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FROM THE PRESIDENT

This is my last word as President, as I am standing down at the AGM in April. I will continue on the Committee as “Past President”, but my time has come to an end as family and personal commitments press after ten years on the back-burner.

I remain on the Committee as “Past President”, until another change in the position. I will also continue as Newsletter Editor, absent someone else putting up their hand. And perhaps now there will be time to complete the long-needed website revision.

Thanks to all those who chose (about 50 of you) to pay by direct deposit - a great help to the Treasurer. We will continue to explore electronic ways of paying, to further reduce this burden.

Stein Boddington

President

New Members

We welcome the following new members of the Association:

Ian Carruthers, of Buddina Qld.,
Rainer Ebel, of Alberta, Canada,
Mrs. Linda Martin, of Colyton, NSW,
Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.,
Kurtis Lindsay, of East Killara, NSW,
Tegan Douglas, of Duncraig, WA,
Anita Watson, of Margate, Qld.

AGM 2011 and Scientific day

The Association’s Annual General Meeting will be held at Charles Sturt University in Albury, on 9th April, 2011, commencing at 1.30 pm. We welcome the active involvement of CSU staff and students from the Ornithology course delivered there.

See map on page four, and included registration sheet. There is not much time left, so act now to register.

A program of lectures will run from 10 am, on the theme of “Threatened Species”. Speakers include:

- Judit Szabo, from Charles Darwin Uni in Darwin, working with Stephen Garnett on an update to the “Status of Australian Birds”
- Dean Ingwerson - on Regent Honeyeaters.
- Peter Menkhorst - on Orange-bellied Parrots
- David Parker on Plains Wanderers.
- Natasha Schedvin on Barking Owls

We are still working on some excursions to nearby points of interest - Chiltern, River Red Gum National Park, Wonga Wetlands are in our sights.

Cyclone Yasi Blows Birds Everywhere

“There is now a Sooty Tern receiving plenty of TLC in good hands here in Alice Springs. He was bit tired and just needs some time to rest and (fingers crossed) we’ll stick him on a plane back to Queensland - seems unreasonable to make him fly back! Full story and photos on the website.

<http://comebirdwatching.blogspot.com/2011/02/sooty-tern-crash-lands-in-alice-springs.html>

Chris Watson

Alice Springs”

Lord Howe Woodhen – for whom the bell tolls? - Reply

A response to concerns raised by Jonny Schoenjahn in the December issue of the ABSA Newsletter (No 101)

In 1980, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Lord Howe Island Board (LHIB) embarked on the recovery of one of the then rarest birds in the world, the Lord Howe Woodhen.

This initiative commenced with the eradication of feral pigs and cats, the main threats to Woodhen. It also involved the establishment of a captive population from the remaining population of 37 individuals, and the subsequent release of offspring across the island.

Since then, the LHIB has undertaken recovery actions in accordance with the NSW & National Recovery Plan, 2002—Recovery Plan for the Lord Howe Woodhen (*Gallirallus sylvestris*)—which focuses on removing other threats and monitoring the Woodhen population annually. Population size is assessed by recording the number of banded and unbanded birds sighted along a set of systematic transects during a two-week period in November of each year. Birds without bands are captured and banded. Individual Woodhens that cannot be identified or caught are recorded as seen or heard.

Banding is essential to detect any population changes so that appropriate management actions can be implemented where required. Metal bands have only been used exclusively in the last 4 years, to reduce the need to recapture birds, as the plastic darvic bands are too easily lost (average of 40% loss rate of one or more bands between capture sessions). The use of metal bands reduces the stress on the birds and the time to undertake surveys. The banding procedures have been approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of the Department of Environment, Climate Change & Water and undertaken under the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme (ABBBS).

The monitoring program has indicated that, since the 1990s, the Woodhen population initially increased from about 170 to being relatively static over the past 10 years, with a population of 250–300 individuals. There is no evidence that the noise from the metal bands has increased predation by Masked Owls or other predators.

As part of the monitoring program, the LHIB collates Woodhen deaths per annum. Any dead banded birds are reported as part of the ABBBS reporting requirements. Data on Woodhen deaths collated over the past 5 years has identified death from collision with a moving motor vehicle (on average 10 birds per year) as the greatest current threat to the Woodhen population.

In response, the LHIB has erected signs at known danger spots along roads to encourage awareness of the vulnerability of Woodhens to roadkill and is working with the NSW Police and the LHIB Traffic Management Committee to implement a maximum speed limit of 25km / hr and reduce traffic movements.

The unregulated, frequent and long-term use of rodenticides is also of concern, although there are limited data on the number of birds known to have died as a result

of primary or secondary poisoning. This was because suitable analysis techniques to detect rodenticides were unavailable but this situation has now been remedied and all Woodhens that have died from unknown causes are currently collected and tested for rodenticide poisoning.

Other threats to the Woodhen include predation of eggs and chicks by the introduced Black Rat, as well as predation by the introduced Masked Owl. However, the Woodhen is principally a diurnal feeder whilst the Masked Owl is a nocturnal hunter and the period of cross over is primarily limited to dawn and dusk. Rats and Masked Owls also cause significant damage to many other native species on Lord Howe Island.

To protect these species and biodiversity generally, the LHIB has developed a plan to eradicate rats and mice, and has commenced research into the ecology and behaviour of the Masked Owl population to determine the most appropriate and effective methods for owl eradication, to be undertaken simultaneously with rodent eradication. It appears that owls are susceptible to secondary poisoning as several individuals have been brought in with symptoms of rodenticide poisoning, and are expected to be heavily impacted during the proposed rodent eradication.

This would be an opportune time to eradicate all owls, although further research is required to develop methods to remove individuals that do not succumb to secondary poisoning and to ascertain the genetic provenance of the local owl population should translocation of part of this population for captive breeding on the mainland or Tasmania be attempted.

Research on owls to date has shown that many bird species on Lord Howe Island are preyed by Masked Owls including the Little Shearwater, Black-winged Petrel, Sooty Tern and White Tern and that the species' removal is well warranted.

A recent article published in the December 2010 issue of Birds Australia's Wingspan provides an overview of the research program on the Masked Owl on Lord Howe Island.

Hank Bower
Manager Environment/World Heritage
Lord Howe Island Board

This response received input from:
Dr David Priddel, DECCW
Nicholas Carlile DECCW
David Milledge, Landmark Ecological Services.
Christo Haselden, Ranger, Lord Howe Island Board
Dave Kelly, Manager Environment Community Development, LHIB.

OLDEST MOTHER?

The oldest known bird in the US, a Laysan albatross named Wisdom, has been spotted with a chick on Midway Atoll in the north Pacific. It was banded in 1956, as she was incubating an egg. Laysan albatrosses typically breed at 5 to 9 years old, so she is probably in early 60s.

More than 100 rare gulls massacred in New Zealand

from The Birds Nest <www.thebirdsnest.net.au/>

MORE than 100 rare birds have been massacred as they nested in the South Island of New Zealand. Department of Conservation staff found 100 black-billed gulls dead beside the Aparima River, at the bottom of the South Island, with shotgun shells scattered around them.

Post-mortem results released today confirmed most of the birds died from bullet wounds, while others had broken bones and some chicks were found starving beside their dead parents.

The Mossad Vulture

When an Israeli Vulture was captured and taken to a village in rural Saudi Arabia, it was found to be carrying a GPS tag labelled "Tel Aviv University". The villagers came to the (to us) startling conclusion that it was an Israeli spying bird, controlled by Mossad. Local press picked up the story, and it flashed around the world.

It was some weeks before common sense prevailed, and the bird was released, much to the joy of the researchers in Israel. Prince Bandar bin Saud alSaud is quoted as saying that similar devices were used in Saudi Arabia for research into rare birds and other animals, and that journalists should do some checking before posting such stories.

Penny Olsen Awarded OAM

Renowned conservationist, and raptor researcher Dr. Penny Olsen was made a member (AM) of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours list, for her 'service to the conservation sciences through the study and documentation of Australian bird species and their history.'

Dr. Olsen studied at ANU in the 1960s, and gained her PhD in the 1980s with a thesis demonstrating the shell-thinning consequences for Peregrine Falcons of the use of DDT.

She has written a number of books, is the editor of the Birds Australia quarterly magazine, *Wingspan*, and acts as a consultant to various government departments.

In 2009, Dr Olsen was awarded an Australia Council's Arts Literature Grant and has six times been the recipient of the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales' Whitley Award.

Dr Olsen's research has focused on birds of prey, and in particular Peregrine Falcons. She is also involved in a long-term research program on the Norfolk Islands to re-establish a population of owls which all but disappeared in 1986.

Congratulations, Penny.

On Board Filming

Remarkable footage from the BBC from cameras on board a Peregrine Falcon and a Northern Goshawk. For those who might be prone to motion sickness, take your pills before watching. The clip can be seen at:

<<http://wimp.com/hawkssee>>

RUDDY HELL: TURNSTONE FLIES 27,000 KMS – TWICE !!

Wader researchers from the Victorian Wader Study Group, Australia, have just recaptured a Ruddy Turnstone which has completed a **27,000 km** round trip migration for the second time. This is the first time a wader has been tracked with a geolocator on its complete migration in successive years.

The bird had a one gram light sensor data logger (geolocator) attached to its leg. The device was attached to the bird in mid April at Flinders, Victoria. Researchers have used these data logging devices over the last two years to find out the key stopover locations which are so important for the birds to refuel on their long journey.

"The data retrieved so far shows that the birds generally start their northward migration with a nonstop flight of around 7,600km in six days to Taiwan or adjacent regions.

"There they refuel on the tidal flats before moving north to the Yellow Sea and northern China. They then make a flight of over 5,000kms to the breeding grounds in northern Siberia, arriving in the first week of June.

"One of the interesting findings is that after breeding, the return journey shows considerable variation, no two birds following the same route. Some return through Asia while an amazing alternate route has been demonstrated by these new results.

"This is a trans-Pacific route where the bird moves east to the Aleutian Islands off southwest Alaska before making the huge journey across the Pacific, stopping only once or twice before reaching Australia in early December."

The first record of this flight was in 2009 when the bird set off southward over the Pacific Ocean and flew nonstop 7,800kms to Kirabati, where it stayed for six weeks before making the 5,000km trip back to Flinders, Victoria. In 2010 the same bird undertook a similar incredible journey, this time stopping off in the Marshall Islands and Vanuatu in the Pacific before returning to Australia.

Scientists from the Australasian Wader Studies Group and Deakin University are still puzzling over why individual Turnstones from the same breeding and non-breeding population should use such widely differing routes for their annual migrations. The study shows the importance of key regions within the flyway. Scientists are concerned about the ability of these birds to cope with the massive habitat changes occurring as a result of reclamation and urban development.

Dr Clive Minton

Flightlines

Here are a few snippets from the latest "Flightlines", the newsletter of the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme, who issue bands, authorise projects, and keep a database of banding activity and recoveries. The full newsletter is available on their website.

The ABBBS website has moved home location to:
<www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/science/abbbs/>

New office address:
ABBBS,
DEWHA,
Level 5, Lovett Tower
13 Keltie Street
WODEN ACT 2606

There have been 235 new projects approved since July, 2003.

First recovery of a banded Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) for Australia.

A UK banded Manx Shearwater was recovered in November 1961 at Venus Bay, SA. This was not reported to the ABBBS until 2008 when David (Drynan - ABBBS Co-ordinator)) happened to be looking through the BTO (UK Banding Scheme) website at their longest recorded movements. As it turns out, this recovery was displayed on their website as an illustration of where birds banded in the UK have turned up, as it is the longest movement recorded for any bird banded in the UK.

The details:
Band 2057768 was placed upon an adult Manx Shearwater on 9 September 1960 at Skokholm Island, Wales, UK. Recovered dead on 22 November 1961 at Venus Bay, SA. Time elapsed: 1 year, 2 months and 13 days, distance moved: 16208km.

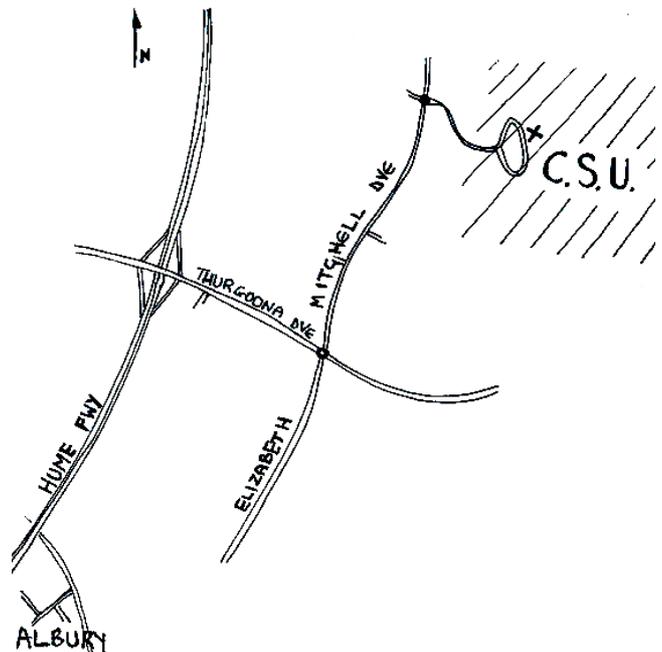
Help Wanted

Can anyone put me in touch with people currently catching White-browed or Grey-crowned Babblers as part of specific research projects or general banding projects. I am seeking pictures of the tongues of the two species to see whether there are any differences (for example there are structural differences in the tongues of Buff-rumped vs Brown and Striated Thornbills).

Thanks in advance,

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Come off the freeway at Thurgoona Drive. East along Thurgoona Dve, and left into Elizabeth Mitchell Drive.



Turn right at the roundabout and proceed to parking lot.

