

HFNC Excursion to Lake Linlithgow area wetlands on 18 February 2018

Rod Bird

Participants: Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs, Dave & Lyn Munro, Peter Hocking, Yvonne Ingeme, Glenys Cayley and Janeen Samuel. Arriving a little early, Rod & Diane looked for waterbirds on Lake Kennedy. There was mist over the water and this obscured the southern part of the lake, making a complete count impracticable. However, we did see a swag of ducks including 2,600 Grey Teal, 60 Shovelers, 200 Hardhead, 250 Shelduck, 5 Freckled Duck and 15 Black-winged Stilts. The lake was at about 80% capacity and suited ducks and Black Swan, of which we could see about 600. Another count of some species was made on 2 Mar. 2018 when Rod drove around the lake; more birds were seen, incl. 1200 Black Swan, 3200 Pink-eared Duck, 103 Red-capped Plovers and 30 Red-necked Stints –see the table.

We made a brief stop on the SW corner of Lake Linlithgow, 100 m north around from the Habel Cypress grove on Chatsworth Rd, where the best view of the SW part of the bay is to be had. At 8 am we met other members at The Point, off Chatsworth Rd. There was no wind and the sky was overcast but visibility was good. The water level was at about 85% capacity and the marker was at 2.40 (indicating a max. depth of 110 cm). We used a spotting scope to count birds from that elevated position, the most significant findings being 780 Blue-billed Duck distributed in rafts and singly across the water and 5,000 Pink-eared Ducks. We then drove around the east bank to the tree blocks planted as far back as 1975, where we had a morning tea stop and another scan of the water for birds. Freckled Duck, 135 in number, were sighted in this area and off Boonawah Creek, along with 200 Hardhead, 250 Shoveler and 7 Pelicans. Shovelers are protected species this year, as are Blue-billed Duck and Freckled Duck. Whether the Game Management Authority will ban shooting on this lake this year is another matter.

The track to Boonawah Ck was deeply rutted by 4WDs so 3 of us drove down in one vehicle, taking a diversion from the track where the ruts were too deep to negotiate, to make a count on the lakeside.

We drove to Krauses Swamp via Linlithgow Lane, where we saw a few waterbirds, including 30 Shovelers, 13 Purple Swamphen, 9 Yellow-billed Spoonbills, 5 Royal Spoonbills and 1 Great Egret.

We drove around Lake Linlithgow on North Lake Rd, observing a flight of 56 Straw-necked Ibis, and stopped where the road turns to the NW, to inspect the bank site where HFNC planted Plains Silver Banksia from Yatchaw and Sweet Bursaria from the shrubs on this bank in the early 2000s. The trees had grown well and the banksia were flowering. Seed from the Bursaria had not yet ripened.

Continuing, we followed West Lake Rd back to Chatsworth Rd and visited Lake Bullrush. The water level was high with capacity about 90%. A small party of boating people were there but had not launched onto the water. Their dogs gave us a rowdy welcome but were on leash and soon ignored us. Bird numbers there were low, mainly 1450 Coots and 35 Black Swan. Duck hunters this year will find it hard to access the shores to the north since it will not be possible to drive along the west shoreline.

Our last stop was at Harnath Swamp on Lake Rd. We saw 425 Shelduck, 9 Yellow-billed Spoonbill and 9 Purple Swamphen there, with small numbers of other species. We finished the outing at 12.30 pm.

The table below lists the annual rainfall data (mm) and maximum lake water depth in February from the year we began our annual surveys here. Note that for each line in the table the annual rainfall is read at the end of December whereas the entry for lake water depth is for February of that year.

The annual rainfall in 16 years from 1983 to 1998 was 664.1 mm (range 496-864 mm) and the lake was never dry in February. The max. depth of water in mid-Feb. 1984-99 was 126-245 cm (ave. 151.6 cm).

The annual rainfall in 19 years from 1999 to 2017 was 606 mm (range 428-838 mm) and the lake was dry in 11 years. The maximum depth of water in mid-Feb. 2000-2018 was 0-114 cm (ave. 24 cm).

These data show the episodic nature of our climate. The lake is a sink for water falling on the catchment; the changes in water level reflect changes in rainfall. A fairly small change in average rainfall (58 mm) has a large impact on the average summer water level (a difference of 128 cm). Thus, a difference of 1 mm in annual rainfall might result, on average, in a change of 2 cm in the level of the lake in February.

Rainfall (mm) & water depth (cm)

Waterbirds & Raptors seen on 18 Feb. 2018

Year	Depth	Rain	Birds in 18 Feb 2018	LKen	LLin	LBul	Krau	Harn
1983	0	864	Black-winged Stilt	15				
1984	158	704	Masked Lapwing	40	37		2	4
1985	176	711	Red-capped Plover	(103)	15			
1986	164	689	Red-necked Stint	(30)				
1987	220	598	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	(1)				
1988	174	595	Australasian Shoveler	60 (100)	250		30	
1989	122	622	Australian Shelduck	250	37		5	425
1990	138	634	Australian Wood Duck		3			10
1991	126	660	Black Swan	600 (1200)	52	35	10	2
1992	126	870	Blue-billed Duck		780		1	
1993	245	644	Cape Barren Goose #	1#				
1994	209	512	Chestnut Teal	(10)				
1995	153	701	Freckled Duck *	5 (5)	135			
1996	133	696	Grey Teal	2600 (2000)	2000		350	140
1997	145	496	Hardhead	200	200			
1998	85	629	Hoary-headed Grebe	12 (280)	295		7	26
1999	42	568	Musk Duck		3			
2000	0	592	Pacific Black Duck	300				
2001	0	727	Pink-eared Duck	1600 (3200)			40	
2002	45	532	Australian Pelican		7			
2003	0	719	Great cormorant	(1)				
2004	14	687	Little Pied Cormorant	(1)	2			
2005	0	428	Australian White Ibis		1		18	
2006	0	434	Eastern Great Egret				1	
2007	0	685	Eurasian Coot	(150)	10	1450		40
2008	0	540	Purple Swamphen				13	
2009	0	564	Royal Spoonbill				5	
2010	0	737	Straw-necked Ibis		56		3	1
2011	80	713	White-faced Heron	8 (12)	3		1	
2012	46	553	White-necked Heron				2	
2013	30	562	Yellow-billed Spoonbill				9	
2014	16	488	Silver Gull	(20)	72			
2015	0	471	Australian Hobby		1			
2016	0	838	Brown Falcon		7		1	2
2017	114	672	Nankeen Kestrel		1		1	
2018	110		Swamp Harrier		1		2	1
			Wedge-tailed Eagle		1	1		3
			Whistling Kite	3 (2)	1			
			White-bellied Sea-eagle ‡		1‡			
			Golden-headed Cisticola				3	

() count on 3 March LKEN

Cape Barren Goose at LKEN seen by Y Ingeme & R Hill on 22 Feb. and by S Clark & R Drummond on 25 Feb. Last seen at LKEN in 1973, KRAU 2005 & LLIN 1977.

‡ The White-bellied Sea-eagle was seen at LLIN by Dale Tonkinson on 25 Jan. 2018 (last seen 9 Feb. 2008).

* S Clark & R Drummond saw 4-500 Freckled Duck at LLIN on 25 Feb. 18 – some are shown below (photos by Steve).

