



ABSA

NEWSLETTER

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Editorial

A big thank you to those members who wrote in with their ideas. Elsewhere is a selection of the letters received. All recommended the option of a combined volume at the end of each year, with on-line availability to members of each edition (quarterly).

Should Committee decide to run with this idea, it will have to do some more feasibility work, and your webmaster will have to learn yet more about Joomla Content Management Systems, before we can implement it.

Ornithological Conference and AGM

On 23rd March 2013 the Australian Bird Study Association will conduct a joint ornithological conference with BirdLife Southern Queensland and both organisations will hold their respective AGM’s at the same venue – ABSA AGM during the Congress lunch break and BSQ AGM after the last presentation in the Conference.

The venue is the Environment Centre of Nathan Campus, Griffith University, Brisbane Qld. The theme of the talks/lectures/presentations will be “Birds of Tropical and Subtropical Queensland”.

The program and speakers have unfortunately not yet been finalised, but I can assure you that a number of very prominent and well known ornithologists have agreed to present papers. Registration will be from 9am at the venue and the entry fee will be \$50 – but that will include morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

A number of prestigious prizes will be available from BSQ:

- 1) Students who submit a poster or an abstract will receive free admission and the best poster will receive an award of \$500.
- 2) The authors of the top four abstracts related to bird conservation will be invited to present a 15 minute presentation. The best presentation will receive an award of \$1000 and
- 3) There will be a separate award of \$500 for the best promotional material, regardless of format, that will help raise the profile of bird conservation with a focus on attracting new members, to ABSA and BSQ.

BirdLife SQ will organise a morning bird walk at a local hot spot on Sunday 24th March.

More details will be published on the Association’s website as they come to hand. [www.absa.asn.au]

Jeff Hardy

President

Newington Sea-eagle Tangle

Graham Fry writes:

While I was volunteering at the Birdlife Centre at Newington on Sunday, it was noticed that one of the sea-eagle chicks seemed to become tangled in fishing line. Therefore, it was decided that an intervention action would be taken. Initially, an experienced tree climber went in but he couldn't get to the nest. The following day a cherry-picker was brought in and I was asked to pluck the chicks out of the nest. It all went well, the chick that was badly tangled was later found (by a vet) to have swallowed a fish hook. The hook was removed and the chick returned to the nest the next day.

All in all a great experience and now for my five minutes of fame: the whole episode was recorded from the webcam and is now available on YouTube:

Just search for: “WBSE_2012 Rescue of S3 and S4”

Recoveries on the Website

A minor recent improvement to the Association’s website is the ability to search the recoveries by entering the species number. It is at the bottom of the recoveries page, and should benefit those who know their species numbers.

ABSA AGM 2013

Formal notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held at lunchtime on 23 March 2013, at:

The Environment Centre,
Nathan Campus,
Griffith University,
Brisbane, Qld.

At the meeting, a special resolution will be put, as described in the ABSA Constitution, to allow consideration of a number of amendments to the Association's constitution. These amendments reflect the evolution of the Association's practices over the years, and not any radical change in intent. To be accepted, the amendments must attract a vote of two thirds of members present (plus any proxies held).

Proposed Constitutional Amendments - 2013

1. Clause 1 (3) - delete "1984", insert "2009" **[A new Associations Incorporation Act was passed then]**
2. Clause 3 (2) (1) Classes of membership. Delete "retirees", insert "aged pensioners"
3. Clause 8 (1). Delete current clause. Insert new Clause 8 (1): "The annual subscription for membership will be decided from time to time by resolution of the Committee."
4. Clause 8(3). Delete current clause. Insert new Clause 8 (3): "The financial year of the association shall be from 1st October to 30th September, unless otherwise decided by the Committee. The membership year shall be from 1st January to 31st December."
5. Clause 19 (3) After the word "oral", insert " , email". **[This allows Committee meetings to be arranged using email]**
6. Clause 19 (5). Add "A quorum for a Committee meeting may include up to two members taking part by telephone or over the internet." **[This will facilitate gaining a quorum at meetings, which has periodically been difficult]**
7. Clause 25 (1). After the words "member's address appearing", delete "the", insert "in the register" **[this tidies up a typo in the currently held version of the constitution]**
8. Clause 40 (1). At the end, insert the words "or by email to the last email address notified to the Association by the member". **[this, and the next two amendments, will allow the Association to move towards electronic communication with members, and towards making Corella available on the web]**
9. Clause 41 (2). At the end, insert the sentence: "If a document or notice is sent to a person by email, it shall, unless the contrary is proved, be deemed to have been served on the member 72 hours after the time of sending."
10. Clause 41. After the word "members", insert "or made available electronically". Delete the words "magazine" and "periodical", and insert the word "journal".

Future of Corella - members respond

Letters have been edited for space reasons. Issues other than the future of *Corella* have been noted and passed on to the relevant people. Ed.

From Peter Dann

I would like to support the option "ON-LINE PUBLISHING WITH A COLLATED YEARLY HARD COPY". As you put so nicely, "it steers a path between many of the problems" and still caters for people like me who enjoy reading and referring to a hard copy.

From Henry Battam

For me the time has come to limit what I store as hard copy. I am not a collector of publications: I need access to selected information and soft copies stored on someone else's server to which I have access is a much more useful service.

If I elect to forego a hard copy of *Corella*, and be given access (secured or open) to whatever I pay for, I would expect this access to always be available to myself whether or not I remain a member of ABSA, and also to my heirs (if they so desire) after I cark it. In this event I would expect an advice email with a link to a table of contents whenever an issue is published.

Libraries no longer want hard copies of journals. Once a few subscribe, others just use inter-library loans to satisfy user needs. Grist for your mill. I would be satisfied with eternal access to *Corella* on a remote server.

From Don Franklin

I note your call for comments on the future of the journal.I note that each issue of the journal is rather slender, and wonder whether producing two thicker issues instead of four thinner issues per year would represent a significant saving (and on postage?). As suggested, going a further step and producing but one very-thick printed version per year combined with on-line availability sounds sensible to me. However, I question the viability of an on-line subscription process. Web-site administration is a substantial matter and ABSA appears to struggle a little with it already. Given minimal publication costs on-line and the desirability of: a. keeping web-site maintenance to a minimum; and b. maximising access to and use of *Corella*, this is a vote for a combination of:

- one large issue per year in print form; and
- free on-line availability

From Emeritus Professor Harry Recher

I just checked and see I've been a member of ABSA since 1978. I also checked my CV and see that I've published 12 papers in *Corella*, with the first in 1983 and the last in 2005. I therefore conclude that I've been a strong supporter of ABSA and *Corella* for the past 35 years and, although I intend to allow my membership in ABSA to lapse after 2012 (explained below), I do feel entitled to comment on the options for *Corella* going into the future.

Corella is an important journal in Australian ornithology. It is therefore necessary that it be viable and it continue to be published. I imagine *Corella* faces many of the same problems of other ornithological journals, such as *Condor* and *Auk* in North America, with declining subscriptions and increasing publication costs (postage, printing). The problem

has been, and continues to be, extensively debated among the American ornithological societies, albeit with no clear resolution to date.

My own view is that there are real benefits to on-line publication. It can be significantly faster, allows on-line pre-publication (where hard copy is retained), theoretically reaches a larger audience, permits the inclusion of more figures, tables, and colour among other benefits. I am convinced that the two papers reached the audience most likely to use and benefit from the published research..... I therefore encourage on-line publication of *Corella* and suggest ABSA consider making *Corella* 'open-access'. This, of course, may not be possible commercially, but the choice should be included in your options.

Retaining hard copy is a more difficult decision. However, no one can be certain exactly how much longer the worldwide web will continue to function or to be affordable. Having copy only on the internet is therefore potentially risky. Of course, neither paper nor electronic copies (a cd, for example) will last forever either. Just consider what the Romans did to Alexander's great library a few years back. There needs to be a national discussion of how best to conserve national archives, including journals and on-line journals in particular, for posterity. The world needs the equivalent of 'seed-banks' for these things and they need to be in each nation. If such things existed, and they may, then *Corella* would only need to produce periodic hard copies for library/seed-bank storage and provide digital copies to libraries outside the seed-bank. All important and interesting things to think about and perhaps not so difficult to achieve.....

From Eleanor Rowley

I like to have a hard copy because I like to browse through a journal and read abstracts and dip into articles that I would not look at online. However, I know the problems of cost of a hard copy, especially one that has relatively few subscribers like *Corella*.

If it can be managed, I like the idea of online publishing, with a yearly hard copy. If a reminder email could be built in when a new issue is available, that would be good.

I realise that the costs of this would have to be carefully calculated - a larger number of pages might make collating/binding more expensive, and postage costs are complex - you might cross a line that makes postage more, not less expensive. But I am sure you will think of all that. Online only by subscription is OK, and one can browse through and read abstracts. But proliferating passwords are a pest. With a paper copy, I can choose to sit in a comfortable chair.

From Dr Ian Abbott

I'd be reluctant to receive *Corella* only online. However, I do agree that it is important to have an online presence.

One way on increasing the journal's online presence would be to apply for a grant to scan all of your back issues and place these freely available online, except for the last 5 years (In WA, the Lotteries Commission will fund such projects of parochial interest but the material must be freely available online to the public. Many bird journals, such as *Auk* and *Condor* are freely available on JSTOR (except for the last 5

years), though I don't know who pays for this to be done. This could be worth exploring.

In the interim, why not publish only one volume each year? This should save postage and printing costs. This one annual issue would also look more attractive and resemble a proper journal in size, consisting of c. 120 pp.

From Cilla Kinross

I would be happy with an on-line service only if it was accompanied by an email alert with the contents.

Editor:

Thanks to all who contributed. There is a clear consensus for the on-line publication of *Corella*, with a once a year collation in hard copy. Our Committee has discussed this again, and the initial inquiry to the printers indicated that the savings will not be as high as we had anticipated, but still substantial.

We have already made the decision to put all back issues of *Corella* online, and they are currently being scanned.

We request an email address as part of the subscription renewal process as we hope to convert the Newsletter to an online version early next year. All members will get an email with a link when it is ready to download as a .pdf file from the website. (in keeping with disability access principles, we will also have an online 'Word' version for the vision-impaired using a text reader.) We anticipate a very small number of readers will still request a hard copy, and believe this need can be met with a domestic printer.

A side-benefit of the online newsletter is that it can then be decoupled from the *Corella* production timetable, allowing more or fewer editions, and small, instant-news copies to be produced as needed.

There are a few other issues that need to be discussed before *Corella* itself can make the transition - a more detailed costing, website development, training a back-up webmaster, and development of online payment systems, for both subscriptions and purchase of single papers, to name a few.

Applications for Research Grants 2013

The Australian Bird Study Association operates a fund to provide financial assistance to researchers. The fund, known as the ABSA Fund for Avian Research, provides grants on an annual basis. The total value of grants this year is in the order of \$2000 and is intended to provide researchers with assistance in the acquisition of equipment and research material.

Expressions of interest for obtaining a grant are now being sought from members of the Association. The Association would like to encourage grant applications from both amateur and professional researchers. Expressions of interest must be in writing, clearly setting out the aims and objectives of the proposed study.

The successful recipients would be encouraged, at the completion of their study, to provide a paper for publication in *Corella* outlining the results of their research.

All applications should be forwarded by **31 Jan 2013** to:

The Secretary,
Australian Bird Study Association,
PO Box A313, Sydney South, NSW 1235.

or by email to info@absa.asn.au

The final decision will be made at the February meeting of the Committee.

Little Penguin Guides Wanted

The St Kilda penguin colony numbers around 1300 and is now suffering from its own popularity. Hence the volunteer penguin guide program, run by Earthcare St Kilda.

More guides are needed for the season, which started in October and runs until Easter. If you've ever wanted to find out about the life cycle, habits and problems of a Little Penguin, this is the job for you! Guides are there to inform people and also to prevent flash photography and use of white light. Equipment and training are provided.

Right now, there's plenty of shameless penguin 'debauchery' as well as dozens of fluffy, brown penguin chicks, which inevitably follow. It's a rewarding thing to do, and makes a real difference to the safety of the colony. A commitment of one evening per fortnight is all that's required, particularly Friday or Saturday night.

For information, contact Susie Parker on 0419 896 011.

Direct Entry of Banding Data

The following appeared on the Birding-aus email list recently. - something to argue about during coffee breaks whilst banding!

“At Rocky Point Bird Observatory, we have been doing direct entry since 2006. A critical factor for us was finding a backup system that worked with open files. Syncback is very reasonably priced software that does this for us. We have backups every 2 minutes to an external drive, 10 minutes to the computer hard drive, and 17 minutes to the external drive again. The banders review the data after each session and either print out a hard copy or email an electronic copy off site for a permanent record.....”

Pros: Direct entry reduces the workload considerably. Verification tables can immediately let you know if a wing or weight is out of range, so you can double-check. Recapture information is immediately accessible (BandManager did it better--gave the full history; Bandit only gives the original banding date). Bandit filters (find function) have been very helpful in summarizing data.

Cons: need for power or fully charged batteries to cover the banding period. Something devastating "could" happen, but hasn't. This was also true with the paper records. They could have been stolen, lost, or damaged between the field and home. Scribe error is somewhat more likely than with paper for certain fields; less likely for others.

We've loved using the direct entry method, but always have paper banding sheets on hand for emergencies. If we notice the computer acting up, or if the backups aren't working properly, we use the paper sheets and enter the data in the computer at the same time. Overall, we believe our data error rate to be the same or better with the direct entry model, and as we rely very heavily on volunteers, anything to make things easier is a plus for us.”

Ann Nightingale
Rocky Point Bird Observatory
Victoria, BC, Canada

“Tattler” now out.

Download the latest “Tattler”, the newsletter of the Asia-Pacific Flyways, from the AWSG website for all the latest.

www.awsg.org.au/tattler/Tattler-26.pdf

Avian Extinctions

Abstract

Birds have long fascinated scientists and travellers, so their distribution and abundance through time have been better documented than those of other organisms. Many bird species are known to have gone extinct, but information on subspecies extinctions has never been synthesised comprehensively. We reviewed the timing, spatial patterns, trends and causes of avian extinctions on a global scale, identifying 279 ultrataxa (141 monotypic species and 138 subspecies of polytypic species) that have gone extinct since 1500. Species extinctions peaked in the early 20th century, then fell until the mid 20th century, and have subsequently accelerated. However, extinctions of ultrataxa peaked in the second half of the 20th century. This trend reflects a consistent decline in the rate of extinctions on islands since the beginning of the 20th century, but an acceleration in the extinction rate on continents. Most losses (78.7% of species and 63.0% of subspecies) occurred on oceanic islands. Geographic foci of extinctions include the Hawaiian Islands (36 taxa), mainland Australia and islands (29 taxa), the Mascarene Islands (27 taxa), New Zealand (22 taxa) and French Polynesia (19 taxa). The major proximate drivers of extinction for both species and subspecies are invasive alien species (58.2% and 50.7% of species and subspecies, respectively), hunting (52.4% and 18.8%) and agriculture, including non-timber crops and livestock farming (14.9% and 31.9%). In general, the distribution and drivers of subspecific extinctions are similar to those for species extinctions. However, our finding that, when subspecies are considered, the extinction rate has accelerated in recent decades is both novel and alarming.

Citation: Szabo JK, Khwaja N, Garnett ST, Butchart SHM (2012) Global Patterns and Drivers of Avian Extinctions at the Species and Subspecies Level. *PLoS ONE* 7(10): e47080. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0047080