



# EUROBODALLA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Inc.

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NEWSLETTER NO. 139

MARCH 2010

**THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** will be held at Trunketabella Gardens at 11 a.m. on Sunday 23 May; meet in the Gardens car park at 10.30 a.m. A nomination form is appended which needs to be with the Secretary by 14 May. A candidate should be nominated by two members and give written consent.

We welcome your participation. J Fearn, Public Officer.

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## CAN TURTLES PREDICT THE WEATHER?



The only local turtle, the Snake-necked Turtle, *Chelodina longicollis* seems to be much better at predicting the weather than the Bureau of Meteorology. In our yard they move regularly to and from Newstead Pond according to the season – up to higher land in late spring to lay their eggs then back to the pond; up to higher ground in autumn to over-winter and then back to the pond in early spring. Their movements are usually regular and you don't see many, just the occasional one in the yard or crossing the road.

During last year's drought, Newstead Pond dried up completely for the first time in about 20 years and there were a few turtles in the yard moving away from the drying pond in December. However, on February 2, three days before 130mm of rain fell over three days, and ten days before over 300mm fell in two days, our yard became a turtle highway. It was not uncommon to see five or six of them in the yards at once, all doggedly heading for the dry pond. On one morning my neighbour found 17 in his yard, all heading in the same direction! I don't know how they do it, but they certainly must have some predictive circuit wired into them that can sense the coming rain. The pond filled to overflowing during those two weeks and since then I haven't seen hide nor 'hair' of a turtle – they must be all in the pond doing whatever turtles love to do. (MC).

**WHAT TO EXPECT IN MAY-JUNE.** Winter, of course. The days growing shorter and the nights longer, the mornings and evenings nipping fingers and toes, and the birds busier than ever. Finding enough food to sustain them during those long, cold hours of darkness is no easy task. There is a lot less of it available than there was in summer; the moths, butterflies and beetles are gone, the caterpillars cocooned and hidden from sight, there are fewer skinks and lizards, a dearth of frogs, and blossom is scarce and not particularly nutritious. Those with strong beaks dig for worms, beetles and other invertebrates, some beg at back doors and scavenge the garbage and compost. Little brown birds search the undersides of leaves for spider sacs, moth cocoons and sucking insects. The honeyeaters harvest insects visiting the winter-flowering wattles and sip nectar from the few garden flowers. The night birds come into their own, lurking round outside lights and calling conversationally in the wee hours. Now is their courting time and, sadly, it coincides with the cold weather when we hear little of the life going on outside closed windows and doors and so we usually miss their haunting exchanges of 'whoos' and 'ooms'.

When the south wind blows, wrap up well and try to find a sheltered spot on a prominent headland to watch the albatrosses and gannets. If shelter can't be found, just be brave and immerse yourself in admiration of the skill of these big seabirds as they use the wind and the sea to their advantage. The albatrosses glide with effortless grace close to the waves, presumably searching for food. So why have I never seen one snatch a fish from the sea? And if they do make a catch, do they swallow it on the wing or at rest on the water? The eating habits of albatrosses are puzzling. In contrast, the gannet method of catch and dispatch is much more visible; plunge from a great height, emerge from the water with a prize, swallow it before flying off. The bird world is full of little mysteries and it throws one at us from time to time, just to keep us from becoming complacently unbearable know-alls.

## **NOTICE BOARD**

**FIELD MEETINGS. Saturday 10 April, Mummaga Lake.** Meet at 2 p.m. in Bodalla Forest Park Rest Area on Princes Hwy, approx. 9 km S of Bodalla. **Sunday 25 April, Meringo.** Meet at 9 a.m. at Bingie turn-off from Princes Hwy. **Saturday 8 May, Bumbo Road.** Meet at 2 p.m. at Bumbo Rd turn-off from Princes Hwy opposite Trunketabella Farm. **Sunday 23 May, AGM.** Meet at 10.30 a.m. in car park of Trunketabella Gardens. Lunch and birdwatching at Coopers I.

**NEW MEMBER** We welcome Jill Denning of Narooma.

## **ROBIN FAMILIES KEEP THEIR SECRETS**

It's amazing how much information one can have, yet still be in the dark. In 07/08 a pair of colour-banded Eastern Yellow Robins had a successful nest. The male was banded NP, black on pink (black is called noir to distinguish it from blue), the female NY, black on yellow. We banded one of the fledglings RO, red on orange and it turned out to be a male. In 08/09 RO helped his parents with their first nest then teamed up with an unbanded female and had a nest that was unsuccessful. So he went back home and helped his parents feed their second brood of that year.

In 09/10, the female NY had disappeared and NP had a new partner that we caught and banded as NS, black on light blue (saxe). We also managed to catch young RO's partner and band her as RS. It was a hard year for the pairs but both eventually succeeded in fledging young, and this is where the mystery begins. The old couple, NP and NS, fledged at least one young and we saw NP, NS and RO feeding this bird on the morning of October 25. It rained that day, it was a cold, wet night and we never saw the young bird again. By October 31 NP and NS were building again but abandoned that nest on November 30 and, surprisingly, did not have another, at least not to our knowledge. The young couple, RO and RS, had two failed nests but were successful with the third, which contained two young. It was empty on January 12 and that morning we found the parents with one young. Subsequently, we found RS with one young on January 18 and 24.

The problem is that on January 18 we also found, about 100 metres away, RO with his parents NP and NS, feeding a young bird the same age as the one RS was feeding. It was too young to be the bird that fledged on October 25 from the nest belonging to NP and NS. So, did the old couple have another successful nest after November 30, one that eluded our search, and RO was helping to feed

a fledgling from this nest? Or did RO and his mate RS actually fledge two young on January 12, the fledglings were split up, and we were now witnessing NP and NS helping their offspring rear one of his young? We don't know. **SMG.** (Are you sure this isn't yet another Greek myth? Ed.)

## INTERESTING AND UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS

**Great Frigatebird**, a first for Eurobodalla and a very rare sighting in the area. It appeared on Montague Island in late January and was still hanging around the island in late February.



The photo is by Paul Bourke, NPWS.

A **White-headed Petrel** beachwashed at CO on 13 Dec.'09.

(MC) photographed a **White-necked Heron** nest with 4 almost-fledged chicks in a eucalypt at MYA cemetery entrance on 16 Mar.; late?

A **Spotless Crake** at Coopers I. on 14 Nov.'09 (MC).

At TS estuary: on 9 Feb. (GR/WN) reported 14 **Pacific Golden Plovers**, 18 **Greenshanks**, unusually large numbers of both species; (PJP) reported effect of Feb. rain on waders: **Bar-tailed Godwit** down to 50 (last sight of Alaskan P1 on 7 Feb.), **Red-necked Stint** down from 75 to 14, **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** and **Ruddy Turnstone** gone by 9th, **Eastern Curlew** down to 6 at month end.

A **Red-kneed Dotterel** at Coopers I. on 14 Nov.'09 (MC).

## VULNERABLE AND THREATENED SPECIES

**Eastern Osprey**: 1 male at TS estuary 9 Feb.

**Square-tailed Kite**: **Jan**: 1 at MSH, Broulee, Pedro Swamp, Mystery Bay.

**Bush Stone-curlew**: usual bird at NA.

**Australian Pied Oystercatcher**: **Jan**: 28 at Coila L.; 4 at TS, Brou L.; 8 at TS estuary; 6 at NA; 1 at Mystery Bay. **Feb**: 6 at MHN; 4 at TS; 5(1 banded, 1 juv) at TS estuary; calls over Pedro Swamp. **Breeding**: 1 dy at TS estuary 12 Jan.

**Sooty Oystercatcher**: **Jan**: 6 at Mystery Bay; 3 at Candaglan Ck; 2 at NA; 1 at BP, Broulee. **Feb**: 3 at BP, 2 at TS.

**Hooded Plover**: no records submitted.

**Lesser Sand Plover**: (late record of 1 at TS estuary on 21 Nov.'09).

**Sanderling**: 1 at TS estuary on 5 Jan.

**Broad-billed Sandpiper**: (late record of TS estuary bird 19 Nov.'09).

**Little Tern**: **Jan**: 2 at Coila L.; 5-14 at TS estuary. **Feb**: last sighting of 2 on 9 Feb. **Breeding**: nest x 2 eggs Coila L. 20 Jan.; 1 dy at TS estuary 30 Jan.

**Fairy Tern**: last sighting of 3 at TS estuary on 12 Jan.

**Glossy Black-Cockatoo**: **Jan**: 2 at MO; 3 at BP; 4 at Bergalia; 5 at PDD. **Feb**: 3 at MSH, Pedro (1 juv), Bergalia; 4 at PDD; call at MKS.

**Masked Owl**: **Jan**: call at Pedro Swamp; 1 at MKS.

**Powerful Owl**: **Jan**: fresh road kill in Mogo town, adult; 1 at MO with Sugar Glider remains. **Feb**: call at MKS.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SYSTEMATIC LIST RECORDS

The following records are from January-February 2010.

**GROUND BIRDS**. **Emu** numbers reached 14 at TS estuary (GR/WN); 10 **Stubble Quail** daily, 2 **Brown Quail** in Feb. at Comerang (JC); 1 **Quail sp** at Pedro Swamp 8 Jan. (JM).

**WATERSIDE.** Max. 450 **Black Swan**; **Wood Duck** and **Pacific Black** numerous, calling at nest trees after flood at Comerang; 1 **Northern Mallard** in eclipse at TSF 28 Feb.; up to 20 **Grey Teal**, max. 65 **Chestnut**; 1 **Musk Duck** displaying at Pedro Swamp; a **Little Penguin** moulting at BP; up to 10 **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** at BP; 1 dead **Fluttering** at Bengello, wreck 10-20 at MSH, both in Feb. (BA/MC); 1 dying **Short-tailed** at Bengello; 1 or 2 **Aust. Grebe**; max. 44 **White Ibis**, up to 140 **Straw-necked**; up to 30 **Royal Spoonbill** at TS estuary, 1 at Mystery Bay, BBWG. Two **Nankeen Night Heron** at Comerang, 1 young at PDD (JC/JF); 1 **Striated** at Broulee (DR), 1 or 2 at TS estuary, single **White-necked** at Bergalia, Comerang (DHK/JC), **White-faced** widespread, flock of 23 at TS estuary Feb. 9 (GR/WN); up to 3 **Eastern Great Egret**, 1 **Intermediate** at Wagonga Inlet, 1-5 **Little**, 2 **Eastern Reef** at BP, 1 at Mystery Bay, MO (MA/NM); max. 60 **Pelican**; 1-3 **Gannet**; Cormorant maxima: 72 **Little Pied** (nest, dy at Little Lake, NA); 300 **Little Black**, 12 **Pied**, 40 **Black** (1 juv); 1 **Darter** at Brou Lake, 2 or 3 at Comerang, 4-6 at TS estuary.

**RAPTORS.** One or two **Kestrel** and single **Hobby** widespread; 2 **Brown Falcon** at Comerang, 1 at BP; 2 **Peregrine** (1 juv) at BP, 1 at Coila L., TS and estuary, Pedro, Comerang, 3 (ad. 2 imm) at MO; 1 or 2 **Black-shouldered Kite** (dy at TS); 1-4 **Whistling Kite** widespread, nest building at Horse I.; up to 5 **White-bellied Sea-Eagle**, several immatures, recently-vacated nest near TS sewage farm; single **Swamp Harrier** at Barlings, MYA, Kianga, PDD, MO; 1 or 2 **Grey Goshawk** at MHS, TS estuary, Comerang, MO, white-phase in Bodalla SF; 1 **Brown Goshawk** at TS, MO, Pedro Swamp, Bergalia; 1 **Collared Sparrowhawk** at BP, Pedro Swamp, Comerang; up to 3 **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, juv. at Pedro Swamp, Comerang; single **Little Eagle** at Barlings Swamp, Bergalia, PDD, MO.

**CRAKES, RAILS, GALLINULES & BUTTON-QUAILS.** Up to 10 **Purple Swamphen**, young at BBWG; **Dusky Moorhen** with young at BBWG, 4 at Coopers I., 2-4 at Comerang, 2 at MO; **Coot** with young at BBWG.

**WADERS.** One **Pacific Golden Plover** at Mystery Bay in Jan. (MA); **Red-capped Plover** rose to 130 at TS estuary in Feb.; 4 **Black-fronted** at Coila L., 2 at MO, 1 at CO (WN/NM/JM/JS); 1 **Latham's Snipe** at BBWG, 3 at West Flat (JF/JC); max. 350 **Bar-tailed Godwit** at NA in Jan.; no more than 3 **Whimbrel**; up to 15 **Eastern Curlew**; 5 **Red Knot** at TS estuary, 22 at NA; 118 **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** at TS estuary 2 Feb.; 1-5 **Curlew Sandpiper** at TS estuary in Jan. (PJP).

**SKUAS, GULLS & TERNS.** Up to 12 **Caspian Tern** at TS and estuary (JH/GR/WN); no more than 50 **Crested Tern**.

**OTHER NON-PASSERINES.** Up to 10 **White-headed Pigeon**; **Brown Cuckoo-Dove** call at MKS 21 Jan. (SMG); max. 10 **Common Bronzewing** widespread, 1 **Brush** at MKS 22 Feb.; no more than 6 **Wonga**; 2 **Peaceful Dove** at PDD, 1 at Comerang, TS (first sighting on site) (JF/JC/JH); max. 29 **Y-tailed Black-Cockatoo**; up to 6 **Gang-gang** at usual haunts, 8-15 at Pedro Swamp; lone **Long-billed Corella** still at TS; max. 60 **Little Corella** at MYA (JL); **Rainbow**, **Musk** and **Little Lorikeet** in good numbers; in Jan.1 juv. **Pallid Cuckoo** at Broulee, call at OMBS, 2 at Comerang; **Brush**, **Horsfield's**, **Shining Bronze** to end Jan.; 1 or 2 **Fan-tailed** both months; **Koel** declining in Feb.; **Channel-billed** to mid Feb.; **Southern Boobook** at MYA, Pedro, Bodalla SF, Bergalia (JL/JM/JS/DHK); 1 or 2 **Tawny Frogmouth** at MKS, Mystery Bay, MO, pr/2 young at PDD; **White-throated Nightjar** calls at MKS, PDD, Pedro Swamp, nest/1 chick at Pedro; **Owlet-nightjar** calls at MKS, Pedro; **White-throated Needle-tail** to end Feb.; 12 **Fork-tailed Swift** at Broulee in Jan. (DR); up to 6 **Sacred Kingfisher**; 1-3 **Azure** reported.

**PASSERINES.** Two **Superb Lyrebird** at NA, MKS; 1 or 2 **Red-browed Treecreeper** at PDD; **Striated Pardalote** calls at Pedro Swamp 20 Feb. (JM); a **Yellow-throated Scrubwren** on Spring Ck Trail, Bodalla SF in Jan. and 2 **Large-billed** in Box Cutting Reserve; a few **Brown Gerygone**; up to 20 **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**; 1-4 **Lewin's**; 2 **Brown-headed** at MO in Jan., 9 at PDD 12 at TS in Feb.; no more than 6 **White-naped**; **Noisy Friarbird** to end Feb.; 2-8 **White-cheeked** at PDD (BA/JF); 1 or 2 **Scarlet**; 2-7 **White-fronted Chat** at TS estuary (GR/WN); **Rose Robin** call at PDD, 1 at Box Cutting Reserve, 2 at Comerang; up to 11 **Varied Sittella**; **Rufous Whistler** to end Feb.; 1 or 2 **Crested Shrike-tit** at MKS, PDD, MO, 3 at TS estuary; **Rufous Fantail**, **Black-faced Monarch**, **Leaden Flycatcher** to end Feb.; 1 **Restless Flycatcher** at Comerang; 10 and

fewer **White-breasted Woodswallow** at Pedro Swamp, MHS to 4 Feb., then 50 at Malabar Weir on 1 Mar. (JM/MC); 2 **Masked** overflying Pedro Swamp 25 Feb.; up to 20 **Dusky** at MKS, Pedro Swamp, Comerang, MO, TS; **Cicadabird** to end Feb.; 2 **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike** at BP, call at MKS, 1 at Pedro Swamp, pr/2dy at Comerang; 2 **White-winged Triller** at Comerang to 7 Jan. (JC); **Figbird** at MYA to end Jan.; **Olive-backed Oriole** to end Feb.; 1 **Blackbird** at TS; up to 70 **Tree Martin**; small parties **Silvereye** moving N from early Feb.; 2 **Golden-headed Cisticola** at Comerang to end Jan., 4 at TS estuary 9 Feb.; 1-5 **Mistletoebird**; 12 **Aust. Pipit** at Comerang, 2 at Coila L., 1 at TS; strangely, no records **Aust. Reed Warbler** in either month.

**MAMMALS.** **Echidna** widespread; **Spotted-tailed Quoll** scats at Pedro Swamp; **Dusky Antechinus**, **Yellow-bellied Glider** in Bodalla SF; **Sugar Glider** as usual; **Bush Rat** at BP, TS; 1 **Brown Rat** at Mossy Pt (HR); 1 **Aust. Fur Seal** at NA; **Fox** at BP, MKS; 2 of original 3 **Bottlenosed Dolphin** at TS (1 died); 2 **Dolphin sp** at Bengello.

**REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS.** Many **Snake-necked Turtle** seen, laying eggs at Comerang; 10 **Water Dragon** at Comerang; up to 3 **Lace Monitor**; 1 **Diamond Python** at BP, Comerang; a **Mustard-bellied Snake** at BP; **Red-bellied Black** near water. **Common Eastern Froglet**; **Eastern Banjo**, **Brown-striped**, **Spotted Grass Frogs**; **Haswell's Froglet**; **Brown**, **Smooth** and **Tyler's Toadlets**; **Bleating**, **Brown**, **Peron's**, **Leaf-green**, **Tyler's** and **Verreaux's Tree Frogs**.

**INSECTS, MOTHS & BUTTERFLIES.** All the usual **Spider sp**; **Christmas**, **Longicorn Beetles**, **Ladybirds**; three **Cicada sp**; **Dragonflies** and **Damselflies**; **Blue-banded Bees**; among 15 Moth sp were a **Black Geometrid** and a **Convolvulus Hawk Moth**; among the 30 Butterfly sp were **Orange** and **Splendid Ochre**; **Blue Triangle**; **Yellow Admiral**; **Monarch** and **Imperial Hairstreak**.

**BLOSSOM.** Twenty-two species of local flowering trees, shrubs and vines were reported and four species of fruiting trees and shrubs.

**WEATHER.** January was generally warm and fairly dry (three days over 40deg.C), with light winds and a thunderstorm or two; chilly and a hailstorm on 18th. The heavens opened in the first two weeks of February; rivers ran and overflowed (Comerang had its largest flood in 18 yrs), lakes and lagoons opened, (some by machine) to the sea, wetlands filled and low lands flooded. Falls ranged from 300-400 mm in the northern parts of the Shire to 500-700 further south, and a whopping 900-something at Dignams Creek south of Narooma. **Rainfall: Jan:** 26.5mm at BP; 25mm at MKS; 28.5mm at MYA; 35 mm at Pedro Swamp; 13mm at TS; 29.5mm at Comerang. **Feb:** 387.5mm at BP; 457mm at MKS; 484mm at MYA; 429mm at Pedro Swamp; 637mm at TS; 721mm at Comerang.

#### **Correction for Newsletter No. 138**

**WEATHER . . . 2009 totals:** 647mm at BP, lowest annual total since we began records in 1995, driest month August 3.5mm, wettest October 121mm. 520mm at MKS. 503mm at MYA, driest August 3.5mm, wettest June 90.5mm. 555.5mm at Comerang.



OOZLUM'S CORNER

*This is the corner where members place interesting articles or publish their queries. We encourage you to send items to the Editor.*

#### **Christmas Beetles at Comerang**

In December and January, hundreds of Christmas Beetles arrived at Comerang farm and settled in Blue Box trees *Eucalyptus baueriana*. Julie discovered them one night when she heard a noise and thought it was a big wind coming through the trees. When the wind did not arrive, she walked further and realized a humming noise was coming from the Blue Box trees. She could see hundreds of beetles flying about, mating and chewing leaves, pieces of which were falling around her.

The next day the ground under the trees was covered in chewed bits of leaves, beetle scats (tiny, black and cylindrical-shaped) and a few dead beetles. The insects were often visible during the day and numbers peaked several times during their stay. The humming noise they made at night was not heard on rainy nights or when there was a threat of rain. There are three Blue Box trees on this part of the property but the beetles favoured one, which was largely defoliated by the time they left. Christmas Beetles are in the family Scarabaeidae, sub-family Rutelinae. They occasionally breed in large numbers and are capable of defoliating large trees. Scarab beetle larvae are cream-coloured with a dark head, curved, and have three pairs of legs on the underside of the head. They feed on plant matter in the soil where they are often encountered by gardeners. **JM.**



Mandy Anderson took this photo of an immature Wedge-tailed Eagle feasting on a Brushtail Possum.

#### CONTRIBUTORS

#### ABBREVIATIONS

BA	B Allan, PDD	JM	J Morgan, Pedro Swamp	BB	Batemans Bay
MA	M Anderson, Mystery Bay	WN	W Nelson, TS	BBWG	BB Water Gardens
JC	P&J Collett, Comerang	PJP	P Parker, TS	BI	Bermagui
MC	M Crowley, MHS	HR	H Ransom, Mossy Pt	BP	Burrewarra Point
JF	J Fearn, PDD	GR	G Rayner, TS	CO	Congo
SMG	M&S Guppy, MKS	DR	D Rosalky, Canberra	ERBG	Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens
JH	J&J Houghton, TS	JS	J Sagar, Pedro	MH	Moruya Heads N & S
TH	T Hunt, OMBS	JW	J Whiter, BP	MKS	Maulbrooks Rd S
DHK	D&H Kay, Bergalia	FM	Field Meeting	MO	Meringo
JL	J&J Liney, MYA	MZ	M Zwankhuisen, ACT	MYA	Moruya
RMcK	R Mackay, Canberra			NA	Narooma
NM	N Montgomery, MO			NP	Newstead Pond
				OMBS	Old Man Bed Swamp
				PDD	Percy Davis Drive
				PP	Potato Point
				SB	Surf Beach
				TL	Tilba Lake
				TN	Tomakin
				TS	Tuross Head
				WL	Wallaga Lake

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