

# PNHA NEWS

Autumn 2018 Issue 75

Pittwater Natural Heritage Association – thinking locally, acting locally

## PNHA UPDATE:

### PNHA AGM 2017, September 24

Thanks to Katandra Bushland Sanctuary for hosting this event. Our guest speaker Lynleigh Greig told us about rehabilitation of injured wildlife with some animal guest appearances. Sydney Wildlife is raising money towards a mobile vet clinic in a van to facilitate rescue and care of wildlife. PNHA donated to this cause.



Lynleigh showed us some of her rescued animals and this is one of her favourites, a small coastal carpet python. More information about Sydney Wildlife Mobile Clinic at <http://www.sydneywildlife.org.au/fundraiser>

The new PNHA committee: Julie Bennett, Robyn Hughes, David James, Marita Macrae, David Palmer, Kerry Smith, Mark Turner.

### PNHA Fauna connectivity campaign

PNHA is continuing to be proactive in working for the best environmental outcomes for the Mona Vale Road upgrade, and the Ingleside land release.

**Mona Vale Rd widening.** Member for Pittwater Rob Stokes has announced that plans for the widening of Mona Vale Rd East have been finalised and tenders for the project are now being sought. Work is expected to commence around mid-year so we hope to see results of our campaign for fauna crossings appear in the next year or so.

**Ingleside Development.** The Planning process for the Ingleside Precinct urban development is being held up by difficulties in overcoming environmental constraints which are causing delays with completion of the Biodiversity Certification and the Water Cycle Management reports.

However the final Land Use and Infrastructure Implementation Plan is expected to be released in April and we have been advised that it will be on exhibition for four weeks, during which time submissions will be invited.

#### Inside:

Jayden's NB Big Year, Bell Miners in Warriewood, The 2017 Drought, Citizen Science and Frogs, Backyard Buddies



*Protecting Pittwater's Environment*

## PNHA's Strategic Plan

This was developed and completed late 2017, after a long gestation period and adopted by the committee at its meeting on 14 February. Copies have been emailed to members.

## Northern Beaches Council

PNHA will be represented on the Environmental Strategic Reference Group of Northern Beaches Council. The SRG will advise Council on environmental management.

Representatives from the community and community organisations were inducted on March 1. The goals and strategies continue to be developed with input from group members and Alex McTaggart as chair. We expect PNHA to make a positive contribution in line with our own Strategic Plan, developed late 2017. The group will meet four times in 2018.

PNHA was established to work in the former Pittwater LGA so since amalgamation PNHA has decided to concentrate on the whole of the new Pittwater Ward.

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## ARTICLES



**Jayden Walsh's 2017 Gap Year** was an unusual one, spent building on his already extraordinary knowledge of birds, reptiles, frogs, marsupials and other fauna. When we first met him he had neither binoculars nor camera. Now he has both there is no stopping him. He is a highly valued guide on our PNHA Sunday Birdwalks for his ability to see and hear birds, and help others to share his experience. He starts a Bachelor of Biodiversity and Conservation at Macquarie University this year.

See footnotes for help with birdwatcher's language. Photo credits at end of glossary.

Left: Jayden with an Eastern Pygmy Possum.

## JAYDEN'S 2017 NBBY

What started off as just a silly idea in early February quickly turned into a full-on physical, emotional and mental 10 month challenge. Put simply, a Big Year is a personal challenge or an informal competition among birders to see how many species of birds they can identify by sight or sound within a single calendar year and within a specific geographical area. In this instance, the geographical area is the Northern Beaches local government area and the challenge was to reach an arbitrary (and seemingly insurmountable) figure of 200 species.

Once word got out that I was completing a Northern Beaches Big Year (from hereon to be referred to as NBBY) I was told that there was no way I could get 200 species. Going off Bruce Cox's list (an

old birding legend <sup>1</sup> from the Northern Beaches) everyone was under the impression that 200 species on the NB was only just achievable in a lifetime. I did my calculations very early on using the IOC Australian list<sup>2</sup> and figured out that with a lot of planning, hard work and luck 190 species would be possible but not very likely.



During **January** I had not yet decided to undertake my NBBY and as such my birding wasn't concerned with the number of species. I focused most of my energy upon nocturnal wildlife particularly herpetofauna (reptiles) of the area. Thankfully, I picked up all the summer migrants <sup>3</sup>(such as Sacred Kingfisher, left) as well as Superb Lyrebird, Black Bittern, six species of Raptors<sup>4</sup> and Bassian Thrush all in the first two weeks without much effort. However I was unsuccessful in re-finding a large flock of Pacific Swift at North Head reported on Birdline NSW.<sup>5</sup> One particularly interesting sighting (although not a rare bird by any stretch of the imagination), was a young Golden Whistler in Irrawong Reserve (near Warriewood) with 'rufous' plumage. From what I read they are only in this phase for 3-4 days before maturing!

In the third week of January I visited Careel Bay to find an Eastern Curlew (right) initially found by my friend Julie. I had excellent views of the bird almost instantly as it stood feeding on the exposed mudflats alongside a Striated Heron. A sweet song alerted my attention to a Mangrove Gerygone who happily fed about 2m away at eye level! This species is resident at Careel Bay but not many people know about their presence here. I would highly recommend a visit to the Careel Bay mudflats, although it would've been better if you did so 40 years



ago! In the final week of January the highlight was a Shining Bronze Cuckoo (right) behind the settling ponds at Warriewood (near Shearwater Estate on Garden St.)



The absolute highlight of my year happened early on in **February** and was in fact what inspired me to undertake my 2017 NBBY. I needn't waffle on about all the other birds I saw in February (As good as Musk Duck, Glossy Ibis, Peaceful Dove, White-necked Heron and Barn Owl are) as they were all massively overshadowed by a pair of Australian Masked Owl. (left)

The pair consisted of a Dark Morph Female and a Light Morph Male. Both were seen from only 15m away and their chattering call was what initially alerted me to their presence. I had views of them for around a minute before they both flew off. Knowing that Masked Owls still occur and breed on the Northern Beaches makes me so happy and my sighting represents the first time a pair of Australian Masked-Owls have been seen in Northern Sydney since 1976, when they bred literally up the road from my house in Warriewood. Since my sighting in February I have seen the male on one other occasion and heard them calling three times.

February just got better and better as I discovered the second population of Dainty Tree Frog in Sydney ever, numbering over 300 individuals across eight sub-populations/breeding sites. Finally, a Little Red Flying-Fox in Ku-ring-gai Chase NP was only the tenth sighting in Sydney of a typically Northern Australian species. What a month!! (Ed: he didn't stick to birds.)

**March, April and May** saw me birdwatching about four times a week and steadily increasing my list.



An early morning walk along Chiltern Trail on March 4 (in Ku-ring-gai NP at Ingleside) resulted in stunning views of a Painted Buttonquail which I unintentionally flushed and refound as it stood motionless 2m away from me. The 7th March was another early morning to remember as I found a Pacific Emerald Dove in Irrawong Reserve - another species which is exceptionally rare for Sydney!

Nothing out of the ordinary for the next two weeks in March until a single Freckled Duck was reported at Warriewood Wetlands. Of course, as soon as I saw this I raced down to the wetlands with no luck. The next morning I was back very early and found not one but two Freckled Ducks! (above) They became quite a fixture and close to 200 birdwatchers from all around Sydney visited over the course of the next three weeks in order to see the Freckled Ducks of Warriewood Wetlands. Late April got me Black-fronted Dotterel at Dee Why Lagoon, White-headed Pigeon at Deep Creek and the winter migrant Honeyeater species at Chiltern Trail and lots of Rose Robins (right) at Deep Creek.

**June**, as always, is a very quiet and difficult month for birdwatching in Sydney. Most of my time was spent bushwalking and exploring Garigal National Park more thoroughly. The benefit of this was that I got my 100th Species for Deep Creek - a Lewin's Rail in a thick patch of Blechnum fern and Gahnia (Swordgrass). June is a particularly good month for Honeyeaters however and I got the first Northern Beaches record in more than five years of Tawny-Crowned Honeyeater along Waratah Track on West Head. They stuck around for over a month and were viewed by several other people after I reported them to Ebird <sup>6</sup> and Birdline NSW.



**July and August** were mainly spent bushwalking (or bush 'climbing' as it often ends up) and looking for a job. Birding was limited to about two days per week. The highlight was discovering a sizeable population of Large-billed Scrubwren in Ku-ring-gai Chase NP. Other bonuses included finding a White-bellied Sea-Eagle nest with a chick, two Pacific Baza (right) at Irrawong Reserve and nine other species of Raptor.



**September** - the month that saved my Big Year. Well, where to begin? September started off very nicely with Dusky Woodswallow, Tree Martin and Pallid Cuckoo all at West Head, and all rare birds for the Northern Beaches (NB). Then out of nowhere, bam! The interior of NSW dried up and birds that almost never occur on the NB started flocking to the coast. I'm talking White-winged Triller, Fairy Martin, Spotted Crake, White-Browed Woodswallow, Masked Woodswallow, Brown Songlark, Rufous Songlark, Restless Flycatcher, and Red-Capped Robin (the only one I missed, but seen by friends). Other good birds<sup>7</sup> were Curlew Sandpiper and Baillon's Crake at Long Reef Golf Course, Large-billed Scrubwren in Irrawong, Painted Buttonquail at Elvina Bay and Swamp Harrier at Dee Why Lagoon.

**October** – Nil in northern beaches area. I spent October volunteering as a Field Assistant to a PhD student studying thermal tolerance of Jacky Dragons. This involved capture and data recording at multiple sites over 28 days around Bairnsdale and Gelantippy. I got two lifers<sup>8</sup> when down there: Hooded Robin and Grey Currawong.

**November** saw me finally get a job and since then my birding was limited to 1-2 days per week. I finally nailed #200 in the form of a Bar-tailed Godwit, a species which should be more common on the NB than it really is. Then I had a European Goldfinch at Dee Why Lagoon - a Northern Beaches introduced bird<sup>9</sup>. As exciting as it was to reach #201 it taught me a lesson not to take life too seriously. November 26 was a date locked in my diary for several months, the PNHA Warriewood Wetlands guided birdwalk. I highly recommend these walks as they provide the opportunity to meet other less familiar birds but also improve your birdwatching skills by learning from some experienced local legends. Just as well I turned up, as #202 was waiting for me, a Brown Falcon, no doubt a bird pushed to the coast by drought.

Fast forward to **December** and my final month of NBBY had arrived. I would normally say "The pressure was on", but it wasn't. I'd already far exceeded mine and everybody else's expectations so anything in December was a bonus. A walk through a relatively unexplored patch of 'rainforest' (actually Coastal Enriched Sandstone Moist Forest but who can remember that?) yielded another new population of Large-billed Scrubwren. One individual was recorded here several years ago but I had great views of at least three birds. Near this spot I also found a new White-bellied Sea-eagle nest. #203 was a bird which I had anticipated to get earlier in the year at Dee Why Lagoon; however, conditions were poor and nothing eventuated. As you can imagine, I was very pleased when a smallish looking Egret turned out to be a Little Egret (right)



when we finally got good views of it dancing around the sandbar near South Creek, Narrabeen Lagoon.

December was progressing quickly and I was aware of the looming Christmas responsibilities, mainly, spending time with family which meant NO BIRDING! Thankfully, on the way to work one morning I found a Eurasian Blackbird<sup>10</sup>, another feral in the 200's bringing me to 204 species.



December 31st saw me have one final day for birdwatching. My friend Mike and I organised to go out for a morning exploring some habitats that we hadn't yet been to in the local area. Bayview was the first area we decided to visit and a Superb Lyrebird was a nice first bird. As we ascended a slope with towering Grey Ironbark *Eucalyptus paniculata* and Spotted Gum *Corymbia maculata* (a good area for Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot in winter) the rain really began to set in. Whilst there were plenty of birds calling - Sacred Kingfisher, Brown Cuckoo-dove, Eastern Yellow Robin (left)- there was no sign of Satin Bowerbird which was my primary target for this area.

The humidity made it difficult to continue on for much longer so we decided to head to Rowland Reserve, a decision that paid off. Mike spotted a bird with an odd shape that we quickly identified

as a Woodswallow<sup>11</sup>. Eventually I got good enough views to call it a White-Breasted Woodswallow, (below right) a rarity for our area and Sydney in general. Over the next 20 minutes we had awesome views of at least eight White-browed Woodswallows flying around and landing on yacht masts. Interestingly one bird repeatedly fed another on the wing indicating possible local breeding or courtship. From here, we headed back to Bayview for more of a look around. Another Superb Lyrebird was nice as was a Dollarbird (below) at a suspected nesting hollow.

By now, it had warmed up, and so too had the Cicadas who were blaring out at 120 decibels! We decided to call it quits although the



habitat looks very promising for Barking Owls, Brush-tailed Phascogale and Green Tree Frog so I will no doubt be back soon! A quick visit to Careel Bay was fruitless as multiple owners were letting their dogs run around on the mudflats chasing anything that moved. I regretfully left but was more than happy with the White-breasted Woodswallows from earlier.



I challenge you all to undertake a Northern Beaches Big Year like I have or just get out into nature, in order to discover new hotspots and learn more about the wildlife of our local area, and how to better conserve it. My sightings that I submitted to Ebird all contribute to land management decisions and will ultimately help determine the fate of what bush remains in our local area. If we want to know how to protect the environment we must first know what lives in it.

And there it is! The first ever NBBY!

**Jayden Walsh**

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**Editor's Notes:** Jayden's account mentions birds of particular interest to him and of conservation interest, so he omits common birds such as Australian Magpie, Noisy Miner and so on, though they would have been on his list.

**Bird photos** indicate the birds Jayden saw, not the actual birds.

Images copyright by Rod Warnock: Sacred Kingfisher, Eastern Curlew, Shining Bronze Cuckoo, Australian Masked Owl, Pacific Baza, Eastern Yellow Robin, Brown Cuckoo Dove, White Breasted Woodswallow.

Images by Neil Fifer: Freckled Duck, Rose Robin, Dollarbird

**Footnotes:**

1. Legend. The late Bruce Cox, the "birding legend", is legendary for his bird watching skills and knowledge. Bruce compiled lists of birds recorded in the northern beaches area and set up a Google group which connected birdwatchers mostly in the northern Sydney area.
2. IOC List. IOC Australian list - refers to International Ornithological Congress, see <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/checklist.jsp?region=au&list=ioc>
3. Summer migrants. Some such as the Sacred Kingfisher breed in the southern summer, then move north for the winter. Others such as Eastern Curlew breed in the northern hemisphere but come here to escape the northern winter.
4. Raptor. A bird that seizes prey with its talons, such as an eagle, hawk, owl
5. Birdline NSW. A database supported by Birdlife Australia. Records contribute to the ongoing study of Australian birds, the Australian Bird Atlas.
6. Ebird. a global database operated by Cornell university. A website on which you can record unusual birds you've seen
7. Good birds, or nice birds are ones you really wanted to see; uncommon; made you happy.
8. Lifer. a bird you have yearned to see for some time but haven't been successful yet, or a bird you have just seen after long wishing to see it.
9. Goldfinch. The European Goldfinch is a widespread species in Europe, central Asia and northern Africa and was introduced to Australia in the 1860s. Originally restricted to urban areas, the European Goldfinch has successfully moved out into country areas of south-eastern Australia, including Tasmania. (from Birds in Backyards website)
10. Eurasian Blackbird. The Common (European) Blackbird was introduced to Australia at Melbourne in the 1850s. The male is the 'black' bird, with deep orange to yellow bill, a narrow yellow eye-ring and dark legs. The female is a brown bird, with some streaks or mottling, and has a dark bill and legs. Immature birds are similar to the female with lighter underparts. (from Birds in Backyards website.) These two birds would have arrived during the 19<sup>th</sup> century acclimatisation movement, when English or European birds and animals were introduced to make Australia feel more like "home".

11. Woodswallow. Several species, unusual around Sydney. They hunt insects in the air and have unusual brush tongues.

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### Bell Miners in Warriewood and Ingleside

The enchanting sound of Bellbirds – Bell Miners - is not one we welcome. Arriving about two years ago for the first time in our area, these birds pose a threat to other birds and the trees. Bellbirds are honeyeaters, living in aggressive territorial groups. They feed on the secretions of sapsucking insects on eucalypts, but deliberately do not kill the insect itself. Over time, these insects can multiply, weakening and even killing the host trees. Birds such as Spotted Pardalotes and other honeyeaters which would consume the insects thus cannot protect the trees



Image: ©Rod Warnock, Bell Miner

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### The 2017 Drought in Pittwater

Informal rainfall records from Avalon over the last year show that during January to June our rainfall was about 836mm, compared to the average 734 for that period.

The July to December period was another story. About 174 mm fell, compared to the 479mm average, so only just over a third of average. Falls in that period were mostly light and scattered, with some hot days too.



Often plants that are stressed respond by flowering, a survival tactic, you could say. This could account for the prolific flowering of Angophoras in early summer.

Let's hope for more rain in March, normally one of our wettest months.

Image: M. Macrae, *Angophora floribunda* Rough-barked Apple.

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**Citizen Science - Frogs** The Australian Museum has developed a FROG ID app for mobile devices, available from the App Store. The purpose is record location of Australia's frogs. Filters in the app enable you to select Near Me and a list of frogs that you could encounter will pop up with images. Click on the frog you think it may be and record the call. Then potential

matches are offered, chose one and submit your recording. More about this project at [www.frogid.net.au/](http://www.frogid.net.au/)

Above: The Brown Striped Marsh Frog call is like a racquet hitting a tennis ball – POCK! It's one of our commonest frogs. Image: M.Macrae

More Frog apps: **Frogs of Australia** – a \$24.99 complete field guide - has profiles of all 238 frog species, 1200 images and more than 700 frog call sound clips.

## Backyard Buddies



Backyard Buddies are the native plants and animals that share our urban areas, waterways, backyards and parks. They are also the people who value native wildlife and want to protect it. Are you a backyard buddy?

Go to [www.backyardbuddies.org.au](http://www.backyardbuddies.org.au) to find out about this initiative of the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife. The plants and fauna are not confined to the Pittwater area and there is lots of mostly general information. DIY projects help you build places for wildlife to live

– nesting boxes for birds, a bee hotel and so on.

Many species of lizards live in our area and help control snails and other invertebrates such as termites. This Water Skink at Warriewood comes into the house looking for cockroaches under the fridge.



## Membership Application

I would like to join Pittwater Natural Heritage Association. I agree with the PNHA's aims: raising awareness of and preserving our unique Pittwater natural environment.

Name: .....

Signed: .....

Address: .....

P/Code .....

Email: ..... Ph: .....

Date: .....

I would like a **paper copy** OR **emailed** newsletter (circle your choice). Membership fee: \$20 or \$10 pensioner/student. To pay your membership, you can deposit electronically into our account at the Commonwealth Bank: BSB 062 208, account no.10168467. Type your surname in the reference box so we know who the membership is for. Alternatively make cheque payable to: **Pittwater Natural Heritage Association** or **PNHA**. Post cheque payable to **Pittwater Natural Heritage Association** to PNHA, PO Box 187, Avalon Beach NSW 2107.

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