

Observations of the Lewin's Rail on the Central Coast of New South Wales

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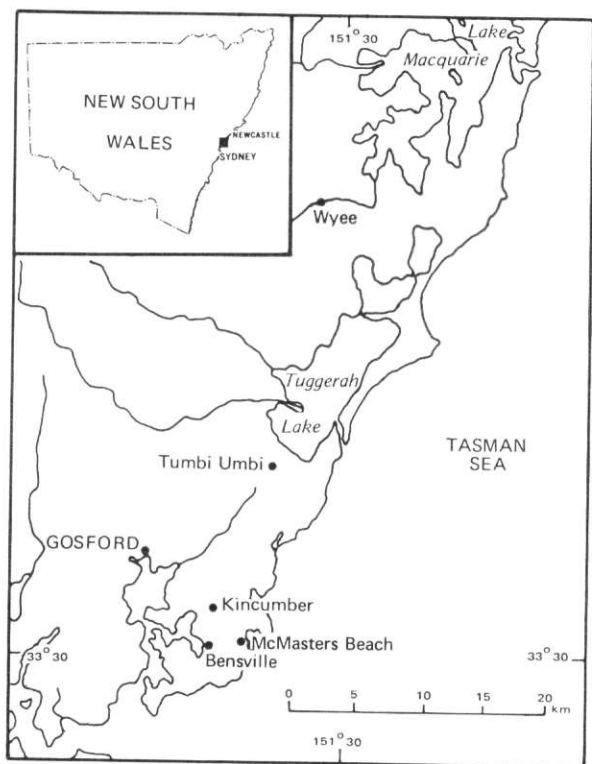
On 6 January 1973 whilst mist netting birds at Tumbi Umbi, south of Tuggerah, New South Wales (see map Figure 1), an unusual bird was caught. It was identified as Lewin's Rail *Rallus pectoralis*. It initially posed an identification problem because it lacked the characteristic rufous colour of the head and nape and the brown wing markings were indistinct. However this was attributed to the fact that this bird was most likely immature.

Nothing more was seen of the species until January 1974 when I observed a single bird, apparently an adult. On 19 January 1975 Mr P. White netted and banded a bird which was recorded as an adult, it was noted to have rufous on the head and nape and prominent brown wing markings. Single birds were observed on 22 and 23 February 1975 and single adult birds were observed by Mr D. I. Smedley on 26 January 1976 and by Mr S. Kum Jew on 18 September 1976.

On 21 November 1976 Mr J. McCrea found a sick Lewin's Rail at Tumbi Umbi, it was so weak that it was easily caught by hand. A close examination revealed a large tick embedded in its neck. The tick was removed and the bird was fed a number of earthworms and curl grubs which it voraciously devoured. The bird, an adult, was banded but not immediately released as it was still weak. It had apparently regained its strength the following day as it escaped from the carton in which it had been kept overnight.

On 22 January 1977, at the same location, a small blackish rail was observed scurrying from one patch of lantana to another. A closer search revealed a juvenile Lewin's Rail sheltering amongst thick lantana. It eventually moved to an open area where it stretched its wings and sunned itself in the early afternoon sun. It allowed me to approach to a distance of approximately two metres but although I had a hand net the thick lantana prevented its use. The bird was approached three times and each time it retreated to the thick cover of the lantana.

However when I retreated, it emerged from cover to enjoy the sun again. Another bird, an adult, was then sighted concealed amongst the lantana. The behaviour of the juvenile bird i.e. its tameness and sunbathing was thought to be unusual for such a shy species.



● Figure 1. Map of Central Coast showing locations mentioned in text.

TABLE I

Recorded observations for the Central Coast of N.S.W. (and adjacent areas to the north)

| Date | Location | Source |
|----------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 28.1.63 | Gloucester | Rose (Pers. Comm.) |
| 4.10.72 | Bungwahl (Smiths Lake) | Rogers (1973) |
| 6.1.73 | Tumbi Umbi | Clancy |
| 23.12.73 | Wyee | Rose (Pers. Comm.) |
| —, 1.74 | Tumbi Umbi | Clancy |
| 7.1.74 | McMasters Beach | The Australian Museum |
| 17.2.74 | Kincumber | Rogers (1975) |
| 19.1.75 | Tumbi Umbi | Clancy |
| 18.2.75 | Bensville | Rogers (1976) |
| 22.2.75 | Tumbi Umbi | Clancy |
| 23.2.75 | Tumbi Umbi | Clancy |
| 26.1.76 | Tumbi Umbi | Smedley (Pers. Comm.) |
| 18.9.76 | Tumbi Umbi | Kum Jew (Pers. Comm.) |
| 21.11.76 | Tumbi Umbi | Clancy |
| 22.1.77 | Tumbi Umbi | Clancy |

All the foregoing records were made during the period September to February. This prompted a check of The Australian Museum records and the Journal of the N.S.W. Field Ornithologists Club to see if there was a general absence of autumn and winter records for the Central Coast of N.S.W. Recorded observations for the Central Coast of N.S.W. (and adjacent areas to the north) are shown in Table 1. No records were found for the period March to August. Likewise no observations have been made at Tumbi Umbi during this period despite there having been 48 banding visits to the area between 1973 and 1977. The absence of records for this species from the Central Coast of N.S.W. between March and August may be due to the limited sample available or the possibility that the Lewin's Rail is migratory in this part of its range.

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References

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