

The Belongil Estuary Bird and Field Report – Jan Olley

Report No 29

Date 26/10/06

Report for 1st September to 5th October

Unlike a couple of years ago when conditions were much drier for September and October the intermittently opening Belongil Creek maintains an opening into the sea. The sea rushes in, filling the creek at high tide and the tannin stained waters rush out at low tide exposing the sand and mud flats in the inner estuary. As the creek runs along the edge of the northern sand dunes, the dunes are continually being undermined. The garden refuse (seen in the photo) which was once on the top of a large dune is now at the bottom and is slowly being dispersed up the creek and out to sea by the tides. A large carpet python has been seen taking advantage of the changed situation by using the platform of palm fronds to bask in the warm sun. Since the last report at the end of August, an old Banksia which once provided nectar for Noisy Friarbirds and Little Wattlebirds has been toppled over the sandbank by the wind. The dead branches are now used by the Rainbow Bee-eater's as a perch to survey their nest building activities in the face of the dune and also as a launch pad for their aerial displays while catching flying insects.



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The Pied Oystercatcher (POC) chick, mentioned in the last report, was banded at the beginning of October. While some BB members blocked escape routes, and the parents of the chick kicked up a bit of a fuss and made out as if they were injured the chick lead others on a merry chase until it was finally caught by Greg Clancy. Greg is licensed to tag birds in NSW and he applied two bands, one yellow tag on the left leg with the number A2 on it, for easy identification through binoculars, and on the opposite leg a small silver band.. The chick is now two months old and is ready to fly off. We hope to track its future movements so all you birdwatchers keep your eyes peeled for a tagged (no. A2) POC as once they fledge they are on their own, the parents wanting no more responsibility.

Two more POC's have just moved into the estuary and for a while it was war! The original resident's definitely did not want intruders on their patch. They seem to have

come to some agreement though, as the resident POC stay at the estuary mouth and the new immigrants seem to have settled on the island in the inner creek. It would be interesting to know if one of the new POC's was a fledged chick born at the estuary in the past two years and has returned with a partner, after checking out the world.



Sarah holding the Pied Oystercatcher chick for banding while the parents protest.

It's definitely spring in the lower estuary, a couple of weeks ago I heard what sounded like woody woodpecker tapping away in the bush and after investigation I discovered the tail of a bird protruding from a hole in an ants nest, I made a slight noise, the tail disappeared then there was a rustle inside and out popped the head of a Kookaburra. Two Kookaburras are now protecting the nest and I await the results of the activity. A number of Rainbow Bee-eaters and a pair of Striated Pardalotes are tunnelling a nest into sand banks

This week, along with 14 other bird enthusiasts from the Brunswick Valley Birdwatchers, we were looking at the area around a small pond in what I call the modified part of the estuary and we discovered an amazing array of birds in different stages of breeding. A Striped Honeyeater was busy feeding chicks in a deep cup-shaped nest suspended in the leaves of a Melaleuca; a Willy Wagtail was feeding a chick at the edge of the pond as was a Purple Swamphen. In the fork of a dead tree, and well camouflaged, was a Tawny Frogmouth with two fluffy chicks. An Olive-backed Oriole was sitting on a nest suspended low in a Banksia, and a Grey Butcherbird was feeding chicks in a nest of untidy sticks mid way up another tree. Also sitting on a nest half its size was a Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike and high up in the green foliage of another tree sat a Figbird in a cup-shaped nest. These were all in the surrounds of a small pond of water. Nearby on a nest in the open mowed grass was a Masked Plover. Five Latham's Snipes were also flushed from the reeds of the pond – (see feature bird.)

Over the last two months only small numbers of migratory birds have returned from their northern migration to the estuary mouth. Dave reported the first small flock of Little Terns as well as Common Terns on the beach on Saturday October 21st but they were gone by the next day. Three days later Heather reported about 20 small Terns, unidentified but smaller than the Crested Tern, the next day only Crested Terns were sited. Hopefully there will be more news in the next report.

We observed 54 bird species in total for the day on 25/10/06

Australasian Grebe,
Little Pied Cormorant
Little Egret
Pacific Black Duck
Osprey, Buff-banded Rail
Latham's Snipe
Whimbrel
Silver Gull
Crested Pigeon
Rainbow Bee-eater
Eastern Yellow Robin
Eastern Whipbird
Brown Thornbill
Blue-faced Honeyeater
White-cheeked Honeyeater
Figbird, Magpie Lark
Grey Butcherbird
Torresian Crow.

Australasian Gannet
Pied Cormorant
Australian White Ibis
Brahminy Kite
Purple Swamphen
Pacific Golden Plover
Common Greenshank
Crested Tern
Bar-shouldered Dove
Welcome Swallow
Grey Fantail,
Superb Fairy-wren
Olive-backed Oriole
Noisy Miner
Striated Pardalote
Spangled Drongo
Pied Currawong

Little Black Cormorant
Great Egret
Australian Wood Duck
Whistling Kite
Masked Lapwing
Red-capped Plover
Pied Oystercatcher
Gull-billed Tern
Brown Cuckoo-Dove
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Willy Wagtail
Variegated Fairy-wren
Little Wattlebird
Lewin's Honeyeater
Red-browed Finch
Pied Butcherbird
Australian Magpie

Feature Bird – Latham's Snipe – *Gallinago hardwickii*



Always difficult to observe, Snipes are well camouflaged as they hide amidst low vegetation around shallow wetlands during the day. When disturbed, they burst forth and fly off in a zigzag pattern. They breed and migrate from Japan, spending the summer in Aust. mainly along the east coast.

These birds are distinguished by a long straight beak which they use like a sewing machine to gather food from the mud. Their plumage is a mixture of bold buff, black and rufous patterns and brown and cream stripes, much like the habitat they hide in.