

OUTINGS

Breakup

6 December 2008

So many met for a late afternoon walk at Newland Head that we split into two groups. Val led some members up the track through the scrub, and Denzel took the rest of us over the dunes and along the beach to the creek.

Bird sightings were few and far between for the beach group. Predictably, the Crested Tern and Silver Gulls faced into the onshore breeze, but it was good to see a pair of Hooded Plover patrolling the edge of the lagoon.

The scrub group fared better birdwise but I don't seem to have received formal reports for either group so I cannot compile a comprehensive report at this stage.

The evening gathering in the shelter of Dennis Hut suitably celebrated the end of another year of excellent birdwatching, with a local mother and child hovering unperturbed nearby.

Verle Wood



Photo: Verle Wood

Gilbert Siding

Friday 9 January

On a mild and still evening 33 keen members gathered at Gilbert Siding. The group split, one posse going along the train line towards Strathalbyn and the other in the opposite direction.

Our group, led by Ann Turner, walked along the train line for a short distance and saw Yellow Thornbill, Silvereye, Laughing Kookaburra and Spotted Pardalote. The embankment on each side of the line restricted the view and we moved back to the plantation alongside Gilbert Siding Road. Crimson Rosella, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo,

Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Superb Fairy-wren, White-plumed Honeyeater, Australian Magpie and lots of Galah were sighted. A Peaceful Dove was heard but remained elusive.

As light faded we settled for nibbles and drinks, and listened to recordings of night bird calls. Bird call was conducted under a full moon with a background of warbling Magpie and glimpses of Wood Duck flying by. A total of 31 species was recorded for both groups completing an enjoyable evening for our first outing of 2009.

Margaret Dreyer

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The other group walked about 500 metres before seeing many birds. A small group of noisy Brown-headed Honeyeaters getting ready to settle down for the night was interesting. A Peaceful Dove was heard ahead, then seen fluttering from near the railway line into a tree.

Several Galah flew over at intervals then a big flock was seen in the distance. There were also several Magpie families carolling in the fading light as they prepared to roost.

On the return walk the rising moon shone through misty pink cloud as the last rays of the sun reddened the light cloud on the opposite horizon.

Several Wood Duck flew quacking low overhead as everyone gathered for the bird call and supper in the twilight.

Despite the birds not coming to the party—only 31 species were observed—it was a very pleasant walk on a mild evening.

Peter Gower



Black-winged Stilt nest (left) and a clutch of Stubble Quail eggs (right) at the wetlands in the Beyond development at Pt Elliot. Photos: Win Syson

Urbanised Hooded Plover: An unlikely breeding success story!

Being aware of declining populations and habitat conflict issues facing the Hooded Plover in southern Australia, it was surprising to watch an Encounter Bay pair just get on with the job of raising a brood on a busy city beach. Talk about species behavioural adaptation in fast forward!

During the National Hooded Plover census (8–9 November 2008) a nest with three eggs was found just off the beach sand at Kent Reserve west of the Inman River. Hmm— not much hope here, we thought! But we went ahead and erected six metres of orange bunting and the standard Hooded Plover alert signs at the beach access boardwalks, 50 metres east and west of the nest. Regular visits thereafter revealed dogged diligence to incubation duties by both adults, which totally ignored the passing parade of people and canines, and the staring attention of goggle-eyed bird-watchers.

Then, on 27 November— great excitement and trepidation— there were three speckled, nidifugous, fluffballs with legs, skittering around! Soon afterwards, persistent, and at times gale force, winds arrived which kept some people off the beach but provided our birds with a little respite from disturbance.

By mid December only two runners remained. Then the holiday crowds arrived and inevitably, more people and more dogs on the beach. Still the HP family stuck together on their patch. They were never seen more than 50 metres from home, and always a short scutter distance from the shelter of the scruffy but essential, spinifex, sea-rocket and spurge growing above the line of seaweed.

Would they be able to fly by Christmas? Not quite, we knew: they needed ~35 days of feather development. Anyway, the two survivors made it through to fledging and were still hanging out around their natal territory with their oldies in mid January. When last observed they were taking instruction lessons on reading dog and people body language and speed-over-sand danger calculations.

Behold, the Urban Hooded Plover has arrived!

*Terry and Helen Dennis,
and Verle Wood*



Elsewhere on the south coast ...

Hooded Plover breeding has been less than exciting.

The site monitored by Ann Turner at Watson Gap failed.

At Hindmarsh Estuary, Andrew Jeffery reported that the birds didn't nest although he had sighted one to three birds intermittently during the season. Andrew believes that local dog walkers know that they need to avoid the birds' potential habitat, but that a bigger threat to the birds are the corvids and Masked Lapwing.

Monitoring the Hooded Plover at Basham Beach has been a very disappointing exercise. Win Syson reported.

"Signs and bunting were erected and I was delighted when some time in November two chicks hatched. They did very well for about a week and then both the adults and chicks disappeared. In early December the adults reappeared, nested and hatched two chicks. But sadly, it seems that no chicks have survived."

Signs along our foreshores read to the effect that "Dogs must be under effective control at all times and on leash between 8 am and 10 pm during daylight saving."

But one wonders whether they might not as well be in a foreign language!

犬は夏時間調整の間に有効な制御の下でそして8 amと10 pm間の鎖でいつもあるなる。

In Tasmania ...

feathers are flying after signs aimed at protecting nesting sites of endangered shorebirds have been vandalised. This season, Little Tern (endangered), Fairy Tern, Oystercatchers, Hooded Plover and other shorebirds have made unsuccessful breeding bids in an area near Bicheno on the east coast.

Signs have been installed at 29 beaches between Hobart and Bicheno to help educate the public and protect nesting sites. Efforts have also been made to provide dog owners with information on responsible dog management on beaches.

The Denison Beach area will be fenced off to help protect the birds whose populations are seriously going downhill, and to stop people inadvertently wandering through and treading on the eggs. An approved dog-friendly area has been established nearby.

Mercury (Tasmania) 23/01/09

Special birds

The beginning of this new year gives us here at



Waitpinga Cliffs real reason to celebrate. Firstly, with the wonderful news that after many years the Waitpinga pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagle have bred successfully this season.

Secondly, we have had positive sightings of Beautiful Firetail adults, juveniles and fledglings in January.

I was delighted to hear one calling mid December, for the first time since June last year. Since the new year I have had almost daily sightings. At first I thought there was just one bird coming to water, but on 8 January I was excited when a banded bird arrived, clearly indicating at least two Beautiful Firetails in the area. A photo taken a few days later revealed four or five numbers on the band, sufficient to ID the bird. David Paton is looking at his banding records to supply further information.

Shortly after this discovery I observed another adult male and later I was even more thrilled to see a juvenile coming with the adult pair. But the highlight occurred some days later when *three* young fledglings appeared with the parent birds. What an amazing start to the birding year!

Elizabeth Steele-Collins



Above, White-bellied Sea-Eagle at Waitpinga Cliffs.
Below, Beautiful Firetail and chick.
Photos: Elizabeth Steele-Collins

House crows causing a stir



WANTED for questioning — report this illegal immigrant to authorities 1800 084 881.

“One of the world’s most invasive species of bird has been sighted in the Pilbara, sparking fears the pest may establish in Australia with devastating consequences.” So reads an article in the *Pilbara News* for Wednesday 10 December 2008.

Locals believe this Indian and SE Asian species observed near a Woodside oil-drilling platform, 140 km off Karratha and at nearby Cape Lambert, with unconfirmed sightings elsewhere, could be arriving on ships. Its presence on the platform has been confirmed by AQIS.

“In some countries the House Crow is considered a major pest, preying on the chicks and eggs of native birds, destroying nests and harassing birds and other animals.”

In Australia the house crow has the potential to establish a feral population which could obliterate native animal species and spread disease.

Thanks to Yrena Mountford for this item.

And further afield ...

“Not everyone wants to see sea eagles back in Norfolk” Eastern Daily Press (UK), Saturday 29 November 2008

The possible reintroduction of the Norfolk sea eagle has become a hot topic among conservationists, anglers, birdwatchers, rambblers and farmers. Each of these groups has, of course, its own agenda but a survey of people on the street found that 91% would like to see the birds back again.

The birds occasionally visit from Europe, delighting birdwatchers, but their predatory habits are of serious concern to enterprises such as free-range pig and poultry farms, and sheep farms, all important to Norfolk’s economy.

Some conservationists argue that the comparatively small acreage of bird reserves in north and west Norfolk are already under significant predator pressure. They also fear that in the absence of their usual diet the sea eagles may compete with resident raptors for the eggs and young of other shore birds. Some would prefer that the available resources be applied to protecting more common farmland species than to “headline-grabbing birds”.

So the discussions continue. “It may be that pigs have more hope of flying in our skies than sea eagles.”

Thanks to Joyce West for this item.