

HFNC recording of birdsong on the Wannan and an excursion to Brady's Swamp, 18 March 2017

Rod Bird

Participants: Peter Hocking, Diane Luhrs & Rod Bird, John & Glenys Cayley, Yvonne Ingeme & Reto Zollinger, Daryl Delahoy to Four Posts. Rod Bird visited Brady's Swamp in the afternoon.

Our speaker on Friday evening was Andrew Skeoch ("Listening earth – listening to the wild"). Andrew is a nature sound recordist whose nature albums 'A Morning in the Australian Bush' and 'Favourite Australian Birdsong' have each sold over 50,000 copies (www.listeningearth.com). Andrew offered to follow up on his talk with a demonstration of equipment and recording techniques on Saturday morning.

Twenty years ago in the pre-dawn landscape of central Australia, listening to a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater calling, Andrew realised how few of us get to really listen to nature. That moment started him in a career that has taken him to extraordinary wild places in Australia, Asia, India, Africa and the Americas in search of some of our planet's most beautiful and fascinating sounds.

Rod met with Andrew on Friday morning and visited some likely places to conduct the recording session. The main requirements were freedom from noise and presence of many vocal bird species. Peter showed us his block on the Wannan River at Four Posts and that was an immediate selection. We did check out the Wannan River accessed from the track along the northern boundary of Hewett Park and that would also have been a great site but was a little too difficult for our members to access. After the meeting on Friday evening Andrew camped the night at Peter's place, on site to set up his equipment before dawn.

On Saturday at 8 am we met with Andrew and Peter at Peter's home at Four Posts. Andrew and Peter had set up 2 listening devices at different spots by the river in the dark before dawn, to capture the first sounds of birds and frogs. Apart from one or two vehicles crossing the bridge other noise had not intruded in the first 2 hours of recording. When the noise from traffic and the distant sound of farm dogs and vehicles began to intrude Andrew decided to collect his equipment from the sites. We followed down to the river and Andrew demonstrated how his equipment worked. The two types of recorders are shown below, one designed to collect sound from all around and the other rather more directional.

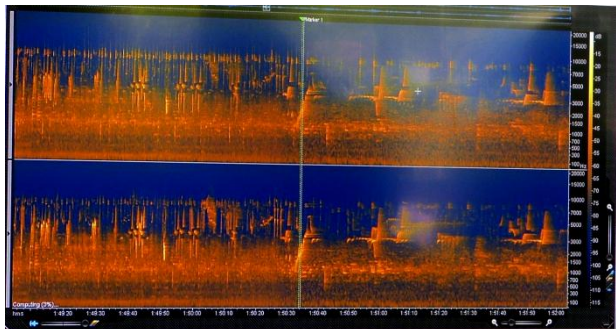


Back at the house Andrew and Peter set up the TV screen and Andrew's speakers to play samples of the recordings. Andrew used an application that gave a visual impression of the sounds, synchronized with the sound from the speakers (as shown by a moving vertical cursor). He could examine certain frequencies from the screen in isolation from other frequencies. For example, the sound of a Forest Raven was low frequency rising, whereas that from a Yellow Robin was a repetitive note of medium and constant frequency. The photo below was taken of the TV screen for one small section of a recording. It shows the upper trace of all sounds recorded while the lower trace is the same except parts have been highlighted by manipulation of certain frequencies. The vertical axis is frequency and horizontal is time.

Birds that we heard on the recordings included Laughing Kookaburra, Long-billed Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crimson Rosella, Grey Shrike-thrush, Eastern Yellow Robin, Brown Thornbill,

Striated Thornbill, Grey Fantail, Superb Fairy-wren, White-throated Treecreeper, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Varied Sittella, Willie Wagtail, Magpie and Common Bronzewing.

A pair of Grey Shrike-thrush, in particular, gave a very melodious and protracted performance. Andrew left us with a copy of a portion of one of the recordings that featured these birds.



All present were treated to a very interesting exhibition of sound recording and discussion on the uses of it for survey as well as pleasure. We thank Andrew for the opportunity to see his craft. We finished at 12.30 pm, after looking into Peter’s mammal nest boxes that he has on trees and buildings. Bats occupied one and a Ring-tailed Possum sat on top of another! The Brush-tailed Possum has not yet taken up residence in ‘his’ box outside, nor have the Sugar Gliders settled into boxes on the outside walls.

At 1.15 pm, no others having arrived, Rod left the Hamilton Visitor Centre and travelled to Brady’s Swamp to survey the waterbirds on that swamp and the nearby Gooseneck and Walkers Swamps.

Walkers Swamp and Gooseneck Swamp were both dry and there were no birds on either. Brady’s Swamp had water on East Pool and more on the West Pool. There appeared to be a fair depth there and still very extensive – but not shallow enough for many waders. Most of the waterbirds were there, including 20 of the Spoonbills and all 13 of the Avocets.

This was the first day of the open-season on ducks; there were a couple of camps and 2 vehicles were driving around. There were decoys in the water on the Western Pool (see photo of plastic Canada Geese & ducks!). There were many teal on that pool and it seemed no-one had disturbed them. However, Doug Craig told Rod that he was there early, feeding out in an adjacent paddock, and found that the fog gave good cover to the ducks until around 9 am when it lifted. He said the two shooters present had ‘got their bag’. Apparently two others had a couple of shots later in the afternoon.



The White-bellied Sea-eagles that had been there in Dec. and Feb. were not seen but Doug saw them 2 weeks later. Three Brolga were at the Eastern Pool and several Emu walked up to me while I was using the scope to count birds there. Waterbirds seen on the eastern and western pools are listed below.

Black winged stilt	30	Australian Shelduck	32	Australian White Ibis	1
Masked Lapwing	5	Hardhead	4	Straw-necked Ibis	8
Red-necked Avocet	13	Grey Teal	1250	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	22
Black Swan	2	Pacific Black Duck	15	Silver Gull	45
Brolga	3	White-faced Heron	4	Whiskered Tern	15
Hoary-headed Grebe	20	White-necked Heron	11	Whistling Kite	1