

BELMONT WETLANDS STATE PARK BIRD REPORT

AROUND THE PARK IN MARCH 2023

EARLY AUTUMN ON THE BEACH. In many ways February-March has been a brutal period for many Australians, not just on the east coast. Weather gurus seem relieved to declare La Nina's climatic violence is almost over – breaking the cycle of intense storms, widespread flooding, extremely hot weeks, bushfires and even unseasonal snow. It's been challenging times for those living inland as well as on our SE coastline.

This pair of Australian Pied Oystercatchers loafing on Nine-mile Beach (22/3/23) got me thinking - why we don't adopt a similar approach to life. It's humbling to know shorebirds have evolved this migratory approach for survival over literally millions of years.

I've noted this species, *endangered* in NSW, regularly on Nine-Mile since October 2020; they usually roost in 4WD tracks along the shoreline. Thankfully, BWSP regulations enforced by its Rangers have aided survival by limiting the number and speed of 4WD vehicles in this area.



AKA *Haematopus longirostris* it is described as a large black and white wader reaching 50 cm in length¹. A Google search says people also ask: do they eat oysters, mate for life, and where do they live? I won't spoil your curiosity but my brother, a South Coast oyster farmer, could reply in a jiffy. In the Hunter Region, this species is described as *resident*, and HBOC² notes a long-term trend (since 1999) suggesting a recent increase in the local population, with sizable populations at Port Stephens and Worimi Conservation Lands.



Also observed along Nine-Mile Beach (22/3/23) were resident, mixed groups of (11) Crested Terns and (~150) Silver Gulls.

Hawking for small animals in the spinifex grass along the foredunes was a Nankeen Kestrel³. This handsome, small and swift raptor was identified (with binoculars) by dark 'teardrop' lines under its eyes.

The highlight of Rangers' sightings this month was three Eastern Osprey⁴ (*Pandion cristatus*, a *vulnerable* species in NSW). The smaller size of one bird, their relative proximity to each other and their 'really jumpy' (wary, flighty) behaviour suggests two parent birds and a juvenile. This species is known to 'plunge dive' after prey, so are more likely to be seen fishing in deeper water (eg. Cold Tea Creek or Lake Mac) than locations that White-breasted Sea Eagles prefer (eg. Belmont Lagoon). However at this time of year both species can be observed in this NE area of the Lake.



OTHER NEWS: A hundred plus Black Swan have been seen regularly, foraging all over the Lagoon this month. After daybreak they fly in from the Lake, which is also saltwater. In early

¹ Australian Pied Oystercatcher.

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=10386>.

² Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC). Annual Bird Report. Number 27 (2019). Page 55.

³ Nankeen Kestrel. https://ebird.org/species/auskes1?siteLanguage=en_AU

⁴ Eastern Osprey. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=10585>

morning up to 20 seem to congregate (warily) in the NE corner near the reeds and mudflats. They were observed drinking the (fresh-brackish) water draining into the Lagoon at that end.

The number and abundance of coastal woodlands bird species observed in the Park, including around Belmont Lagoon, has slowly increased to 129 since 2016. A recent survey⁵ tallied 38 (mostly woodland) species (329 birds). It is no coincidence that coastal woodlands around Lake Macquarie are beginning to bloom profusely - especially banksia, coastal paperbark and some eucalypt forest trees. This all points to some exciting birdwatching in this region next month (April), as the annual 'honeyeater migration' unfolds. Birds to look out for in the 449 ha Park include not only nectar-eaters such as wattlebirds, lorikeets and numerous honeyeaters but also a wider range of insect-eaters, scavengers and raptors that are also attracted in this period of blossom, from the many shrubs and trees growing here.

Belmont Wetlands State Park and Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) have organised a specific bird-watching walk in the Park (weather-permitting) on Thursday morning, 20 April. Those interested can look for further details on Lake Mac's Eventbrite website⁶.

Park management staff encourage visitors and locals to use the beach area in a conservation-minded manner (protective of vulnerable native species). This means not disturbing the temporary resting areas or beach nesting territory of visiting shorebirds.

Bird sightings and breaches of regulations should be reported to BWSP rangers on duty. This applies to dog-walkers along the beach or around 3rd Creek. Fines may be applied.

Bird-watching guides, walking trails and related information can be obtained from BWSP's website (<https://www.belmontwetlands.com.au/>) or by visiting the Rangers office at 119 Kalaroo Road, Redhead 2291. If you'd like to report a bird incident, or volunteer some of your time at BWSP please talk with Rangers Clinton or Shane Smith or Greg Johnson.

Thank you.

Grahame Feletti

0429 455 243 gfeletti@hotmail.com

24mar23

⁵ G. Feletti survey 22mar23. <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=9159635&h=93d2dc53>

⁶ Lake Macquarie City Council <https://www.lakemac.com.au/For-residents/Community/Volunteer-with-us/Arts-culture-and-events/Events-Tourism-and-Festivals>