

The Belongil Estuary Bird and Field Report – Jan Olley

Report No 30

Date 31/12/06

Report for 5th October to 31st December 2006

Everything seemed to be perfect this year for the Little Terns to visit the Belongil. The dog numbers were down, there was camouflage debris everywhere just as they like it, the fence was positioned to give ample room, the signs were up and people numbers were down as it was difficult for people to access the spit from the Becton-side of the creek. But they did not come!

As stated in the last report, Dave reported ten Little Terns on October 21st and Heather reported 20 small Terns about the same time but it was uncertain if they were the Little Tern. I saw 64 Common Terns a couple of weeks later but no little Terns. When I visited Flat Rock in Lennox Head in November there were a small number there. Last year the Common Terns visited Belongil in their hundreds and always the Little Terns were with them, not so this year. Maybe next year will be the year!



New sign - back view



High Tide - Belongil Estuary 6/10/06

The creek is still flowing out to sea and a new sign has been erected. The sign very prominently says the area is a bird sanctuary and no dogs are allowed. The National Park rangers have been on the job and this has obviously made a difference to the dog numbers.

The Terns may have decided not to visit but a number of migratory birds have again taken up residence over the summer.

On Saturday I counted 38 Pacific Golden Plovers which is about the same number as last year.

A small number of Bar-tailed Godwits, Red-neck Stints and Sharp-tail Sandpipers have also been seen regularly at the creek. The Common Greenshank that usually wanders around the estuary on its own has a couple of mates. An Eastern Curlew and the occasional Whimbrel have also been observed.

The Pied Oystercatcher chick with the yellow tag left the protection of its parents sometime in the first two weeks of December. The Red-cap Plovers obviously nested

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again, as I spotted a chick just before Xmas, I only hope it survived as I did not see it on my next visit a week later. The second pair of Oystercatchers continues to occupy the island in the inner creek. The number of Rainbow Bee-eaters that were quite prevalent during spring seem to have moved on, as I didn't see any on my last visit, only the occasional sound could be heard.



Sharp-tail Sandpipers and Pacific Golden Plovers 1/10/06

The sound of the Figbird has dominated the bush over the past three months; they seem to be enjoying the fruit on the Tuckeroos. In November I spotted a Rufous Fantail, a bit late in the season, as an altitudinal migrating bird I thought they would be moving back to the mountains and the cool wet and dense rainforest by November. I guess there is always the exception but they are a delightful bird so I didn't mind.

I was not able to check on all the nesting birds that I mentioned in the last report, for two weeks and by the time I did most of the nests were deserted or destroyed and the chicks had flown the coop. The Latham Snipe could still be seen around the ponds in the modified area.

I observed 86 birds over the past three months including some of the following. A more comprehensive list is included as an attached spreadsheet.

Birds observed September to December 2006

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Australasian Grebe | Australasian Gannet | Australian Darter |
| Little Black Cormorant | Little Pied Cormorant | Pied Cormorant |
| Great Egret | Little Egret | White-faced Heron |
| Striated Heron | Australian White Ibis | Royal Spoonbill |
| Australian Wood Duck | Pacific Black Duck | Brahminy Kite |
| Whistling Kite | Osprey | Buff-banded Rail |

Purple Swamphen
Red-capped Plover
Latham's Snipe
Whimbrel
Pied Oystercatcher
Gull-billed Tern
Crested Pigeon
Galah
Eastern Rosella
Pheasant Coucal
Dollar-bird
White-throated Needletail
Varied Triller
Little Shrike-thrush
Willy Wagtail
Variegated Fairy-wren-
Brown Thornbill
Noisy Miner
Brown Honeyeater
Striated Pardalote
Spangled Drongo
Pied Currawong

Masked Lapwing
Red-neck Stint
Bar-tailed Godwit
Common Greenshank
Silver Gull
Common Tern
Bar-shouldered Dove
Corella
Common Koel
Sacred Kingfisher
Rainbow Bee-eater
Welcome Swallow
Eastern Yellow Robin
Grey Fantail
Eastern Whipbird
White-browed Scrubwren
Little Wattlebird
Lewin's Honeyeater
Striped Honeyeater
Figbird
Grey Butcherbird
Australian Magpie

Pacific Golden Plover
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
Eastern Curlew
Black-winged Stilt
Crested Tern
Little Tern
Brown Cuckoo-Dove
Rainbow Lorikeets
Laughing Kookaburra
Azure Kingfisher
Tawny Frogmouth
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Rufous Whistler
Rufous Fantail
Superb Fairy-wren
White-throated Gerygone
Blue-faced Honeyeater
White-cheeked Honeyeater
Silvereye
Magpie Lark
Pied Butcherbird
Torresian Crow

Feature Bird – Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*)



The Pacific Golden Plover is listed on both the China Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA) and the Japan Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA1998/99). Apparently about 9000 birds migrate to the beaches and mudflats of Australia's coastline from the arctic tundra of western Alaska and far northern Russia where they breed. About 1800 arrive in New South Wales each year. Generally

arriving in August-September and leaving April-May, some birds over-winter in Australia. The non-breeding birds that are seen in Australia have a mottled grey-brown to pale-yellow speckled plumage, with white, streaked brown, underparts. There is a broad white eyebrow above the large eye and the bill is short and black. The plumage changes to black and gold when breeding, which makes them one of the most colourful migrant waders. Some individuals display varying intensities of these breeding colours while they are on our shores both on arrival and before departure..

Bird size is about 24-26cm and they feed on insects, small crustaceans and worms. They are usually seen in small flocks, inhabiting coastal and sub-coastal wetlands, fields and inland swamps. At Belongil over the past three years up to sixty birds have been sited at one time, but the usual number is about 38. They congregate on the sand and grassy dunes at the mouth of the creek during high tide and feed on the mud flats in the inner creek at low tide.



Belongil.