

NEWSLETTER 118

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Editorial

Members may not have noticed that the Association's new website has a Forum, where people can contribute to on-going discussions on a number of subjects. Previous Forums have fizzled out from lack of use/lack of interest. We hope that this time, with an easier format, lively exchanges will be the norm. If something is bugging you, put it up!

The Association's AGM and annual scientific day is upon us - March 14 at Gluepot Station in South Australia. It's not too late for a last-minute plan to visit a fascinating environment, and see a heap of birds.

New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Association:

Alan Pilkington,
Zoe Reynolds,
Matthew Stanton.

Affiliation with BirdLife Australia

The ABSA Management Committee decided to seek affiliation with Birdlife Australia (formerly Birds Australia and BOCA). In January this year, a formal agreement was signed that outlines the terms of the affiliation.

Committee was cognisant of the importance to ABSA members of maintaining the Association's independence, and that is reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding. In reality, the only new obligation on the Association is to appoint a conservation officer, which was done at the last Committee meeting. The MOU encourages co-operation between the two organisations, but does not impinge on ABSA's standing as an independent bird organisation.

The affiliation formalises the developing relationship of co-operation between the two organisations. ABSA already has negotiated use of information and illustrations from the HANZAB series in our "Bird in the Hand" series (2nd Edition) now on the Associations website. Our last two AGMs were held in conjunction with regional sections of Birdlife, resulting in much higher attendance than we otherwise could attract. Likewise this year's AGM and Scientific day is a joint project of ABSA, Birdlife Australia and staff from University of Adelaide.

The MOU will, in due course, be posted on the Association's website.

Corella Contents:

March 2015 - Vol. 39(1)

Papers

A comparative evaluation of transect, point count and two hectare search methods for bird abundance estimates in dry sclerophyll forest and rainforest. S.L. Totterman

The movement and survival of Star Finches *Neochmia ruficauda subclarescens* in the Wyndham Region of Western Australia. J. Lewis and J. Leyrer

Nightly and seasonal patterns of Barking Owl *Ninox connivens* loud calls at one site in Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory, Australia: 1981-82 L. Corbett

Banding Project Report, No. 3:

New Chums Road, Brindabella Ranges, Australian Capital Territory. A. Drew, M. Davies, J. Stol and J. Harsdorf

Book Review:

Australian High Country Raptors G. Clancy

Recovery Round-up.

June 2015 - Vol. 39(2)(advance notice)

Papers:

A survey of outlying populations of the Grey Grasswren *Amytornis barbatus*. A. Black, G. Carpenter, R. Jaensch, L. Pedler and R. Pedler

Dynamics of the waterbird fauna of Peery Lake, arid north-western New South Wales, after flooding. J. Smith and P. Smith

Morphological sexing of Grey-crowned Babblers *Pomatostomus temporalis temporalis*: near enough is not quite good enough. K. T. A. Lambert and C. J. Blackmore

Recovery Round-up.

AOC 2015

The 2015 Australasian Ornithological Conference (AOC) will be held at Flinders University in Adelaide on **25–27 November**, with field trips on 28–29 November. Time to start planning a trip to SA, especially if you didn't go to the ABSA AGM this month!

New BARC Checklist available

The latest BARC Checklist v2015Jan was uploaded on January 31. <<http://www.tonypalliser.com/barc/barc-home.html>> The intention is that the BARC Australian Checklist will be updated every 6 months (in Approximately January and July).

Help with Dune Stabilisation at Eyre

Following on from its successful dune stabilisation course last month, Eyre Bird Observatory is offering half price accommodation and meals for six people for its next dune revegetation course, 10–16 May. Hurry to book your place — call (08) 9039 3450.

Swedish Names for the World's Birds

Andrew Thelander tells us via Birding-Aus:

"I have just read that the Swedes have now finished their official list of Swedish names for all the world's bird species. It is interesting what they have come up with here in Australia. Our treecreepers are (translated) "eucalyptus creepers" and the White-winged chough is the "kidnapper bird". Naturally, currawong becomes kurrawong but chowchilla stays as is. Cuckoo-shrikes are "grey birds" and the Noisy miner is the "noisy honey starling". For many NZ birds, they have settled for the Maori names."

Durno Murray Award

The Durno Murray Award is given annually by the Association to the best paper published in Corella. The Winner of the 2014 award will be announced at the Association's Annual General Meeting at Gluepot Station, South Australia on 14th March.

Durno Murray was a CSIRO scientist who came to bird research late in life, but made a huge contribution. He was one of the founding members of the Association, and instrumental in getting Corella off the ground, editing it himself for some years.

The award consists of a cash amount of \$150, and a year's membership of the Association.

Poisoning Feral Cats

The Western Australian Department of Environment has developed a cat control method using a newly developed bait medium, laced with a poison which is considered to be more humane than the previously used 1080, which attracted criticism for the time it took animals to die. The new poison, called PAPP is described as "sending them to

sleep from which they never wake up". It poses no danger to any animal that might eat the deceased cat carcass.

A combination of kangaroo meat, chicken fat and digest and flavour enhancers was found to be attractive to feral cats. The poison is contained in an encapsulated pellet known as a 'hard shell delivery vehicle'. This method protects non-cat species who chew food first, and discard the hard shell capsule, whereas cats tear the bait into smaller pieces which are then swallowed whole, including the bait.

The bait is called Curiosity®, with intellectual property rights held by the Department of Environment.

Any method that promises to help deal with the carnage inflicted on Australia's native fauna by cats is to be welcomed.

<<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia/feral-cats>>

The S.G.'Bill' Lane Award - 2014

The Bill Lane Award is given each year to the most outstanding student in Charles Sturt University's Graduate Certificate in Ornithology course. The prize consists of a cash award of \$150, and a year's membership of the Association.

The prize is given in memory of 'Bill' Lane, one of the early giants of ornithology in Australia, and a founding member of the Association, and editor of both The Australian Bird Bander and later, Corella. There are still many banders working who were trained under Bill's eagle eye.

The 2014 prize was awarded to Sara Judge, of Kingswood NSW. Congratulations, Sara.

International Dawn Chorus Day

International Dawn Chorus Day 2015 is happening on 3rd May this year.

We have recently launched a new website: <http://www.idcd.info/> which we hope will engage far more people with the event next year. Every year we get well over 100 events registered on our website from all corners of the globe, but we are hoping that 2015 will be the year when we reach an even bigger audience, so I am asking for your help to achieve this.

Please could you forward information about International Dawn Chorus Day to your members/readers and encourage them to organize events to celebrate this very special day.

If you wish, I can send through a story explaining more about what it is for people who are not familiar with IDCD. Please email idcd@bbcwildlife.org.uk if you have any requests for more information, stories about the day, tips on organizing events or anything else and we will respond in the new year.

Joe Peacock
Membership and Communications Officer

Saemangeum - South Korea

This newsletter has previously reported on plans to reclaim the Saemangeum mud flats in South Korea. A 33 kilometre long sea wall will enclose an area of 400 square kilometres for development, with the loss of key coastal tidelands that are a vital stopover for birds travelling the East Asian Flyway, the vast migration route that sees millions of birds move yearly from Siberia, central Asia and Alaska to Australia and the Pacific. A study by Birds Korea and the Australian Wader Studies Group showed a reduction of 137,000 shorebirds, and declines in 19 of the most numerous species between 2006 and 2008. They said that the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the endangered Spotted Greenshank are at particular risk from this development.

The project is proclaimed as an boost for South Korea's economy, but this may well be at the expense of the migratory birds that populate our own shores each summer.

Co-operative Banding Sites

The Co-ordinators of Co-operative Banding Sites are invited to place details of their site (probably not the exact location!!) on the Association's website. We are particularly interested in publicising opportunities for people to undertake training to be banders, and to assist in field studies. Please outline the broad parameters of the project, and any opportunities that exist for training at any level.

Forward information to <info@absa.asn.au>

ABSA Fund for Avian Research Grants

Two applications were received for grants from the FAR in 2015. Both were adjudged to be appropriate, and the following amounts were awarded to:

Zoe Reynolds: \$1200 for assistance in her research which will investigate the role of unburnt patches within fire-scars for the survival and persistence of birds in the fire-prone mallee woodlands of semi-arid south-eastern Australia. To explore this she will address the following specific questions:

- Is the size of the unburnt patch of vegetation within a fire-scar important for bird species richness and abundance?
- Does the quality of an unburnt patch of vegetation within a fire-scar influence which species are found there, and how abundant they are?

Jacqueline Nguyen: \$769 for assistance in her research entitled: A phylogenetic and morphological study of Australasian passerine birds. The aims of the project are to investigate the evolution and origins of passerine birds in Australasia. Specific goals are to:

- Describe and illustrate the skeleton of selected Australasian passerine groups;
- Identify and describe additional fossil passerines from Riversleigh and St Bathans; and
- Assemble a comprehensive dataset of skeletal characters for resolving passerine phylogeny.

ABSA Facebook Page

ABSA now has its own FaceBook Page. Log on and have a look, make a comment, post a picture, but most important, 'like' it! We only have about 42 "likes" so far, which is really a bit sad!

You can click or type in <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Australian-Bird-Study-Association-Inc/1501193146808980?fref=nf>>

or search for "facebook.com Australian Bird Study Association". (Don't try 'ABSA' as there are too many ABSAs.)

Ed.

Feral Cat Kills Night Parrot.

Greg Roberts reports on his blog <<http://sunshinecoastbirds.blogspot.com.au>> that a dead night parrot has been found, predated by a cat. It was found in an area of arid spinifex country south-west of Winton in Queensland, close to where John Young photographed a Night Parrot for the first time in 2013.

Mallee Emu-wren

The Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt has announced funding for 11 projects, each aimed at plants or animals that are at risk of extinction across Australia.

One of those is the Mallee Emu-wren, which is now found only in a small area of north-western Victoria. Because other populations (eg in South Australia) have recently gone extinct, the specie is now extremely vulnerable to stochastic events such as wildfire.

One such fire could lead to the immediate extinction of the bird (as happened to the South Australian population), as they are unable to flee such a fire, and any survivors need spinifex that has been unburnt for 15 years to survive.

Protection against such an event may mean the creation of one or more 'insurance' populations in other locations, perhaps in the area of South Australia where they lived prior to 2014. Other previous habitats in Victoria are also being considered. Current population is sufficient to allow the moving of some birds. If we had waited until the population was in dire straits, then the only option would have been to take some into captivity - a more expensive option, they said.

The Announcement came as a result of the Emergency Summit hosted by Birdlife Australia last year.

Royal Naval Birdwatching Society

Sea bird enthusiasts are advised that the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society journal 'Sea Swallow' Vol. 33 1984 to Vol. 61 2012 is now available free on-line at :- <www.mnbs.org.uk/sea-swallow-archive>



Purple Swamphen Samples needed

The large, flamboyant Purple Swamphens (genus *Porphyrio*) demonstrate extraordinary dispersal capabilities, with evidence of multiple invasions that have resulted in divergences of size, colour, and other traits. Seven species of purple swamphens are currently recognised. Principal among these is the widespread Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), which occurs from Africa and the Mediterranean east to the Pacific. We are exploring the evolution of this bird to better understand the way dispersal and natural selection interact. To do this we are seeking the support of enthusiastic birders. What we need are tissue samples, locality information and where possible photographs to verify plumage colouration.

Feathers or other tissue samples from living or recently killed swamphens (e.g. collision with road vehicle) are best preserved in 95% ethanol. Failing that immediate placement in a domestic freezer in suitable ziplock back of plastic tube will preserve DNA short term while we help organised preservative and shipment. Feathers can be placed in envelopes and allowed to dry but these will need treatment before sending to New Zealand which has strict biosecurity laws.

If you can help, please contact Steve Trewick at Massey University, New Zealand (s.trewick@massey.ac.nz).

World's Largest Volant Bird?

A fossil species of pelagornithid bird exhibits the largest known avian wingspan. Pelagornithids are an extinct group of birds known for bony tooth-like beak projections, large size, and highly modified wing bones that raise many questions about their ecology. At 6.4 m, the wingspan of this species was approximately two times that of the living Royal Albatross. Modelling of flight parameters in this species indicates that it was capable of highly efficient gliding and suggests that pelagornithids exploited a long-range marine soaring strategy similar, in some ways, to that of extant albatrosses. *Pelagornis sandersi* appeared in the Palaeocene, and attained a world-wide distribution before going extinct in the Pliocene.

Abstract

Pelagornithidae is an extinct clade of birds characterised by bizarre tooth-like bony projections of the jaws. Here, the flight capabilities of pelagornithids are explored based on data from a species with the largest reported wingspan among birds. *Pelagornis sandersi* sp. nov. is represented by a skull and substantial post-cranial material. Conservative wingspan estimates (~6.4 m) exceed theoretical maximums based on extant soaring birds. Modelled flight properties indicate that lift:drag ratios and glide ratios for *P. sandersi* were near the upper limit observed in extant birds and suggest that pelagornithids were highly efficient gliders, exploiting a long-range soaring ecology.

Reference: Daniel T. Ksepka (2014) Flight performance of the largest volant bird. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1320297111

European Eagle Owl

Purmerend, a town in Northern Holland, is home to an owl that attacks humans, and is making walking at night a nightmare for residents. The European Eagle owl is one of the largest owl species, and can weigh up to 3Kg. It's wingspan stretches to 1.8m.

Two members of an athletics club out for an evening run were attacked, and one required stitches to five separate head wounds. Workers and residents of a home for people with disability have also been attacked fifteen times. One victim, Niels Verkooijen told Dutch news that his encounter with the bird of prey "was like have a brick laced with nails thrown at your head".

Experts from the Dutch Owl Foundation say that the unusual behaviour may be because the owl may have been reared by humans and then released, and it now associates humans with food, or it may simply be suffering from a hormone imbalance that heightens its territory-defending instincts. Whatever it is, no-one hears the owl coming before its razor-sharp talons strike.