HOME ABOUT ABSA OUR HISTORY CONTACT US

NEWSLETTER 142

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Contents

Editorial

We can't wait to say goodbye to 2020. The full consequences of the fires that ravaged NSW and Victoria in late 2019 and early this year have yet to be fully realised. The death toll for native wildlife is now thought to be in the vicinity of 2 billion. Only time will tell if the ecological devastation wrought by these fires will mean this number rises again and again.

Then our own species suffered the Covid19 disaster. Fortunately Australia has had a less deadly time of it than other countries. But the economic consequences will make the funding of necessary research and conservation measures harder for years to come.

Compounding these natural disasters is the stream of questionable decisions coming from our political establishment - from the Adani Mine approval, the Narrabri gas-fields, the koala habitat imbroglio, the raising of the Warragamba Dam wall, the easing of land clearing controls - and these are the NSW ones that are in my newspapers. Other states no doubt have similar stories.

But the enduring commitment of so many people, including the members of ABSA, to conserving our wildlife, our beautiful birds, and the extraordinary landscapes within which they live - that is what keeps us going in the face of adversity. What can we say, but to wish everyone a happy holiday season, however you celebrate it, in the quiet hope that 2021 will bring better news.

Stein Boddington
Newsletter Editor

ABSA Annual Conference Cancelled, AGM by email

Committee has reluctantly come to the decision that there are too many uncertainties to warrant holding the Annual ABSA Scientific Conference in 2021. We hope 'normal service' will resume the following year.

Similarly, committee decided that a face to face AGM was too risky, given the long lead time in organising, and the short notice cancellation that would be necessary if there were another Covid19 wave. It was therefore decided that the AGM would be run in the same manner as the 2020 AGM was, by email. Notices will be sent by email to all members in due course.

Renewal of Membership

Members are reminded that it is time to renew your subscription. Please do so in a timely manner, so committee time is not wasted chasing people up.

Banding co-ordinator required

Over the next 5 years, UNSW Fowlers Gap Research Station (north of Broken Hill) will be changing from an active sheep station to a biodiversity managed station, including total destocking of the site. The management committee is looking for research projects and proposals to run on the research station, starting as soon as possible. Currently they do not have funding to support projects, but in-kind support of accommodation/camping access (depending on demand) is available. They are particularly interested in commencing a bird banding project at the site. The design of this could be flexible, but would likely target two small dams, and a few creek lines along which birds are in higher numbers, and would need to be planned to run as a long-term project.

Any A Class Bander interested should contact:

Simon Gorta s.gorta@unsw.edu.au

Fund for Avian Research - Call for Submissions

The deadline for applications for funding support from ABSA's Fund for Avian Research (FAR) Grants is fast approaching.

The FAR Grants are intended to support researchers with project-related expenses such as buying equipment and/or travel within Australia. It is anticipated that approximately $2,000 will be available in the 2021 round of funding. That amount is usually distributed across several applications.

The amount of money isn't large, but the applications don't need to be lengthy, either! If you are running a research project on some aspect of the Australian bird fauna and could use some extra funding, give it a go.

Please read the Assessment Criteria below carefully. Applicants should email their signed applications (as attachments either in .pdf or .doc formats) to:

info@absa.asn.au
by 31st December 2020.

FAR Grants – Assessment criteria

1. General Criteria

How well does the proposal relate to ABSA's objective "to support, encourage and promote the study of Australian birds and to contribute to their conservation" and the purpose of the avian research fund to "assist with the publication of information, the provision of education or the carrying on of research into various aspects of the avifauna of Australia"?

2. Scientific and Technical Criteria

a) Does the proposal have a clearly stated objective?
b) Does the proposal include a clearly stated and practical methodology to achieve its objective?
c) Is the methodology consistent with good scientific design and with good practice (including ethical considerations)?

d) Is the achievement of the objective able to be measured or quantitatively assessed?
e) If successful, how significant and/or useful will the outcome be in terms of our knowledge of the Australian avifauna and its conservation?
f) How likely is the project to result in formal publication of results?

3. Financial Criteria
a) Does the proposal provide a clear and itemised account of how the funds will be spent?
b) Are the allocations in the proposed budget appropriate and do they provide reasonable value for money?

Kookaburra fratricidal aggression

Kookaburras in Burua, Beecher and Calliope, near Gladstone in Queensland, have been observed in what is assumed to be territorial struggles with each other, sometimes even leading to death. Death was the result of similar behaviour reported by Charles Hunter on Birding-Aus email group, in the Sydney suburb of Castle Cove.

Original story from the Gladstone Observer:
https://www.gladstoneobserver.com.au/news/kookaburras-kill-each-other-for-living-space/2198312/

Superb Lyrebirds as Eco-Engineers

Ref: *Foraging by an avian ecosystem engineer extensively modifies the litter and soil layer in forest ecosystems*
by Alex C. Maisey, Angie Haslem, Steven W. J. Leonard and Andrew F. Bennett. https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.2219

Abstract

Ecosystem engineers physically modify their environment, thereby altering habitats for other organisms. Increasingly, “engineers” are recognized as an important focus for conservation and ecological restoration because their actions affect a range of ecosystem processes and thereby influence how ecosystems function. The Superb Lyrebird *Menura novaehollandiae* is proposed as an ecosystem engineer in forests of southeastern Australia due to the volume of soil and litter it turns over when foraging. We measured the seasonal and spatial patterns of foraging by Lyrebirds and the amount of soil displaced in forests in the Central Highlands, Victoria. We tested the effects of foraging on litter, soil nutrients and soil physical properties by using an experimental approach with three treatments: Lyrebird exclusion, Lyrebird exclusion with simulated foraging, and non–exclusion reference plots. Treatments were replicated in three forest types in each of three forest blocks. Lyrebirds foraged extensively in all forest types in all seasons. On average, Lyrebirds displaced 155.7 Mg/ha of litter and soil in a 12–month period. Greater displacement occurred where vegetation complexity (<50 cm height) was low. After two years of Lyrebird exclusion, soil compaction (top 7.5 cm) increased by 37% in exclusion plots compared with baseline measures, while in unfenced plots it decreased by 22%. Litter depth was almost three times greater in fenced than unfenced plots. Soil moisture, pH, and soil nutrients showed no difference between treatments. The enormous extent of litter and soil turned over by the Superb Lyrebird is unparalleled by any other vertebrate soil engineer in terrestrial ecosystems globally. The profound influence of such foraging activity on forest ecosystems is magnified by its year–round pattern and widespread distribution. The disturbance regime that Lyrebirds impose has implications for diverse ecosystem processes including decomposition and nutrient cycling, the composition of litter– and soil–dwelling invertebrate communities, the shaping of ground–layer vegetation patterns, and fire behavior and post–fire ecosystem recovery. Maintaining Lyrebird populations as a key facilitator of ecosystem function is now timely and critical as unprecedented wildfires in eastern Australia in summer 2019–2020 have severely burned ~12 million ha of forest, including ~30% of the geographic range of the Superb Lyrebird.

For an overview of this research, see:
https://phys.org/news/2020-09-lyrebirds-litter-soil-animal.html

Lost sighting of Black-necked Stork

I colour-banded a nestling Black-necked (Satin) Stork at Gilletts Ridge (Clarence Valley Northern NSW) on 12 December 2007. I placed a yellow band on the upper left leg and a green band on the upper right leg. It was observed at Port Macquarie on 12 May 2012. I lost many emails from my old computer and now don’t have the original correspondence reporting the sighting. I was of the view that the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme (ABBBS) would have received the details but they haven’t. I have only the date and the general location ‘Port Macquarie’ of the record but would be keen to receive more details to allow them to be lodged with the ABBBS. I am hoping that the person/s who observed the banded bird may be a subscriber or someone may know who saw the bird. Any information would be appreciated.

Dr Greg Clancy
Ecologist
Phone: 0429601960

Indigenous name ratified in NAIDOC Week

NAIDOC Week Australia celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. BirdLife Australia joined in the celebrations by recognising the new common name Mukarrthippi Grasswren for *Amytornis s. striatus*, a small bird of great conservation concern.

The name Mukarrthippi (pronounced moo-kwah-tippy) comes from the language of the Ngiyampaa people. Their lore men and women worked closely with the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and BirdLife Australia's Australian Bird Names Committee to develop a name that would capture their holistic way of looking after Country. The result is this lovely name, which can be translated as 'small bird of the spinifex (Mukarr)'.

This subspecies of the Striated Grasswren, long thought lost altogether, still exists but is at imminent risk of becoming extinct. More intense droughts, changing fire regimes and habitat modification from invasive goats are all contributing to its troubles. The hope is that this beautiful new name will inspire re-doubled conservation efforts, as outlined in our Mallee Conservation Action Plan.

The Mukarrthippi Grasswren joins a list of over 40 species and subspecies of Australian birds whose names are inspired by Indigenous Languages, such as the 'Budgerigar', known round the world.

From Birdlife Australia website: https://birdlife.org.au/media/meet-the-mukarrthippi-grasswren/

Passing of Doug Dow, former President of BirdLife Australia.

We note the passing of Doug Dow, former President of BirdLife Australia, and co-founder of the Queensland Ornithological Society. There is a web-based memorial page at: https://www.mykeeper.com/profile/DouglasDow/

Serventy, Hobbs Medallists

The winners of BirdLife Australia's prestigious Serventy and Hobbs Medals have been announced — Professor Ralph MacNally was awarded the Serventy Medal, while Dr Alan Stuart was awarded the Hobbs Medal.

"Professor Mac Nally's research has led to quantum leaps in our understanding of how landscape, climate, and habitat change drive avifaunal dynamics in southeastern Australia's woodlands, forests and floodplain systems. Among his most important contributions to ornithology are those in avian community ecology, interspecific competition and the factors that shape species assemblages, temporal and spatial dynamics of woodland birds and their resources, especially in response to variability in climate and water in the landscape, and foraging ecology. He has worked extensively on avian ecology and conservation in western North America and Amazonia in parallel with his Australian work."
See the full citation here.

"(Dr Alan Stuart's) contribution to Australian ornithology is distinguished by his ability to galvanise a regional bird community to commit to systematic bird study in a sustainable manner by fostering a culture that engages the whole spectrum of the birding community. This is exemplified by the more than 20 consecutive years of Hunter Shorebird monthly surveys which have involved over 150 participants with results disseminated annually in the HBOC Annual Bird Reports and the Shorebirds 2020 database."

See the full citation here.

Trip Reports

Ungarie NSW - 6 December 2020

Three Sydneysiders drove out to 'the Painted Honeyeater site' at Ungarie on Saturday in the wind and rain. We set up 13 nets on arrival in preparation for the next day's banding, also in the wind and rain. The inclement weather was forecast to pass for Sunday, and we were mostly optimistic that it was going to be a productive next morning. We had dinner at the local pub and received great interest from locals about the research we were conducting. Having a cold one with the locals is one of the best community engagement tools I have witnessed in practice.

True to her word, the sky cleared up for Sunday and it was a pleasant day for banding, albeit a bit windy. There was enough fruit on the mistletoe for us to sample a taste, and also at one point sufficing quite a large mid-morning snack for one of our party. It came as a surprise; normally we are out-competed by the birds.

We caught a range of species, including Striped Honeyeater, Southern Whiteface, Little Friarbird, White-winged Chough, Spiny-

Cheeked Honeyeater, Mistletoe Bird and Fairy Martins! But, alas, we did not catch any Painted Honeyeater. As we packed down nets around lunch time, a Painted Honeyeater called overhead, taunting us. Next time? Thanks to Tony Hunt for the opportunity.

Genevieve Kyi

Weddin Mountains Nature Reserve

Last weekend I was joined by an elite team who got to experience some lime green invaders from the west - budgies. We set nets on Dixon property only but covered the levees at top and down to bottom levee at 48 for budgies. Small puddle at top levee was visited by Glossy Blacks at dusk on Saturday after furling .... pheeeew. Breeding was happening with lots of birds with brood patches and this juvenile Eastern Yellow Robin. Orchids were magnificent again but the 14 budgies really stole the show on Sunday morning.

Richard Allen

Trip 180

	Species	New	R	Total	oldest
295	Red-rumped Parrot	1		1	
310	Budgerigar	14		14	
322	Laughing Kookaburra		1	1	1+
361	Grey Fantail	2		2	
364	Willie Wagtail		2	2	2+
392	Eastern Yellow Robin	7	4	11	12+, 11+
401	Rufous Whistler	3	1	4	3
408	Grey Shrike-thrush	1	1	2	3
416	Crested Shrike-tit	2	2	4	7+
476	Inland Thornbill		1	1	1+
498	Chestnut-rumped Heathwren	1		1	
504	Speckled Warbler	3	2	5	5+
509	Rufous Songlark	6		6	
529	Superb Fairy-wren		2	2	3+
547	Dusky Woodswallow	2	1	3	1+
564	Mistletoebird	1		1	
625	White-plumed Honeyeater	1	18	19	8
652	Diamond Firetail	3	1	4	1+
728	Restless Flycatcher		1	1	4+
	Total	47	37	84	
	# species	14	13	19	
		56%	44%		

Munghorn Gap - 3-5th October 2020

It was hard to believe that 12 months ago when we were last at Munghorn Gap that the country was in a very bad drought with dead grass and dying trees. This year after good late summer and winter rains the country is in magnificent condition. All the dams are full, the creek below site 4 had water and the spring was flowing well. However, a lot of the understorey plants were dead and therefore not providing small birds with safe roosting and nest sites. There was little blossom but some of the grey mistletoe on wattles have small numbers of flowers.

We had a very large team this weekend, probably one of the largest in 20 years. We had two trainees from Canberra, Brittany Brackett and Mickey Christenson and three more trainees from Newcastle, Milly Formsby, Emily Mowat and Emy Guilbault. In addition we had our usual banders, Marty Filipczyks , Judy Little and Rob Kyte as well as Liz, Gen Kyi and Doug Moffat and his grandson Toby. Daryl Smedley and his mate Michael also helped over the weekend.

Saturday 3rd October 2020

We banded at site 1, in very good conditions. We set up our nets on the usual locations while Judy set nets on the eastern side of the road.

Initially we had a good start but we quickly discovered that a pied currawong had a nest near the spring, it killed four birds in the nets – 3 white-naped honeyeaters and a yellow-faced honeyeater. We immediately closed the spring net and two nets nearby and had no further predation. However, our catch rate was down due to the unavailability of the spring site. We caught 23 birds of 11 species. Of concern was the influx of noisy miners in the area and the lack of small insectivorous birds with only 5 thornbills, one scrubwren and on fairywren caught. While it is temping to blame the miners I think the drought stopped any breeding last year and may have resulted in many birds succumbing in the hot dry conditions.

Sunday 4th October 2019

In contrast to Saturday, this was a great day with 62 birds of 23 species being caught. The trainees got their hands on many new birds for them. Rufous whistlers were particularly common, probably trying to establish territories after arriving from the north. Again thornbills were uncommon with only 3 caught but fairywrens were more common and a male variegated in full breeding plumage was stunning. Rob caught two satin bowerbirds, both were males with one in full black plumage while the other was green but with a few black feathers appearing. One of the birds was caught with a blue bottle top which he rapidly grabbed when it was offered to him.

Of great interest were two birds which haven't been caught at MG for over thirty years, a peaceful dove. This species was last caught in 1984 and a rufous songlark, last caught in 1986. We are aware the rufous songlarks have arrived in great numbers probably reflecting the good conditions but why a peaceful dove was present is a mystery.

An interesting retrap was a white-browed babbler which was originally banded with an aluminium band in March 2016, the band

had worn so much that the prefix was gone, the bird was rebanded with a stainless steel band. A good example of how aluminium bands should not be used on larger ground foraging birds.

Another interesting retrap was of a speckled warbler, these are normally relatively common at MG but are currently scarce. This bird was originally banded on the 26th September 2012. It was retrapped in 2013,2014 and in 2017 I added a second band as the first was getting thin. The bird was again retrapped in 2018 and in 2019 I noted that the band was now very thin. I didn't see the bird this time but there was no mention in the data sheet of a 2nd band and I assume Emilly would have mentioned it had it been there. Therefore, this is again justification for rebanding/duplicating bands on ground foraging birds as it gives a more realistic retrap age. In this case the bird was banded as a 2+ adult and the band lasted for probably 6+ years. It is now 8 years since it was originally banded, I will add this record to the recovery roundup published in Corella.

Sunday 5th October 2020
Today we banded at Site 2, again we had good weather. I had 7 nets on the north eastern side whilc Judy had 4 nets up near the escarpment while Rob went up the gully behind the campsite. Again small insectivorous species were uncommon but honeyeaters were, in particularly eastern spinebills, brown-headed honeyeaters and new holland honeyeaters. On virtually the final round we had a hit of 18 brown-headed's which kept us busy for sometime. However, the undoubted highlight was the rock warbler Judy caught. Some of our group had not seen this species before and it was well photographed. In total we caught 62 birds on the day.

Summary
Overall, a very satisfactory weekend with some good birds and retraps caught. It was great seeing the seeing the country is such good condition, this was reflected in the birds where we found many birds actively breeding with two about to lay eggs.

I would very much like to thank the large team which made it easy to handle the large numbers of birds we caught at various times during the weekend.

We normally observe emus around honeyeater flat and for the first two days none were seen we became concerned but later in the weekend a male was seen with young and separately two adults were also seen so they seemed to have done OK. In contrast were the kangaroos which are normally abundant but this time very uncommon and would seem that the drought or some other factor had decimated the population.

Again we were grateful to NPWS for the great honeyeater flat campsite and the good condition of the facilities in the reserve, much appreciated.

I plan to go to MG again this year, probably between Xmas and New Year and possibly in November as well. I will keep you informed. I have attached a spreadsheet showing the results from the weekend.

Graham Fry
11 October 2020

Species	New	Ret	Total
Peaceful Dove	1	0	**1**
Grey Fantail	1	0	**1**
Willie Wagtail	3	0	**3**
Yellow Robin	4	0	**4**
Rufous Whistler	11	1	**12**
Grey Shrikethrush	1	1	**2**
White-browed Babbler	3	1	**4**
Striated Thornbill	4	1	**5**
Yellow Thornbill	1	1	**2**
Brown Thornbill	3	1	**4**
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	1	0	**1**
White-browed Scrubwren	2	0	**2**
Speckled Warbler	0	1	**1**
Rockwarbler	1	0	**1**
Rufous Songlark	1	0	**1**
Superb Fairywren	4	4	**8**
Variegated Fairywren	1	0	**1**
Varied Sittella	1	0	**1**
White-throated Treecreeper	1	0	**1**
Mistletoebird	0	1	**1**
Spotted Pardalote	1	0	**1**
Silvereye	2	0	**2**
White-naped Honeyeater	4	1	**5**
Brown headed Honeyeater	11	9	**20**
Eastern Spinebill	13	6	**19**
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	7	2	**9**
White-eared Honeyeater	0	0	**0**
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	1	2	**3**
White-plumed Honeyeater	6	6	**12**
New Holland Honeyeater	6	1	**7**
Noisy Miner	3	0	**3**
Noisy Friarbird	5	0	**5**
Diamond Firetail	0	0	**0**
Red-browed Firetail	2	0	**2**
Satin Bowerbird	3	0	**3**
Striated Pardolate	0	0	**0**
TOTAL	**108**	**39**	**147**
CATCHRATE			**0.55**
Retrap Ratio			**27%**
No. of Species			***34***


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