

VOL. 41 ISSUE 1 • JUN 2026

THE WETLANDER

Newsletter of the
HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE



ISSN 1325 0744

A MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER James Wilson

As we move through another busy and rewarding year at the Hunter Wetlands Centre, I would like to begin by saying an enormous thank you to our volunteers. Whether you are working in bush regeneration, maintaining infrastructure, helping with events, welcoming visitors, or supporting our administration, your dedication continues to make everything we achieve possible.

The first half of 2026 has been an exciting period for the Centre, with a number of significant projects coming to fruition, strong community engagement and growing recognition of the important work being undertaken across the wetlands.



One of the highlights of the year was the official opening of our newly refurbished BHP Theatrette. This incredible transformation has created a modern and welcoming space for community events, education programs, workshops and film screenings. Featuring upgraded audiovisual equipment, improved acoustics, air conditioning, new furnishings and a stunning mural by local artists Lisa Stratigos and Sharon Salmi. The theatrette is already proving to be a valuable asset for the Centre and the broader community with our recently launched Film Festival.

We were also thrilled to see the Hunter Wetlands Centre featured on ABC TV program, Gardening Australia. The segment showcased the remarkable transformation of the site from former rugby fields and dumping grounds into a wetland of international significance, while also highlighting the incredible contribution of our volunteers. The response from the community was overwhelmingly positive, with many first-time visitors coming to explore the wetlands after seeing the story on television.

Conservation and restoration continue to be at the heart of everything we do. Our Urban Rivers Project remains the most significant restoration initiative currently undertaken at the centre. The project aims to restore tidal exchange to Ironbark Marsh and improve habitat for migratory shorebirds and other wetland species. While substantial progress has been made, the approvals process has proven more complex than originally anticipated. Navigating environmental assessments, engineering requirements and regulatory approvals takes time, and despite our efforts, we are unsure as to how this project will proceed. We remain committed to working through the processes and doing everything we can to obtain the approvals.

THE WETLANDER

The weed removal and revegetation aspect of the project is going well, with significant progress across the entire site and in particular, drastic improvements in the Torpedo Grass infestation around BHP Pond.

This year also marks the second year of our Wetlands & People Program. Following the success of last year's events, the 2026 program focused on sharing Indigenous heritage, culture and connections to Country. Throughout the first half of the year we welcomed a range of Aboriginal speakers, artists and cultural educators who shared their knowledge through storytelling, workshops, guided walks and community events. Highlights included World Wetlands Day with Uncle Amos, Campfire Yarns with Auntie Theresa, Aboriginal art workshops and the Wetlands & Cultural Heritage Forum. These events provided valuable opportunities for our community to learn about traditional knowledge, cultural heritage and the enduring connection Aboriginal people have with wetlands and waterways.

Community engagement continues to be a major focus for the Centre. Our Easter Fun Day was once again a huge success, welcoming over 1,000 visitors to enjoy a day of family activities, wildlife encounters and outdoor fun. Events such as Easter not only provide important fundraising opportunities for the Centre but also help connect new families with nature and encourage future generations to value and protect wetlands.

Our school holiday programs have also been among the most successful we have ever delivered. Across multiple weeks we welcomed hundreds of children and families to participate in wildlife encounters, nature-based activities, canoeing, environmental education and hands-on experiences. It has been wonderful to see so many young people engaging with the wetlands and developing a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

The wetlands themselves have continued to flourish this year. Recent rainfall has given them a boost, and is creating excellent conditions for birds and wildlife. Visitors have enjoyed fantastic wildlife sightings while our volunteer teams continue their incredible work restoring habitat, maintaining infrastructure and improving the visitor experience.

As we look ahead to the second half of the year, we remain focused on delivering meaningful conservation outcomes, strengthening community connections and continuing to improve the facilities and experiences we offer.

Thank you once again to our volunteers, members, sponsors, partners and visitors for your ongoing support. Everything we achieve is only possible because of the community that stands behind the Hunter Wetlands Centre.

Warm regards,
James Wilson
General Manager



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



THE WETLANDER



GENERAL MANAGER REPORT
James Wilson
PAGE 01



BOARD CHAIR REPORT
Dr Peter Nelson
PAGE 04



BANKSIAS
Bruce Tozer & Paddy Lightfoot
PAGE 05



WETLAND BIODIVERSITY
IN YOUR BACKYARD
Marion Baldwin
PAGE 07



ART REPORT
Mark Kempton
PAGE 08



WORLD WETLANDS DAY*
PAGE 10



WETLANDS AND PEOPLE
Geoff Nicholls
PAGE 11



SPANGLED DRONGOS
Margaret Stewart
PAGE 13



BAT DIVERSITY
Fernanda Tique Bernal & Brad Law
PAGE 13



EASTER FUN DAY
Val Noake
PAGE 15



APRIL SCHOOL HOLIDAYS*
PAGE 16



FIGHTING MYRTLE RUST*
PAGE 17



FAUNA FLORA & FOE*
PAGE 18



OUR FRECKLED DUCKS*
PAGE 19



NATIONAL VOLUNTEERS WEEK*
PAGE 20



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR 2025*
PAGE 20



BHP THEATRETTE RELAUNCH*
PAGE 21



SWAMP FILM FESTIVAL*
PAGE 22



NEW BUGGIES*
PAGE 23



BIRDWATCHING FOR BEGINNERS
PAGE 24



RECENT VISITORS
PAGE 24

SUPPORTERS, PARTNERS
& SPONSORS
PAGE 25

HWCA INFORMATION
PAGE 26

What
Is In
This
Issue

* Written with the assistance of an AI Agent

* Written with the assistance of an AI Agent

THE WETLANDER

REPORT FROM THE HUNTER WETLANDS BOARD CHAIR

Dr Peter Nelson

Another successful term for the Centre deftly managed by our GM James and our marvellous team of volunteers. Recently James has decided to reduce his days to four and this has allowed the talented Linda Rowan to fill the gap on Fridays. Also, the Board has a new member in Bayley Foley. Bayley brings much needed expertise and experience in commercial management, and his enthusiasm and drive is a breath of fresh air. Director Pam Dean-Jones has also been a great addition to our Board. Pam is chair of our Scientific Advisory Group and her experience and connections in coastal management has been an asset. Carolyn Gillard has decided to step back from de facto Board Secretary position; we thank her for her good work. Michelle Keith has generously stepped into that role. Scott Redman has taken leave of absence for six months to deal with health issues. Scott's experience and commitment in financial management is greatly missed and we wish him a safe recovery.

The grounds have been generally looking lush and green and the maintenance volunteers have done a good job of keeping the grounds looking great, but this belies the low and sporadic rainfall we have had for many months now, which has seen the water levels in the ponds fall to very low levels. Brambles Pond was virtually empty and the low level in BHP has seen the water quality deteriorate to a pea soup green. This pond receives run off almost exclusively from the urban areas of Shortland making the nutrient levels high and promoting algal growth which is exacerbated by the number of waterbirds using the pond. The solar pump we installed to have the vegetation in Brambles Pond take up nutrients has been non-operational so far due to lack of water in Brambles Pond. An additional pump with an aerator will soon be installed.

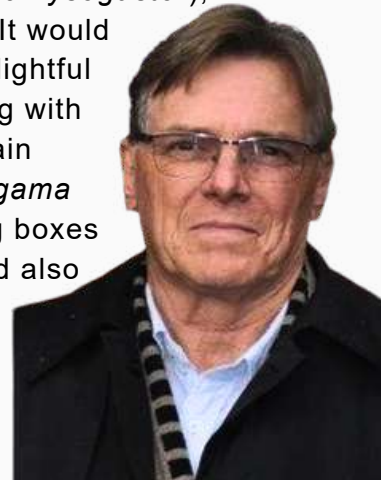
I was excited to hear of the recent photographing on site of a Rakali (*Hydromys chrysogaster*), the much-maligned native water rat which has been described as like a small otter. It would



Photo by Ian Feltham

be great to encourage more of these delightful creatures to make our ponds home along with some other notable wetland animals again such as Eastern Water Dragons (*Intellagama lesuerii lesuerii*). The addition of nesting boxes in our relatively young forest trees would also encourage more wetland birds such as Kingfishers.

Dr Peter Nelson,
Chair, HWCA Board of Directors



VOLUNTEERS WANTED

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,
GROUNDS CARE TEAM MEMBERS - Sat, Sun, or Mon
RECEPTION - Sat or Sun (Weekly or Fortnightly)**

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:

www.wetlands.org.au/volunteer



BANKSIAS here,
Banksias there,
Banksias everywhere

Bruce Tozer & Paddy Lightfoot

Thank Goodness for Sir Joseph Banks. If he had not persuaded the British Government, following the USA preventing them sending their convicts to North America, to send them to Australia, or New Holland as it was known then, we would be speaking French and Paddy failed the leaving certificate in oral French. The French arriving in Port Jackson very close behind the first fleet in 1788.

Some two years ago Carolyn Gillard whilst guiding a walking tour was asked by a visitor "Where can we see the iconic Old Man **Banksia**." We certainly had them scattered around the Wetlands but never had an area where we could showcase them. The message went out.

"Let's create a **Banksia** Trail!"

This was a challenge the Thursday Mob took on with enthusiasm, to establish that '**Banksia** Trail.' A location was selected along the banks of Brambles Pond, and as you can see the '**Banksia** Trail' area has grown rapidly. At present we have over 40 well established plants with another 10 to be added to our selection to complete our project. Finishing touches, logs, signs are underway.

Visitors can now admire the 'Iconic Australian **Banksia**' in one location whilst on their many exciting, guided tours of our wetlands.

Once established this area will attract a variety of birds, particularly honey eaters, parrots of all varieties, thornbills, and black cockatoos which are regular visitors to the wetlands, just to name a few. As a side note wouldn't it be fabulous to have the endangered Regent Honeyeater return. Noting it had been sighted a short time ago in Melaleucas on the west side of the Wetlands.

Sir Joseph Banks was born, 1743, into a very wealthy family of landowners holding no fewer than fourteen country estates in Lincolnshire, England. With this prestige and extreme wealth, he was able to persuade the British admiralty to let him and his staff sail with Cook on the Endeavour to the Southern Hemisphere. He collected samples of the Banksia species at Botany Bay and when they were scientifically named the plant genus was named Banksia after Sir Joseph.



THE WETLANDER



Banksia are in the same family, Proteaceae, as Grevillea, Waratah, Hakea etc. Proteus refers to the mythological sea god of Greek mythology. He was reputed to be able to foretell your future if you could take hold of him. However, he could shape change when about to be held so no one ever had their future told. Individual genus members of the Proteaceae family have very similar individual flowers. However the total flower head is very different. A great name choice by early botanists.

There are around 170 species of Banksia which are all found in Australia with the sole exception of Banksia dentata which occurs in New Guinea. We have planted Banksia spinulosa var collina (collina means of the hills) which is of particular interest to Novocastrians as the type (that is the first specimen collected and described) was collected by surveyor Alan Cunningham from the ridge above Glenrock Lagoon.

A further interesting species on the trail is a variety of Banksia integrifolia (Coast Banksia). This Banksia has a sub species known as variety sentinel. This is a compact, narrow cultivar only 1 to 1.5m in width so very suitable for smaller gardens.

When you're next at the Wetlands visit our Banksia Trail, take a seat and enjoy the beauty that surrounds you.



Paddy at the Banksia plantings

THE WETLANDER

BRING WETLAND BIODIVERSITY INTO YOUR BACKYARD

Marion Baldwin

Local native sedges and rushes provide habitat and food for indigenous wildlife, attracting frogs, lizards, butterflies and birds into your garden.



Bright eyed brown butterfly



Ficinia nodosa **< Knobby Club Rush**

A tough fast growing perennial sedge. A reedy plant with slender arching round green stems. Knobby brown spikelet seedheads all year round.

Natural Habitat: Sand dunes, wetlands and saltmarshes.

Environmental Benefits: Shelter for water birds, small birds and frogs. Ideal for planting in or near water features. Suitable for biofiltration.

Lomandra longifolia **Mat Rush >**

A perennial with tough strap-like leaves with yellow scented flower spikes in spring and summer. Very hardy plant. Low to no maintenance growing to 1m.

Natural Habitat: Wide-ranging from creek banks, rainforest, open forest and sand dunes.

Environmental benefits: Stabilises surrounding soils and provides habitat and food for native frogs and lizards.



Carex appressa **< Tall Sedge**

Densely tufted sedge with bright green leaves and yellow/brown male & female flower spikes.

Natural Habitat: Wetlands, watercourses and ponds.

Environmental Benefits: *Carex appressa* is the only larval food plant for the Bright-Eyed Brown butterfly (*Heteronympha cordace*). The flowers also providing adult butterflies and small birds with nectar. Frog habitat.

These plants are propagated and grown by our volunteers and are available for purchase in tube stock \$4 each or 3 for \$10.00

THE WETLANDER



JANUARY



APRIL



FEBRUARY



MARCH

MID-YEAR ART REPORT Mark Kempton

JANUARY

The 'Artists with Parkinson's' exhibition was the product of a series of workshops held last year. The range of artworks on display reflected the passion and artistic skills developed by the artists and their support people.

FEBRUARY

20 young artists from around the region, combined in February to participate in an exhibition 'The Wetlands Through Young Eyes'. This was an outstandingly successful display, with all the young artists enjoying the accolades from family, friends and visitors to the wetlands.

MARCH

Laurie Bartlett (photographer). We live in a world full of wonder, intrigue and beauty. Laurie explores this through his photographic interpretation of the wetlands.

APRIL

'Under the Same Sky.'

In this shared exhibition, *Alison Ellis* is exploring the importance of community and connection through the birds of the wetlands and the impact they have on the people who live and visit here.

This is *Ciara Symons'* first exhibition and marks her journey using watercolours, to interpret and showcase her love of our many and varied native birds.

THE WETLANDER



MAY - Ash McIntyre

MAY

In *'Quiet Kingdoms'* Ash McIntyre delves into the hidden stories of the wetlands through her intricate re-creations of delicate and fantastic scenes.

Newcomer to Wetlands exhibitions, Les Peterkin OAM, shared his passion and devotion to all things Kookaburra.



MAY - Les Peterkin OAM



JUNE

JUNE

'Watermark' features the work of the Port Stephens Artisan Collective. These artists proudly presented a series of artworks that reflected their unique interpretations of the vibrant wetlands environment.

Upcoming Exhibitions for the rest of 2026

JULY

Cath McCarthy Group

AUGUST

Hunter Print Makers

SEPTEMBER

Jenni Gander Group

OCTOBER

Merran Kilgour & Eugenia Denlevie

NOVEMBER

Dorothy Compton & Val MacDonald

DECEMBER

Christmas Special

BIRDING GUIDE TO THE HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

Limited Copies Available at Reception

Background to the Hunter Wetlands Centre

The Hunter Wetlands Centre is a 45-hectare site, part of what was once a vast chain of wetlands from Beresfield to Warabrook. It was partly used as a rubbish dump, then filled and converted to a football field and clubhouse which was later abandoned.

Dr Max Madcock (pictured with telescope) had a vision of the site as a conservation, education and ecotourism site. With tremendous community support the site was acquired in 1994. It is mainly a freshwater site, but some salty water flows in. A canal channel links the wetlands to Ironbark Creek and on to the Hunter River. This provides an opportunity to hire a canoe and paddle the creek to observe the birds along its banks. There is also a large network of paths that allow access to bird observation points.

In 2002 the wetlands centre was recognized as part of the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar site. Ramsar sites are dedicated to conserving wetlands worldwide. As far as possible, the wetlands are kept as a natural system that periodically dries out, and at other times attracts different bird species as conditions become drier or wetter. In any case, any human intervention can interfere with the natural state but every effort is made to mitigate those effects.



THE HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE is a not-for-profit organization. It is a registered charity and a not-for-profit company. It is a registered charity and a not-for-profit company. It is a registered charity and a not-for-profit company.

If you would like to make a donation please phone:

02 4951 6466

For more information visit the Hunter Wetlands Centre website at:

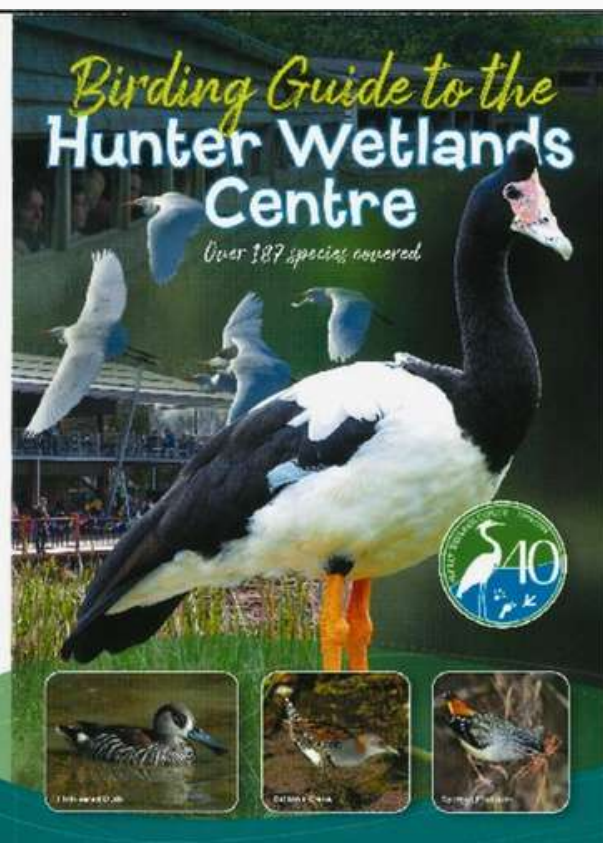
www.hunterwetlandscentre.org.au

For more information visit the Hunter Wetlands Centre website at:

www.hunterwetlandscentre.org.au

For more information visit the Hunter Wetlands Centre website at:

www.hunterwetlandscentre.org.au



WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2026

World Wetlands Day is observed every year on 2 February, marking the anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands — an international treaty adopted in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar.

The 2026 theme — "Wetlands and traditional knowledge: Celebrating cultural heritage" — underscores the deep and enduring connections between wetlands, people and culture. The theme is particularly resonant here in Australia, where First Nations peoples have cared for wetland country for tens of thousands of years.

On Sunday 1 February, we marked the occasion with a morning of family activities that brought our community together to celebrate and reflect on the importance of these precious ecosystems.

Uncle Amos led in storytelling, song, and dance — a joyful reminder of the Indigenous wisdom and ancestral practices that have shaped our relationship with the land and waterways for generations.

Visitors explored the wetlands through self-guided discovery walks, guided canoe tours, and a bird photography tour that showcased the remarkable biodiversity right on our doorstep. Families got up close with our reptile encounter, and curious minds discovered the fascinating micro-invertebrates living just beneath the surface of the ponds.

Children created handprints decorated with wetlands slogans and added them to the tree in reception, forming a growing display of community support and stewardship.

Wetlands are among the world's most diverse and productive environments — cradles of biological diversity that provide the water and productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival. Yet today, wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests. Days like this one matter.

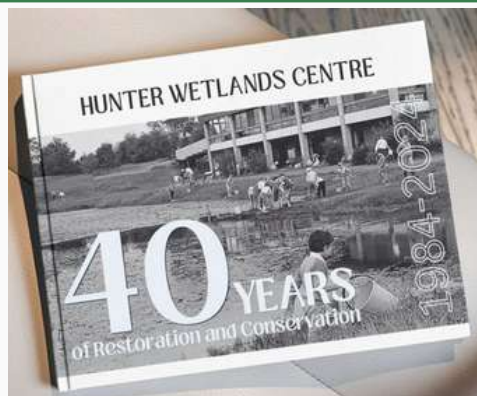
FOUR DECADES OF THE HUNTER WETLANDS

To celebrate the Hunter Wetlands Centre's 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 WETLANDER

WETLANDS AND PEOPLE (Sharing Indigenous Heritage) Geoff Nicholls

THIS PROGRAM IS FUNDED BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST AND DELIVERED FOR LOCAL LAND SERVICES, A MEMBER OF THE COMMONWEALTH REGIONAL DELIVERY PARTNERS PANEL.

Thanks to the stewardship of Louise Duff, Hunter Wetlands Centre was fortunate, in March this year, to host a forum on wetlands and cultural heritage.



Our immersive day began with a deep “Welcome to Country” ceremony provided by Aunty Theresa, a Worimi Nation cultural communicator. Aunty Theresa’s passionate observation of local country, assisted by a didgeridoo player from Darwin, and culminating in a Smoking Ceremony, drew us into the world of spiritual connection to our Lower Hunter wetlands.

The first speaker for the forum was Daryn McKenny, a tireless advocate for preserving indigenous languages through the “Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre”, based in humble lodgings in Boolaroo but

broadcast throughout the world. Daryn battled exhaustion after spending a late night tending to a stranded whale to give us an insightful talk on the interconnectedness of wildlife cycles with the seasons, culminating in a subtle, detailed Seasonal Calendar for Awabakal Country.

Following Daryn, Peter Gillam, an experienced waterways engineer of Awabakal descent, gave a talk on the collaboration between indigenous perspectives and property developers in the area of the proposed Western Sydney Aerotropolis. He showed how the integrity of local creeks and wetlands are being preserved in conjunction with industrial scale construction. Along with empathetic values for the historical natures of the waterways feeding into the site, consideration has been given to implementing foundational materials that are sympathetic to resources already present on the land. Peter’s presentation showed how the built environment and accompanying infrastructure of today can combine with traditionally held beliefs.

Our third presenter for the day was Shellie Smith. Shellie is an Awabakal woman and 8th generation Novocastrian who works both as an artist and a lecturer in architecture at the University of Newcastle. She gave an inspiring account of the lived experience of fishing with her grandmother and witnessing the patterns of movement of mullet (watawan) in Coquun (Hunter River), and how that informed her collaborative artwork in the foyer of the Newcastle Art Gallery. Shellie discussed the philosophical concepts that operate in her approaches to architecture and public art, how indigenous culture can and should be represented in these practices.

After the lunch break, Christine Prietto, Ramsar Officer and HWCA representative, facilitated a discussion panel on connecting to Country. The conversation emphasised the importance of consulting with local communities. Christine also made the closing remarks, summarising the health and wealth of the approaches to sharing indigenous heritage.

THE WETLANDER

Louise Williams, a Senior Land Services Officer with the Natural Heritage Trust, followed the panel discussion with an account of the recovery work being undertaken in the Hunter Estuary Wetlands and Myall Lakes Ramsar sites to improve the habitats of threatened species such as the migratory Eastern Curlew, Green and Gold Bell Frog, Australasian Bittern and Estuary Stingray. The project employs indigenous rangers, such as the Awabakal Winjirra team, to control the impacts of invasive flora and fauna species along with climate change pressures on the sites. Their ongoing involvement increases First Nations participation in and custodianship of our Ramsar wetlands.



Susie Young, a strategic urban planner and designer and landscape architect, gave the final presentation of the day. Susie highlighted the features offered by the Upstream Kit, a strategic framework for planners working on Country. Developed as a regional response to the Connecting with Country Framework (GANSW), the Kit takes a wholistic approach to urban planning, essentially being inclusive of local First Nations knowledge and input. The aim being to find a common ground between indigenous and settler communities, arriving at their mutual benefit and the well-being of place.





Photo by Robert Stewart

SPANGLED DRONGOS AT THE WETLANDS CENTRE

Margaret Stewart

This handsome bird with its iridescent black feathers and forked tail is very easy to see at the Wetlands Centre. It perches on open branches and then swoops into the air to catch insects. When it lands back on the branch it often flicks its forked tail in a characteristic fashion. There are frequent reports of sightings here and earlier this year a bird on a nest was seen. Unfortunately, this nest failed but we still see 2 or 3 of the species flying around each month.

The scientific name is *Dicrurus bracteatus*. *Dicrurus* refers to the long, deeply forked tail. *Bracteatus* alludes to the iridescent spangles on the breast. The word 'drongo' is a shortened form of various French alternatives, and it is pretty well established that the use of the word drongo as an Australian term of abuse is only indirectly associated with the bird.

BAT DIVERSITY AT HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

Fernanda Tique Bernal & Brad Law
(NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development)

In autumn 2026, we carried out a rapid acoustic survey across the Hunter Wetlands Centre (HWC) to discover which bat species use the wetlands and surrounding habitats. Using special ultrasonic detectors, we recorded bat echolocation calls over four nights at ten locations across the reserve.

The results were remarkable.

In just four nights, we recorded nearly 5,000 bat passes, representing 13 bat species from a wide variety of habitats including freshwater wetlands, rainforest, paperbark swamp, and ironbark marsh. The most active species was the Southern Myotis (*Myotis macropus*), a threatened fishing bat that feeds on insects above the water surface. Other commonly recorded species included the East Coast Freetail Bat (*Micronomus norfolkensis*) and the Little Bent-wing Bat (*Miniopterus australis*), both also considered threatened in New South Wales.

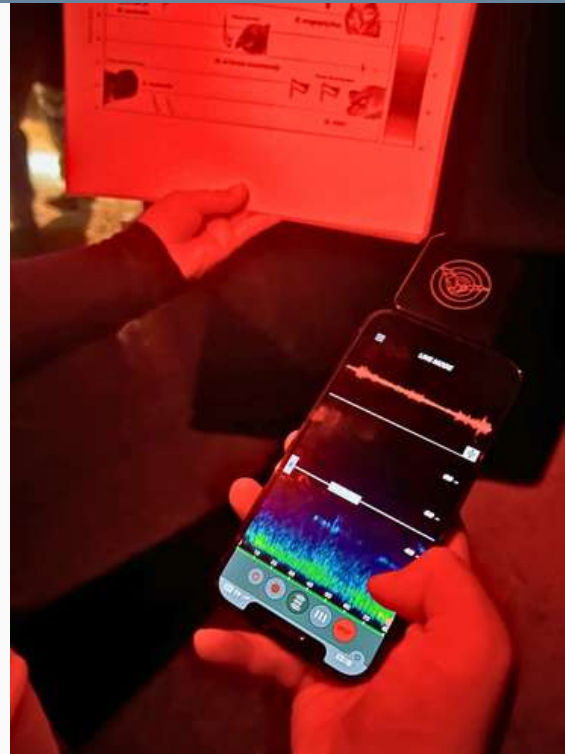


The highest levels of bat activity were recorded in freshwater wetlands and Ironbark Marsh habitats, highlighting the importance of these areas for bat feeding, movement, and conservation. These habitats provide abundant insect resources, open flight paths, and important shelter opportunities for bats.

This study provides the first ecological snapshot of bat diversity at HWC and will help guide future conservation efforts, environmental education initiatives, habitat restoration, and management actions within the reserve.

Bat species recorded across different habitat types at the Hunter Wetlands Centre during autumn 2026 acoustic surveys:

- Yellow-bellied Sheath-tail Bat (*Saccolaimus flaviventris*)
 - Casuarina/Paperbark Swamp, East Coast Rainforest Section, Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh
- Gould's Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus gouldii*)
 - Casuarina/Paperbark Swamp, East Coast Rainforest Section, Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- Chocolate Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus morio*)
 - Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Reed Marsh
- Little Bent-wing Bat (*Miniopterus australis*)
 - Casuarina/Paperbark Swamp, Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- Large Bent-wing Bat (*Miniopterus orianae oceanensis*)
 - Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- East Coast Freetail Bat (*Micronomus norfolkensis*)
 - East Coast Rainforest Section, Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- Ride's Free-tailed Bat (*Ozimops ridei*)
 - East Coast Rainforest Section, Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- Southern Myotis (*Myotis macropus*)
 - Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- Eastern Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus megaphyllus*)
 - Casuarina/Paperbark Swamp
- Greater Broad-nosed Bat (*Scoteanax rueppellii*)
 - Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- Eastern Broad-nosed Bat (*Scotorepens orion*)
 - Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- White striped Freetail Bat (*Austronomus australis*)
 - Casuarina/Paperbark Swamp, Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- Eastern Forest Bat (*Vespadelus pumilus*)
 - Casuarina/Paperbark Swamp, Freshwater Habitats, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh
- Forest Bat species group (*Vespadelus spp.*)
 - Casuarina/Paperbark Swamp, Freshwater Habitats, Freshwater Swampland, Ironbark Marsh, Reed Marsh



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!!!

EASTER FUN DAY 2026 Val Noake

Despite some rainy weather and local fuel shortages, Easter Fun Day on 4 April 2026 was a great celebration at the Wetlands. Attendance was slightly down on previous years, but the energy and enthusiasm from visitors and volunteers alike made the day a success.

Our face painters were absolute stars — three talented artists didn't stop all morning, transforming 100 faces into Easter bunnies, turtles, swans and other masterpieces. The Reptile Encounters sessions were so popular that the Animal Care Team added a third show after the first two sold out by Friday — a testament to how much our visitors love getting up close with our scaly friends.

Vicki the Easter Bunny was in fine form, posing for countless photos throughout the day, while families following the Bunny Trail left cute messages for the Easter bunny and checked the hidden houses for the Easter Bunny and the Easter Bilby. The jumping castle, craft activities, games, and sand pit were also popular.

Thanks to Debra and Danny from general maintenance we were able to add the story of the Easter Bilby to our celebrations with a fabulous Easter Bilby photo frame for children to pose behind.

The Lions Club BBQ was a crowd favourite as always, and the Magpie Geese Feeding and Water Bug activities kept visitors engaged with the wetland environment throughout the morning.

A big Easter event like this doesn't happen without an enormous amount of work, so a huge thank you to every volunteer who gave their time and energy to ensure the the day was a success.





Zoe & Claire build a Lizard Lounge

APRIL SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Busy Days at the Wetlands

The April school holidays brought a wonderful buzz to the Wetlands Centre, with families making the most of the warm autumn weather to explore, discover, and connect with nature. Activities were well attended across the two weeks, with most sessions booking out.

Critters and Craft

Extra Reptile Encounter shows were added on Wednesdays throughout the holidays, joining the regular Saturday and Sunday sessions. As always, they were a hit. Families also dropped in on Wednesday mornings for Lizard Craft and a close-up look at some of our pond critters — all free with entry. The Lizard Lounge proved popular with children having a great time digging and building.

Wetlands After Dark

Our evening tours on 8 and 15 April sold out quickly, and it's easy to see why. Guided by John Simpson, our expert naturalist, visitors spotted frogs, possums, bats, spiders, and even the usually shy Freckled Ducks going about their evening routines. A magical experience for all ages.

Campfire Yarns with Aunty Theresa

A highlight of the holidays was a very special first — Campfire Yarns, an evening of Aboriginal storytelling around the fire with Aunty Theresa. It was a beautiful and interesting addition to our holiday program.

OOSH Groups

We were delighted to host vacation care groups from Nulkaba, Tomaree, Medowie, Newcastle East, Raymond Terrace, Clarence Town, and Grahamstown. In total, 180 children enjoyed a Wetland Adventure Day, taking in Reptile Encounters, the sensory trail lizard walk, bush shelter building, and plenty of time on the Discovery Playground. It was wonderful to see so many young people experiencing the Wetlands, many for the first time.

Thank you to all the volunteers who made the April school holidays such a success.

FIGHTING MYRTLE RUST

How Research and Volunteers Are Restoring Our Wetlands

The Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia continues to strengthen its bush regeneration efforts through close collaboration with researchers working to combat myrtle rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*), a disease threatening key wetland species.

A central figure in this work is Karina Guo, a PhD student at the University of Sydney and Technical Officer with the Botanic Gardens of Sydney. Her research focuses on Broad-Leaved Paperbark (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), a foundational wetland tree species that supports entire forest swamp ecosystems. At the Hunter Wetlands Centre, Karina works directly with practitioners and volunteers, ensuring her research is grounded in real restoration conditions.

Karina's project spans genetic analysis, glasshouse experiments and on-ground monitoring. She investigates the genetic basis of resistance to myrtle rust, studies how wild populations respond to disease pressure, and examines how environmental stressors such as drought affect plant susceptibility. Importantly, this research feeds directly into on-site restoration activities. Seedlings grown from carefully selected mother trees are planted at the Centre, where Karina phenotypes and monitors them over time to identify which individuals show strong resistance.

The Hunter Wetlands Centre's bush regeneration work is integral to this process. Site preparation by volunteers—including clearing invasive lantana and applying mulch to retain soil moisture—creates the conditions needed for these seedlings to establish successfully.

Together, this partnership demonstrates how science and community action can align. By integrating rigorous research into practical restoration, the Centre is helping to build resilient wetland ecosystems capable of withstanding emerging threats like Myrtle Rust.





FAUNA, FLORA & FOE

The Hunter Wetlands Centre was delighted to host a full house on 14 May for this year's Fauna, Flora & Foe talk, delivered in partnership with CWA Belmont. The event brought together community members, nature enthusiasts and citizen scientists for an engaging exploration of Australia's unique ecosystems—and the challenges they face, often beginning in our very own backyards.

Presented by Michele Keith and Carolyn Gillard, the morning offered valuable insights into the interconnectedness of flora and fauna and the importance of conservation at a local level.

Exploring Australia's Native Flora and Fauna

Carolyn guided attendees through the fascinating world of She-oaks (Casuarinas), highlighting their diversity across Australia and parts of Asia. These native trees play a vital role as a food source and habitat for wildlife such as the endangered Glossy Black Cockatoo.

Michele then highlighted the plight of the threatened Glossy Black Cockatoo, outlining current conservation efforts and key challenges. Habitat loss remains one of the most significant threats, affecting this species and many others that rely on healthy ecosystems.

The Hidden Threat in Our Backyards

A key message of the day centred on invasive garden plants. While often introduced with good intentions, these species can spread rapidly, outcompeting native plants and reducing vital food and shelter sources for birds, animals and insects. The presentation offered a clear reminder that everyday gardening choices can have far-reaching environmental impacts.

From Awareness to Action

The event also highlighted practical ways individuals can support conservation efforts. Attendees were encouraged to take part in citizen science initiatives, reinforcing that even small actions can contribute to protecting endangered species. The morning concluded with a delicious morning tea and a guided walk through the Centre's Casuarina forest, bringing the day's themes to life.

Community Reflections

Feedback from attendees reflected the impact and value of the event, with many expressing appreciation for the informative presentations and a renewed commitment to planting native species and supporting habitat corridors.

"Now we all know that we need to plant more casuarinas to make corridors for the black cockatoos."



OUR FRECKLED DUCKS

Retirement and Romance

Visitors to the Hunter Wetlands Centre may have noticed a few familiar faces are missing from the Freckled Duck aviary. After many years delighting visitors and helping tell the story of one of Australia's most remarkable waterbirds, five of our senior Freckled Ducks – Barry, Hunter, Jacob, Zenon and Jewel – have officially retired.

Aged between 17 and 22 years, the “freckled five” spent their entire lives together at the Wetlands Centre, so it was fitting that they made the move together to their new retirement home at Misty Mountain near Port Macquarie. While we are sad to see them leave Shortland, Animal Carer Ash reports that they have settled in beautifully and taken to their new pond like, well, ducks to water!

Meanwhile, the next generation is continuing the Wetlands Centre's proud Freckled Duck legacy. During a recent visit to Taronga Zoo, Ash checked in on Jill, Stubbsy and Larry, who are part of Taronga's captive breeding program. The trio are doing an outstanding job, with ducklings from two recent broods growing quickly into healthy juveniles. During the visit, both Jill and Stubbsy were sitting on nests while proud dad Larry stood guard nearby.

The Hunter Wetlands Centre has a long and distinguished history with Freckled Ducks. Since joining the CSIRO captive breeding program in 1991, the Centre became a national leader in breeding this unique native species, producing Australia's first captive-bred Freckled Duck chicks in 1998. Today, many captive Freckled Ducks found in zoos and sanctuaries around the world can trace their lineage back to the Hunter Wetlands flock.



NATIONAL VOLUNTEERS WEEK

The Hunter Wetlands Centre is supported by more than 150 dedicated volunteers who generously contribute their time across a wide range of roles, including administration, maintenance and bush regeneration. Their efforts are essential to the care, preservation and ongoing success of this unique natural environment.

On 20 May, as part of National Volunteers Week, the Centre took the opportunity to celebrate and thank these remarkable individuals. Volunteers came together to enjoy a series of engaging talks, a guided walk and a relaxed BBQ lunch, all set within the landscape they help nurture. The talks and walk reflected themes from the recent "Fauna, Flora and Foe" session held earlier in the month, that is covered on page 18 of this newsletter.

Gathering in this shared environment provided a meaningful moment to reflect on the significant impact volunteers make. Their commitment, passion and generosity strengthen both the wetlands and the wider community.

We extend our sincere thanks to every volunteer for the time and care they give. Each hour contributed helps protect this vital ecosystem for future generations.

If you are inspired to get involved and be part of this important work, visit <https://wetlands.org.au/volunteer> to learn more.

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR 2025

Terrie White joined the Animal Care Team two years ago and became the Team Leader last year. She leads a diverse team of volunteers who make up the Animal Care Team who feed, clean and care for the animals in the Animal House and the Visitor Centre, seven days a week. She is the presenter of our very popular reptile encounters held on-site and at community events. Terrie also maintains the health and welfare records for a range of captive animals to comply with various government regulations.

Terrie is dedicated to our animals with their welfare at the forefront of everything she does.

Congratulations Terrie!!!





Theatrette 1989

BHP THEATRETTE RELAUNCH Opening New Opportunities

Earlier this year, the Hunter Wetlands Centre officially celebrated the reopening of the BHP Theatrette, marking an exciting new chapter for one of the Centre's longest-serving educational and community spaces.

The refurbished venue was officially opened in March 2026 and enjoyed its public grand reopening during the inaugural Swamp Film Festival on the June long weekend, coinciding with World Environment Day celebrations.

The theatrette's origins stretch back almost 40 years. In 1986, part of the former Hamilton Rugby Club building was converted into a tiered theatrette to support education programs, community meetings and nature-based presentations. Funded through a \$25,000 sponsorship, it quickly became an important facility for school groups, visitors and special events.

The latest refurbishment was made possible through the generous support of BHP, whose association with the Hunter Wetlands Centre dates back to the mid-1980s when BHP Newcastle Steelworks helped support the transformation of the former rugby ground and swamp into the internationally recognised wetland sanctuary we know today. BHP's recent grant enabled a major upgrade of the facility, continuing a partnership that has spanned decades.

Visitors to the relaunched theatrette will find a modern facility featuring a 120-inch projection screen, upgraded audio-visual equipment, built-in audio system, acoustic improvements, new carpet, air-conditioning and a vibrant mural created by local artists Lisa Stratigos and Sharon Salmi. When not booked for events, the space will also screen short environmental films for visitors throughout the day.

The BHP Theatrette will continue to support school excursions, seminars, workshops, talks and community events. It is also available for hire by businesses, organisations and community groups seeking a unique venue close to Newcastle. Importantly, income generated through venue hire is reinvested into the Hunter Wetlands Centre's conservation, education and wildlife programs, ensuring every booking helps support the protection of our wetlands and the species that call them home.

SWAMP FILM FESTIVAL

Celebrating the Environment Through Film

The Hunter Wetlands Centre's inaugural Swamp Film Festival delivered a memorable day of creativity, environmental storytelling and community engagement.

The day began with **Swamp Kids Make Films**, where children and their families took part in a hands-on stop-motion animation experience. Young filmmakers enthusiastically created their own short movies using a 3D dinosaur diorama complete with movable dinosaur figurines. One particularly imaginative production recreated the extinction event by attaching a rock to the backdrop with Blu Tack and animating it as a descending meteor.

Younger children were especially drawn to the 2D wetland pond sets, where magnetic animals and letters provided endless opportunities for storytelling and animation. The activity proved popular not only with the children but also with parents, who enjoyed becoming active participants in the filmmaking process.

In the afternoon, audiences gathered in the Hunter Wetlands Centre's refurbished theatrette for **Swamp Films on Screen**, a showcase of locally produced environmental films and wildlife footage celebrating the landscapes, wildlife and conservation stories of the Hunter region. With more than 30 people attending, the audience created a lively and interactive atmosphere throughout the screening session.

A highlight of the afternoon was the screening of *Orange to Blue Sky*, followed by a Q&A with Associate Professor Dr Hedda Haugen Askland. The discussion generated strong audience interest, with an extended and engaging exchange of questions and ideas following the film.

The festival also recognised audience favourites through the People's Choice Awards. In the **Swamp Shorts** category, *Silence of the Hives* by Henry Peter Dean was voted the winner. In the **Swamp Clips** category, the award went to Rob Anderson's *Spoonbills Snacktime*. Both winners received vouchers.

The enthusiasm of participants, filmmakers and audiences demonstrated the value of environmental storytelling and highlighted the strong community interest in celebrating the unique wetlands, wildlife and natural heritage of the Hunter region.



THE WETLANDER

NEW BUGGIES

Supporting Visitors and Conservation at Hunter Wetlands Centre

Exploring the Hunter Wetlands Centre has become easier than ever thanks to the arrival of two new buggies, purchased with funding secured through the NSW Community Building Partnership program.



The Centre received a \$30,000 grant through the program, enabling the purchase of the new vehicles that will support visitors and volunteers across the Centre's expansive 45-hectare Ramsar-listed wetlands site.

On 31 March 2026, Wallsend MP Sonia Hornery visited the Hunter Wetlands Centre to officially inspect the new buggies and see firsthand the difference they will make to daily operations and visitor experiences. Ms Hornery highlighted the importance of improving accessibility while supporting the vital conservation and environmental education work undertaken at the Centre.

The first vehicle is a six-seater buggy, which is already helping make the wetlands more accessible for visitors with limited mobility, including older visitors and people with disabilities. The buggy allows guests to enjoy guided tours and experience parts of the wetlands that may otherwise be difficult to reach on foot.

The second vehicle is a two-seater utility buggy dedicated to behind-the-scenes operations. It is being used by volunteers for activities such as bush regeneration, grounds maintenance and transporting equipment around the site. By making it easier to move across the wetlands, the buggy helps volunteers spend more time on the important conservation work that keeps the Centre thriving.

The Hunter Wetlands Centre is grateful for the support of the NSW Community Building Partnership program and Sonia Hornery MP. These new vehicles are already making a practical difference—improving accessibility, supporting volunteers and helping more people experience the beauty and tranquillity of our unique wetlands.

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

THE WETLANDER

PHOTO GALLERY

BIRDWATCHING FOR BEGINNERS

Photos from our January "Birdwatching for Beginners" tour, including some of the birds seen along the way. Keep an eye out for announcements of our next event.



**Superb
Fairywren**



Black Swan



**Royal
Spoonbill**



**Male
Eastern Koel**

SOME OF OUR RECENT VISITORS



**Egret and
Pied Stilts**



Glossy Ibis



**Whistling
Ducks**



Rail



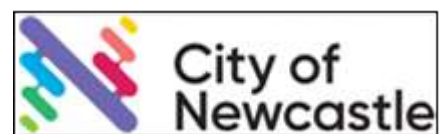
**Striped
Marsh Frog
Eggs**

Our Supporters, Partners & Sponsors

BHP



GLENCORE



Sharon Claydon MP
Federal Member for Newcastle
Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives



**Hunter Bird
Observers Club**

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia

Daily activities:

- * Dip-netting
- * Pond bird feeding
- * Self guided tours
- * Canoe hire
- * Animal House
- * Children's playground

Guided Walks & Tours

- * Guided walks for groups and buggy tours can be booked in advance.
- * Free guided walks
Tues. 10.30am &
Sat. 10.30am

Reptile Show

Sat. & Sun 11am
*Extra Show
School Holidays
Wed. 11am

School Holidays

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

**For further details
phone, email or visit
our website**

www.wetlands.org.au



WETLANDS MEMBERSHIP

Join our wonderful wetlands!

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

For more information see page 14



DONATIONS

January 2026 to June 2026

**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.**



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 Editor:
DAVID ELLIOTT

Volunteer Coordinator:
MARION LEETE

Arts Coordinator:
MARK KEMPTON

Ramsar Officer:
CHRISTINE PRIETTO



HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE

1 Wetland Place, Shortland NSW 2307
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 - Weekdays: 9am-2pm & Weekends: 8:30am-2pm Phone: 040 353 7211

