

IS IT SUMMER YET OR HAVE WE MISSED IT?

It seems like no two weeks of summer, once a hallmark of holidays, are the same. Who's heard the wake-up calls of Kookaburras, Koels or Cuckoos lately? The answer may lie in Dorothea MacKellar's¹ famous poem – we're somewhere between 'I love a sunburnt country' and 'droughts and flooding rains'. If we're confused what month or season it is, spare a thought for migratory birds which have endured this turbulence for millions of years.

BIRDLIFE AT THE LAGOON

Many common and uncommon bird species were noted around the Lagoon this month, but not (yet) in numbers seen 5 years ago. Sporadic rainstorms are providing ample freshwater - vital for breeding and survival. Black Swan is the main species (50-100 daily) noted on the shallow, salty Lagoon. Early on hot days 10-30 swans at a time are seen (from the peninsula track) drinking freshwater from wetlands flowing into its north-east corner.

For those interested a weblink to most recent bird survey data (27/12) is given below². Of special note, three Rainbow Bee-eater birds were observed; two mid-way along Cold Tea Creek, and the third bird 400m away where a pair of these summer visitors were first noted.

Other points to note are: no Brown Honeyeater or Dollarbird, typically seen and heard in the Park at this time of year; (34) White-breasted Woodswallow preening in the same tree beside Cold Tea Creek; and low numbers of common waterbird species (cormorants, egrets, heron, silver gull, pelican, ducks). Very low numbers of common woodland species (honeyeaters, cuckoos, thornbills, silvereye, doves, whistlers) were recorded. Quite unusual at this time of year, yet a high species count on both surveys (44; 12/12), (41; 27/12).

ALONG NINE-MILE BEACH

The almost-weekly coastal storms in December and ongoing Park activities restricted Rangers' attention to 'unusual' shorebird movements on regular beach patrols. Verbal reports were of low Crested Tern and Pied Oystercatcher numbers, sighted mostly near 3rd Creek until it emptied. Red-capped Plover were also noted on the beachfront and foredunes.

THANKS TO LOCAL RESOURCE GROUPS

Rangers' contributions to monthly reports of birdlife on its Facebook page play a key part in public awareness for the conservation of birds and other fauna. In its unique way this respects the legacy of the Park from its traditional custodians, The Awabakal. These reports also complement regular waterbird surveys on adjacent sites by Lake Macquarie Council staff and contribute to its native fauna database. In turn, Rangers benefit from local expertise of members of Hunter Bird Observers Club in identifying and caring for species in this area.

Rangers and BWSP volunteers finished the year by planting Pigface runners on northern dunes. Results of ongoing stabilisation of fore dunes are dramatic. Congratulations to all involved in this effort. Collaboration of Park Rangers and Land Manager with local community organisations is a hallmark of BWSP and DPIE. It has regular support from Hunter Bird Observers Club and Lake Macquarie Council staff. Finally, THANK-YOU to many local users and visitors who support the Park and its ongoing development.

Best wishes for 2024.

Report prepared by Grahame Feletti (0429 455 243) on 29dec23.

¹ *My country*. Dorothea Mackellar. 1971. The Poems of Dorothea Mackellar. Australia: Rigby Ltd.

² Birdlife Australia. 27dec23. <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=9421111&h=2dcfc99b>