

## No. 106 March 2012

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### Editorial

All ready for the Scientific day on March 10??

On behalf of the Committee, I repeat our oft-given plea for new committee members. The minimum commitment is to turn up at meetings four times a year for three or four hours (in Sydney). Above that is entirely up to you, but the governance of the organisation will be stronger for having a few more heads to talk about the issues that arise.

Do not think that you have ‘nothing to contribute’! We all started from a low base and learned as we listened.

### New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Association:

Mr Graham Dent of Ballan, Vic.

Dr Steve Murphy of Malanda, Qld.

Dr Paul McDonald of UNE, Armidale, NSW

Mr Ken Gover of Blacktown, NSW

Ms Bronwyn McCulloch, of Healesville, Vic. (see Bill Lane Award below.)

### AGM 2012

The ABSA program of ornithological lectures and AGM will be held from 10am until 4pm on **Saturday 10 March 2012 at the Hunter Wetlands Centre**, off Sandgate Road, Shortland - a north western suburb of Newcastle, NSW. It is about 10 minute's drive from the centre of Newcastle and

5 minutes from the northern end of the F3 and the Hexham bridge. The Wetlands Centre is open from 9 to 5 - see <<http://www.wetlands.org.au>> for activities at the HWC.

A number of experts will present ornithological lectures/seminars on the theme ‘Migratory seabirds, shorebirds and waterbirds’. These talks will be conducted between 10am and 12 noon and continue from 2pm until approximately 4pm. Cost is \$25 per person. The AGM will be held in the second half of the 2-hour lunch break.

The ABSA will provide light refreshments for a welcome and for morning and afternoon tea/coffee breaks. Café Nourish at the Wetlands Centre provides a wonderful lunch menu - cost to be met by those taking advantage of the café. Picnic and BBQ facilities are available if you BYO.

There is a registration form on the ABSA website ([www.absa.asn.au](http://www.absa.asn.au)). Registration will give us an idea of how many scones to buy!! **But don't let not registering deter you from turning up on the day!**

### ABSA Website Make-over

The ABSA website has had a complete make-over, and the new one went live on January 2 this year.

Note the links to the ABSA published Seabird Island Series, which makes available all the Seabird Island Papers published in Corella and its predecessor Australian Bird Bander.

Also published on-line for the first time is the complete Bird in the Hand, published by ABSA as an aid to ageing and sexing birds after they have been trapped.

We have deleted the Guide to Wader flag colours, as this is more a ‘work in progress’ than we had assumed. Instead a link is provided to the Shorebird Network, which maintains an up-to-date list.

We are working on putting back issues of Corella and ABB on line, as well as a history of ABSA, a list of award winners, and photos of the Student Poster Prize awarded at the AOC.

The next major revision of the website will bring a member log-on facility, which will grant access to the latest Corella papers in their entirety. Some time after that, we may achieve the holy grail of a payment facility for subscriptions, Scientific days, Mistnet service etc.

Please don't hesitate to report problems with the website, or ideas for improving it to <[info@absa.asn.au](mailto:info@absa.asn.au)> Nb: The missing logo in the header is a place-marker that we are working on getting rid of - oops, sorry about the terminal preposition!

## The ABSA S.G.(Bill) Lane Award, 2011

The 2011 Bill Lane Award for best Grade-point average in Ornithology at Charles Sturt University was won by:

Ms Bronwyn McCulloch of Healesville, Vic.

She receives a cash prize as well as a year's membership of ABSA including Corella.

Congratulations Bronwyn.

## A New Species of Hawk in NZ?!

New Zealand farmer Grant Teahan is appealing a conviction for "ill-treating an animal" after being caught spray-painting hawks in a pinkish-red hue as part of "prank" on bird-watchers who were hoping to have discovered a new species of bird, according to the Manawatu Standard.

The mystery began in early 2009, when locals began snapping pictures of the strangely colored hawks and sending them to the local newspaper. It was only after one of the hawks was accidentally hit by a car that the spray-painting ruse was discovered.

An investigation by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) failed to turn up a culprit until Teahan asked his nephew to send a video clip to the media of him catching a magpie in a trap covered in the spray paint. When police seized computers from Teahan's property, they found deleted pictures and video relating to "red hawks."

"Various people got involved, like experts who thought maybe it was a new strain or a new type of bird or whatever, but then feathers were being found and it was obvious somebody was actually painting these hawks," Palmerston North SPCA manager Danny Auger told the Standard.

## Green Light for Nocturnally Migrating Birds

### Abstract:

The nighttime sky is increasingly illuminated by artificial light sources. Although this ecological light pollution is damaging ecosystems throughout the world, the topic has received relatively little attention. Many nocturnally migrating birds die or lose a large amount of their energy reserves during migration as a result of encountering artificial light sources. This happens, for instance, in the North Sea, where large numbers of nocturnally migrating birds are attracted to the many offshore platforms. Our aim

is to develop bird-friendly artificial lighting that meets human demands for safety but does not attract and disorient birds. Our current working hypothesis is that artificial light interferes with the magnetic compass of the birds, one of several orientation mechanisms and especially important during overcast nights.

Laboratory experiments have shown the magnetic compass to be wavelength dependent: migratory birds require light from the blue-green part of the spectrum for magnetic compass orientation, whereas red light (visible long-wavelength) disrupts magnetic orientation. We designed a field study to test if and how changing light color influenced migrating birds under field conditions. We found that nocturnally migrating birds were disoriented and attracted by red and white light (containing visible long-wavelength radiation), whereas they were clearly less disoriented by blue and green light (containing less or no visible long-wavelength radiation). This was especially the case on overcast nights. Our results clearly open perspective for the development of bird-friendly artificial lighting by manipulating wavelength characteristics. Preliminary results with an experimentally developed bird-friendly light source on an offshore platform are promising. What needs to be investigated is the impact of bird-friendly light on other organisms than birds.

Poot, H. *et al.* (2008). **Green light for nocturnally migrating birds.** *Ecology and Society* **13**(2): 47.

URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol13/iss2/art47/>

## Book on Birds and Climate Change

Titled *Winged Sentinels* and published by Cambridge University Press, this book is about birds and climate change. It was written out of concern for bird species threatened by climate change. You can read more about the book on the authors' blog:

<http://wingedsentinels.com/about-the-book/>

and a review by ornithologist Ian Newton:

<http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/book-reviews/winged-sentinels-birds-and-climate-change-by-janice-wormworth-and-cagan-sekercioglu>

## Bird Journals Available On-line

The following link will take you to a list of ornithological journals that are available free on-line through Wiley Press:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/subject/code/LSD0/titles>

## Australian Wildlife Health Network

### NOTIFICATION

Please note the following update from the Victorian DPI which confirms detection of pigeon paramyxovirus 1 (PMV-1) in two additional species of birds in Melbourne. One sparrow hawk (*Accipiter cirrocephalus*) found dead and one spotted turtledove (an introduced free-ranging feral species of dove) have been confirmed with the disease. It is assumed that these birds were infected through contact with feral pigeons.

The DPI Victoria website provides the following details - see <http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/animal-diseases/vetsource/vetwatch/vet-watch-february-2012>

**Sparrowhawk case:** "PMV-1 was isolated from the tissues a sick sparrow hawk (*Accipiter cirrocephalus*) – a raptor native to Australia. The bird was collected by a park ranger, who had been monitoring a family of sparrow hawks in a park in central Melbourne. Four birds died around or before 10 January with some displaying neurological signs before death. Paramyxovirus 1 infected feral pigeons had previously been confirmed in the immediate area and it is likely that infection in the sparrow hawk may be the result of high virus challenge associated with recent predation on diseased pigeons. Although this is the first time pigeon paramyxovirus 1 has been isolated in a native species in Australia, there are several reports of predatory and in-contact birds becoming infected in endemic countries overseas."

**Spotted turtle dove case:** "PMV-1 was confirmed in a spotted turtle dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), an introduced species. The bird had been in close contact with a group of semi-feral pigeons which have been previously diagnosed with paramyxovirus."

**We would like to ask AWHN subscribers (outside Victoria) to continue to be alert to any signs of disease that are unusual or clusters of deaths in wild birds. Please report these to your local AWHN Wildlife Coordinator, your local department of agriculture, or call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline: 1800 675 888.**

**IN VICTORIA WHERE A NUMBER OF WILD BIRDS SHOWING CLINICAL SIGNS AND/OR A CLUSTER OF DEAD WILD BIRDS ARE FOUND THE DPI SHOULD BE NOTIFIED ON 1800 675 888.**

## Photo monitoring at Western Treatment Plant, Werribee

A message from Melbourne Water, who manage the WTP, to our Melbourne readers, who we know frequent this outstanding bird site:

We have had 30 photo monitoring points set up at the WTP. These are green painted posts with a simple bracket on the top to position your camera.

**I'd be grateful if you would take photos from these posts when you pass by.**

Date-stamped electronic photos can be emailed to a central site. Photos are then displayed in date order at an open access web site. All of the relevant info on how to submit photos is included on the posts.

We are specifically interested in monitoring:

(a) Seaweed dumps on the intertidal; how often do these occur? Is there a seasonal pattern or some link to weather variables we can use to predict dumps (which seriously affect our intertidal studies and are thought to affect shorebird foraging habitat and prey availability)?

(b) Saltmarsh vegetation re-establishment at Western Lagoon.

(c) Natural wetland/estuary water regimes and veg responses.

(d) The state of some of our managed conservation ponds to determine the extent of mudflat versus open water and emergent vegetation. This includes photo points to monitor reed beds (*Phragmites* and *Typha*) to allow us to monitor their rate of encroachment into wetlands.

(f) The state of some wetlands where we plan to change our management regime, so that we can assess how these management actions alter wetland vegetation and extent."

## iPhone App

"Birdsight AU" is an iPhone/iPad app that allows a person to record bird sightings.

Perhaps knowledgeable readers could comment on its potential use for recording bird data straight into a digital format, and whether it can be converted to ABBBS requirements.

## "Biodiversity Pays" Forum at Cowra

The Cowra Shire Council and the Lachlan Catchment Management Authority present

### 2012 CENTRAL NSW FUTURES FORUM 'BIODIVERSITY PAYS'

Hosted by: Robyn Williams  
When: Thursday 1st March  
Where: Cowra Civic Centre

Info and booking: See <http://www.lachlan.cma.nsw.gov.au/> and follow the link to the Forum.

## Study Shows Species Can Change

A study of South American songbirds completed by the Department of Biology at Queen's University and the Argentine Museum of Natural History, has discovered these birds differ dramatically in colour and song yet show very little genetic differences which indicates they are on the road to becoming a new species.

“One of Darwin's accomplishments was to show that species could change, that they were not the unaltered, immutable products of creation,” says Leonardo Campagna, a Ph.-D biology student at the Argentine Museum of Natural History in Buenos Aires, who studied at Queen's as part of his thesis. “However it is only now, some 150 years after the publication of his most important work, *On the Origin of Species*, that we have the tools to begin to truly understand all of the stages that might lead to speciation which is the process by which an ancestral species divides into two or more new species.”

For decades scientists have struggled to understand all of the varied forces that give rise to distinct species. Mr. Campagna and his research team studied a group of nine species of South American seedeaters (finches) to understand when and how they evolved.

The study found differences in male reproductive plumage and in some key aspects of the songs that they use to court females. Now, the group is looking to find the genes that underlie these differences, as these so-called candidate genes may well prove to be responsible for the evolution of a new species. This will allow researchers to gain insights into evolution.

“Studies like ours teach us something about what species really are, what processes are involved and what might be lost if these and other species disappear.”

Campagna's research co-supervisor is Stephen Loughheed, Acting Director of QUBS and an associate professor in the Department of Biology. QUBS has been a pivotal part of research and teaching at Queen's for more than six decades and hosts researchers from both Canadian and international institutions. Research at QUBS has resulted in more than 800 publications in peer-reviewed journals and more than 200 graduate and undergraduate theses.

The findings were recently published in Proceedings of The Royal Society.

## Barn Owls Help Farmers in Mid-east

See:

<http://birdingblogs.com/2012/grrlscientist/birds-of-prey-ambassadors-of-peace-in-the-middle-east>

for a blog about a man who is using Barn Owl conservation tactics to assist farmers with rodent problems, thereby dramatically reducing usage of harmful pesticides.

## Pigeons on Par with Primates in Numerical Competence

by Damian Scarf, Harlene Hayne, Michael Colombo  
*Science* 23 December 2011: Vol. 334 no. 6063 p. 1664  
DOI: 10.1126/science.1213357

### Abstract:

Although many animals are able to discriminate stimuli differing in numerosity, only primates are thought to share our ability to employ abstract numerical rules. Here, we show that this ability is present in pigeons and that their performance is indistinguishable from that displayed by monkeys.

## SOSSA Pelagic Trips

Sister organisation, the Southern Ocean Seabird Study Association holds regular pelagic trips, going 45 to 50 km off the coast of Wollongong and Southport (Qld). They always welcome non-members, and guides are available on board to describe and explain the oceanic fauna seen on the day. Depending on the time of year, that may range from albatrosses to killer whales, from sunfish to dolphins.

Cost is \$100 for non-members. bring your own refreshments, drinks etc. A full list and details are on the SOSSO website: <<http://www.sossa-international.org>>

Dates for the next six trips are:

Wollongong	Southport
24th March	March - 17th
28th April	April - 21st
26th May	May - 19th
23rd June	June - 16th
28th July	July - 21st
25th August	August - 18th



Brown Falcon. Photo by Graham Cam ©