

PETER NOLAN and RAPTORS

Val Dolan

Raptor aficionado, Peter Nolan's, annual sojourn in the northern hemisphere began with his attendance at the International Falconry Conference in Kearney, Nebraska, U.S.A. Representatives of 38 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Spain, Japan, Colombia and the Czech Republic gave presentations and many appeared in spectacular national costume at the conference dinner.

Later, meeting up with friends in Devon County, U.K., Peter continued the falconry theme of his holiday by hunting rabbits using American Harris's Hawks, assisted by ferrets. This bird is a captive breed in England. About a quarter of its flights resulted in a successful kill, which is appreciated by the vegetable gardeners who allow their properties to be used by hunters but not shooters. A slide showed one bird feasting on its final prey of the day.

While a friend was hunting with a precious four year old Peregrine Falcon the bird hit a wire amputating its leg. The caring owner drove for 3 1/2 hours to a veterinarian who had to euthanase the damaged bird.

The English weather in early December, 2006, was not conducive to comfortable bird watching with temperatures down to -1degree F, gale force winds, huge seas and overcast skies. Peter sometimes set off walking in the morning darkness, and with sunset at 3.37pm ... time was short, too. However, during his hunting walks, Peter sighted 27 small birds including a Red Legged Partridge, Green Kingfisher, Golden Plover and nine species of ducks. Driving to Dartmoor, in southern Devon, with the expectation of sighting some of the famous wild ponies only the more common deer were seen. Obviously lucky to see anything at all on the day, Peter's slide of Dartmoor's fog was reminiscent of a Turner painting!

Peter's enthusiasm was obvious and much appreciated by the club audience. Questions were answered about the differences between Peregrine Falcons around the world and Peter spoke of the plight of eagles in countries where farming and their habitat overlap. He also commented that many countries, much poorer than Australia, are involved in conservation and bird studies. Martin Cocker thanked Peter for his 'inimitable way' of making a club meeting interesting. Club members then monopolized Peter during supper looking at his still photographs and falconry magazines.

BLACKBUTT RESERVE WALK - Wednesday, 14/3/07

Chris Brandis

12 members met in the central carpark on a beautiful day and while waiting for the later arrivals Joan's sharp eyes spotted a White-throated Treecreeper, the first for years indicating, like the Eastern Whipbirds, there is some re-colonisation after the large fire some 15 years ago. By the time we were ready to move off we had some dozen species, including numbers of immature Spotted Pardalotes and a pair of Brown Goshawks, then as we moved down the central track a party of Fairywrens was found to have both Superb and Variegated present. This track led to the western carpark but there are a number of well used tracks going off on both sides but they all end up at the edge where there is a ring track. We arrived at the dam which was a picture with the bright smooth water with a dark forest background and plenty of dragonflies skimming around, a good spot for morning tea overlooking an Eurasian Coot on a nest.

As we were preparing to go eagle eye Jim spotted a Large-billed Scrubwren, the first ever for this area, and then a Rufous Fantail showed us how it got its name. We returned up a narrow mountain bike track back to the centre track and then wended our way back to the cars. The area is often quite busy at weekends with the picnic area well patronised by groups enjoying

the green space. With 2 new birds for the area it just goes to show that many eyes make for good spotting and an interesting walk around a nice local area.

Bird List

Black Swan	Pacific Black Duck	Little Pied Cormorant
Little Black Cormorant	Australian White Ibis	Brown Goshawk
Purple Swamphen	Dusky Moorhen	Eurasian Coot
Spotted Turtle Dove	Galah	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Rainbow Lorikeet	Crimson Rosella	Laughing Kookaburra
White-throated Treecreeper	Superb Fairywren	Variiegated Fairywren
Spotted Pardalote	White-browed Scrubwren	Large-billed Scrubwren
Brown Gerygone	Brown Thornbill	Yellow Thornbill
Red Wattlebird	Lewin's Honeyeater	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
New Holland Honeyeater	Eastern Spinebill	Eastern Yellow Robin
Eastern Whipbird	Golden Whistler	Magpie Lark
Rufous Fantail	Grey Fantail	Willie Wagtail
Black-face Cuckoo-shrike	Grey Butcherbird	Australian Magpie
Pied Currawong	Australian Magpie	Red-browed Finch
Mistletoebird	Red-whiskered Bulbul	Silvereeye

* **Help !** Catherine Thomas, an Honours student at UTS is seeking help for her thesis on the Australian White Ibis. Specifically she is seeking sightings, numbers and locations of the ibis from March 20 to April 20 and then later in June/July. She would love it if you can help with bird sightings etc, and filling out a brief questionnaire. Catherine can be contacted at Catherine.A.Thomas@student.uts.edu.au

BEHIND the MENACE OF HITCHCOCK'S BIRDS

Mike MORPHETT

I guess we IBOCers joined the club as ornithophiles and not in order to overcome any hint or evidence of ornithophobia; still, I suspect that between these two extremes most of us on at least one occasion have felt some apprehension when confronted by a certain bird species, when there has been a too-close-for-comfort situation for both parties. Images of the open beak and raised wings of a honking sentinel goose or an irritable caged parrot or a large raptor with powerful talons may come to mind.

I was in my early twenties when I saw Alfred Hitchcock's horror movie *The Birds*, released by Universal Pictures in 1963, which Mark Obmascik quips "made the world think twice about backyard feeders". It was this American journalist's book, *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession* (Bantam Books 2004), I'm currently reading, that reawakened my interest in the film. Somewhat similar to Sean Dooley's personal experiences in *The Big Twitch* (Allen & Unwin 2005) in our own country, Obmascik traces the individual journeys in all sorts of conditions across North America during the year of 1998 by three birders in their obsession to record the highest number of avian species. Two of his protagonists, Al Levantin and Sandy Komito (Greg Miller makes up the trio) by chance joined the same tour boat to search Bodega Bay, north of San Francisco. This harbour was where Hitchcock did most of his filming. Inspiration came to him from two prime sources: Daphne du Maurier's short story of the same name, set in Britain, and a report in a Californian newspaper in August 1961 of strange and at times violent behaviour exhibited by certain seabirds. According to the Wikipedia, it was thought they suffered amnesic shellfish poisoning from ingesting fish containing domoic acid produced by the algae *Pseudo-nitzschia australis*.

After the initial innocuous pet shop scene, I recall the impact of the turn of events in the film: the sinister large gathering of crows on the children's playground gym equipment amid the succession of seemingly arbitrary and unexplained attacks on individuals and groups of people in the coastal village by these and other ordinary birds that we generally take for granted; namely, (western) seagulls, ravens and sparrows. Humans sought refuge from avian air-raids at a diner, an outdoor birthday party, and a gas station, and windows were splintered by diving birds.



To create heightened tension, the director enlisted the help of Ub Iwerks, who afterwards was nominated for an Academy Award for special visual effects, and bird trainer, Ray Berwick. Needless to say there were many technical problems to overcome over forty years ago to produce over 1400 shots. Live action with trained birds, mechanical birds, animation, and optically altered film overlay of flying birds were methods used. For many months Berwick trained birds to perform in simulated menacing ways: seagulls to circle over actors and return to his hand, and, in scenes where children featured, their beaks were wired shut for the protection of the children. Many gull scenes were shot in San Francisco, where the population was noted to be naturally nasty. Ravens and crows learned to peck hamburger off of actors' faces or seed sprinkled in their hair. Crows were made to lurk on the gutters of the old schoolhouse with magnets attached to their feet. One raven, named Corvus, took a particular dislike to Rod Taylor and attacked him at every opportunity, whereas another raven, Buddy, lived up to his name and refused to attack anyone for he welcomed human contact. At the outset Tippi Hedren was told that mechanical birds would be used in the brutal bedroom attack scene; however, live birds were thrown at her by the prop men for a week. Upon almost having her eye gouged, she became hysterical and collapsed and for a week suffered "flapping birds" nightmares. Elsewhere in the film she had birds attached to her by long nylon threads. Obmascik states that children fleeing swarms of black birds were actually running on a studio treadmill with the birds tied to their necks. He also refers to raspberry-dipped house finches pouring into a living-room through the fireplace. Another version describes attempts to lower 2000 bullfinches down the chimney, but instead they just hung out on any available perches.

So why did birds start and keep attacking humans? In an interview with French film director and critic, Francois Truffaut, who was influenced by Hitchcock's works, the latter said he didn't believe there was a reason. A number of theories have been advanced: in general to symbolise the frailty of human relationships, particularly in the form of feelings of, and responses to, attraction and rejection. More specifically, one critic's suggestion is the manifestation of a mother's anger, to the point of rage, towards other women's attempts to gain her son's affection, whereas in another's view the birds serve as a reminder that control is an illusion and those who persist to manipulate or dominate are the most vulnerable to unpredictable circumstances.

Should ever a *Birds III* movie be made - there was a 1994 Cable TV sequel, which I've not seen and apparently haven't missed much as it was generally considered a failure despite the appearance of Tippi Hedren in a different role - I should imagine, and perhaps hope, that the motive behind similarly relentless, aggressive behaviour would be as a payback for our universal destruction of their feeding and breeding habitats.

Travels in New Zealand, or 'I Feel Like A Tooheys or TUI!' Val Dolan

I didn't go to New Zealand for birdwatching but rather to attend a conference in Auckland and to catch up on some family history on the way. Driving from Wellington we saw millions of sheep, thousands of black and white cows but few birds. When we booked into the local pub at Taihape and asked the publican to recommend a NZ beer, \$6 bought us two half pints of Tui (pronounced Toohey, which sounded familiar!) The next day we bought a six pack of

Tui at the supermarket and noticed the lids had a picture of a tiny black bird with a tuft of white feathers under its beak. On our very first bushwalk at Huka Falls, above Lake Taupo, we sighted our first distinctive Tui . A shiny black bird with a ‘bow tie’ of white feathers let us have a fleeting glimpse as it flew into the trees by the river and caused us great excitement. We didn’t yet know that the Tui is a very common bird on the north island. It was to become the symbol of our trip.



All the rooms at the Tauranga YHA are named for native trees. Ours was KOHEKOHE (the native cedar). An attractive print decorated one wall and a framed account of the uses of these trees the other. Maori cooked seabirds, often Shearwaters, in these leaves to disguise the strong taste and give a mixture of garlic, onion and spinach flavour to the dish. We also learned that once a year the Tui feasts on the ripe scarlet seeds of this tree and grows very fat. Maori have a saying ‘he koko kai kohe,’ which

means something like: ‘you’re as fat as a Tui !.’ At a waterfront pub in Tauranga I ordered a couple of Tuis and the young Irish couple serving me said they kept seeing this distinctive bird but couldn’t identify it until they watched a David Attenborough documentary.

Booking into a park on the Coromandel Peninsular we were treated for the first time to the call of the Tui as it returned to roost in a pine tree for the night. Great imitators it also gave us a rendition of a Bellbird’s call, a bird it shared the tree with. My friend had an up close and personal encounter with the Coromandel Tui as it joined her for an early morning cuppa. She reported that as well as the distinctive neck tufts it also had a ring of longer decorative feathers around its neck. First settlers named it the parson bird for its distinctive collar.

Reaching Auckland I spent \$50 on a substantial bird book and another \$10 on a pocket guide to carry on walks. These told us that the Tui was an endemic honeyeater, 30 cm long, and confirmed many of our observations. The Auckland Museum records that Maoris tamed Tui and taught them to talk, even to offer a greeting to strangers. My final encounter was at the wondrous stainless steel railway station (Britomart) in Auckland where a huge billboard caught my eye - a single black Tui on a yellow background advertising the local brew. Enough to make one feel like a Tui or two!

Bellawongarah, Cambewarra Lookout, Red Rock - 18.3.07 Sylvia Garlick

It was a cool and overcast Sunday, but great for walking.

We (14 of us all told) met Betty at the turnoff to the cemetery, and parked the cars at the fire station. A walk around the parking area then down to the Historical Cemetery rewarded us with sightings of Lewin's Honeyeater, Superb Lyrebird, Crimson Rosella, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Grey Butcher Bird AND a few leeches. SO morning tea was taken on the fire station verandah that had a cement floor.



At the Top - David, Betty, Nerida, Sylvia, Joan Z, Bill, Terry Photo: Martin Cocker

Next we walked up the gentle slope to the rain forest, the rocks and leaves were dripping wet from yesterday's rain. Excellent cover was provided for birds, animals and insects by the understory of giant Bird's Nest and Rasp Ferns growing on the rocks as well as the ground. Here we saw Rufous Fantail, Brown Thornbill, Yellow Robin, Eastern Whipbird, Grey Shrike Thrush. On the path was a Bassiau Thrush. Only the second time I have seen this bird. On the right hand side of the track Red Browed Finches were sitting on the fence. The gate was locked so we returned to the cars and headed for Cambewarra Lookout. Here we saw three Brown Goshawks.

We parked the 2wheel drive vehicles and left in the 4wheel drive vehicles and headed for Red Rock. Lunch along the track and then a slow walk. to the Aboriginal Site overlooking Nowra, Bombaderry and the Shoalhaven River. Lots of birds in this area Red and Little Wattle Birds, Whitenaped Honeyeater, Yellow Faced Honeyeater, Grey Fantail, Dusky Woodswallow, Spotted Pardalote, Silvereeye and an immature Scarlet Honeyeater.

Time to return to the Lookout, and thank Betty for another interesting excursion, and head for home. 38 bird species sighted all told.

Brown Goshawk	Brown Thornbill	Grey Shrike-thrush
White Headed Pigeon	Brown Gerygone	Rufous Fantail
Brown Cuckoo-Dove	Red Wattle Bird	Grey Fantail
Wonga Pigeon	Little Wattle Bird	Dusky Woodswallow
Topnot Pigeon	Lewin's Honeyeater	Grey Butcher Bird
Australian King Parrot	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Australian Magpie
Crimson Rosella	White-napped Honeyeater	Pied Currawong
Laughing Kookaburra	New Holland Honeyeater	Australian Raven
Superb Lyrebird	Eastern Spinebill	Satin Bowerbird
Superb Fairy Wren	Scarlet Honeyeater	Redbrowed Finch
Spotted Pardalote	Eastern Yellow Robin	Silvereeye
Yellow-throated Scrubwren	Eastern Whipbird	Bassian Thrush
White-browed Scrubwren	Golden Whistler	

...and Pieces

* **Congratulations** to longtime IBOC member Lindsay Smith, who has reaped another prestigious award. The following appeared in the Mercury recently.

"Unanderra resident Lindsay Smith was yesterday presented with the Serventy Conservation Medal for his commitment to wildlife protection. At the Parliament House ceremony, Mr. Smith was recognised for his work protecting seabirds.

"Mr. Smith has been actively studying the seabirds visiting the coast near Wollongong for over 50 years and has become an expert on Australian seabirds, especially the albatross.

"Mr. Smith describes himself as an amateur, but in 1987 the Australian Museum employed him as an ornithologist for his research and he received an OAM for his work in 2004."

* **Projector** After much debate, the Committee has decided to purchase a projector for the club. (Up to now we have borrowed or hired projectors) Chris Brandis has investigated a number of machines, and compared prices. The Committee gave approval the purchase of a machine up to \$1000 approx (Prices range from \$800 to \$2,500) \$500 will be withdrawn from the club's Term Deposit and the rest will be paid from general funds.

* **BIGnet** Chris Brandis attends various BIGnet meetings on behalf of the club, and reports and writes about them. But he wonders, 'Does anyone read these reports? Is it worth the time and effort he puts into it?' What say you? Feedback is wanted? Talk with Chris!

* **Colour Supplement** Colin and Melissa Markham traveled to Kenya in August last year. They stayed at Larsens Tented Camp in Samburu Game Reserve, at Kicheche Tented Camp on the Masai Mara and in the Great Rift Valley staying at Lake Elementatia, Lake Nakuru, Lake Baringo, Lake Bororia and Lake Naivasha. Two weeks all told.

These three areas of Kenya have a vast array of bird species.

The **Markhams** have provided the two back pages of their bird photos of this IBOC News, *gratis*, to the club. And there will be another Colour Supplement to come from them!

Biggest and Smallest – the Same Bird – How's That? Dave Thomson

I've been thumbing through some bird statistics. Remarkable what you can find. Bet you didn't know that the greatest number of broods raised in one year by a bird pair was 21, and by a pair of our Zebra Finches. Or that one of the birds most susceptible to nasal leech infestation is the swan. You didn't? Luckily, some of the stuff is much more interesting.

The world's smallest bird is the Bee Hummingbird of central America, weighing in at just 1.6 grams (our smallest, the Weebill, weighs about 6 gms). The smallest mammal is probably the mouse-like Savi's Pygmy Shrew of the Mediterranean, which comes in about 3 grams, double the weight of the smallest bird. The largest bird is the Ostrich of Africa, weighing in at about 150 kg while the largest mammal is the Blue Whale, tipping the scales at about 150 tonnes – 1,000 times the weight of the largest bird. But the Ostrich is far too heavy to fly, leaving the title of heaviest flying bird to the 21 kg Great Bustard of Africa. The mammals have a similar problem in that the whale is so heavy that it can't be supported like the other large mammals by a prop on each corner, it has to have its weight uniformly supported over its body by living in water. The largest walking mammal is the 7 tonne Asian Elephant.

And we all know that the Peregrine Falcon when diving (stooping) on its prey is the fastest bird - in such a dive it can reach 188 km/h. In level flight, the title seems to go to the racing pigeon (Rock Dove) at a speed of 177 km/h, with the White-throated Needletail and the Red-breasted Merganser (duck) close behind. The title for the slowest flying bird goes to the American Woodcock (snipe-like game bird), getting along at the remarkable pace of 8 km/h. And while we're on flying, wing beats per second range from 2.3 for a lapwing through 5.0 for a Mallard and 9.0 for a pheasant, but none can match the hummingbirds. The South American Amethyst Woodstar (hummingbird) beats its wings 90 times a second, the resulting

hum being pitched about one and a half octaves below middle C, just a couple of notes lower than the familiar hum from our electrical gear.

Some of the more interesting figures involve eggs. As we'd expect, the biggest egg, 1,600 grams, is that of the Ostrich, while the smallest is, again not surprisingly, that of a hummingbird, the Vervain Hummingbird of the West Indies, weighing in at a mere 0.37 grams. And the biggest egg relative to the size of the adult is that of the Little Spotted Kiwi – though it weighs only 310 grams, it's 26% of the mother's 1.2 kg. At the other end of the scale, the Ostrich nearly makes it as the smallest egg relative to size of the adult at 1.8%, but the record goes to the Emperor Penguin whose 450 grams egg is 1.5% of the mother's 30 kg weight.

And so the figures go on – longest bill (Australian Pelican, 470 mm), country with the most introduced species (US (Hawaii), 68), deepest dive (Emperor Penguin, 540 m), most intelligent (Grey Parrot of Africa), highest price paid for an egg (1,000 pounds for that of the extinct *Aepyornis maximus*) and so on.

If you'd like to find more exciting information, try *The Bird Almanac*, by David M. Bird.

Unusual Records for February 2007

Chris J. Chafer

Send your records to: email cchafer@speedlink.com.au

Species	#	Date	Location	Habitat	Observer
Great Crested Grebe	1	17-Feb	Yallah	pond	IM
Streaked Shearwater	1	24-Feb	off Wollongong	marine	LS
Nankeen night Heron	1	11-Feb	Windang Bowling Club	lake shore	MR
Pacific Baza	1	31-Jan	bottom Macquarie Pass NP	forest	IM
Brown Goshawk	1	15-Feb	Excelsior Reserve, Thirroul	overhead	MM
Wedge-tailed Eagle	2	2-Feb	Berry Mountain	overhead	BA
Wedge-tailed Eagle	1	24-Feb	Jerrara Dam	overhead	IM
Painted Button-quail	1	2-Feb	Berry Mountain	roadside	BA
Black-fronted Dotterel	5	17-Feb	Spring Creek wetland, Kiama	wetland	MR
South Polar Skua	1	24-Feb	off Wollongong	pelagic	LS
Arctic Jaeger	1	12-Feb	Bellambi Point	inshore	JW
Long-tailed Jaeger	2	3-Feb	Black Head, Geroa	inshore	BA
Common Tern	1	12-Feb	Bellambi Point	rocky shore	JW
Sooty Tern	1	24-Feb	off Wollongong	pelagic	LS
White-headed Pigeon	1	22-Feb	Minnamurra Rainforest	rainforest	JM
Topknot Pigeon	50+	23-Feb	Balgownie	overhead	RT
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	3	3-Feb	Bendella	garden	RR
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	5	17-Feb	Bomaderry Creek Reserve	woodland	BH
Red-rumped Parrot	3	11-Feb	Barrack Point	parkland	MR
Noisy Pitta	1	1-Feb	near Upper Cordeaux Dam	rainforest	JR
Rose Robin	1	4-Feb	bottom Macquarie Pass NP	forest	BO
Rose Robin	1	20-Feb	Bellawongarah	garden	BA
Logrunner	2	15-Feb	Excelsior Reserve, Thirroul	forest	MM
Crested Shrike-tit	5	5-Jan	Gibson track, Thirroul	forest	IM
Leaden Flycatcher	1	24-Feb	Jerrara Dam	woodland	IM
Spangled Drongo	1	20-Feb	Bellawongarah	garden	BA
Dusky Woodswallow	6	26-Feb	Barrack Point	roadside tree	MR
Bassian Thrush	1	8-Feb	Keiraville	garden	ME

Contributors: BA - Bob Ashford; ME – Mary Eskdale; BH – Betty Hudson; IM – Ian McKinlay; JM - Jill Molan; MM - Mike Morphet; BO – Bruce O'Brien; MR – Michelle Rower; RR – Robert Rind; JR – Neil and Judi Russell; LS – Lindsay Smith; RT – Roger Truscott; JW – Joan Wylie

Comment: The South Polar Skua is the third recorded from the region, and the Noisy Pitta is the 12th recorded in the Illawarra since 1839.