

The Belongil Estuary Bird and Field Report – Jan Olley

Report No 31

Date 18/4/07

Report for 1st January to 16th April 2007

Its ages since the last report so lots to tell!

First of all I guess everyone now has heard that the Belongil Bird Buddies have had a name change. The Buddies will be now known as Byron Bird Buddies. Essentially nothing, at this stage anyway, has changed except the ability to further bird conservation activities for seabird, shorebirds and waterbirds in Byron Shire and the Marine Park area, through education. Isabel has done a fantastic job with the assistance of CMA funding producing an education package and getting the message out. Hope you have all seen the posters around town, using Reid's photos. With a shire wide focus people in other areas, particularly those who live near the other two estuaries, can now become involved. The Byron treatment works wetlands are in the process of building a bird hide for waterbird observation. Mark your calendars for the 25th August for a bird field day with BBB's, BVL and Byron Shire Council.

On Monday when I visited the estuary, a sandbank had obstructed the mouth of the creek preventing the tea-tree stained water from flowing to the sea and elevating the water in the creek and covering the inner sand and mud flats. To my knowledge this has happened, only a couple of time in the past 18 months. This time last year the creek was well open to the sea and tidal action was causing enormous amount of erosion to the front dunes. Even though the tidal action and onshore winds have not been as damaging this year there is still extensive amount of erosion happening on the frontal dunes and creek sandbanks.

The Rainbow Bee-eaters use the frontal dunes to build nest and raise chicks. Over the Xmas period a number of nest were destroyed and chicks died due to this activity. Reid and Isabel rescued a couple of chicks which were sent to WIRES in Lismore for care.

Despite the fence (erected at the request of BBB's) people are still accessing the creek this way, exacerbating the erosion problem. Another melaleuca, a favourite of the Friar Birds had slumped into the creek since February. I watched 8 people just in half an hour on the Easter holiday week-end climb down the dune and cross the creek.



Frontal dune erosion –mouth of the Belongil 4/4/07



Remember this access from Becton!

28/06/07

That Easter week-end was the first time in ages that I was able to cross the creek with an in-coming tide and only get my knees wet but most of the sandbanks in the inner estuary were covered.. I assumed then, that the creek was in the process of closing and 10 days later it had although I am not sure of the exact date it closed.

Over the past four months my visits have been limited and I missed March altogether. A small number of Bar-tailed Godwits were resident all over summer, they were starting to get their breeding colours in February and they had all gone by the 6th of April. On the 6th of April the Pacific Golden Plovers were showing strong breeding colours and 10 days later only 3 of the 27 were left and none of these were in breeding colours so possibly they were last season's juveniles. Also on the 6th April, hidden amidst the sand dunes were 5 Red-neck Stints and two NZ migrators the Double-banded Plovers. Scattered all over the beach, the tide lines and the creek edges you will always find a number of Red-capped Plovers darting too and fro.

As the sand and mud flats were all inundated with water there were no birds in the inner creek except the lonely Greenshank sitting forlornly on a piece of drift wood. The two Oystercatchers are still together. A small number of Little Terns have finally arrived but as their breeding season is over they are most likely on there northern migration. About 10 were sitting amongst about 200 Common Terns and 60 Crested Terns on Monday. Three have been spotted fishing off the New Brighton Beach during March and April and also a number have been reported on the Brunswick River wall.



Pacific Golden Plover in breeding colours



Royal Spoonbill – golf course drains

After the silence of the hot summer months the chirps of the birds have returned to the riparian strip along the Belongil. But you never know what you might see..... as usual I was looking through my binoculars, this time at a Scarlet Honeyeater high up in a flowering melaleuca when I suddenly realised I was also looking at a green tree snake wrapped around a branch enjoying a bit of warm autumn sun. When I couldn't hold the binoculars up any longer I realised I was also being watched a small swamp wallaby with its head poking out just above the sedges in the salt marsh was intensely watching me it hopped off as soon as we made eye contact and I could not locate the bird or the snake again. For the first time I spotted a Buff-banded Rail in the inner creek I've never seen them outside the resort before. The Osprey was tending the nest instead of being in its usual position on its perch pole. We await the arrival of a mate; from my report last year two Ospreys were attending the nest by the 25th of April.

Birds Observed in the lower Belongil during January to 16/4/07

Australasian Grebe	Double-banded Plover	Sacred Kingfisher	Blue-faced Honeyeater
Little Black Cormorant	Red-capped Plover	Dollar-bird	Noisy Miner
Little Pied Cormorant	Bar-tailed Godwit	Rainbow Bee-eater	Lewin's Honeyeater
Pied Cormorant	Eastern Curlew	White-throated Needletail	White-cheeked Honeyeater
Great Egret	Common Greenshank-	Tree Martin	Scarlet Honeyeater
Intermediate Egret	Pied Oystercatcher	Welcome Swallow	Brown Honeyeater
Little Egret	Silver Gull	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Striped Honeyeater
White-faced Heron	Crested Tern	Varied Triller	Mistletoebird
Striated Heron	Common Tern	Eastern Yellow Robin	Silveryeye
Australian White Ibis	Little Tern	Little Shrike-thrush	Striated Pardalote
Royal Spoonbill	Crested Pigeon	Grey Fantail-Rufous Fantail	Red-browed finch
Australian Wood Duck	Bar-shouldered Dove	Willy Wagtail	Figbird
Hardhead	Brown Cuckoo-Dove	Eastern Whipbird	Magpie Lark
Pacific Black Duck	White-headed Pigeon	Superb Fairy-wren	Spangled Drongo
Brahminy Kite	Galah	Variegated Fairy-wren	Grey Butcherbird
Whistling Kite	Rainbow Lorikeets	White-browed Scrubwren	Pied Butcherbird
Osprey	Scaly-breasted Lorikeets	Brown Thornbill	Pied Currawong
Australian Brush-turkey	Eastern Rosella	Little Wattlebird	Australian Magpie
Buff-banded Rail	Fantail Cuckoo	Noisy Friarbird	Torresian Crow
Dusky Moorhen	Common Koel		
Purple Swamphen	Laughing Kookaburra		
Masked Lapwing	Pheasant Coucal		
Pacific Golden Plover			

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BBB members have reported that dog numbers are way down on previous years, the Council and National and Marine Parks have increased their patrols and we think the new big sign has had an effect.

Brendan provide the following information;

Title: Signage reduces the impact of human disturbance on little tern nesting success in Portugal

Authors: Medeiros, R; Ramos, JA; Paiva, VH; Almeida, A; Pedro, P; Antunes, S

Source: BIOLOGICAL CONSERVATION, 135 (1): 99-106; FEB 2007

Abstract: This study evaluated the influence of human disturbance in nesting success of little tern (*Sterna albifrons*) and its interaction with the intrinsic seasonal variation in the birds' breeding biology. During 2003-2005 we studied little tern nesting ecology in southern Portugal in two different types of habitat: their natural habitat (sandy beaches) and a man-made habitat (Salinas). In both habitat types, annual variations were found in the distribution of nest initiation over the breeding season and in the size of the clutches. The percentage of nests producing hatched chicks varied between 26.7% and 66.4% in different years and different habitats. The main causes of hatching failure varied between years and habitats, but predation, flooding and human activities were very common. No consistent differences in breeding parameters or nesting success were found between habitats. On sandy beaches, the effect of protective measures (warning signs and wardening) on nesting success, together with differences between years and within each breeding season, were assessed using a logistic regression model. The presence/absence of protective measures was the most important predictor of nesting success, with birds being up to 34 times more likely to succeed with protective measures. Seasonal declines were found for clutch size and egg volume, and season was also an important predictor of nesting success, with nests more likely to succeed earlier in the season. Hence, earlier breeders will be those that benefit more from protective measures, suggesting that conservation efforts for little tern can be maximised if concentrated earlier in the season. (c) 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Regards Jan

28/06/07