

## The Byron Bird Buddies Field Report – Jan Olley

Report No 32

Date 18/4/07

Report for 16<sup>th</sup> April to 17<sup>th</sup> August 2007

As the Bird Buddies have changed by expanding the groups focus to include water and shore bird conservation and education of the Byron Shire and the Marine Park to Lennox Head, so must this report. First with a name change and secondly it will now include observations and issues regarding birds and habitats in those areas.

The future events mentioned in the last report in April (you can see it on the website) are just about to happen. You should have all received the e-flyer detailing the field day events next weekend the 25<sup>th</sup> August, with walks and talks as well as the opening of the bird hide at the West Byron Wetlands. Isabel has been very enterprising with getting the education message into the schools and currently, there is a photo exhibition in the Byron Council foyer featuring Reid's photos of Birds of the Belongil.

**The Belongil -** Nigel, Arakwal NP ranger says the Bundjalung meaning of Belongil can be broken into two words; *Belon* – meaning paperbark and *gil* meaning opening to the sea, said quickly *Belongil* means paperbark opening to the sea.

At the time of the last report in April the Belongil Creek mouth was closed to the sea and on about the 6<sup>th</sup> of June the mouth was artificially opened, this happens from time to time when the water reaches a certain height in the upper reaches of the creek. Put simply, the strategy is aimed at maintaining a healthy system so as to reduce fish kills, the last fish kill being more than five years ago. By the number of phone calls that BBB received some people were obviously surprised by this activity. Since June, it's possible the creek has closed and may have been opened again several times, but currently it flows to the sea taking the same course as when it's artificially opened. The picture shows the sand dunes created along the creek edge by the dredging and the wooden fence seen in the foreground is being erected by the Beach Resort to prevent people using the exposed dune face to access to the creek. The Rainbow Bee-eaters are back again and look to be investigating nest sites at several places along the creek, including the exposed dune seen in the picture.



Rainbow Bee-eater



Belongil Creek – 12-8-07

If the creek remains tidal it will be perfect habitat for the returning migratory birds the reason for the celebrations on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Already we are seeing migratory birds along the shores and wetlands in other areas. A number of Bar-tailed Godwits were seen at Brunswick as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> July. On Wednesday last week at Brunswick Eastern Curlews and Grey-tailed Tattlers were spotted and Latham Snipe were seen at Belongil and the Byron Wetlands.

Another reason to celebrate is the Belongil is once again a nursery. The resident Pied Oystercatchers laid two eggs, a month earlier than last year, and one chick has hatched and is almost three weeks old. Heather and I watched yesterday as one parent flew off constantly looking for food and the other stood guard. As the parent returned with the food it would give a brief squawk and the chick would run out from a well camouflaged position amidst beach debris and take the offering then disappeared again into its hiding position. When a beach-goer walked into the area ignoring the fence and bird-nesting messages, the parent rushed back with a different squawk and the chick obviously got the message and stayed hidden while both parents remained alert to any threat.

The Red-caps have two very tiny chicks that are running all over the sand flats, they need to be very aware of the Ospreys who also have chicks and are constantly on the look out for food. We watched on Thursday as the Osprey caught and killed a huge fish by bashing it on a branch in the middle of the estuary. It then took it into the nest of the 10 day old and constantly shrieking chicks and when it thought they had enough it took the fish to the other pole and wasn't sharing it with anyone. The other parent looked dejected and eventually flew off looking for her own snack and the chicks were left crying. A Masked Lapwing sits on four eggs among the dunes. As well as the Bee-eaters the Striated Pardalotes are also busy seeking out a site to burrow a nest in the sand bank.



Osprey chicks 18-8-07 - photo Reid Waters



White-neck Heron and Pacific Black Ducks

### **Other Areas**

**South Brunswick Heads** - Wendy from Brunswick Valley Bird Watchers (a bird watchers group started in the early '90's) told me that they had an exciting start to their morning bird walk at the beginning of the Greys Lane track near the Brunswick Surf Club in July. While checking out a side track they all had a wonderful sighting of the beautifully coloured Noisy Pitta bobbing around, turning leaves over in the undergrowth. Noisy Pittas migrate at the end of summer from the wet mountain rainforests to spend the winter in the coastal lowland forest, apparently flying during the night. Other birds

spotted that are not on the Belongil list are: Peaceful Dove, Spotted Turtle Dove, and Brown Quail

**Unusual Sightings for the Area April to August** - Last week at the West Byron Wetland a lonely Wood Sandpiper, an uncommon migrant which breeds as far north as Siberia, was feeding in one of the drained sewage ponds. Reid reported that a Black-neck Stork has been at the Belongil for at least 10 days during August and a juvenile was spotted at West Byron last week. In Billinudgel NR I saw the very colourful black and bright yellow Regent Bower Bird and a Bassian Thrush. In the ECHO, dead juvenile Australasian Gannets were reported washed up on the beach at the beginning of winter. The graceful adult gannets can be seen feeding off-shore at the moment and a NZ fur seal paid a visit to the Belongil and was rescued and transported to Seaworld. The White-neck Heron (see picture above) paid a rare visit to the ponds on Bay Resort golf course

**Birds Observed in the lower Belongil April 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Australasian Grebe	Red-capped Plover	Variegated Fairy-wren
Australasian Gannet	Red-neck Stint	White-browed Scrubwren
Australian Darter	Latham's Snipe	Large-billed Scrubwren
Little Black Cormorant	Black-winged Stilt	Brown Thornbill
Little Pied Cormorant	Pied Oystercatcher	Little Wattlebird
Pied Cormorant	Silver Gull	Red Wattlebird
Great Egret	Crested Tern	Noisy Friarbird
Intermediate Egret	Common Tern	Noisy Miner
Little Egret	Crested Pigeon	Lewin's Honeyeater
White-necked Heron	Bar-shouldered Dove	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
White-faced Heron	Galah	White-cheeked Honeyeater
Striated Heron	Rainbow Lorikeets	Eastern Spinebill
Australian White Ibis	Scaly-breasted Lorikeets	Scarlet Honeyeater
Royal Spoonbill	Laughing Kookaburra	Brown Honeyeater
Straw-necked Ibis	Sacred Kingfisher	Striped Honeyeater
Black-neck Stork	Azure Kingfisher	Mistletoebird
Australian Wood Duck	Rainbow Bee-eater	Silvereye
Hardhead	Tree Martin	Striated Pardalote
Pacific Black Duck	Welcome Swallow	Red-browed finch
Brahminy Kite	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Figbird
Osprey	Varied Triller	Magpie Lark
Australian Brush-turkey	Eastern Yellow Robin	Spangled Drongo
Buff-banded Rail	Golden Whistler	Grey Butcherbird
Dusky Moorhen	Little Shrike-thrush	Pied Butcherbird
Purple Swamphen	Grey Fantail	Pied Currawong
Masked Lapwing	Willy Wagtail	Australian Magpie
Pacific Golden Plover	Eastern Whipbird	Torresian Crow
Double-banded Plover	Superb Fairy-wren	

**Total 81 birds observed.** BBB members are once again reporting an increase in the number of dogs, seven in half an hour last month on a Saturday morning and even illegal campers with a dog within the fenced area. Hope to see you this coming week-end. Jan



Red-cap Plover



<http://www.byronbirdbuddies.com.au/>