



NEWSLETTER

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Contents

Editorial	2
President's report to AGM	2
Corella Editor's Report to AGM	3
Treasurer's Report to AGM.....	4
Summary of the Accounts.....	4
Committee Election Results	4
25 th International Ornithological Congress	6
COG Bird Notes now on line.....	6
Travelling Stock Routes: volunteers needed...7	

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following people to membership of the Association:

Ms Josephine Dessmann of Kensington NSW
Dr Nina Svedin of Epping NSW
Ms Hazel Watson of Hillsdale NSW
Ms Jolene Scoble of Flinders Park SA

BEQUESTS

Have you thought of making a bequest to ABSA in your will? There are many ways to make a bequest of any size, that will help ABSA in its work. If you wish to know more, please see the website page <www.absa.asn.au/bequests> or contact the President: <info@absa.asn.au> or by phone 02 9670 1413, or write to: PO Box A313, Sydney, NSW 1235

From the President

Well, we managed to complete the AGM, despite the drama of yours truly being taken off to hospital halfway through the meeting with an unstoppable nosebleed! Ah! The strains of presidency!! Thank you to those members who helped make a quorum for this meeting. Following on from the discussions held after the first AGM, the people present spent some time debating and developing further the issues and ideas raised in the Draft Strategic Plan.

Members are reminded that the closing date for applications for research funding is 31 October.

Later in this issue is a rundown on a PhD project by Pia Lentini from ANU on the use made by birds of the Travelling Stock Routes in NSW, which are under threat of disposal to graziers etc. Members are urged to participate in this important project, especially if they live near any of the actual survey sites.

Stein Boddington

ABSA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Association's Annual General Meeting was held on 8th August, at Macquarie University. The following reports were presented to the meeting:

President's Report

I thank you all for coming to this AGM, and we apologise for the omission of the usual day of lectures, and assure you that they will be back next year. We did attempt to have one, but were unable to gain the services of crucial speakers, and ran out of time to re-organise.

We also encourage you to stay for the planning session to be held at the conclusion of this AGM. We will spend an hour listening to your ideas, suggestions, hopes and fears concerning the future of ABSA – because it is YOUR organisation.

Those ideas will be taken to a committee session this afternoon, where we hope they will be distilled into a program of action that will guide the committee over the coming months, or even years.

As for the past year, we report another year of quiet achievement. Corella continues to flourish, and we foresee the more common use of colour photos, and single topic editions in the future, after the experiments of the last two years.

We are also proud to have put out the CD of all the Seabird Island Series of papers, so capably assembled by John Farrell and his team. It is fitting that this happened in the year of Durno Murray's death. Durno was in at the beginning of the Association, and held executive office, including that of editor, for many years. It was he who saw the need for this separate series of papers and started the ball rolling many years ago.

This has been a sad year for ABSA, as we noted the passing of four members or former members in the last six months – Durno, Allen Keast, Ian Rowley and Richard Zann. Each in his own way made a substantial contribution to Australian ornithology.

In a way, these deaths reflect one of the basic problems that ABSA faces, that of an ageing membership, with no large influx of younger people joining. But I will leave discussion of this sort of question to the later session.

ABSA continues to support the Bill Lane Award to the outstanding student in ornithology at Charles Sturt University, and also a prize at the Australasian Ornithological Conference, for the best poster by a student. That occurs again this year, in late November / December in Armidale. We are also looking for ways to honour the late Durno Murray, who made such a huge contribution to the genesis and development of ABSA.

Committee meetings have been problematic in the past year, with a quorum difficult to come by at times. The addition of one or two more Sydney members to the committee would help enormously, without dulling the national focus of the organisation. So I extend the invitation to all members present to put their hand up for a spot on the committee. We meet quarterly on a Saturday for 4 or 5 hours, at a venue chosen to be most convenient for those coming – often here at Macquarie, or at Olympic Park.

It reflects the strain that running the organisation puts on volunteer members that I also have to renew my plea for a person to take over the running of the Mist Net Service. Don Ripper has kept this going, even through the dark days of the Victorian fire crises. But he has flagged for some time now the need to pass this on to someone else. Please, if you know of someone who might be interested, pass their contact details on to Don.

Lastly, I wish to thank the Committee members who have given their time and energy in running the Association, particularly during my extended absence overseas last year. I single out John Farrell for keeping on top of the toughest job, editor of *Corella*, and for getting the Seabird Island CD to fruition. In the background, a whole team of editorial assistants plough through paper after paper, and Alan Leishman brings it all together as production editor. Special mention also goes to Peter Ewin, who not only compiles the index of *Corella*, but manages the membership database of the organisation. Thank you all.

Stein Boddington
President

Editor of *Corella*'s Report

In 2008 we again published a large range of papers covering a plethora of topics on Australian avian fauna, including several book reviews. It was pleasing to see the release of our Seabird Island Series CD, which will be a great resource for all those studying seabirds and those in management roles. I thank both the late Durno Murray and Geoff Smith for their efforts in seeing this project to its conclusion.

In 2007 we dedicated a special issue to the iconic Wedge-tailed Eagle. This year we are looking at producing another special issue - this time on the White-bellied Sea-Eagle. I thank Stephen Debus again for his work in tracking down and preparing papers for this issue. I once again would encourage supervisors of honours, masters and PhD candidates to think about getting their students to publish in *Corella*. It is an ideal venue!

The number of manuscripts continues to rise and we now have a working backlog of papers ready for publication.

Our printer, after a few teething problems, continues to do an admirable job especially with Tables and coloured photographs and we are now looking at further upgrading the quality of *Corella*.

I would like to again thank all those people who have worked behind the scenes:

- a) our sub-editors: Durno Murray, Geoff Smith, Peter Fullagar, and particularly Peter & Judy Smith and Stuart Halse who handle most of the manuscripts submitted.
- b) Alan Leishman for supervising the final production of *Corella* and for continuing with the compilation of Recovery Round-up.
- c) Peter Ewin for compiling the volume index.

It has been a pleasure working with sub-editors and authors in the publication of *Corella*. Our journal continues to fill an essential niche in disseminating knowledge of Australian avian fauna.

John Farrell
Editor
Corella

Treasurer's Report

Notes on the Audited Accounts by the President, on behalf of the Treasurer

I present these notes as the Treasurer has only just taken on the job, and also only just returned from overseas last night, and is justifiably excused from the meeting.

There is one slight distortion in the Accounts, in that \$6648 had not been transferred to the Research Fund from the General Fund as at the end of the financial year. Thus, the Association itself made a small loss (\$2170) for the year.

It is indeed fortunate that the savings associated with the reduction to three issues of *Corella*, and the change of printers, came into full force this year, or that loss would have been much greater. As a consequence, we face the unpleasant prospect of a possible subscription increase next year.

Nevertheless, the Association is still in a sound financial position, with a transfer from the Mist Net Service more than offsetting any equivalent loss that may occur in the current financial year.

Please also note that the cost of postage of *Corella* and Newsletter has not dropped from last year as much as is indicated, some of those costs being included in the printing accounts, and only \$471 in a separate account.

Of course, the balance between costs and income is part of the debate about boosting the quality of Corella and Newsletter production eg. with colour photographs, better paper etc. But if necessary, the Association can afford to sustain a few losses while we strive to get that balance right.

The Research Fund now shows the substantial boost of the Twitchathon money, and the benefits of the extra income so generated will start to flow through in the next round of grants.

Stein Boddington
on behalf of Annette Cam

Summary of the Audited Accounts

General Fund:

Income:

Avian Research Fund	\$ 6,648
Other Income	<u>\$16,170</u>
TOTAL	\$22,818

Expenses:

Printing and Postage	\$15,699
Other	<u>\$ 2,641</u>
TOTAL	\$18,340

Net Profit: \$4,478*

*Note that after Research funds have been transferred, this represents a loss of \$2170.

Election of the Committee

The following people were elected to the Committee of the Association at the AGM on 8 Aug 2009:

President:	Stein Boddington	Vice President:	Vacant
Secretary:	Graham Fry	Treasurer:	Annette Cam
Editor of Corella:	John Farrell	Past President:	Graham Fry

Ordinary Members: **Alan Lill, Don Ripper, Stephen Debus, Chris Lloyd**

Hydrogen Isotope Analysis Identifies Plane Crash Culprits

Members will remember the crash of a US Airways flight into the Hudson River in New York earlier this year, after the failure of its engines due to a bird strike.

Scientists working with a database held at the Smithsonian Institute's Feather Identification Lab (see <http://www.mnh.si.edu/highlight/feathers/>) have analysed feather and tissue samples recovered from the plane's engines and identified the birds involved as Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*), a familiar bird right across North America.

Given that the Canada Goose varies considerably across its range (some are big, some are small) and habits (some are migratory and some are not), further analysis was done to determine the origin of the birds involved in the collision. They used hydrogen isotope levels for which there are good data from around North America – in essence, a map of how hydrogen isotope ratios vary from place to place.

The raw materials (food and water containing hydrogen) used for feather production after moult are local, and reflect the isotope ratios of the breeding grounds of the bird. In this case, the birds were determined to have come from Labrador in Canada.

This information allows airport managers to properly manage the threat to planes from these birds, knowing that they are migratory, and not the local, resident population.

(Based on an article by Gregory Gough [June 2009] on the website of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Centre <<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds>>)

25th International Ornithological Congress

Campos do Jordão, Brazil
22 - 28 August 2010

A welcome message and an invitation from the Congress President

Greetings to Ornithologists from around the world.

It is with great pleasure that I invite you to attend the XXV International Ornithological Congress to be held in Campos do Jordão, Brazil, from August 22 – 28, 2010. This will be the first International Ornithological Congress to be held in Latin America. In this age of rapid global change and loss of biodiversity, scientists from all continents will discuss basic research, conservation and educational issues that are critical now and for the future.

An important event of the congress will be the initiation of an International Ornithologist's Union. At the XXIV International Ornithological Congress in Hamburg in 2006, the International Ornithological Committee voted to approve formation of the Union to promote international collaboration in ornithological research, education and outreach. This has been achieved and the Union has new statutes and has been incorporated as an organization to provide continuity between congresses. The framework for the Union will be open for discussion by the International Ornithological Committee and by individual delegates to the congress.

The Scientific Program Committee has assembled an outstanding roster of ten plenary speakers and forty eight symposia. Contributed papers and posters are now invited, and round table discussions are encouraged to promote discussion of ornithological issues from education to research, international collaborations, conservation etc.

Pre- and post-congress tours are being planned to the major biological regions of the neotropics, as well as cultural tours exploring the rich traditions of the Brazilian people.

The venue of the congress, Campos do Jordão is a small town in the Atlantic mountains between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The conference centre is surrounded by hotels and many small cafes and restaurants where delegates can meet at lunch and in the evening. Stands of Atlantic forest can be found within the town and the surrounding area with outstanding opportunities for hiking and bird watching.

Full information will be found on the IOC's webpage:
<www.i-o-c.org> OR <www.acquaviva.com.br/ioc2010>

John C. Wingfield
President

CANBERRA BIRD NOTES ON LINE

Members are informed that the complete set of “Canberra Bird Notes”, published since 1968 by the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG), is now freely available on line. This is a wonderful effort by COG, and gives members and non-members alike access to some 5,100 pages of illuminating bird notes, stories, research and information.

Go to: <cbn.canberrabirds.org.au>

Does the New South Wales Travelling Stock Route network provide connectivity to native woodland birds during migration?

Pia Lentini PhD Scholar The Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia Page Email: <pia.lentini@anu.edu.au> Phone: 02 6125 4196

BACKGROUND

Since European settlement, the ‘wheat-sheep belt’ of New South Wales has been cleared extensively of its original woodland and grassland systems to allow for the establishment of agricultural production. These systems once provided essential habitat for many declining woodland bird species as well as other vulnerable taxa, which are now limited to what little vegetation has been left.

Travelling Stock Routes (TSRs) are corridors of vegetation gazetted to facilitate the droving of stock to markets and other pastures. Unlike the lands which form the NSW protected area estate, many TSRs traverse low-lying and productive areas and comprise several threatened ecological communities which are poorly represented in the protected area system. Although the network initially comprised 2 million ha, it is believed that because of the encroachment of adjacent properties, excessive grazing pressure, or inadequate funding to allow for appropriate management, it has now been reduced to 600,000 ha.

Until recently, TSRs in NSW have been managed by Rural Land Protection Boards, which managed them for both agricultural and conservation purposes. However, a 2008 review recommended that the network be handed over to the NSW Department of Lands, which could increase the likelihood that portions of ‘lesser conservation value’ will be sold or leased to local landholders. This would simplify the habitat and remove important understorey and perennial ground-layer species as a result of long-term permanent grazing, or set-stocking.

The key argument against this ‘cherry picking’ of sections is that the whole network is more valuable than the sum of its parts. One key reason for this is that the network as a whole provides vital connectivity to allow species migration and dispersal. The latter will become increasingly important as climate change drives species out of their historical ranges. Should the network be

slowly picked at and become disjointed, its overall connectivity value could become seriously compromised.

AIM

This project aims to determine whether native woodland birds preferentially use the TSR network, as opposed to the surrounding cleared agricultural lands, during the spring migration. It has been suggested by experienced ornithologists that this is the case, however to date no hard evidence is available.

Should it be demonstrated that the network does indeed play a key role in providing connectivity, this will prove the benefits of retaining and restoring the TSR network, and protecting habitat for threatened woodland birds in the wheat-sheep belt on the western slopes of NSW. Given the insecure future of the TSR network, this work will deliver timely scientific input of great practical relevance.

(continued next page)

PROPOSED FULL PROJECT DESIGN

The project will take place across four weeks in Sept/Oct 2010, during the peak spring migration period. 30 sites, 3km² each, will be identified across the central wheat-sheep belt of NSW. Sites will be arranged in 5×6 grid across NSW, with five sites located roughly at the same latitude for six latitudes. Within each of these sites, four sample points will be located within one of four landscape elements: a TSR, a remnant patch of vegetation, a scattered paddock tree, and a paddock. Thus, a total of 120 sample points will be identified, and therefore 120 volunteers will be required

Volunteers are needed to conduct surveys once a day, at some time during the three hours following dawn, over a four-week period. Survey protocols will follow those of the Bird Atlas (i.e. a 20 minute search of a 2 ha area, recording all birds seen and heard). Different volunteers will rotate between the four landscape elements within the same site so as to not cause any observer bias.

More importantly, the dataset could test whether there are a more birds moving through the TSRs than other landscape elements during migration. The data could, of course, also be use to compare movements of migrating vs. sedentary species, or vulnerable specialists vs. invasive generalists, and so on. Evidence such as this would clearly demonstrate the value of TSRs for connectivity, and support the argument that they should be protected and restored, rather than separated into 'high conservation value' and 'low conservation value' areas and subjected to set stocking.

PILOT STUDY

This is not a simple project, with a range of obstacles to overcome, and in recognition of these obstacles a pilot study will be conducted in September-October 2009. The pilot study will determine if the experimental design works, and also if the data obtained follows the expected trends. This study will take place across four weeks, with only one site at each latitude being sampled, and volunteers required to conduct surveys four days a week only.

What is required from each volunteer?

Volunteers are needed to conduct a total of sixteen 20-minute 2 hectare searches, in the three hours following dawn on the Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday mornings of the weeks beginning 16, 23, 30 Sept and 7 Oct. Study sites will be located around the towns of Wagga,

Temora, Grenfell, Parkes, Dubbo, Coonabarabran, Narrabri and Moree. Around each of these, a TSR, paddock, patch of remnant vegetation and scattered tree area will be selected as study points, and volunteers will rotate around these. So for each of the study weeks, each volunteer will survey each of these study points once.

It is intended that the results of the full study will be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal, which will require that the above issues are addressed before the paper can be accepted

CONCLUSION

Although large-scale studies such as this are difficult to coordinate, I have no doubt that the positive outcomes of this project for the conservation of woodland birds would be nationally significant and your commitment as a volunteer would be very rewarding. The experimental design outlined above has been developed in consultation with several academics at ANU who have considerable experience in landscape-scale ornithological projects, including my supervisor Dr. Joern Fischer, Dr. Penny Olsen, and Emeritus Professor Henry Nix. All have advised that although logistically complex, the project is achievable, and if successful would make a significant contribution to our understanding of both bird movement and conservation, and the value of TSRs. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, and feel free to circulate this brief to others who may be interested in getting involved. I would like to reiterate that the participation of volunteers in this project is invaluable, and I look forward to working with everyone in the coming months.