

HFNC Lake Linlithgow & associated wetlands excursion – report for 23 February 2014

Rod Bird

The morning was fine, calm and mild. There were 6 people present (Rod, Diane, John, Glenys, Dave & Lyn) and we had an agreeable, relaxed morning outing.

Lake Kennedy: the lake was bone dry, gleaming with salt.

Lake Linlithgow: we met at 7.30 am at The Point. The marker showed a depth of 1.46 (corresponding to a max. depth of 16 cm of water in the lake). This represented a drop of 6 cm in 13 days, when measured on the 10 Feb. We estimated that the shallow water covered not more than 30% of the lake surface, with many strips of mud throughout. There has been no rain for at least 2 months, except for perhaps 10 mm in this last week, and the weather has been very hot so that evaporation has been high.

The sludge mark on the marker (see photo) indicate that a water level of 2.00 occurred in 2013, therefore it appears that a max. depth of 0.7 m of water was reached in the lake in 2013.

This year we did not make a count of all birds on this excursion – that was done by RB on the 10 Feb (see list below) to coincide with the BirdLife Australia Shorebird monitoring program.

We noted the following species present today: Blue-winged Parrot, Red-rumped Parrot, Golden-headed Cisticola, Silver-eye (a flock in the tall thistles on the east fence), Willie Wagtail, Magpie-lark, Brown Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Superb Fairy-wren, Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo, Blackbird, Goldfinch, Stubble Quail, Red-capped Plover, Red-necked Stint, Black-winged Stilt, Masked Lapwing, Australasian Shelduck, Grey Teal, Silver Gull, Forest Raven, Brown Falcon and Australian Hobby (see photo). The latter bird was seen over the lake and careening over the Cypress on the Lane to the east. We stopped to watch it as it slewed around the trees and then perched for a minute or so, watching us. A photo is given below, showing the blue eye-ring and beak, features that positively distinguish this species from a Peregrine which has a yellow eye-ring and bill (the male may be of similar size to a large Hobby).

We saw 4 Black Wallabies grazing on the slashed eastern track.

We stopped at the HFNC tree block on the east bank and at Boonawah Ck. After morning tea we walked out on the drying lake but there were no waders in the shallow waters there. We noted the proliferation of the weed, Tall Wheatgrass, that has come down the creek from its sown site near North Lakes Rd. This very tall and fibrous grass was promoted from about 1980s by DPI and GHCMA for planting on salt areas. GHCMA also promoted it in the 2000s. It is now a bad environmental weed, spreading along roadsides (e.g. at Mirranatwa) and onto wetlands. We believe it is too late to control this pest at LLIN.

Over the last 16 summers (Feb. 1999-Feb. 2014) this lake has been dry in 9 of those February records. The most water seen in February was 80 cm in 2011, following 126 mm of rain in late December 2010 and 125 mm in January 2011. For those 16 years the average water depth in February was 0.144 m (range 0-0.8 m). Contrast that with the previous run of 15-years (Feb. 1984 to Feb. 1998) when the average depth was 1.583 m (range 1.26-2.45 m), with no dry year.

Krauses Swamp: Birds were few, with Australian Shelduck, Grey Teal, Masked Lapwing, White-faced Heron, Swamp Harrier, Whistling Kite (it flew close to examine us) and 2 Brolga that walked slowly away from us, across the swamp (see photo). The water, judging by the Brolgas steps, was not more than about 15 cm deep but covered at least 70% of the swamp. As we were about to leave a Crested Pigeon landed on the bushes nearby – the bronze & purple wing patch glinting in the sun. This species has adapted to our area in the last few years.

Bullrush Swamp: Black Swan, Eurasian Coot and Grey Teal were the most numerous birds – numbers in many hundreds. There were some Pink-eared Duck, Australasian Shoveler, Chestnut Teal and Hoary-headed Grebes. Freckled Duck were seen 13 days earlier but not today. The water level is at about 80% capacity. The ducks were very skittish and departed from the shore before we turned in to the parking area by the swamp. No doubt they are aware that the open season begins soon! (on 15 March, for 3 months). One impact of shooting is that it becomes difficult to approach the birds at other times of the year, even on protected areas.

Harnath Swamp: The water level was still quite high. There were a few Grey Teal on the water and a Brown Falcon approached and perched on a fence post on the west side of the swamp.

In the following table, species not seen this year have been omitted (although previously recorded for one or more of the listed wetlands).

Waterbirds & Raptors of Lake Linlithgow & adjacent Wetlands Feb 2014							
Wetland	LLinlit	LKene	Krause	Bullru	Harna	Soldie	Tabor
Observer	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB
Survey date	10Feb	10Feb	10Feb	10Feb	07Feb	24Feb	07Feb
Water depth (max.)	0.22 m	dry	mod	high	mod	v low	dry
Water % cover of area	50	0	70	90	70	<10	<1
Any waterbirds/shorebirds?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
WATERBIRDS							
Freckled Duck				2			
Black Swan	220		12	280		44	
Australian Shelduck	100		20	50	320		
Pink-eared Duck	5000			1500	9		
Australasian Shoveler				20			
Grey Teal	13000		60	3000	18	700	
Chestnut Teal	900			500			
Pacific Black Duck				10		100	
Blue-billed Duck				4			
Hoary-headed Grebe				500			
Little Pied Cormorant						1	
White-necked Heron						28	
White-faced Heron			2	3		54	8
Australian White Ibis			1			5	
Straw-necked Ibis						10	
Royal Spoonbill			2			1	
Yellow-billed Spoonbill			8		4	16	
Brolga			2				
Purple Swamphen			6			20	
Eurasian Coot				3000			
Whiskered Tern	70					13	
Silver Gull	60			3		1	
SHOREBIRDS/WADERS							
Black-winged Stilt	450			23		12	
Red-necked Avocet	400						
Red-capped Plover	400						
Red-kneed Dotterel						5	
Masked Lapwing	60		2	4		70	
Red-necked Stint	770						
Pectoral Sandpiper	1						
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	110						
RAPTORS							
Black-shouldered Kite	2						
Whistling Kite			1				
Swamp Harrier						1	
Wedge-tailed Eagle	1						
Nankeen Kestrel	1						
Brown Falcon	1						
Australian Hobby	1						
OTHER WETLAND sp							
Golden-headed Cisticola	6						
White-fronted Chat	2						
Stubble Quail	4						2
Magpie-lark	25					2	
Australasian Pipit	2						

