



# Hunter Bird Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc  
PO Box 24, New Lambton, NSW 2305  
www.hboc.org.au  
ABN 62 415 889 446

## **BIGnet Report, March 2021**

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 August 2020 to March 2021, 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 in the Hunter Region and elsewhere. These campaigns are time-consuming and sometimes frustrating, and we thank our conservation sub-committee for their efforts. Key submissions/letters included:

- August 2020. Submission to the NSW Department of Planning, Environment and Infrastructure (DPIE) on the reservation of suitable land under the Draft State Strategic Plan for Crown Lands.
- August 2020. Submission to Newcastle Port Authority regarding the Macquarie Pier Revitalisation Project, requesting further information and highlighting the importance of Stony Point for birds.
- August 2020. Submission to the City of Newcastle Council requesting modifications to the Richmond Vale Rail Trail project.
- November 2020. Objection made to the change in status of the Lake Macquarie Sport and Recreation Centre to a State Significant Infrastructure development.
- December 2020. Input to an NSW Independent Planning Commission teleconference regarding the Kings Hill development near Raymond Terrace.
- February 2021. Letters sent to NSW Government Members requesting that Swift Parrot habitat on the NSW South Coast should not be logged.

### **Monitoring and Data Surveys**

- Expeditions to Broughton Island off Port Stephens continued monitoring and banding of terrestrial birds; this project is in its tenth year and is done in collaboration with the local NPWS office.
- Our other regular field studies projects also continued in late 2020 and early 2021 – e.g. the Port Stephens waterbirds survey, beach surveys of Worimi Conservation Lands, Rufous Scrub-bird surveys in the Gloucester Tops, quarterly surveys in the Martindale Valley as well as the regular monthly surveys of shorebirds and wetlands throughout the Region.
- We contributed to BirdLife Australia / Hunter Local Land Services (BLA/HLLS) workshops to develop priorities for migratory shorebird conservation in the Hunter Estuary, Port Stephens, Worimi Conservation Lands and the Manning Estuary. The workshops led to the formation of three estuary-specific Working Groups, into which several HBOC members were co-opted.
- We began working with HLLS on surveys for Australasian Bitterns, which are drone-based and require applicable permits. The Club, with funding support from HLLS, purchased a state-of-the-art thermal imaging drone to assist in the surveys. Four HBOC members are being trained to fly the drone.
- In January 2021 we published our 2019 Annual Bird Report, the 27<sup>th</sup> edition. The report was produced using Birddata and eBird records and from this data we were able to generate distribution

maps for most species and accurate timelines for migratory species. Thanks especially to production by Rob Kyte and review by the Records Appraisal Committee, our Annual Bird Report is a high-quality document that is a valuable reference for our members (all of whom receive a hard copy).

- Since the previous BIGnet report, we have published another nine articles online on our website for our peer-reviewed annual journal *The Whistler*. In February 2021, the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the hard copy journal was published, which is made available for all Club members and sent to natural history focused libraries worldwide.
- Club members also participated in Latham's Snipe surveys and Regent Honeyeater / Swift Parrot survey weekends.
- All records from HBOC's outings and camps are entered into the national database, Birdata.

## 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 2020 across all the projects amounted to 356 hours of willing contribution, which is down 20% on 2019's efforts, but a good outcome considering the challenges that were faced with COVID-19. 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. Work continues to extend this to some other projects, with our habitat restoration work close to incorporation.

As mentioned in the Monitoring and Data Surveys section, HBOC is an active partner on a project focusing on studying 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 is using drone technology to monitor bittern habitat initially in the Hunter River estuary, then potentially elsewhere in the Region. With Hunter LLS financial support, our club has purchased a new state-of-the-art drone fitted with thermal imaging technology. We expect this thermal imaging drone to become a powerful tool for us, not only for the Australasian Bittern surveys but for many additional applications. For the Bittern project we are also likely to assist with other fieldwork and future community education programs.

## Activities

- Following the early disruption of COVID-19, HBOC managed to implement a successful programme of outings during late 2020 – early 2021. It included the monthly Sunday and midweek outings, camps and other events, primarily focusing on the recreational needs of members. The mid-week camp visited Old Bar in September, with the October camp being held at "Fossickers" in GRNP. Unfortunately, the January long weekend camp to Smiths Lake was cancelled due to the threat of bushfire.
- COVID-19 continued to impact activities throughout the year, particularly with cancellations of events organized by external parties. In lieu of a Christmas Meeting in December, a picnic was held at Walka Water Works, which was a great success, despite the inherent restrictions.
- Club Night meetings continued to be held online via Zoom throughout 2020, with limited numbers physical attendance meetings resuming at the Hunter Wetlands Centre from early 2021. The success of the Zoom meetings in accessing a broader membership has inspired the Club to continue running this service despite a likely return to traditional meetings in 2021.

## 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 Biodiversity Day and Cessnock Bioblitz events were unfortunately cancelled due to the impacts of COVID-19.
- 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.
- The “featured bird” initiative, a monthly e-mailed information sheet focused on birds of the Hunter Region continues. 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.
- The “Birding Guide to the Cessnock Woodlands” has now been produced and is due for launch at a special event on 25<sup>th</sup> March.

### **Organisational Matters**

- The vacant position of Club President was filled at the February AGM by Dan Williams.
- An initiative has been implemented whereby members nominate skillsets that they can offer to assist the Club, which will be used to help find suitable candidates for assisting the Club in the many available capacities.
- There are 415 members at the start of March 2021.

For more detailed information refer to the club’s web site at [www.hboc.org.au](http://www.hboc.org.au)

Dan Williams  
President  
Hunter Birds Observers Club