

## AROUND THE LAGOON

Early mornings are cooler and darker now as winter looms. The Lagoon, its surrounding vegetation and birdlife are also visibly changing – locked into an ancient ecological cycle. Some flora (remnant forest canopy trees<sup>1</sup>) are now in full bloom. Different ‘nectar-eater’ species are arriving in small to medium flocks and foraging noisily before moving on. Half of the 130 species (I’ve) noted here since 2015 appeared on less than 20% of fortnightly surveys, including many migratory birds<sup>2</sup>.

Small crustaceans, fish-fry and molluscs have reached sufficient size and numbers to attract different waterbird species. Cooperative feeding frenzies have been observed when mixed groups of pelican, cormorant, silver gull, egret and heron actively forage fish-fry, herding them into shallow water. Up to 300 Black Swan congregate daily and graze on lake weed across this once freshwater lake<sup>3</sup>. It’s hard not to anthropomorphise<sup>4</sup> but the wetlands and lagoon seem a popular tourist destination for many birds at this time of year, with lots of fishing and natural food available. But for migratory birds this is a short stay or oasis; they’re not on holiday and have further to travel. Interesting types of insect also abound<sup>5</sup> at present.

## COASTAL WOODLANDS

Another worthwhile, short nature walk in April or May is the Gilbey Loop<sup>6</sup>. Its upper entrances are near the site office on Kalaroo Road (check the BWSP website map or ask the Rangers for a Bird Guide, which will aid your observation and identification of species). Walking along the concrete blocks on that upper level you may hear familiar woodland bird calls, while on the lower trail beside the Wetland various nectar-eating species can be seen and heard in the Swamp Mahogany and Broad-leaf Paperbark trees.

Even in dismal weather conditions early on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 11 woodland species were noted, including *Yellow-faced Honeyeater* (GF photo edited by Rob Palazzi, HBOC). In previous years (of abundant blossom) 2-3 times that number of species were recorded. Note here, ‘nectar-eaters’ include not only those species *named* as honeyeater, but also friarbird, wattlebird, silvereye<sup>7</sup>, lorikeet and parrot<sup>8</sup>.

The ‘south-eastern honeyeater migration’<sup>9</sup> is still one of nature’s exciting events and wonderful mysteries, in that



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<sup>1</sup> Broad-leaved Paperbark *Melaleuca quinquenervia*, Smooth-barked Apple *Angophera costata*, Old Man Banksia *Banksia serrata*, Swamp Banksia *Banksia robur*, and Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia*.

<sup>2</sup> G. Feletti (2020) Birdlife at Belmont Lagoon Wetlands 2015-2020. <https://www.hboc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Birdlife-at-Belmont-Lagoon-Wetlands-2015-2020.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Belmont ‘Lagoon’ (geologists note) was a freshwater dune lake until 1942 when pipes into Cold Tea Creek were added. This changed its hydrology to saltwater, under slow tidal influence from Lake Macquarie.

<sup>4</sup> Anthropomorphism: the habit of explaining animal behaviour in terms of human emotion and motivation.

<sup>5</sup> 4-metre caterpillar trains of Batwing Moth *Chelepterix* were seen crossing Kalaroo Fire Trail on 28/3/23.

<sup>6</sup> Gilbey Loop. Named in honour of John and Carol Gilbey, pioneer Landcare volunteers here after John retired. They and others cleared and planted many tube stock shrubs and trees, and shaped walking trails for visitors.

<sup>7</sup> Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis* is a small bird migrating annually from Tasmania to Queensland.

<sup>8</sup> The Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor* is a critically endangered species which migrates 2000km from Tasmania to the Hunter Region. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=10455>

<sup>9</sup> The south-eastern honeyeater migration. <https://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/6087179/autumn-the-time-to-spot-honeyeater-migration/>

birds may use different flyways and timing to migrate northwards. These are not very predictable from year to year. In a 'good' year, experts have estimated up to 50,000 birds migrate northwards from Tasmania and Victoria into New South Wales and southern Queensland. Besides making this perilous 2000km journey twice a year the Swift Parrot also faces extinction due to competitors for its nesting sites and destruction of habitat by industry.

### SHOREBIRD SIGHTINGS AT 9-MILE BEACH

On 19/4/23 an Australasian Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*<sup>10</sup> was observed on the beach front. This species was last reported (KW) approx. five years ago, further south. The Australian Museum describes the Pipit as 'a well-camouflaged, brown ground-dwelling bird'. From previous observations (GF) at Ash Island the species is more likely seen in open fields than dunes. (Photo by GF, edited by Rob Palazzi, HBOC).



Other recent observations along the beach may be of interest.

Raven and Silver Gull are commonly seen foraging singly or roosting in large flocks; both species are known scavengers. On the same survey (as above) 12 Magpies and a Willie Wagtail were noted fossicking among clumps of seaweed on the beach. They may be looking for insects (flies or maggots) on carrion.

In passing several large groups of roosting Silver Gulls one bird was noted with fishing line wrapped tightly around its leg; another had its leg stuck through a polystyrene cup. Add to that a Pied Oystercatcher with one stumpy leg. A recent international bird magazine features an article on plasticosis<sup>11</sup>, a new chronic seabird illness caused by ingestion of small plastic debris. Together these examples should remind all who use the shoreline for any purpose: *please take your rubbish home with you.*

Park management staff encourage visitors and locals to use the beach area in a conservation-minded manner (protective of vulnerable native species) in this area. This means not willingly disturbing the temporary resting areas or beach nesting territory of any shorebirds. Bird sightings and breaches should be reported to BWSP rangers on duty.

If you would like to know more, or to report your bird observations in north-east Lake Macquarie consider visiting or joining the Hunter Bird Observers Club<sup>12</sup> Details of their monthly club meetings and activities are advertised online.

Bird-watching brochures, walking trails and related information can be found on BWSP's website (<https://www.belmontwetlands.com.au/>) or by visiting the Rangers office at 119 Kalaroo Road, Redhead 2291.

Comments? Contact BWSP Rangers or Grahame Feletti [gfeletti@hotmail.com](mailto:gfeletti@hotmail.com) 22apr23

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<sup>10</sup> Australasian Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*.

[https://www.google.com/search?q=australasian+Pipit+Australian+Museum&rlz=1C1ONGR\\_enAU1015AU1015&oq=australasian+Pipit+Australian+Museum&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i60.27188j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=australasian+Pipit+Australian+Museum&rlz=1C1ONGR_enAU1015AU1015&oq=australasian+Pipit+Australian+Museum&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i60.27188j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

<sup>11</sup> Plasticosis article. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/03/22/plasticosis-scientists-name-new-disease-in-seabirds-caused-by-pollution#:~:text='Plasticosis'%3A%20Scientists%20name%20new%20disease%20in%20seabirds%20caused%20by%20pollution,-Scientists%20have%20studied&text=Scientists%20have%20discovered%20a%20new,in%20the%20guts%20of%20seabirds.>

<sup>12</sup> Hunter Bird Observers Club meets every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday night of the month except in January, at Shortland Wetlands Centre. Further details may be found via the website <https://www.hboc.org.au/>