

HFNC Lake Linlithgow Excursion - report for 23 February 2008

Rod Bird

Seven members met at 7 am at the Cypress (SW corner of the lake, Chatsworth Road). It was a lovely mild morning and we finished up at 11.30 am, having spent much of the time at Bullrush Swamp, Krauses Swamp and Soldiers Swamp (West Boundary Rd, Tabor).

Lake Kennedy was dry (LKEN had a little water on 9 Feb.), as was Bullrush and Lake Linlithgow (LLIN had a little water on 29 Jan but was dry on 9 Feb). Consequently there were no waterbirds to be seen on these wetlands, in contrast to the picture a month earlier. At that time I observed ~5,000 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (and a few Pectoral Sandpipers) rising from Bullrush and descending in several flocks to LLIN, where they settled on the remaining shallow pools of water in the centre of the lake. At that time there were also many Australian Shelduck, Black Swan, Silver Gull, Whiskered Tern, Straw-necked Ibis and a few Masked Lapwing and Banded Stilts.

Over the last 10 summers LLIN has been dry on 7 occasions during our excursion around the 20 Feb. LLIN has been dry at this time in each of the years 2005-08. The most water seen was 45 cm in Feb. 2002, 42 cm in 1999 and 14 cm depth in 2004 at The Point marker. Contrast that with a 15-year run from Feb. 1984 to 1998 when the range was 0.85 m (1998) to 2.45 m (1993) and the average 1.58 m depth. As a result we have seen a great amount of grass on LLIN, particularly in 2007 when the lake did not accumulate water until spring. That may account for the enormous flocks of birds (Whiskered Tern, Banded Stilt, Black-winged Stilt, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Grey Teal, Black Swan, Australian Shelduck, Silver Gull and Masked Lapwing) that we have observed over summer. Incidentally, we also observed a Black Falcon and White-bellied Sea-eagle at LLIN, 6 Glossy Ibis at Krauses Swamp, and 10 Pied Geese, 2 Brolga & 22 YB Spoonbills at Soldiers Swamp in Jan. 2008.

Back to events of 23 Feb. 2008 – early arrivals walked along the slashed break beside the row of pines on the west bank, sheltered from the light wind. We then inspected *Poa salacustris* (Salt Poa) on the shore below the Cypress. Next stop was The Point where we scanned the dry lake for raptors. At the windmill area we walked ~250 m across the rise to Bullrush. There we saw 3 Blue-winged Parrots and looked at the impact of DSE/ParksVic's spraying on 23 Jan. 2008, to prevent "Fairy Grass" from blowing to one or two of the farms to the NE. HFNC has protested, since it may be damaging to flora (including the rare Salt Poa), birds, frogs and other fauna, and there are alternative control methods. On the positive side, ParksVic have sprayed Boxthorn, Tall Wheatgrass and Spiny Rush at LLIN.

Krauses Swamp provided a few waterbirds, Tree Martins & 2 Wedge-tailed Eagles perched nearby. Our last stop was Soldiers Swamp, on West Boundary Rd (off Penshurst-Hamilton Rd) but we stopped briefly at a dam on the east side of West Boundary Rd, further towards Tabor. That contained quite a few Grey Teal, Pacific Black Duck and other species. This year we counted on 6 associated wetlands.

	LLIN	LKEN	KRAUSWP	BULRSWP	SALTSWP	SOLSWP
Hoary-headed grebe			11			
Little pied cormorant						1
White-necked heron						2
White-faced heron			2			20
Australian white ibis			1			1
Yellow-billed spoonbill			2			2
Black swan			8			105
Australian shelduck			380			54
Pacific black duck			8			100
Grey teal			28			150
Chestnut teal						12
Australasian shoveller			28			
Hardhead			3			
Purple swamphen						13
Brolga			2			
Masked lapwing			11			90
Red-capped plovers						7
Silver gull			10			21
Black-shouldered kite	3					
Whistling kite						4
Wedge-tailed eagle			2			
Swamp harrier						1
Brown falcon	1			1		
Nankeen kestrel				1		
Cisticola			P			