

HFNC Excursion to Lake Linlithgow & allied wetlands on 23 Feb. 2020

Rod Bird

Participants: Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs, Steve Martinich, Reto Zollinger & Yvonne Ingeme, Peter Hocking and Peter McDonald.

Diane, Rod & Steve met before 8 am for a brief look at a viewing point in the SW corner of Jenawarra, off Chatsworth Rd, where 130 Masked Lapwing were walking on the beach. We then met the others at The Point, at 8 am. There was no wind and the sky was overcast but visibility was good. The water level was at about 70% of full cover and the marker at the Point was at 1.64 (indicating a max. depth of 34 cm of water). The level on 26 Jan had been 42 cm and cover about 75%. This indicates that the lake will probably dry out completely in autumn, in response to low rainfall in 2019 (508 mm) and a comparatively dry spring.

There were few ducks in the Chatsworth Rd Bay area where the waterline was well out. We noted later that the most numerous duck on Jenawarra was the Australian Shelduck (1100 birds), with a large number of Grey Teal (550 birds) but no other ducks. Hoary-headed Grebes numbered 130.

We drove along the SE bank, past the old windmill, and stopped several times to look for waders on the shoreline but finding only Red-capped Plovers. A stop at the Nth end of the 1975 HFNC tree block revealed several rafts of Red-necked Avocets in the northern half of the lake. We observed 32 Blue-winged Parrots and 10 Rainbow Lorikeets at this stop, along with Crested Pigeon, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Red Wattlebird, New Holland Honeyeater and other birds. We noted that many Silver Banksia were flowering and visited by honeyeaters and butterflies. In an earlier survey on 26 January a Black-eared Cuckoo was seen – that, and the Rainbow Lorikeet, are first records for this reserve.



We drove down to Boonawah Creek, stopping in the trees along the way where we had a better view of the birds, counting over 1000 Avocets. There were no Eurasian Coots or Blue-billed Duck, and few Black Swan, no doubt a consequence of the low water level.

Red-necked Stints were seen in greater numbers (we saw 320 birds), along with Red-capped Plover (155 birds) and 4 Double-banded Plover.

We had observed 4 Double-banded Plover last February. The latter are early arrivals on their autumn migration from New Zealand. We did not see any Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

We had morning tea at the mouth of Boonawah Creek, where Peter M observed a Hobby perched in a tree. Earlier we had seen several Whistling Kites, Brown Falcon, Nankeen Kestrel, a Wedge-tailed Eagle and a juvenile White-bellied Sea-eagle carrying something that it had picked off the shore.

Our next stop was at Krause's Swamp, via Linlithgow Lane, where we saw very few waterbirds, the best being 7 Yellow-billed Spoonbill.

We continued our drive around Lake Linlithgow via North Lakes Rd and then West Lakes Rd. The wind had increased by this stage and there was a shimmer over the water, making observations a little difficult. We did not note any different species. Steve left us the mid-western stop and we continued back to Chatsworth Rd and on to Lake Bulrush.

As with Krause Swamp, there were few birds at Lake Bulrush, with only a few Shelduck, Grey Teal and 7 White-faced Heron. A flock of 16 Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos were seen in the air.

Peter McD left us after Bulrush and we checked out Harnath Swamp and Lake Kennedy. Harnath was dry and no birds were seen. Recent roadworks there have created a more elevated road around the swamp, with a steeper slope down to the fence.



Lake Kennedy also proved to have no waterbirds, the surface being almost dry (there was a glimmer of water on about 5% of the area). We drove in both directions along the northern boundary and observed only Brown Falcon (pictured) and Red-wattle birds in the trees.

We saw a patch of Queen Anne's Lace (or similar species) in the NE corner, than needs to be eliminated before it spreads throughout the reserve. *Juncus acutus* is also gaining a hold on the foreshore. Our excursion ended at 1.50 pm.

The table below lists the annual rainfall data (mm) and maximum lake water depth (cm) in February from the year we began our annual surveys here. Note that the annual rainfall is read at the end of December, whereas the entry for lake water depth is for February of the next year. No water is pumped from this lake, and it rarely overflows (the last was in 1956), so it acts as a rain gauge for the catchment and the influence of climate change is evident.

Waterbirds & Raptors seen in 23 Feb. 2020					
	LLIN	Kraus	Bulr	Harn	Kenn
Water cover	70%	80%	80%	dry	5%
Double-banded Plover	4				
Masked Lapwing	265	4			
Red-capped Plover	155				
Red-necked Avocet	1060				
Red-necked Stint	320				
Australian Shelduck	1100	5	38		
Black Swan	4	6			
Grey Teal	555		30		
Hoary-headed Grebe	130				
Purple Swamphen		2			
Straw-necked Ibis	400				
White-faced Heron	9	2	7		
Yellow-billed Spoonbill		7			
Silver Gull	245				
Australian Hobby	1				
Black-shouldered Kite	2				
Brown Falcon	4	1	2		4
Nankeen Kestrel	1		2		
Wedge-tailed Eagle	1				
Whistling Kite	10	1			
White-breasted Sea-eagle	1				
White-fronted Chat	1				

Notes for LLIN:

1. Straw-necked Ibis were only seen in flight over LLIN.
2. 275 Black-winged Stilt were seen on the 26 Jan survey.
3. 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were seen on 26 Jan.
4. 1700 Pink-eared Duck were seen on 26 Jan
5. 139 Whiskered Tern were seen on 26 Jan.
6. 14 Yellow-billed Spoonbill were seen on 26 Jan.

Water depth (cm) & Rainfall (mm)		
Year	Depth in Feb	Rainfall
1983	0	864
1984	158	704
1985	176	711
1986	164	689
1987	220	598
1988	174	595
1989	122	622
1990	138	634
1991	126	660
1992	126	870
1993	245	644
1994	209	512
1995	153	701
1996	133	696
1997	145	496
1998	85	629
1999	42	568
2000	0	592
2001	0	727
2002	45	532
2003	0	719
2004	14	687
2005	0	428
2006	0	434
2007	0	685
2008	0	540
2009	0	564
2010	0	737
2011	80	713
2012	46	553
2013	30	562
2014	16	488
2015	0	471
2016	0	838
2017	114	672
2018	110	565
2019	107	508
2020	34	
Long term		680

Annual rainfall in 15 years 1983-97 inclusive was 496-864 mm (ave. 666 mm) and the lake was never dry in February. The max. depth of water in mid-Feb. 1984-98 inclusive was 85-245 cm (ave. 158 cm).

The average rainfall in 22 years (1998-2019 inclusive) was 600 mm (range 428-838 mm) and the lake was dry in 11 years. The maximum depth of water in mid-Feb. 1999-2020 was 0-114 cm (ave. 29 cm).