

NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Stein Boddington

<info@absa.asn.au>

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Editorial

We have had a request from a member who likes to print the Newsletter so as to have a hard copy, but doesn't want to use up all his green ink on the background colour. So, from this issue, there will be a print-friendly copy made as well, without the background colour, with a link to it directly from the email we send. Other members may wish to take advantage of this if they print their own copy.

After filling in as Treasurer since the AGM, John Farrell has formally accepted the position, and was duly voted in at the recent committee meeting.

New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Association:

Mr Damien Smith of Erskine Park, NSW

Dr Joanne Maclean of Freshwater, Qld.

Ms Emily Mowat of Beecroft, NSW

Mr Gareth Evans of Earlwood, NSW

Ms Jodie Hill of Annandale, NSW

Ms Liina Pittaway of Surry Hills, NSW

Mr Neil Hermes of Garran, ACT

AGM 2014

Committee has decided that the next AGM will be in Canberra, probably in March 2014. The theme for the lectures will be "Raptors". Formal notification and more details in the December edition.

ISSN 2202-297X (Online)

Subscription Rate 2014

The Committee has decided that the subscription rate would remain unaltered for the coming year (2014). Rather than address the deficit by raising the subscription rate, the longer-term economic survival of ABSA will be better served by the publishing reforms already mooted, with plans well under way to publish Corella electronically from 2014, with an annual compilation only in hard copy.

Night Parrot found at last!

John Young's rediscovery of the Night Parrot *Pezoporus occidentalis* has found general acceptance, and we congratulate him on ending a hundred-year-old puzzle. We look forward to a rigorous assessment of the conservation status of this bird, and appropriate action for its preservation if necessary.

The discussions in the media and the birding blogs since the rediscovery was announced on whether the call and/or the location should be published (Mr Young is keeping quiet about both these) have highlighted the complexity of the impact of information, in this age when it is assumed we should be able to know everything.

Those wishing to pursue this further need only google 'night parrot' to find a wealth of discussion.

New (and not-so-new) Apps:

John McGowan informs us that the following apps are available, just in case you hadn't heard:

The Shorebirds of Australia (free)

Museum Victoria's Field Guide (free).

Bird Trails Tropical Australia (free)

Morcambe and Stewart's Birds of Australia (\$31)

Powerful Owl Call

Nice recording of a Powerful Owl and a Bassian Thrush in the Royal National Park, Sydney:

<http://wildambience.com/2013/04/powerful-owl-and-bassian-thrush/>

New Name(s) for Magpie??!!

A conversation on Birding-Aus.

From: Carl Clifford

While having an internet trawl to see how widely *Cracticus tibicen* is used, I came across the Italian common name for Australian Magpie on Avibase. It is *Gazza australiana*. How Australian can you get. Perhaps we should campaign for it to become the scientific name.

From: John Penhallurick

How many people are aware that the Australian Magpie has been transferred from *Gymnorhina* to *Cracticus*, as a result of Kearns, A.M., L. Joseph, and L.G. Cook (2013), **A multilocus coalescent analysis of the speciation history of the Australo-Papuan butcherbirds and their allies**. *Mol. Phylogenet. Evol.* **66**, 941-952.

So it's a Butcherbird!

From: Greg and Val Clancy

A friend has argued that as the Australian Magpie is not related to the European Magpie then we can use names of European birds for other native birds. My view is that we should change the name from 'Australian Magpie' to 'Ground Butcherbird' which is apparently what it is. I am running and ducking as I sign off!!!!

From: Brian Fleming

And ducked in running water is what he should be. It's a "Black and white piping crow-shrike"!

White-throated Needletail in UK

A White-throated Needletail turned up in Britain last June - a long way from home - and then managed to collide with a wind turbine and died. This prompted an article on wind-farm bird death statistics compared to deaths from other types of power generation. Referring to a paper by Benjamin K. Sovacool, Harry Huyton, in the Guardian Environment Blog, said that fossil fuel generators kill approximately 17 times more birds per gigawatt-hour of power produced than wind-power. Harry Huyton is the RSPB's head of climate change policy and campaigns..

In raising this issue, he cast a light on an ignored side of the debate about wind-farms and their propensity to kill birds, , and that is that many things we humans do, including all forms of power generation, have a associated bird mortality. This is similar to the debates about the dangers of nuclear power, which rarely detail the health and environmental damage of fossil fuel power.

See the full story at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2013/jun/28/white-throated-needletail-wind-turbines>

You can click through to the original paper from there too, or search for:

Benjamin K. Sovacool. Contextualizing avian mortality: A preliminary appraisal of bird and bat fatalities from wind, fossil-fuel, and nuclear electricity Energy Policy, Volume 37, Issue 6, June 2009, Pages 2241-2248

New BARC checklist published

The new Birdlife Australia Rarities Committee checklist of Australian birds is available for download from the following website:

<<http://www.tonypalliser.com/barc/barc-home.html>>

There is much discussion within birding circles about which list to follow. Since Christidis and Boles' "The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories" in 1994, which ABSA publications follow, there has been a steady trickle of amendments, the usual splitting and lumping, vagrants and lost visitors, and many regard it to be hopelessly out of date. The BARC checklist follows the IOC World Bird Names checklist (Gill, F. & Donsker, D. [2013]; IOC World Bird List v 3.4; <http://www.worldbirdnames.org/>) with minor amendments eg to spelling and species sequence.

Unfortunately, there is no plan to update C&B, and we may be stuck with it for some time. The difficulty for ABSA is whether to continue with a readily available resource like C&B, even though it slowly goes more and more out of date, or have a hotch-potch system that changes from month to month as analyses are published, or go with the IOC list as it is periodically revised.

For the time being, we will stick to C&B, but eventually we will have to confront the problem.

Baudin's and Carnaby's Cockatoos

I just want to let you know about a short animated film and webpage I've created about Baudin's and Carnaby's Cockatoos, called 'A Tale of Two Cockatoos' <http://cockatoos.treehugger.com.au/>

As part of my PhD studies, I have been investigating how Australian society values Baudin's and Carnaby's and have discovered why Carnaby's is favoured over Baudin's. This research was funded by The Nature Conservancy Applied Conservation Award 2011 and I wanted to use some of those funds to develop a communication strategy to raise public awareness of the plight of the two cockatoo species as well as help people find practical ways to get involved in conservation efforts. A Tale of Two Cockatoos is the result.

Gill Ainsworth

Email <gill.ainsworth@cdu.edu.au>

PhD Candidate: Social Values of Australian Threatened Birds.

Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University, Darwin NT.

Self-cleaning Eggs of the Guillemot

At the recent conference of the Society for Experimental Biology in Valencia, Spain, Dr Steven Portugal of the Royal Veterinary College in London explained that the eggs of the Guillemot are self-cleaning. He noticed after a spill in the lab, that water formed droplets on the surface of the eggs, and later electron microscopy revealed that they have tiny cone-shaped structures on the surface that make it hydrophobic. These cone-like structures were absent in the eggs of other sea-birds living in similar habitats.

When drops of water are shed from the surface, they take dirt with them. He believes that the ensuing cleanliness also

facilitates the passage of oxygen and carbon-dioxide through the shell.

Guillemots are members of the auk family and gather in large colonies around the coast of the UK. They nest on the sheer face of sea-cliffs, depositing their eggs on any flattish surface without bothering with a nest. The eggs are exceptionally conical, so that when they roll, they do so in a tight circle, and so avoid rolling off into the sea.

Reported on BBC Nature News on 5 July 2013.

Download latest "Tattler"

<<http://www.awsg.org.au/tattler/Tattler-29.pdf>>

European birds adjust their flight initiation distance to road speed limits

Pierre Legagneux and Simon Ducatez

Abstract:

Behavioural responses can help species persist in habitats modified by humans. Roads and traffic greatly affect animals' mortality not only through habitat structure modifications but also through direct mortality owing to collisions. Although species are known to differ in their sensitivity to the risk of collision, whether individuals can change their behaviour in response to this is still unknown. Here, we tested whether common European birds changed their flight initiation distances (FIDs) in response to vehicles according to road speed limit (a known factor affecting killing rates on roads) and vehicle speed. We found that FID increased with speed limit, although vehicle speed had no effect. This suggests that birds adjust their flight distance to speed limit, which may reduce collision risks and decrease mortality maximizing the time allocated to foraging behaviours. Mobility and territory size are likely to affect an individuals' ability to respond adaptively to local speed limits.

Biology Letters, DOI: [10.1098/rsbl.2013.0417](https://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2013.0417)

Migration routes sometimes learned

Mueller T., et al (2013). **Social Learning of Migratory Performance**, *Science*, **341** (6149) 999-1002. doi:10.1126/science.1237139

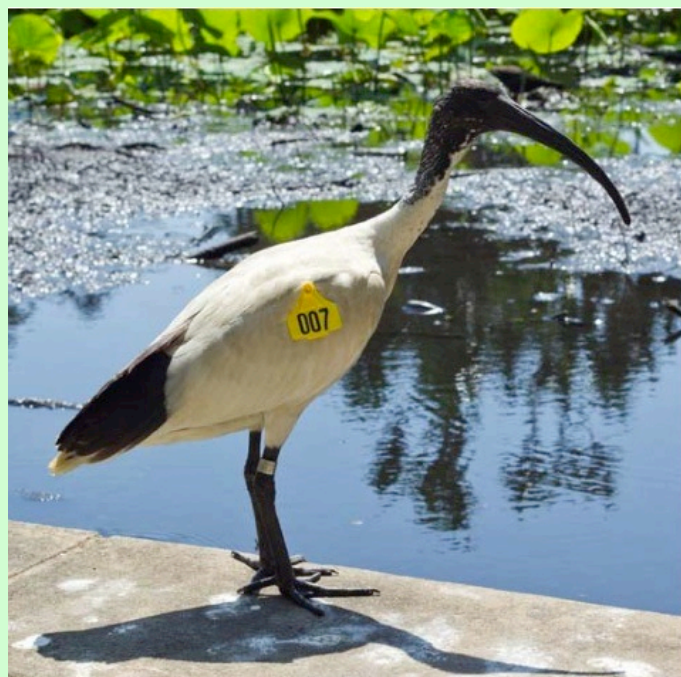
Abstract:

Successful bird migration can depend on individual learning, social learning, and innate navigation programs. Using 8 years of data on migrating whooping cranes, we were able to partition genetic and socially learned aspects of migration. Specifically, we analyzed data from a reintroduced population wherein all birds were captive bred and artificially trained by ultralight aircraft on their first lifetime migration. For subsequent migrations, in which birds fly individually or in groups but without ultralight escort, we found evidence of long-term social learning, but no effect of genetic relatedness on migratory performance. Social learning from older birds reduced deviations from a straight-line path, with 7 years of experience yielding a 38% improvement in migratory accuracy.

White Ibis Survey

Sunday 20th October 2013

Anywhere in Australia



The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is conducting its annual White Ibis survey to get a better understanding of the distribution and abundance of this bird in NSW. This year we are requesting participation from across Australia.

The survey has been running since 2003 and the information collected has assisted considerably with our knowledge of these distinctive birds.

Increasingly Ibis are moving into urban environments bringing them into conflict with humans e.g. affecting aircraft safety, water quality and biodiversity.

To participate, simply report the number of Ibis you see via the below website. Reports within a week of the 20th are accepted. Additional information such as breeding, the number of nests or wingtags (pictured above) is greatly appreciated.

<www.environment.nsw.gov.au/surveys/WhiteIbisSightingForm.htm>

Welcome Swallow Nesting

As part of my university ecology studies, we're attempting to monitor some Welcome Swallow nests around Sydney.

While it is likely that few swallows have started nesting, past year nest locations could still be useful as swallows often reuse nests or nest sites. Therefore, if anyone knows the sites of any swallow nests (past or present) in Sydney, hearing about them would be much appreciated!

Ashwin Rudder

<noisypitta@gmail.com>

15 New Species of Amazonian Birds!

An international team of researchers coordinated by ornithologist Bret Whitney of the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science, or LSUMNS, recently published 15 species of birds previously unknown to science. The formal description of these birds has been printed in a special volume of the "Handbook of the Birds of the World" series. Not since 1871 have so many new species of birds been introduced under a single cover, and all 15 discoveries involve a current or former LSU researcher or student.

"Birds are, far and away, the best-known group of vertebrates, so describing a large number of uncataloged species of birds in this day and age is unexpected, to say the least," said Whitney. "But what's so exciting about this presentation of 15 new species from the Amazon all at once is, first, highlighting how little we really know about species diversity in Amazonia, and second, showing how technological advances have given us new toolsets for discovering and comparing naturally occurring, cohesive ('monophyletic') populations with other, closely related populations."

Full report at: <https://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/lsuresearch/2013/08/28/l-su-research-responsible-for-naming-15-new-species-of-amazonian-birds/>

Shorebird flag sightings

The plotting of migration routes and important staging areas for migratory shorebirds took a quantum leap with the instigation of coloured leg flags and more recently with individually identifiable alphanumeric engraved flags allowing the site of flagging and date to be identified.

This system only works if observers report the sightings of the flags and they in turn are informed about the details of the bird.... The immediate response is the key to the success of the project, encouraging observers to send in every observation and learn about where the bird comes from. By far the most efficient flagging database has been that maintained by Heather Gibbs on behalf of the AWSG - more efficient than any banding scheme reporting system run by government or NGOs around the globe. The sudden and unexpected death of Heather last November left many of us in the AWSG saddened and in a state of disbelief, and of course the collapse of the system.

Fortunately for us all, and the birds, Roger Standen has taken on ... the flagging database and is catching up with a backlog of flag sighting reports. These events have led us to streamline the reporting process with a dedicated email address for all sightings of colour flags <flagging@aws.org.au>.

Phil Straw <philip.straw@aws.org.au>

From the AWSG Report to BIGnet meeting in June.

Grass-wrens

Christidis, L., F. E. Rheindt, W. E. Boles & J. A. Norman, 2013. A re-appraisal of species diversity within the Australian grasswrens *Amytornis* (*Aves: Maluridae*). *Austral. Zoologist* 36 (4): in press

Abstract: The Australian grasswrens (*Amytornis*) comprise a genus of cryptically plumaged species inhabiting the arid regions of southern, western, central, and northern Australia. Isolated, fragmented populations characterise the distributional pattern of several species, whereas others appear to show ecophenotypic clinal variation in plumage patterns. These features have made the species-level taxonomy of the genus a matter of ongoing debate. We undertook qualitative considerations of morphological, biogeographical and ecological features in combination with quantitative DNA distance measures from published studies, to provide a comprehensive species level revision of *Amytornis*. In addition to the ten species recognised by Schodde and Mason (1999) (*housei*, *textilis*, *goyderi*, *burnelli*, *ballarae*, *merrotsyi*, *woodwardi*, *dorotheae*, *striatus*, *barbatus*), we also recognise as species the following: *modestus*, *rowleyi*, *oweni* and *whitei*. These fourteen species are placed into four subgenera: *Amytornis*, *Magnamytis*, *Maluropsis* and *Cryptamytis* subgen. nov. The latter subgenus is erected for *A. merrotsyi*. The potential impacts that this new taxonomy will have on the conservation status of the various taxa are canvassed.

Grey Falcons

You would be aware that I conduct an ongoing study on the Grey Falcon (since 2003). I would like to ask people to please not publish sites where the species has been seen or found roosting or nesting. PLEASE.

In regards to publishing sites of rare falcons, be aware of the following recent paper. The title says it all: Booms, T.L. 2012. **Banded Alaskan Gyrfalcons discovered in Arabian Falconry.** *Journal of Raptor Research* 46(2)

The find gives food for thought. Our Grey Falcon has an estimated population size of about 1000 individuals, making it one of the 5 rarest falcon species of the world. I suggest to disclose sites of sightings, roosts and nests only to trusted contacts. It will be fine to write e.g. 'Grey Falcon seen on our trip through the Northern Territory', but don't reveal the precise location and other details such as regular roost because such information may lead to nest sites.

Please do continue to send reports to me: the study is plagued by chronic data deficiency and I have no chance without the kind help of people reporting their sightings. I keep all information confidential. Please check out the project's website for further information and publications.

Jonny Schoenjahn
<jonnybird@bigpond.com>

T: (08) 9385 9939

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