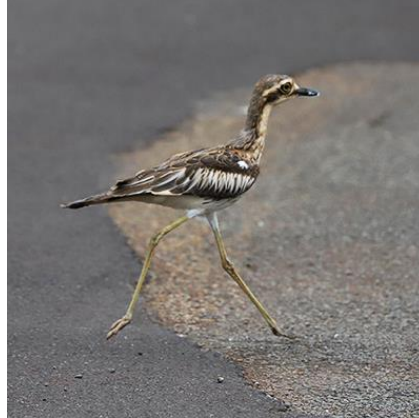




In this issue ...

Page 3-6	St Georges Basin Public School's Rainbow Lorikeet problem – by Rob Dunn
Page 7-10	Wetlands and Sewerage Ponds - a Trip to North Queensland - by Phil Hendry
Page 11-12	Can the Osprey be helped? – by Chris Grounds
Page 13-14	Rex Worrell – a Shorebird Pioneer – by Chris Grounds
Page 15-21	Birding Scotland and Iceland – by Brett Davis
Page 22	Habitat for Wildlife launch
Page 23	Our Eastern Bristlebirds are disappearing – but it's a good thing! - by Dion Maple
Page 24	Great Glossy Count
Page 25-30	No to mining at the Macquarie Marshes - by Chris Grounds
Page 31-33	The Aussie Bird Count & Twitchathon is coming soon! - by Rob Dunn
Page 34-35	Our Facebook page – what you have missed
Page 36	The Last Page, the Fine Print and more!



Cover photo: Atlantic Puffin by Brett Davis – see Birding Scotland and Iceland article on page 15

St Georges Basin Public School's Rainbow Lorikeet problem

- by Rob Dunn, President of BirdLife Shoalhaven

In July James Mason, a teacher at St Georges Basin Public School in Basin View, contacted me to see if BLS could assist three classes of grade 4 & 5 students (kids) in their STEM project this term. The kids wanted to get a better understanding of the problem the school has with Rainbow Lorikeets in the playgrounds and classrooms in close proximity with the kids. He said the problem has become worse over the last few years and they had recently had instances of Lorikeets flying inside classrooms and becoming injured and stressed when trapped inside.

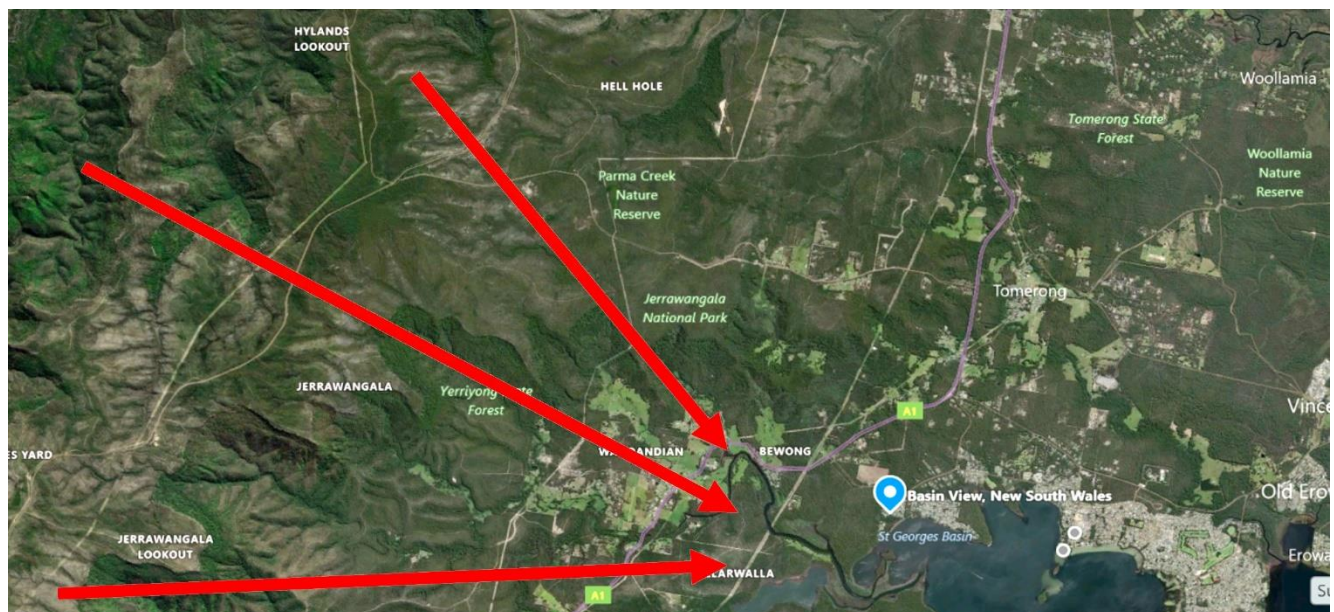
So, what is happening down in Basin View?



Seventy bird conservationists of the future

A month later, I was standing in front of seventy 10 and 11-year-olds to talk about some Lorikeet basics, to suggest why it could be happening, and to look at what might be done about it.

The Black Summer bushfires could be part of the explanation. When the Currowan fires moved east, they crossed the highway towards Basin View and stopped at the edge of the village. Many fast-flying Lorikeets could have stayed ahead of the fires and found a sanctuary in the village, leading to a sudden increase in their local population. We can theorise that many would not have returned to the unburnt areas despite habitat recovery. Why would you, given the village is a great place for Lorikeets!

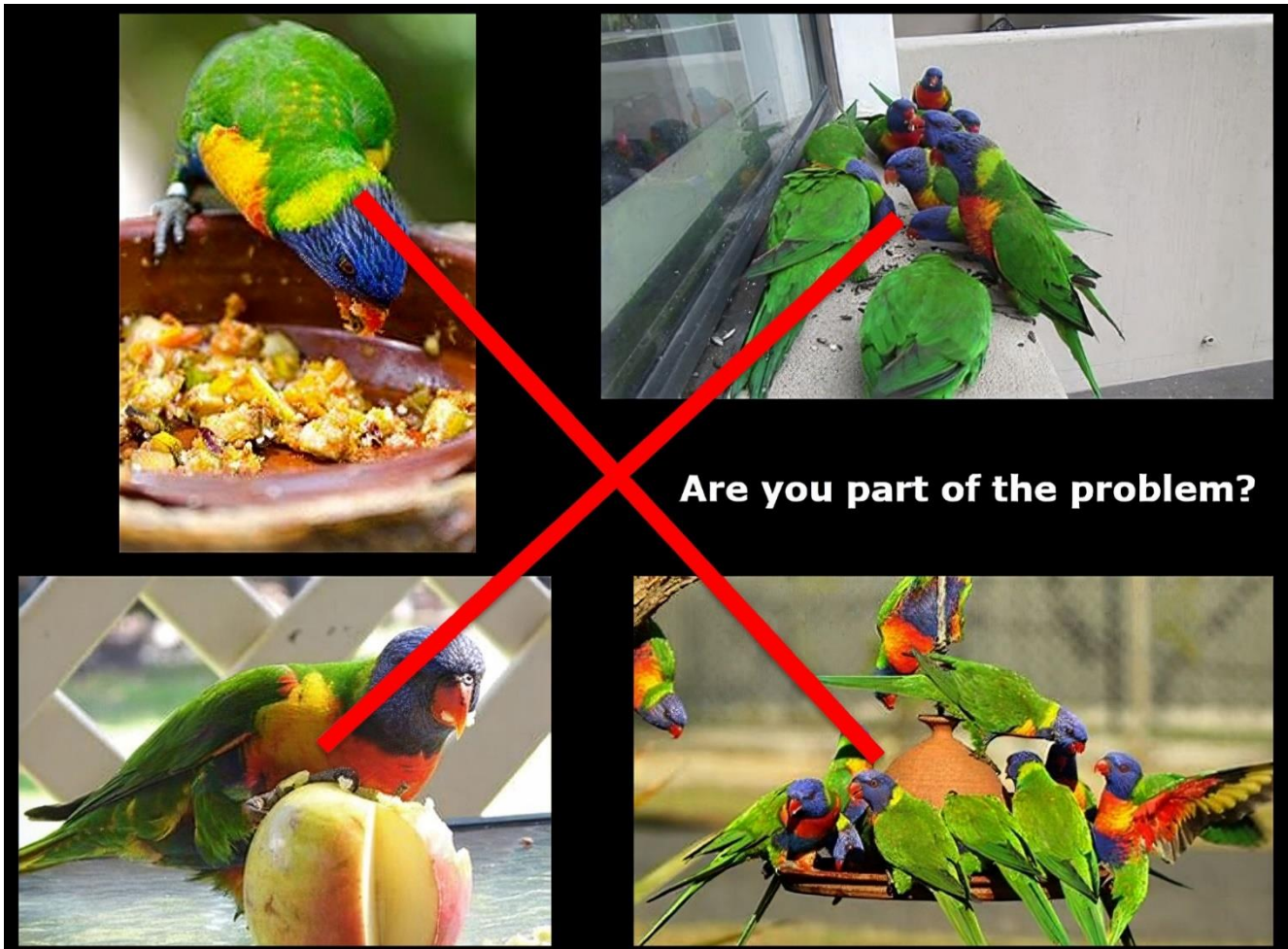


Direction of the bushfires towards Basin View

Basin View and the school are ideal locations for nectar feeding and scavenging birds. As the map shows, the village is surrounded by bushland with tall flowering eucalypts. The school also has many pockets of tall trees, as well as healthy native gardens. In contrast there is minimal tree cover for roosting and feeding in the residential areas. If you add to this the scraps of food to be found in the playground, then St Georges Basin Public School is Lorikeet heaven. So, I had to say that the seventy very attentive kids in front of me were partly to blame!



The school on the edge of the village



We went on to talk about possible solutions to the problem; making sure that no food was left in the playgrounds was an obvious first step. Placing decoy owls at the doors into classrooms to deter birds going in and pruning plants in the gardens to provide shelters for small birds were two other things for them to consider.



Whites Pest Control Bobble Head Owl | Bunnings Wareh...



Saxon 41cm Brown Owl Bird Scarer - Bunnings Australia



Whites 40cm x 1.0m Pest Control Prowling Owl | Bunni...



Whites Pest Control Outdoor Laser Solar Owl | Bunnings ...

Before I got to the school the kids had already been doing bird surveys around the school grounds and had done their own reading about lorikeets. This could have explained the 15 or so questions I was asked. The project has obviously got off to a great start!



As the project proceeds the kids will decide what they want to focus on - a poster, decoy birds, surveys, etc. I made the offer to them that when they finish their projects, they could make a presentation to BLS members about what they have found out. They seemed to be up for the challenge, so I hope to see the kids again in October to hear what they have discovered.

It was great to meet some of our youngest local bird conservationists. It bodes well for the future of birds and bird conservation in the Shoalhaven!



Rainbow Lorikeets – photo by Charles Dove

Wetlands and Sewerage Ponds - a Trip to North Queensland

- by Phil Hendry

One of the things I love about birding is the new perspective it gives on travel and that it takes you to out of the way places. Earlier this year I had the need to drive to Herberton in North Queensland. This was an opportunity to see some birds that we don't normally see around the Shoalhaven. One of the ways I kept amused was to keep a daily list of birds that I could identify from the car at up to 100 km/h. Naturally, the lists consisted almost entirely of large birds, morphing into more northern species each day.



Comb-crested Jacana



Blue-faced Honeyeater

By day 3, Gympie to Rockhampton, I had recorded Red-tailed Black Cockatoos and Blue-faced Honeyeaters, a Grey-crowned Babbler and a Comb-crested Jacana. The next day, to Mackay, I saw a Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Brahminy Kite, Black-necked Stork (Jabiru) and Pheasant Coucal. Anyway, you get the idea. Also helping to keep me amused for the 3500 km northwards, was a revisit to the complete BBC series of the Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy.

Mike Jefferis had recommended a couple of stops along the way. Firstly, I spent an excellent couple of hours at the Rockhampton Botanic Gardens. There is a large lake in the gardens, and it was thrilling to get a great look at some Great Crested Grebes including a couple of chicks.

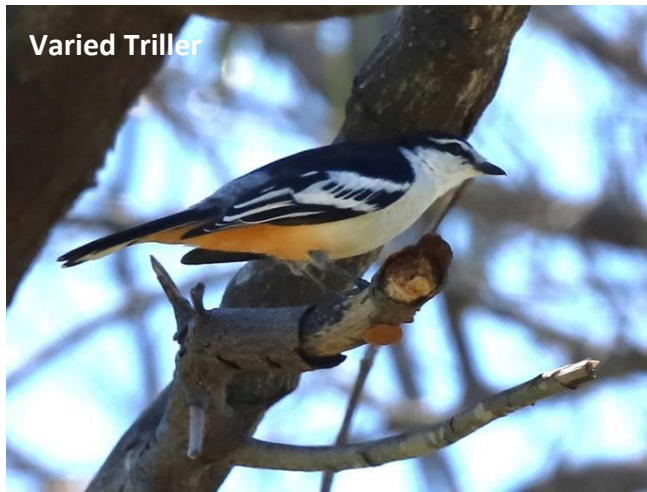
Later a Brahminy Kite flew in to keep an eye on me and the Nankeen Night Heron. Also around Rockhampton, at the "Wool Wash" I got my first look at some young Chestnut-breasted Mannikins although I'm still not sure that they weren't Nutmeg Munias.



Great Crested Grebes

Mike's second recommendation was Eungela to the west of Mackay. It is famous, of course, for the Eungella Honeyeater, one of our endangered species with a very restricted range. Eungella village is located high above the sugar cane plains west of Mackay and is in an amazing elevated tropical rainforest.

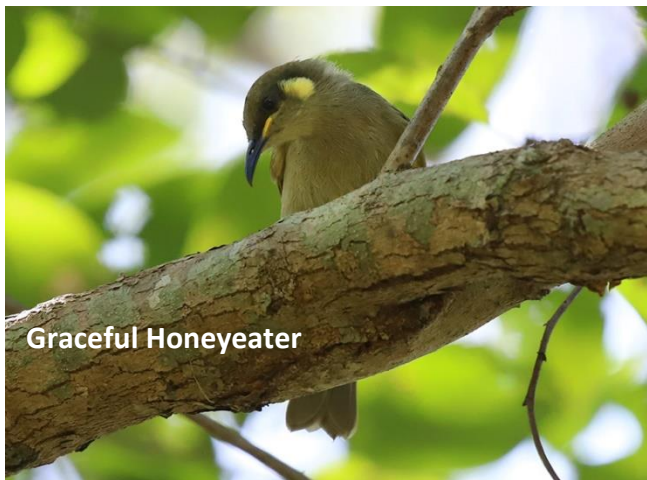
Travelling into the National Park, the road I had chosen became a bit steep and rugged but I was rewarded at the end by an amazing, secluded campground - "The Diggings" - by the river. As I contemplated spending the night there and enjoying the bird life, the sky grew darker, and I envisaged trying to leave in the morning on rutted clay tracks with no mobile phone reception. I was overcome with a bout of sensibility and packed up and left before the rain. Sadly, my brief visit didn't include a Eungella Honeyeater, but the place is definitely on my list to revisit.



Varied Triller

The next day I spent a few hours at the Townsville Town Common. An amazing place that I have no recollection of despite having spent many of my formative years at university in Townsville.

It's a great expanse of wetlands and paperbark forests just north of the airport. There were plenty of birds, most memorably the Comb-crested Jacana, Varied Triller, Red-backed Fairywren and Olive-backed Sunbird.



Graceful Honeyeater



Chestnut-breasted Mannikin

Later in the day, in Ingham, I discovered - almost by accident - the Tyto Wetlands. The trails and boardwalks were a bit neglected, but the birding was amazing. In a short walk over 25 minutes I saw Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, Crimson Finches, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes, Red-backed Fairywrens, White-gaped, Graceful and Yellow Honeyeaters and many others. Arriving at my brother's place in Herberton, about 100 km south-west of Cairns, the rain continued, and barely stopped for the week I was there.



Spectacled Monarch

Near Atherton on the Tablelands is a famous birding spot called Hastie's Swamp. It features a great double-story bird hide, and although it wasn't peak bird season, I spotted a Large-billed Gerygone, Forest Kingfisher and a Spectacled Monarch. Another day, I got a window without heavy rain in the rainforest walk around Lake Eacham. It was too wet to take my camera and of course all the great birds came out. I managed not to photograph a spectacular male Victoria's Riflebird, a possible Mountain Thornbill, female Chowchilla, and an Orange-footed Scrubfowl.

The rain got heavier, and a low in the Gulf of Carpentaria looked like becoming a cyclone, so I packed up and headed southwest. It was great to get away from the coast and get some good looks at some Emus, Bustards, Cockatiels and White-breasted Woodswallows as I whizzed past. I camped just past Hughenden, and the next day was delighted to see both Squatter and Spinifex Pigeons. I stopped for coffee and a visit to the sewerage treatment plant in Longreach. There were various water birds, but there was also a family of White-winged Fairywrens in the saltbush.



Kori Bustards



Squatter Pigeon

The next day in Blackall, there was a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater and dozens of Zebra Finches and Little Woodswallows a little later. At Cunnamulla, it was still too early in the year to visit Bowra Wildlife Sanctuary, so I visited the sewerage ponds. As well as the usual water birds, there were Rufous Whistlers, Splendid Fairywrens and White-winged Trillers. Crossing the border back into NSW, the most abundant wildlife were feral pigs, there must have been hundreds per square kilometre!



Zebra Finch



Little Woodswallow



Crimson Finch

Having previously had great birding experiences around Lake Cargelligo, I headed that way via Cobar. In drizzling rain at Round Hill Nature Reserve, I saw Singing, Yellow-plumed, Spiny-cheeked and Striped Honeyeaters.

At "Chat Alley" there was a quick glimpse of an Orange Chat among the saltbush, but also lots of Zebra Finches and Horsfield's Bushlarks. The sewerage ponds were rich with birds, highlights being Darters, Royal Spoonbills, Zebra Finches, Black-fronted Dotterels and White-plumed Honeyeaters.

Can the Osprey be helped?

- Chris Grounds, Conservation Correspondent

Ospreys are a species given to nesting on artificial structures and some ten years of our surveying South Coast nests has only ever revealed one nest on a tree - and they do seem to love Telstra towers!

In the last magazine BLS committee member Karen Davis wrote of her success in having Endeavour Energy provide a power pole for a proposed artificial nesting structure in the Bherwerre Wetland that would suit a local Osprey pair known in that part of Sanctuary Point.

Monitoring has shown nesting among Bay and Basin Ospreys has been largely a futile and unproductive activity for the threatened species though there are usually birds to be observed.



The Sanctuary Point pair has become associated with the Telstra tower for the last five breeding seasons. Each cool season they have attempted to build a nest on the side of the tower behind an antenna dish and every time it has failed. It was a very unusual choice for the species.

The very same happened again this year, but it will definitely be the last such attempt as the dish has now been removed.

However, hope does spring eternal and a change of the tower configuration with the removal of the side antenna has provided a stimulus for a new nest.



The Osprey pair now has a well-developed nest on a triangular platform at the top of the tower – see photo on the next page.

The photos to the left show the old nesting attempts and the removal of the antenna. The photo below shows an Osprey taking new sticks to the nest. Sticks are usually taken in flight from nearby trees – as shown in the image on the next page.



Chris Grounds



For most intents and purposes, the new nest appears to be viable, which includes progressive building and replenishing of sticks taken from trees around the site while in flight, calls from the nest and the presence of two adults at the site with at least one on the nest regularly.

This is the most promising nest-building activity in their history at the site. The Osprey pair certainly gets points for perseverance and our fingers are crossed for their future success.

The conundrum with the new nest location is that it is very close to a selected site for the Endeavour Energy pole! If the pole is installed it will be interesting to see if the Ospreys abandon their new nest or whether another pair seizes the nesting opportunity!

Monitoring continues with the usual fledgling time being toward the end of August.



Chris Grounds

Rex Worrell – a Shorebirding Pioneer

- by Chris Grounds, Conservation Correspondent

Photos: South Coast Register file, Chris Grounds and Sally Leonard

In May the South Coast Register journalist Glenn Ellard posted an article that detailed a testimony to Rex Worrell for his contribution to shorebird conservation as a volunteer at Shoalhaven Heads. This article echoes the sentiments expressed in the SCR article.



The Shoalhaven Heads shorebird nesting area

After Rex Worrell passed away a couple of years ago the NPWS approached his family suggesting a name change from the Shoalhaven Heads foreshore park as the “Rex Worrell Shorebird Park” in honour of his extensive work and dedication with shorebirds.

That suggestion was supported by a range of community organisations including the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council, South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program and Shoalhaven Heads Community Forum. It also gained unanimous support from Shoalhaven Councillors. Rex’s contribution was noted at a Council meeting in May with a presentation by his son Richard.



Rex Worrell spent 30 years looking after the shorebirds that nested around Shoalhaven Heads

In 2012 Mr. Worrell was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for service to conservation and the environment through the South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program.

At the time he said it was “a real pleasure working with birds” and “a lovely job to do”.



During Rex's time Pied Oystercatcher numbers went from a single breeding pair in 2006, to 44 birds in 2022. Earlier this year a record high number of 56 individuals were counted in monitoring at Shoalhaven Heads supervised by current Heads volunteer Sally Leonard.

Mr. Worrell moved to Shoalhaven Heads in 1982, and he was advised to walk regularly for his health. As he was strolling the local beach, he bumped onto a ranger rope fencing breeding sites of Little Terns. "I asked did he need any help and it kind of started from there. That chance meeting led to Rex dedicating the next 30 years of his life to the protection and conservation of migratory and resident shorebirds and their environment."



Rex Worrell spent plenty of time carrying out bird counts, with the numbers passed on to the NPWS and scientific researchers.

As his son Richard noted in a dedication at Council in May, "He built fences to keep predators away from shorebird nests and patrolled the nesting areas daily during the breeding season, counted birds each month to contribute to scientific studies, helped design interpretive signs giving information about the different bird species, took part in the NPWS South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program, and taught anyone interested about the birds."



Richard says his father "was a prolific educator, mentoring and inspiring groups of people almost as large as the number of birds he counted at the estuary during the bird counts".



Endangered shorebirds were comfortable around Rex Worrell, and he was able to work close to them without causing them any distress. Picture supplied.

Birding Scotland and Iceland

- by Brett Davis

My wife (Karen Davis, the BLS treasurer) and I recently spent a couple of months in the northern hemisphere, splitting the time between Scotland and Iceland. Most of our holiday was not a dedicated birding trip – but we are birders, so we still took our binoculars, we still looked for birds wherever we went, we went to a couple of places just to look at birds, and we did manage to see a lot of birds we hadn't seen before. Some of them were fascinating!

One of our favourite places in Scotland was Handa Island, just off the north-west coast and only a 15-minute ferry trip from the small coastal village of Tarbet. The island has spectacular coastal cliffs (see image at the end of this article) and stacks and is a nature reserve and breeding place for Razorbills, Guillemots, Fulmars, Arctic and Great Skuas, and Puffins (more about them later).



Other notable birds often seen on our trip include Ptarmigans, Eider Ducks, Harlequin Ducks, Graylag Geese, Pink-footed Geese, Golden Eagles and many birds with names starting with "Red" - Redwing, Redshank, Red Grouse, Red-necked Phalarope and Red-throated Diver. Quite a few also had very familiar names, but we soon found out that although the names were the same, the birds were very different.



Oystercatchers looked like our Pied Oystercatchers, but they weren't confined to beaches and coasts like our birds. We saw them in fields, along rivers, and even perched on rural buildings or wandering around in urban car parks!

Our Ravens are small compared to the brutes we saw in Europe which were close to the size of our larger kites. Eurasian Magpies were lovely looking birds, but apart from the black and white colours that saw our birds given the Magpie name – they are quite different and are not related.

Similarly, the European Robin (the Robin Redbreast) may have given the Robin name to supposedly comparable birds in Australia, but its breast is really a dull orange which is put to shame by the much brighter orange of our Flame Robin, not to mention the brighter and true red breasts of our Scarlet and Red-capped Robins. And dare I say that even our Eastern Yellow Robin is a much prettier bird as well?!



In Australia we have Latham's Snipe and Painted Snipe, but they are larger and much more cryptic than the Common Snipe we saw in both Scotland and Iceland. While walking a coastal track in Scotland we almost trod on a couple of Snipe – they actually were extremely common – and the drumming sound they produce during their courtship flights was pretty much a constant during our walks in the Icelandic countryside. Legend says that the erratic flight of the snipe made it difficult to shoot for hunters, and the word "sniper" was coined for a marksman with the skills to bring them down!

Golden Plovers in Europe are similar and related to the Pacific Golden Plovers we see in Australia. It was weird seeing Golden Plovers in full breeding plumage and even weirder to see them away from the coast, on farmland, and even in mountainous regions – see photo at right!

Black-tailed Godwits were sighted regularly, and they too were in their full-breeding plumage. In Australia they are exclusively coastal, but in Scotland and Iceland we saw them in a much larger variety of habitats - and mostly inland! And did you know that Black-tailed Godwits are the national bird of the Netherlands?



Arctic Terns were the most common tern we saw in Iceland. The species is migratory, travelling from its northern Summer Arctic breeding grounds to the Antarctic coast for the southern summer.

According to Wikipedia, recent studies have shown average annual migrations of over 70,000 km for birds nesting in Iceland, making their migrations the longest of any bird or animal. And they experience more hours of daylight than any other living thing as well!

In northern Iceland we stayed at a hostel that was surrounded by a nesting colony of Arctic Terns. Fifty metres from the hostel was a bird hide which overlooked a small island that was home to hundreds of Puffins. The hostel had a supply of hard hats that it loaned to guests who dared to venture through the nesting terns to the bird hide.

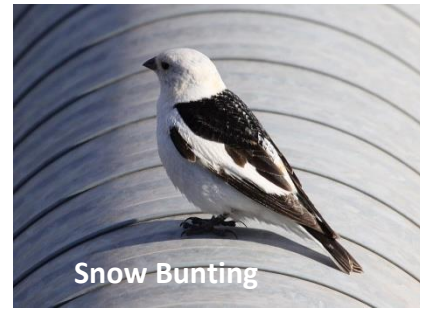


Arctic Terns - despite their delicate appearance - defend their nests aggressively, and we were constantly under attack during the short traverse. My helmet was struck hard a couple of times during the visit to the hide!

Another commonly seen bird during our trip was the Whimbrel. They are pretty much the same as our Whimbrels, except for the fact that they were calling almost constantly. Icelandic and Scottish Whimbrels winter on the coast of Africa, with Asian Whimbrels migrating to Southeast Asia and Australia. We get occasional birds from North America as well.



Two birds we definitely do not have in Australia are Snow Buntings and Puffins. There are small and isolated populations of Snow Buntings on a few high mountain-tops south of the Arctic region. We saw them on top of Ben Nevis (the highest mountain in the United Kingdom) – see image on previous page - and also atop Cairn Gorm in central Scotland – but Snow Buntings are Arctic specialists, and we saw lots of them in Iceland on both the coast and in the mountains.



Snow Bunting

Many visitors to Scotland and Iceland go in search of the “elusive” Puffin - and the tourist industry makes a lot of money from those who are prepared to pay for a tour to add the bird to their life lists.

We saw Puffins from a distance in north-western Scotland, but in Iceland there are places where you can visit a colony for free and have Puffins within touching distance – check out Borgarfjarðarhöfn on the east coast or the cliffs near the Bjargtangar Lighthouse on the west coast!

There are three species of Puffin, with the Atlantic Puffin seen in Scotland and Iceland. There are about ten million Atlantic Puffins in Iceland, with a colony in the Westmann Isles having an estimated million nests and up to four million individuals!

Unfortunately, Puffins are still hunted for eggs, feathers, and meat. The Atlantic Puffin forms part of the national diet in Iceland, where the species does not have legal protection, and Puffin meat is often found on restaurant menus. The fresh heart of a Puffin is a traditional Icelandic delicacy that is supposed to be eaten raw!



Puffins



Puffins

And who could visit Scotland without going to the Scottish Owl Centre?! Located midway between Glasgow and Edinburgh, it reportedly houses the largest collection of owls in the world and even has twice-daily flying displays! Karen and I had to make our own flight and were pressed for time so were unable to see the show, but we did spend a fascinating hour checking out all the owls on display. While we don't like to see birds in captivity, we hope that the promotion and appreciation of owls will increase community awareness and love of owls, and lead to better conservation outcomes for all owl species around the world.

Somewhat bizarrely, the only non-owl we saw at the Scottish Owl Centre was a Kookaburra! We felt quite sorry for the poor nocturnal owls whose daytime sleep was constantly being disturbed by the loud and raucous call of our diurnal national icon!!





Guillemots and Razorbills



Habitat for Wildlife

On September 1st, 2024, BirdLife Shoalhaven and the Milton Ulladulla Birdwatchers will join in the launch of **Habitat for Wildlife** by the grassroots environmental organization "Treading Lightly". The launch will be held at the Ulladulla Civic Centre from 11am to 12 midday.

More information is available on Treading Lightly's website at tlinc.org.au/habitat-for-wildlife.

**1st Sep 2024
LAUNCH**

Do something in your OWN BACKYARD to protect our natural world

**RECEIVE A
METAL SIGN TO
DISPLAY ON YOUR
PROPERTY**

Treading Lightly invites you to the launch of **Habitat for Wildlife** - a project to support you to create or improve your garden and encourage biodiversity.

WHY

Join **Habitat for Wildlife?**

Promote Conservation: Create habitats that help protect endangered species and become part of the broader local wildlife corridors.

Preserve Biodiversity: Ensure a thriving ecosystem for plants and animals.

Educate Future Generations: Inspire environmental stewardship.

WHEN

11 am -12 midday
Sunday 1 September 2024

WHERE

Ulladulla Civic Centre
(downstairs)
81B Princes Hwy, Ulladulla

JOIN

Habitat for Wildlife - only \$25 per year - and receive a sign to display, seasonal newsletters and attend workshops for free.

We appreciate the support of: Birdlife Shoalhaven • Budawang Coast Atlas of Life • Bungalin • Bushcare • Gardenhaven • Harbour Bookshop Ulladulla • Milton Rural Landcare • Ngulla-Dulla Garden Centre • Yumaro Garden Centre

Our Eastern Bristlebirds are disappearing – but it’s a good thing!

- by Dion Maple

In April this year Eastern bristlebirds from the Bherwerre Peninsula were captured and translocated to Wilsons Promontory National Park “Yiruk and Wamoon”. There were 32 birds caught in total, with 21 from Booderee National Park and 11 from Jervis Bay National Park. There were 16 boys and 16 girls.

All the birds survived the 800km overnight journey and were successfully released into their new home the morning after capture. Half the birds have radio transmitters attached and will continue to be monitored over the coming days, weeks, and months. After that, the birds will be monitored similarly to what we do here in Booderee with listening surveys.

The project took three years to complete and covered three jurisdictions (JBT, NSW & Vic). It involved five different Government agencies and three NGOs all working together for the conservation of this endangered species.

Importantly, representatives from the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community were at the release site this year to formally hand the budjaans over to the traditional custodians of Wilsons Prom.

The 20+ years of ecological management and monitoring of Eastern bristlebirds within Booderee is considered by the translocation team to be the foundation for this conservation activity being possible.

Thank you to all the staff who assisted in the translocation and with the Eastern bristlebird monitoring in the years to come.

Editor’s note: Previous translocations to Wilson’s Prom were reported in the Spring 2022 magazine.



Great Glossy Count

Do you have some time on the weekend of **7th and 8th of September** for the Great Glossy Count?

The Great Glossy Count is a citizen science event that collects data across the distribution of the South-eastern Glossy Black-Cockatoo (aka Glossies). Participant citizen scientists spend one hour (or more) at any time during the Count weekend exploring their selected survey site to collect data on Glossies and their feeding habitat. Citizen scientists can join the Count as a group or bring a friend along to help support the recovery of these threatened birds.

Data collected during the Count will support vital bushfire recovery and conservation work for Glossies by informing actions to manage their habitat.

For registration, training and site information see birdlife.org.au/events/the-great-glossy-count.



No to mining at the Macquarie Marshes

- by Chris Grounds, Conservation Correspondent

Photos: Leanne Hall and Chris Grounds

The Winter 2018 BLS magazine reported on the Macquarie Marshes KBA, habitat to 77 waterbird species including threatened Brolga, Magpie Geese, Australasian Bittern and Painted Snipe.

The Marshes embrace an extraordinary 220,000 ha, feature Ramsar listing, Key Biodiversity Area (BirdLife) international status and a Nature Reserve of 23,141 ha (NPWS) all of which identify it as a very special place for birds but also for its Indigenous, historical, environmental and conservation character. The Marshes are a critical part of the Murray-Darling Basin and the entire Macquarie River Valley. The Marshes are well known as “Reedbed Country”.

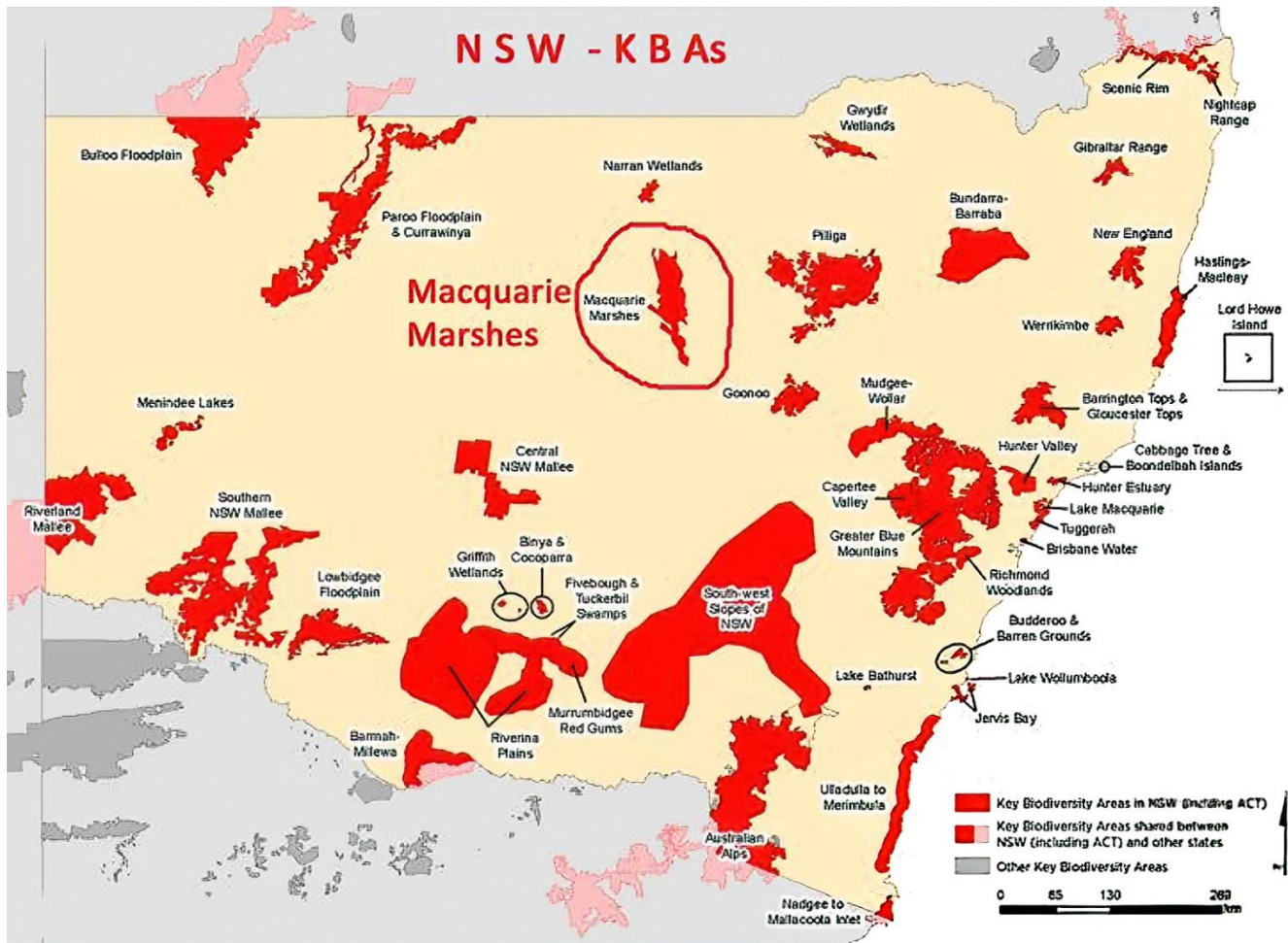


Cumbungi reedbeds on the Marshes



Environmental flow releases are critical

There has been some notable progress over the last twenty years with a significant boost to environmental flows held by the NSW and Commonwealth governments since 2004 improving flows in one of the most threatened wetland systems in Australia. However, all the work and progress in management and conservation has taken second place with a new, sinister threat and the ‘leopard has changed its spots’.



Mining Exploration Approved

The ABC broke a story on July 16, 2024 of the approval of a mining exploration intrusion into the Marshes. Canadian-owned mining company Australian Consolidated Gold Holdings [aka. “Inflection Resources”] was granted approval by the NSW Resources Regulator in March 2024 to continue exploration on the western side of the Macquarie Marshes to drill for copper and gold. This fits a little strangely with a Canadian gold and copper mining outfit withdrawing its application to drill in the Marshes in 2021.

The news of this approval “hit the fan” and caused widespread alarm among a very wide range of Marsh supporters, not the least of whom were the conservation pastoralists Garry and Leanne Hall, a family with a four generation and near century presence on their land and historic property “The Mole” at the Marshes. Garry and Leanne have been at the forefront of the Marshes conservation fight for very many years and are super keen birders.

The Hall family was notified on May 9th after it had been approved three weeks earlier on April 17th. It is somewhat disturbing that the 25 page “Approval for Prospecting Operations” [APO] of April 17 2024 highlighted 36 criteria for “Sensitivities of Land to be Disturbed”. Only one was assessed as causing any ‘disturbance’ and that was “Land designated as a nationally important wetland in the Directory of Important Wetlands”.

However, a concerning contradiction was a NO to sensitivity to disturbance of “Wetlands of international significance listed under the Ramsar Wetlands Convention. The balance of 35 criteria were self-assessed as having “NO Sensitivities” including “Land identified on the authority (e.g., exploration licence or assessment lease) as environmentally sensitive land.” Likewise, a NO to “Will the activity have a significant effect on threatened ecological communities or their habitats.”

Garry and Leanne were shocked by the decision and see it as little more than government “apathetic box ticking”. That is a generous and restrained description! The shock has been promptly shared by horrified colleagues, friends and supporters. This shock was generated because the approval for drilling was in a portion of the Ramsar-listed wetland and also by the decision by the Regulator not to insist on an environmental impact statement. Ironically, all drill sites were currently under water.

Garry noted in media releases that - “As landholders around the Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve, we abide by strict guidelines before doing so much as constructing a fence, and yet a gold miner can start drilling without any proper assessment of the land’s cultural values and biodiversity.”

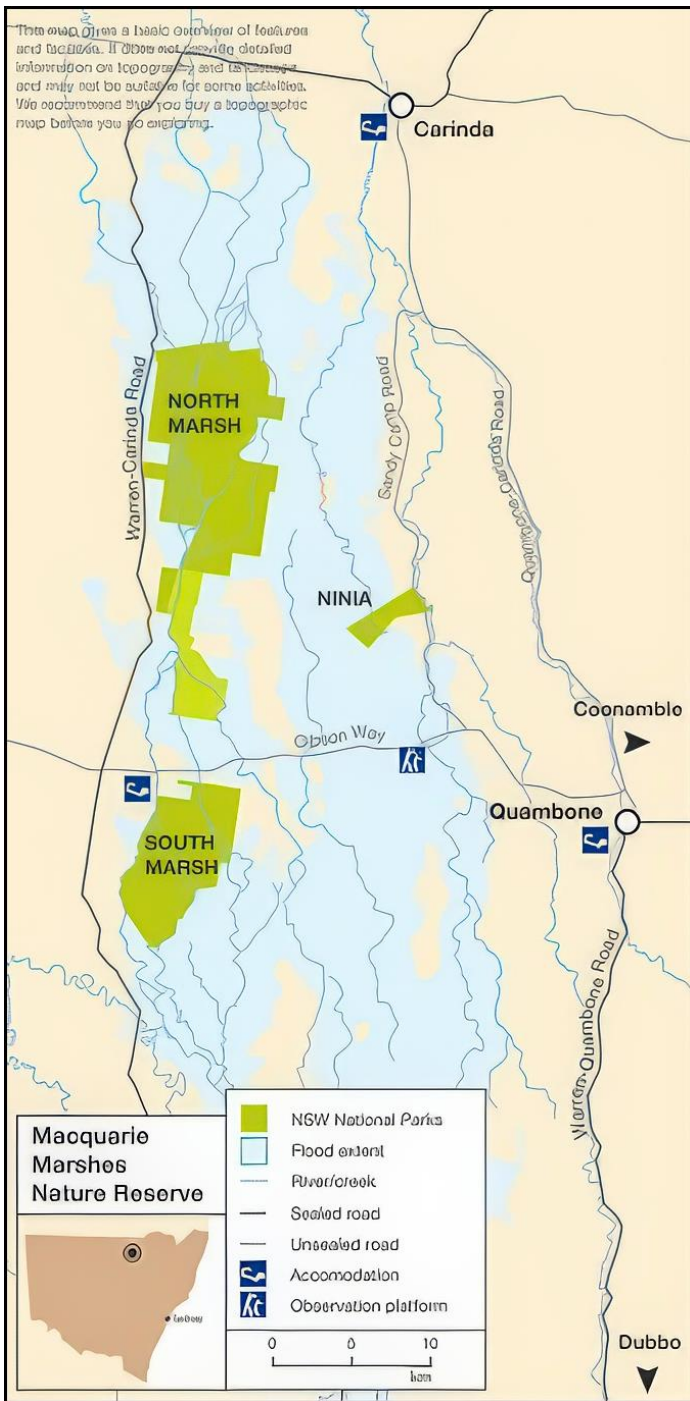


Garry Hall monitoring the Ramsar Marshland and Magpie Geese (Leanne Hall)

The NSW Resources Regulator has since instructed the company to cease exploration activities and has started investigating the proposal.

How did the Regulator let the company loose on the Marshes when that very company stated and submitted that “there are no areas of critical habitat or areas of outstanding biodiversity value within the proposed drilling area.” That alone represents a comprehensive and catastrophic factual error and ineptitude. It is the most serious concern if mining companies have this view of such peak ecology and that they seek to operate in 2024 in this way.





Marshes Heritage

The Marsh country has a deep and abiding Heritage. Originally it was and remains recognized Wailwan country. The area was one frontier of the contact wars in western NSW as ‘squatters’ moved into take up extensive Runs and build property dynasties. (c.1840s) Many of these were either former convicts or their sons. The occupation door was opened by explorers Charles Sturt and John Oxley.

The surviving populations of these Indigenous people were first given and then had taken, property [c.1901] as an Aboriginal Protection Board Reserves on the Bulgeraga Creek, a key Marshes tributary. It was considered too valuable to leave in Aboriginal hands.

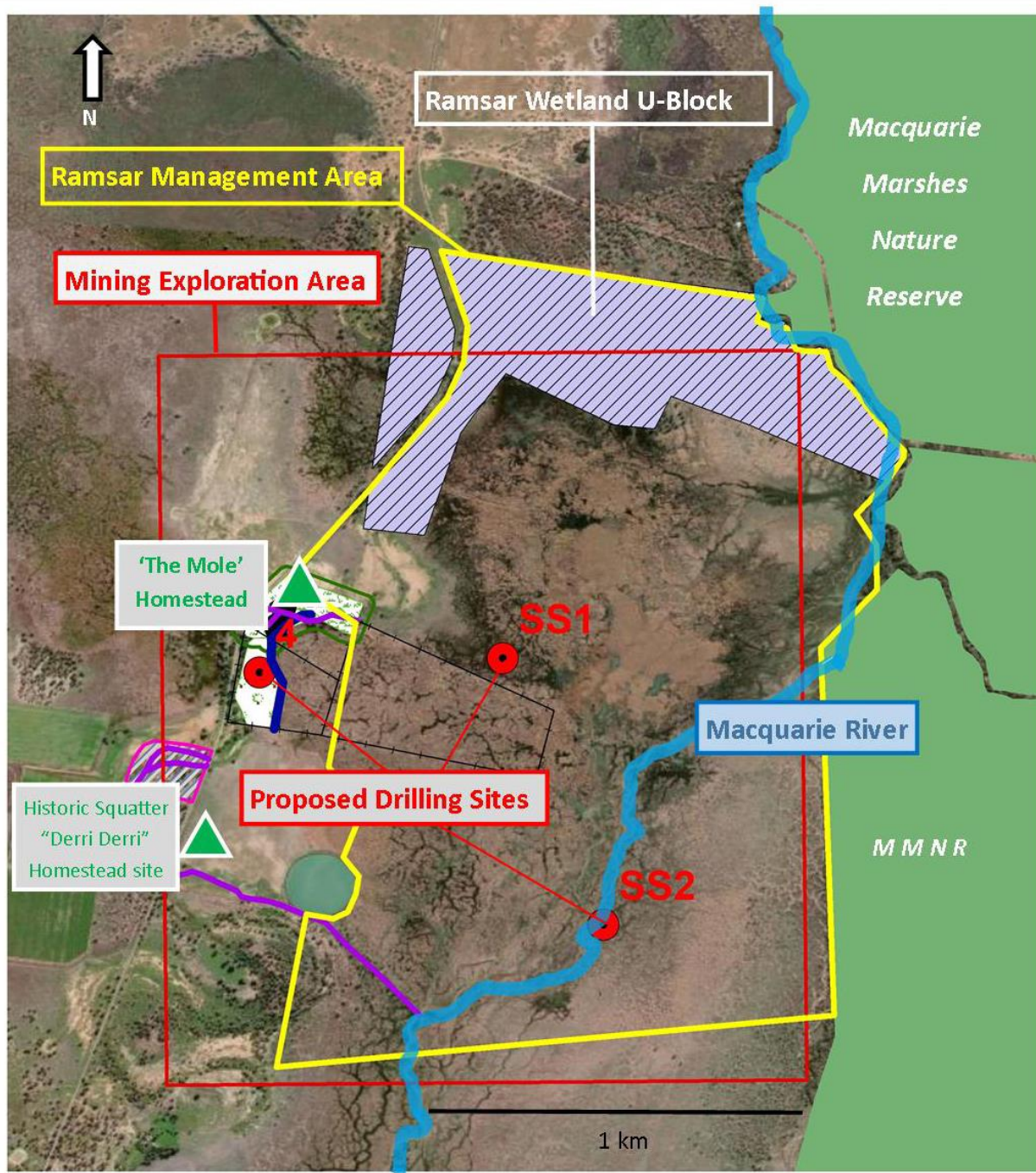
Ironically it was a Marshes pastoralist and Sydney identity (c.1880s), Richard Hill, who created the Aborigines Protection Board and such Reserves that have been at the centre of the ‘Stolen Generation’. It is all part of the heritage character and story of the Marshes .

The Marshes tree that has seen it all



Masked Lapwings and Brolgas





MACQUARIE MARSHES LOCALITY & MINING DRILLING SITE DETAILS

Mining Exploration Sites

Even a cursory glance at the above mapping reveals worrying detail of the mining exploration proposed and approved by the Resources Regulator for this locality in the Marshes. In the first instance it is a relatively confined area, which imposes on Ramsar declared areas. One drilling site is immediately adjacent to 'The Mole' homestead and home of the Hall family. Another site (SS2) is immediately adjacent to the Macquarie River itself. Another (SS1) is in a major confluence of Marshes channels in this area. The area involved has little or no variation in elevation. This is intrusive, negligent and ecologically dangerous .

First Campaign Success

On July 25 the Nature Conservation Council [NCC] announced that within hours of their proceeding to Court, the “Resources Regulator has just overturned their decision to allow exploratory drilling for copper and gold in this critically important and environmentally sensitive wetland. “

The sting in the tail was that the Regulator has invited the company to apply again with “more information”.

Is this how the Resources Regulator works?

They allow such an environmentally devastating proposal only to withdraw it when they are besieged with legitimate questions and protests. Then their own response was no less than a tacit admission that the decision was seriously flawed by immediately overturning that very decision. Is this not an open admission that the Regulator approved without reasonable information in the first place but that they only admit to that under public and community scrutiny and pressure?

The Regulator has admitted their decision was not based on “all relevant and accurate information”. Well - why was it made?

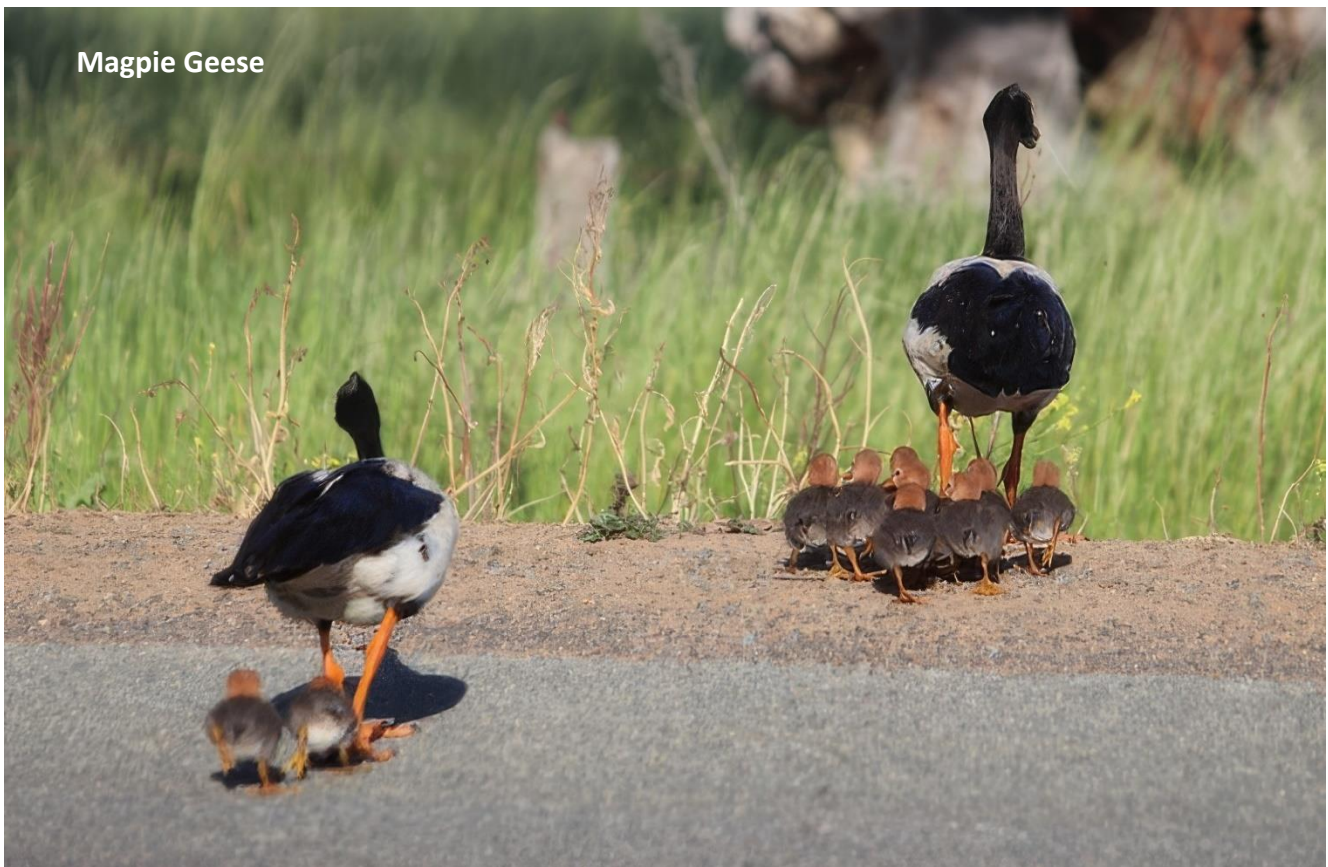
Didn't the decision-makers know and assess the paucity and veracity of information? To add insult to injury they then invite the foreign owned mining exploration company to reapply and provide ‘more information’.

This is not a 2024 best practice standard!

The Halls’ network and the NCC are now gearing up for the next phase of the defence of the Marshes.

BirdLife Australia decided after some pointed lobbying that “the Campaigns Team noted the NCC involvement and is keeping it as a watching brief given their [NCC] work and success.” A tad underwhelming, given the profile of birds and with a KBA involved.

Magpie Geese



What is threatened?

Sadly, the Marshes have been under considerable threat to its ecological integrity for so many decades now and this intensified when Burrendong Dam was built on the Macquarie River near Wellington and irrigated cropping, especially cotton, became the rural growth industry.

The Macquarie Marshes are also listed on the Register of the National Estate, the Register of the National Trust, and the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia.

The Nature Reserve itself is part of the Macquarie Marshes Key Biodiversity Area, originally an Important Bird Area, identified as such by BirdLife International because of its importance as a breeding site for waterbirds. Such is the contemporary profile of the Macquarie Marshes in western N.S.W., a north-western section of the Macquarie River catchment, though its total area is close to 200,000 ha.

Surely, such ecological credentials must weigh heavily on the call for “more information” and the utter rejection of mining interests and the proposal to drill.



You can support and help!

There is a petition to protect the Macquarie Marshes on the Nature Conservation Council website at www.nature.org.au/protect_the_macquarie_marshes

On that page the petition calls on the NSW Government to:

- Cancel all current mining exploration licences within the 200,000 hectares designated as the Macquarie Marshes.
- Ban the granting of mining exploration licences in this area in the future.
- Improve public notifications to ensure communities are informed and aware of exploration applications in their communities and what their rights are.

For more information you can connect to the Macquarie Marshes Environmental Landholders Assn. at www.macquariemarshes.com.au

The Supreme Court of Australia provided a momentous decision this week in granting Native Title to a group of four western NSW Indigenous peoples, including the Wayilwan (Wailwan) of the Macquarie Marshes region.



The Aussie Bird Count & Twitchathon is coming soon!

- by Rob Dunn

In October, I want everyone to get out and do 20-minute surveys for the Aussie Bird Count and a lot of you to take part in the annual NSW and ACT Twitchathon as well.

This year the Aussie Bird Count will be held over 14-20 October and is a great way to build up your bird ID skills. Go to aussiebirdcount.org.au to learn more. As in previous years we will be running a bird walk for beginners at the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum in Huskisson to show you how to use the ABC App and improve your bird ID skills. If you would like to run a similar event near where you live, please get in touch with me.



The Twitchathon will be run over the weekend of 26-27 October. This could not be more different than the Aussie Bird Count. It is a friendly competition between small teams of birdwatchers from across NSW and ACT to find out who can see/hear the most birds in three, eight or 24 hours. We will put the link to the Twitchathon website on Facebook soon, as it is currently being updated. This will tell you all you need to know.



I know of a few of our serious birders who will be doing the eight-hour event, and you can expect to hear about their exploits in the next magazine. I have not heard of anyone who plans to do the 24-hour event, but if there is it will probably be the lead story! Still the three-hour Twitchathon is doable for both experienced birdwatchers and novices wanting to cut their teeth. I will be looking to get some teams to have our own BLS Twitchathon challenge. Expect to hear more about this on Facebook.

The more serious side of this annual event is to fundraise for a bird conservation project selected by the NSW & ACT Bird Interest Group Network, of which BLS is a member. In recent years up to \$30,000 has been raised. As announced in the last magazine the successful project was submitted by Dr Catherine Price from the University of Sydney's School of Life and Environmental Sciences.



At a possible site in Bherwerre Beach (from left: Tyson Kane and Dion Maple (Booderee NP), Cathine Price (US), Chris MacGregor (BLS and ANU Fenner School) and Shani Masani (US)

Catherine's research looks at new sensory tools to protect beach-nesting birds from introduced predators, such as foxes. Researchers have demonstrated that 'hiding' birds from predators using smell can reduce egg predation by up to 70%. By targeting the senses that predators use to find nests, you can now exploit 'sensory misinformation' to trick predators, but not interfere with the birds themselves.

As well as smell, Catherine's team also want to know if sound cues betray the location of nestlings and fledglings, so that we can expand the effectiveness of these sensory tactics.

The money raised from this year's Twitchathon will directly support research looking at how predators might find nesting colonies using the sounds of calling adults and chicks. And then whether sound, as well as smell, can reduce the predation of chicks.

Catherine's team will be working with shorebird wardens in the Shoalhaven and on the Mid North Coast to record the soundscapes of nesting colonies that predators may use as a cue. These sounds will then be used in experimental tests using a range of mammalian nest predators, from black rats to foxes and cats. Some of these experiments will take place in the Shoalhaven. Developing these new techniques could be a gamechanger for protecting our shorebirds.

Beach-nesting birds – Pied Oystercatchers



Beach-nesting birds – Hooded Plovers



Beach-nesting birds – Little Terns



Catherine and Shani Masani from the University of Sydney came down to the Shoalhaven in May to look at possible sites for their field work in Booderee NP and at Shoalhaven Heads. They met with staff from the NPWS shorebird recovery team, Booderee NP, the Shoalhaven Landcare fox program and BLS members - everyone was excited about the opportunities of working together. The project is already off and running - it just needs the dollars from the Twitchathon to kick things off properly.

I know everyone hates asking friends to donate money, so we are planning to run some ticketed events and a raffle. But that does not mean you cannot shake the pockets of your friends and families!

Let's all help the NSW and ACT Twitchathon beat its target of \$30,000 in October and make a direct contribution to Catherine's research to help Shoalhaven's shorebirds!

Our Facebook page – what you may have missed

If you haven't been visiting our Facebook page recently, here are some examples of what you missed. Our page includes the latest news on conservation issues, local sightings of unusual birds, and great bird photography from Kim Touzel, Phil Hendry and Yolande Cozijn!

Our Facebook page can be found at www.facebook.com/shoalhavenbirdlife





Pelican



Masked Lapwings



Beach Stone-curlew

The Last Page - and how you can help BirdLife Shoalhaven

If you would like to get involved in bird conservation in the Shoalhaven, either as part of a specific BirdLife Shoalhaven project or by taking on a BirdLife Shoalhaven committee position, please let us know!

There are, however, a lot of other things that you can do. If you are not a member of BirdLife Australia – join! You could write an article (or articles) for this magazine. Or you could lead a bird walk in your local area - something that you might do on a regular basis anyhow!

You could also become one of our Facebook editors, send us some photos, or tell us about conservation issues in your neighbourhood!

Send all correspondence by email to communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

The Fine Print

Contributions - if you have any bird photographs, articles, conservation issues, birding experiences, anecdotes or sightings that you would like to share with fellow members, please send to communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org. Requests for re-publication of articles must be referred to the BirdLife Shoalhaven committee for approval.

General Disclaimer - the information in articles in this magazine is accepted in good faith and although the editor has tried to verify the accuracy of all information, BirdLife Shoalhaven and BirdLife Australia accept no responsibility for any errors, inaccuracies or exaggerations in this magazine.

Errors - if you find any errors in this magazine, please send an email with the details to the editor at communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

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Apologies - to contributors and sources who have inadvertently not been acknowledged. Let us know of our oversight and we will acknowledge your contribution in the next magazine.

Opinions - the opinions expressed in articles in this magazine are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of BirdLife Shoalhaven or BirdLife Australia.

Contributions: Articles about birds - from anyone and everyone - are most welcome!!! Send all contributions via email to communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

Acknowledgment: BirdLife Shoalhaven acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the Shoalhaven, their care of country, birds, and habitat, and pays respects to all Elders – past, present and emerging.

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

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