

BirdLife Shoalhaven Magazine

Summer 2024



PHOTOGRAPHY BY

Peter Noakes

In this issue ...

- Page 3-5 President's Report - Rob Dunn
Page 8-9 Free talk by AWC's Dr Jenny Pierson at BLS AGM at Sanctuary Point on February 8th
Page 10-13 BLS Student Research Grant Article - by Shani Masani
Page 14-17 Bherwerre Wetland – a Long Haul - by Chris Grounds
Page 18-19 2023 Twitchathon – by Marg Hamon
Page 20-23 MUDBirders Birdcamp at- Griffith / Leeton - October 2023 – by Phil Hendry
Page 24 Congratulations Yolande!
Page 25 Python in Birdbath – by Tom Kaar
Page 26 The Last Page and the Fine Print



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

Cover Photo: Eastern Osprey by Peter Noakes

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

President's Report - "Another year over and a new one just begun"

- by Rob Dunn, President of BirdLife Shoalhaven

To steal from John Lennon - "And so this is 2024 and what have we done? Another year over and a new one just begun."

In response, I can say that 2023 was another active year for BLS. We have been working with other groups, leading walks, running events, releasing our final report on our bushfire project, announcing our student research grant program, getting the "word out there" and making some changes in the Committee.

Working with the "good guys"

Any report on our achievements needs to state at the beginning that a key part of our work is to support other local conservation groups. Several years ago, we shied away from the word "partnership" to cover our approach to bird conservation. We are not part of formal "partnerships".

The Shoalhaven is a small "community" where we all know the "good guys" and, often more importantly, the "not so good guys", aka the "bad guys". (Apologies for use of the colloquial masculine noun in the last sentence.) This means we don't need to formalize who is doing what, but we can simply pick up the phone to agree the best way forward.



We would like to thank and acknowledge the work being done by these "good guys", including the Lake Wollumboola Protection Association Inc, Manyana Matters, Bherwerre Wetlands in St Georges Basin, Heritage Estate in Vincentia, Our Future Shoalhaven and Keep Jervis Bay Unspoilt, Shoalhaven Landcare, Shoalhaven City Council Bushcare and the NSW NPWS South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program.

Apologies to any that I have failed to mention.

BLS was involved with other groups on two key issues last year - tighter control of **domestic cats** and **the 45-degree rule**. On the control of cats, while there is broad support from NSW Councils, including Shoalhaven Council, to make changes, this is stymied by the need to first repeal the NSW Companion Animals Act. The campaign to oppose the 45-degree rule, urging Shoalhaven Council to scrap the rule and replace it with a comprehensive urban greening program, saw partial success, with the adoption of a one-year trial. Hopefully this time next year we will see lasting changes on both issues. Watch this space!

Releasing the final BLS Bushfire Recovery Project Report

In June we completed our Bushfire Recovery Project, which looked at the recovery of bird populations in the three-year period after the 2019-20 bushfires. This was one of the most important projects that BLS has ever undertaken and is an important contribution in trying to understand the impact on birds of this catastrophic environmental event.

The primary aim of the project was to examine changes in bird species richness and abundance by analyzing 750 bird surveys recorded by some 40 volunteers at different fire-affected sites across the Shoalhaven. The report provides evidence that we are seeing more species of birds returning to burnt areas, though overall their numbers are not showing a marked increase. This supports the observation anecdotally, that after three years, while the dawn chorus includes a greater variety of bird calls in some areas, it is still not at the same volume as it was before the fires.

While the aims of the project focused on doing bird surveys, it also delivered unexpected social outcomes. Over the three years the project became multi-faceted. It involved writing articles, supporting arts events, running bird courses, organizing bird walks, giving presentations and making new connections across the Shoalhaven.

BLS appreciates the commitment to the project shown by local birdwatchers, who have contributed many hours of effort in the field to complete bird surveys, as well as bird photographers, event organizers and speakers and private landowners. Without their support this report would not have been possible.



BIRDLIFE SHOALHAVEN
BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PROJECT
FINAL REPORT

June 2023



Supporting the scientists of the future

In 2022 we launched the BLS Student Research Grant program, offering \$4,000 to fund a project to improve bird conservation and a better understanding of birds in the Shoalhaven.



In March we awarded the grant to Shanaz Masani (above right) to support her PhD at the Behavioural Ecology and Conservation Research Group at University of Sydney, which will look at the impact of olfactory misinformation on predators' behaviour. Shanaz is now analyzing her first year of field work, but I'll let her expand on this in **her article in this magazine – see page 10.**

We have just released our second grant in this program to be awarded this year. The deadline closes on 31 March, so if you know anyone who may be interested, please direct them to our website - BLS Student Research Grant.

BLS also provided \$1,500 from the funds raised at the showing of the award-winning film "The Message of the Lyrebird" in Huskisson in 2022, to support the producer's launch of an edu-action drive to get the film into the Australian and NZ school curriculum.

Visit by Prof. Martine Maron, BirdLife Australia President

In April, Prof. Martine Maron, former President of BirdLife Australia and Professor of Environmental Management at The University of Queensland, came to Ulladulla to talk about latest research into tracking the health of woodland bird communities. Martine was last in the Shoalhaven when she spoke in Mollymook soon after the 2019-20 bushfires.



Martine was joined by Erin Farley from BirdLife Australia, who talked about the new national laws to protect nature and what can be done to make sure we get the best outcome for birds. It was also great to have **Fiona Phillips MP**, Member for Gilmore, provide an opening address at the event. She also spoke at the event in Mollymook, so the event was the perfect time to have Martine and Fiona release of our final Bushfire Recovery Project.

Bringing the birding faithful together in the field (and at the brewery)

The BLS bird walk program has continued to offer opportunities for the birding faithful to go on bird walks in the Shoalhaven. Many thanks to **Sue Mitchell**, BLS Bird Walk Coordinator, and Milton-Ulladulla Birdwatchers for once again organizing walks throughout the year. If you want to get more details on future walks, please contact Sue Mitchell, the BLS Bird Walk Coordinator, at birdwalks@birdlifeshoalhaven.org.



This year BLS celebrated Bird Week with three events in October - two of which involved beer. The first was at the Cupitt's Winery at Ulladulla, organised by Milton-Ulladulla Birdwatchers, the day before they headed off to **Griffith** for a Bird Week road trip.

Not to be outdone, four days later a similar number gathered at the **Jervis Bay Brewing Company** in Huskisson, though no bird list was produced, which I will let you interpret as you wish. We also held a **bird walk for beginners in the Jervis Bay National Park** with 25 people learning how to get the best out of their binoculars and find their way around a bird guide.



Birders, some with beverages, and their bird list from Cupitt's Winery

Meanwhile in Canberra, **Fiona Phillips** MP, Member for Gilmore, celebrated Bird Week, along with **Tanya Plibersek** MP, Minister for the Environment and Water.

Fiona has been a valued supporter of BLS and it was great to see her spending time with **Sean Dooley** from BirdLife's National Office.



Over the last few years, BLS has developed a close relationship with the **Shoalhaven Landcare Association**. This continued in 2023 as part of their four-year project to restore native vegetation, do pest control and educate local landowners to better support endangered species around the Kangaroo Valley area.

So far, BLS's **Yolande Cozijn** has given talks to landowners on the Glossy-black and Gang-gang Cockatoo and Powerful Owl, while BLS's **Kim Touzel** has presented on the birds she has recorded at Landcare sites since the bushfires. BLS members will be invited to this series of talks this year.



Yolande Cozijn - speaking to Landcarers on endangered bird species

Spreading the word

The impressive BLS Magazine continues as the cornerstone of our communications to our ever-expanding supporter-base. The magazine, along with Facebook and our web-site, has been vital in maintaining BLS's voice to conserve Shoalhaven birds. The credit for this work must once again go to Brett Davis without whom our "word" would not be spread so widely.

Update on the BLS Committee

BLS continues to be supported by a collegiate and committed Committee and I would like to thank them for the time they have put in through 2023.

Unfortunately, Brett Davis retired from the BLS Committee last year. He was one of the co-founders of the branch in 2014 and he has made a major contribution to the Committee. Despite this resignation, I'm delighted that Brett will still be supporting BLS by managing our magazine, Facebook and website.

We also had a change in the role of **Conservation Officer** with the resignation of Emily Dyball last year, who was replaced by **Deb Callister-Carter**. Prior to her retirement, Deb had a long career in the conservation and environment space, including over a decade as a senior executive in Canberra.

The current BLS Committee is - President - Rob Dunn; Secretary - Phil Hendry; Treasurer - Karen Davis; Conservation Officer - Deb Callister-Carter; Media - Yolande Cozijn; Bird Walk Co-ordinator - Sue Mitchell; General Committee - Oisin Sweeney.

The year ahead

Many thanks for everyone's support in helping us to conserve, appreciate and teach others about birds in 2023. See our 2024 Action Plan on www.birdlifeshoalhaven.org/howeare.html.

You do not need to be on the Committee to support BLS. Leading bird walks, writing for the magazine and posting on Facebook are just some of the ways you can help and you will have your own ideas. If you want to get involved, get in touch, using the email addresses on the Contact page of [our website](#).

To steal from J.F.Kennedy - "Ask not what BLS can do for you, but what you can do for BLS!"

Hear Dr Jenny Pierson from Australian Wildlife Conservancy speak at the BLS AGM in Sanctuary Point on 8 February

BLS will be holding its AGM at St Georges Basin Country Club, 11 Paradise Beach Road, Sanctuary Point on Thursday 8 February at 7pm.

Our guest speaker will be Dr Jenny Pierson, a Senior Ecologist at Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) - see details below. Afterwards Rob Dunn, BLS President, will give a brief overview of what BLS has been doing in the past year and cover the requirements of our AGM.

This is a free event, but so we can get an idea of numbers, please register by clicking this link humantix.com or use this URL - <https://events.humantix.com/presentation-dr-jenny-pierson-awc-and-bls-agm>

Several of us will have dinner at the Club before the talks and will be sitting at the tables to the right of where you pay for your meals.



“Providing sanctuaries for Malleefowls, Gouldian Finches and other threatened birds” - a presentation by Dr Jenny Pierson, Australian Wildlife Conservancy

Dr Jenny Pierson is a Senior Ecologist on AWC’s National Science Team, leading the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Conservation Genetics Program. Jenny has worked in Australia since 2010, with CSIRO, ANU, and ACT Parks and Conservation Service prior to AWC. Before this she did a PhD at University of Montana, using genetic data to understand landscape scale movement patterns.

AWC is the largest private owner and manager of land for conservation in Australia, delivering and influencing effective conservation across more than 12.9 million hectares. The mission of AWC is the effective conservation of Australian wildlife and their habitats.



Gouldian Finch



Purple-crowned Fairywren



Malleefowl



Jenny will talk about how AWC's research is helping in the recovery of threatened species at their sanctuaries and on partnership sites in iconic regions of Australia.

She will cover their work in captive breeding, and how their ecological monitoring program, one of the largest in the country, is being used to document trends in birds on sites across the country.

Jenny will show how these innovative approaches to conservation are helping to protect several of Australia's threatened and iconic birds, including Malleefowls, Gouldian Finches and the Purple-crowned Fairywren.

And, she may also talk about woodpeckers, which was the focus of her PhD!

BLS AGM and joining the BLS Committee

After Jenny's presentation, Rob Dunn, BLS President, will give a brief overview of what BLS has been doing in the past year. His talk will cover the requirements of our AGM, including approval of our 2023 financial results and appointment of the new BLS Committee.

All the BLS Committee positions need to be re-confirmed each year and this time we are especially keen to fill two new General Committee positions. If you would like to join the Committee, please contact Rob on president@birdlifeshoalhaven.org. Nominations close on 1 February.

Also, if you have any questions that you would like Rob to cover in his talk, please send him an email beforehand.

BLS Student Research Grant Article

Understanding predator hunting to decrease nest predation of ground nesting shorebirds

- by Shani Masani

Background

Nest predation by invasive predators has been a major cause of the decline in ground-nesting shorebird species, in Australia and globally. Despite the extensive use of lethal control practices these shorebird populations continue to decline.

Over the past year I have been conducting research for my PhD with the Behavioural Ecology and Conservation Research Group, supervised by Prof Peter Banks and Dr Catherine Price, at the University of Sydney, looking into understanding how predators use prey cues to hunt in the wild. Our aim is to use this understanding to decrease nest predation of ground nesting shorebirds by invasive mammalian predators, such as the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*).

Invasive mammalian predators are olfactory-driven, using scent cues to detect and pursue their prey. Exactly how these predators use prey scent cues is not very well understood, despite it being a vital component of predator-prey interactions.

Olfactory misinformation is a non-lethal technique developed by the Behavioural Ecology and Conservation Research Group, led by Prof Peter Banks. It works by altering the olfactory information which predators experience in their environment to decrease the conspicuousness of their prey which we want to protect.

For example, 'odour camouflage' works by concealing the exact location of prey by making the environment around them smell like that prey i.e. applying the odour of birds all over a nesting site. This makes it harder for the predators to pinpoint the exact location of the birds as the whole area smells of 'bird'.

Another olfactory misinformation technique, which my work is focussing on, is 'odour pre-exposure'. This works by exposing predators to unrewarding prey odour before the prey are present (e.g., before nesting season), leading them to habituate to the prey odour. Once prey appears in the system (e.g., for nesting season), the predators are no longer motivated to follow the prey odour and therefore do not find the prey as quickly.

A combination of these two techniques has been used successfully in New Zealand to create an olfactory refuge for endangered shorebirds during nesting season, reducing nest predation by invasive mammals such as ferrets and feral cats, and subsequently doubling nesting success over two nesting seasons.

However, for odour pre-exposure to be rolled out as a conservation management technique, managers need to know how long the pre-exposure period needs to be and how long the refuge effect might last once birds arrive for nesting. This will determine the field effort needed to develop the most cost-effective approach possible.

How individual predators vary in their response to olfactory information about their prey is not well known. This is important because we know individual predators vary in their behaviour, thus they vary in their responses to predator control and their impacts on prey. For example, a single fox was reported to have killed nearly 30 Penguins in North Head, despite lethal control efforts.

These 'problem individuals' are difficult to manage because of a large gap in our understanding of how and why individual predators vary in their response to predator control.



Our work so far

Over the past year, we've been investigating how individual predators respond to unrewarding prey odour cues, during odour pre-exposure, and then towards prey when prey is added to the system using wild black rats (*Rattus rattus*) as our model predator. We're also looking at how this is influenced by an individual's behavioural, physical (body condition) and informational state (the cues it's experienced).



Rattus rattus

This has been done at Lane Cove National Park in North Sydney, so far at 13 independent sites across the park (10 treatment, 3 control).

Each site consisted of a 3x3 grid (30m x 30m), with an artificial nest and a camera on each grid point to record rat behaviour.

At each site we spent 4 nights trapping wild black rats. Each trapped rat was weighed, their body length was measured, we conducted a wriggle test to assess their behavioural state, and then we shaved a unique mark into their fur so we could ID them on camera.

We then conducted 7 nights of odour pre-exposure (only at the treatment sites). This consisted of placing prey odour (quail feathers, faeces and eggshell) at each grid point. Prey (quail eggs) was then added to each nest for the prey introduction phase, which involved replacing any eggs that were taken every day for 21 nights.

We recorded the date and time of all rat interactions with odour and predation events (a rat eating the prey) throughout odour pre-exposure and the prey introduction phase.

Preliminary Results

After 4 months of data collection and thousands of videos to go through, we've still got plenty of videos and data to analyse. Of the videos we've analysed so far, we have these results from 3 different sites and 4 individual rats (2 are from the same site) (Figure 1).

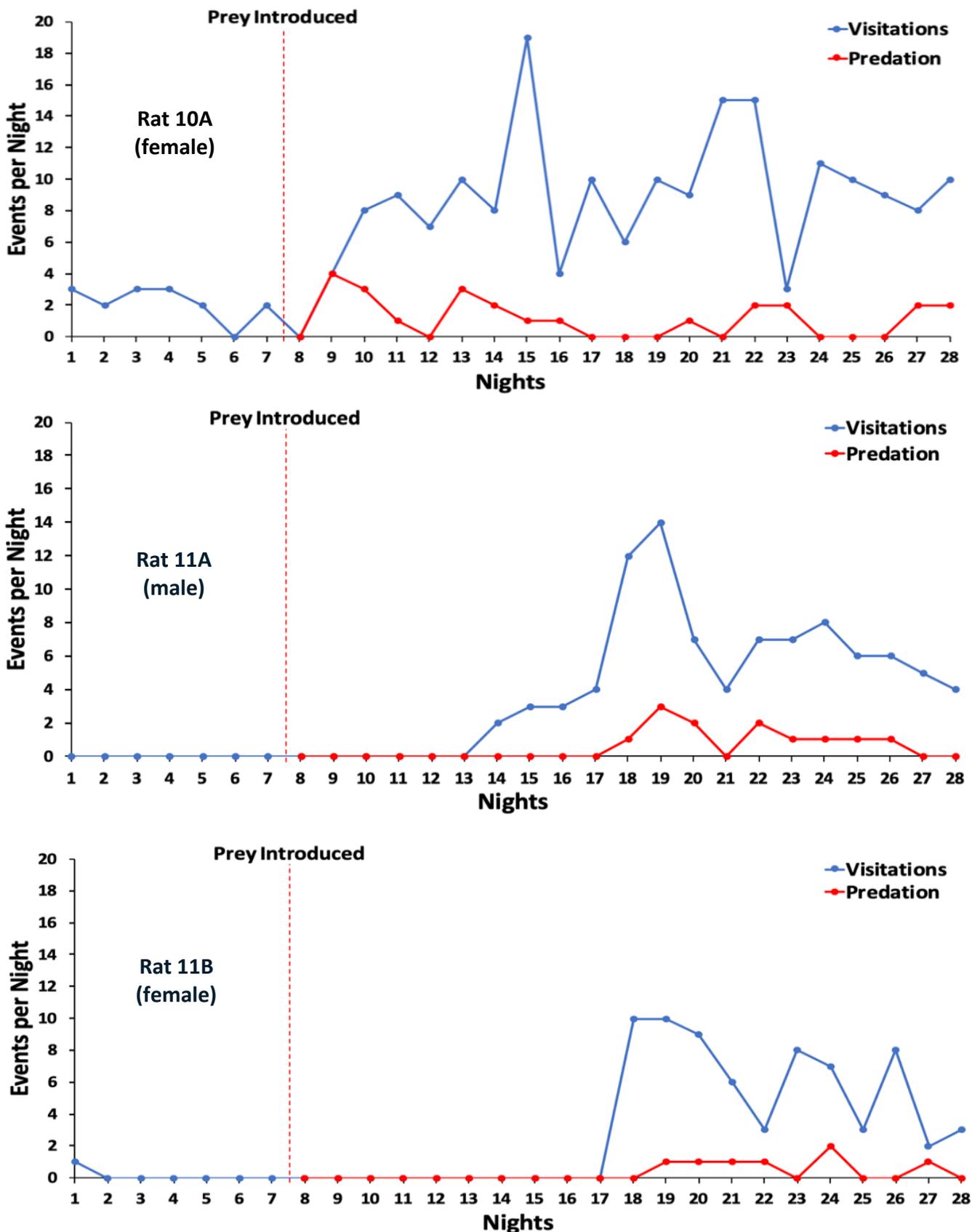


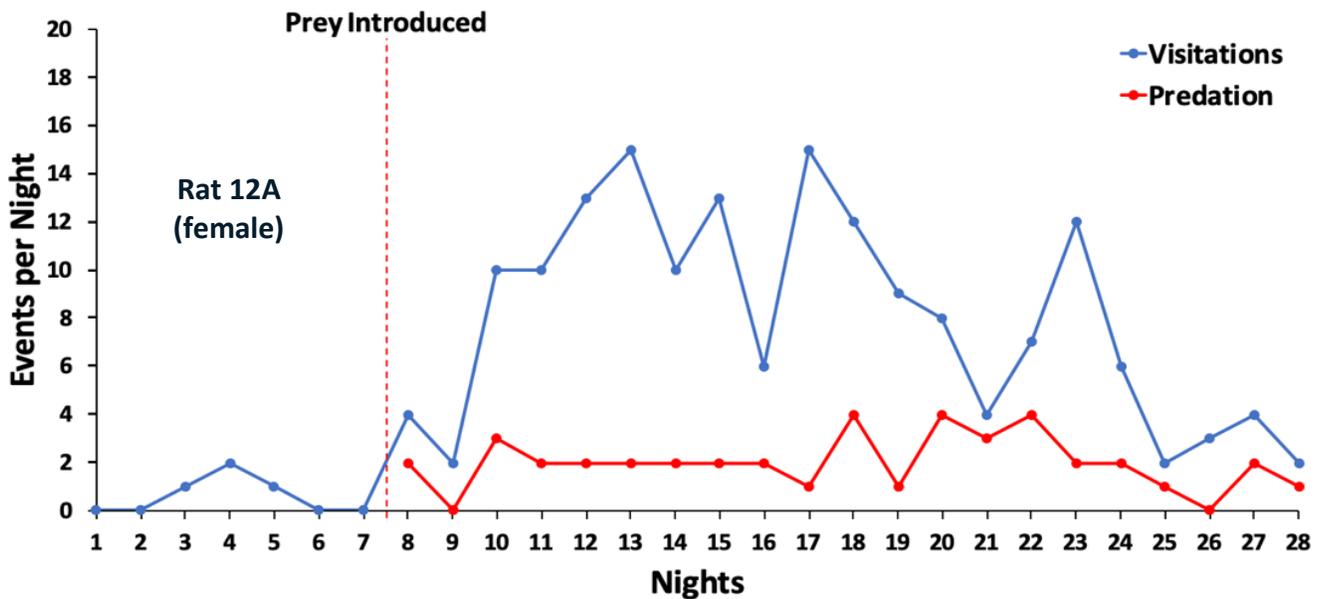
From these results we can see that unrewarded prey cues during odour pre-exposure are not visited frequently by these individuals. However, once these individuals experience just one reward (predation), this is enough to switch on their search effort and their motivation to visit the prey cues accelerates rapidly and remains high as prey are present.

This suggests odour pre-exposure alone may not be enough to reduce predator motivation.

Once all videos have been analysed, we will then look into how these results vary between individuals, looking into how behavioural, physical and informational state impacts the rat behaviour.

Figure 1. Number of visitations (blue) and predation events (red) per night of 4 individuals at different sites, except 11A and 11B which were at the same site. Odour pre-exposure was during the first 7 nights, after which prey was introduced.





Outcomes

This grant provided the funding for essential daily travel to and from Lane Cove National Park (the primary expense of this work). Because of this, we have been able to gain insights into how individual predators hunt, as well as their responses to odour pre-exposure.

We are gaining a better understanding of how individual predators use information in their environment to hunt and how they respond to prey cues, as well as how this varies intraspecifically. By investigating this individual variation this will hopefully help us understand problem predators better.

We are also better understanding the use of olfactory misinformation as a conservation management tool. These preliminary results have made clear the importance of delaying/reducing the chance of these predators experiencing rewarding cues because, as soon as they do, they seem to stick around.

Furthermore, these results highlight the importance of using odour camouflage as well as odour pre-exposure, so putting bird odour all over the nesting site area rather than only at the nests (which was the design of this experiment), to increase the search effort for these predators and thus reducing predation, which has been successful in the past in New Zealand, as mentioned above.

By having a better understanding of how individual predators hunt and their response to olfactory misinformation, this will help guide the use of olfactory misinformation at shorebird nesting sites to reduce nest predation by olfactory-driven predators.

Nest predation is a huge driver of shorebird population declines, so developing a technique to reduce this will be of huge benefit to the conservation of these vulnerable species.

As such, we hope to use olfactory misinformation at Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus longirostris*) and Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*) nesting sites on the NSW coast, including at Shoalhaven, this coming nesting season and apply what we've learnt from our research over the last year.



I'd again like to thank BLS for awarding me the Birdlife Shoalhaven Student Research Grant which has allowed me to conduct this exciting research and for supporting me along the way!

Bherwerre Wetland – a Long Haul

- by Chris Grounds, Conservation Correspondent

(Photographs: Chris Grounds. No photographs in this article can be copied or used without the express written permission of the author.)

Readers can note that BHERWERRE is the Dhurga language word for St Georges Basin [SGB] and was spelt BHERWERREE on the first surveyors mapping of the Basin, which speaks to the phonetics and original Aboriginal pronunciation. The name Bherwerre Wetland was sourced with the local Aboriginal community and is now the official name for the site in Wandra Wandian country.

The Spring 2022 BLS magazine reported through me that the progress with the Bherwerre Wetland conservation and recreation project at Sanctuary Point had “slowed to a crawl”.

It is pleasing to be able to now report that the project is nearing a completion – of sorts - and bounding along to a probable formal opening in February after a nine year incubation and rearing! Fledging is pending!

Once the wetland is formally opened I will lead a BLS walk there and members will be notified in the usual way.

That progress has seen the original concept plan varied to involve just the northern side to manage a financial shortfall, the construction of two elevated boardwalks, one a disabled standard boardwalk adjacent to Cockrow Creek, the development of signage, parking and the conversion to Community Land status.

BHERWERRE WETLANDS

Birds in the Wetlands

The area features an amazing range of birds because of the variations in habitat, seasonal conditions, normal movement, and migrations. Egrets, Herons and Ibis feature in wetter areas, Cormorants, darters and ducks inhabit water courses. Bush birds occur anywhere on the wetland. Raptors such as Sea Eagles, Eastern Osprey, both threatened species and Brown Goshawk are ever present. Swans will move in with floodwaters from the onshore seagrass meadows. A sighting of the Endangered Glossy-black Cockatoo is a special experience.

 <p>AZURE KINGFISHER <i>Alcedo azurea</i></p>	 <p>EASTERN OSPREY <i>Pandion haliaetus cristatus</i></p>	 <p>GOLDEN WHISTLER <i>Pachycephala pectoralis</i></p>	 <p>SPOTTED PARDALOTE <i>Pardalotus punctatus</i></p>	 <p>WHITE-FACED HERON <i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i></p>	 <p>CHESTNUT TEAL <i>Anas castanea</i></p>	 <p>LITTLE PIED CORMORANT <i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i></p>
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Shoalhaven City Council

Photos by Chris Grounds

The northern side is substantially a regenerating Swamp Sclerophyll Forest dominated by Bangalay (*Euc. botryoides*) and Swamp Mahogany (*Euc. Robusta*) eucalypt species which offer flowering in both a warm and cool season respectively, though there is a large range of other adapted native plants including casuarina, acacia, melaleuca and an amazing number of orchids in season.

A canal was formed on a wetland area by the prior owner-developer and this still divides the wetland into a north and south section. This is actually the downstream outlet to SGB of the drainage-stream system of the St Georges Basin Country Club golf course. Future work will probably involve a bridge connection.



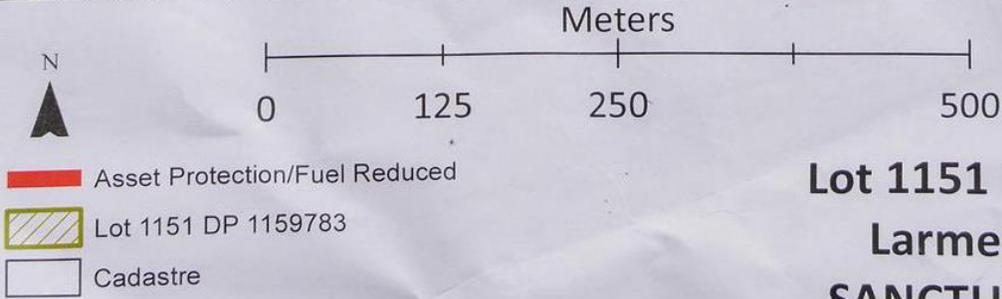
The image above right shows the Cockrow Creek-Canal confluence in flood in July 2020



NORTHSIDE WETLAND

- A Larmer Ave Entry Art site
- B Bushland Boardwalk
- C Parking Area The Park Drive and start of Cockrow Creek Boardwalk
- D Disability Boardwalk
- E Boardwalk terminus

**REVISED CONCEPT PLAN
BHERWERRE WETLAND**



Source: Chris Grounds May 12

**Lot 1151 DP 1159783
Larmer Avenue
SANCTUARY POINT**

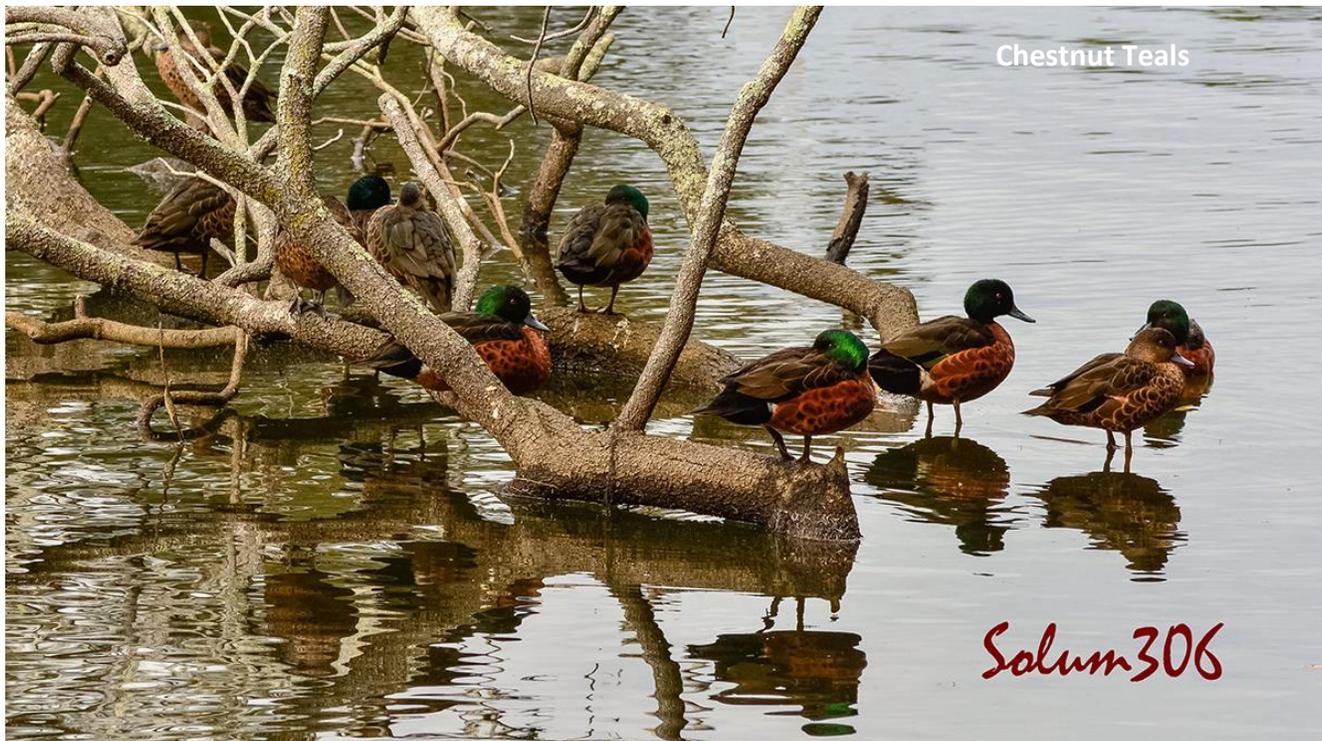
For the uninitiated, this project was commenced in 2015 as a combined Shoalhaven Council and local SGB community effort, which itself was administered by a committee under the auspices of the Basin Community Resources [BCR] organization, involving the Basin Villages Forum [BVF] Community Consultative Body (CCB).

The land itself was purchased by Council from a 'developer' and the project concept brought to the BVF by the Council Environmental Planner of the time.

The notion that it could be used for development and even a canal estate caused a serious environmental intrusion and damage that ceased with the council purchase.

To this stage the project has been financed by a Destination NSW Tourism Grant.

Initially, the area was most often regarded just as an area that 'got wet' with minimal appreciation of the natural value, though there was inherent potential with council ownership and attitude to the site being inappropriate for the usual urban development.



Fallen shoreline trees make excellent habitat

Any lack of appreciation of the site was shaken by the production and photographing of a bird catalogue in 2014-2016, which has been continuously updated since. This seemed an obvious place to start with Marly and myself as BLA members and weekly monitoring was always rewarding, especially in so varied an ecology and weather.

There are 81 catalogued native bird species at the wetland site and this has been included in the Resources Pack also developed for the site. There is a considerable biodiversity in species given the varied habitat in what is, in reality, a small site.

The reaction across the board was just terrific, especially among the 'non-birders'. This simply also went to prove how popular birds are with the vast majority of people.

The wetland project then gained some status in the sense that it now provided a palpable sense of pride in the Sanctuary Point and Basin community and formal council surveying indicated it was extremely well accepted.

This also included a major community project on the wetland led by Vanessa Barbay with the Basin Community Resources. Vanessa, a local woman, PhD Visual Artist and teacher instructed and co-ordinated the production of an Art Installation in collaboration with BCR on the wetland, adjacent to Larmer Avenue and this has been seen by thousands of people as they drive into Sanctuary Point.



Bherwerre Wetland Art Installation Opening

The installation was officially opened in November 2018 and to the delight of our local bird interests is totally based on the birds of the wetland, painted as they were photographed from the surveys.

The wetland has also been part of the former Sea Change Arts Festival "Reading The Land" group excursions and exhibitions.

The BCR and BVF maintain their interest and involvement in the wetland project to give it an enduring community attachment.

As is the way with these things, a couple of conservation challenges remain and changes need to be made. Part of the wetland is quite appropriately zoned for Conservation but a section remains zoned for Rural, which is far from appropriate and is incongruous.

The area is a "Natural Area-Wetland" involving Ecologically Endangered Communities but the 'default' Council position is that 'Dogs On Leash' are permitted to use the area. As birders know, on-leash so often becomes 'off-leash' at the whim of dog owners and dogs will disturb fauna.

The Eastern Osprey has been a special sighting at the wetland over many years but only once as a trio as shown in the image on the right.

The project steering committee has been comprised of Council staff and project managers, BCR and staff with committee members of the BVF. Chris, a BLS member is a member of that committee.



Twitchathon 2023

- by Marg Hamon

The morning of 28th October 2023 dawned overcast and calm. Time for the Twitchathon.

The MUDbirders' team, The Wooden Spoonbills - Marg Hamon, Rosemary Hales and Evelyn May - had signed up for the 3-hour Birdathon. Under the rules of the Twitchathon, team members must stay within voice range of each other, and a majority of the team must verify a bird's identity. Maggie joined us as list-keeper but couldn't be part of the team on account of her vision problem.

We arranged to meet at Bada Dam, Burrill, to start our quest at 8.00 a.m. The first bird was not a waterbird but a Little Corella gorging itself on wattle seeds. It was not long before Evelyn reported a smallish bird running in and out of the reeds in the middle of the dam. Luckily this Baillon's Crake gave us very good views of itself.

Australian Reedwarblers were also quite visible and there were the usual Purple Swampheens, Ducks and Coots. We went right round to the far end of the dam hoping for a Latham's Snipe, but it wasn't to be. Never mind, a Hardhead and a Dusky Moorhen were compensation. There were no Spoonbills, sadly, which are often there. We searched the other little bodies of water nearby - without luck.

We all set off in Rosemary's car for the Burrill Lake entrance in the hope of picking something up there, even if it was only a Silver Gull. The tide was high, the sea was up and water was rushing into the lake. To our delight we found both Sooty and Pied Oystercatchers, Hooded and Red-capped Plovers and Crested Tern and Caspian Tern. And a Silver Gull.

Jackpot! With a few minutes of our first hour left, we raced up the hill to see if we could find any seabirds, but nothing doing.



After a 5-minute break to re-evaluate our strategy, we headed to the west side of Burrill in search of Pelican and anything else hanging out there. We got the Pelican and Black Swan and Great Cormorant, and several other species before heading off to the Ulladulla Sports Field. This has been productive in the past but wasn't as good this day. Certainly there were no Dusky Woodswallows, which we have often seen there, but a lovely pair of Sacred Kingfishers made up for them.

With a bit of time left we decided to visit the South Pacific Heathland Reserve. In the short time we had we couldn't locate the Frogmouths, which have been moving around a bit, and no Glossy Black or any other cockatoos came over to see us. Then the second hour was up.



Next stop was morning coffee at Mavericks, and a chance to transfer our running list to the Checklist and discuss our strategy for the final hour.

We had 51 birds on the list; how could we add to that? We started the last hour at Wilford Wetlands, where, with the aid of the scope, we were able to add great Egret and Pied Stilt but not a great number more. There were a couple of small shorebirds, but even with the scope we couldn't see any identifying marks.

A couple of raptors, White-bellied Sea-eagle and

Swamp Harrier, were welcome additions. So off we set for the Milton Rain Forest, picking up White-necked Heron and Cattle Egret on the way. The Rain Forest was looking very dry and there was little around until we got in to where there was a flowering Silky Oak. The very top of it was alive with birds, mainly large honeyeaters, all zipping around at speed. There were also a few smaller ones but as they were so high up and refusing to stay still, we had to admit defeat with identifying them.

We returned to the car and did the final tally, coming up with 62 species. This was better than last year, so we were quite pleased. The constraint of time means it is sometimes better to sacrifice one bird for searching a location where you might find more. For example, we considered going after Buff-banded Rail, but the high tide and general uncertainty of finding one in the reeds made us decide against it. Evelyn was the timekeeper and set her timer to 20-minute intervals each time we started a new hour, and this helped keep us focused on how we were doing.

A Twitchathon is great fun; it puts a whole new twist on birding. The purpose must not be forgotten though, and that is to raise money for whatever project has been decided by the BIGnet committee should receive it. This year it is for research into the Australian Painted Snipe, one of the rarest birds in NSW, and one of the least known.

We are waiting now for the sponsorships to come through from all our friends in the birding world, and hope that the target of \$30,000 is met so research on this mysterious and beautiful bird can continue.



MUDBirders Birdcamp - Griffith / Leeton - October 2023

- by Phil Hendry

After four years of planning, and three cancellations due to plague and flooding, an intrepid collection of 15 birders ventured out to Griffith Caravan Village and gathered at 5pm on the 17th of October. A quick meeting was followed by dinner at a local club and an early night.



Wednesday morning started out with a 7am trip to Leeton and a walk through the loop at Fivebough Swamp. What a place! An amazing collection of waterbirds, our heads were spinning, never sure to look left or right, up or down. Walking in we heard and/or saw Little Grassbirds, Golden-headed Cisticola and Reedwarblers. At the first clearing there were three species of Crake and Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels. Another highlight was the arrival of a flock of Brolga. All up we saw at least 65 species at the site that day. A full list of birds seen at each site is shown later.

After a stop for morning tea at McCaughey's lagoon, a wander through the stunningly beautiful River Redgum forest yielded 28 species including the Yellow (Crimson) Rosella and a possible glimpse of a Superb Parrot. Next stop was Gogeldrie Weir and a pleasant walk along the banks of the Murrumbidgee and another 22 species including Whistling Kite and Square-tailed Kite. A lovely lunch was had among the River Redgums and then back to Fivebough Swamp.



Initially we visited the Eastern side lookout from Hooey Rd. There we were treated to views of Magpie Geese and Shelducks, and lovely display from the Variegated Fairywren. Back at the main entrance to Fivebough Swamp where we were treated to the sight of about 400 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers flying in to land just in front of the hide. They were then spooked by the arrival of a Peregrine Falcon.

Dinner that night was at an Italian restaurant in the centre of town. Lovey end to a very busy day, I think we all felt it!

Thursday morning was another early start as we headed out north-east to the Binya State Forest. At 8am we gathered at Wattle Dam, a small dam in fairly open Callitris (Cypress pine) scrubland. There were no birds at the dam, but a walk through the nearby bush rewarded us with great views of three Turquoise Parrots and White-browed Babblers. Another dam a few hundred metres up the road brought us Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, Western Gerygone, and Splendid Fairywrens!

The leader, your correspondent, then decided that we would take the Whitton Stock Route to the next site, Store Creek in Cocoparra National Park. A fateful decision, as it turns out to be a road rarely travelled and it took us an hour to get the 10km to Store Creek. It was quite invigorating with some hair-raising moments, but we made it, although the Cool Coffee Van decided to go back and around the long way.

The Store Creek site was closed for repairs, but we stopped for morning tea and had some excellent birding on the outside of the fence, and maybe just a little bit inside. Highlights were Southern White-face, Striped Honeyeater and Grey-crowned and White-browed Babbler.

Another sighting of Splendid fairywren by some (but still not me). A gentle drive back to Griffith was interrupted by a stop at a flooded paddock to see Egrets, Heron, and Ibis. We then had a welcome break for a lie-down for a few hours, or a stroll to see the sights of the orange sculptures in the main street for the Griffith Spring Fest.

3pm saw us convene at Campbell's Swamp to the north-east of Griffith. A rickety boardwalk through the reeds took us to a hide with all the usual birds. Just outside the hide though, we got to see a pair of Red-rumped Parrots nesting in a dead tree. The final stop for the trip was at the causeway over Lake Wyangan.

I'm convinced that I saw a Great-crested Grebe in the distance but it disappeared before we could get a scope onto it. There was a bold Reed warbler, which, unusually, was happy to be photographed. Among the honeyeaters, Singing and Spiny-cheeked, we got a great look at a pair of White-winged Trillers.

The formal end of the trip was marked with the typical level of disorder, where five of us ventured out to the Golf club to look for the Pink Cockatoo. The remainder had had enough birding and needed a drink!



Southern White-face



Striped Honeyeater



Blue Bonnet



Black-shouldered Kite

Brown Treecreeper



Brown Goshawk



On the way there we stopped at the Hermit's Cave and were treated to great views over Griffith. As we climbed into the car, some Blue Bonnets flew into a tree in the car park. Out we climb, look, look, photo, photo. At the Golf club the Blue Bonnets were everywhere, as were Red-rumped Parrots and Mallee Ringnecks - but no Pink Cockatoos.

Finally, we managed to sit down and enjoy a quiet drink before collapsing for the night. All in all, a very successful trip. Thanks everybody for your contribution to making the trip so much fun.

Red-rumped Parrots



Photo Credits: Fiona Evans, Marianne Cool, Geoff Andrews, Marg Hamon, Phil Hendry

Congratulations Yolande!

Many of us may remember the TV advertisement from some years ago which used the phrase “you oughta be congratulated”. Well, one of our members, Yolande Cozijn, should be congratulated - though not for using a particular brand of margarine.

After watching her husband, Warren, photograph birds over the years, Yolande decided that she may as well join the action. Around mid-2023 she snaffled one of Warren’s cameras, purloined his best lens and started taking serious photos of birds. Fast forward to August and Warren, massively impressed with her work, encouraged her to enter one of her images of a Rainbow Bee-eater (below) in a Birdlife Australia photographic competition.

She won her category! And on her first attempt! Yolande certainly should be congratulated.



Python in Birdbath

- by Tom Kaar

On Saturday 9th Dec the Sydney Morning Herald reported that “Thousands of Sydneysiders flocked to beaches and swimming pools as temperatures soared past 40 degrees” - whereas one local at Penguin Head, Culburra Beach found a more novel way to cool off.

I believe the species name to be *Morelia spilota spilota* - the Diamond Python.

The carpet python seemed unperturbed as I mowed the grass, but it did reposition itself after I happened to bump into the base of the birdbath.

Was it cooling off, or was it simply waiting for some birds to come in to cool off as well?



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. 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.

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