

## AROUND THE PARK

The Bureau's *El Nino* Alert<sup>1</sup> (NINO3.4) forecasts it will develop during spring, prolonging inland drought and generating higher summer temperatures. This month BWSP enjoys an early onset of spring, passing showers and increased diversity in birdlife. Numerous native ground cover and shrub species<sup>2</sup> are in bloom on Wildflower Walk (beside Fernleigh Track). Several 'early bird' species<sup>3</sup> have been recorded this month, including Australasian Figbird, Olive-backed Oriole and Australasian Grebe. Common spring-summer visitors may arrive in early spring. Small flocks of Double-barred Finch and Red-browed Finch have been seen in the Park since May. This may be linked to inland drought conditions and/or grass seed spread abundantly in open areas recently! Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Eastern Yellow Robin are seen/heard regularly in woodlands.

## BELMONT LAGOON

Black Swan are returning to the Lagoon in flocks (50+). It is unusual to see smaller flocks (<20) feeding and roosting daily around Belmont Bay, adjacent to the Lagoon. This species and other freshwater birds<sup>4</sup> (cormorants, herons, egrets, ibis, spoonbill, ducks) suggest favourable conditions have returned (salinity, water temperature and diet diversity). Of note, swans often drink at stormwater inlets to the Lake and freshwater seepage into the Lagoon.

It's not all good news for conservationists. Experienced local birders<sup>5</sup> have noted a possible recent decline in a common Hunter wetland species, Intermediate Egret<sup>6</sup> *Ardea intermedia* (aka Plumed Egret). This is difficult to verify by amateur birdwatchers, for various reasons. It is often wary of observers; its wetland habitats often obscure visual or call recognition and it shares similar physical features with Great Egret and Little Egret<sup>7</sup>.

There is much to consider this photograph below. It was taken (12/8/23) from Cold Tea Creek track, a great place to observe bird species on the lagoon (N) or creek (S).



<sup>1</sup> Climate driver update <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/> BOM 15 August 2023.

Rainfall and temperature long range forecasts <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ahead/outlooks/>

<sup>2</sup> Download BWSP maps and brochures <https://www.belmontwetlands.com.au/maps-and-downloads.html>

<sup>3</sup> Species survey at Belmont Lagoon (12aug23) <http://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=9214200&h=e81ab823>

<sup>4</sup> *Wetland Birds of south eastern Australia Identification booklet*. Birdlife Australia 2020.51pp.

<sup>5</sup> *Pers comm* (email correspondence 1/8/2023) M. Roderick, Hunter Bird Observers Club.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hboc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Hunter-Estuary-large-waterbirds-The-Whistler-V-15.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Intermediate Egret *Ardea intermedia* [https://ebird.org/species/integr?siteLanguage=en\\_AU](https://ebird.org/species/integr?siteLanguage=en_AU)

It reminds us how fragile and important this suburban Lagoon is – both for wildlife conservation, and our joint responsibility in maintaining water quality in Lake and wetlands.

In the foreground appear two discarded suitcases, resting on sand/silt/mudflats and only metres away from crossover pipes which permit daily waterflow between lake and lagoon. If extreme, prolonged drought occurs in the region this summer, unrestricted interchange will be crucial to protect the lagoon from drying up and stinking. This happened once before<sup>8</sup>.

Just behind are small flocks of Black Swan, Pied Stilt and Pacific Black Duck, roosting and foraging. These three species reveal how shallow the lagoon really is, and yet how well it protects and provides for their different needs. The diversity and number (129) of all species observed around the Lagoon since 2015<sup>9</sup> show how vital this coastal habitat is for bird conservation. Results of two recent surveys at the Lagoon are available<sup>10</sup>.

Third, the Pied Stilts on each end in the photo have only one leg; it is not tucked under belly. This should remind us that migratory shorebirds face many challenges for survival.

### OBSERVATIONS ALONG 9-MILE BEACH

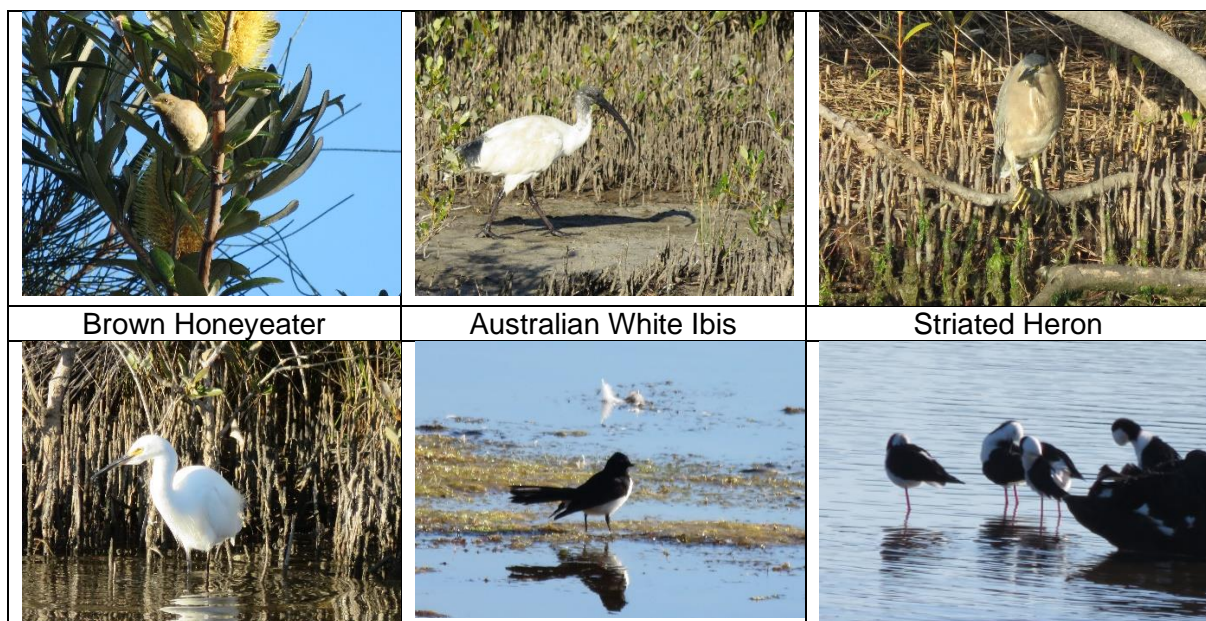
Latest verbal reports from BWSP Rangers were of White-bellied Sea Eagle hovering over a compacted school of Salmon and Tailor near the shoreline and 2-3 Pied Oystercatcher at Third Creek (2-9/8). No other migratory shorebirds were noted.

A reminder that visitors are always welcome at Hunter Bird Observers Club meetings. Members meet every 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday night of the month except in January, at Shortland Wetlands Centre. Further details may be found via the website <https://www.hboc.org.au/>

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Photos from around Belmont Wetlands State Park and Belmont Lagoon in August.



<sup>8</sup> The Newcastle Sun. Tue. 9 April 1940, p.5. *Lagoon dries up*.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.hboc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Birdlife-at-Belmont-Lagoon-Wetlands-2015-2020.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> 25july23 <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=9202787&h=777ba737> and 12/8/23

<http://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=9214200&h=e81ab823>