NEWSLETTER 156

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Western Spinebill by Floyd Holmes

Editorial:

Many thanks are due to Stein Boddington for his years of dedicated service as an active committee member of the Australian Bird Study Association, and especially for his role as newsletter editor. Stein will continue his commitment to the committee, but I have taken over as the new newsletter editor. I plan to draw inspiration from his excellent work and look forward to seeking his guidance and assistance in this new role.

I joined the committee in April of this year, although I have been a member of the Association for several years. Based in Perth, I work as a zoologist for a consulting company, with a deep passion for ornithology. Since 2019, I have been actively involved in banding through the Herdsman Lake Banding Project and have seized opportunities to band birds as often as possible between field trips. While I am still early in my career as a bander and ornithologist, I aspire to achieve the level of success of my esteemed predecessors and our dedicated readers.

Preparing to Protect Australia's Birds from H5N1 Bird Flu: A Call to Action

As spring approaches, Australia faces a potential challenge with the possible arrival of H5N1 bird flu, carried by migratory shorebirds and seabirds from the northern hemisphere. While this virus has caused significant harm to wildlife globally, including the loss of millions of birds and thousands of mammals, there is still time for Australia to prepare and protect its unique bird species. With the right response in place, we can minimize the impact and safeguard years of conservation efforts.

Australia's wildlife is incredibly resilient, and by taking action now, we can give our birds the best chance to weather this storm. Key steps include:

- Identifying at-risk bird species and prioritizing high-value conservation sites
- Developing coordinated response plans across states and organizations
- Swiftly removing infected carcasses to reduce the spread
- Preventing disturbances to vulnerable wildlife colonies
- Vaccinating highly susceptible bird species

While the current funding for wildlife preparedness is limited, increased government and community support can ensure we are ready.

While avian influenza does not normally infect humans, some strains have been associated with disease in humans ranging from mild illness to severe disease and death. The Wildlife Health Australia released advice for bird banders, wildlife rangers and researchers. See this link for more information.

Wind Farms and Bird Conservation: Balancing Renewable Energy with Wildlife Protection

As Australia continues its shift towards renewable energy, wind farm developments are crucial for reducing carbon emissions and combating climate change. However, these projects can pose risks to bird populations, particularly migratory and endangered species, through collisions and habitat disruption. In response to these concerns, the federal governments Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) has issued updated guidance for wind farm projects, emphasizing the importance of proper site selection and wildlife protection measures (See this factsheet on wind energy and birdlife). Conservation groups are working closely with developers to implement these guidelines and minimize risks to vulnerable bird species.

To mitigate collision risks, advanced technologies such as radar-assisted shutdown systems are being implemented. These systems detect incoming birds and temporarily halt turbine operations to prevent collisions. Trials have shown that these systems are highly effective, reducing bird fatalities significantly in areas of high migratory activity. In Australia, sites like the Woolnorth Wind Farm in Tasmania are using this technology to protect species such as the Wedge-tailed Eagle .

With these efforts, there is hope that Australia can meet its renewable energy goals while safeguarding bird populations. Collaboration between wind energy developers, government agencies, and conservation groups is essential to ensure that wildlife and clean energy can coexist.

Banding report – Herdsman Lake Banding Project

Spring has finally come around and we are no longer allowed to use bird recordings to attract birds to our mist nets. As a result, the numbers of birds caught are lower at this time of year. However, this means we have more time to run nets that we usually don't set up. The past two weekends we have been out banding on Saturday's mornings (7th and 14th September) and caught 14 and 7 birds respectively.

7th September

Participants: Bill Rutherford, Roger Bazeu, Floyd Holmes, Aiden Williams, Patrick Williams, Ethan Broom, Jen Beeson, Belinda Howe

All stations were a go this morning as we had several banders down. We ran the mound (Comprising 2 x 12m nets and 2 x 18m nets), the Car Park (comprising 2 x 12m nets and 2 x 18m nets), and the duck net which is set up over a drain. The mound nets are set up on a sandy hill covered in *acacia*, and target species such as Silvereyes, Striated Pardalotes, Brown Honeyeaters, and other Honeyeaters. The car park is set up in front of a series of bottlebrushes and a few gum trees in a grassed area behind the cottage. A lone Australasian Shoveler teased us by loafing about the drain. We tried to walk it into the net, but it was quick to flush and flew the opposite direction. Species list for the morning included 6 Silvereyes, 5 Western Gerygones, 1 Singing Honeyeater, 2 Australian Wood Ducks.

14th September

Participants: Roger Bazeu, Patrick Williams, Ethan Broom, Jen Beeson, Caitlin Nagle

The conditions were a little windy, so the mound was out of the question as it has little to no protection from the wind. Instead, the car park and the duck net were set up and ran for roughly 3 hours. The morning was slow but yielded several uncommonly captured species. The Australasian Shoveler presented itself again this morning however it was much further down the drain past the bridge, so trying to get it flush towards the net was almost out of the question. Regardless, we still attempted to flush it down the drain, but it was no use. Several other waterfowl foraged nearby the drain, including Australian White Ibis, Grey Teals, and Dusky Moorhens, however they all knew better and evaded us. The species list included: 3 Red Wattlebirds, 2 Australian Wood Ducks, 1 New Holland Honeyeater,

and 1 Laughing Kookaburra. Several of these species were banding ticks for our two trainees and presented them the tasks with working on their skills applying stainless steel bands, handling waterfowl, and avoiding being covered in large amounts of excrement.

Top: Red wattlebird by Patrick Williams
Bottom: Laughing Kookaburra by Patrick Williams