

NEWSLETTER No. 98

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NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following people to membership of the Association:

Mr. Simon Robinson, of Bundanoon NSW

Ms. Jolene Scoble of Flinders Park SA

Dr. Nina Svedin of Epping NSW

Ms. Hazel Watson of Hillsdale NSW

EDITORIAL

Now that the AGM is out of the way, we can start to concentrate on the future of this Association. We are aware of the tentative moves within other organisations to amalgamate, in the face of financial difficulties. I wish to reassure members that there are no such moves within ABSA, which looks to a long future as an independent organisation.

We will, however, look at any proposal that might swell our membership base, or our print volumes on Corella and the Newsletter. It is unfortunate that our print run is on the cusp of being too small for large-scale, and too large for small-scale printing methods.

We may be near to finding a way to allow payment of subscriptions and conference registrations online. This will be a convenience for members, and take a huge load off the Treasurer.

The suggestion was made at the AGM that older volumes of Corella be made available in digital format. We will look at the feasibility of this, knowing how it would advantage anyone searching the literature. The easier it is for Corella to be accessed, the more likely we are to be cited in papers, and citing is the currency of the scientific economy.

We are on the lookout for a volunteer bookkeeper for the Association. We believe this would be one way of lightening the load on the Treasurer. If anyone is, or knows of someone who might do this job, please contact me at [<info AT absa DOT asn DOT au>](mailto:info@absa.asn.au).

Stein Boddington

SCIENTIFIC DAY 2010

About 38 people attended the Scientific Day, and heard an illuminating set of lectures on DNA - how it works, how it is useful to bird research, and how it may help us in the future. A big thankyou to John Farrell and Graham Fry for organising the event; to Ros Farrell for catering; to BASNA volunteers for opening the Discovery Centre for us; to Pixie Maloney and Judy Harrington for advice and support; and all the others who lent a hand.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sixteen people attended the AGM, and the following reports were presented:

President's Report

Thank you all for attending this AGM. I welcome those non-members here, and someone will twist your arm later to fill out a membership form. The year under report is a short one, as we ended up holding a delayed AGM in only August last year. In that time, the Association has carried on its business as normal, producing Corella and the Newsletter.

I thank John Farrell for the design work done on the Newsletter format, and we hope to see it bedded down in 2010. Likewise, the appearance of Corella has improved, with better quality paper, and the more liberal use of colour. John will also report later that the flow of papers gives us great confidence in the future of the journal.

We were saddened by the death last year of Durno Murray, an original and founding member of the Association, who continued his work for us right up until his death. Committee has decided to commemorate his contribution to Australian ornithology by instituting an annual prize for the best paper published in Corella. We are in the process of developing guidelines for the awarding of the prize, and it will most likely consist of a cash prize and a subscription.

Members are reminded that we award two other prizes - for the best student poster at the biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference, and each year the outstanding student in ornithology at Charles Sturt University receives the Bill Lane Award.

Our attempt at formulating a strategic plan continues. Some of the items have already been acted upon - the improvements to Corella and the newsletter. We are starting to join with BASNA in organising a series of training courses that will allow people to step up a level from merely birdwatching, to learn field skills, surveying skills, bird handling skills, and maybe one day even doing bander training and taking on a project themselves. Current plans are for five such courses to be held this year. We believe this is the most productive step we can take to address the slow drop off in numbers of banders.

Some of the other ideas discussed may take some time to unfold.

I welcome the nomination of two new members to the committee - after several years of pleading. We hope that this will see the end of the quorum problems we have suffered lately.

Those problems may also be allayed when the new regulations governing Incorporation come into effect later this year. We will then be able to legally explore the use of technology in the conduct of meetings, the taking of votes etc. Eventually the new rules will require constitutional amendments, which you can anticipate at the next AGM.

I am pleased to announce that, after many years of searching, we have found a new Manager for the Mist Net Service. He will be taking over in the next few months, and we beg your forgiveness if there are a few hiccups during the transition. Don and Jude Ripper have

provided a professional and efficient service for many years, and we are indebted to them for their tireless work. Not only did they run the Mist Net Service, but they also held the archives of the Association, and stored and distributed the back copies of Corella.

I want to finish by thanking ALL the people who contribute to the running of the association. They give their time freely so that you get your Corella and Newsletter, so that events such as today happen, and so that the scientific integrity and reputation of Corella and the Association is maintained and enhanced.

Just to give you an idea, I am going to list the names: John Farrell, Graham Fry, Annette Cam, Chris Lloyd, Alan Lill, Don and Jude Ripper, Peter and Judy Smith, Peter Ewin, Alan Leishman, Stephen Debus, Stuart Halse, Peter Fullagar, Geoff Smith, That's fifteen people whose volunteer efforts sustain the Association. And one last one, who has so far gone unacknowledged - my step-daughter Erin, who has Down Syndrome. Erin loves putting stickers on anything, and I shamelessly use this to our advantage when the labels for Corella envelopes arrive, and she spends an evening sticking them on. She has cheerfully done this job for over ten years now.

I also thank our auditor, Ross Fowler, for doing it on the cheap for us, and the auditor in Sale, Robert Cherry for the many pro bono audits of the Mist Net Service he has done whilst it was located there. With the Mist Net Service moving to the Blue Mountains area, we would love to identify someone who could do the audit for both arms of ABSA pro bono. Please let me know if you have any ideas.

Without all these people, the Association would do nothing. If you wish to join them, talk to any member of the Committee, and we will find something for you to do.

Stein Boddington President

Editor of Corella's Report

In 2009 we again published a large range of papers covering a variety of topics on Australian birds, including several book reviews. In 2007 and 2009 we dedicated special issues to the iconic Wedge-tailed Eagle and the White-bellied Sea-Eagle, respectively. I thank Stephen Debus again for his inspiration and work in tracking down and preparing papers for these issues. We are now looking at producing another special issue – this time on rare raptors. I once again would encourage supervisors of honours, masters and PhDs (and candidates themselves) to think about getting their research published 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 and again will be able to publish 4 issues this year. This is in contrast to a few years ago when we were down to only 3 issues per year.

In conjunction with our printer we have changed the paper used for printing Corella to a glossy finish. This has enabled us to produce more vibrant colour photos and graphs and thus make our journal a much more interesting read.

I would like to again thank all those people who have worked behind the scenes: our sub-editors, Geoff Smith, Peter Fullagar, and particularly Peter and Judy Smith, and Stuart Halse who handle most of the manuscripts submitted and Peter Ewin for compiling the volume index.

A special thanks must go to Alan Leishman for supervising the final production of Corella (a very time consuming job) and for continuing to work with the Bird and Bat Banding Scheme in

the compilation of Recovery Round-up.

As I mentioned last year, 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

The Treasurer gave a brief spoken report, in which she mentioned that the Association's income from subscriptions has been slowly declining, but that generally the accounts show the Association to be in a healthy position for the time being.

Audited Accounts (Summary)

General Fund:

Income: \$18,448.87

Expenditure: \$16,609.78

NET SURPLUS \$ 1,839.09

Research Fund:

Interest received: \$ 3,885.02

Expenditure: -

NET SURPLUS: \$ 3,885.02

Mist Net Service Report: Report not available

AUSTRALIAN BIRDFAIR

This annual Australian Birdfair will once again be held in Leeton, NSW on 17-19th September 2010.

The event will include Birdwatching, optics, art and cultural events, photography, seminars, lectures, ecotourism and of course, birdwatching tours of the region, including Binya State Forrest, Fivebough Wetlands and Oolambeyan National Park.

Details on <www.australianbirdfair.org.au>

HOW DO AUSTRALIANS VALUE BIRDS?

Can you help us find out?

We are looking for a volunteer to help measure the various wildlife values people place on different species of native Australian birds, for example: consumptive (e.g. hunting, shooting) or non-consumptive (recreational, scientific, symbolic, aesthetic, artistic, cultural and religious). Other people use the terms intrinsic (value in their own right) or extrinsic (value for human purposes). Yet other terms relate to use, non-use, option, bequest or existence values.

We have a number of small projects looking at ways some of these values are expressed and how they might be measured. One example is to identify which bird species appear on stamps, street signs and in figures of speech.

If you are good at tracking down information, want to learn more about birds and society and have about a week or more to spare in March (flexible hours) then please contact:

Gill Ainsworth at the School for Environmental Research, Charles Darwin University, Darwin; email: <gill DOT ainsworth AT cdu DOT edu DOT au> phone: 08 8946 6413.

Find out more about the Social Values of Australian Threatened Birds project: <<http://www.cdu.edu.au/ser/profiles/GillAinsworthProfile.htm>>

WORLD'S RAREST BIRDS PHOTO COMPETITION

The new photo competition is now online at <<http://www.theworldsrarestbirds.com>> with plenty of exciting prizes to be won. Photos of 623 species, all presented in a list on the website, are eligible to take part in the competition and many will be used in The World's Rarest Birds which will be published in the first half of 2011. Published photographers do of course receive a free copy of the book and can buy more copies at a discounted price. The submitted photographs will play an important role in increasing awareness for these rarest birds of the world.

The World's Rarest Birds has evolved from Rare Birds Yearbook and will be produced by WILDGuides, a not-for-profit publisher and, as with Rare Birds Yearbook, proceeds from sales will be donated to BirdLife International's Preventing Extinctions Programme. The facelift will see the publication becoming a hardback and expanded to cover the 362 species categorised as Endangered as well as the world's 192 Critically Endangered species.

If you are on Facebook, please join the group Critically Endangered birds and/or become a fan The World's Rarest Birds. For more information on The World's Rarest Birds, please contact me at:

<editor@theworldsrarest.com>

Erik Hirschfeld Editor, The World's Rarest Birds

BIRDING IN THE WAR ZONE

From information on <<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/publications>> and <<http://www.world-science.net>>

Researchers have braved the wilds of Afghanistan and spats of inter-tribal fighting to confirm the finding of the breeding site for one of the world's least-known birds. The Large-billed Reed Warbler, or *Acrocephalus orinus* was first collected in 1867, in Northern Pakistan (4 specimens). A further collection was made in 1937 near the Wakhan Valley in north-east Afghanistan, but all five specimens were mis-diagnosed.

R.J. Timmins observed the bird in June 2008, and took detailed notes and recordings of its call, but was unable to identify it properly, tentatively assigning it to Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*. Its identity was not revealed until further fieldwork was prompted by a recording forwarded to Lars Svensson in Sweden, who suspected it might be the Large-billed Reed Warbler.

In 2009, A team was sent out by the Wildlife Conservation Society Afghanistan Program (based in New York), and several birds were caught, examined, photographed and sampled, and the identity finally confirmed.

Not enough is known yet about the bird's range and habitat to properly assess its status, but it appears to be threatened by habitat loss as local people gather firewood in wet "scrubby bushland" that it makes its home. The local people fortunately do not hunt or trap passerines.

References:

Svensson L., R.Prys-Jones, P.C.Rasmussen & U.Olsson. (2008) Discovery of ten new specimens of large-billed reed warbler *Acrocephalus orinus*, and new insights into its distributional range. J. Avian Biol. 39: 605–610.

FIRST PHOTOS OF FIJI PETREL

http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/09/fiji_petrel_discovery.html

An expedition to find the Critically Endangered Fiji Petrel *Pseudobulweria macgillivrayi* at sea has been successful, returning with stunning images and new information on one of the world's least-known seabirds. The team included members of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti, the BirdLife Species Guardian for Fiji Petrel.

Known from just one specimen collected in 1855 on Gau Island, Fiji, the Fiji Petrel was lost for the next 130 years. Since 1984 there have been a handful of reports of "grounded" birds that had crashed onto village roofs on Gau. Until now there had been no confirmed sightings of the seabird at sea.

The search for the elusive petrel is described in a paper in the latest Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club. Up to eight individuals were seen over eleven days in an area around 25 nautical miles south of Gau. The species' flight, behaviour and detailed comparison to other species are also described for the first time.

The paper's lead author, Hadoram Shirihai, said: "Finding this bird and capturing such images was a fantastic and exhilarating experience". Fellow expedition member Tony Pym commented, "To see such a little-known bird at such close range was magical."

Finding Fiji Petrel at sea was no accident, combining meticulous planning and luring the seabirds with a specially made food, called "chum". The main ingredients of chum? Fish offal cut into small pieces and mixed with very dense fish oil, to which water was added and then frozen in 10-kg blocks.

Frozen chum blocks persist for up to one-and-a-half hours, creating a pungent and constant oil slick, which attracts petrels from some miles away. On the second day, the first Fiji Petrel appeared, approaching the chum slick from downwind, slowly zigzagging over the slick, and suddenly changing direction to drop onto a small floating morsel.

Fiji Petrel is classified as Critically Endangered, with its perilous status confirmed by this

expedition.

The expedition also gathered valuable distributional information on many other seabird species, including the Endangered Phoenix Petrel *Pterodroma alba* and the Vulnerable Gould's *Pterodroma leucoptera* and Parkinson's Petrels *Procellaria parkinsoni*.

This news is brought to you by the BirdLife Species Champions and the British Birdwatching Fair - official sponsor of the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme