NEWSLETTER 154

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ISSN 2202-297X (Online)
March 2024

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Photo: Rufous Fantail by Darryl MacKay

Editorial

So here we are in 2024, and the lessons learnt during COVID have been expressed in an up-dated constitution for the Association, and a more inclusive Australia-wide format for both Annual General Meetings and the Associatiion's Annual Conference.

As noted in the President's Report to the AGM, Jeff Hardy has stepped down from Committee involvement, after many years in various roles including stints as President, Secretary, and Mist Net Service Manager. For many years, whilst he worked within NSW National Parks, he was a valuable liaison between ABSA and the Department. Jeff was instrumental in the publication on the Association's website of the Second Edition of Bird In The Hand, which gives vital identification and sexing details of almost all Australian birds.His work with Grey Grasswrens culminated in the creation of Narriearra Caryapundy Swamp National Park two years ago, which protects the habitat of the endangered NSW population of this bird. So we give a big thankyou to Jeff for his tireless effort for both the Association, and for bird research more generally.

The 2024 Committee of ABSA is listed below. Note that no nomination was received for the position of Secretary, and only five for the position of Ordinary Member. Committee can appoint suitable people to these positions under the "Casual Vacancy" provisions of the Constitution. Interested members are encouraged to contact the

President by emailing <info@absa.asn.au> if they wish to express an interest in serving on the Committee. Time spent on a management committee looks good in the CV of young researchers, and they are particularly encouraged to consider it. The presence of older experienced members is equally valued and encouraged. As meetings are help by Zoom, do not let distance or remoteness be a deterrent.

ABSA Annual General Meeting

The on line Annual General Meeting for 2024 was successfully held in February. As the notice to members contained all the reports, we are not republishing them here as we did for a physical meeting pre-COVID.

The reports were all accepted, and the nominated people were declared elected to the Committee. Our auditor, Ross Fowler and Co, of Penrith NSW was reappointed to the position. Finally, the ABSA Constitution as amended in 2013 and 2022 was adopted.

ABSA Committee 2024

President – **John Farrell**
Vice President – **William Rutherford**
Treasurer – **Chris Young**
Secretary – No nomination received
Editor of Corella – **Walter Bole**
Ordinary Members:
Amy Tipton (Manager, Mist Net Service), **Stein Boddington** (Newsletter Editor), **Alan Leishman** (Production Editor), **Ian Bailey** (Conservation Officer) and **Michael Franklin.**

ABSA Annual Conference

By now, you will all be aware of the new format for the ABSA annual conference - a series of on line presentations on the chosen theme, this year being "Technology in Avian Research". We trust you will find these presentations interesting and/or informative. Please feel free to comment or make further suggestions by emailing <info@absa.asn.au>. We would welcome feedback on the suitability of this format, or suggestions on an alternative approach. And we extend our thanks to Amy Tipton for organising this year's presentations.

ABSA Awards

Fund for Avian Research Grant 2024
The 2024 recipient is Alice Barratt (pictured below).

Project Title: Torpor use and burrowing behaviour in an arid zone passerine
Aims: Building on a successful preliminary study in July 2023, which demonstrated our ability to capture the birds and obtain sufficient signal strength from attached radio transmitters to find them again, despite birds resting deep inside their burrows, we aim to complete a robust study on thermal physiology and roosting behaviour of White-backed Swallows during the Australian winter of 2024. We aim to gain body temperature data from at least 10 birds under a range of weather conditions and determine their use of torpor to conserve energy during poor weather events. Further to track the movement of birds between burrows, describe characteristics of selected burrows and assess vulnerability to predators. This study aims to improve our understanding of the thermal physiology and ecology of passerine birds, which is increasingly important for their survival given the increasing environmental variability and unpredictability associated with climate change.
Funding Provided: $1,900


White-backed Swallow

‘Durno’ Murray Award for Best Paper in Corella 2023

The ‘Durno’ Murray Award was instigated in 2010 and is given to the author(s) for the most outstanding paper published in Corella each year. The Award commemorates the work of Durno Murray who contributed greatly to the founding of the Association, and served in many roles in his extensive involvement in its management. Durno also contributed enormously to the development of ornithological research in Australia – particularly the study of seabirds.
The award consists of $200 cash and a year’s membership of the Association.
This year's authors have donated their prize money to the Fund for Avian Research

2023 Winner:
John Farrell, Michael Franklin, Jeff Hardy, Rebecca Jacobs and Rudy Jacobs for their paper entitled:
“Foraging areas and habitat utilisation of Bulloo Grey Grasswrens (*Amytornis b. barbatus*) in Narriearra-Caryapundy Swamp National Park, north-western New South Wales”

Abstract: The threatened Bulloo Grey Grasswren (*Amytornis b. barbatus*) was studied over a 6-year period in the ephemeral flood channels of the Bulloo River system, within the Narriearra-Caryapundy Swamp National Park, NSW. Building on earlier work, this study aimed to better delineate the size of foraging areas and determine the vegetation communities in which these birds forage and roost. VHF radio tracking was used to obtain multiple point locations for each of 13 individual birds, through time. These were used to estimate the size of individual foraging areas. Vegetation communities were mapped over orthomosaics generated from drone-captured images. Bird point locations were then plotted over vegetation communities to assess habitat utilisation. Roosting and foraging occurred primarily within Lignum thickets (52.6%), and birds foraged in Old Man Saltbush (30.6%), Swamp Canegrass (5.6%) and mixed Old Man Saltbush/Swamp Canegrass (11.2%) communities. The average adult Grey Grasswren foraging area (43.7 ha) far exceeded those published for congeners. The size of the average male foraging area (61.9 ha) was much larger than females (34.6 ha). Males also made the longest movements within a day, suggesting that males may be more nomadic within their limited habitat than females. In 2022, a pair of tracked females was found to remain with a juvenile bird for 19 days, highlighting the need for further investigation into group dynamics and possibly cooperative breeding in this species. This species requires large areas of flood channel containing multiple vegetation communities for long-term persistence.

Ros Farrell, Rebecca Jacobs, John Farrell, Jeff Hardy and Rudy Jacobs

Michael Franklin

‘Bill’ Lane Award 2023

‘Bill’ Lane was a founding member of the Association, and contributed enormously to the development of ornithological skills and research in Australia. The S.G. ‘Bill’ Lane Award in his honour, is presented annually to the student at Charles Sturt University who achieves the highest Grade Point Average in the Graduate Certificate of Ornithology course.

The award consists of $200 cash and a year’s membership of the Association.

2023 Winner – Cécile Espigolé (Pictured below)

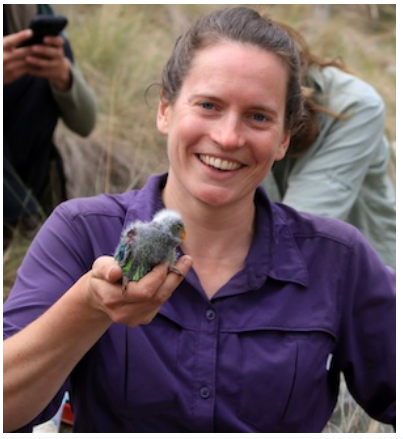
Cécile Espigolé

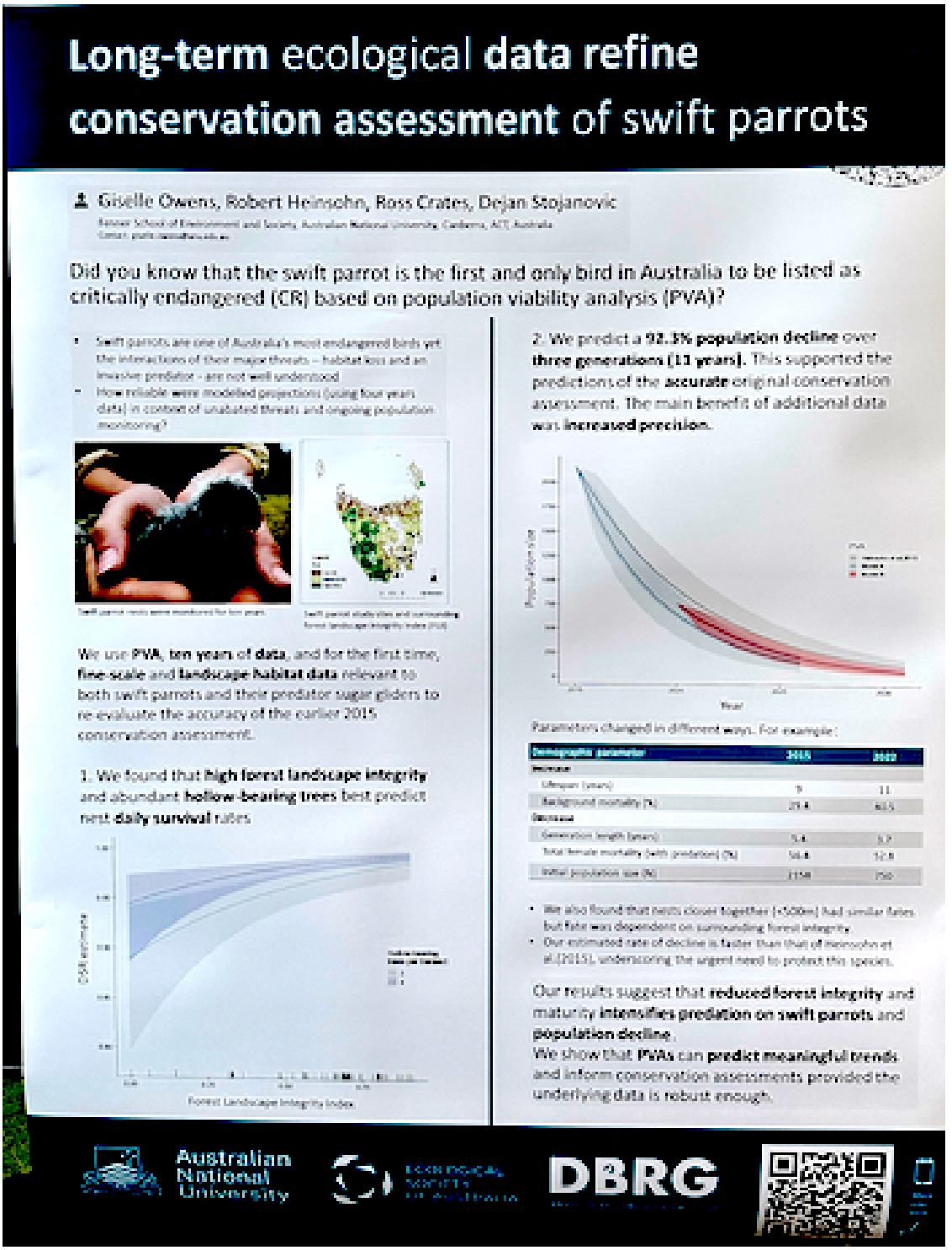
The Alan Lill Award
The Alan Lill Award (previously ABSA Poster Award) is presented for the best Student Poster at the biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference.The winner is chosen by members of ABSA attending and AOC representatives.

Alan Lill was a long-standing member of the Association and was Vice President and Editor of Corella for many years. He collaborated with many research students and assisted in the publication of a plethora of studies particularly encompassing the interplay between native birds and urban environments.

Prize: $200 cash and a year's membership of the Association.

2023 Winner - Giselle Owens (Robert Heinsohn, Ross Crates and Dejan Stojanovic) for her poster entitled: Long-term ecological data refine conservation assessment of swift parrots





Giselle's Winning Poster at AOC

Birdlife Shoalhaven 2024 Student Research Grant Applications close 31 March 2024.

BirdLife Shoalhaven will provide a grant of up to $4,000 to fund a research project in 2024, that will improve bird conservation and/or a better understanding of birds in the Shoalhaven.

To be eligible you must be a student currently enrolled in a university higher degree course. While it is not a requirement, projects focused on threatened species or with field work carried out within the Shoalhaven, will be highly regarded.

The grant must be used to directly support the project or its dissemination, for example on-ground bird conservation work, education programs or materials, project equipment and materials, or travel to relevant conferences. The successful applicant will be required to give a presentation on their project or write an article for the BLS Magazine.

The deadline for applications is 31st March 2024. The application guidelines and form can be downloaded by going to www.birdlifeshoalhaven.org/grant.html.

WW2 - Unintended Consequences: the extinction of the Wake Island Rail

Wake, Peale and Wilkes Islands together form a typical coral-reef fringed atoll in the Pacific ocean, roughly halfway between Hawaii and the Philippines.
From Wikipedia:

"The Wake Island Rail (*Hypotaenidia wakensis*) was a flightless rail and the only native land bird on the Pacific atoll of Wake. It was found on the islands of Wake, Wilkes and Peale, which are separated by a channel of about 100 meters. It was hunted to extinction during World War II.

The Wake Island Rail is classified as extinct. Its inability to fly and the island's geographic isolation, combined with the bird's inquisitiveness and lack of fear of humans, made it an easy victim of over-hunting. It is now known that the extinction event occurred specifically between 1942 and 1945. This was a direct result of the presence of thousands of starving Japanese troops stranded on the island after a U.S. blockade of the island took place as a direct result of the Japanese invasion and occupation of Wake Island in December 1941, combined with the inevitable habitat destruction resulting from military altercations and extensive aerial bombardment by the Japanese and U.S. during World War 2.

The extinction cut short the scientific study of the bird, and there are only a limited number of samples, photos, and scientific papers about the bird. By the early 21st century, the number of people that had personally encountered the bird was also dwindling."
Read the full article here.