

The Wetlander

The Newsletter of The
HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

Volume 40 Issue 2
December 2025

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FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER JAMES WILSON

A Year of Renewal and Community Connection

As 2025 comes to a close, I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our incredible volunteers. Week after week, rain or shine, your passion and hard work keep the Hunter Wetlands Centre thriving. From bush regeneration, to organising events, to welcoming visitors and maintaining the grounds, you are the heart of this place.

A special thanks also goes to our generous sponsors, BHP, Conexa, and Hunter Water, whose ongoing support enables us to continue our important conservation and community work.



Conservation and Restoration

Our Urban Rivers Project continues to progress, with the Vegetation Management Plan now guiding our volunteers in implementing a more systematic bush regeneration strategy. The BHP Pond Water Quality Project is well underway, with new culverts installed and the solar-powered pump almost ready to transfer water from BHP Pond to Brambles Pond. We're now planning Stage 2, which will see the installation of 'floating wetlands' to further improve nutrient removal in both ponds. Work also continues behind the scenes to navigate approval pathways for the proposed saltwater inundation in Ironbark Marsh, an exciting long-term goal for estuarine restoration.

Infrastructure and Site Upgrades

Despite a quieter year for visitors due to the persistent rain, the wetlands are once again coming alive as the weather clears. We were thrilled to complete the Sensory Trail upgrade, thanks to funding from the Australian Government, Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group, and the Lions Club. The path has been fully resurfaced, replanted, and fitted with new signs and an accessible audio tour, creating an immersive, multi-sensory experience for all visitors.

We have also completed the refurbished Theatre, with an official launch planned in January, this

amazing transformation was made possible by BHP. The space now features a new AV system, air-conditioning, carpets, acoustic panels, and a beautiful mural by local artists Lisa Stratigos and Sharon Salmi. We're looking forward to hosting more community talks, film nights, and workshops in this rejuvenated space.

Another highlight was the arrival of two new utility buggies, funded by the Department of Communities and Justice, one dedicated to visitor tours and the other a tipping-tray work vehicle that's already lightening the load for our hardworking volunteers.

Partnerships and Research

We were excited to welcome Gardening Australia, who filmed on-site earlier this year, showcasing our wetlands, history, and even joining us for a paddle on the canoes. Keep an eye out, as by the time you read this, the episode may have already aired!

Our partnership with the University of New South Wales and the Botanic Gardens of Sydney has also taken root - literally. Together with volunteers, we've planted over 300 Melaleuca trees as part of a Myrtle Rust resilience study. We continue our collaboration with the University of Newcastle, hosting student placements focused on bush regeneration and water quality monitoring, helping train the next generation of environmental scientists. (Continued next page)

**To all our Volunteers and Visitors wishing you all the best for Christmas 2025.
Check out our website for the December 2025/January 2026 School Holiday Program.**

Events and Community

Our Spring Festival was one of the biggest ever, drawing between 1,500 and 2,000 visitors for a day filled with live music, markets, tours, kids' activities, and a special thanks goes to the Lions Club for hosting the BBQ once again. We've also continued to welcome hundreds of families during our school holiday events and OOSH group visits, while our Twilight Tours have been a sell-out success, offering a magical way to experience the wetlands at dusk.

As we look ahead to 2026, the wetlands are greener, our partnerships stronger, and our community more connected than ever.

Thank you once again for being part of the Hunter Wetlands Centre family.

Warm regards,

James Wilson - General Manager

Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia

**Please note our PO Box has changed due to Shortland Post Office closing. The new PO box will be:
PO Box 47, Jesmond NSW 2299**

LEAVE A GIFT THAT GROWS

Leaving a gift in your will to the Hunter Wetlands Centre is a lasting way to protect nature for future generations.

Even a small bequest can help restore wetlands, support endangered species, and inspire environmental education well into the future.

To learn more or have a confidential conversation,

**please contact James at:
gm@wetlands.org.au**



Christmas New Year Holidays

The Hunter Wetland Centre

will be closed from

Monday 22nd December 2025

and will re-open on

Friday 2nd January 2026

Happy Holidays

to all our

Volunteers and Visitors

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REPORT FROM THE HUNTER WETLANDS BOARD CHAIR - DR PETER NELSON

This past term has proven to be another successful period for the Centre, with revenues remaining steady even in the face of an unusually wet and cold winter. The resilience shown by the Centre in maintaining its financial stability during challenging weather conditions is a testament to sound management and ongoing support from our community.

Our volunteers have continued to play a vital role in the Centre's achievements. Their dedication and hard work have been instrumental in maintaining both the visitor centre and the overall site. In addition to caring for the premises, volunteers have ensured the smooth and efficient operation of the office, allowing daily activities and essential functions to run without interruption. Their outstanding efforts are deeply appreciated and make a significant contribution to the ongoing success of the Centre.

In the first week of November, Director Pam Dean-Jones and I participated in the NSW Coastal Conference held in Ballina, where we shared an update on the progress of the major grants awarded to us last year. Our presentation highlighted key milestones achieved and the ongoing efforts associated with these significant projects.

In addition, our Ramsar Officer, Chris Prietto, contributed to the conference by presenting an electronic poster that showcased the highly successful series of education and capacity-building workshops and conferences. These events, aimed at both government agencies and the public, form part of the comprehensive four-year engagement program. The program, being expertly developed and managed by former CEO Louise Duff, has thus far been very well received by all participants.

Progress on the grant awarded through the federal government's Rivers and Catchments Restoration program has presented a number of challenges. The process of reintroducing tidal influence to a section of

the site, with the goal of restoring salt marsh habitat, has proven particularly complex. Meeting the detailed bureaucratic requirements associated with this task has required considerable resources and has increased both the complexity and cost of the project.

Despite these challenges, other elements of the program are advancing well. Barry Horvath has applied his extensive engineering knowledge and experience to deliver significant progress on the installation of water quality improvement systems for the BHP pond. In addition, the weed management program is moving forward as planned, with a management strategy now approved and implementation underway.

The Scientific Advisory Group convened to help guide the saltmarsh project and to strengthen our bonds with the university is meeting regularly and working well.

As this is the last Wetlander being produced by the current team, I would like to acknowledge volunteers, Lenore Horvath for 21 years as editor of our newsletter, and Denis Hilder for 11 years of production and editorial assistance. Thank you both for keeping members informed of the highlights and happenings at the Wetlands over so many years.

Dr Peter Nelson,
Chair, HWCA Board of Directors



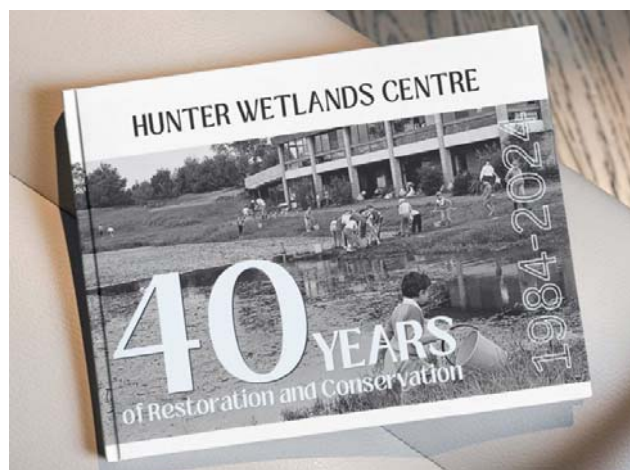
FOUR DECADES OF THE HUNTER WETLANDS

To celebrate the Hunter Wetlands Centres 40th Anniversary a Commemorative Book has been produced.

It outlines the history of the site, including how it began, the key people involved and how the site was transformed from rugby fields to a Wetland of International Importance.

Copies are available for purchase at reception or online.

The cost of this book is \$40.00



THE WETLANDS FRIENDSHIP GARDEN

Bruce Tozer & Paddy Lightfoot

“Friendship Garden”

This is how it all started

We have had the Challenge Disability Services community group working with the Thursday Mob for over 10 years now. The Challenge Team consisted of Scotty Beston and Garry Griffith with Terry Ward as part of their support team. Their duties were to help out with the Thursday Mob where and when they could and they were good at it.

This great work didn't go unnoticed, and it was decided they should have an area of their own, thus the “Friendship Garden” was established.

Terry Ward from the Challenge Group was one of the main motivators in helping get this garden up and running. The Garden started off as a small area opposite the canoe shed and has grown to be substantial as shown in our photos. John Stuart was seconded from the Thursday Mob and has taken this project under his wing and with his support the team is doing wonders, a great showcase for the wetlands.

We have established perimeter logs to identify the area, Ken Bayliss from our plant nursery has placed several native bee hives in that area. We are looking forward to summer for the bees to take up residence.

The Friendship Garden is but one of several projects supported and encouraged by the Wetlands in their ongoing all-inclusive volunteer workforce. Why not consider volunteering with us. We can offer you a rewarding experience with great comradeship, come join our team!



Gary Griffith

Scott Beeston

Our newly established “Wattle Grove”, adjacent, is also looked after by the Friendship Garden Team. As usual a great effort put in by our all-ability Thursday Mob volunteers.

The Friendship Garden and Acacia Grove can be accessed from the Nardoo Gate Road or the Canoe Shed track.

Both these gardens show off not just local Lower Hunter plants but Australian Native Plants from all over our Country.

There are many species of Acacias on show, from small plants to suit small gardens to larger trees for bigger locations.



There are about 960 Australian species of Acacia (Wattles) from a world total of around 1300.

They are probably equal in species numbers to Eucalypts as Australia's dominant species.

The Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) is the floral emblem of Australia. Its spectacular green foliage and bright yellow flowers have been adopted by Australia's sporting teams for their green and yellow uniforms, when competing on the world stage.

The “Friendship Gardens”



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Carolyn Gillard

Community engagement is a vital aspect of the Hunter Wetland Centre Australia.

Whether it is a casual chat with a visitor walking passed or a more formal planned event, it is important to engage with as many people as possible about the values of wetlands and the significance of HWCA.

We have a very active group of guides who lead free guided walks each Tuesday and Saturday. Occasionally, during periods of rain or very hot weather, there are no visitors. Usually however there are groups from 2 to 10 or more.

Over the past 6 months, I have led about 11 walks and I try to find participants particular interest, whether it is just be about HWCA, or specifically birds or plants, and build the walk around that. Participants are always interested, particularly in the history of HWCA, and leave saying they will return, become members or give a donation. I find this very encouraging.



During special events, we offer guided walks or talks throughout the day. At the recent Spring Festival, I did a Bush Food walk for about 20 people. A few dropped out due to the heat or restless children but it was very well received.

Other groups often request a talk on a specific topic. During the last 6 months, I have spoken to:

- A Rotary Group of about 20 members
- Wallsend Probus of about 50 members
- CWA talk on Saltbush to about 20 participants
- CWA talk on Frogs to about 60 participants
- U3A of about 50 members
- Cactus and Succulent Society, which was a bit out of my comfort zone.

Recently there has also been interaction with a school group, which is a completely different demographic for our community engagement.

Carolyn Gillard

Director



Come along and enjoy a cup of coffee or lunch at our Café

Café at the Wetlands

Café Manager Greg Sinclair makes the most beautiful sweets to have with your coffee while you watch the birds on the ponds.

He also caters for weddings, birthdays, conferences and, for funerals and wakes as well.

For bookings phone: **040 353 7211**

The café is open from 9.00am to 2.00pm weekdays
& from 8.30am to 2pm at weekends

SO COME ALONG AND ENJOY!



HUNTER WETLANDS ART REPORT

July to December 2025

Mark Kempton

Featured artists for the second half of 2025:

1. July:

Malang Indigenous Hunter Artists

This captivating showcase brought together a diverse collection of artworks from 12 talented artists hailing from the Wonnarua, Worimi and Awabakal areas. Through their vibrant paintings, Malang offers a unique insight into the traditions that have been passed on down through generations.

1



2. August:

The Hunter Valley Children's Therapy Art Group followed a creative journey inspired by the wetlands. The artists explored the link between inner experience and the sensory expression of art making. For many, this was their first exhibition. They did themselves proud.

'Nest to Flight' the second August Exhibition, celebrated the shared creativity of the voices and visions of a mother Ashlee and her 2 sons Mallee and Eleuca Jedzrejak. Each expressed their own art making with energy and intuition.

2



3



3. September:

Artists (and good friends) Wynette Horne and Wilma Rufford, have been regular visitors to the Wetlands. They always find something new and exciting to become the subject of artworks that express beauty and originality. These are the essence of their exhibitions.

4



4. October:

Lisa Kennedy was a visiting artist based in Mudgee region of NSW. Working in pen, ink, watercolour and mixed media, Lisa's art explores movement, energy and fleeting moments of the natural world.

5. November:

In the 'Mystical Creatures of the Wetlands', artist Chrissy Murray portrays the familiar, pelicans, frogs and other creatures, through the lens of wonder, as if the wetlands awakens into a magical state, when no one is watching. Each piece balances colour, detail and imagination, to reveal the spirit hidden within these landscapes.

5



6. December:

Deb Spence is a realist artist whose preferred medium is pastel pencils. A passion for drawing animals especially birds and an obsession with detail, results in the creation of technically precise realistic drawings that capture the expression and emotion of her subjects. In this exhibition, the artist aims to showcase the vibrant colours and character of the wildlife in the Hunter Region.

Upcoming Exhibitions in 2026

January: Artists with Parkinson's

February: Wetlands Through Young Eyes - a Group Youth Exhibition

March: Laurie Bartlett - photographer

April: Alison Ellis

May: Ashlee McIntyre

June: Prue Sailor Group

Mark Kempton - Art Co-ordinator

6



SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Val Noake



Ducks, ducks and more ducks

School Holiday Events

In the July school holidays visitors were invited to take the Duck Discovery Trail to learn about Pink-eared, Blue Billed, Freckled and 7 other kinds of ducks that visit our Wetlands. The ten duck species, beautifully painted by volunteers Mark and Mel, were placed around the centre for families to find. There were questions to answer and jokes to enjoy and a special prize of a guided tour of the Freckled Duck enclosure to be won.

For the September/October holidays the focus was on water. A Pond Scavenger Hunt took visitors around the ponds looking in, under and on the water to learn more about Wetlands. On Wednesdays there were water experiments to try – making a water filter, testing to see what floats and what sinks, and making a boat.

Our dipnet expert Catherine helped visitors identify a wide range of water bugs that can be found in BHP Pond. Thanks to Hunter Water for a What is Flushable Kit that demonstrated what should not be flushed down the toilet.

The After Dark Tours in both holidays booked out quickly. Terrie and the Animal Care Team are to be congratulated on presenting a record number of Reptile Shows in the September/October holidays.

In the most recent holidays five OOSH groups, with a total of 180 children, enjoyed a day out at the Hunter Wetlands Centre.



One of the Duck species displays



Lego proved popular in the July holidays

HELP!!

We are asking for help to keep our great Wetlands functioning. We need some more volunteers in the following areas:

Small Engine Mechanic, Team Leader for Bush Regeneration, Bush Regeneration Team Members - Mon. to Sat.

Maintenance Team Members Mon. to Wed. and Sat. to Sun.

If you can give a small amount of time to us we would be most grateful. Don't forget we are run by volunteers so we need your support to share the work of maintaining this important site.

Fill in an Expression of Interest form on our website or ask at reception

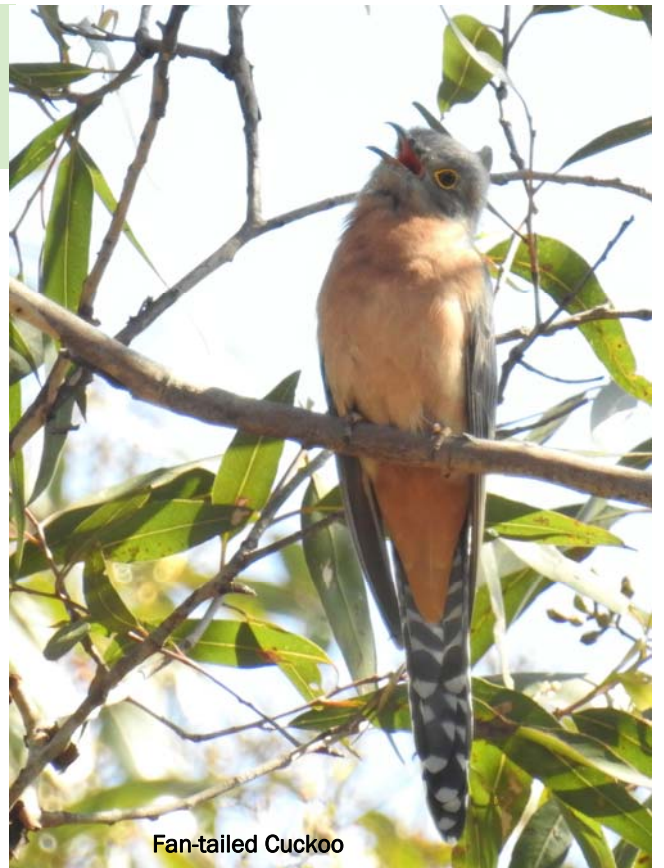
CUCKOOS SEEN AT THE HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

Margaret Stewart

Several birds in the Cuckoo family are seen and heard at the Wetlands Centre.

The most regular is the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, which is often seen perching in the trees. This cuckoo is seen and heard all year round. Two very noisy large cuckoos are more likely to be seen flying over or perching briefly before flying off as they return from the north in spring.

We are all familiar with the Eastern Koel which often disturbs us in the wee small hours with its loud “koel” or “coo-ee” call. The male is a large black bird with a long black tail and red eye while the female has upper parts dark brown and spotted white, with a dark tail with whitish barring.



Fan-tailed Cuckoo



Channel-billed Cuckoo

The other noisy cuckoo often seen flying over is the Channel-billed Cuckoo. This is a large mainly grey bird with barring on its long tail and is easily identified by its loud harsh call.

Two smaller similar looking bronze-cuckoos, the Shining Bronze and the Horsfield's Bronze have also been infrequently recorded. These both have iridescent green plumage with stripes across their underparts. These five cuckoos all lay their eggs in the nests of smaller birds. One cuckoo, the Pheasant Coucal, a larger bird than the Koel, with tail and wings heavily barred, has been recorded here. It is unusual among Australian cuckoos in that it incubates and raises its own young instead of laying its eggs in the nest of another species and is present all year round.

Text by Margaret Stewart

Photos by Robert Stewart



Eastern Koel female



Eastern Koel male

GARDENING AUSTRALIA

During the last week of August we had the pleasure of having the ABCs Gardening Australia team visit us to film a segment on the Hunter Wetlands Centre and its story of conservation and community.

In some of the wildest winds this year, host Clarence Slockee and the Gardening Australia crew trekked through the full range of wetlands environments from ponds and bushland to the mangrove fringed waters of Ironbark Creek.

Paddy Lightfoot, Michele Maddock Keith and Geoff Nicholls all “mic’d up” for interviews with Clarence.



Clarence Slockee interviewed with Gilligans Island as a backdrop



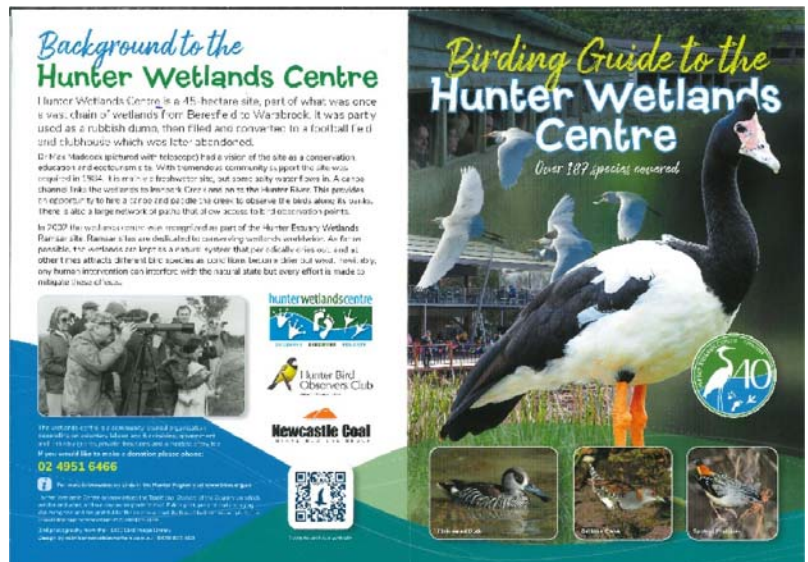
Clarence Slockee and Geoff Nicholls on the canoe trail

Many other volunteers also got in front of the cameras while Pi, the Magpie Goose decided to direct from the sidelines.

We are very proud of our story and the transformation that has taken place over 40 years at the Hunter Wetlands Centre and are pleased that Gardening Australia have taken the time to showcase it to the Australian public. We look forward to seeing the episode on ABC television soon!

BIRDING GUIDE TO THE HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

Limited copies are available, ask at the front desk



BECOME A MEMBER OF THE HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE WITH AN ANNUAL PASS

Membership valid for 12 months from date of purchase

Membership includes unlimited entry into the Wetlands for members and their school-age children/grandchildren accompanying them (except for special events).

You can pay for Membership at the Visitor Centre or online at our website:

www.wetlands.org.au

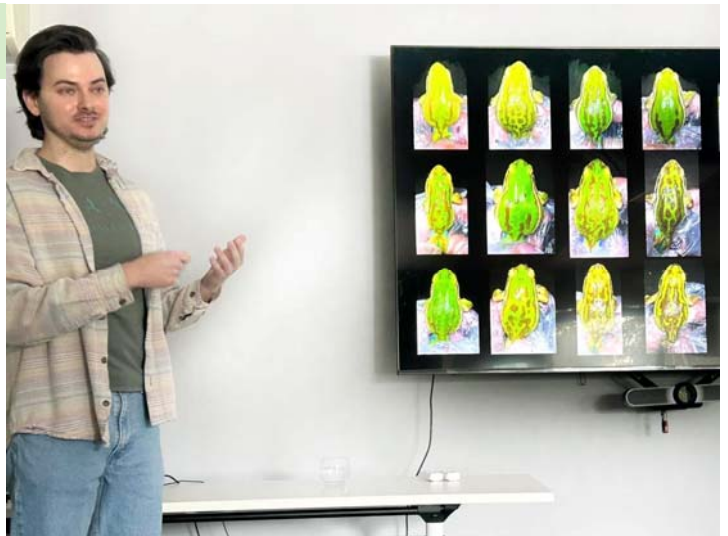
COME ALONG AND JOIN NOW!!!

SCIENCE WEEK

The Hunter Wetlands Centre took part in National Science Week 2025 with activities for kids and adults.

On Thursday 14 August, we held a morning of conservation talks with a focus on what is happening in our Ramsar-listed Hunter Estuary Wetlands.

Dr John Gould, Research Scientist from the University of Newcastle joined us to discuss the conservation management research projects aimed at understanding and conserving the endangered Green and Golden Bell Frogs (*Litoria aurea*) on Kooragang Island. John was able to give us insight what the project has learned about the frogs behaviour and habitat preferences as well as updates on the Chytrid Fungus and Gambusia (Mosquito Fish) infestations which threaten threatening the GGBF species.



Dr John Gould talking about the Green & Gold Bell Frog

species undermine the success of conservation projects by competing with native plants and disrupting the ecological balance. Geoff's presentation greatly helped us to learn about the common weeds found in the Hunter Estuary; how to distinguish them from native species; the issues they can cause if left unmanaged and how to effectively remove and dispose of them.

For children, "Science Week Sunday" was a morning of hands-on activities especially designed for kids to explore, learn about and understand the natural world. The day included Guided Dipnetting with Catherine Bremmell, a Magpie Geese Feeding and Talk, Reptile Encounter show and a Guided Walk. There were also craft and games set up under the deck for those who didn't want to brave the persistent rain.



Geoff Nicholls with invasive weed species

HWCA's Bush Regeneration Team Leader, Geoff Nicholls discussed how Weeds and other invasive

THEATRETTE REFURBISHMENT

Work has begun on the refurbishment of the Hunter Wetlands Centre's Theatrette.

The Theatrette was first built back in 1986 specifically to show documentary films and slideshows for the International Wetlands Symposium held at the Centre in conjunction with University of Newcastle.

After 40 years of use the theatrette will receive a much-needed makeover thanks to BHP. This will include renovating floors, walls and seating as well as updating the audio-visual aspects of the room to improve sound, lighting, screen projection and media capacity making it functional for years to come. The theatrette is a great space for lectures, reptile encounters and the next generation of wetlands and



wildlife documentaries.

The theatrette will be finished and officially opened in 2026.

NEW NETTING

Geoff Nicholls

If you take a walk over to the Freckled Duck Enclosure, you will find their facility now has a much higher ceiling and there's far more light in the enclosure.

This is a result of trees around the enclosure being trimmed back to prevent debris from falling on the netting, a task undertaken by local arborist, Bill Anderson. A brand-new net, tensioned at the full height of the perimeter fencing, has been installed by specialist contractors, Nationwide Netmakers. We are grateful to a generous benefactor, Mac and Peg Keddle, who donated the money to go towards these essential repairs.

The Freckled Duck Enclosure was originally constructed in 1993 to house seventeen ducks obtained from the CSIRO for the purpose of captive breeding. While the breeding programme ceased in 2000, HWCA has continued to produce offspring, providing ducks to public zoos and private breeders for many years.

The original net was of a larger gauge, so much so, that it was not uncommon for waterbirds, such as swamp hens, to find their ways through the net and into the environs below. Of particular concern were pelicans, who, seeing an apparent open body of water below, would land on the unseen net and become snagged with their legs dangling. To remediate this problem, a second layer of net, with a smaller gauge, was attached over the former. This caused an unexpected and upsetting result. To our dismay, a couple of freckled ducks, over time, got their heads caught between the two nets and were hung. In response to this dilemma, the two nets were removed, and a sturdier grade of material was applied. This was in fact an adapted form of tennis net obtained from a sporting goods manufacturer.

The previous netting sustained keeping the ducks safely in, and other birds out, for a number of years. However, a serious storm in late 2020 caused four mature she-oaks to fall onto the enclosure, crushing fence posts and lowering the net to only metres above the pond area. This was straightened up through the diligent efforts of Bill Anderson, assisted by an all-hands-on-deck volunteer crew. But, in recent years, it became evident that the existing net was due for replacement. The damage from the storm had resulted in temporary repairs to holes in the fabric, busted support cables, and rusted fittings around the surrounds.

We now have a superior grade of cover for the whole shelter, and an enhanced environment for the freckled ducks' welfare. Take a stroll and have a look!

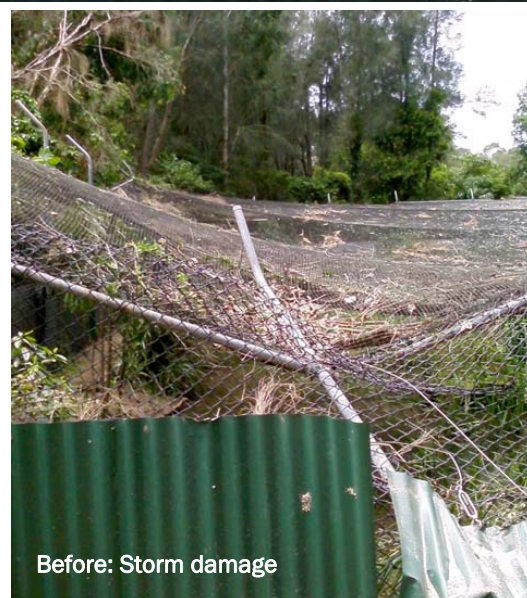


Photo Credits for this Wetlander:

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Page 14; Page 17

Linda Rowan - Media Coordinator

Thanks also to Linda Rowan for writing:

- Gardening Australia - Page 9

- Science Week and Theatre Refurbishment - Page 10
- Spring Festival - Page 14
- Orica Bird Hides and Calendar Photo Comp - Page 15
- November 1985 History - Page 17

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM FOR LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS

Michele Keith

This year we developed a pilot Environmental Stewardship program for Senior Students at Trinity Catholic College Adamstown.

The students and school staff are working with Hunter Wetland Centre staff and the Lions Club to restore the Sensory Garden. The students come to the centre once a term to learn, plan, weed, plant and mulch the garden and the work that we do at the Hunter Wetland Centre. Students have designed new signs for the garden which will reflect our 5 senses (Sight, Touch, Taste, Sound and Smell) and will be installed along with an audio tour to create an accessible walk for all people, particularly those with additional needs

During their visits, students have learnt about the history and the conservation work we have done over the past 40 years, visited the Australian Plant Nursery learnt how to propagate plants, and explored



what Australian Native plants would be suitable to be planted in the garden. They sampled and learnt about the delicious flavours that our Bush Tucker Garden offers. Students enjoyed exploring our bird hides and learning about our bird life and their habitats.

Thank you, James, for finding us a grant from Newcastle Coal Infrastructure and our local member to repair the paths and the Lions Club for fund raising. Thank you to the terrific team at APS for donating the plants for the garden. We appreciated Sandra's team and Barry for helping us out. Thank you to Nina, Max, Chole, Ella R, Ella T, Rachael, Belle, Mia, Kayla and Luka from Trinity College for your willingness to contribute to the conservation of our Wetlands. The school would like to continue the program next year and we look forward to seeing the garden complete.

Michele Keith,
Director



HOW YOU CAN HELP

MAKE A DONATION TO THE HUNTER WETLAND CENTRE

As a community owned wetlands centre we rely almost solely on funds we generate ourselves, such as from the generous donations of our members and supporters.

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

BECOME A CORPORATE PARTNER

The Hunter Wetlands Centre enjoys the support of a wide range of corporate partners. Contact the General Manager to find out how your business can benefit from an ongoing relationship with us.

gm@wetlands.org.au

ATTENDING COP15-ZIMBABWE

Christine Prietto

In the closing weeks of July 2025, I travelled to Zimbabwe to attend Ramsar COP15, “Protecting wetlands for our common future”, held in Victoria Falls from 23 to 31 July.

I attended as an NGO advisor to the Australian delegation representing Hunter Wetlands Centre and the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar Site. I bought with me 25 plastic platypuses from the Hunter Wetlands Centre gift shop as easy-to-carry-and-distribute gifts.

COP15 hosted 1500 delegates from 172 countries and culture is full on display through what people are wearing. The main business of the COP is the review



Chris Prietto with some of the delegates

6, More Side Events, Evening Social Events. Contact groups are set up to sort out disagreements that are not progressing within the Plenary.

There are 6 Ramsar Regions and our region is Oceania with 9 Contracting Parties and 86 Ramsar sites. All Oceania Member countries are islands, all have indigenous peoples, and all share a common language. Our region is small in number of Contracting Parties but vast in area and includes countries with vastly different resources.

Throughout the COP, Contracting Parties meet in their regional groups each morning to review the day's program, share their priorities and where possible come together to develop statements, called interventions, that are delivered during Plenary sessions on behalf of a region.

At COP 15 Oceania was represented by 6 countries, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, our newest Ramsar Contracting Party. Our group met at 8.30 each morning and our meeting was opened with a free-form prayer led by one of the Pacific Island delegates. Over the course of the meeting everyone in that room made at least one intervention on the floor, either for the region, for their own country or to support a specific DR. Oceania countries face many challenges. COP Regional Meetings provide many important opportunities to strengthen ties and talk about goals for Oceania Region wetlands going forward.

About the platypuses, these went to new homes in many different countries. My most significant recipient was Dr Musonda Mumba, Secretary General of the Convention.

Christine Prietto,

Ramsar Officer



Chris Prietto with Patience Gandiwa of Zimbabwe

of Draft Resolutions. At COP15 there were 26 DRs to be considered. How delegates from countries with no geographical connection, different languages and sometimes conflicting belief systems collaborate to make decisions for wetland conservation is amazing to watch.

The COP follows a set programme with many components: Regional Meetings in the morning, Plenary from 10 to 1, Side Events, Plenary from 3 to

ANNUAL SPRING FESTIVAL

It was sunshine and warm weather for our Annual Spring Festival on Saturday 28 September.

More than 20 local artisans and community groups held market and food stalls under the shady eucalypts with background live music by Jarrod Grant. Musical entertainment was also provided by local choir "Stella A Capella". It was great to see large numbers of children and adults joining our free walking tours on Birdwatching, Bush Tucker and Bush Regeneration. Scattered around the main pond were more family friendly activities, including, dip netting, magpie geese feeding and talks and a jumping castle, while over at the Animal House kids could meet our resident reptiles as they stepped out of their enclosure to join the festivities.

Thanks to all our volunteers for their work in preparing and running the event. Special thanks to Bob and Margaret Stewart of Hunter Bird Observers Club for leading the Birdwatching for Beginners Tour and Jesmond Lions Club who happily hosted our sausage sizzle, despite having spent Saturday with the snags at Bunnings.

With Free Entry, the day was a chance for the local community to come and see what the Wetlands Centre is about. More than 1,500 came through the gates between 9am and 2pm, making it a very



Successful event. We're looking forward to next years Spring Festival on Saturday 27 September 2026.



Great for families



Market & Food Stalls



Stella A Capella



Reptile encounter



Jarrod Grant

ORICA BIRD HIDES

We've made a visit to the Hunter Wetlands Centre even more special for birders with the refurbishment of three of our bird hides.

Thanks to generous funding from Orica, the Water Ribbon Hide, Bittern Hide and Brambles Pond Hide have all had a much needed makeover. Our volunteers put in all the hard work repairing and repainting the hides and walkways. A special mention to Lisa Stratigos and Sharon Salmi who repainted the interior of our Bitten Hide with a magnificent and informative mural and interactive display.

Hides are an important feature of our wetlands. They allow people to closely approach and observe wildlife and their natural behaviour with minimum disturbance. The hides also provide shelter from the heat and rain making it a much more enjoyable



Michele Keith, Peter Nelson, Carolyn Gillard, James Wilson and the representative from Orica, with the newly installed murals in the background

outing for observers and photographers.

CALENDAR PHOTO COMPETITION

Our Annual Photo Competition for the Hunter Wetlands Centre's Fundraising Calendar has been a success.

More than 50 entries were received from members and visitors showcasing the wildlife and scenery of our Hunter Wetlands Centre. Although only a dozen photographs could be chosen for our 2026 Fundraising Calendar all entries were on display in the Lower Floor of our Visitors Centre to allow the public to vote on their favourites. And vote they did! After tallying a record number of votes Linda Davis' Jumping Spider was announced as the "People's Choice".



'Jumping Spider' by Linda Davis the People Choice

Other photographers who's work will be featured in the Hunter Wetlands Centre's 2026 Calendar are:

Rob Anderson, Bill Behan, Cooper Cavallaro, Ted Elks, Dianne English, Megan Lodge, Melissa Murry, Sarah Nelson, Melissa New, Deborah Oxley, Mei Toh.

Congratulations to all photographers whose photos were selected. Our calendar is now in the process of being produced and will be on sale from reception shortly. With Christmas just around the corner these calendars a great gift idea and will also be helping nature with proceeds going back into the Hunter Wetlands Centre.

**Support the Hunter Wetlands Centre by doing your
Christmas/Holiday Shopping here!**

Gift Vouchers

- Membership
- Day Pass & Canoe Hire
- Family Day Pass

Gift Vouchers can be ordered and paid for in person or by phone
Your voucher can be emailed to you, or you can collect it from reception.

**Our Gift Shop has a wide range of products to suit all ages
or maybe a painting from the gallery**



THE WETLANDER STORY

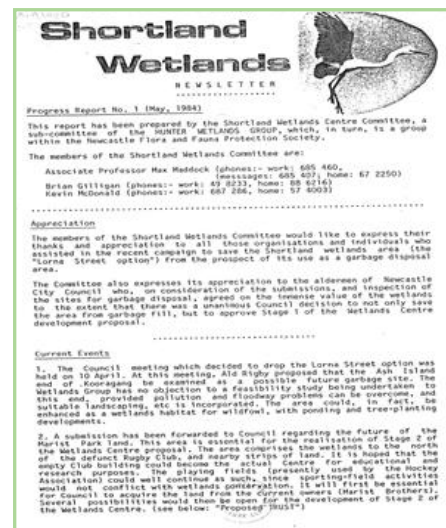
The official newsletter of the Hunter Wetlands Centre has its origins as far back as 1984 long before the site and main building was officially opened.

It all started with a Newsletter in May 1984 for the Hunter Wetlands Trust.

An early article: **The Purchase of Marist Park**

The acquisition of Marist park and the defunct rugby club building on the site is essential to the early realization of the trust's aims to establish a functioning wetlands centre with visitor and parking facilities.

The idea of acquiring the site was first put to the Newcastle City Council and to the public in October 1983. It was reported in the press that Marist Brothers offered the park to the Council for just over \$400,000.



The first Newsletter 1984

The first Hunter Wetlands Trust Newsletter was published in May 1985

This newsletter is our first as a registered periodical and the first since our inaugural A.G.M.

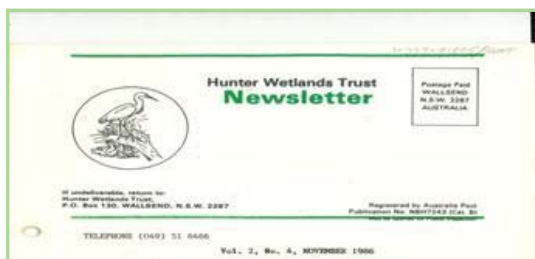
November 1985

Announced: Bicentennial Funding

On 24 August the premier announced a Bicentennial Grant of \$400,00 towards setting up the Shortland wetland centre. This consisted of \$300,000 in October 1985 towards the purchase of Marist park, and 4 further amounts of \$25,000 each at 6 monthly intervals up to 1988 for conversion of the building and improvements to the centre.

BHP Centenary Grants

BHP marked its centenary by announcing a grant of \$100,000 towards the purchase of Marist Park, \$20,000 for the cost of the consultants study and stated its intention to do the earthworks for the construction of the feeding ponds in front of the Visitors centre. (BHP Pond)



The masthead remained the same from 1985 to 1990

February 1986

Shortland Wetland Centre Land and Building

On November 1st 1985, in the trust's solicitor Office, cheques and papers were exchanged to make Shortland Wetland Centre Ltd the owner of the former Marist Park land and Hamilton Rugby Club building.

There were 4 issues in 1986 & 1987 Feb, May, August and November each issue up to 20 pages in length.

May 1986

BHP Ponds: Another Landmark

In March, a further step forward was made in the development of the Shortlands Wetlands Centre when BHP earth moving equipment started preliminary work on the former rugby field in front of the building. Over the next few months it is hoped that the excavations will become attractive ponds, with diverse habitats to support a wide range of water birds.

November 1986

Centre Gets Steel Industries Grant

On 6th June Allan Morris, Federal Member for Newcastle announced a Steel Industries grant of \$167,000 for purchasing land adjoining our eastern boundary and setting up the canoe trail.

Newsletter Editor: Max Maddock

February 1987

Our First Operational Year

The Centres first year was a great success. The derelict building was rehabilitated with office, shop, display area and theatre, assisted by sponsors funds and considerable input from volunteers.

August 1987

Official Opening of Classroom/Laboratory

On 23rd May 1987, the Minister for Education, Hon. Rodney cavalier MLA officially opened the new facility at the Wetlands Centre. This represents a major facility for environmental education programmes for visiting school classes and non-formal educational groups. The facility adjoins the Theatre and opens on to a paved verandah, the construction cost \$50,000 as was part of the \$400,000 grant from the Australian Bicentennial Authority.

Next time the official opening of the building in 1988 postponed!

Denis Hilder, Wetland Editor

NOVEMBER 1985 HISTORY

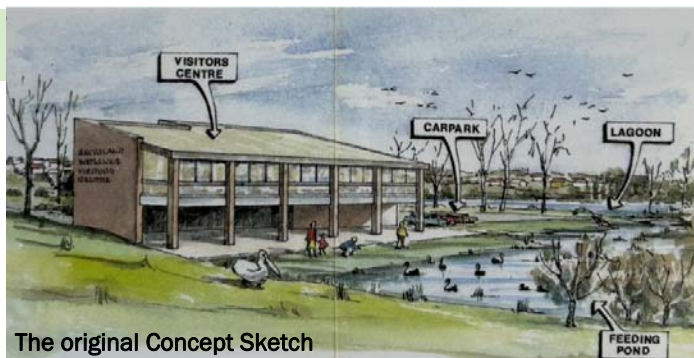
On the 1st of November 1985, Shortland Wetlands Centre (as it was known then) became the proud owner of Marist Park, a 30 hectare property which consisted of the Hamilton Rugby Club clubhouse and amenities buildings, playing fields and disused land.

The purchase of the property was the culmination of years of lobbying, fundraising and planning. Donations and support had been received from members of the community, industry and local and state government, including a significant Bicentennial Grant.

As the founders looked through the broken windows of the clubhouse and over the barren grounds scattered with burned out cars, the reality of the work ahead must have sunk in.

The first order of the day was take down the Hamilton Rugby Club sign and erect the Bicentennial Project sign. Next was to take stock of the work that needed to be done to rehabilitate the site into the envisaged showpiece of environmental excellence and wetlands education, conservation and recreation.

The jobs list was extensive: broken windows, new



The original Concept Sketch

plumbing and electrical and repurposing of the building as well as extensive landscaping and rehabilitation, excavation of the football fields to turn them into wetlands ponds. All hands were needed on deck to get the Centre open for business by 1986. The first of many working bees was organised for 24 November. Volunteers recall how the club house had been left in bizarre disarray, almost as if trading had ended part way through a busy night and everyone had simply walked out. The room was still furnished with chairs, tables and poker machines, some still holding coins. There were even plates of 'mummified' food found in the bistros long-cold ovens. To make quick work of it, everything unwanted went out the already broken viewing windows to the ground below.



The Hamilton Rugby Club sign is removed



The burnt out cars and piles of rubbish!

FAREWELL FROM THE EDITORS Denis Hilder

From the June 2026 edition of the Wetlander there will be a new editor. After 21 years of being typist, assistant editor and editor of the Wetlander Lenore Horvath has decided to retire in December 2025.

I would like to thank Lenore for the many years of being associated with the Wetlander.

To relieve Lenore from some of the publishing work, from about 2014 I gradually took over the production side of things, having been producing newsletters for Lake Macquarie Landcare from 2004 to 2012.

We, as volunteers, are all getting older and it is time to pass the editorial baton to a younger person, so I will only be involved with The Wetlander by writing an occasional article on native plants.

I would like to thank all the people who have submitted articles over the years and put up with me hassling them to get them in on time.

Denis Hilder, editor



Retiring Editors, Denis Hilder & Lenore Horvath

Daily activities:

- ♦ Dip-netting ♦ Pond bird feeding ♦ Self guided tours
 - ♦ Canoe hire, ♦ Animal House ♦ Children's playground
- Guided walks for groups and buggy tours can be booked in advance. Free guided walks Tues. 10.30am & Sat. 10.30am

School Holidays

- ♦ Special activities are organised for children during school holidays. Check our website for details.

If you need further information please contact the Hunter Wetlands Centre by phone, email or check our website

www.wetlands.org.au



DONATIONS

July 2025 to December 2025

Our thanks go to all the people and groups who have made donations over the past 6 months.

Also thanks for the many anonymous small donations that come from the Donation Box and Freckled Duck. It all helps!

The Hunter Wetlands actively seek donations, whether large or small and they can be made on-line or in person.

WETLANDS MEMBERSHIP

Join our wonderful wetlands!

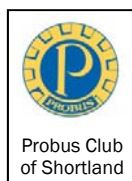
Annual pass is only \$25 per year, with unlimited entry

For more information see page 9

HWC Staff Directory

General Manager: James Wilson
Chairman: Dr. Peter Nelson
Office Manager: Val Noake
Nursery Manager: Ken Bayliss
Weekend Site Manager: Michael Burak
Accounts Payable/Receivable: Christine Pozywio
Bookings Coordinator: Kay Brewer
Landcare Coordinator: Paddy Lightfoot
Media Coordinator Linda Rowan
Membership Officer: Merrita Jeffrey
Wetland Editors: Denis Hilder
..... Lenore Horvath
Volunteer Coordinator: Marion Leete
Arts Coordinator: Mark Kempton
Ramsar Officer: Christine Prietto

Our Supporters, Partners and Sponsors



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PO Box 47, Jesmond NSW 2299

Open 9am to 4pm - 7 Days

Phone: **4951 6466** Email: **hwca@wetlands.org.au** Website: **www.wetlands.org.au**

Café at the Wetlands - Opening times see page 5 Phone: **040 353 7211**

