

LAKE ILLAWARRA AUTHORITY COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

July 2005

LAKE ILLAWARRA – AN IMPORTANT BIRD HABITAT

Lake Illawarra is an entrance lagoon situated on the south coast of New South Wales. The lake has a total water area of approximately 35km² and circumference of about 38km. The Lake supports a large number and variety of birds, some of which are present throughout the year and some are seasonal visitors. During droughts, populations of nomadic inland waterbirds migrate to the coast and settle on the Lake. In summer, the Lake is host to a number of migratory species from the northern hemisphere.

The Lake comprises areas of intertidal sand and mudflats, reed beds, seagrass meadows, salt marsh and sheoak swamp. Although the Lake is a mecca for bird watchers due to the variety of bird life supported by the range of habitat types, some of the sites are on restricted land and require permission to enter. The main sites where some of the species can be seen are listed below. You will find muddy, marshy and bush areas all along the foreshores, many with walking tracks already in place.

LAKE ENTRANCE - WINDANG / LAKE ILLAWARRA SOUTH

The entrance meets the sea between Windang and Lake Illawarra South. Here you will see a number of migratory waders such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Red-necked Stint, Double-banded Plover as well as the resident Red-capped Plover and a range of terns, cormorants and gulls.



↑ The Lake entrance has large areas of frequently inundated sand flats that support a range of wader species.



KOONA BAY / HAYWARDS BAY

Koona Bay and Haywards Bay are restricted areas that have large areas of samphire (a small saltmarsh herb) with mud flats. When the water levels are suitable the area becomes a haven for the Pacific Golden Plover, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt as well as other visiting waders, herons and ducks.



↑ Double-banded Plover in breeding plumage

← Black-Winged Stilt



← Pacific Golden Plover

YALLAH

The former Tallawarra Power Station site is another area that has somewhat restricted public access at Yallah. Along the foreshore, ducks, cormorants and herons can be seen. One bird that appears in this area is the Striated Heron, which can often be sighted skulking along the rocky shore. There are remnant woodlands and large wetlands that can be accessed with permission.

The Illawarra Bird Observers Club conducts regular outings to atlas the varied bird life in this location. The area is favoured by raptors, especially the White-bellied Sea-eagle, which nest and hunt on the site.



White-bellied Sea-eagles

PURRAH BAY AND HOOKA POINT

At Purrah Bay and Hooka Point a number of water birds can be seen in the Lake and along the foreshores where Mullet and Hooka Creeks enter the Lake. The observation tower built by the Authority at Hooka Point is a good vantage point from which to see waders using the mud flats along the Lake shore.

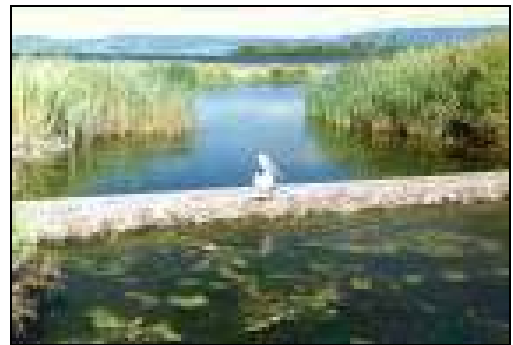


The observation tower at Hooka Point looking over Koong Burry Bay

BUDJONG CREEK WETLAND AND WOLLAMAI POINT

A wetland built by the LIA to help reduce sediment and nutrient flow into the Lake, the Budjong Creek wetland is used by many waterbirds such as ducks and moorhens.

The shoreline is often patrolled by Red-capped Plovers and Black-wing Stilts, and the Common Sandpiper is sometimes recorded on the boat harbour walls. The revegetation areas along Budjong Creek and Wollamai Point are a favoured site for small bush birds as they make their way back into suburbia along these green corridors.



Budjong Creek Wetland at Tuggerah Bay

KULLY BAY WETLAND

Kully Bay wetland is a good site for waterbirds with areas of marshy samphire, mud flats and reeds. The area attracts a range of species, including waders and crakes and the rare Freckled Duck, particularly during periods of inland drought.

WINDANG PENINSULA

Heritage Park, along the foreshore of Windang peninsular, has been planted with native plants and has bird hides from which to watch both waterbirds and bush birds.



Cormorants using roosting posts installed offshore at Heritage Park

LITTLE TERNS, A SAD SUCCESS STORY

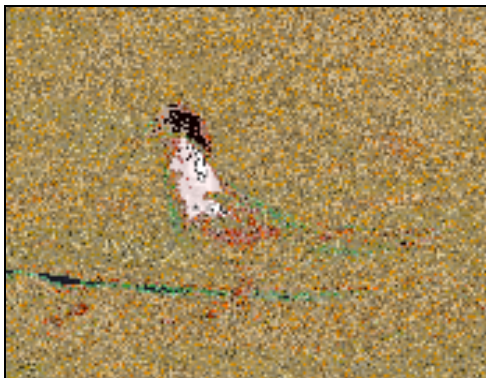
In the summer of 2003/2004 a colony of endangered Little Terns chose the sandy beach area alongside the Lake entrance at Windang to nest for the first time in about 40 years.



Little Tern nest with eggs

The year started quite successfully with a protective fence around most of the colony until a severe hail storm almost wiped out nearly all the chicks and many of the adults, smashing the remaining eggs and stopping the breeding.

The following year, 2004/05, saw the Little Terns return to breed with the first few eggs being scavenged by Silver Gulls before wire cages were placed around the nests by the Department of Environment & Conservation (NPWS).



Little Tern
(photo D. Watts)

A substantial fence was also erected by the LIA around the edge of the breeding site to keep people and their dogs out. Unfortunately, this did not stop some children going in and stoning the birds as they tried to protect their nests, resulting in the death of an adult bird.

In spite of these early disruptions, some pairs of Little Terns persisted with their nest sites at the Lake entrance further into the season. This was until a fox found the breeding site and over the course of several nights, ate all of the remaining eggs in the colony.

At that point the Little Terns abandoned breeding efforts, but they did remain to feed on the small fish around the Lake shore and the ocean shallows for the rest of the season.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The information and many of the photographs contained in this brochure have been provided by the Illawarra Bird Observer's Club.

The Authority would like to acknowledge the contribution of the club's members. A special thanks also to Mr Chris Brandis, Secretary of the Club, for his assistance with monitoring and reporting bird census around the lake.

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