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Newsletter of the Australian Bird Study Association

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## NEWSLETTER 127



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### **Editorial**

Welcome to the re-designed Newsletter. Hope you like it.

This edition also includes a trip report by John Farrell. We hope to bring you more reports from banders this year.

A last minute reminder that the ABSA AGM and Annual Conference is on this coming weekend - 11th March, at ANU in Canberra. Last minute bookings are accepted until Friday, but if you only decide on the day, just turn up; I'm sure someone will take the money from you!

*Stein Boddington*  
Newsletter Editor

### **Corella Contents**

A reminder that there are no longer quarterly editions of Corella. Papers will be uploaded to the website as they are finally approved for publication, and an email sent to all financial members. The Newsletter will continue to be published quarterly.

## Website Review - We want your ideas

Our website was found wanting as a result of the delays in Corella's publication in January. It has some automated features that are both inappropriate, and a tad rude in its email wording. It did not cope with the renewal process during the delay, and it has had continued criticism for its payment procedures.

Committee has decided to review the website, and wants to use this opportunity to upgrade the functionality of the whole site. The members of the Association are the main users of the website, and accordingly, we invite you to critique it for us - tell us what is good, what is bad, what is easy to use and what is not; what is missing, and what should not be there. Tell us your dreams for the best website. We don't promise to do it all, but we will listen carefully to what you say.

Please send your critique to to <info@absa.asn.au>

## ABSA Conference - Program

"Long-term banding studies for monitoring bushland birds – what we've learned and future directions."

11 March 2017

Australian National University, Canberra

08:30-09:00	Registration	
09:00-09:10	Welcome and Introduction	Jeff Hardy
09:10-09:30	Overview of the theme	Tony Hunt
09:30-10:00	Project review – Munghorn Gap, NSW	Graham Fry
10:00-10:30	Project review – Charcoal Tank, NSW	Mark Clayton
10:30-11:00	Morning Tea	
11:30-11:30	Project review – Iluka, NSW	Greg Clancy
11:30-12:00	Project overview – Iron Range, QLD	Jon Coleman
12:00-12:30	Project review – Weddin Mountains, NSW	Richard Allen
12:30-1:30	Lunch	
1:30-2:00	ABBBS	David Drynan
2:00-3:00	Plenary Discussion	All speakers
3:00-3:30	Review and wrap-up	John Farrell
3:30-4:00	Afternoon tea	
4:00-5:00	AGM	Jeff Hardy

## Bird in the Hand Uploads

I have recently uploaded the following new species profile sheets for Bird in the Hand (Second Edition) to the website.

31 December 2016 – 13 new species profile sheets and 4 revisions. Total of 425 species profile sheets in the Bird in the Hand (Second Edition) series have now been published on website [www.absa.asn.au](http://www.absa.asn.au)

### Megapodes

Australian Brush-turkey      Alectura lathami

### Frogmouths & Nightjars

Australian Owlet-nightjar      Aegotheles cristatus

### Diurnal Raptors

Australian Hobby      Falco longipennis

### Waders

Black-fronted Plover      Elseyornis melanops

Red-kneed Dotterel      Erythrogonys cinctus

### Pratincoles

Oriental Pratincole      Glareola maldivarum

**Cockatoos, Parrots & Lorikeets**Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*Australian Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius*

(now all subspecies - former Mallee Ringneck sheet has been deleted)

Varied Lorikeet *Psitteuteles versicolor*Musk Lorikeet *Glossopsitta concinna*Little Lorikeet *Glossopsitta pusilla*Purple-crowned Lorikeet *Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor***Cuckoos**Shining Bronze-Cuckoo *Chalcites lucidus* (Revised)**Babblers**Grey-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis* (Revised)White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus supercilliosus* (Revised)**Whistlers**Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis* (Revised)*Jeff Hardy*

President

**Pesola electronic field balances now available through the Mist Net Service**

While inexpensive electronic balances have been available for quite a while, many banders still use Pesola spring scales for weighing birds. Including me until a few months ago! The main reason seems to be that most electronic balances are much too sensitive for field use, with too much “flutter” of the readings whenever the bird wriggles or whenever the wind blows.

However, I've long been unhappy with spring balances. Even under ideal conditions they can be hard to read with precision and there is often significant variation between operators. They are also frequently affected by wriggling birds and breezes.

However, after a discussion about trying to improve both the accuracy and the precision of weight measurements amongst some banding colleagues, I went in search of a solution and came across the Pesola MS500, a pocket-sized digital unit with a range from 0 to 500g and an accuracy of 0.1g. I ordered one to test it under field conditions and after a few months of using it I can honestly say I don't think I'll ever go back to using spring scales.

The MS500 has a number of features that make it ideal for field use. The hinged case makes it durable for field use and its small size means it fits easily into my banding toolbox. It uses 2 x AAA batteries and has a pair of spare battery slots so you can keep the batteries away from the terminals when not in use, in case they leak. The readout is very stable even in breezy conditions, making it easy to get a reliable reading quickly. And it kept operating even in the baking midday heat of a summer day in western NSW, when another brand being tested in parallel succumbed to the heat.

There are probably many ways to use these balances in the field, but the method I have been using has proven to be simple, quick and seems very effective. I use a light plastic bowl to keep everything on the weighing platform. A takeaway food container would probably be ideal for this. The first step is to put the bird, still in the bag, into the bowl (Figure 1) and then press “Tare”, which zeroes the reading. The bird is then removed from the bag, ready for processing, and the empty bag is immediately put back into the bowl. The readout will now show a negative number (see Figure 2), which is the difference between the bird+bag weight and the weight of the bag alone i.e. the weight of the bird, with no mental arithmetic required, removing yet another source of error!

In the example shown, the bird+bag weighs 23.9g (Figure 1), which is then tared to zero. The display then reads -8.6g when the empty bag alone is weighed (Figure 2), so the bird (a Superb Fairy Wren in this case) weighs 8.6g. Of course, you have to get the bird out and reweigh the empty bag before the “auto off” function kicks in, but this gives several minutes and it hasn't been a problem. So far I've weighed birds ranging from Weebills to Grey Shrike Thrushes without difficulty.

Based on the satisfactory result of these tests, the Mist Net Service is now stocking the Pesola MS500 electronic field balances. This unit allows measurements of birds up to 500g in weight to an accuracy of 0.1g consistent across the whole measurement range. At least three spring balances would be required to cover this range, and the precision would not be anywhere near as

good (0.5 g in the 0-60g range, 1g up to 100g and 5 g up to 500g). The price for ABSA members is \$100, while the non-member price is \$115, a fraction of the cost of the three spring scales required to cover the same range.



Fig 1. Step one - Weighing the bird+bag. My hardback copy of Simpson & Day provides a solid surface to sit the balance on. At this point I press the "Tare" button, which zeroes the readout.



Fig 2. Step 2 – the empty bag is re-weighed. The negative number displayed is the weight of the bird.

### **ABSA Grey Grasswren Project – September 2016**

All was prepared for our third major sojourn into the sand dunes and clay pans of Narriearra Station east of Tibooburra to trap, radio tag and track Grey Grasswrens. Receivers, transmitters, antennae and GPS equipment were all tested and ready to go. Permits were secured from the wild dog patrol officers, National Parks and the Dept. of Agriculture ethics committee, pets were being looked after, vehicles serviced and recovery gear packed away.

Then we got the news that heavy rain had fallen across the region.

Much discussion over telephone and emails ensued: Will we go and chance it? Will we postpone? As some of the members of our team had organised holiday time that couldn't be changed at the last moment it was decided to head out to the north-west of NSW.

Rallying point was the camping ground at Tibooburra as the only trafficable road was from Broken Hill. On arrival we were met with large signs informing us that all other roads leading out of Tibooburra were closed, including the one to Narriearra (the Grey Grasswren property). After a couple of days visiting the accessible tourist sites around Tibooburra, hanging out at the pub and indulging in huge bacon and egg rolls at the general store, the road out was finally open to the turn off to Narriearra and Adelaide Gate so we ventured out to check on the station tracks.



#### ***One bogged vehicle!***

All went comparatively well until we got through the main gate to the property and were presented with an impassible barrier of a combination of mud and water. The winch was put to good use extracting two vehicles that only ventured slightly from the main track and ended up to their axles in the soft goo.



As the clouds slowly dissipated, the wind sprang up and the sun came out so we decided to wait a little while for the track to the Grey Grasswren site to fully dry out. In the mean time we came across an area within the sand dunes and wet clay pans containing some cattle-nibbled old growth, lignum – potential grasswren habitat – that had not been sampled before. The following day we left our camping gear at Tibooburra and headed out to search the new lignum site and do some banding.



***Rainbow Bee-eater***

We were surprised by the variety of species we caught, which included:

Blue Bonnet, Bourke's Parrot, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Rainbow Bee-eater, Variegated Fairy-wren, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Southern Whiteface, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Singing Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Pied Honeyeater, Red-capped Robin, Rufous Whistler, Willie Wagtail, White-winged Triller, Black-faced Woodswallow, Apostlebird, Zebra Finch, and Rufous Songlark.



***Flooded clay pan adjacent to our banding site***

We also scored several species which hadn't been recorded by us on Narriearra previously:

Tawny Frogmouth, Mallee Ringneck, Bourke's Parrot, Mulga Parrot, Brown Honeyeater and Red-browed Pardalote.

Time was now running out for half our team so they decided, reluctantly, to head back home while three couples chanced the weather and camped out on the property and continued banding and waited.

In between checking the track the opportunity to have a general 'look see' around the area was taken. The camp site was surrounded in part by clay

pans which had filled with water and gave an opportunity to observe the marvelous sight of millions of Shield Shrimp taking advantage of this unprecedented rainfall. The camp site was even invaded by several flocks of very inquisitive Emus.

All was going well. The main track was drying out rather quickly and we thought in a day we would be right to head to the Grey Grasswren site then that night it rained. Well actually it poured. The following morning we checked the track and not only was it flooded more than before, the creek had broken its banks and water now covered many low lying stretches.

This was the final blow. There was no way of proceeding north up the track so we also, reluctantly, packed up and headed to Tibooburra. This was by no means a drive in the park as our three vehicles were towing off-road caravans so the going was a little hairy. We stationed the two vehicles with winches, at the front and back of our little convey, so we could pull each other out if necessary.



### ***Our sandy campsite***

When we finally arrived back at Tibooburra, covered in mud, we were informed that more rain was forecast so without further thought, but after another bacon and egg roll, it was Broken Hill at full speed. We were very fortunate as we found out later that if we'd stayed another day we would have been in for a very long forced holiday.

Well the outcome was no Grey Grasswrens but we still have the equipment so we'll give it another go sometime this year and hope for fine weather.



### ***Just one of the millions of Shield Shrimp***

Many thanks to all the team members:

Jeff Hardy, Heather Parsons, Rudy Jacobs, Rebecca Jacobs, Darryl McKay, Tony Hunt, John Farrell, Ros Farrell, Brett Allen and Mark Allen.



### ***The creek we needed to cross in full flood***

## **Yandina Wetlands — Safe at last**

The negotiations have taken months, but Queensland's Unitywater has announced that it has purchased Yandina Wetlands on the Sunshine Coast. The site—a magnet for migratory shorebirds and other wetland birds—was set to be destroyed before BirdLife Southern Queensland stepped up its advocacy to safeguard and restore the site.

Well done, Birdlife Southern Queensland!

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