

BirdLife Shoalhaven Magazine

Spring 2018



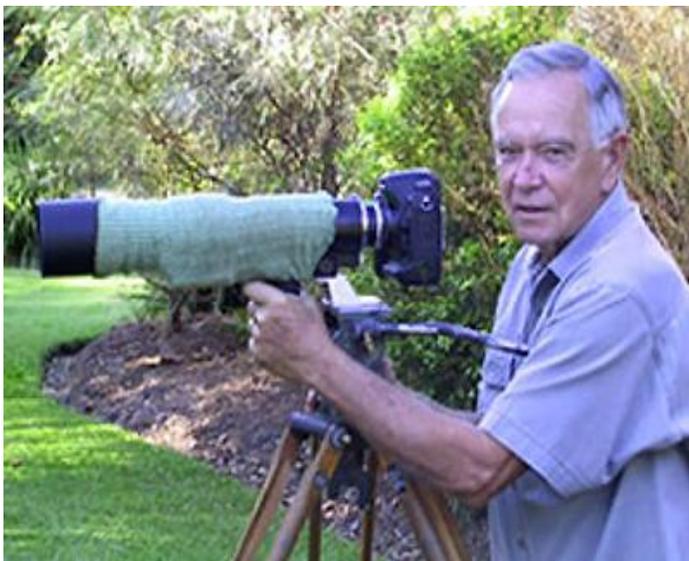
Photo by Graeme Chapman

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Interview

This season's interview is with Graeme Chapman, renowned bird researcher, bird photographer, birdsong recordist, BirdLife Australia life member and BirdLife Shoalhaven member ... see page 10.



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 them with any related photos, drawings or maps to brett@brettdavis.com.au

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

Suggestions, criticisms, feedback (positive and negative) and corrections are always welcome.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the BirdLife Shoalhaven members and friends who contributed articles and photos for this magazine. These include Rob Dunn, Chris Grounds, Kim Touzel, Charles Dove, Matt Jones, Graeme Chapman, Cathy Law, Perrie Croshaw, Frances Bray, Brian O'Leary, Vas Smilevski and Leanne Hall.

In addition, images and text from the following websites have been used in this magazine - abc.net.au, theconversation.com, theguardian.com, e360.yale.edu and australiangeographic.com.au, and Vas Smilevski's Flickr page at www.flickr.com/photos/14869355@N07/

Apologies to those contributors whose text or images may not have been acknowledged. If you have not been acknowledged please let the editor know, and the error will be rectified in the next magazine.

General Disclaimer

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

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

Errors

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

Cover Photo

This season's cover photo of a somewhat confused Galah was taken and Photoshopped by Graeme Chapman. For an explanation of the image, see the interview with Graeme which starts on page 10.

President's Report

- by Rob Dunn

Since the last magazine, there has been a great deal happening in the local birding community.

As always major conservation issues have been front of stage with the problem of dogs on Cudmirrah Beach and development applications at Lake Wollumboola both reaching positive conclusions.

The start of the beach nesting birds breeding season and the arrival of migratory shorebirds has meant the NPWS Shorebirds Recovery Program volunteer teams have cranked into gear for another monitoring season.

The MUD Birdwatching Club and Shoalhaven Birders bird walk calendar continues apace with more walks now being run by BLS members.

Bird Week kicked off with many people downloading the Aussie Backyard Bird Count (ABBC) app and entering bird sightings. The number of people involved and sightings recorded means we will have beaten last year's count.

Part of this increased interest is most likely due to the many Birds in Backyards (BIBY) talks that have been given to community groups over the year (by Yolande Cozijn) and most recently in the lead up to Bird Week.

Members of BLS, Shoalhaven Birders and Vincentia Bushcare came together to plant nearly 100 she-oaks in the reserve adjacent to the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum to kick off the "Save our Glossies" project.

What is especially exciting about several of these activities is that they introduce more people to the enjoyment and a greater understanding of birds and their conservation.

Birders are really good at talking to birders. We often seem to speak in code and use secret language. Amazing as it might seem, not everyone knows that a GST* has nothing to do with the 10% on your grocery bill!



A Grey Shrike-thrush (GST)

Then it all gets too hard for the novice as they get lost in a bird guide with species from Cape York, when all you need to know is the name of the bird in your bird bath!

The ABBC, BIBY talks and especially the Bird Haven Festival are helping to break down these barriers and prove that birders are not nerds in a secret society (not all of us at least!)



BirdLife Shoalhaven President Rob Dunn speaking at the Bird Haven Festival



This year's count is over - but get involved next year!

A great many of the people involved in these recent events were relatively new to birding and clearly want to learn more.

This is exciting and can only make a big difference for bird conservation in the Shoalhaven and beyond!

Then there was the inaugural Bird Haven Festival at Shoalhaven Heads in October - see report on page 7.

Save Collingwood Beach

An Important First Step

- by Rob Dunn

Over many months, indeed years, BLS has added its voice to that of the vast majority of the community members who have become increasingly angry about the vandalism of native vegetation along Shoalhaven's coast-line. Collingwood Beach in Vincentia has become a symbol for this on-going battle between those who want to maintain a healthy and resilient dune system and those wanting uninterrupted views of the sea.

The fight to save Collingwood Beach has gone on for over four years! After a huge amount of time and effort, involving community consultations, a lot of Council staff time and air-time at Council meetings, a compromise position was negotiated between all parties earlier this year.

This led to a tree planting event in August along a 100m trial section of the dune. A mix of species of varying height was chosen to build up an intact system suitable for a range of birds and other fauna and to stabilize the dune, while still allowing filtered views of the bay.

The planting event was supported by over 60 volunteers from the local Bushcare group and Vincentia residents, both young and not so young, under the guidance of Council staff. Reality TV star, Wombat, was also there to raise some media attention.

Another section of banksias was later selectively pruned by Council contractors where previous vandalism had led to an overly dense thicket of shrubs. A review of the planting site is planned in two years to look to extend the restoration project along the rest of the dune.

Amazingly, more tree vandalism took place just a few weeks before the planting. Clearly some people are still determined to ignore the wishes of the majority of residents. This proves more than ever that Council must finalise a review of its vandalism policy, which they committed to as part of the decision to go ahead with the trial planting.

Vandalism of native vegetation is happening all along the coast. It is not just Collingwood Beach. Without a strong vandalism policy, the destruction of habitat on which our birds rely will continue. BLS is talking to Councillors to ask that this key issue is progressed and quickly.



Conservation Officer Report

- by Chris Grounds

A rare environmental win with Cudmirrah Beach

The last edition of our BirdLife Shoalhaven [BLS] magazine featured the first part of the story of Cudmirrah Beach and local council attempts to allow dogs off-leash on a known Hooded Plover nesting beach. There was much more to come! This report is the story of the campaign for you!



Mike Clear educating visitors who said they knew they were doing the wrong thing!

Many BLS members and supporters participated in this campaign and helped support Mike Clear in the campaign he generated. This report is very much about that landmark result and how it was achieved.

Bear in mind that the Hooded Plover is "Critically Endangered" in NSW under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. The legislation itself remains controversial to this day though the status of the Hooded Plover has not changed.



Consider as well that the Hooded Plover is at the northern extreme of its south-east Australian distribution on our local beaches but most especially on the Booderee National Park beaches, adjacent to Cudmirrah.

Successful breeding on these beaches has been extremely limited and remains so. It is an apex extinction scenario.

A bare majority of councillors (7-5) at the June 26th Ordinary Meeting had accepted the Clr. Pat White proposal of late June and voted to make the beach dog off-leash.

It was left to Mayor Findley and councillors Gartner, Levett, Cheyne and Guile to oppose the flawed proposal.

This decision triggered BirdLife member Mike Clear, a Cudmirrah resident, long-standing Shorebird Recovery Co-ordinator, and co-author with wife Rose of a book on the Hooded Plover, to develop a campaign to challenge this decision.



Cudmirrah Beach and northern neighbour Booderee NP

I joined Mike in support as Conservation Officer on behalf of BLS to develop and execute the campaign, which would ultimately reap not only an appropriate but a deserved result.

It became virtually full time work for the next month. At times it looked as though the campaign might falter with key elements not falling into place and it did take some strength of conviction to ensure the campaign progressed.

The decision to go "off-leash" was narrowly based on very poor information, seriously flawed consultation with agencies, non-existent consultation with staff and totally inadequate community engagement.

Significantly, there was no referral at all to BirdLife Shoalhaven nor proper consultation with NPWS. Science ran a poor second to commerce and tourism, and one could only be left wondering how such a shoddy proposal could see the light of day - but it did.

Mike Clear, highly literate, eloquent and diplomatic at the best of times, produced an outstanding letter for counter-signing by supporters and relentlessly chased necessary contacts. This was one of the core strategies of the campaign.

The letter drew dozens and dozens of signatures to the cause, including BirdLife Australia (BA) staff, encouraged

of course by BA board member and our president, Rob Dunn. This "trickle up" is one of the great advantages of our BL organization.



A signal of concern

Mike Clear and BLS connected with members, supporters and regular networks to generate letters and emails of support for the campaign and this next plank of the campaign strategy was very effective, reminding all councillors that the previous majority had made a really poor and unpopular decision. The subsequent recission debate noted the huge number of emails received by councillors.

Early formal advice from the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) indicated to allow dogs off-leash on a known breeding beach would be a "significant threat" to the Hooded Plover. Later formal advice would be even more damaging to the council decision.

A major strategy, originating with BLS, as described in the last newsletter, was to send a letter of concern to the Minister for Environment and Heritage, Gabrielle Upton.

This was to produce another "big nail" in the coffin of the off-leash proposal but more of that in a moment.

A further key development was the submission of a "Recission Motion" to the Ordinary Meeting of Council on July 31 by concerned councillors, seeking to abandon the original motion and decision.

President Rob Dunn put his voice to the grind as a BLA Board member in a ring-around all councillors on the eve of the recission motion to explain the fragility of the original decision.

One of the most decisive moments came on the eve of the council meeting to consider the recission motion. Our BLS letter to the minister had created, as was intended, a "Ministerial". This took the form of a response and advice from a senior OEH staffer in relation to our expression of concerns re the Hooded Plover nesting beach at Cudmirrah. The critical part of the letter to BLS was:

"I understand that Shoalhaven City Council is still considering their position on the proposal to change the on-leash requirements. You can be assured that OEH shares your concern and is therefore providing data and other information to council. We are advising council that Cudmirrah Beach is an important beach for the conservation of the Hooded Plover and that **the threat from domestic dogs needs to be managed at this site by having a no-dogs policy, or at a minimum, keeping the existing on-leash regulation.** We are also requesting that these regulations be backed up by active compliance, particularly through the Spring and Summer breeding season for the Hooded Plover."



Off-leash and out of control at Cudmirrah

There had been no council action to garner this advice, despite its absolute relevancy. It took BLS, as a community based organization, to do the ground work.

The final act of the campaign was to provide a "Deputation" to the council meeting for the recission motion, completing the presentation by quoting from the minister's advice above from the OEH. The Deputation also highlighted the serious errors and omissions of the off-leash case.

The entire councillor group, the majority of whom had voted for the "off-leash" proposal, now fell in behind support for the recission motion and there was an amazing unanimous vote to abandon the proposal and return the beach to "On-leash".

Footnote: Mike and Chris were two of the fifteen merit-selected, community members of the Council's Natural Resources and Floodplain Management Committee. This committee was recently abandoned by a majority of councillors only to be re-instated in a new three region format associated with a recission motion.

The chairpersons of the three new committees are all councillors who voted for the original "off-leash" proposal at Cudmirrah!

Bird Haven Festival proves it has wings

-by Cathy Law, Festival Director

When we first met with Rob Dunn to discuss our idea of holding a festival in Shoalhaven Heads to celebrate birds, we were thinking the first one would be in 2019. By the end of our initial meeting, we were planning a fledgling event for 2018 to see if the concept could fly.

We are delighted to report that the taste test for our Bird Haven Festival was very well received, and everyone is encouraging us to move ahead with a bigger and better 2019 event.



With birdlife such a feature of our village, our eco-Festival is aimed at attracting visitors to the area and turning them into bird advocates. We incorporated elements of our themes of science, education, creativity and community into our mini-Festival, and we think we succeeded in giving a glimpse of the vibe we are seeking to create. We want people to have fun while they learn.

While the film night was plagued with technical difficulties of no-one's making, it meant a camaraderie had been built up by the time *Chasing Birds* was on the big screen.

The cult doco on the Twitchathon was a great introduction for the weekend, with the extra element of the director and producer being on hand to take questions afterwards.

On Sunday, a program of talks was held at the local Community Centre. Birdlife Shoalhaven's Rob Dunn, Chris Grounds (see image below) and Yolanda Cozijn explained the significance of the Shoalhaven and then The Heads as a home for local and migratory birds. Yolande also explained how to attract birds to gardens and how to participate in the Aussie Backyard Bird Count.



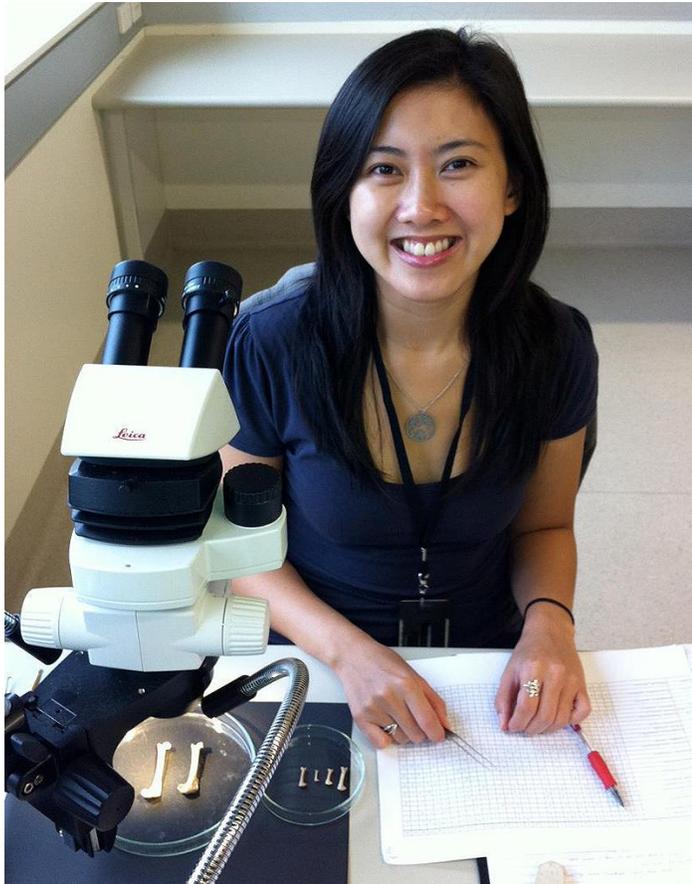
The Festival was also able to attract Melbourne-based author Harry Saddler to travel up to speak about his new book, *The Eastern Curlew*. Rather than give a set presentation, Harry (see image below) was interviewed about his early fascination with birds, his adventures following the Curlews on their route from Siberia and the threats to their survival.



We were also very fortunate to have Dr Jackie Nguyen (see image below), a bird palaeontologist from the Australian Museum, as a guest speaker.

Jackie gave a fascinating talk about the evolution of birds and the important work that is being done at the Riversleigh fossil site in Queensland.

In 2014, she got to describe the world's oldest fossil of the songbird family *Cracticidae*, a family which includes well-known Australian species such as Magpies, Currawongs and Butcherbirds, and name it after her late father.



Apart from her work on extinct birds, she is participating in the Bird 10,000 Genomes (B10K) Project, an initiative to generate representative draft genome sequences from all living bird species within five years (to 2020). Jackie tells us that they are on track to meet this ambitious target.

The quality of the questions from the floor showed how engaged the audience were (including Robyn Williams, long time host of the ABC's Science Show, who lives in nearby Gerroa).

Over half of the attendees at the morning of talks came along for walks after lunch, despite damp conditions, and were treated to a glimpse of the Eastern Curlews (see photo by Kim Touzel below) and other birds in the native forest and on the river tidal area.

There was also a pop-up exhibition of the work of local artists, inspired by birdlife, and a mini-Fair with stalls by conservation groups.

Over sixty people come to the film night at the Bowlo on Saturday, and almost 100 came to talks and walks on Sunday.

While we received great support from Birdlife Shoalhaven and Illawarra Birders' members, the event attracted a large cross section of birding experience with many newbies coming along.

It attracted a mix of Shoalhaven Heads locals, South Coast residents and people from Canberra and Sydney.

My co-Director, Perrie Croshaw, and I believe the weekend has shown the twofold benefits that the Festival can bring to Shoalhaven Heads - promoting our birdlife as a reason to visit throughout the year and encouraging people to be advocates for protecting the environment both here and elsewhere.



Shoalhaven Heads is the ideal place to hold the Festival as, apart from its abundant birdlife, it has:

- a number of small venues all within walking distance (nice and flat)
- a variety of accommodation options (from luxury to camping)
- proximity to Sydney and Melbourne
- a strong local affection for birds

We have many ideas for next year's Festival, which will again be a forerunner to National Bird Week and will be held on 18-20 October.



The idea is for various streams to be based at venues around town (like the Surf Club, the Bowlo, the Community Centre etc), to focus on content such as indigenous stories and culture; gaining or honing bird watching skills; visual arts; aspects of avian science; children's enrichment activities; storytelling; and more. People will be able to create their own Festival, based on their interests and levels of knowledge.

There will also be activities like the film night and a dinner to round out the weekend and give people an opportunity to socialize. We want festival goers to learn about birds while having fun and making connections.

This year's Festival was only made possible with seed funding from Shoalhaven Heads Bowling & Recreation Club, Bangalay Luxury Villas, Shoalhaven Council and the Heads Hotel. Birdlife Shoalhaven provided amazing support by providing speakers and guides for the walks.

Next year we are hopeful of getting significant tourism funding to promote and run the event. While it will take years for the Festival to develop to its full potential, we believe that it will become a major annual celebration of the beauty and wonder of birds.

Suggestions for speakers or topics that interest you can be sent to twobirds@birdhavenfestival.com.au



Rob Dunn (centre) with Festival Directors Perrie Croshaw and Cathy Law



An Interview with Graeme Chapman

- with Brett Davis

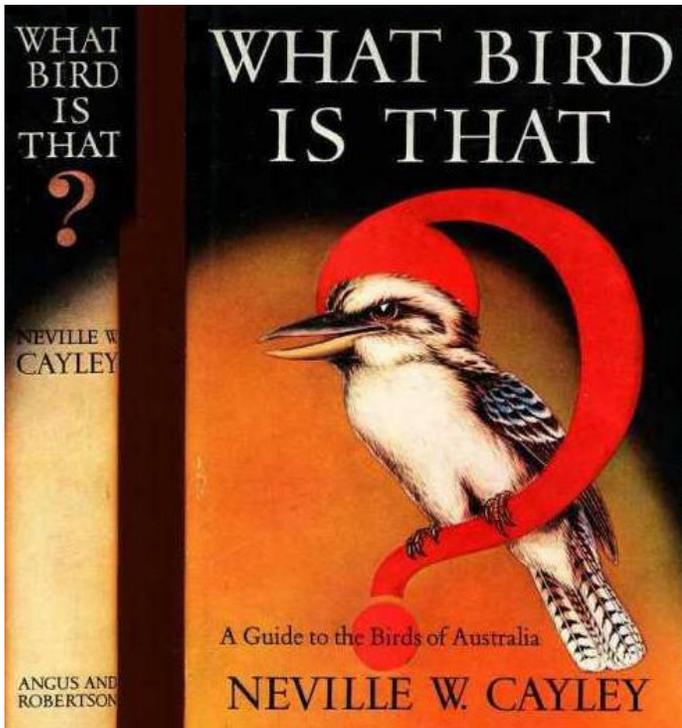
Graeme Chapman is a renowned bird researcher, bird photographer, birdsong recordist, BirdLife Australia life member and BirdLife Shoalhaven member. This interview was conducted at his home in Basin View in September 2018.

BLS: The Biography page of your website (which can be found at www.graemechapman.com.au) doesn't give your age ...?

GC: I was born in 1938 - I turned 80 in March. I'm actually living on borrowed time because I had a triple bypass 7 years ago, and they are only supposed to last for 15 years, so I am counting down the days! I retired at 55 (in 1993) and although retiring that early cost me a lot in superannuation, I don't regret it at all because I was fitter then and I have done so much since! If you can afford it, retire early. You might do without some stuff, but it is really worth it.

BLS: Your biography page begins with "At age eleven I won a copy of Cayley's "What Bird is That?" as a school prize and no doubt that was where it all started." What was the competition?

GC: The prize was for coming second in the class for the year - I think it was 5th class, which is probably Grade 5 now. The prize was "What Bird is That?" which I didn't really want, because the boy who beat me and came first, got "Wonders of the Great Barrier Reef" and I thought that was much more exciting - so I dipped out!



I'm not sure how many copies of "What Bird is That?" I have now - in fact I sold one just the other day - a first edition from 1931. Did you know that Cayley - who had a reputation as a drunk - sold the rights to the book to the Gould League for a song. And it sold as many copies in Australia as the Bible and it's gone to about 30 different editions! (According to Wikipedia, in 1960 it was rated the all-time best seller in Australian natural history).

BLS: Your biography says "Not until I was 18 when I took my first job with CSIRO in Sydney and became acquainted with the local birdwatching community did I become seriously interested in birds.

GC: As luck would have it my boss was Durno Murray (see sidebar below) and he had copies of The Emu kicking around the lab. This prompted me to attend the local birdo meetings held then at the Australian Museum and I guess the natural thing was to join. It wasn't long before I became Secretary of that group, because only dills put their name up for secretary.

Durno Murray

According to Wikipedia "Mitchell Durno Murray (1925 - 25 April 2009) was an Australian veterinary scientist, and an ornithologist with a particular interest in seabirds. He was born and educated in England before moving to New Zealand and then Australia. He was the first regional organizer for New South Wales of the Australian Bird Banding Scheme. He was instrumental in establishing the New South Wales Albatross Study Group, now the Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association (SOSSA). He was President of the Australian Bird Study Association 1973-1974, Editor of its journal Corella 1990-1994, and largely responsible for its 'Seabird Islands' series".

BLS: Did you go to University?

GC: I had two goes at it. I had a year at the Uni of NSW where I didn't do very well because I was too busy playing snooker or golf or something, and then I did another year at New England studying general science, and I was severely pissed off there because I failed a whole year because I mis-read a question in the exam! All my practical work was top of the class - I had the best collection of invertebrates and all the rest of it - but this question asked for an annotated diagram of a small organism. I put in a labelled diagram because I didn't know what annotated meant - and I got 2 out of 20 and I think that was harsh! (Apparently annotated means to "add notes to (a text or diagram) giving explanation or comment"). So I thought "stuff your bloody degree" ...

I left school to go to the CSIRO and worked in the Division of Animal Health, but left there after a year and got a job

with a scientific instrument firm - Watson Victor - and I worked there for six or seven years. They primarily made X-ray equipment, but I was more interested in their optical stuff, like microscopes and spectrophotometers.

BLS: Your biography says "Suddenly, with new found riches to spend and an urge to record what I was seeing, I bought my first camera. For a while the pictures were simply records, but I was satisfied. I had never heard of a loupe." What's a loupe and how is it relevant to photography?

(Graeme reaches across his desk for a small object).

GC: That's the best loupe on the market. It's worth \$150. It's basically a magnifying glass, and it is really useful for looking at slides on a light box.

Actually, I recently learned something really interesting on the trip we just came home from. With the new cameras, don't worry about ISO! We got into the dark in the rainforest and I got lovely pictures of the Eungella Honeyeater - at 6400 ISO! No problem at all! That is something that was un-dreamt of in film days - 200 ISO was huge. There was 200 Ektachrome, and it was terrible!

BLS: You used slide film and preferred Kodachrome 25 which was a stop or two slower than the standard ISO 100 on modern digital cameras. Was that a problem?

GC: There wasn't anything else available that was any good, so you worked with it. I actually photographed all the Grasswrens on a manual focus film camera using Kodachrome 25. That is something I am pretty proud of!

I think I actually started all the current Grasswren mania with a series of lectures I used to give when at O'Reilly Bird Weeks around 1990 on "Grasswrenning your way around Australia".



BLS: You were with the CSIRO's Division of Wildlife Research in Canberra from 1962 to 1969. What did you do with them?

GC: I was working with Ian Rowley on crows and ravens. Ian served the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union as Editor of the Emu from 1990 to 2000. My main claim to fame (I believe) is that I discovered the Little Raven.



I came back from a field trip where I was out there shooting and collecting them. I looked at the Ravens and I said "I think we're dealing with two different species here" and they said "Tell us another one!". Ian Rowley, who held me in high regard and called me his "right hand man", put in a program and proved that Little Ravens are as different to Australian Ravens as they are to a Magpie. This was before DNA testing, so we proved it because of their life histories. Once you look at them closely you can see that they are actually physically different as well. The Australian Raven has a great big gular pouch that it stuffs with meat and rushes off to hide it somewhere, whereas the Little Raven is mainly only an insect eater.

BLS: Seven years was a long time to be studying a single group of birds ... ?

GC: It was, but those long-term dream jobs don't happen anymore. You don't want to tell your kids to study biology these days, because if they do get a job they will only get a three year contract. It stinks actually, and the whole system is very inefficient - it's a major step backwards.

BLS: You transferred to Perth in 1969. What did you do over there?

GC: Cockatoos were the thing over there. I started with Galahs and worked on them for five years, and then I worked on Major Mitchell Cockatoos of all things. What a lovely job - except that they can bite harder!

BLS: What did the job involve?

GC: We examined the bird's entire life history - what happens to it from the year dot. The sort of things we would do included climbing up to the nests, numbering the eggs so we knew which order they were laid in,

tagging the young birds and then following them for years once they left the nest and became adults.

(Graeme shows an image he has produced of a Galah at a waterhole with its reflection being a Major Mitchell Cockatoo - see the large version on the cover).



GC: I would like to write an article about this image, because that Galah could easily be a bird that has been brought up by Major Mitchells - it happens! The Galahs lay their egg in a Major Mitchell's nest and the Galah hatchling gets raised by the Major Mitchells. These Galahs become imprinted and actually believe they are Major Mitchell Cockatoos - they behave like them, they fly like them, they call like them, they hang out with them, and they even try to cross-breed with them. It has actually happened - at the Eyre Bird Observatory there are intermediates between Majors and Galahs and I have photos of them.

Here's my little poem about the Galah in question -

*Mirror mirror on the water
Who am I? I'm someone's daughter
Pink and white or pink and grey
Who am I? I cannot say
I fly alone on an endless search
for a loving mate to share my perch*

It was really sad to see this actual imprinted Galah, when she was two and a bit years old, decide that she was old enough to breed, so she tried to cuddle up to a Major Mitchell, and he just told her to get away - it was really sad to watch ... which is why the poem talks about her

endless search for someone to share her perch, because most of the time they would never actually mate.

One species of bird being raised by another species - apart from Cuckoos - has never been written up in a popular way. Our research has been written up in a scientific journal - "Behaviour" (Vol 96, Issue 1 pp. 1-16 1986) - but who ever reads "Behaviour"?

BLS: Are Galahs and Major Mitchells the only birds that do this?

GC: There are intermediates between most of the Rosellas and lots of Cockatoos, and there is a shortage of nest hollows, so I believe that one bird putting an egg in another bird's nest is probably quite a widespread phenomenon. And if you look at many flocks of Major Mitchells in Western Australia, quite often you will see a Galah leading the flock! So that's why I put this Photoshopped image together ...

BLS: Do you use Photoshop a lot?

GC: Yes, an old, old version, because you can't buy it any more. It's very annoying actually as you now have to hire it! My version of Photoshop is CS1 or something like that. It's about nine versions behind! It still works though!

BLS: So you left WA and returned to Canberra in 1984?

GC: That's right. The chief of our Division visited all the out-stations to make sure that everybody was happy, and I said that we would really love to head back to Canberra from WA because our families are all in the east. And it turned out that Ederic Slater, the photographer, was retiring, so I took his place and became a photographer for the rest of my time with the CSIRO.



Star Finch

BLS: Had you done any formal photographic study, or were you just naturally talented?

GC: That's a nice way to put it - naturally talented - but I picked up the stuff that I didn't know about from Ederic Slater. He was an extremely good photographer! He is actually listed on IMDb.com - the International Movie Database website - because he made a film called "Birth of the Red Kangaroo". They attributed that to one of the scientists who just found the money for it, but Ed made the film!

BLS: The next thing you mention in your biography is that you retired!

GC: Yes, I retired at 55 - in 1993. We moved to Vincentia, right up the top of Waldegrave Crescent, a fantastic spot. We had a vacant lot next door but it was bought by a builder who knew all the rules and all the inspectors and he built a house that shaded us out and broke all the rules. They wouldn't even talk to us, so we decided to leave. We moved to Queensland where we thought it would be nice and quiet. And it was to a certain extent. We were 20 kilometres from the coast at Beerwah on one of the Glasshouse Mountains.



The Red-backed Fairy Wren can be found in SE QLD

BLS: But you came back to the Shoalhaven?

GC: We did, chasing family, and moved into this house, but unfortunately after we came back the family moved!

In fact not only did my wife's brother move, he died as well, so that didn't help! Now we don't have any local family in the area anymore. But we love this place, and you should see our backyard - it's like a piece of Western Australia. It's looking really good now. There are some bloody beautiful plants out there.

BLS: BirdLife Australia awarded you the 2004 John Hobbs Medal for services to amateur ornithology ...

GC: Yes. I had been secretary and president of god-knows-what since I first joined the RAOU in 1956. I was amongst three or four people who formed COG - the Canberra Ornithologists Group - and I wrote the first edition of the Canberra Bird Notes. My pictures and articles have been published widely, particularly in Wingspan, the Birds Australia magazine and also in the Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds plus a myriad of other books and publications both in Australia and overseas. My continuing passion will be the birds of Australia and their behaviour, especially those that are peculiar to this great continent, the real Australian birds.

John Hobbs

The John Hobbs Medal may be awarded annually by BirdLife Australia for "outstanding contributions to ornithology as an amateur scientist". It commemorates John Hobbs and was first awarded in 1995. Hobbs was a British and Australian career police officer and amateur ornithologist. After serving with the Metropolitan Police Force in London, he emigrated to Australia in 1952 and joined the NSW Police Force in which he served until 1980, mainly in country towns across New South Wales, where he made detailed studies of local birdlife.

He served on the Records Appraisal Committee of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU) from 1975 to 1989, as well as contributing prolifically to the RAOU's Nest Record Scheme. He is commemorated by the John Hobbs Medal, awarded annually from 1995 for major contributions to amateur ornithology.

BLS: Did you know John Hobbs?

GC: I did. He was actually aware of the Little Raven being different, but he was a policeman, not a scientist, so he couldn't follow it up like I could. Actually, I went to Tasmania and collected 27 specimens of Corvid, and it turns out that we now call them the Forest Raven.

BLS: When you say "collected" you actually mean you shot them?

BLS: Oh yeah! With a shotgun - an automatic Browning. You just squeezed the trigger and off it went, 5 shots in a row - which may be why these days I am partially deaf!

BLS: You are a Life Member of BirdLife Australia. Can you tell us about that?

GC: Anyone who has been a member of BirdLife Australia for 50 years automatically becomes a Life Member, and membership fees are waived. I've been in since 1956.

BLS: There is extensive information on your website about the photographic equipment you have used over the years, but not a lot on the change from film to digital. How quick were you to embrace digital?

GC: When I worked at the CSIRO I actively avoided changing over to digital, because I was approaching retirement and the learning curve going from film to digital would have been too steep and too time-consuming. In fact, when I left they hired a girl who didn't like my Leica equipment so she sold the bloody lot and bought Nikon! She didn't last long and then they sold everything and got rid of the photography altogether! That's the way the CSIRO goes.

BLS: So when you retired and embraced digital, you went Nikon too. Why Nikon?

GC: Nikon not only make cameras and lenses, they make other optical equipment and it is always of the highest quality. Canon make every bloody thing - and though their lenses are good, I just don't think they are up to the quality of Nikon. A lot of photographers use Canon for their long lenses because they make such a huge range, but there is a new Nikon lens that's coming out that will set the cat amongst the pigeons. It's a 500 mm f/5.6 PF which is really small and light and costs nearly \$6000. I wish I had the money, but my wife won't let me buy it!



Orange-bellied Parrot taken with Nikon equipment

BLS: You use a 1.4 or 1.7 tele-converter. How are they?

GC: My 1.7 is particularly well-matched to my 300mm lens for some reason, which makes it equivalent to a 510mm lens, and I don't see any great loss of quality.

BLS: Tell me about your favourite tripod?

GC: My favourite which has served me well for nearly 50 years is a Miller wooden tripod with a fluid head. Until you've tried a decent fluid head you'll never realize what a difference they make. Originally designed and still made in Australia, the Miller is a truly professional tripod, well known in the television industry around the world. Unfortunately it isn't cheap but second hand ones are often available at a fraction of the new price. A new one will cost you thousands, but I think I got mine for about \$400.

You just grab the handle and move the camera to wherever you want it. If you let go it just stays where it is, and it is so smooth. These days they make tripods out of carbon fibre, and they are really light, but if you want a tripod to be really steady it has to be heavy! And wooden tripods are the way to go, because you can stand them in salt water or use them on the sand and they don't seize up because of rust or salt or grit.

I have 9 tripods, but I didn't use one on my recent trip and I don't think I will need to use them in future. You don't really need them with the new cameras with their high ISOs. Except I have a zoom lens - 200mm to 500mm - and it's heavy, so I will probably use a tripod with that, because if I go down to Lake Wollumboola or somewhere like that I will take a tripod to put it on, because I just can't hold it for long periods. I should have a tripod sale!

BLS: Your website has bird sounds for 385 birds, including 13 Grasswren species. Can you tell us something about your sound recording?

GC: I still have some old recordings I made on open reel tape back in the 1960's, and most of my recordings were done using tape. I have a huge collection of tapes. When I used to go bush, like when I was after Grasswrens, I used to go through all the birds I thought I might like to photograph and I would take along tapes for "replay" purposes (playing calls to attract birds). I don't skite about the replay thing - I have been doing replay for as long as I can remember - mainly scientifically. In the Kimberley I was doing research on Purple-crowned Fairy Wrens. There was an island in the middle of a creek, and I put one speaker on the bank of the creek and one speaker on the island, with a mist net in the middle, and I had 15 Purple-crowned Fairy Wrens caught in no time!

They ban replay these days - in the national parks in Queensland you can't do it, and at Bowra they won't let you do it.

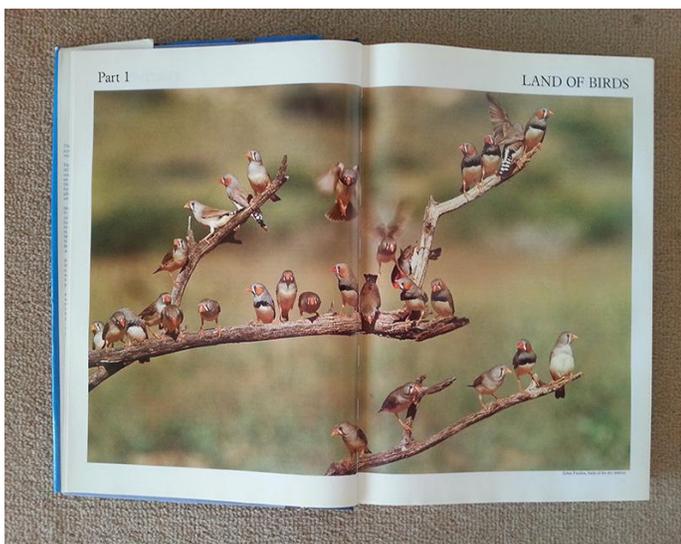
Of course, having people playing calls can be really disconcerting to other birdwatchers too, but that's no reason to ban it. I was at Kingfisher Park and I played a Pied Monarch and someone said "I think I just heard a Pied Monarch" and I had to admit that it was probably just me ...



Silvereye - taken at Kingfisher Park

BLS: You have a lot of images in the Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds which you say is the most comprehensive and popular reference guide to Australian ornithology, and if you have only one book on Australian birds, this should be it - and I agree!

GC: Yes, I do have a lot of images in the book. And the double-page spreads - see image below - they are nearly all mine. I tried to convince Readers Digest to put in some new ones, but that costs them too much money. Do you know their sales of that book were worth more than three million dollars?



BLS: Were you well paid for your photos?

GC: No. The images were organised by Donald Trounson via his National Photographic Index of Australian Birds (see side bar in next column).

The National Photographic Index of Australian Birds

The National Photographic Index of Australian Birds was founded as a project of the Australian Museum on 3 June 1969 (to compile a comprehensive collection of photographs of Australian bird species. The founder, Donald Trounson, served as the project's chief executive officer until 1981. It was the first systematic attempt to compile a comprehensive photographic record of all the birds of any country.

Because of the National Photographic Index of Australian Birds, most of the pictures of all the birds were available - they were missing only one or two. Trounson went up to the Iron Range on Cape York and caught the birds that hadn't been photographed and put them into a big Perspex box with a lot of flashes and some of the pictures were of birds that had never been photographed before.

BLS: Your website has "pictures of more than 600 Australian birds". It is amazing to see that many let alone photograph them all. Exactly how many Aussie bird species have you seen?

GC: I don't keep a "life list". Years and years ago I joined the so-called 600 club that John McKean invented, and I haven't seen many more than that. In fact, if you count only the true Australian birds - forgetting vagrants or sea-birds and the like - there are only about 600.

People go out on pelagic trips and visits to remote dependencies like Christmas and Macquarie Islands just so they can add birds to their list. Oh, we've been to Lord Howe and Kangaroo Island, and Tasmania, but we haven't been to any of the far-flung ones.

BLS: I notice that you call the Rusty Grasswren a Rowley's Grasswren on your website ...

GC: Yes - its scientific name is *Amytornis rowleyi*. We already have the Dusky and Rufous Grasswrens so why have one with a very similar name. It's scientific name is *rowleyi* after Ian Rowley - one of Australia's pre-eminent ornithologists - so why not call it Rowley's Grasswren?

BLS: Tell me about the images of the Paradise Parrot on your website ... (shown below)



GC: I do say it's a mock-up and that the bird is extinct, but it is amazing the number of people who don't read the text. I get all these emails from people having a go at me and I just tell them to read the text for goodness sake!

(We move out into the backyard for a coffee break with Graeme's wife Pam)

BLS: Do you use a bird hide?

GC: I've had about half a dozen of them. I don't use them much anymore, but I always have one in the boot of my car. No, I prefer to stalk the birds ...



Beautiful Firetail

BLS: So you don't put out bird baths or water sprayers or put grubs on branches or throw fish out to raptors?

GC: No. I did know a National Parks ranger at Jervis Bay who used to provide fish for the raptors, and he had a pretty tame Sea-eagle that used to follow him around every time he went out! So by and large I don't use bait for birds. But, having said that, I have a box of meal worms in the fridge right now and I took some with me on my last trip - but I didn't use them. I always carry a portable bird bath.

BLS: Who do you feed the meal worms to?

GC: Bluey - our Satin Bowerbird - that's his dish there (pointing). He comes every morning, and he gets a little bit of orange as well - he loves a bit of orange. And grapes as well, but do you know that a Satin Bowerbird can't get a whole grape into its mouth? I have to break it up for him!

BLS: Here is probably the silliest question I will ask today - which field guide do you use most?

GC: I hardly ever use a field guide but I am a fan of Peter Slater's field guide, partly because he is a great friend, but also because his illustrations are very good. And I am impressed with the latest CSIRO one which I have heard they are going to bring out in a larger format and call a

concise handbook. They have amassed an amazing amount of information for that book - and they just can't fit it all in! But I like Peter's - I keep it in the glove box of the car because it's small enough to fit. I use it mainly to check the ranges of birds that I am not all that familiar with.

BLS: Tell me about your first set of binoculars ...

GC: Interesting! One of my very early sets of binoculars was a pair of East German Zeiss 8 x 30s. I have always liked 8 x 30 - 8 is plenty of magnification and 30 means they are not heavy. I gave Pam a pair of the latest ones recently, Zeiss Conquest HD 8 x 32. They are fantastic, and only (!) \$1300 - not the \$3000 you pay for some.

BLS: And what binoculars do you use now?

GC: It depends - I've got several! I've got the big Nikons - 8 x 40. I've got a compact set of Nikons that fit in my pocket, but I hardly ever use them. I have my original Leica Leitz Trinovids that I bought back from the government when I left, and they are still working perfectly after 40 years. When you get older, anti-shake binoculars can make an amazing difference, but they tend to be heavy.

BLS: Do you do special birding holidays these days?

GC: We have just been to the Atherton Tableland and thanks to Pam we got photos of both male and female Golden Bowerbirds (male shown below) roaming around feeding on fruit.



We also got the Great-billed Heron. We took a boat trip on the Daintree with Murray Hunt and he got us really close to the heron.

We took heaps of pictures - Pam's are every bit as good as mine - and I had to use a smaller lens because we were so close I couldn't fit the Heron in!



One place I can thoroughly recommend if you've never been there is Lady Elliot Island. Go in the last week of November and you will have a ball! That's when everything is breeding - Roseate Terns, Bridled Terns. We had Red-tailed Tropic Birds nesting under our unit! And of course there are the Manta Rays if you snorkel - and it's not expensive!



BLS: Do you have a bogey bird?

GC: Well, I've never seen a Princess Parrot, but I didn't bother going out there when everybody was chasing it. When these things come up I don't do what Mike Carter from Melbourne does and jump on a plane and go. I'm a bit of a tern person, but I didn't go up to Old Bar to see the Aleutian Terns - they will probably come every year now and I might go up there one day.

BLS: What is your most exciting bird experience?

GC: Well I always remember stalking a Red-bellied Pitta in a Cape York rainforest. The bird never quite came out into the open. I did manage to get one photo of it, with a shutter speed of about a second, but it wasn't as good as other people have managed to get.

BLS: Do you have any advice for beginners wanting to improve their bird photography?

GC: Always aspire to a shutter speed of 1/1000th of a second, because birds twitch and move even when they are standing still and one part might be sharp but the rest will be a blur, so try to have a shutter speed of at least 1/1000th of a second to stop bird movement. There is some other advice that I mention on my website. The greatest cause of failure for people taking photographs in general is camera movement. You need to hold the camera really still or better yet, use a tripod. Cameras these days have anti-shake, but it is not the be-all and end-all because it only works for about two or three stops.

High shutter speeds are so easily achievable these days provided you have a good camera - simply increase the ISO.



White-winged Fairy Wren (Black and White sub-species)

Helping to "Save Our Glossies"

- by Rob Dunn

Norm Webb, a member of BLS and Shoalhaven Birders, is the coordinator of a Bushcare site in the woodlands beside the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum in Huskisson. This site is bordered by the Museum grounds, mangroves and Woollamia Road and offers habitat to a wide range of bird species, notably the threatened Glossy Black-cockatoo. The woodland has patches of she-oak with several old trees with nesting hollows close by, both essential for the survival of this specialist bird.

In July, Norm organised a dozen volunteers from BLS, Shoalhaven Birders and Vincentia Bushcare to plant nearly 100 trees at the Bushcare site to kick off his plan for the "Save our Glossies" project. The site included a single she-oak that was planted about two years ago. It is already more than 4m tall and shows this is an ideal location for the planting. Another BLS member, Hugh Capes, who has seen Glossies on his property at Tomerong, built some large nesting boxes, which will be set up on trees adjacent to the plantings.



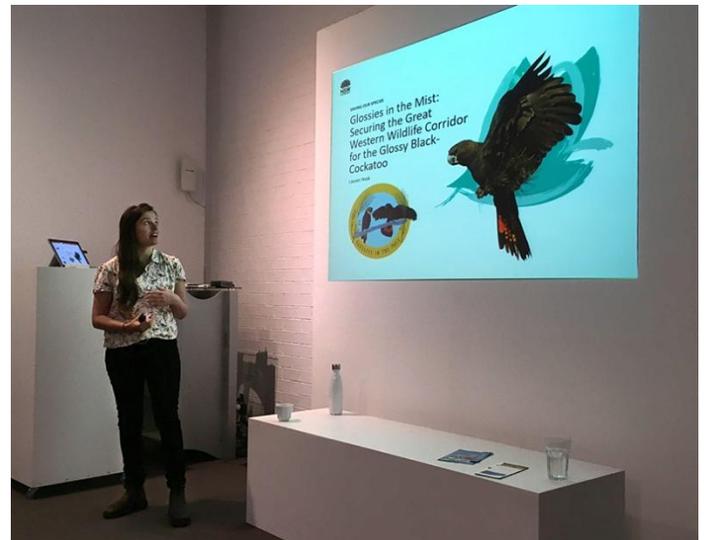
Hugh, Lauren and Norm

Part of the inspiration for "Save our Glossies" was the success of the Office of Environment & Heritage's "Glossies in the Mist" project in the Southern Highlands. We were delighted when Lauren Hook, OEH Threatened Species Officer, agreed to give a talk about the project at the Museum as part of our Bird Week calendar.

The talk gave a number of insights into Glossies:

- how to age and sex a bird by the stripes on its feathers
- they feed on around 60-80 she-oak cones per day and spend 30-40% of their day feeding
- breeding males will eat double this amount and then feed the female and young in the nest
- it takes about three minutes to process a she-oak cone, though older Glossies are faster
- females lay a single small egg
- 90 days after hatching the fledgling is ready to leave the nest
- the juvenile remains dependent and receives food from its parents for the next 6- 12 months.

These aspects of their ecology combined with competition for hollows, loss of habitat, climate change and more, all contribute to the bird's threatened status.



Lauren also talked about the long-term "Glossies in the Mist" project in the Southern Highlands and her work with private landowners between Belanglo NP and Penrose SF; a critical link for the bird between the Blue Mountains and Morton NP.

Over 7000 trees have been planted and with increasing support of 250 landowners and awareness of Glossies, the project is making great progress and importantly has committed funding till 2021.

All Bushcare projects across the Shoalhaven are making a real difference for bird conservation, but it is exciting to see this new project focussing on one of our most threatened birds. The recent plantings, nest boxes and the inspiration to build on the success of the work in the Southern Highlands means that this small patch of woodland will raise awareness about the Glossy Black-cockatoo and help "Save our Glossies" into the future.

Lake Wollumboola "Developments"

- by Frances Bray

Major decisions on the Lake Wollumboola catchment and other news.

Lake Wollumboola Protection Association Inc members and many other Culburra Beach residents and friends are delighted and relieved at the decisions made by the NSW Independent Planning Commission (IPC) to refuse both the Long Bow Point Golf course application (September 26th) and the West Culburra mixed-use concept proposal (October 17th).

The refusal of both these State-Significant development applications after years of uncertainty, sets the scene for increased protection of the Lake Wollumboola catchment and inclusion into Jervis Bay National Park and a reduction in the overall scale of development proposed in the Crookhaven River catchment.

Sadly, we had to endure an angry, out of control, abusive pro-development campaign at the two IPC public meetings before the decisions were reached. However, community feedback since shows that many more people are now aware of the scale and predicted damaging environmental and cultural impacts of the proposals and supportive of the refusal decisions.

Thanks to Rob Dunn for speaking on behalf of Paul Sullivan - CEO of Birdlife Australia - and explaining the Lake's significance as an internationally important Key Biodiversity Area, and opposing the Long Bow Point application.

The IPC took account of recommendations made by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment as well as expert advice from previous independent inquiries and submissions from LWPA and Birdlife Australia in concluding that:

- Long Bow Point is unsuitable for a golf course development because of the environmental sensitivity of Lake Wollumboola and its catchment, with potential adverse impacts for the entire ecosystem and therefore a precautionary approach is appropriate.
- the West Culburra proposal has the potential to adversely impact the Crookhaven River and Lake Wollumboola catchments.
- both proposals would involve irreversible impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Both the Department and the IPC commissioned expert peer reviews of the applicant's claims of "Neutral or Beneficial Effects" - particularly regarding surface and groundwater quality, and of no adverse water quality impacts for Lake Wollumboola and the Crookhaven River.

The peer reviewers and the IPC demonstrated that these claims could not be substantiated and emphasized that a precautionary approach was therefore essential.

Whilst representatives of the Halloran Trust have indicated a range of responses to the decisions, including appeals and potential sale of Long Bow Point, the strength of the decisions based on comprehensive past and recent expert advice would suggest that appeals would be unlikely to succeed.

The IPC decisions indicate that expectations of the current areas proposed for development as part of the Halloran Planning Proposal will need to be reduced. The implications include:

- potential for Government acquisition of Long Bow Point and other Halloran lands in the Lake Wollumboola catchment by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service for inclusion in Jervis Bay National Park, recognising that less land would be proposed for biodiversity offsetting.
- recognition that Lake Wollumboola catchment lands are unsuitable for urban development expansion, particularly the north west and west.
- reduction of the area to be zoned for development expansion in the Crookhaven River catchment.

Meanwhile, despite the welcome rain, Lake Wollumboola has continued to evaporate, with large areas of mud and sandflats extending west from the north east bay into the lake. Many birds are enjoying the conditions although numbers and distribution have been affected by wind and weather extremes.



Ruddy Turnstone (photo by Charles Dove)

The lake supported large numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits, Eastern Curlews, Red-necked Avocets, Black-winged Stilts and Grey and Chestnut Teal during the winter months.

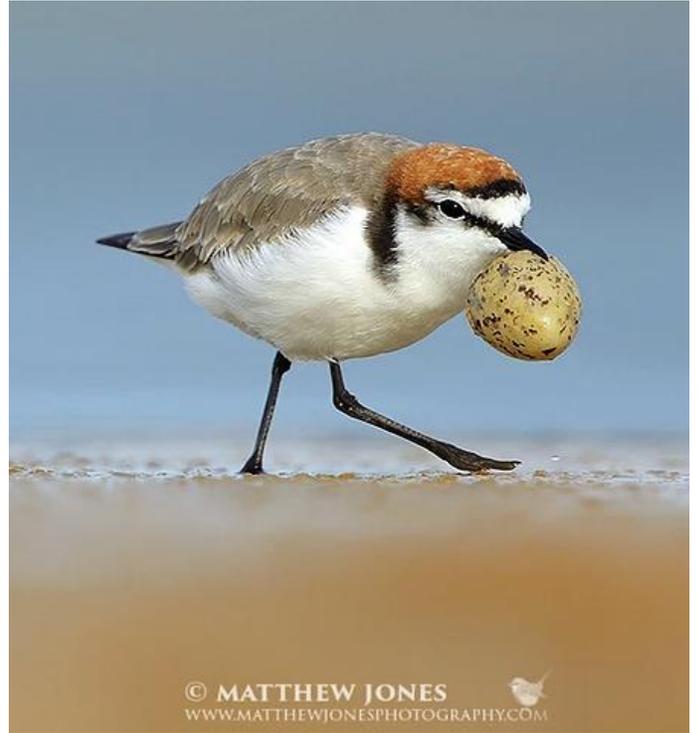
During September and October, the list expanded to diverse migratory species including Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints and Little Terns and a short sighting of Grey Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones.



Matt Jones

Sadly, on 27th October we farewelled our dear friend, consummate bird photographer, former NPWS Ranger and expert ecologist, Matt Jones. Matt loved spending long hours at Lake Wollumboola under camouflage, observing and photographing the birds. His beloved wife Nathaly arranged a moving ceremony at the Lake, and now Matt will always be part of Lake Wollumboola, immersed in its exceptional birdlife, its serenity and its spirituality.

However, the shorebirds are difficult to observe, as many are roosting far from the shore and are very flighty due to windy conditions and the presence of raptors.



The images on this page, and the passion that Matt had for wildlife conservation, can be found on Matt's website at www.matthewjonesphotography.com

We are delighted that one Pied Oystercatcher pair produced three chicks over 18th - 20th October and hope that this season the chicks will successfully fledge. POCs present vary between 4 and 10 including birds flagged in Victoria.

He was a member of the NPWS Lake Wollumboola Shorebird volunteer group and an honorary member of Lake Wollumboola Protection Association Inc, always generous in sharing his knowledge and passion for birds and wildlife monitoring, his photographs and his expertise in environmental assessment. Dearest Matt, rest in peace. Our heart-felt sympathy to Nat.

However, despite all the signage and fencing, visitors still walk through fenced areas!



Web Watch

- by Chris Grounds

Three different perspectives on critically endangered birds open our WebWatch with conservation news of particular species, front and centre in this edition, including a "woops" moment for the cousin of our local Eastern Ground Parrot.

One article deals with a totally new take on the danger that cats represent, and as a mammal I bear strong personal testimony to the warning.

Remember to copy and paste the link into your browser for full articles.

Night Parrot

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2018-10-12/night-parrot-australian-wildlife-conservancy-evidence-in-doubt/10364842>



Proof of a new night parrot population in South Australia is in doubt as the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) has removed all information about the rare bird from its website. The conservation group also confirmed that John Young, a senior ecologist who was instrumental in finding evidence about the bird, last month resigned from the organisation.

"We have received questions about the veracity of some of the content and we are investigating these matters," a statement released by the AWC reads. "The Night Parrot content will not be republished until we receive the results of the independent investigation into the veracity of the work."

Night parrots have been independently confirmed in other regions, including Pullen Pullen reserve in western Queensland, the Great Sandy Desert and in the East Murchison in Western Australia. But the AWC's claim of evidence that the birds are also in South Australia is now under a cloud.

Northern Bald Ibis

<https://e360.yale.edu/features/after-a-400-year-absence-waldrapp-rare-ibis-returns-to-european-skies>



The Northern Bald Ibis is critically endangered, with fewer than 1,000 existing in the wild. But a German group is reintroducing these birds in Europe, where they once thrived, and is using ultralight aircraft to lead them on migrations south toward the Mediterranean.

With its black body and wide wings, the bird flying along Austria's Salzach Valley on a mild summer day looks, at first glance, a lot like a crow. But when it lands in a nearby meadow, it quickly becomes clear that this is a very different animal.

The bird's iridescent feathers give it an almost magical appearance. Its long, curved beak enables it to hunt for small animals, and its naked head, with feathers that point straight into the air, Mohawk-style, make it look like no other bird in Europe.

Regent Honeyeater

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-08/rare-regent-honeyeater-spotted-in-queensland-by-birdwatchers/10088826>



Wildlife watchers are in a flap after one of Australia's rarest species of bird, the regent honeyeater, was spotted three times in Queensland in recent weeks. The three sightings near the Queensland coast have the Australian birdwatching community excited, but also concerned

Urban development and drought have destroyed the habitat of the critically-endangered bird and its population is believed to be as low as 400 in the wild across Australia. The bird is extinct in South Australia and western Victoria, but is found in woodlands west of the Great Dividing Range.

**Recent sightings have also been made in Nowra and Wollongong. See the BLS Facebook page.

Toxoplasmosis

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-09/toxoplasmosis-killing-tasmanian-wildlife/10093038>



The eastern barred bandicoot on the necropsy table died yesterday. "Ah," she said, after pointing with her scalpel. "The brain is soft and mushy." She has placed samples of the male bandicoot's brain, kidney, lung and liver into a specimen jar, to be sent to the Department of Primary Industry labs for testing.

The third year veterinary science student has made her assessment based on the haemorrhaging she has found on the lungs and the condition of the brain.

"I would say with 90 per cent certainty this bandicoot died of toxoplasmosis." The Toxoplasmosis disease is spread in the urine and faeces of cats.

All mammals, including humans, are susceptible. Reducing the density and activity of feral or stray cats at an affected location is recommended.

Barking Owl in NSW

<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/wildlife/2018/08/top-10-most-unusual-threatened-australian-species/>



The barking owls "wook-wook"-sounding call is often mistaken for the yap of a dog or a fox, but really they're communicating with potential mates. They're notorious, however, for their high-pitched scream, which has earned them the nickname "the screaming woman".

Sadly, this charismatic bird is considered vulnerable across NSW due to habitat loss, but the species is still considered quite common in parts of northern Australia. Also endangered is the Mountain Pygmy Possum shown below ...



Powerful Owl

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-05/powerful-owl-attack-risk-prompts-shift-mt-coot-tha-zipline/10201150?>



A zipline through Brisbane's Mt Coot-tha Reserve may soon send you flying like a bird through the treetops, but the ride's developers have revealed they have shifted the location of the operation to minimise the risk of attack from angry owls nesting nearby.

Late last year, Zipline Australia received a thumbs-up from Brisbane City Council to lodge a development application for the project, safe in the knowledge Lord Mayor Graham Quirk enthusiastically backed the environmental tourism proposal.

On Monday night, hundreds of residents met at the Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens auditorium to debate the merits of the zipline, raising concerns with both the project and the council approval process.

Zipline Australia's own exhaustive development application revealed the position of the zipline had been moved to mitigate the risk of owl attacks. Powerful owls have nested in parts of the Mount Coot-tha Reserve for at least 30 years, and conservation groups — including Birds Queensland and Birdlife Australia — had raised concerns about risks to the species and potential owl attacks on patrons of the zipline.

Beach Stone-curlews

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-14/tweed-wildlife-at-risk-from-increasing-fox-population/10105686?>



Foxes are threatening the remaining breeding pairs of Beach stone-curlews on the Gold Coast. At Fingal Head south of the Gold Coast, landowners and the local council have come together to try to control a growing problem.

The Tweed Byron Aboriginal Land Council's Banahm Slabb helped set traps for the foxes with workers from the Tweed Shire Council. "It's pretty hard because foxes are pretty smart animals, there's a lot of work in it and a lot of thought," he said. "First we got monitoring cameras and set them up for three weeks to monitor foxes and where they went."

Rooks trained to clean theme park

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-12/french-theme-park-sends-rooks-out-on-litter-patrol/10111040?>



A French theme park has trained six rooks to pick up cigarette butts and other rubbish dropped by visitors in return for food. Christophe Gaborit, the head of falconry at the Puy du Fou historical theme park in western France, hand-reared the six rooks and trained them to collect garbage by offering a treat for each piece of rubbish collected.

"Rooks are unfairly maligned, classed as a nuisance, but these birds will perform an eco-friendly deed and restore their image," Mr Gaborit was quoted as saying on the theme park's in-house blog.

The rooks, which belong to the crow family of birds, will receive a nugget of food from a small drawer each time they deposit rubbish in a designated container. While birdbrain has long been a pejorative term used to insult someone's intelligence, rooks are considered particularly smart.

Tawny Frogmouth Feather Transplant

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-07/bird-rescue-qlld-tawny-frogmouth-feather-transplant/10077944?>



In what has been described as a "miraculous" rescue, a Brisbane vet has surgically implanted feathers into a badly injured wild bird, saving it from certain death. A tawny frogmouth was recently found tangled in a barbed wire fence at Jimboomba, south-west of Brisbane.

The distressed bird was cut free by wildlife carer Annette Bird and taken to the Brisbane Bird and Exotics Veterinary hospital at suburban Greenslopes on the city's south side.



Peregrine Falcons

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-03/baby-peregrine-falcons-hatch-on-melbourne-skyscraper/10332492>



The hearts of armchair birdwatchers are aflutter after the hatching of three peregrine falcon chicks was streamed via webcam from a nest atop a Melbourne skyscraper. Three fluffy white chicks emerged from their eggs on Tuesday; a fourth egg has not yet hatched.

Leigh Stillard established the [367 Collins Falcon Watchers Facebook group](#) which has grown to more than 1,300 members. He said the online community was thrilled to see the new chicks hatch.

"You start to feel nervous as the start of October approaches and you're expecting a hatch day and hoping nothing goes wrong," he said. "It's great that we can see more about the lives of urban wild animals, even if it's through a web browser."

Same Sex Gentoo Penguin Foster-parents

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/12/lovebirds-male-penguin-couple-in-sydney-absolute-naturals-at-incubating-live-egg>



Two male penguins have "proposed" to each other in a [Sydney](#) aquarium, and are now the proud foster parents of an egg.

Sphe and Magic, two Gentoo penguins, have built a bigger nest than any other couple, take turns incubating, and have been praised by staff as model parents. The two became "inseparable" earlier this year, and staff noticed that as they approached breeding season, the couple began collecting pebbles to build a nest. They were given a dummy egg to look after and performed so well keepers gave them a real egg to foster.

Hannan said that because Gentoo penguins split parental responsibilities equally between male and female, it made no difference to have a same-sex couple.

Archaeopteryx

<https://theconversation.com/how-we-discovered-a-new-species-of-the-missing-link-between-dinosaurs-and-birds-102363?>



Perhaps one of the world's best known fossils is *Archaeopteryx*. With its beautifully preserved feathers, it has long been regarded as the first bird in the fossil record, and is often called "the icon of evolution". Only a handful of specimens have ever been found, its elusivity adding to its fascination.

But was it really the first bird – and could it really fly? Given that we now know birds descended from dinosaurs, was *Archaeopteryx* actually just another small dinosaur with a feathery covering?

Despite more than 150 years of study, we still have much to discover about this primitive bird. Much of the controversy surrounds the question of whether *Archaeopteryx* could fly, the consensus being that it was at best a "feeble flipper".

\$5bn project to map DNA of every bird and animal

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/nov/01/5bn-project-to-map-dna-of-every-animal-plant-and-fungus>



An ambitious international project to sequence the DNA of every known bird, animal, plant and fungus in the world over the next 10 years has been launched.

Described as "the next moonshot for biology", the Earth BioGenome Project is expected to cost \$4.7bn (£3.6bn) and involve reading the genomes of 1.5m species. It could be as transformational for biology as the Human Genome Project, which decoded the human genome between 1990 and 2003.



The ABBC draws to a close for 2018

- by Rob Dunn

The Aussie Backyard Bird Count (ABBC) is now a fixture in the BirdLife Australia calendar each October as part of Bird Week. This year we tried to raise its profile, as it is an ideal platform to get more people looking at and talking about birds.

In early October, Yolande Cozijn, BLS Publicity Officer, gave another of her fun and informative talks on the Birds in Backyards (BIBY) program to 45 people at the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum. Afterwards everyone tried out the ABBC app in a bird walk around the Museum. The ABBC had been launched in the Shoalhaven!



As in previous years BirdLife Australia ran an extensive media campaign across the country, which was been picked up by TV, print and social media. Locally Holly Parsons, BirdLife's BIBY project co-ordinator, spoke on ABC Illawarra, and, not to be outdone, Yolande was on the airwaves a few weeks later.

The Bird Haven Festival managed to get more people on board, reminder emails to members and supporters spread the word further and the grape-vine and peer pressure seems to have done the rest. We also had the ABBC picked up by some local schools this year. Mike Jefferis, BLS Committee member, even had his nephew telling him he needed to do it! Many thanks to those of you who made this happen.

It was also great to see that Shoalhaven City Council promoted the ABBC in their own e-news. A key aim of the ABBC is to engage councils to consider bird habitat in their management of parks and public space. So hopefully this will allow us to begin a conversation with Council to consider our birds more in their urban planning and policies.

I am writing this article just after the official ABBC cut-off time and already the level of involvement is much higher than last year with over 2.7m birds recorded from more than 82,000 surveys submitted. Many thanks to everyone who has been part of the 2018 ABBC!

Left: Yolande speaking at the Bird Haven Festival

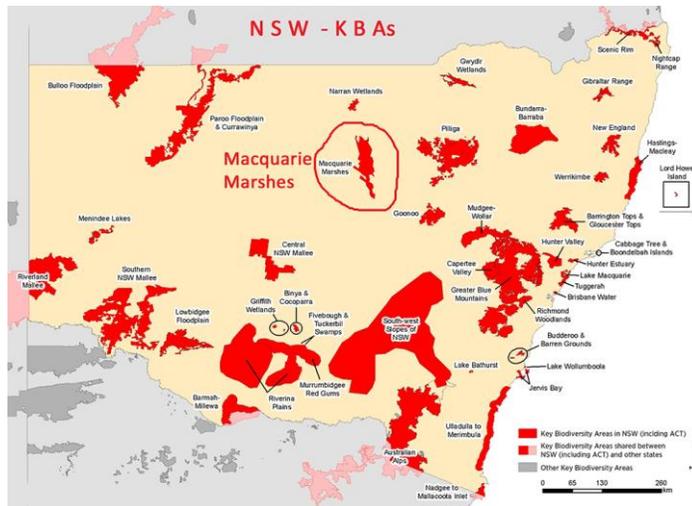
Below: the count showing over 2.7 million birds counted!

2 7 3 1 8 6 3

Birds counted

Macquarie Marshes - a bucket list KBA

- by Conservation Officer Chris Grounds
 - photos by Chris Grounds and Leanne Hall



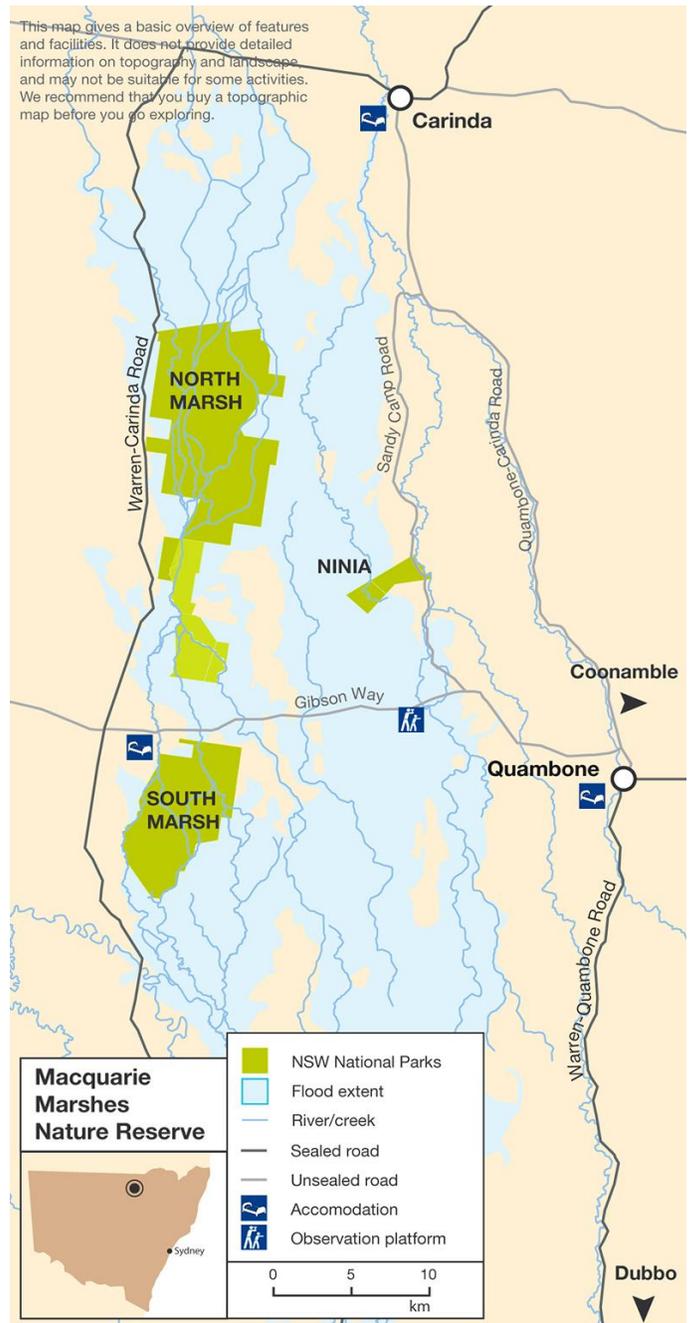
A site that boasts a Nature Reserve of 19,824 ha (NPWS), RAMSAR listing and Key Biodiversity Area (BirdLife) status is a very special place not just for birding but for its environmental and conservation character.

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. The group was able to access the Nature Reserve as an OEH sanctioned activity.

Such as 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.

It was an enormous privilege to undertake an intensive field trip to the Marshes under the guidance of Dubbo based OEH Water Management Officer, Tim Hosking, and in the company of the Dubbo Field Naturalists, a group with whom I had strong associations many years ago in co-authoring a natural history book for the Dubbo region.



Source: NPWS Marshes Brochure

The field study produced an amazing array of bird species across the genres of both waterbird and bushbirds. Sighting birds was relatively comfortable but photography was challenging as many of the birds were quite distant. The light was a challenge too, though the experience and help of fellow birders was a great help, especially when lifting tripods out of a marsh bog.

The timing of the field trip was near perfect as there had been a planned "environmental flow" release from Burrendong Dam, near Wellington.

This was finding its way through the many channels of the marshes some hundreds of kilometers downstream, to inundate considerable stretches of the western plains country in a very dry 2018.



The nature reserve is approximately 10% of the Macquarie Marshes floodplain. It consists of two main reserves, the North and South Marsh, and a third small reserve, which were listed as a wetland of international importance in 1986 under the Ramsar Convention of 1971.



Brolgas and Black-tailed Native Hen were two special sightings

Birding in the Marshes involved three extended "wet walks"

The Macquarie River is a key river of the Murray-Darling Basin, draining from the ranges east of Bathurst to traverse the central west before spilling over the western plain, north of Warren, in a delta like-anabranched habit.

The Marshes have been a focus of conservation debate for decades related in large part to the diversion of natural flows and development of irrigation, mostly for cotton, which features around the Warren area.

The drying out of the Marshes associated with the development of large scale agricultural use of Macquarie River flows, has threatened the very existence of the Marshes at various times.

The contemporary setting where Office of Environment and Heritage staff like Tim Hoskings are working hand in glove with landholders like Garry and Leanne Hall, the hosts of our trip, represents some of the real conservation progress that has been made. The Hall family is part of a rural network, the Macquarie Marshes Environmental Landholders Association, which has worked since 1995 for the environment and sustainability in the area.



Wedge-tailed eagle close to fledging

The Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve is the core of the Macquarie Marshes. It is the area most frequently flooded and contains samples of all the habitat types present in the Marshes.

Nevertheless, there are large and significant wetland areas outside the nature reserve, including extensive river red gum (*Euc.camaldulensis*) areas and some of the largest rookeries in the Marshes. (NSW NPWS Plan of Management)

Various vegetation associations are found throughout the wetlands with the dominant vegetation types being river red gum forest and woodland, as well as extensive beds of common reed.

Black Box (*Euc. largiflorens*) and Coolabah (*Euc. microtheca*) eucalypts are an essential landscape element as are the shrubs, Weeping Myall (*Acacia pendula*) and the Wilga (*Geijera parviflora*).

BirdLife notes of its Key Biodiversity that a minimum 206 species of bird have been recorded in the Macquarie Marshes (NSW NPWS 2007).

This figure includes more than 60 species of waterbird, at least 43 of which breed in the marshes (Brooker 1992; Brock 1997; Brookhouse 1999).

The Marshes are predicted to support over 190,000 waterbirds during major floods (Kingsford et al. 1997), including large numbers of breeding birds.

For example, in 2000, there were breeding colonies of Glossy Ibis (3900 nests), Straw-necked Ibis (31,225 nests), Intermediate Egret (20,200 nests), Nankeen Night-Heron (15,500 nests), Great Egret (1300 pairs), Australian White Ibis (2940 nests), Little Egret (100 nests) and Royal Spoonbill (76 nests) (Kingsford & Auld 2002).

There have not been any prolific waterbird nesting events since 2000-2001 though 2016 was a year of flooding in the Marshes. The marshes have supported large numbers of waterfowl, e.g. 60,000 waterfowl were counted on the northern quarter of the marshes by Kingsford (1996), 3500 Pacific Black Duck were counted on the marshes in 1997 (Kingsford et al. 1997) and 5652 Caspian Tern in 1983 (Kingsford and Porter (2006)).

Other notable species which have been recorded in the KBA include Australian Little Bittern, Australian Painted Snipe, Superb Parrot, Painted Honeyeater, Pied Honeyeater and Diamond Firetail (Atlas of Australian Birds database).

P.S. A suite of instrumental-environmental music was written for the Macquarie Marshes and performed by Sirocco in 1993 in a concert there. If you can track down the album or music online it is really worth a listen.



Chris Grounds

Our Black-faced Cuckoo Shrikes

- by Kim Touzel

It was December 23, 2017 and we were packing the car in preparation for a quick visit to the Manning River entrance near Old Bar in search of Aleutian Terns, first observed there by Liam Murphy on December 11.

The Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes (BFCs) were calling from the nearby paddock. Nothing unusual - we had been hearing and seeing them on the property for the past week or so. Then one flew onto a branch of the old eucalypt tree near the house holding a small twig in its bill. They were nest building, right outside my backdoor!



All packing ceased, a spotting scope was quickly set up. What follows is a story of the beginnings for two Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes from nestling to fledgling, one of the most exciting five weeks I have experienced.

The nest building was completed the following morning and one bird remained on the nest. Unfortunately we had to leave for Old Bar and then spend Christmas Day in Sydney. It was to be the longest Christmas of my lifetime, anxious to get back to the birds, hoping they were surviving the heat.

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike chicks, as well as all altricial birds are completely dependent on the parent birds from the time eggs are laid, as hatchlings and continuing until they fledge the nest. As a hatchling they have no feathers or down, their eyes are closed and they are quite immobile.

Temperature control, protection from predators and nourishment while the embryo and hatchling develop are all dependent on the skill of the parent birds. In choosing where to build a nest, camouflage to protect from predators, availability of food as well as an environment where temperature extremes will be minimal will determine rates of breeding failure or success.

This dependency includes temperature control of the embryo before hatching as embryos require heat from the parent birds to grow into hatchlings. However they also require protection from extremes of temperature as temperatures over 40 C can be lethal. The BFCs chose to build their nest in a large eucalypt facing north. Small twigs were brought in, as the birds took turns nest building. Final touches were made with spider webs. The birds were seen flying in with their bills and face covered in webs which they spread on the nest.

It was fourteen days after the nest building was completed that a parent bird was seen tossing an egg shell from the nest. The following day this was repeated.



It wasn't until three days later when two chick's bills emerged from the nest, finally visible, begging for food and devouring insects provided by parents that it was obvious there were two successful hatchlings.



Some shade was available from branches above and when temperatures got up to 40 C the parent bird was seen sitting above the nest allowing the breeze to blow over the shaded chicks. She was panting and distressed.



The following day the family survived thunderstorms, high winds and pouring rain. The parent remained on the nest with her bill to the sky allowing rain to pour off her back.



The birds took alternate shifts sitting on the nest with the second bird presumably the male flying in for short periods allowing its mate to go off to feed and gather insects for the young.

Before returning to rotate places on the nest the bird would call out from a distant tree, allowing the nesting bird to leave the nest before it came in. This behaviour could potentially have been to direct the attention of predators away from the nest.

The second parent was never far away, and on one occasion one of the BFCs was observed chasing a Wedge-tailed Eagle which had been circling at a distance - a frequent occurrence along the escarpment near the nesting site.

At eight days old a chick was seen to open an eye for the first time and begin to make distinct small BFCs calls. From this time on the backyard became very noisy.



With the nestlings now one week old, the parents would stay off the nest for short periods during feeding. At this stage the young chicks are beginning to develop more muscle, and metabolism and metabolic rate are increasing allowing slightly more independence for body temperature control. However, their feathers haven't developed and the chicks' movements are still quite clumsy. A brightly coloured yellow gape was visible at the opening of the bill assisting the adult to direct food into the digestive system of the young. This faded in colour as the birds matured.

The maturing young had developed feathers and more muscular tone by 13 and 16 days old and were beginning to sit up on the nest beside parent birds.



Hatchling number two, less active was always lagging behind its sibling. Feeding was more frequent now and larger insects such as cicadas, which are in abundance at this time of year, were supplied by parents. Much nourishment is required to improve the physical condition and growth of the nestlings in preparation for their flight from the nest.



At 21 days the nestlings were seen listening to a Kookaburra laughing on a tree branch above the nest, stretching their wings and standing on the branch outside the nest, these activities aiding in the development of the wings before leaving the security of the nesting area.



At three weeks old the distinctive black facial features of the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike were seen as the pair sat waiting for parents to return with more food. Meanwhile the adult birds were now only returning briefly to feed the young and sit with them on the nest at night. Lessons in independence were being enforced.



I arrived home from work on January 30th to find only one nestling remaining, #1 had fledged 25 days after hatching and was nowhere in sight. #2 was sitting on a vertical branch and one adult bird was calling from a high treetop 50 metres to the west.



The calling continued for some time to no avail, as darkness set in. Finally #2 spread its wings and flew to the nesting branch below where it spent the night alone.



Number 2 was still on the nest in the morning and finally joined the family during the day. That was the last time the fledglings and adults were seen.

However, as I am now writing their story, it is the beginning of November and I am wondering if the two Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes I heard calling from the paddock this morning could be the same parent birds returning to nest in our backyard once again ...

Editor's Note:

The images used in this article were taken and supplied by Kim Touzel, but edited by me. All of the larger originals have been uploaded to a Flickr album in the order in which they were taken. Click the following link to view the images ...

[This is the link for all of the images](#)

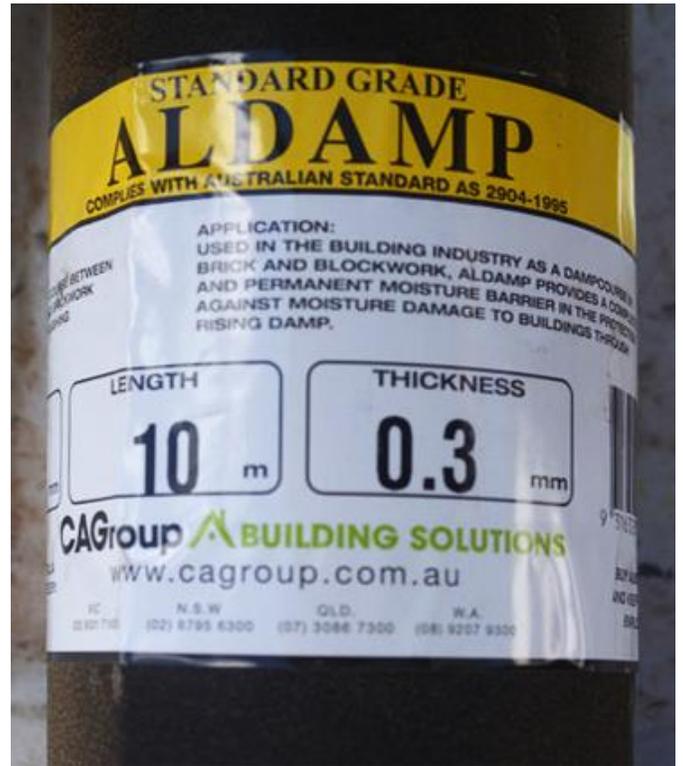




Simple Nest Boxes

- by Brian O'Leary

1. Find some large bits of wood with holes in them.
2. Make sure nothing is already living in them.
3. Ream them out if the holes need to be larger.
4. Seal the bottom with Aldamp (used for dampcourses).
5. Attach smaller, solid log (or dressed timber) with wire.
6. Sling the solid timber over a fork in a tree.
7. Its weight should hold it in place - if not, fix with wire.



BirdLife Shoalhaven Calendar for 2018

Date	Event / Location / Group*	Details - meeting time and place, leaders etc.
November -----		
Fri 9th	Ulladulla Sports Ground (MUD)	Meet: 8 am South end of Camden St. Leader: Geoff Andrews 4454 3580
Sun 18th	Lake Wollumboola (SB)	Meet at 8:30am at Lake Entrance car park at end of Lake Entrance Circuit in Culburra.
Fri 23rd	North Fishermans Paradise (MUD)	Meet: 8 am back of Harry Higgs Room, or at 8:15am Murrays Road Turnoff. Leader: Chris Shinton 0423 352 718
December -----		
Fri 7th	Manyana to Bendalong (MUD)	Meet: 8 am: Back of Harry Higgs Room, or at 8:30am at parking area by toilets on Sunset Strip. Leader: Mike Jefferis 0412 480 371
Sun 16th	Xmas get-together (SB)	BYO drink, picnic, and nibbles to share. Meet at 5pm at the Moona Moona Creek Picnic area. North side of creek. Enter via Jervis Street, Huskisson
Fri 21st	Xmas Picnic - Burrill Lake (MUD)	Meet: 8 am: Lions Park Burrill Lake. Leader: Bob Rusk 4455 2169
January -----		
12th / 13th	Bayswood (BLS)	Saturday or Sunday 12/13th January depending on forecast. Bayswood and surrounds birding and BBQ. Meeting 4.30pm in Bayswood by the lakes at Pacific City Park. Bring a chair, drinks and BBQ or cold dinner. Expressions of interest / preferred evening - Karen Davis 0487 208437
Fri 18th	ANU Kioloa Campus (MUD)	Meet: 8 am: ANU Campus. Drive almost to Kioloa, watch for ANU sign on right. Leaders: Marg Hamon & Maggie Mance 4457 1129

* The BirdLife Shoalhaven calendar contains activities from the branch (**BLS**) and two associated birdwatching groups - Shoalhaven Birders (**SB**) and the Milton-Ulladulla District Birdwatching Club (**MUD**). BLS members can attend all activities. SB have no leaders on their outings and it is possible that nobody else will turn up, especially if the weather is bad. Contacts: Stan and Su Brown 4443-4828 and 0419 287 224, Peter and Julie Hale 0402 076 548. MUD have outings every fortnight on Fridays from 8am until about 11am. For information about joining MUD phone Marg Hamon 4457-1129 or Chris Shinton 4454-5584 or email mubirdclub@gmail.com.

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.

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join us

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volunteer

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donate

Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats