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Newsletter of the Australian Bird Study Association

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NEWSLETTER 137



Editor: Stein Boddington
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Editorial

As I near the end of my period as Newsletter Editor, I am going to indulge myself, go a bit off-track, as it were.

Saving Lives While Birding

In 1999, my partner and I and another friend went down to Burrinjuck Dam and stayed in a cottage for the weekend. Very nice, high on the hill overlooking the lake, and comfy. It was wintry cold.

On Sunday morning, I was up before everyone else and stood at the front big window looking at the lake with binoculars, to see if I could see any interesting birds. Far, far in the distance, several kilometers away, I saw an unusual shape in the water. It puzzled me. It was right on the limits of vision. I looked at it for a few minutes, trying to work out what it was. One part of the shape seemed to move in position - really only a grey blob and a patch of red.

It slowly dawned on me that the only thing that matched this was an up-turned boat with a person in the water beside it. And they were obviously not able to get back in the boat, as it had already been a few minutes.

I quickly jumped in the car, and headed down to tell someone. The lady at the office directed me to the shore and the park ranger. I raced down there, explained to him - he had a look through the bins but you couldn't see, probably due to curvature of the earth. Anyway, he launched his boat and went off to see. Several minutes later, he radioed for them to call an ambulance, and after a while, he returned with a very, very cold man aboard, barely able to walk. They put him into a car until the ambulance arrived. For some reason, I had to leave at that stage, and returned to the cottage, and we packed up and left for home, calling in at the office on the way. They said that the ambulance had said, of the victim, that if he had been one degree colder, he would have been dead, so my actions clearly saved his life, as it would only have been a few more minutes, and there was no-one else on the lake at that time.

I was pleased, and they said he came from Bowning. If I hadn't been looking for birds, he would be dead.

That's my story, and now I throw open the spot for any interesting bird stories - just send them to info@absa.asn.au

Stein Boddington
Newsletter Editor

ABSA AGM and Conference 2020

A heads-up for next year's conference and AGM - it will probably be at Yarramundi Conference Centre in Western Sydney, and the mooted theme is 'Technology in Bird Studies'.

Malleefowl 'safe haven' now a reality

From *COWRA COMMENTS* - the quarterly newsletter of the Cowra Woodland Birds Program - 20 June 2019

A feral proof fence spanning four kilometres and encapsulating 55 hectares north of Griffith will one day be a safe haven for the threatened Malleefowl. Land Services Officer David Kellett said the fence was erected round prime habitat and all pests within it would be eradicated over the next six months.

There's no doubt feral animals have contributed significantly to the decline of Malleefowl with foxes caught on camera stealing their eggs and feral pigs and wild goats trampling mounds, Mr Kellett said.

Landholder David Heath is passionate about Malleefowl conservation, as were his grandparents. My grandparents had the foresight to protect these blocks of Mallee from clearing and overgrazing by stock and I'm excited to be a part of this project and look forward to the reintroduction of Malleefowl, Mr Heath said.

Neighbouring landholder Rodney Guest remembers exploring Mallee reserves as a young boy in search of Malleefowl nests - an interest he's still pursuing at almost 60. On his 2200 hectare property north of Griffith, Mr Guest is one of ten landholders working with Riverina Local Land Services to curb feral animal predation to give Malleefowl a chance at reviving in their native habitat. Malleefowl died out in the 1980's in these reserves, allegedly shot by someone wanting to remember what they tasted like, Mr Guest recalled.

They still exist within local ranges but with pressure from feral animals, mainly pigs, they may become locally extinct. We have prime habitat on these reserves. The only thing missing are the birds, so it's very exciting to think that reintroducing them could be a reality. We hope we can establish a stable safe breeding colony that may also encourage other farmers to preserve habitat on their properties.

This project is supported by Riverina Local Land Services, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program. Media contact: Simone Norrie at Riverina Local Land Services (0419 648 813)

They also have a small YouTube video of the project:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOA67pd2ww8>

Queen's Birthday Honours

Congratulations to Central Coast legend Alan Morris who received the award of AM for 'significant services to wildlife conservation' in the Queen's Birthday 2019 honours list.

Photos of Skuas

Vincent Mourik (Birding NSW) is commencing a study on Brown and South Polar Skuas on the east coast of Australia, and is seeking photos of Skuas.

Study on Brown and South Polar Skuas along the East coast

Migration patterns, plumage development, moult timing and duration, even basic identification are poorly understood in Brown Skuas (common winter visitor along the East coast) and South Polar Skuas (rare spring and autumn visitor along the East coast). As part of the SOSSA study on seabirds, conducted during pelagic boat trips off Wollongong and Kiama, we seek to analyse photographs of Skuas to complement our field data. You can greatly aid this study by supplying your photographs of Skuas. Place (port of departure suffices for pelagic trips) and date are crucial information. All picture qualities are accepted, and the more shots of a single bird, the better. Please contact Vincent Mourik for more information or send your pictures to Vincent at email: vincentmourik@gmail.com

BirdHaven Festival - Shoalhaven Heads

18-20 October 2019

All details: <https://birdhavenfestival.com.au/>

Spotted Magpie

A rare leucistic Magpie was reported on ABC news, with a Dalmation-like spotted appearance.

Go to: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-13/rare-dalmation-like-spotted-magpie-photographed-in-victoria/11509778?pfmredir=sm>

Night Parrots will Benefit from Cat Research

Drs Steve Murphy and Alex Kutt will soon be tracking cat movements in landscapes adjacent to Pullen Pullen Reserve, the prime home of the Night Parrot. They hope to learn about the movement and habits of the region's feral cats, and use that knowledge to protect the Night Parrots from this skilled predator. The newly fledged Night Parrot young are noisy, and this makes them particularly vulnerable to attack by cats.

The research is a joint project of the University of Queensland and Bush heritage. Dr Murphy recently gave an interview to ABC Radio's AM program. There is a transcription of the interview on the Threatened Species Recovery Hub website.

<http://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/news/tracking-cats-to-help-the-night-parrot>

Book: "Cats in Australia - Companion and Killer"

This book details the devastating effects of cat predation on the native fauna in Australia. Professor Chris Dickman, co-author of the book, said that each day cats are killing some 2 million mammals, 2 million reptiles and 2 million birds in Australia.

said that each day cats are killing over 3.1 million mammals, 1.6 million reptiles and 1.3 million birds in Australia.

“Many of Australia’s native species cannot withstand these high levels of predation, and will become increasingly at risk of extinction unless the problem of cats in Australia is solved.”

The book describes the origins, spread and ecology of cats; the impacts of feral and pet cats on Australian wildlife; the impacts of cats on human health and livestock productivity; the legal and moral context for their management; and options for managing feral and pet cats to reduce the toll they take on our biodiversity.

“Cats in Australia: Companion and Killer” is available from CSIRO Publishing and was launched by the Australian Government’s Threatened Species Commissioner, Dr Sally Box, at the Australian Mammal Society Conference at The University of Sydney last July.

Bird in the Hand

The following additions and revisions were made to Bird in the Hand (Second Edition) and have been uploaded to the new website. Total species profile sheets – 551. In the new website all of the changes to BIH2 are listed in a PDF file under Publications - Bird in the Hand (2nd Edition) - Index - Recent Additions. A new alphabetical index (by group and common name) and with the date of publication or last revision has also been added to the Introduction

Introduction

Alphabetical Index of species included in BIH2

Guides & ID Keys

ID guide to nestling egrets

Guide to sexing passerines by cloacal examination (photos will be added in a later revision if suitable ones are supplied by banders).

Identification Key - Quails and Button Quails – (Revised)

Identification Key – Red-breasted Robins – (Revised)

Guide to Primary Moult – (Revised)

Raptors

Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Black-breasted Buzzard	<i>Hamirostris melanosternon</i>
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>

Pigeons & Doves

Peaceful Dove	<i>Geopelia placida</i> (Revised)
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Treecreepers

White-throated Treecreeper	<i>Cormobates leucophaea</i> (Revised)
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Honeyeaters

New Holland Honeyeater	<i>Phylidonyris novaehollandiae</i> (Revised)
Little Wattlebird	<i>Anthochaera chrysoptera</i> (Revised)
Western Wattlebird	<i>Anthochaera lumulata</i> (Revised)
Brown Honeyeater	<i>Lichmera indistincta</i> (Revised)
Red-headed Honeyeater	<i>Myzomela erythrocephala</i> (Revised)
Scarlet Honeyeater	<i>Myzomela sanguinolenta</i> (Revised)

Robins

Eastern Yellow Robin	<i>Eopsaltria australis</i> (Revised)
Rose Robin	<i>Petroica rosea</i> (Revised)
Pink Robin	<i>Petroica rodinogaster</i> (Revised)

Waders

Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i> (Deleted)
(Black-winged Stilt does not occur in Australia and our local stilt has been redescribed as Pied Stilt <i>H. leucocephalus</i>)	
Pied Stilt	<i>Himantopus leucocephalus</i> (Renamed)
Black-fronted Dotterel	<i>Elseyornis melanops</i> (Revised)
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i> (Revised)
Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i> (Revised)

Waterfowl

Chestnut Teal	<i>Anas castanea</i>
Grey Teal	<i>Anas gracilis</i>
Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>
Australasian Shoveler	<i>Anas rhynchotis</i>
Australian Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadornoides</i>
Maned Duck	<i>Chenonetta jubata</i>

Parrots

Golden-shouldered Parrot	<i>Psephotus chrysopterygius</i>
Hooded Parrot	<i>Psephotus dissimilis</i>
Eastern Ground Parrot	<i>Pezoporus wallicus</i>
Western Ground Parrot	<i>Pezoporus flaviventris</i>
Night Parrot	<i>Pezoporus occidentalis</i>

Quail-thrushes

Spotted Quail-thrush	<i>Cinlosoma punctatum</i> (Revised)
Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush	<i>Cinlosoma castaneothorax</i> (Revised)
Western Quail-thrush	<i>Cinlosoma marginatum</i>
Chestnut Quail-thrush	<i>Cinlosoma castanotus</i> (Revised)
Copper-backed Quail-thrush	<i>Cinlosoma clarum</i>
Cinnamon Quail-thrush	<i>Cinlosoma cinnamomeum</i> (Revised)
Nullabor Quail-thrush	<i>Cinlosoma alisteri</i>

Flycatchers

Lemon-bellied Flycatcher	<i>Microeca flavigaster</i> (Revised)
Yellow-legged Flycatcher	<i>Microeca griseiceps</i> (Revised)

Whistlers & Shrike-thrushes

Grey Whistler	<i>Pachycephala simplex</i> (Revised)
Golden Whistler	<i>Pachycephala pectoralis</i> (Revised)
Rufous Whistler	<i>Pachycephala rufiventris</i> (Revised)
Little Shrike-thrush	<i>Colluricincla megarhyncha</i> (Deleted)
	(now split into two species as below)
Arafura Shrike-thrush	<i>Colluricincla megarhyncha</i> (Renamed)
Rufous Shrike-thrush	<i>Colluricincla rufogaster</i>

Bitterns, Egrets and Herons

Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>
Eastern Reef Egret	<i>Egretta sacra</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Pied Heron	<i>Ardea picata</i>
White-faced Heron	<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>
White-necked Heron	<i>Ardea pacifica</i>

Ibis

Australian White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis molucca</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Straw-necked Ibis	<i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>

Owls

Australian Boobook	<i>Ninox boobook</i>
Southern Boobook	<i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i> (Revised)
	(Australian mainland subspecies have been reclassified as a different species, as above, but the Tasmanian and Norfolk Island subspecies remain within the NZ based <i>N. novaeseelandiae</i>)

Sittella

Varied Sittella	<i>Daphoenositta chrysoptera</i> (Revised)
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Skuas

Brown Skua	<i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i> (Revised)
South Polar Skua	<i>Stercorarius maccormicki</i> (Revised)

Jeff Hardy

Regent Honeyeater Tracking

Radio-tracking is well-established as a method of finding a bird's whereabouts, and satellite trackers have revolutionised our ability to locate birds. But for smaller birds, such as the Regent Honeyeater, satellite tracking has not been possible due to the weight of the transmitters. This has been limited to 5% of the bird's body weight, so as to not significantly interfere with its normal habits and behaviours.

But new technology has seen a drop in the weight of a transmitter to 2 grams, which just allows its use on a Regent. Tests are under way to prove the techniques for its use, and it is hoped that its use will be authorised by the end of 2019. It uses 3D printing to make a light-weight

harness to hold the transmitter on. The kits currently cost around \$6000, and have been funded by the Australian Threatened Species Recovery Fund.

Then, at last, researchers will be able to answer questions about the movement of these elusive birds. Dean Ingwerson is the National Coordinator of the Regent Honeyeater Recovery program. He told the ABC that "From January through until March and April [the Regents] just disappear. We don't know where they go."

Seabird Research

Good to see an article in the Sydney Morning Herald on seabird research and the contribution of data by twitchers to the research database - and a good photo of the usual suspects on a Kiama pelagic trip.

See: <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/twitchers-have-a-treasure-trove-of-data-to-aid-seabirds-as-numbers-drop-20190625-p5212g.html?btis>

Back to 'Bungles' Bird Week

28 September to 1 October 2019

Come birding in the beautiful Warrumbungles! Join other enthusiastic volunteers to count birds along different trails within Warrumbungle National Park.

We've been monitoring recovery of the bird community since the devastating fires of 2013. We do two surveys a year, in Spring and Autumn. Last April we saw 600 birds of sixty species, including a new species for the survey - Superb Parrots. That makes 110 species in total.

We will go out counting birds each morning from 28 Sept. to 1 Oct. inclusive - leaving you plenty of time for other bird-watching and exploring Warrumbungle National Park. Anyone can be involved and you can join for as much or as little as you want.

For information on previous birdcounts, go to <http://bit.ly/2u6UErp>

For more info, or to register your interest in coming, please contact Gillian Dunkerley at gillian.dunkerley@environment.nsw.gov.au



Trip Reports

Munghorn Gap - 23-25th August 2019

Driving to Mudgee it was very obvious the impact of the drought, very little grass, dams near empty and not a lot of stock. As a result we were concerned about Munghorn. Fortunately, the spring was still flowing although the upper trough was dry unlike last visit. The dams at both the campsite and site 4 still had water although the levels were low. Gulgong had received 6mm in the previous week but overall for the past 3 months had only had 17mm.

The weekend weather was good with cold mornings with frost on the nets on Saturday but bright sunny days although it became windy by the middle of the day.

There was very little blossom anywhere, with occasional flowers on *styphelia* and grey mistletoe while some white box was in flower.

We had a good team for this trip with one of Australia's most experienced banders, Alan Leishman joining us for the weekend. We also had a new bander from the UK, Josie Hewitt who is currently studying in Newcastle and has a "A" class UK licence. She had had little experience with Australian birds, so we managed to find her some of our birds with attitude, such as a friarbirds, kookaburra and a crimson rosella! She handled them very well. The other members were Rob Kyte, Liz Cameron, Doug Moffat and Darryl Smedley. Rob didn't arrive until Friday afternoon.

Friday 23rd August 2019

We banded at site 1, in perfect conditions with no wind and a light cloud. We set up our nets on the western side while Alan set his nets up on the eastern side, in total we had 12 nets erected.

In total contrast to last visit when we only caught 10 birds at this site, this time we caught 62 birds from 19 species. We caught a number of yellow-faced and white-naped honeyeaters, mostly in the spring net but the highlight were two species we rarely catch now, a rose robin and varied sittella. The last time these species were caught at MG was in 1999 and 1996 respectively. Overall it was a good day with a high, 32% retrap rate.

We had two old retraps - a striated thornbill, banded in October 2005 and now 14 years old and a spinebill banded in 2011.

Saturday 24th August 2019

Today we banded at site 4. I had nets in the usual locations while Alan netted down the creek line while Rob went over to the open woodland to the north. Perfect weather if a little cold in the morning. When we were putting up the nets the day before we noted the large

numbers of birds using the dam and so I decided not to open the dam net. In retrospect a smart move! On our first round, one of the nets below the dam was filled with birds, 50+ white-naped HY's and other species. Fortunately, Alan and Daryl were with me and so we had enough people to extract, however, on checking the next net, it was the same story, full of birds. In total we caught 66 white-naped honeyeaters in these two nets, all clean skins and therefore probably on migration. Overall, we caught 123 birds on the day with only 15 retraps reflecting that a lot of birds were on the move. Like the previous day, there were some unusual species caught – fuscous honeyeater (first since 2002), a diamond firetail and a jacky winter.

We had one good retrap, a white-plumed honeyeater banded on 5th August 2008 and now aged 12+.

Sunday 25th August 2018

Today we banded at the camp site, site 2. We setup nets in the usual locations while Alan set up nets to the near the escarpment while Rob set up on the northern side of the camp area. Again we had perfect weather with no wind.

Unlike last visit when we caught 24 different species, this time we only caught 13 different species probably reflecting the paucity of blossom and the dry conditions. Of interest was the dam which normally doesn't attract passerines was being used by birds, in particular, noisy friarbirds spent considerable time bathing in the water.

Overall, the birds and species were unremarkable other than one good retrap of an eastern spinebill which had lasted 10+ years since its original banding.

However, the highlight by far was a mammal, Rob found a koala up a large angophora tree. The animal looked healthy and didn't seem to be distressed. This is the first time we have seen a koala at Munghorn although there has been suggestions that they were in the area.

Summary

Similarly to our last visit there was a paucity of retrapped birds that were banded in 2018. The retraps from the last 4 years were 2016 – 1, 2017 – 24, 2018 – 3, 2019 – 4, earlier than 2016 – 7. I have no explanation as to why 2017 retraps are much more common, other than perhaps the last two breeding seasons failed? It seems that it is unlikely that weather conditions may affected birds just those recent birds as it would have affected all the birds in the area. Like many aspects of natural history, more questions than answers.

It was again a good weekend, with lots of birds of many species and some very good retraps. I would very much like to thank all the participants, it was a very enjoyable weekend particularly the campfire discussions. Unfortunately, with the current weather pattern it will be unlikely that we will be able to have another campfire before next winter.

I hope to go Munghorn again in late October but won't be there over the 8-hour long weekend but feel free to go there if you are free.

I have attached a spreadsheet showing the results from the weekend.

Graham Fry

8 September 2019

DATE		2019_20			23-Aug-19			24-Aug-19			25-Aug-19		
Bander		TOTALS			on,A.Leishman, D.Smedley,J.			Leishman,R.Kyte,D.Smed			eron,A.Leishman, D.Sme		
Nethours		207.6			79.3			69.3			59		
Site					1			4			2		
Code	Species	New	Retrap	Total	New	Ret	Total	New	Ret	Total	New	Ret	Total
281	King Parrot	1	0	1	1		1						
282	Crimson Rosella	1	0	1				1		1			
322	Kookaburra	2	0	2	1		1				1		1
361	Grey Fantail	1	0	1				1		1			
377	Jackie Winter	1	0	1				1		1			
384	Rose Robin	1	0	1	1		1						
392	Yellow Robin	5	4	9	1	1	2	1	3	4	3		3
398	Golden Whistler	1	0	1	1		1						
408	Grey Shrikethrush	1	1	2	1		1		1	1			
470	Striated Thornbill	7	5	12	4	3	7				3	2	5
471	Yellow Thornbill	8	0	8				4		4	4		4
475	Brown Thornbill	3	3	6	2	2	4		1	1	1		1
486	Yellow rumped Thornbill	1	0	1							1		1
488	White browed Scrubwren	1	1	2	1		1		1	1			
504	Speckled Warbler	2	2	4		1	1				2	1	3
529	Superb Fairywren	7	2	9	4		4	2		2	1	2	3
549	Varied Sittella	1	0	1	1		1						
555	Brown Treecreeper	0	3	3					3	3			
558	White-throated Treecreeper	2	2	4	1	2	3				1		1
578	White-naped Honeyeater	78	2	80	12	2	14	66		66			
583	Brown headed Honeyeater	0	1	1								1	1
591	Eastern Spinebill	11	9	20	2	6	8	1		1	8	3	11
613	Fuscous Honeyeater	1	0	1				1		1			
614	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	26	3	29	5	1	6	15	2	17	6		6
619	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	2	2	4	1	1	2	1	1	2			
625	White-plumed Honeyeater	5	3	8				5	3	8			
631	New Holland Honeyeater	4	0	4				4		4			
645	Noisy Friarbird	4	0	4	1		1	1		1	2		2
652	Diamond Firetail	1	0	1				1		1			
655	Double barred Finch	1	0	1				1		1			
662	Red-browed Firetail	4	1	5	2	1	3	2		2			

TOTAL	183	44	227	42	20	62	108	15	123	33	9	42
CATCHRATE			1.09			0.78			1.77			0.71
Retrap Ratio			19%			32%			12%			21%
No. of Species			31			19			21			13

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