

The Belongil Estuary Bird and Field Report – Jan Olley

Report No 27

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January to April 2006

How fast the weather can change, it was a glorious warm winter's morning when I visited the Belongil last week but by about lunch when I left it was cold and raining. The creek remains open to the sea and since my last report in April more of the high sand dunes along the Becton property have collapsed. Now it's a big drop-off from the end of the board and chain beach access into the creek and at high tide nearly a waist high crossing to the other side. The alternative is now by rope from the golf course access point at T7 and a shallower crossing at the mouth. But, as always, the estuary provided some nice surprises and delights.



Belongil Creek Mouth 30/6/06

Once again the sleek looking Australasian Gannets could be seen swooping and diving just off the coast. I have not seen them since the end of September last year. They move back to NZ and the southern regions of Australia for the summer.

A pair of Black Cormorants were fishing the creek, a Great Egret looked elegant against the blue and still waters of the creek and the Red-capped Plovers were actively darting too and fro. Our resident Pied Oystercatchers were making eyes at each other. Well, they were actually doing more than that very positive signs that they will nest again this year. The Red-capped Plovers and Masked Lapwing were also checking the dunes behind the fence presumably for a nesting site. Reid and Dave reported that the Red-caps have already made sand scrapes in an old fire ring in the dunes. An Osprey overhead sent everything scattering, including over a hundred Crested Terns, and then it swooped to the beach to pick up straw for its nest.

The bush was just as interesting, for the first time I spotted a female Regent Bower feeding on berries high in the canopy. It would certainly be a buzz if I had spotted the bright yellow of the magnificent male, but no luck. This is actually the fourth new bird species I've seen at

the site in the last three months. The other species observed, all in May, include the Long-billed Scrub Wren, Striped Honeyeater and one of my favourites the Rufous Fantail. These birds obviously migrate to the area for winter. The total species observed by BB's for the site since September 2004 is now at 132.

A really great sight were three Eastern Spinebills fighting over the bath water that had been trapped in a hollow high up in a tree, they were also competing with a White-cheeked Honeyeater.



Easter Spinebill taking an opportune bath.

On the mudflats in the inner creek again wintering this year from NZ were at least two Double-banded Plovers with their breeding bands still obvious. They have been at the Belongil for about a month. We are uncertain about two other plovers possible non-breeding female Double-banded but could be the non-breeding Lesser Sand Plover as they are very similar. At this time of the year the Lesser Sand Plover should in the northern breeding grounds of Tibet or thereabouts. Seven Black-winged Stilts were also feeding on the mudflats.

We had an “emergency” working bee in May when Reid and Dave first noted mating behaviour in the Oystercatchers, the fence had to be moved out from its reduced winter position and the dunes cleaned of the encroaching bitou bush much sooner than anticipated actually a couple of months earlier than last year.

On a less positive note, unfortunately, in the past month, there have been a number of people going inside the fenced area including a person on a bike and even more disturbingly they are taking dogs with them. This activity puts any possible breeding at risk. Over the past week even cars have been in the area for fishing in the creek and over the week-end 12 dogs were counted on the beach and that is in a “no dog area” and Marine Park Sanctuary Zone. It is interesting that this activity seems to have increased since the MP was opened in May.



Great Egret (photo Reid Waters)

LIST OF BIRDS APRIL TO JUNE

Australasian Grebe
 Australasian Gannet
 Little Black Cormorant
 Little Pied Cormorant
 Pied Cormorant
 Australian Pelican
 Great Egret
 Little Egret
 White-faced Heron
 Australian White Ibis
 Straw-necked Ibis
 Australian Wood Duck
 Hardhead
 Pacific Black Duck
 Brahminy Kite
 Whistling Kite
 Osprey
 White-bellied Sea Eagle
 Australian Brush-turkey
 Buff-banded Rail
 Purple Swamphen
 Masked Lapwing
 Pacific Golden Plover
 Double-banded Plover
 Lesser Sand Plover
 Red-capped Plover
 Common Greenshank

Black-winged Stilt
 Pied Oystercatcher
 Silver Gull
 Crested Tern
 Common Tern
 Little Tern
 Crested Pigeon
 Bar-shouldered Dove
 White-headed Pigeon
 Galah
 Rainbow Lorikeets
 Scaly-breasted Lorikeets
 Laughing Kookaburra
 Sacred Kingfisher
 Rainbow Bee-eater
 Tree Martin
 Welcome Swallow
 Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
 Varied Triller
 Eastern Yellow Robin
 Golden Whistler
 Little Shrike-thrush
 Grey Fantail
 Rufous Fantail
 Willy Wagtail
 Eastern Whipbird
 Superb Fairy-wren

Variegated Fairy-wren
 White-browed Scrubwren
 Large-billed Scrubwren
 Brown Thornbill
 Little Wattlebird
 Noisy Friarbird
 Little Friarbird
 Noisy Miner
 Lewin's Honeyeater
 White-cheeked Honeyeater
 Eastern Spinebill
 Scarlet Honeyeater
 Brown Honeyeater
 Striped Honeyeater
 Mistletoebird
 Silveryeye
 Striated Pardalote
 Red-browed finch
 Figbird
 Magpie Lark
 Spangled Drongo
 Grey Butcherbird
 Pied Butcherbird
 Pied Currawong
 Australian Magpie
 Regent Bower Bird
 Torresian Crow