

Editorial

Welcome to the 18th edition of *The Whistler*, presented here for your reading pleasure. This edition brings you 13 articles covering a wide variety of topics from across the Hunter Region. Four of the articles present the results of long-term studies with extensive data sets. The remaining nine are shorter articles which document various aspects of avian behaviour, population studies, unusual observations, and some ‘firsts’ for the Hunter Region.

Results are presented for a study by HBOC members of five different habitat types in the Martindale Valley, that were surveyed quarterly across seven years. This study is only the second ever to deal with southwestern parts of the Hunter Region and it considerably expands our knowledge of the avian populations in that part of the region. Eighteen threatened species were amongst the 190 species recorded. The seasonal change in population is documented as are the impacts of El Niño and La Niña climate events. The study demonstrated that the avian population responded to increased rainfall in a similar manner to that associated with inland wetland systems, rather than a near-coastal refuge.

A long-term study reported by Mike Newman and Eric Woehler documents how a Red-browed Finch population in the Paterson area responded opportunistically to higher rainfall. The study demonstrates an increase in the number of birds per survey and an increase in group size that lagged the increased rainfall by two years. The quarterly sampling technique used for the study was shown to be sufficient to generate statistically significant trends for the finches and three additional woodland species.

A paper by Ann Lindsey and Neil Fraser reviews the status of the White-fronted Chat in the Hunter Region. The known local distribution of the species is mainly limited to six estuarine wetland sites all of which are targets for regular shorebird monitoring by HBOC members. The study demonstrated a 64.5% decline in reporting rate over the period 2010-2023, which was similar to state-wide studies for the species. The authors also highlighted that the species’ true distribution across the region could be much wider than is currently understood.

The fourth reported long-term study is about the Swan Bay area of Port Stephens. The article relates local changes in the behaviour and population of wader species to habitat changes at the site over a 48-year period. An important coastal wetland on the site previously hosted 25-50% of the shorebirds in Port Stephens. The numbers of shorebirds have declined by 30% and many species are no longer recorded. The site is subject to encroachment by mangroves due to rising sea level and changed weather patterns, exacerbated by human intervention. The article suggests measures to support wader populations in the face of rising sea levels.

There are nine shorter articles in this edition of *The Whistler*, which collectively comprise around 50% of the total content. We are delighted to be able to present the diverse range of topics which these articles cover.

One of the articles is about Snapper Island, near Swan Bay, Port Stephens. This small rocky island, supporting littoral rainforest habitat, is infrequently visited by birders. The rainforest habitat supports a range of fruit-eating birds including Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove. Five other threatened species including Glossy Black- Cockatoos have been recorded. Another Port Stephens article demonstrates the decline in the local Whistling Kite population. Increased competition from other raptor species is postulated as the probable cause.

Two articles are based on observations from within the port of Newcastle. Judy Little has used local bird banding observations and recapture records for Australian Pelicans to assess their longevity and movements within our region. The other article, supported by excellent photography, describes the sighting of a Great Frigatebird in Newcastle Harbour in 2015, the first confirmed record for the Hunter Region.

First time author Mandy McDonald has analysed Australian Pied Oystercatcher records from around Lake Macquarie, another area with limited previous documentation. Her study showed that the species had increased breeding success in 2021 and 2022, which she attributes to reduced human interference of nesting sites during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Two articles by Kim Pryor describe previously unreported aspects of Channel-billed Cuckoo and Galah behaviour, respectively. The cuckoos were observed exchanging food items as part of their courtship behaviour. Galah chicks, from a backyard nest box brood, were observed to fledge on the same day. Both articles are wonderful illustrations of how little has been documented about many Australian birds as well as excellent examples of the important role that all of us potentially can fill by careful observation and then follow-up reporting.

Broughton Island, the site of a number of exceptional reports and avian firsts for the region, was the site of another first-time record. A trail camera revealed a Peregrine Falcon displaying previously undocumented behaviour when capturing a Wedge-tailed Shearwater on the ground, just prior to dawn. The final short article, by Dick Jenkin, also documents another first for the Hunter Region. While birding along the Cattle Lane hot-spot in the north-west of the region, Dick made the first breeding record of Red-chested Button-quail for the Hunter Region.

It is pleasing to note that, once again, this latest edition includes articles from several first-time authors or co-authors. Over the 18 years of annual publication, there have been 85 individuals who have appeared at least once as an author or co-author. To us, that serves to demonstrate the important role that *The Whistler* fills in documenting Australian birdlife at a regional level – it would not have occurred to many of those local authors to put pen to paper were it not for their awareness of *The Whistler*'s existence and their knowledge that some of their peers had previously “given it a go”.

Preparation of *The Whistler* involves a large team and we extend our thanks to all the contributors, referees and production staff. We also thank the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group for their continuing financial support.

Neil Fraser and Alan Stuart
Joint Editors