

# Birdlife Shoalhaven Newsletter

Winter 2015



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## 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, please send details to the editor at [shoalhaven@birdlife.org.au](mailto:shoalhaven@birdlife.org.au) with any related photos, drawings or maps.

In addition, if you have any bird photographs you would like to share, please send them in as well. This includes photos of unidentified birds that could be used in our "What Bird is This" section.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the BirdLife Shoalhaven members who contributed articles to this newsletter, and also to those people who supplied images. These include Duade Paton, Ian Brown, Chris Grounds, Christine Rigg, Chris Brandis, Ann Millard and Sue Tolley. 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 has endeavoured to verify the accuracy of all information, BirdLife Shoalhaven accepts no responsibility for any 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, contributors or branch members. They may not be the views of 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

The cover photo of this edition of the BirdLife Shoalhaven Newsletter - a family of Glossy Black Cockatoos - was taken by Chris Grounds

## Editorial

- Brett Davis

There is a lot of doom and gloom in birdwatching circles around the world today, as shown in this newsletter's Francis Bray article about the Eastern Curlew and Curlew Sandpiper being listed as critically endangered due to an 80% decline in their populations in the past 20 to 30 years, primarily due to mudflat reclamation overseas.

But can we complain to overseas governments about their disastrous environmental policies if we can't stop our own governments from doing the same? Frances wants us to "think globally, act locally" and to call on our politicians to protect Lake Wollumboola, arguably the Shoalhaven's most important migratory shorebird conservation area.

Our conservation officer, Chris Grounds, reports on two areas where public pressure on politicians seems to be producing some wins, with the Heritage Estates saga nearing a favourable conservation conclusion, and the proposed Larmer Avenue wetland likely to proceed.

Chris also looks at the latest developments (poor word choice I know) with the Myola Spit at the entrance to Currumbene Creek, which may be dredged primarily to benefit commercial operators rather than residents. I recommend his latest [New Bush Telegraph](#) article.

[World seabird populations in catastrophic decline](#) - is an internet report showing that it is not just our local birds that are facing extinction, birds like our [Regent Honeyeater](#) which has also just been listed as critically endangered. I was shocked at the announcement - as I assumed the Regent Honeyeater was already on the list!

So we do what we can to halt the decline, and in the meantime we enjoy the birds while we have them, as shown in more upbeat articles by Ann Millard, Christine Rigg, Chris Brandis, Tom Kaar and Bob Ashford.

My wife and I recently had the pleasure of the company of a Tawny Frogmouth roosting in our front yard every day for five weeks. He (or she) moved on about a week ago, so now I have to content myself with the ongoing dramas of our resident Magpies, and the antics of a male Satin Bowerbird (still not completely black) as it builds its bower in our backyard, and arranges its collection of blue bottle tops, pegs and plastic.

Birds help to ease the worries of the world, even when those worries are about the future of other birds ...

**Editor's Note:** If you agree or disagree with the above sentiments why not send a letter to the editor explaining your views. Let me know if you wish to remain anonymous ...

## What Bird is This?

Nobody was game enough - or knowledgeable enough - to identify last season's "What Bird is This". The bird - shown below - was photographed at the Shoalhaven Heads Park behind the dunes on April 23rd this year. It was perched in a *Banksia integrifolia* which was flowering quite well in the area.



Photo by Chris Grounds

We think the bird (above) is the dark morph of the White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike - do you agree?



Photo by Christine Rigg

This season's bird (above) is just as easy ...

Please email your opinion about the identification of the bird to [shoalhaven@birdlife.org.au](mailto:shoalhaven@birdlife.org.au). First correct ID will not receive any material prize, but will be acknowledged in the next newsletter and therefore receive incredible fame and legendary birding cred.

## Myola Spit – Currambene Creek

- text and photos by Chris Grounds

BirdLife Shoalhaven has undertaken two major actions in 2015 concerning the conservation of birdlife at the Myola sand spit.



The first involved a formal approach through both personal contact and submission on January 27 to Shoalhaven Council pointing out the importance of the sand spit as a bird resting area within Jervis Bay - important to threatened species, important migratory species and resident indigenous species.

This submission also argued that the birdlife was being subject to intrusion, disturbance and threat from dogs, which were invariably off-leash, accompanied by owners who were clearly ignoring the 'Dog Prohibited' status and signage. The area is also Zoned E1 which is national park equivalent.

It took two months to elicit a response but eventually, after a reminder, Council responded in the following terms:

"Thank you for your email highlighting dogs and pedestrian traffic on Myola Spit and the disruption of the bird life nesting areas on the spit.

"You are correct that the area is dog prohibited and recognized as a significant site for birds both as a resting and nesting area.

"As a result of your correspondence I have had Rangers attend the location and conduct a comprehensive audit of enforcement/information signage in the area. As a result of the audit Council Rangers have placed a request for a number of signs to be installed in areas of high pedestrian traffic onto the Myola Spit to highlight the environmental significance of the area and aid with control and enforcement under the Companion Animals Act i.e. Dogs in the prohibited area/Dogs off leash on public beaches not categorized as such.

"Once the signage for the area is satisfactory Rangers will then commence a proactive enforcement of the area

which may result in prosecutions of persons who breach the legislation."

It was signed by Wayne Clark, Ranger Team Supervisor at Shoalhaven City Council , and dated April 13 2015.

The area is, of course, part of the dredging zone for the current Currambene Creek-Callala Beach Project and BirdLife Shoalhaven made a formal submission following the public exhibition of the 'Review of Environmental Factors' [REF].

A major element of our motivation was that the Ecologists Report provided bird data for the sand spit taken on three lunchtime occasions on two summer days and commented that there was no threat to birds on the sand spit from neither dogs or people. Well that comment was like an intrusion to a pair of nesting Masked Lapwings – with spurs!

BirdLife Shoalhaven provided a far more accurate and thus longer list of birds observed and photographed at the sand spit over a much longer period of time. Clear, incontrovertible evidence was also provided through photographs of the impact of intrusion by dogs.

The staff report on submissions indicated [in bold] that the REF had been amended to our input.

Our submission also indicated that BirdLife Shoalhaven could have some future role and/or input in such matters on a consultation basis.

Finally, the REF has been accepted by Council on the basis that it will have no serious environmental impact but that this will require monitoring.

So if you are at Currambene Creek as the year and dredging progresses you may like to keep an eye on the birdlife of the most important bird resting sand area in Jervis Bay and let us know of anything of note.



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**Editor's Note:** Chris Grounds is BirdLife Shoalhaven's Conservation Officer, and he is doing a terrific job!

## **Curlew Sandpiper and Eastern Curlew Critically Endangered**

**- Frances Bray**

The article “From Commonplace to Critically Endangered: our Disappearing Migratory Shorebirds” by Richard Fuller and Eduardo Gallo in the June 2015 Birdlife Australia magazine is a wake-up call to all who value migratory shorebirds, the epic flights they undertake each year and the habitats that support them.

The article details how three decades of monitoring of migratory shorebirds across Australia has revealed that at least 12 species have significantly declined and that despite ongoing conservation efforts that the decline along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway continues.

There can be no doubt that urgent action is needed both locally, nationally and internationally to slow such dramatic declines. Therefore I encourage all members to read the article and to consider local action to support migratory shorebird conservation at the most critical South Coast sites - Lake Wollumboola and the Shoalhaven Estuary - as suggested at the conclusion of this piece.

The Birdlife Australia article also reports on action by the Department of Environment in May 2015 to list both the Curlew Sandpiper and the Eastern Curlew as “Critically Endangered” under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

It also refers to recommendations by Birdlife Australia’s Research and Conservation Committee to up-list the Commonwealth threatened status of 7 migratory species and to list the Red-Necked Stint as “Near Threatened.” The 7 species are the Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit (West Coast), Terek Sand Piper, Great Knot, Red Knot (two subspecies) and Curlew Sandpiper.



Curlew Sandpiper at Lake Wollumboola  
Photo by Duade Paton

The Commonwealth determination of “**Critically Endangered**” for the **Curlew Sandpiper** states that the species has undergone very severe reduction in numbers over three generation lengths (23 years for this assessment) equivalent to at least 80.8% and that neither the reduction or causes have ceased or are understood.



The Commonwealth determination of “**Critically Endangered**” for the **Eastern Curlew** documents a severe population decline in numbers over three generation lengths (30 years for this assessment) equivalent to at least 81.4 % with similar comments regarding causes.



Eastern Curlew - photo by Duade Paton

### **Reasons for decline**

Both Determinations consider the declines for these species are due in large part to ongoing loss of intertidal mudflat habitat at key migration stages along the Yellow Sea shore in China but also to threats that are occurring locally in Australia, such as coastal development and recreational activities which cause disturbance, habitat loss, degradation from pollution, changes to water regimes and invasive plants.

Climate Change is also mentioned. These species breed in the Arctic/sub-Arctic and migrate to Australia during the northern winter, utilising key coastal wetland areas in East and South East Asia to feed and gain energy for their epic flights.

**Lake Wollumboola is internationally significant for migratory shorebirds.**

Lake Wollumboola together with the Shoalhaven-Crookhaven Estuary are listed in the Commonwealth Act and Migratory Shorebird International Treaties as important migratory shorebird habitat. Some 34 species at Lake Wollumboola are also protected under the Commonwealth Act. The species now Critically Endangered and others also threatened have all been recorded at Lake Wollumboola including over the past 2 years when the Lake's value as migratory bird habitat has been on display following the Lake opening in June 2013 and subsequent low water levels until April 2015.



The elegant Curlew Sandpipers are amongst my favourites. I have observed them on many occasions wading through the shallows, probing for food such as worms, molluscs, crustaceans, insects and seeds with their down-turned bills. I also love watching them on the sandbar where they roost with the Red Necked Stints and this past season, with the White-rumped Sandpiper. The highest number I counted at Lake Wollumboola is 8 in a group, with observations from August through to February over the past 2 years. Narelle Wright's photo above shows 10 Curlew Sandpipers.

Numbers present are likely to be higher as we cannot record all sightings of migratory species because our Little Tern volunteer duties take priority. The Commonwealth Determination notes Australia's particular responsibility for Curlew Sandpipers, because they spend their first two years here prior to commencing annual migrations.

The Eastern Curlew, the largest of the world's migratory shorebirds, is a more cryptic bird and a less frequent visitor to Lake Wollumboola. It moves in stately fashion with its long curved bill probing for crustaceans, small molluscs and insects along the mudflats and shallows. Most observations at Lake Wollumboola over the past 2+ years have been of solitary birds present from October through to February.

However during October to December 2013, Joy Pegler, Tom Kaar and I saw a group of up to 8 Eastern Curlews. The Determination also advises that as Eastern Curlews spend their first 3 years in Australia before maturing and commencing annual migrations, with birds likely to abandon feeding when disturbed, Australia has a key role to play in efforts to ensure survival of the species.

The Red-Necked Stints (photo by Duade Paton below) are also a delight, dashing to and fro as they feed along the Lake shore, taking off at the slightest perceived threat and snoozing on the sandbar in large flocks - sometimes over 150 (see photo at the bottom of this page).





The use of Lake Wollumboola by the rare White-rumped Sandpiper indicates its importance  
(photo by Narelle Wright)

### **Response to migratory shorebird decline and appeal for action.**

I was shocked at the scale of the losses documented both by the Commonwealth Determinations and the Birdlife Australia and other research, especially as someone fortunate to observe these remarkable and courageous birds close up here at Lake Wollumboola and to assist in their conservation as a NPWS Shorebird Volunteer.

I am also well aware of the likely possibility of catastrophic degradation of the Lake's unique ecosystem and loss of migratory shorebird habitat as warned by NSW Office of Environment and Heritage research 2013, should proposals for urban development go ahead.

The proposed urban expansion, including a golf course and other recreational uses in the Lake Wollumboola catchment, are proposed in the Halloran Planning Proposal and associated development applications. (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage November 2013 Report. Scanes P et al. "*Environmental Sensitivity of Lake Wollumboola: input into considerations of development applications at Long Bow Point, Culburra.*")

Although the Department of Planning and Environment staff recommendations regarding the Halloran Planning Proposal were made public in December 2014, no decision has yet been made, despite Birdlife Shoalhaven,

Lake Wollumboola Protection Association Inc and other conservation groups writing in June 2015 to express concern at the delay to the NSW Minister for Planning, Rob Stokes, and the Member for the South Coast Shelley Hancock.

Nevertheless the Commonwealth's "Critically Endangered" listing for Curlew Sand Pipers and Eastern Curlews increases the significance of Lake Wollumboola as habitat for these species and would require assessment under the Commonwealth Act, for any development or other proposals likely to impact on them.

Accordingly right now there is scope for further action and lobbying. Therefore **I urge individual members of Birdlife Shoalhaven to write** to Minister Stokes with a copy to Shelley Hancock, along the following lines, but using your own words;

Express concern regarding the plight of migratory shorebird species generally and at Lake Wollumboola in particular.

Note that the migratory shorebird species are protected under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, with the Curlew Sand Piper and Eastern Curlew now Critically Endangered as well as most species also being listed under the NSW Threatened Species Act.

Ask for assurance that;

- the assessment process for any concept approval of the Halloran Planning Proposal will include impacts of development and increased population on migratory bird species and their habitat at Lake Wollumboola and the Crookhaven River Estuary.

- high conservation value, undeveloped parts of the Lake catchment would be zoned E 2 Environment Conservation to ensure that the Lake's ecosystem is protected from development impacts and as an initial step towards inclusion in Jervis Bay National Park as part of any biodiversity offset or gifting arrangement.

Send your letters to;

The Hon Rob Stokes,  
Minister for Planning,  
[office@stokes.minister.gov.au](mailto:office@stokes.minister.gov.au)

The Hon Shelley Hancock MP  
Speaker NSW Legislative Assembly,  
Member for South Coast.  
[southcoast@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:southcoast@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

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**Editor's Note:** Frances Bray is the President of the Lake Wollumboola Protection Association Inc. She can be contacted at [info@wollumboola.org.au](mailto:info@wollumboola.org.au)

## Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas Islands

- by Ann Millard

Why go birding on Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas Islands?

Whether you are a twitcher or a lister or a birder, these islands provide for all. They are Australian Indian Ocean Territories and being so far away from the rest of the country, the birds are extra special and mostly unlike anything you see on the mainland.

Cocos (Keeling) Islands consist of 2 atolls and 27 coral islands with a maximum altitude of about 6m above sea level and a total land area of 14.2 sq km. And where is it?? Half way between Australia and Sri Lanka! And you can get there on a plane from Perth. You don't need a passport but if the flight is diverted, you might get to Denpasar.

Approximately 600 residents live on two of the islands and they are predominantly Malay Sunni Muslims whose history goes back to the first settlement with Alexander Hare in the 1820s & then with the Clunies-Ross family from 1831. There is only one bird that is endemic and that is a subspecies of the Buff Banded Rail but the other birds are a passing parade of vagrants. Some have taken up residence like the Green Junglefowl (below) and the White Breasted Waterhen, and when I was there we saw Watercock, Western Osprey, Eurasian Teal, Saunders Tern, White Tern (above right) and Chinese Pond Heron.



Christmas Island is then about 950km to the north east, and 2600km from Perth. What a contrast! It has an area of 135sq km, a coastline of mostly rocky cliffs that measures 73km and an altitude of over 300m.

There are over 2000 residents of which 70% are Australian Chinese. Phosphate is still being mined there and two-thirds of the island is National Park with large areas of monsoonal rainforest.



Most of us have heard, for years, of the special crabs there. There are 20 species of crabs with 13 of those regarded as land crabs. Millions of those crabs travel to the rocky coast to spawn in December and to protect them from cars, bridges and tunnels have been built to give them safe passage.

Frigatebirds by the hundreds, Golden Bosun birds soaring over Flying Fish Cove and three different boobies make it a very rich birding destination. This is the only place that the biggest booby, Abbott's Booby nests and then there are the Red footed and Brown Boobies (below).



There are 6 endemic birds and 5 endemic subspecies.

The top "listers" in Australia (those with over 750 Aussie birds) return to the islands every year because something new is likely to turn up. I was the novice in the group I went with in February this year but learnt such a lot from the others and added 26 birds to my "life list".

Yes, it is hot but there is generally a sea breeze. If it rains, you protect your camera and binoculars and just get wet. You dry off very quickly and it helps to cool you down.



## Heritage Estate Update

- by Chris Grounds [HEST Network Co-ordinator]

The Heritage Estate case remains locked in the Federal Court awaiting a decision on the Appeal by a landowners group.

A substantial portion of the lots have already been sold to the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife but continuing sales are hampered by the court action.

The most remarkable thing in years has been the interest and action of Shoalhaven Council in the Estate, which commenced in recent months.

The remnant estates of Pacific City between Erowal Bay village and Heritage Estate have been purchased by the Office of Environment and Heritage and will be included in the Jervis Bay National Park.

The Heritage Estate features a number of threatened species birds in the 100 plus species catalogue.

One such recent sighting was a Glossy Black Cockatoo family of mum, dad and a noisy juvenile. Other sightings have included the Scarlet Honeyeaters, Swamp Harrier and the previously unlisted White-naped Honeyeater.



Glossy Black Cockatoo

According to Birds in Backyards, Glossy Black-Cockatoo populations have declined, with local extinctions and range contractions, due to land clearing practices that have removed food sources and nesting sites. The incorporation of Heritage Estate into the Jervis Bay National Park could help reverse this trend.

The Scarlet Honeyeater has been attracted in numbers to the Grey Ironbark [*E.paniculata*], some Spotted Gum [*C.maculata*] and the profuse *Banksia ericifolia* blossom of the Heritage Estate.



Scarlet Honeyeater



White-naped Honeyeater



The map above shows the location of Heritage Estate - the area outlined in red in the centre of the image.

**Editor's Note:** Our Conservation Officer, Chris Grounds, established the HEST network and has been fighting for the estate's inclusion in JB National Park for years.

## Larmer Avenue Wetland

- text and photos by Chris Grounds

The BirdLife Shoalhaven newsletter featured the Larmer Avenue wetland project in our Autumn 2015 edition three months ago.

Since then the second community consultative meeting was conducted in May with a strong attendance from our members and a subsequent site inspection by Shoalhaven Council with BirdLife Shoalhaven and the South Coast Register featured in the local press.

The meeting included a slide show of the natural features of the area including a sample of the birdlife and heard a report from BirdLife Shoalhaven on the catalogue of bird species that had been developed.



Scarlet Honeyeater on Cockrow Creek

The proposal for the area is that it is developed as a wetland reserve supporting passive recreation such as walking and bird observation in a protected and regenerating bush area.

At the meeting in May the progress of the concept was outlined by Council's Environmental Planner, Elizabeth Dixon, and ideas were sought from the meeting on what works would be necessary on the site.

It is envisaged that on-site facilities will include access for bird observation, which will be one of drawcards for locals and tourists alike.

BirdLife Shoalhaven has made a major contribution with the provision of a bird catalogue of 68 species to the Basin Villages Forum and the Shoalhaven City Council in support of conservation at the site. The development of that catalogue will continue.

A survey of bird species at the site was commenced by BirdLife members in April 2014 and continued through the next twelve months to complete a twelve month cycle, which would include seasonal migratory species, e.g. Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Koel.

This work emphasized one of the great natural values of the site not previously realized.



The wetland features flocks of Masked lapwings

The area is actually part of the Cockrow Creek (Tomerong Creek) delta floodplain on St Georges Basin. It has a specific but varied wetland ecology that includes a number of different "Endangered Ecological Communities" which cover a large proportion of the block. That varied ecology is the basis for a quite diverse birdlife.

Council's work will now focus on community liaison and bio-banking.

The Basin Villages Forum website (see the following link) can be referenced for details and progress reports - <http://basinvillagesforum.asn.au>.

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## Biobanking

According to the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change, the Biodiversity Banking and Offsets Scheme (BioBanking) has been established to help address the loss of biodiversity and threatened species. DECC says that creating a market in biodiversity credits gives incentives to protect biodiversity values.

BioBanking will (allegedly):

- provide a transparent, consistent and robust framework for the assessment and management of biodiversity offsets
- create new opportunities for conservation on privately owned land
- provide permanent security and management for biodiversity offsets
- provide a secure mechanism for investment in biodiversity conservation.

**Editor's Note:** Biobanking does not stop unwanted development, but it does provide a mechanism of sorts to protect some areas - at the expense of others ...

## Birds around Berry

by Bob Ashford

"Aha! Some little brown jobs, Skipper. LBJ's"

Grateful that I was taking him for a walk, Skipper ceased sniffing temporarily, lifted his head, cocked his ears and upped the revs on the tail wagging. He's learned to humour me - it gets him lots of walks.

"LBJ's, Skipper, are those little non-descript brown birds that flit around the bush deliberately making it hard for you to identify them."

As Skipper ups the tail revs even more I come to the conclusion that dogs are past masters at active listening and are graciously tolerant of birders talking to themselves. "But I'm confident I know what these are." There's no tall poppy syndrome between a man and his dog! Tail and hind quarters were running on max now.

We were strolling along Swamp Road, Far Meadow. We come here regularly, mainly because no one else ever does and because there is a beautiful LBJ that can be found here. First though I had to check out the little flock in the bushes.

A male Rufous Whistler, half a dozen Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, two Grey Fantails and a Willie Wagtail which shot out of the bush to scold Skipper. Out on the track were a dozen delightful Yellow-rumped Thornbills.

There are a number of Thornbill species around Berry and until you get your eye in they can be difficult to separate. But as Skipper trotted ahead the flock lifted to the fence flashing their bright yellow rumps and called out in their distinctive little 'tinkle', reminiscent of a small wind chime. LBJ's no more.

The term LBJ is also used by birders in a derogatory way to pigeon-hole the less interesting, less attractive or the merely common birds that, from a distance all look the same. Brown and boring. Occasionally I reckon it's because they simply can't identify them.

The LBJ I was after was a dead cert to identify. There is only one like it around Berry and you almost always hear it before you see it. It plays hide and seek in tall tufted grass and tantalizes you with its buzzing 'seeek' call. It's the Golden-headed Cisticola and it's a cracker.

There are 45 species of cisticola throughout Africa, southern Europe and Asia. Almost all of them, 43, can be found in Africa and of the remaining two one is found in Madagascar and the other, the Golden-headed, in Australia. The Zitting Cisticola is also found in far north Australia as well as Asia and Africa.

As a group of birds they are murderously difficult to tell apart. I can recall days in Africa where, in spite of lions

and leopards, eagles, cranes and hornbills, I have returned to my lodge utterly depressed because I couldn't sort out the cisticolas. Just hyperactive bundles of brown and stripes. Bloody LBJ's!

But not the Golden-headed Cisticolas of Berry. "Look at this little fella, Skipper. A splash of glowing gold etched with black stripes barely the size of a Blue Wren. A little beauty." On cue Skipper revs up his tail, straightens his ears and adopts the 'Gosh! How interesting' stance.

An ordinary day, a simple walk, an LBJ and a lot of pleasure. And I thoroughly enjoyed it too.



Photo of a Golden-headed Cisticola  
by Duade Paton

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### Editor's Note:

The first Golden-headed Cisticola that I ever saw was at Fogg Dam - a fantastic birding site in the Northern Territory - about 70km from Darwin, in 1996. My second sighting was a few months later at Curl Curl Beach in Sydney, not far from where I had lived all my life.

Why had I never seen them before?

## Philippines Birding

- by Chris Brandis

In February 2014 on a trip to the Philippines organized by Chris Chafer, which I tagged along with Roger Truscott and two others, we visited the islands of Luzon, Palawan, Cebu and Bohol which had a range of both local endemic and Asian bird species.

Although birdwatching is not a very popular past time there, we had good guides with drivers at all sites - needed because maps are almost nonexistent and most places require local knowledge and pre-arranged permission.

Our first site was the water catchment area for Manila and, although a very popular outing area for the locals, we managed to see the stunning Spotted Wood-Kingfisher and both Hooded and Red-bellied Pittas. That afternoon we moved to Mt Makling where we used small motor cycles to travel up and down the steep mountain road and later saw the resident Philippine Nightjar in the nearby university grounds.

In the botanic gardens we spotted both the Scale-feathered and Red-crested Malkohas, hard to spot in the canopy for birds that are over 400 mm long. There were swifts at all sites but they are very difficult to identify being mostly all dark and whizzing around at all heights at great speed.



We then travelled to Palawan for nearly a week with the laid back capital, Puerto Princessa, being a change from the hectic Manila and one of the better birding spots being inside a penal colony where we were lucky to spot the rare Palawan Flycatcher as well as Chestnut-breasted Malkoha and a small flock of Pink-necked Green-Pigeons.

We travelled to the sleepy seaside village of Sabang where the famous Underground River flows out of the surrounding limestone cliffs into the sea and has an easily seen rare lone Peacock Pheasant (below) that lives about the small village.



Around the town there were gardens at many of the lodges where we finally found the Little Spiderhunter as well as several species of Bulbuls, Flowerpeckers and Sunbirds, some of which have been split into the specific island species as they do not travel far and have evolved in isolation.

Much of the birding was done from cleared sites overlooking rainforest and we were fortunate to see Great Slaty Woodpeckers and Blue-headed Racket-tail Parrots (below) fly through. In some of the dense rainforest we followed local paths and were lucky to call up a skulking Ashy-headed Babbler but missed on the Facellated Babbler.



We next went to Cebu which is a very modern area with a large population and after travelling by car early next morning for an hour then 30 minutes across cleared hill sides in the dark, we came to the Taboan Forest, the last remaining patch of rainforest and only about one square kilometre in size. We perched on a limestone outcrop for several hours waiting to see the Cebu Flowerpecker, which had not been seen for about a year and has probably gone extinct, but we did see the rare and endemic to Cebu Black Shama.

Next morning we caught an inter island ferry to Bohol, another more lay back island, which had been affected by a recent earthquake that had damaged some of the old Spanish buildings around the town. We stayed at a butterfly sanctuary which had good gardens and friendly staff and close to the birding spots, including a national park with rainforest which was quite hard birding with most birds high in the canopy.

There was also a small stream nearby where the black and white Silvery Kingfisher lived and a coconut plantation that had flowers that attracted several Sunbird Species and just up the road was a sanctuary for the tiny nocturnal primate Tasiar, below.



We then flew back to Manila and spent a few days at Subic Bay where the US Navy left large areas of untouched rainforest where birding along the roads can be very rewarding birding wise including the only Whiskered Treeswift (below) that we sighted and a Blue-throated Bee-eater colony (next column).

For the last few days we travelled to the Bangkoon Khao Valley staying at a lodge overlooking the rainforest and then on to the coastal forests of Rizal where we found the rare Philippine Trogon, below.



We saw some 260 species, depending on the taxonomy, but as much of the main Philippine islands are heavily populated and intensely developed many of the species are becoming endangered but those remaining habitat pockets that still exist are very interesting and well worth the effort and they will hopefully encourage a greater local appreciation of their bird life.

Travelling back to Manila we stopped at the Candaba Wetlands, an IBA site that produced the only duck species that we came across on the whole trip but it is now under threat by rice paddy expansion.



## "Saving Our Species" Election Promise

- by Chris Grounds



Pied Oystercatchers - Bherwerre beach

BirdLife Shoalhaven contacted member for the South Coast, Shelley Hancock, at the time of the last state election to enquire about the NSW government's promised threatened species funding program - with a view to seeing what it may mean for the birds of the Shoalhaven.

The Minister Mark Spackman responded on June 19 to the local request with information on the "Saving Our Species" state program. The Minister indicated there is to be an additional \$100 million from 2015/17 to secure 970 species and manage threats to flora and fauna species.

The program groups species into six management streams based on ecology, distribution and known information.

The public database is linked to three of the management streams: site-managed species, iconic species and data deficient species.

The database also provides information on developing projects for the three other management streams: landscape-managed species, partnership species and keep watch species.

The program will be led by the Office of Environment and Heritage and will involve interactions which include the community and to this end \$10 million is devoted to a 'Partnerships Grants Program' over ten years.

Further details can be accessed at: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/savingourspecies/about.htm>

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**Editor's Note:** A typical government response, but it does not answer the question - what does this mean for Shoalhaven birds?

## Habitat Loss

- excerpts from an article in the Guardian

Habitat loss is seen as the primary threat to at-risk species but recovery plans avoid addressing it and governments have entrenched the extinction process

Successive Australian governments have failed to protect the habitat of the country's most endangered creatures, with 90% of the 120 most endangered animals having no safeguards to prevent the loss of their homes, a new study has found.

This is despite the fact that habitat loss due to developments such as housing and mining is considered to be the primary threat to nearly 70% of these at-risk species.

Around half of all of Australia's forests have either been cut down or severely disturbed since European arrival on the continent, meaning the habitat of a vast array of species has become fragmented or vanished.

Australia contains more than 5% of the world's plants and animals, with 87% of them endemic, meaning they aren't found anywhere else on Earth. However, the country has one of the worst extinction records in the world, with 50 species vanishing in the past 200 years, including 27 mammal species.

A total of 1,764 Australian species are listed by the federal government as being threatened to some degree.

"Extinction is a choice," said Samantha Vine, head of conservation at BirdLife Australia. "Where we've tried in the past, Australia has been remarkably successful at recovering threatened species. In many cases averting extinction has been straightforward and relatively inexpensive.

"Securing and improving existing habitats for threatened species is one of the most powerful and cost effective conservation tools at our disposal."

Gregory Andrews, the national threatened species commissioner, said the government will also launch an ambitious threatened species strategy that will look at habitat loss and improving recovery plans.

"Given the animals and plants at risk, and losses we have already endured, a strategic response is required," he said.

"And by working on the basis of science, focusing on practical action and partnering as broadly as possible, I'm confident that it's possible."

The article stated "We have a choice – we either accept that we put developments in less environmentally sensitive areas or we will have species go extinct."

## Early bird winds back the avian clock

- from the ABC article shown in the link below

[www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2015/05/06/4230439](http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2015/05/06/4230439)



The image above is a reconstruction of *Archaeornithura meemannae*, a specialised wading bird from the Early Cretaceous of China (Nature Communications: Zongda Zhang)

Modern birds may have evolved six million years earlier than thought, say palaeontologists after analysing the fossil remains of a previously unknown prehistoric relative.

The extinct species, of which two fossils were discovered in China's northeastern Hebei province about two years ago, is the oldest known relative of all birds alive today.

The fossils are described in the journal [\*Nature Communications\*](#).

"The new fossil represents the oldest record (about 130.7 million years ago) of Ornithuromorpha," says study co-author Wang Min of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

"It pushed back the origination date of Ornithuromorpha by at least five million years" and the divergence of modern birds by about the same margin.

The previous oldest known example of Ornithuromorpha lived about 125 million years ago.

The new bird, named *Archaeornithura meemannae*, shared many features with its modern cousins, apart from tiny, sharp claws on its wings.

It stood about 15 centimetres tall on two legs that had no feathers -- suggesting it may have been a wader from a lake shore environment.



*Archaeornithura meemannae* fossils (Source: Chang et al/Nature Communications)

The fossils were not complete enough to determine whether the creature had teeth -- a common feature of birds from the Early Cretaceous period, a subdivision of the Mesozoic era.

Like some modern birds, it may have used gastroliths, or stomach stones, to break down hard foods like seeds, and it was likely a plant-eater, says Wang.

Ornithuromorpha are believed to have comprised about half of bird species that lived during the Mesozoic era, which lasted from about 252 million to 66 million years ago. Some evolved into living birds.

Other Mesozoic groups like Enantiornithes, which had teeth and clawed wings, are not thought to have left any living descendants.

Mesozoic bird fossils are rare, and very little is known about the early evolutionary history of birds.

The earliest known relative of birds is thought to be *Archaeopteryx*, considered a transitional species from non-avian dinosaurs with feathers which lived about 150 million years ago.



Archaeopteryx - from Wikipedia

## Eastern Osprey Basin View Nesting

- by Chris Grounds

(Photographs by Chris Grounds; Ulladulla Tower photo courtesy of Shoalhaven Council)

Readers may recall an article on the Eastern Osprey [*Pandion cristatus*], of St Georges Basin in our first newsletter.

That article concerned observations of a pair of Osprey building a nest on the radio transmitter tower at Basin View in the winters of 2013 and 2014.

Severe windstorm episodes with gusts to 90-100 kph in both seasons seemed to put pay to those attempts and no success was observed and the nest is at an unnaturally high elevation on the tower of course.

Chapter 3 of the observations has been developing since April-May 2015 with the same nest building occurring on the tower by the Osprey pair. Nest building and observation has continued into early July and to this point the nest survives.

Is it possible that this is the only active nest in the Shoalhaven?





## OSPREY NEST BASIN VIEW

JULY 3 2015



Photos: Osprey nest monitoring photos.

Some internet research into Osprey breeding in NSW has indicated that the South Coast is not a known breeding haunt of the Osprey.

The Osprey was described by Greg Clancy [March 2006] as: *a rare to uncommon breeding species in New South Wales*. He noted: *Between 1973 and 1979 only two active Osprey nests were documented in New South Wales. Surveys in 1980 and 1981 found fifteen active nests between Forster and the Queensland border (Clancy 1980, 1981, 1989). The species bred as far south as Lake Macquarie before 1912 with an unconfirmed report of breeding at St Georges Basin (North 1912).*

**The Department of Primary Industry notes indicate that Jervis Bay is south of the known breeding range for the eastern osprey but that foraging habitat however, may be present within Jervis Bay.**

It would be interesting to say the least to have at least one breeding season without destructive weather to observe the outcome of the nesting. That could be a little bit of history though the prospect of electro-magnetic radiation effects associated with the tower are sobering.

Readers may recall from our last newsletter that an Osprey was observed and photographed this year on two successive days on the southern bank of Cockrow Creek in the Larmer Avenue block.

Shoalhaven Council Threatened Species Officer, Angela Jenkins, informed BirdLife that the last known attempt to nest at the camera monitored Ulladulla site was in 2011 though the nest suffered badly from a wind storm (see site photo below).

Sightings at the Huskisson Recycling Centre and the Manildra Bomaderry plant in 2011 have not been repeated.



Photo: Council tower nest - Ulladulla

Angela's check with the office of Environment and Heritage revealed the following sightings: Durras Lake [2013-14], Bawley [2013], Booderee [Jan.2015], Erowal Bay [March 2015], Culburra [2011], Lake Wollumboola [Feb.2015], Greenwell Point [2012], Comerong island [2013], Shoalhaven Heads [2011 & 2013]. An adult and juvenile were reported from Lake Conjola in 2014.

The window of observations from 2011 to 2015 is interesting and poses some questions.

At the point of writing closer observations continue with the forty day incubation period in mind and the note that at the moment there is an observed, continuing, daily presence of at least one bird on the nest.

But we shouldn't count our Ospreys before they are hatched – eh!

[A special thank you for their support to Angela Jenkins – Shoalhaven Council, Merrill for her continuing observations and the Office of Environment and Heritage.]

## Alice Springs

- by Christine Rigg

In early June I spent a week in Alice Springs, accompanied by my mother, doing local day trips.

On the first of our two visits to the **Olive Pink** Botanical Garden, a **Western Bower Bird** landed on our table briefly, stared at us, then flew off. As a teenager I visited relations in Coonamble, who regularly had Spotted Bowerbirds in their house yard collecting roofing nails and sheep vertebra to decorate their bowers.



If you visit the **Desert Park** beware the vicious **Golden Backed Honeyeater** (GBH) - band#483! In one of their aviaries a brilliant golden flash flew by and I assumed a missed pic opp. Golden flash flew back past my ear – and down onto the head of my white-haired mother. This opportunistic bird investigated my mum's scalp and tried pulling her hair out! Mum sat patiently while I went shutter-crazy. GBH, aka Black Chinned HE, central form.

A day trip out to **Trephina Gorge**; skies turned thundery late afternoon, and the last thing I would have predicted for our Alice trip - we drove the last hour back to town with wipers on! Light, steady rain for most of the night. The following morning we breakfasted at the Olive Pink gardens, and were treated to a 'babble' of **Grey Crowned Babblers**, bathing in a shallow pond near the cafeteria.



Grey-crowned Babblers - photo by Chris Tzaros



At the **Telegraph Station**, a pair of **Pied Butcherbirds** performed a beautiful duet of caroling and head-bobbing. A gang of Pied BBs eyeing our sandwiches on the picnic table, and landing on the grass for scraps was behaving like the notorious Kookaburra gang at Iluka/Greenpatch!



Photo by Damian Kelly & Bill Ramsay

**Port Lincoln Parrots** are abundant in the area. Local Alice birdos may be accustomed to them (as I tend to disregard our local Rainbow Lorikeets); but they were the icing on the cake, as their vibrant plumage changes from blue to green as they fly in and out of sunlight.



We had a fabulous day trip to **Palm Valley** on a 4wd-truck tour. Not much birdlife around, once out there, but the awesome skill of the truck driver, and the scenery on the way and at the Palm Valley itself well made up for that.



Really striking is the different colour palette of the scenery. I know local south-coast artists who do a central Oz trip to explore these colours which are dramatically different from the east coast.

60 birds on my list; 9 of those were new in the wild; 22 were 'new' for me in the Desert Park aviaries. Do the new aviary sightings count as a 'new' bird for a twitcher?

A truly soul-restoring week!

## Lake Wollumboola Report for June

- by Tom Kaar

With the relatively high water level, water bird activity was pretty subdued at Lake Wollumboola during the month of June – apart from the ongoing presence of the thousands of **Eurasian Coots**.

However, early in the month, I did see a pair of **Australasian Shovelers** on the eastern side amongst a small flock of Chestnut Teal. I last saw them on the Lake, in greater numbers, last year from June to August. Also sighted was a solitary **Red-necked Stint**.

On this same stretch, regularly during the month, I saw 3 or 4 **Gull-billed Tern**. Although I haven't sighted them here since December 2014, they have become more frequent visitors from August 2013. They are unusual amongst terns in that they exhibit their swooping foraging behaviour over the beach and sand dunes as well as over water.

Interesting sightings for the month in the Culburra area were a **Crested Shrike-tit** in bushland north of the Lake, two **White-fronted Terns** fishing off Penguin Head, and a **Bar-shouldered Dove** and some **Scarlet Honeyeaters** near Roseby Park Cemetery, on the way to Orient Point.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July I was surprised to see a pair of **Great Crested Grebe** on the lake. My only previous sighting of this species on our Lake was a single bird which stayed for a couple of days in October 2014. It is possible that this pair has already been around for some time.



A boat survey of the Crookhaven and Shoalhaven estuaries resulted in 20 **Eastern Curlews** and 42 **Bar-tailed Godwits**. Peter Ward was of the opinion that these numbers were substantially down on other recent winter counts.

We also saw 14 **Pied Oystercatchers** and were able to distinguish at least 23 **Nankeen Night Herons** in their trio of roosting trees at Greenwell Point.

## Locals in Culburra Beach get happy - snapping local birdlife

- by Alex McNeilly

During April and June, over 100 Culburra locals took part in a local social media photo competition to encourage everyone in Culburra Beach to share their favourite image in the Facebook Happy Snaps competition.

Local organizer Alex McNeilly said "It was great to see so many people get involved and share photos of what makes them happy at Culburra Beach. Even better was that local birds in our area were very popular subjects ... even the local teenagers got into bird photography.

The winning photo received the most LIKES (votes) in this case. Congratulations to Erin Bell from Culburra Beach on her winning photo "Gulls in a Row" taken on the Crookhaven River. Another competition is planned for the Summer months later this year."

Here are some of the photos ...



Simon Crane - Egret on Lake Wollumboola



Erin Bell - Gulls in a Row, Culburra Beach



Karen Legge - Crookhaven Seagull Sunset



Debbie Truss - Bird by Lake Wollumboola



Simon Crane - Morning Sam ... Morning Ralph

You can visit the local photos on the Culburra Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Culburra> or view the album by clicking the following link -

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.767629146685945.1073741833.632648493517345&type=3>

## BirdLife Shoalhaven Birdwatching

BirdLife Shoalhaven holds occasional birdwatching activities. In addition there are two local birdwatching groups - the Shoalhaven Birders and the Milton Ulladulla District Birdwatchers - who welcome BirdLife Shoalhaven members to their outings - also shown below. Shoalhaven Birders and MUDBirders are also welcome on BirdLife Shoalhaven activities.

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## Shoalhaven Birders Outings

Shoalhaven Birders usually hold birdwatching outings on the third Sunday of the month, meeting at 8.30am.

Upcoming birdwatching events are as follows :

### August 16

Bellawongarah - meet north side Berry Apex Park

### September 20

Florance Head - meet Bewong Roadhouse

### OCTOBER 6-12

Lake Cargellico / Round Hill - meet Lake Cargellico Van Park. Half way - maybe 2 nights - at Temora (Ingalba NR, lake / wetland). 4 or 5 nights Lake View Van Park. Book your own accommodation. We will visit a variety of habitats at sewerage treatment ponds, Round Hill, and weirs on the river and lake. More details closer to the time. Contacts: Stan & Su Brown 4443-4828. Peter & Julie Hale 0402 076 548. Barry & Susan Virtue 4464-1389

### October 18

Bundanon - meet Illaroo Rd northern end of bridge

### November 15

Lake Wollumboola - meet entrance to lake, Culburra

### December 20

Bomaderry Creek 5 pm Xmas party - meet picnic area, Narang Rd. BYO picnic / bbq.



Lake Cargellico

## MUD District Birdwatchers Outings



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 on 4457-1129 or Chris Shinton on 4454-5584, or you can email [mubirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:mubirdclub@gmail.com)

Upcoming birdwatching events are as follows :

### 24 July : Warden Head

Meet: 8 am: at the lighthouse

Driving: 0 km Time: 0 hr Grade: Easy

Leader: Mike Jefferis 4455 5162

### 7 August : Meroo Head

Meet: 8am Lions Park Burrill Lake (by toilets)

Driving: 50km Time: 1 hrs Grade: Easy

Leaders: Marg Hamon & Maggie Mance

4457 1129

### 21 August : Narrawallee

Meet: 8 am: Back of Harry Higgs Room or 8:15 at the end of Leo Drive

Driving: 8 km Time: 0.5 hrs Grade: Easy

Leader: Chris Shinton 4454 5584

### 4 September : Yatte Yattah Nature Reserve

Meet: 8am: Back of Harry Higgs Room

Driving: 15km Time: 1 hr Grade: Medium for those wishing to go down into the rainforest valley/ easy for those staying above.

Leader: Bob Rusk 4455 216

### 18 September : Day Out and picnic lunch

A full day outing to Bomaderry Creek Regional Park with a picnic lunch stop.

Meet: 8 am: Back of Harry Higgs Room for car pooling.

Driving: 130km (210 km) Time: 3 hrs Grade: Medium

Leaders: Marg Hamon & Maggie Mance 4457 1129

### 2 October : Private Property off Tallow Wood Rd, Milton

Meet: 8 am: Back of Harry Higgs Room

Driving: 15km Time: 1 hr Grade: Medium

Leader: Geoff Andrews 4454 3580

## Some Images



The Tawny Frogmouth in the Editor's front yard



Noisy Friarbird - by Sue Tolley



The Satin Bowerbird in the Editor's back yard



## Equipment:

- Nikon D800 camera
- Nikkor 300mm 2.8 VR2 lens + Nikon 1.4 converter
- Three Nikon SB 900 Speedlights (One master + Better Beamer on flash bracket and two remote slaves)
- Slik heavy duty tripod + Wimberley series 2 gimbal head
- Bird-hide

## Exposure:

- 430mm, f/14 @ 1/320 second and ISO 250
- Master flash @ 1/32 power and both slaves @ 1/64 power

## Post Production:

Adobe Camera Raw: Minor adjustments (including colour temperature), initial sharpening, then Photoshop Elements: Approx. 50% crop, minor levels adjustment and final sharpening. Saved as a Tiff image. Converted to JPEG above.

## 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](http://birdlife.org.au)

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