

Birdlife Shoalhaven Newsletter

Summer 2017



Photo by Sue Tolley

Contents

President's Report	3
Building Corridors for Woodland Birds.....	4
Conservation Officer Report.....	5
Lake Wollumboola Rarities Accepted.....	6
2016 Twitchathon.....	7
Big Year for MUD Birders.....	9
Willy Wagtails - gotta love 'em!.....	9
Successful talk-night in Sanctuary Point.....	10
Web Watch	11
Shoalhaven Seasonal Calendar	13
Magpie Wars and Incest!.....	15
Eury The Spoon-billed Sandpiper	17
The Godwits.....	18
Shoalhaven Birders in 2017	18
Bob Ashford turns 70	18
BirdLife Shoalhaven Calendar for 2017	19
The Final Word	20

Contributions

If you have any information about conservation issues, or if you would like to share some of your birding experiences, travel stories or anecdotes with fellow members (such as the Magpie Wars and Incest article on page 15), please send them with any related photos, drawings or maps to shoalhaven@birdlife.org.au

In addition, if you have any bird photographs you would like to share, please send them in as well.

Contributions, suggestions, criticisms, feedback and corrections are always welcome.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the BirdLife Shoalhaven members and friends who contributed articles and photos for this newsletter - Sue Tolley, Rob Dunn, Narelle Wright, Warren Wilson, Chris Grounds, Kim Touzel, Charles Dove, Keith Coulston, Ian Brown, Karen Davis, Rob Dunn and Mike and Rose Clear.

In addition, images from the following websites may have been used in this newsletter - BirdLife Australia, BirdLife Melbourne, Birds in Backyards, the blog of Sydney Olympic Park and the Rural Fire Service.

Apologies to those contributors whose text or images may not have been acknowledged. If you have not been acknowledged please let the editor know.

Disclaimer

The information in articles submitted for publication in this newsletter is accepted in good faith and although the editor (Brett Davis) has endeavoured to verify the accuracy of all information, BirdLife Shoalhaven and BirdLife Australia accept no responsibility for any of the errors, inaccuracies or exaggerations that may be contained within articles in this newsletter.

Also, the views expressed in this newsletter are those of the editor, individual contributors and branch members. They may not be the views of BirdLife Shoalhaven or BirdLife Australia.

Errors

If you find any errors - typographical or factual - in this newsletter, please let the editor know. The beauty of an electronic newsletter is that it can be amended after publication.

Cover Photo

Fantail Cuckoo by Sue Tolley



President's Report

- by Rob Dunn

My new year resolution was to strive to be "a half glass full" person in 2017. I am certain that, in relation to bird conservation in the Shoalhaven, this will be put to the test this year.

The banner on the BirdLife Shoalhaven website (above) proudly asserts that we are "the voice for birds in the Shoalhaven". Are we being listened to and are our views making a difference? Has our voice got louder and stronger?

Let's take the first and more difficult question first ...

Chris Grounds' Conservation Officer Reports and other articles in our newsletters highlight the increasing number of issues that need to be responded to. The time that Council gives to make submissions on complex and far-reaching issues is getting shorter and shorter and the number of issues gets greater and greater. This work falls largely upon a small number of individuals within BLS and other community groups. Inevitably we will still need to be reactive and move quickly whenever issues arise.

But in 2017 has all this work made a difference? The "half glass full" side of me looks back at good progress made on a number of our campaigns last year.

However, the "half glass empty" side of me knows there will still need to be a huge effort in 2017 to ensure these all become permanent wins and that decisions associated with other issues, many of which are not even on our radar yet, go the right way.

But what does this mean for our birds on the ground and on the wing?

BirdLife Australia campaigns show that we are going backwards on many fronts and we know anecdotally and, through long-term research, that this is the case in the Shoalhaven.

The link between conservation battles and making a tangible difference takes decades of research and analysis. For this to happen, we need more people involved in research, learning about our birds and getting involved.

This leads me to the second, more easy question.

We achieved a milestone statistic at the end of last year. BLS now has over 200 members, up 33% from when we started three years ago, and we have started a new list of supporters and potential members. We have taken several steps to make sure that these numbers keep heading in the right direction.



Amanda Findley, Phil Straw and Rob Dunn

In December 100 people came to hear Phil Straw and Mayor Findley speak at the first of our talks in a series entitled "Nature Conservation through Birds". We sent the invitation out to other nature conservation groups' members, as even if they do not become BirdLife members, they will still be able to spread the word on BLS and the good and not so good news about our birds. We are planning a second talk in this series in April, focussing on woodland birds, with more in the pipeline.

We have also been speaking to other community groups and looking to expand our reach through local media. Yolande Cozijn has "trilled" her "Birds in Backyards" talk in the Bay and Basin area and is backing this up with articles in the local media. She is always looking for new "gigs", so please get in touch if you can help. One event led to new supporters, attendees at our December talk, and new members. Several of you give talks and write for the local media, which is great. If you can also say, "To learn more check out www.birdlifeshoalhaven.org", it will help our birds even more.



Building Corridors for Woodland Birds

- by Rob Dunn

Following on from the success of the talk by Phil Straw, we will be holding the second in our series of talks on "Nature Conservation through Birds" on 10th April at the Sanctuary Point Community Centre in Meriton Street - entitled "Building Corridors for Woodland Birds".

Last year we ran bird stalls at a couple of community gatherings and learnt how to get even more mileage from the time that our members put into this. So far, we have only done this in the Jervis Bay & Basin area, but we see this as a great way to build our supporter base across the Shoalhaven. We will be looking at community events soon for 2017, so if you have any suggestions please let us know.

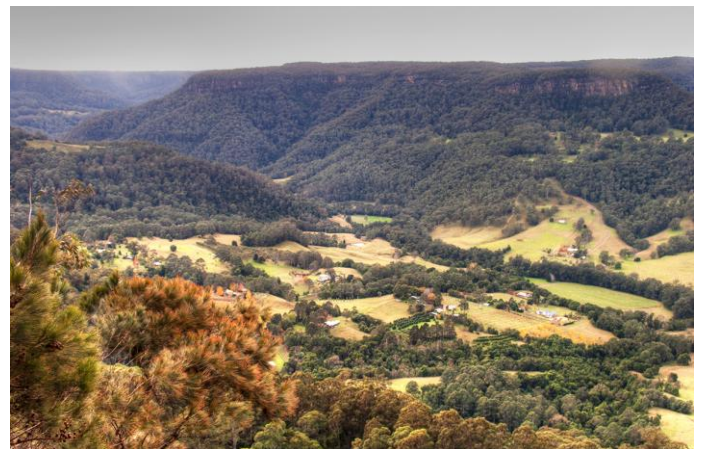


Rose Robin - altitudinal migrant



The talks will focus on the movements of woodland birds and other fauna in eastern Australia at a local, regional and continental scale. Our speakers will explain the importance of connectivity and corridors for our migratory birds and the part played by Landcare in building and maintaining these vital linkages across the landscape. You will hear about how the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative supports and builds on this work over 3,600 kilometres from far north Queensland to the Grampians and how Landcare projects in the Shoalhaven fit into this bigger picture.

MUD Birders and Shoalhaven Birders continued to be really active and new faces continue to go along on their bird walks. We have also started to expand on this with additional bird walks advertised through the newsletter. The MUD Birders 2016 list shown later in the newsletter gives you a good idea of how you might be able to expand your own bird lists. Have a look at the newsletter calendar on the BLS website if you are looking at your own birding diary for 2017.



More BLS talks, more talks to community groups, more media, more stalls and more bird walks can only make us bigger, louder and stronger. This is certainly the plan.

So, at this time next year, will our voice be even louder and stronger, heard ever more clearly and making a real difference? An active and expanding BirdLife Shoalhaven will go some way to helping us all answer that question in the affirmative.

Our speakers are currently being confirmed, but please put 7-9pm on 10 April in your diaries for what promises to be another informative evening, as well as a chance to catch up with other people who are passionate about nature conservation.

It will also help the President achieve his 2017 new year resolution ...

Conservation Officer Report

- by Chris Grounds

Environmental issues affecting our area pervaded the entire year of 2016, ran right up to the Christmas Day weekend and in so many cases they were big, abiding issues with strong implications for the future of habitat and threatened species at local, regional and national levels.

It almost seemed there was no limit in 2016 on what conservation matters captured attention and there is a strong carry-over to 2017.

I would like to wish all our members and friends the very best for 2017 and thank you for your support.

On a sad but inevitable note we say **farewell to Diane Garrood**, Regional Manager of the NPWS, who heads to retirement after exemplary service to our national parks heritage and a major contribution in recent years to the conservation of Heritage Estate.

On a brighter note it is a very special **welcome to Maxine Walker** as the new manager of Booderee National Park. Maxine is an Aboriginal woman from the northern NSW Coast and the first Indigenous manager of Booderee.

Since our AGM will occur close to this newsletter, a review of our BLS year in conservation has been reserved for the report to that meeting and will be available on our website.

This allows me some reflection on experiences directly linked to the very threatened species birds we work to protect.

The previous BLS Newsletter reported the listing of the **Dusky Wood Swallow** on the NSW threatened species list (Australian BirdLife, June 2016, pp 34-37).

As with all threatened species it is reassuring to see them in their natural habitat but it is an even greater delight to see them nest and reproduce successfully.

The Dusky Wood Swallow is a species I am familiar with from the Jervis Bay National Park southern heathland.

In early December a regular walk revealed a nest securely wedged in the multi-branched fork of a stunted Red Bloodwood (*Corymbia gummifera*).

The nest contained three newly hatched chicks but it was clearly a nest of limited engineering and accommodation.

Regular observations revealed both parents feeding the young, mostly with insects and dragonfly and all chicks grew quite quickly.

There came a point some ten days into the observation where it became clear that the three chicks had really outgrown the nest and it was a stay or fall out scenario.



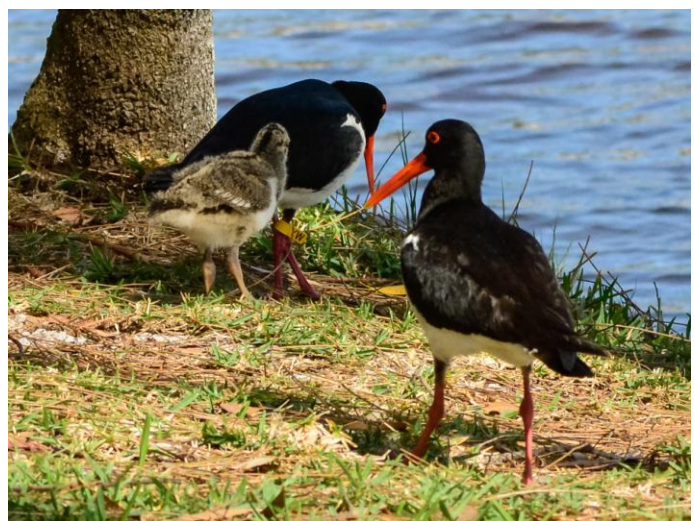
One day on and the nest was empty, chicks gone and the parents with them.

We presumed that the bush bird thing of taking immature, pre-flight chicks into the bush for the final round of rearing, which we had previously witnessed with a few species, ensued for this trio though there was nothing to observe to verify this.

This species is one that has been added to the original Heritage Estate catalogue.

All of the volunteers associated with NPWS Shorebird Program have been busy as usual over recent months but there has been one special surprise.

A late December, early morning visit to Greenpatch in Booderee National Park revealed a pair of Pied Oyster Catchers with an advanced chick, probably around the three week mark but not yet flying, roaming and foraging in the main picnic area.



Yes, Greenpatch!, with the thronging hordes of day visitors descending each day with their barrow loads of tourist infrastructure to adorn the "Unspoilt Shoalhaven". A few other BirdLife-Shorebird members also observed the trio over four days to the new year.

A check with Jodi Dunn, Shorebird Co-ordinator with NPWS and Booderee staff, established that this was a new nesting incidence at this site, which was very exciting.

The other really interesting thing was one of the pair had a flagged upper right leg - yellow YW. Photos were also able to provide Parks staff with the leg ring number.



This has since revealed that this bird was flagged in Victoria at Barry Beach in the Wilsons Promontory area.

However, the chick has not been observed at all in 2017 though the parents have been observed regularly around Greenpatch inlet, the picnic area and Iluka.

Still on the reproduction track, we birdos and photographers know that a photo of one bird is good, two or a pair in a shot, really good, multiple birds is special but a nesting pair with chicks is very, very special.

Still in Booderee National Park and with one of our iconic threatened species, the Eastern Bristlebird, it was a special recent experience to witness parents with fully fledged offspring.



It made up for the thought of how many of this species may have been lost in the Beecroft Peninsula burn in late 2016 that broke containment lines and developed into a major bushfire.

Lake Wollumboola Rarities Accepted

The BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) examined 8 reports of rare birds in NSW during 2016. Of the 7 that have been accepted, 4 were old records that were simply being tidied up as part of their housekeeping, leaving 3 accepted rarities - 2 of which were from Lake Wollumboola!

The BARC case summaries for the two birds are reproduced below -

Case 884:

This case concerned the sighting of a White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* initially at Shoalhaven Heads and then at Lake Wollumboola from January 5, 2015 until at least March 19, 2015. The description and superb photographs left no doubt as to the bird's identity and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It becomes the 7th confirmed record for Australia and the first since 1988. Nigel Jackett, Carla Jackett and Lachlan Hall.



White-rumped Sandpiper (photo by Narelle Wright)

Case 895:

This case concerned the sighting of a Paradise Shelduck *Tadorna variegata* at Lake Wollumboola from December 24, 2015 until at least January 6, 2016. The adult male bird was seen and photographed by many observers and there was no doubt as to the bird's identity. However, a lot of effort went into checking the provenance of this bird and it was agreed that there was no possibility that it had escaped from captivity and, indeed, it behaved exactly as a wild bird, acting warily and flying strongly. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the first confirmed record for the Australian mainland. Dion Hobcroft and David James.

2016 Twitchathon

by Brett Davis

In response to a challenge from the Wooden Spoonbills (an experienced Twitchathon team of Milton Ulladulla District birdwatchers), a team of BirdLife Shoalhaven members from the Bay and Basin area was formed to contest this year's event.

Our team - the Many-eyed Goat-suckers - was made up of Yolande Cozijn, Karen Davis and me. The team name is the translation of the original scientific name for the Spotted Nightjar (*Caprimulgus argus*). *Caprimulgus* comes from the Latin "capra" meaning "nanny goat", and "mulgere" meaning "to milk", referring to an ancient myth that nightjars suck milk from goats. "Argus" is Greek for "many-eyed", with Argus from Greek mythology being a giant with one hundred eyes.



Spotted Nightjar

The Twitchathon is a contest in which teams aim to see as many bird species as they can in an allotted time. This year the Twitchathon went national, and there were three different events - the 24-hour main event, the 12-hour Champagne race, and the Birdathon, where each team has three 1-hour blocks which they can choose to use at any time i.e. one hour at your local park, another hour at a wetland, and a third hour in a patch of rainforest a few hours away.

The Many-eyed Goat-suckers chose the 24 hour event, even though we did not plan to bird at night or drive any great distances. In fact, we confined our birdwatching to the central and northern parts of the Shoalhaven.

The Twitchathon is a fundraising event, and in NSW all money raised from the 2016 event will go towards the recovery of the Gould's Petrel, with critical habitat of the endangered breeding population on Cabbage Tree Island near Newcastle being recently destroyed by storms.

Our team had many generous sponsors, with some opting to donate a fixed amount, and others offering us

some extra incentive by donating amounts varying from ten cents to one dollar per bird!



Gould's Petrel

We started at Huskisson at 2pm on October 29th, checking out Voyager Park, Sharknet Beach and the Myola sandspit. Our first birds were a Red Wattlebird, a couple of Willie Wagtails and a Silver Gull.

We also roamed the main street looking for sparrows, starlings, rock doves and Indian Mynahs - the ferals all just as valuable as an Eastern Bristlebird or a White-bellied Sea-eagle during the event!



Karen and Yolande at Cave Beach

Then it was on to the Vincentia Water Treatment Plant (sewerage works) for a quick trip around the perimeter before heading out to Booderee National Park where we visited Cave Beach (Australasian Gannet), Ryan's Swamp (Chestnut Teal), the Murray's Beach boat ramp (Whistling Kite) and car park (Yellow Thornbill, Striated Thornbill and Brown Thornbill).

We were also treated to an enthusiastic and very loud display of tail-slapping by a family group of whales about 150 metres north of the boat ramp.

On the way back to Yolande's place for dinner, we stopped off in Bayswood hoping for Brown Quail which we did not see - but we did spot an unexpected Dusky Woodswallow! A quick trip around Yolande's property saw us pick up Brown Gerygone, King Parrot and

Common Bronzewing, and we hoped to hear a Southern Boobook or Tawny Frogmouth during dinner on the deck, but went unrewarded. On our way home we received a text from Yolande saying she had heard the Boobook about ten minutes after we left. Unfortunately it could not be counted as the rules state that more than half the team must see or hear the bird. Bugger!



Common Bronzewing - common, but beautiful

Our total at the end of the day was about 70 birds, which we thought was pretty good for an afternoon of birdwatching, but the "easy" birds had now all been seen and additional birds would be much harder to acquire.

Karen and I were back at Yolande's house just after 6am the next morning and we picked up a few more birds before heading north to Bomaderry Creek where we were hoping for Rock Warbler and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater - which did not disappoint! The Rock Warbler was a "lifer" for Yolande!

At Bomaderry Creek we met two other Twitchathon teams doing the 12 hour Champagne Race - the first from Canberra who were starting in Nowra and finishing in Canberra, and the second another Shoalhaven team - the Paradise Shoal Ducks - Barry Virtue, Carla Jackett and Kim Touzel. The Canberra team dipped on Rock Warbler!

After Bomaderry Creek we ventured west to Bangalee on the banks of the Shoalhaven River, one of my favourite birding spots. Karen and I had argued whether it should have been visited first thing in the morning or second. It probably made little difference, as the birding at Bangalee turned out to be fantastic - as usual!

New birds for our list at Bangalee included Lyrebird, Olive-backed Oriole, Green Catbird, Yellow-throated Scrubwren and Large-billed Scrubwren, the latter two species being two more "lifera" for Yolande.

We detoured through Cambewarra looking for Cattle Egrets but only picked up Blackbirds, then it was out through East Nowra towards Lake Wollumboola, getting that elusive Cattle Egret near the Golf Driving Range.

At Wollumboola we ran into the Paradise Shoal Ducks again, who were just leaving and who offered us absolutely no advice, hints or guidance - which would have been against the rules anyway!



Carla and Barry at Lake Wollumboola (photo by Kim Touzel)

My contribution at the Lake was carrying and setting up the tripod and telescope so that Karen and Yolande could work on identifying the few remaining waders that had not headed inland following the recent floods. I am terrible at wader identification ...

Karen and Yolande saw Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Bar-tailed Godwits (both of which I can identify - on a good day), as well as Kestrel, Black-shouldered Kite, and some Black Swans way in the distance on the south side of the Lake. The girls also insisted that they identified at least one Red Knot and some other waders - but they all looked the same to me ...



Karen had spotted a Crested Pigeon on the way to Lake Wollumboola, but Yolande and I had missed it, so with time running out we drove the streets of Orient Point hoping to find one. Karen spotted another one, and after a couple of quick U-turns the rest of the team saw it as well, and yet another tick was added to our list.

In the end we finished with 111 birds with nothing particularly unusual or tremendously exciting - except for Yolande's three lifers of course.

Perhaps the most remarkable part of the experience was birds that we expected to see but missed, like Australasian Grebe and White-faced Heron. In fact none of us saw a White-faced Heron until four days after the event when one flew past me on the St Georges Basin Country Club golf course.



Our route

You might think we did really well when I tell you we finished 10th out of all the teams in the NSW 24 hour event, until I mention that there were only 11 teams competing!

The three top teams all recorded more than 200 birds, with the winning team - the Dodgy Drongos - accumulating 242 species and finishing just ahead of the legendary Hunter Home Brewers who saw 233.

Top score in the Champagne 12 hour race was 177, with the Paradise Shoal Ducks finishing 6th out of 16 with 118 species, and the Wooden Spoonbills finishing 9th with 95.

Big Year for MUD Birders

The Milton Ulladulla District Birders recently produced a spreadsheet detailing their birdwatching activities and the birds that were sighted for 2016.

Locations visited were Bomaderry Creek, Burrill Lake, Burrill west, Comerong Island, Garrads Lane, Kioloa Coastal Campus (ANU), Lake Conjola Nature Reserve, Lake Tabourie, Lake Wollumboola, Leo Drive walking track to Narrawallee Inlet, McDonald SF - Calgaroo Rd, Meroo Lake, Millards Creek (Ulladulla), Milton Rainforest, Morton National Park - Little Forest, North Fisherman's Paradise, Pointer Gap Road, Ulladulla Sports Ground, Warden Head, Wilfords Lane Wetlands and Yatte Yattah.

The total number of bird species seen during the year was 157, which is roughly 20% of all the birds in Australia. A novice birdwatcher attending all of the MUD Birders outings last year, and sighting all of the birds, would be well on the way to an impressive life list!

Willy Wagtails - gotta love 'em!



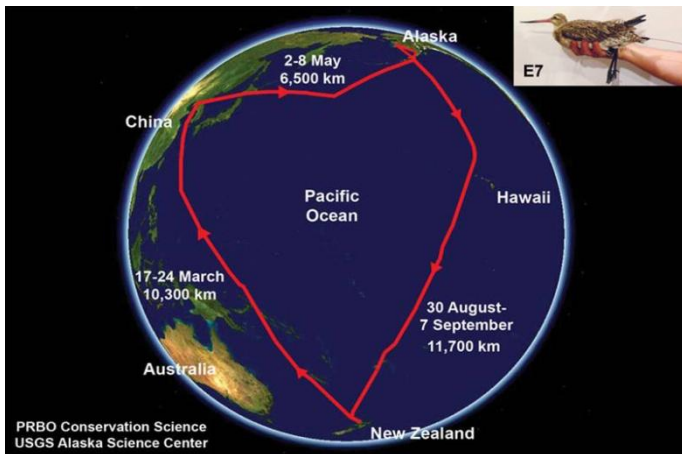
Successful talk-night in Sanctuary Point

by Rob Dunn

The success of any event can be judged by how many attend and the comments you get afterwards. To have 100 people turn up at St Georges Basin Community Centre on 5 December for the first of our evening talks in a series entitled 'Nature Conservation Through Birds' was great to see. We also received a lot of positive, informal feedback.

Any event like this depends upon the quality of the speakers and what they have to say. Phil Straw and Mayor Amanda Findley certainly did not disappoint.

Phil Straw is an expert in migratory shorebirds and has worked with Australian and foreign governments and conservation groups along the flyway routes. Phil chose to focus on one species, the Bar-tailed Godwit, or to be specific the sub-species *Limosa lapponica Baueri*. This bird completes the longest unbroken flight of any animal in the world, when it travels 11,000 kms. non-stop from its breeding grounds in Alaska to spend the winter in Australia and New Zealand.



As well as the well-documented loss of critical wetland habitat with rapid land reclamation in the Yellow Sea, Phil also talked about the research of committed Chinese scientists and community projects educating a growing number of Chinese birders on the issues.



Mayor Findley talked about the challenges to Council in maintaining an unspoilt Shoalhaven, given increases in population, development and tourism growth. The Mayor congratulated BLS on the work that our members have done to protect vital bird habitat.

She specifically mentioned the Save Collingwood Beach campaign and the fight to save Lake Wollumboola, thanking Frances Bray for her amazing long-standing contribution. She urged us to continue to take Council to task on key planning issues, including the next phase of the struggle to save Collingwood Beach, while also promoting the natural wonders of Shoalhaven by linking in to the Council's social media.



Amanda Findley and Phil Straw

Between the two talks we showed a video on the birds of Lake Wollumboola, directed and filmed by Max Davies, who joined us on the night. This impressive film shows the beauty and diversity of birdlife at the lake and the people who care for and celebrate them. If anyone would like to show the video at a community event please get in contact with us.

With the success of the evening we have set the bar quite high for future talks. But we are looking forward to making these talks a key feature of our calendar. You can read more about our next event in this newsletter.

Web Watch

- by Chris Grounds

This article is a new idea for the conservation theme of our newsletter. It canvasses some of the internet news re birdlife conservation over recent months. You may have seen some items but all make for some interesting reading about birds and conservation. The web address, which can be pasted into your web browser is provided with a short version of the news item.

Carnaby's Black Cockatoo

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-20/carnaby-cockatoos-breeding-program-edith-cowan-success/8134164>

A Perth university's program to encourage the threatened **Carnaby's Cockatoo** to breed in urban areas by installing custom-built nesting hollows has been hailed a success, after five chicks hatched this year.



Wildlife authorities did not believe the critically endangered Carnaby's Black Cockatoo bred in Perth. However a chance discovery by a student of a suspected nesting hollow in a car park at a university in the city's northern suburbs a year ago prompted Edith Cowan University (ECU) to install nine artificial hollows in trees around its Joondalup campus

Night Parrot

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-03/elusive-night-parrots-drinking-habits-revealed/8159588>

Scientists have discovered when endangered night parrots leave the safety of their hideouts to drink at waterholes, in a breakthrough which could help boost the population.

Venturing out from the spinifex to the open water exposes the nocturnal, ground-dwelling birds to predators, including feral cats, which live near the water holes and dams to catch prey.



The study found that the birds, which were once thought extinct, would only make the dangerous trip when the day-time temperature in their roost hits 40 degrees Celsius.

Orange-bellied Parrot

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/06/breeding-for-their-lives-the-plight-of-orange-bellied-parrot-leaves-a-lump-in-the-throat?>

For the past five years, around 25 orange-bellied parrots (known as OBPs) have returned to Tasmania to breed – precariously low but consistent numbers. Captive-bred birds have been added to the wild population for the last three years, though many seem to breed then disappear without trace.



Photograph by Lachlan Hall

But last spring, to our horror, the number of arrivals stopped at 16. The sum of Australia's most endangered bird was three females and 13 males. And since breeding is what OBP conservation is all about, in effect there were a mere three pairs left in the world.

Climate Change Adaptation

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-02/growing-parrot-wingspan-could-be-due-to-climate-change/8152602>

Scientists believe the rapid growth of the wing length of a common Western Australian bird could be due to climate change.



The University of Notre Dame research found the wings of ringneck parrots — commonly called twenty-eights — had increased by four to five millimetres over the past 45 years.

Human Swan Migrates

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/dec/05/human-swan-sacha-dench-flies-across-channel-epic-4500-migration>

The conservationist and "human swan" Sacha Dench has become the first woman to cross the English Channel in a motorised paraglider during her epic 4,500-mile journey following migrating birds from Russia to Britain.

The 41-year-old made history crossing the Channel on her paramotor after an eventful 10-week flight accompanying the annual migration of Bewick swans to better understand the reasons for their declining numbers.

Bird species vanish from UK due to climate change

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jan/11/birds-vanish-england-climate-change-habitat-loss>

"Birds are facing a double-edged sword from climate change and declines in habitat quality," said Tom Oliver, at the University of Reading, who led the new study. "In England, birds (like the Meadow Pipit shown) really look like they are struggling to cope with climate change. They are already being hit with long-term reductions in habitat quality and, for the cold-associated birds, those losses are being further exacerbated by climate change."



Pet Sounds (no - not the Beach Boys)

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/dec/06/pet-sounds-why-birds-have-much-in-common-with-humans>

An expert on Australian native species says birds can have empathy, grieve after the death of a partner and form long-term friendships.

Numbers matter in kookaburra society because a neighbouring tribe may have its eye firmly on the expansion of territory – and may invade a smaller group.



Shoalhaven Seasonal Calendar

- by Chris Grounds

The author acknowledges the Aboriginal culture and ownership of the peoples, elders past and present of the Yuin Nation and their knowledge of the seasons and cycles of nature.

At our AGM in 2016 I introduced a version of a local seasonal calendar as part of the presentation and subsequent walk in the Heritage Estate.

This version is a first proper model of the calendar and better response to the interest that was expressed in the concept, which recognized the value and interest of linking birdlife to the true climatic seasons. The I.T. work to transform the model into a proper visual format was expertly done by our very own Brett Davis.

The European four seasons concept is for this country, a grossly inappropriate notion that is misleading and has very limited value for education about our environments. Indeed, it is positively distracting from reality and appreciation.

Such a perspective is of course not new to Aboriginal peoples such as the Yuin Nation clans of the South Coast, whose totem is Umbarah, the Pacific Black Duck.



Nature has its own rhythms, its own annual calendar of seasons depicted regularly in variations in natural elements, particularly flora but in other elements such as birds, their migration and nesting and that this is related to major global forces.

This seasonal calendar has developed from observations over many years, on the south coast and especially the central Shoalhaven based on flora, trees in particular and bird behaviours. The intense study of and photography in the Heritage Estate became the focus of this work in more recent years.

The calendar is in no way intended to replace an Aboriginal view which warrants its own presentation and respect for the greater dimension it can give to our view of the notion of seasons.

The calendar is being presented to generate an interest, appreciation and possible participation in developing knowledge of our country and environment.

Importantly, the seasonal calendar can also contribute to the cause of conservation as it establishes a broader and more dynamic view of environment, so often neglected in debates.

The calendar involves some fundamental changes to the concept of seasons. New names which simply reflect broad, seasonal climatic change and do not imply other natural conditions are used, e.g. autumn is replaced by the COOLING season, Spring by the WARMING season.



Seasonal change is represented as a transition rather than a fixed day and date line.

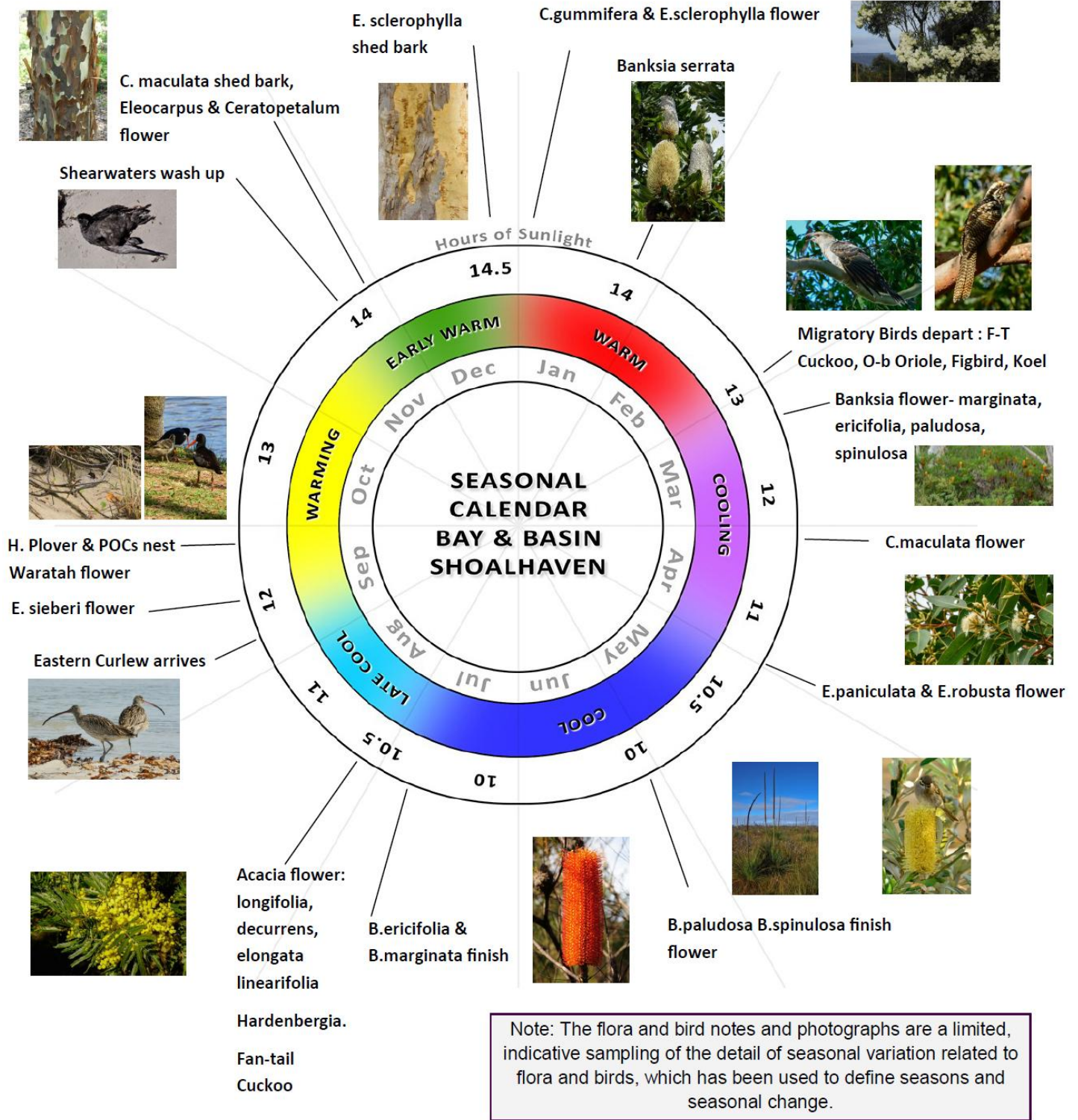


The calendar is supplemented by a selection of indicative detail involving both flora and birdlife but it is limited to illustrative examples in this presentation. Readers may well add a lot of other detail you are familiar with from your birding experience in the bush and beach.

Most of all I trust that it will generate an extended interest and perspective in our birdlife, habitat and conservation.

Then of course we might well reflect on the old adage that "the seasons are changing"!

SEASONAL CALENDAR ST GEORGES BASIN—JERVIS BAY



GRAPHICS I.T.— Brett Davis

© COPYRIGHT—Chris Grounds. This diagram may not be reproduced, copied, printed or used in transmission without the express written permission of the author. Jan 2017

Magpie Wars and Incest!

- by Brett Davis

I have a confession to make - my wife and I feed birds! We have been feeding Magpies at our suburban St Georges Basin home for the past twelve years - but just like Japanese whalers, we swear that it is only done for research purposes!

In 2005 we began leaving a small amount of mince on a saucer on our front porch each morning. Before long the pair of Magpies who "own" the territory that includes our house, noticed the food and began taking it. We named the female Baldy as she was missing a few feathers from her scalp, and the male we named Mister.

Once Baldy and Mister were coming in regularly, we began sitting on the porch while they fed, then once they were accustomed to our presence we started throwing them small pieces of mince rather than leaving it out, and we gradually reduced the distance of our throws until we eventually had the Magpies eating out of our hands.



More correctly, we had Baldy eating out of our hands. It took 18 months of constant effort before we could convince Mister to do the same. This was a pattern that was to be repeated over the years - female Magpies learn quickly to take food from our hands, while male Magpies are always a lot more cautious.

Late in 2005 Baldy and Mister arrived one morning with a single fledgling we called Junior. At first the adults would take the food from our hands and feed their whining baby, but as the weeks passed they fed Junior less and less, but he watched them take the food from us and soon learned to do the same. It was always a wonderful day when a young bird first took food from our hands.

The family group of 3 stayed together until sometime in Autumn. The parents had not been feeding Junior for a couple of months, and Mister had become increasingly aggressive towards his son, even pecking him occasionally and forcing him to cower or roll over onto his back. We don't know if Junior left of his own accord or was forced out, but by the time Spring rolled around Junior was gone. This too was a pattern that was repeated over the years - no offspring ever stayed in the family group longer than about 9 months.

Studies tell us that Magpies live in family groups of 2 to 20 birds. With our Magpies, the family group has always been two adults plus babies who are kicked out of the territory prior to the next breeding season.



In 2006 Baldy and Mister continued coming in for food, and taking it away, but they never brought in their offspring. A neighbour told us that he had seen Magpies feeding a Koel, so we suspect our Magpies were cuckooed that year.

In 2007 our Magpies presented us with three babies - Huey, Dewey and Louie. All three youngsters were soon feeding from our hands. Huey disappeared after a couple of weeks, but reappeared 6 months later, just in time to be kicked out of the territory along with her two siblings.

Sometime before the Spring of 2008 Mister disappeared - presumed dead - but a month or two later Baldy showed up with a new man - Consort, and he has been the most difficult bird to train. It took almost three years before he would eat from our hands. Consort turned out to be a bit of a lad ... but more about that later.

Over the next three years, Baldy and Consort produced one fledgling each year. In 2008 it was a male we named Didley Squat, so called because he had something wrong with his legs and would sit at every opportunity rather than stand. 2009 saw another male fledgling - Short Stuff - and in 2010 it was a female fledgling we named Face Ache because she was a real complainer. The "feed me" cries of all young Magpies are obnoxious, but Face Ache took complaining to a whole new level!



Short Stuff liked hiding his head under his wing

The literature tells us that Magpies occupy territories of 2 to 20 hectares. The territory of our birds - as far as we can tell - stretches about 200 metres from the northwest corner of our backyard down to the waters of St Georges Basin, and about 400 - 500 metres to the west, which comprises about 8 to 10 hectares. It could be larger.

Because our house is located in the extreme north-east corner of our Magpie territory, our birds never nest there, preferring a location closer to the middle of their territory. As a result, we never really knew how many eggs they lay, how many eggs hatch, or how many babies survive long enough to fledge. We also don't always know the fate of birds that go missing, so in 2011 when Baldy stopped showing up, we could only suspect that she had died. That was a very sad day!

Consort and his daughter Face Ache stayed together into 2012. You can imagine our surprise, shock and horror when they arrived one morning in Spring with their two babies! Incest in the Magpie world - who knew? We named the babies M1 and M2.

In July 2013 Consort and Face Ache began the process of kicking out the kids. The male M1 was forced out in early July, with the female M2 eventually evicted a couple of weeks later. Consort, however, also kicked out Face Ache (his partner and daughter) and replaced her with a new female after days of noisy territorial battles.

We called the new female Lucy, because like the famous comedienne, she had a lot of explaining to do! Consort and Lucy produced no successful offspring in their first

year together, but in 2014 they presented us with their new son. We called him Dex - for no particular reason.

2015 was an epic year. In June, Consort decided that he did not love Lucy anymore. He kicked her out and took up with his 4th partner - White Wings - imaginatively named because she had a lot of white on her wings! White Wings immediately kicked out her stepson - Dex - but in the following weeks, before she and Consort could settle down and enjoy their life together, all hell broke loose in Magpie world!

We suddenly had Magpies all over the place - chasing, fighting, calling - it looked like a Magpie version of the Battle of Britain! A few days later when the Magpie war was over, we realised that there had been a complete changing of the guard!

Lucy had quickly recovered from Consort's rejection of her, and had taken up with a new partner - who we naturally called Ricky. When White Wings had booted Lucy's son Dex from the territory, Dex had joined his mother and her new partner and all three of them had combined forces to attack Consort and White Wings and successfully take over their territory. We never saw Consort and White Wings again.

Last November Lucy and Ricky brought in their first two babies, a female named Piano and a male named Forte (Piano had a very soft voice and Forte was loud). Piano went missing in early December, but Lucy, Ricky and Forte are still with us today.



We feed our Magpies only the best quality mince - the leanest meat we can find because Magpies don't tolerate fat in their diets. Our Magpies actually eat better than we do! We buy 500g of mince at a time, and roll it into balls of about 15 to 20 grams. These are placed on a tray and popped into the freezer, and then stored in a container in the freezer once they are solid. We move one meatball into the fridge every evening so that it is thawed ready for feeding the next morning.

Our Magpies don't depend on us for food. Some days they don't come in. Some days they only take a very small amount. When we go away on holiday the Magpies fend for themselves totally, and they always come in again within a couple of days of our return, even after we spent six weeks in France last year.

Sometimes our Magpies will come in and just sit on the porch without taking any food. We have come to recognize that this means the bird is about to regurgitate a pellet of indigestible material composed of insect shells, bones or seeds. They open their beaks a few times, convulse a little bit, and then shake out the offending pellet. Once it is gone, they are totally happy again and come straight in for their food!



By feeding our Magpies, we have come to know each and every individual bird, their personalities, idiosyncrasies, interactions and life histories. We know that Magpie females take food readily, but males are more circumspect. We know that Magpies take a lot of notice of the calls of other birds, particularly the warning calls of Masked Lapwings. Consort and his four partners have shown us that Magpies definitely don't mate for life!

We also know that young Magpies act like absolute idiots when their parents are present - begging them for food, fluttering their wings helplessly, falling over their own feet, and not noticing pieces of mince that are tossed their way. But as soon as the adults leave, young Magpies miraculously grow up and function like fully-fledged adults (pun intended).

And unlike other birds like Kookaburras, our Magpies have never become aggressive or demanding - the way they take the food the first time is the way they always take it. They even seem to understand the concept of taking turns, and don't complain when we feed one bird first and then the other.

Without being up close and personal when our Magpies sing to us, we would never have heard them imitating other birds. Consort and Ricky have done excellent impressions - especially the calls of Satin Bowerbirds and Grey Butcherbirds!

And the research goes on!

Eury The Spoon-billed Sandpiper

- book review by Mike and Rose Clear

Eury The Spoon-billed Sandpiper

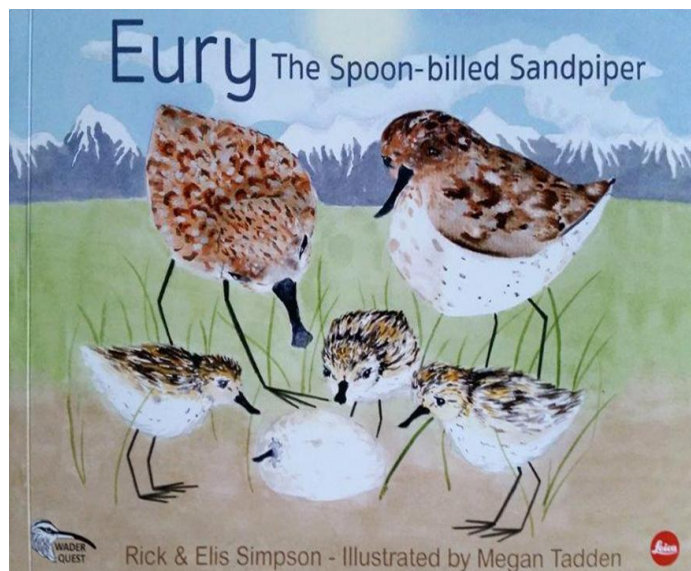
By Rick & Elis Simpson

Illustrated by Megan Tadden

Published by Wader Quest Publishing

2016

"Eury The Spoon-billed Sandpiper" is a beautifully written and illustrated story about the life cycle experience of a critically endangered wader. The title itself provides an interesting and subtle reference to the scientific name for this wader (shorebird) species.



We get to know Eury and his family as we might any family. Sometimes to anthropomorphize in this way can be strained, but here it is comfortable and compelling. We can easily envisage our own grandchildren being captivated by Eury's life and the many adventures he encounters, and experiencing the many emotions that, like all good stories, it evokes.

Of course, "Eury The Spoon-billed Sandpiper" is more than a delightful children's story, because through it, the authors Rick and Elis Simpson who reveal intimate knowledge of the birds, provide a powerful conservation message about the many threats including, and perhaps especially, from "the creatures that walk upright". The clever insinuation of themselves into the story, as friendly upright creatures, is a gem.

This book could be enjoyed, read or read to, by anyone. More narrowly, it might be considered most suitable for upper primary level.

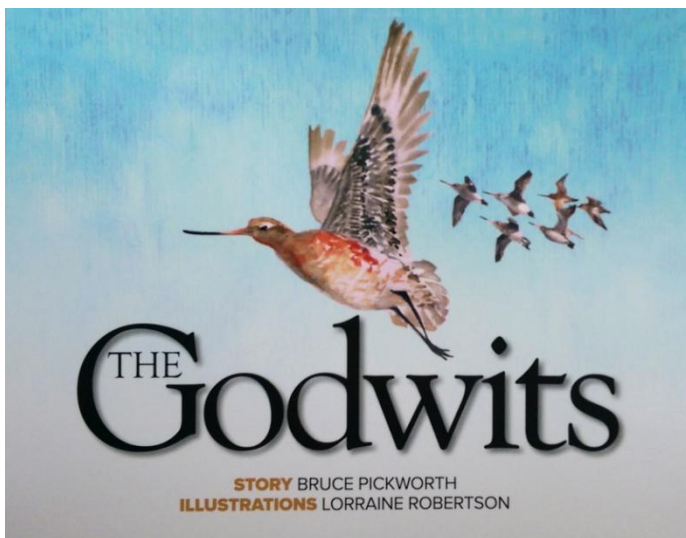
We applaud the authors and the illustrator for this charming and valuable contribution to children's literature about endangered waders.

The Godwits

Phil Straw's passion and knowledge for migratory shorebirds was more than evident at his recent talk "The World's Longest Flight". He has inspired many people in different ways, including those wanting to communicate through stories and art.

"The Godwits" by Bruce Pickworth, with illustrations by Lorraine Robertson came about after Bruce attended a shorebird identification course run by BirdLife Australia at Shoalhaven Heads late in 2014.

Bruce says that Phil Straw and the other presenters outlined the plight of our migratory birds, and that he found that the NZ research on the Godwits was fascinating.



The Godwits is a children's book aimed at primary school-aged readers. The story imagines the lives of a group of Bar-tailed Godwits as they prepare for their annual northerly migration from the NSW south coast to their Alaskan breeding grounds. Lots of tensions, lots of challenges.

A parallel narrative sketches the life of 13-year-old Goo Wei, who lives on the shores of the Yellow Sea beneath the godwits' flyway. The boy's life and the birds' lives intersect when he mounts a courageous protest against plans for a housing development on an important "stop-over" spot for the long-distance travellers.

The book contains beautiful illustrations, a strong narrative, and important social and environmental messages.

"The Godwits" can be purchased for \$15 by contacting Bruce on bullawaibooks@gmail.com.

Bruce has generously agreed to donate \$5 to BLS for each copy sold.

Shoalhaven Birders in 2017

Away Trips for 2017

April 4-7 - Pelican Sheep Station

The Pelican Sheep Station is in Braidwood Road between Goulburn and Tarago. (Philip 4821 4668)

This is a working sheep property (check out their website) which does farmstays with cabins and a lodge which would suit our purposes. The lodge which accommodates 24 people, has a common room and kitchen area and above this four units with two rooms each, one with double bed and one with bunks. A reduced charge has been negotiated for this. For three nights it would be \$1900. If we have 24 people; \$80 pp for 3 nights, or 20, \$95 pp for 3 nights, etc. Philip, the owner, will guide us to birding on the property and we can access some good birding sites nearby around Goulburn, Bungonia and Braidwood, Monga NP.

Depending on interest we will make a tentative booking for 3 nights, April 4-7, but would need confirmation and money by the March outing at the latest.

October 10-13 YHA Hostel Bundanoon

Here we have the option of dorm accommodation (\$35 pp pn) or camping (\$17 pp pn) We have been here before and the kitchen and lounge area are very suitable for our purposes. We can access walks in Bundanoon and good birding sites in the Mossvale - Mittagong area. We will need to make a similar booking arrangement, confirm by September.

Bob Ashford turns 70 ...



No need for bread ...

BirdLife Shoalhaven Calendar for 2017

February

Friday 3rd	Millard's Creek (MUD)	Meet 8am on corner of St Vincent St and Geoffrey St, Ulladulla
Monday 6th	BirdLife Shoalhaven AGM	6pm at Vincentia Golf Club for dinner, AGM at 7pm, Trivia at 8pm.
Friday 17th	Comerong Island (MUD)	Meet 8am at back of Harry Higgs Room or 9:15am at the ferry
Sunday 19th	Shoalhaven Heads (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the migratory bird airport at the river

March

Friday 3rd	Garrads Reserve (MUD)	Meet 8am at back of Harry Higgs Room or 8:15 at the end of Leo Drive
Tuesday 14th	MUD Birders meeting (MUD)	Meet 7:30pm at Harry Higgs Room - activity TBA
Friday 17th	Yatte Yattah NR (MUD)	Meet 8am at back of Harry Higgs Room, 8:15am at the Nature Reserve
Sunday 19th	Yalwal / Bamarang (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the corner of Yalwal and Albatross Roads
Saturday 25th	Tomerong (BLS)	Meet 8am at corner of Parnell and Cambourne Roads, Tomerong. We will do a loop in Jervis Bay NP, and along the power line trail, before morning tea at 62 Cambourne Road. Leader Hugh Capes 0499 219 449.
Friday 31st	Nth Fishermans P'dise (MUD)	Meet 8am at back of Harry Higgs Room, 8:15am Murrays Road turnoff

April

4-7	Goulburn area trip (SB)	Pelican Sheep Station. 3 nights, cabin accommodation - contact Barry Virtue for details - 4464-1389
Friday 14th	Property on Conjola Ck (MUD)	Meet 8am at back of Harry Higgs Room (Good Friday
Sunday 30th	Nowra Ck / Ben's Walk (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the Nowra Showground lookout

May

Sunday 21st	Currarong (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the Coonemia / Currarong Roads
-------------	----------------	---

June

Sunday 18th	Bangalee (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the Illaroo Rd carpark at northern end of the bridge
-------------	---------------	---

July

Sunday 16th	Jervis Bay/Greenpatch (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the Booderee NP Visitor Centre carpark
-------------	----------------------------	---

August

Sunday 20th	Bundanon (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the Illaroo Rd carpark at northern end of the bridge
-------------	---------------	---

September

Sunday 17th	Bellawongarah (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the north side of Apex Park, Berry
-------------	--------------------	---

October

10 -13	Southern Highlands trip (SB)	YHA Hostel Bundanoon, dorms \$35, camp \$17pp
Sunday 15th	Jerrara Dam / Spring Ck (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the north side of Apex Park, Berry

November

Sunday 19th	Lake Wollumboola (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the lake entrance at Culburra
-------------	-----------------------	--

December

Sunday 17th	Greys Beach / Golf Course (SB)	Meet 8:30am at the launching ramp at Greys Beach
-------------	--------------------------------	--

* The BirdLife Shoalhaven calendar contains activities from the branch (BLS) and two associated birdwatching groups - Shoalhaven Birders (SB) and the Milton-Ulladulla District Birdwatching Club (MUD). Members can attend all activities.

BirdLife Shoalhaven outings are organised by Karen and Brett Davis - 0487 208 437 and 0497 868 471.

Shoalhaven Birders (SB) meet every third Sunday of the month at 8.30am. There are no leaders on their outings, and it is possible that nobody else will turn up, especially if the weather is bad. Trips away usually go ahead. Contacts: Stan and Su Brown 4443-4828, Peter and Julie Hale 0402 076 548, Barry and Susan Virtue 4464-1389. [Latest program](#).

MUD Birdwatchers (MUD) have outings every fortnight on Fridays from 8am until about 11am. Membership of the MUD Birdwatchers club is open to all members of the Milton Ulladulla U3A. For information about joining MUD Birdwatchers, phone Marg Hamon 4457-1129 or Chris Shinton 4454-5584 or email mubirdclub@gmail.com. [Latest program](#).

The Final Word

Collingwood Beach – an interim win, but more work ahead

- by Rob Dunn

Thanks to petitions and numerous submissions sent to Council, the community had an interim win in the campaign to Save Collingwood Beach late last year.

Council voted not to adopt either of the two plans that were placed on public exhibition, both of which would have been disastrous for dune vegetation and birds along the beach. Instead Council has appointed consultants to develop a revised plan, which will need to reflect the new Coastal Management Act 2016 management objectives and provide "a reasonable balance between appropriate vegetation and the vista of Jervis Bay from the cycleway". Council also committed to the development of a "strong policy that responds to vandalism" in the Shoalhaven.

It was a great result in many ways but the fight is not over and we are going to have to marshal the troops again mid-year when the new draft plan comes out. In preparation, the Save Collingwood Beach partnership is being expanded with more organisations "signing up" to support the campaign.

Meanwhile acts of vandalism are continuing and it is not only along Collingwood. Before Christmas the Council went to the media to seek information about unauthorized removal of vegetation at Mitchell Parade in Mollymook, and also at the Bawley Point, Kioloa, Lake Tabourie and Ulladulla foreshores.

Is it too much to hope that the final vegetation plan for Collingwood Beach and the new vandalism policy will set guidelines that will see revegetation rather than destruction of Shoalhaven's dunes?

Even if this proves to be the case, will it be too late?



Introduced species on poisoned shrubs at Collingwood Beach - is this the future of birdwatching on Shoalhaven's coast?

Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

birdlife.org.au

Add your voice

join us

Enjoy the rewards of membership, making a real difference for our native birds

volunteer

Contributing your time is one of the most effective ways to help

donate

Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats