was cleared and drained for agriculture and dairying. Recent rehabilitation work has restored some of the lost habitat.

More than 200 bird species have been recorded, and it usually is well worthwhile to spend a few hours exploring the opportunities. The number and diversity of birds using Ash Island can vary considerably according to season, rainfall and the state of the tide. However, a wide variety of waterbirds and shorebirds usually are present in good numbers, and 17 types of bird of prey have been recorded. At night, Barn Owls and Eastern

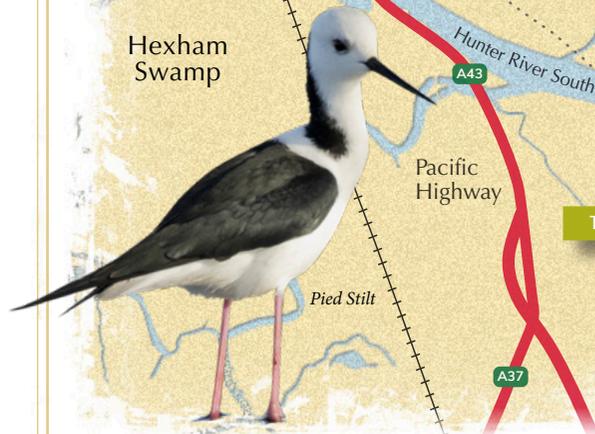
Grass Owls can sometimes be seen hunting or perched on a roadside post. The only public access to the island is from a narrow bridge across the south arm of the Hunter River just east of the traffic lights near McDonald's Hexham (the turning is sign-posted Hunter Wetlands National Park). The only accessible toilet on Ash Island is at the Old Schoolmaster's House.

1 MANGROVE BOARDWALK (WELCOME WALK)

Turn right into Schoolhouse Road; there is parking immediately on the right, leading to a boardwalk that winds its way through the mangroves to the Old Schoolmaster's House. This interesting walk is a good spot for Mangrove Gerygones (which are found anywhere on the island where there are mangroves).



Red-kneed Dotterel



Pied Stilt



Australian Pelican