Since the last *Wetlander* there has been a number of happenings at HWCA with the finishing of some grant projects and with some still ongoing.

The Freckled Duck enclosure has our male ducks back on display and the constructed viewing platform gives a much better view and interaction with these wonderful birds.

The Accessible Fishing Platform, sited along the back track to the rainforest is nearing completion.

The 20 Million Tree Project is all but done. Barry and his willing group of workers have planted many 1000's of trees in the Hexham swamp, Ash Island and Tomago areas - a job well done.

The Visitors Centre renovations are finished. Mark Kempton has arranged art exhibitions at the Visitors Centre featuring local and well known artists. These have been well received and a percentage of sales comes to the HWCA.

To improve security, CCTV cameras have been installed at different locations around the site.

The board walk around Farm Dam and Sensory Track under the guidance of the Jesmond Lions Club is nearing completion. The Lions Club is funding all this work with our maintenance team doing the construction. This will add a great feature to the Farm Dam area.

Paul from the nursery has constructed a paved channel out of old pavers to allow run off water from the nursery sprinklers onto the nursery plant tables. This water then runs through a water ways system full of grasses and sedges to filter out harmful proteins and oxidants before emptying into the canoe channel, thus assisting the environment and helping to maintaining clean water.

Intrepid Landcare, a group of young dedicated environmentalists have been on site weeding and collecting rubbish from our canoe channel and Ironbark Creek. They worked under the guidance of our own Geoff Nicholls and Paddy Lightfoot. This type of partnership is, in my opinion, vital for the ongoing survival of the wetlands.

The daily duty manager system is working very well. It's a great way to share the burden with no one dully stressed or burnt out.

We have again partnered with the Salvation Army Employment Plus for up to 6 job seekers for a 6 month period.

The Annual Christmas Party for volunteers will be held on THURSDAY 5th DECEMBER at 12 noon.

The Hunter Wetlands volunteers are a amazing group of people. They perform every duty required on a day to day operational basis and with an estimated cost for paid personnel to carry out what the volunteers do would be at least $2.5 million per year. A very big thank you from both myself and the Board of Directors. We certainly appreciate your efforts.
REPORT FROM THE WETLANDS BOARD CHAIR

David Crofts

In late September we were honoured to host a site inspection of the Centre by the NSW Minister for Energy and the Environment, Matt Kean MP. The Minister met with some Board members, our CEO and volunteers, to become familiar with our operations and needs. The Board has since written to the Minister thanking him, and seeking further discussions on ways to support us. The visit was facilitated by our local State Member, Sonia Hornery MP and also attended by the former Member for WallSEND John Mills, and the Member for Lake Macquarie Greg Piper MP.

The Wetlands Centre AGM was held in October. It is an important event where the Board presents its Annual Report and tables the audited financial statements for the previous year. In addition, it is an opportunity for members to be elected to the Board because three Board positions become vacant each year. This year the election resulted in three existing Board members being reappointed - Barry Horvath, Carolyn Gillard, and Mary Greenwood. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate them on their re-election.

While it is desirable for any Board to have new members from time to time, the re-election of existing members will provide stability and continuity at the Board level while our Centre explores ways of becoming more financially sustainable.

The State Government and Water Board funded Business Review of the Centre is now complete. The Board has endorsed its recommendations and will be using these to guide our priorities for change over the coming year.

The Business Review has reaffirmed the importance of developing new ongoing sources of revenue, and providing a contemporary visitors centre to support increased visitation and market development. A focus on the entry to the Centre from the Sandgate Road roundabout onwards, improved and renewed signage, and upgraded maintenance in key areas are all highlighted for attention.

The Business Review has also highlighted the importance of continuing to improve our administrative and financial systems.

As a result of the Business Review, the Board has updated the Centre’s Strategic Plan and begun improved prioritisation of strategic projects, and annual business planning. These actions will make us more efficient and better able to pursue funding opportunities, particularly with the corporate sector.

Importantly, the Business Review emphasised the importance of improved communication with our members and volunteers. This will have the benefit of everyone knowing more about the main activities at the Centre and at Board level, so that we are all better “in sync” and can play our part in moving the Centre forward. It also puts members and volunteers in a more informed position whereby they are better placed to provide practical suggestions for improvement to management and the Board.

Finally, I would like to thank all those involved in the September school holiday program. Our regular school holiday programs are not only an important way to increase visitation to the Centre, they introduce a new generation to what the Centre has to offer.

NSW Minister for Energy, Matt Kean MP, Sonia Hornery MP and Wetlands volunteer and former MP John Mills discussing Wetlands operations and needs.

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SAD FAREWELL TO ONE OF OUR LONG TIME MEMBERS
DOREEN BULL

Message sent on behalf of the Hunter Wetlands from Board Director Chris Prietto to Doreen’s family

On behalf of the Hunter Wetlands community we wish to offer our sincere condolences on the passing of Doreen, who was a most valued member. Doreen was closely involved in the early efforts to secure the Shortland Wetlands and it is through efforts of that dedicated group of individuals that we, the public, can enjoy our facility today, over 30 years later.

Doreen was on the foundation Board of Shortland Wetlands Centre Ltd for the first decade. She also gave many hours over many years working with our hardworking volunteer teams, running Breakfast with the Birds and supporting many a public event. We are sorry we are unable to attend the service but will find a way to remember her in a future edition of our newsletter, The Wetlander.

Special memories from Paddy and Caryl Lightfoot.

Our memories of Doreen go back to the days when the Shortland Wetlands Centre first opened.

Doreen played a huge part in the “Breakfast with the Birds’, a monthly activity which helped raise much needed funds for the fledgling Environmental Education Centre.

She helped organise the breakfast and led many of the bird watching walks around the site’s ponds. We joined with her and the many volunteers at these functions.

Doreen’s expertise in bird observing and her organizing skills were invaluable at this early stage of the Wetland’s development.

She will be remembered by us Lightfeet as a friend who was very generous in sharing her enthusiasm for, and knowledge about birds as well as her environmental activism. In fact Doreen twitched us our first Marsh Sandpiper on the muddy margin of Melaleuca Swamp.

Doreen was a gracious and lovely person.

GLORY DAYS WITH THE HAMILTON RUGBY CLUB

Once there were six playing fields and an old blue shed where the hot water would run out before the end of second grade.

Then Hamilton Rugby Club opened its doors in February 1978 and the main field had the tallest goal posts in the southern hemisphere. Once opened, the Rugby Club became one of the best Rock ’n roll venues in Newcastle. Difficult economic times and the booze bus took its toll on the club in the middle of nowhere, and it closed its doors in 1982. Some forty odd years after its closure the good people at the Hunter Wetlands Centre discovered an old sign commemorating the opening of the club and have restored it to Hamilton.

On hand to accept the sign were club stalwarts Tony Morris and Paul Woolf. Both former forwards accepted the gift with gratitude and, as one would expect with old rugby players, the memories came flooding back. Neither had been at the centre since the club closed, but both agreed it was a great use of the land. Morris and Woolf felt that every Novocastrian should visit the site.

Hamilton Rugby Club would like to thank Paddy Lightfoot and all the staff of the Hunter Wetlands Centre and former Principal of the Wetlands School and former Chairperson of the Board, Chris Prietto, who alerted the club to the existence of the sign. Barry Horvath was also outstanding, guiding the boys around the site.

The sign will be on display at Passmore Oval, the club’s home ground.
Peter’s memories of the Hunter Wetlands Centre go back a very long time! He actually volunteered on weekends at our Wetlands even pre-dating the formation of the Thursday Mob. This was at the start of the nineties!

In those days the predator proof fence was just being erected. Peter remembers the Saturday morning planting bees. We had an excellent system. Interested members and volunteers were rung in the weeks before a planting bee was due, that was when we had enough plants to put in the ground. We had to beg, borrow or steal, well we didn’t actually steal! During the actual week of planting those on the list were rung again. If they didn’t arrive for two planting bees in a row they were removed from the reminder list. Plants were placed in position before the workers arrived at 8.30am, chilly in winter. Work went on until morning tea at 11am. Any plants not in the ground were saved for the next bee, maybe in a month or so? At 11am in the café area the Newcastle Group of the Society for Growing Australian Plants (now the Australian Plants Society) put on an amazing morning tea! Next time Peter was rung he could not remember the hard yakka only the superb morning tea!

In those far off days Peter worked as a Registered Nurse. He is now retired. He is married to Sue, a popular Charlestown GP, she retired this year. They are now looking forward to a whole new life together with their son, daughter and four grands!

Since his retirement Peter has been a keen member of the Thursday Mob bush regeneration team. The Mob works every Thursday morning bar the Christmas break. He also occasionally joins in the Mob’s newer sibling, the Tuesday Toilers! He has become an expert on the removal of every weed to arrive in the Hunter since European settlement.

Peter has, over the years, witnessed the roller coaster here at the Wetlands. He well remembers the crests and troughs concerning the finances. He remembers vividly the highs and lows of not enough or too much rain.

He feels climate change is contributing to dry rather than wet weather and this concerns him. Peter is encouraged by the recent deepening of Brambles pond as insurance against further dry spells!

Another concern is that he feels the volunteer base at the Wetlands is getting older and he would like to encourage younger volunteers, such as Cate Paton, to come on board! They would breath the fresh air of the Hunter region wetlands. Not only at HWCA but when the Mob work off-site in other areas and they would experience the comradeship so evident to him!

Peter enjoys the comradeship of our volunteers and, in fact, feels more at home with the Thursday Mob than his other contact groups in bush-walking, sport and cycling. This is a great call! He is a fair weather supporter of the Wallabies, or is that the Wobblies?

Peter is a very keen cyclist travelling all over Australia (including the off-shore island of Tasmania) on cycling tours. He has also biked in New Zealand plus SE Asia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Taiwan.

Well done Peter. We wish you and Sue all the best in your combined retirements. Thanks from us all!
Improving Safety

HWCA has been awarded a $10,000.00 grant from Orica Kooragang Island to purchase materials to reduce safety concerns by re-decking some boardwalks around the site.

The priority boardwalks to be improved are the boardwalk adjacent to the Freckled Duck Enclosure and “Steve’s Bridge” in the Rainforest.

Both these boardwalks are located in dense treed growth areas that remain wet following rain and heavy dew. This makes them very slippery, due to moss growth, and increases the deterioration of the existing pine decking.

The proposed recycled plastic decking will reduce the safety risk, due to slips and falls, as well as future maintenance.

Helping our Reptiles

We have recently had notification that our application for a grant from Glencore has been successful. This grant involves helping us build our Reptile House and also helping with Educational Signage around the Wetlands site.

Building the Reptile House will greatly help with our reptile friends giving them a special place to reside which will be light, cool in summer, warm in winter and a great extra attraction for visitors to our wonderful wetlands.

It may be some time before these projects are completed but they will both be a great boost to the continued improvements around the Wetlands.

We would like to thank Glencore for their most generous support. This partnership is valued at $100,000 ex GST.

INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP COST TO $15.00

MEMBERSHIP SPECIAL OFFER

If you are thinking of a Christmas present for friends or family you can now purchase Membership of the Wetlands that won’t expire until 31st March 2021.

This gives you a special 16 months of membership for $15.00.

Membership usually runs from 1st April to 31st March the following year and includes unlimited entry into the Wetlands for members and their school-age children/grandchildren accompanying them.

You can pay for Membership at the Visitor Centre or online at our website www.wetlands.org.au

SO COME ALONG AND JOIN NOW!!!

A big thank you to My Community Pharmacy Shortland for their support of the Hunter Wetland Centre volunteers.

Please support this local business

My Community Pharmacy
310 Sandgate Road,
Shortland
From July to November, the newly established Arts Space played host to a collection of varied artworks. Curated by volunteer, Mark Kempton, monthly exhibitions brought new artistic experiences to the public. The second half of year began with a spectacular display of sculptural pieces staged on plinths around the space, by Hunter Sculptors. These were complemented by Newcastle Printmakers ‘Over Wintering’ – a collection of prints featuring our migratory bird life.

To bring in a new art form, Textile Artist, Jan Clark exhibited her amazing textile collection on loan from Timeless Textiles. The vibrancy of her textile design birds certainly came to life under the gallery lighting system.

The Society of Artists Inc followed this with a group exhibition. A mammoth collection of 66 artworks featuring a vast array of artistic styles and mediums.

A mystery artist, Mark Kempton snuck in a surprise exhibition in October, celebrating the frog with its humorous idiosyncrasies.

Ashlee Jedrzejak, a budding artist, filled in a late vacancy with her vibrant and colourful exhibition ‘Home Grown’. Our venue provided an ideal setting for Ashlee’s first exhibition.

To complete the 2019 calendar, the Natural History Illustrators Club will be displaying their end of year work, a fitting tribute to the Wetland environs and its wildlife inhabitants – the real draw cards to a visit to the Wetlands.

Financially, the Arts Space has been very profitable for HWC. Eight exhibitions during 2019, have raised an income of over $5,000 from Arts Space hire and commission on sales.

The future for our Arts Space is looking positive, with expressions of interest from local artists filling every month in 2020.

HELP!!

We are asking for help to keep our great Wetlands functioning.

We need some more volunteers in the following areas:
- Weekend Reception
- Mechanic
- Grounds Maintenance Supervisors
- Cleaning

If you can give a small amount of time to us we would be most grateful.

Don’t forget we are run solely by volunteers so we need your support to share the work of maintaining this important site.

THANK YOU.

Come along and enjoy a cup of coffee or a light lunch at our Café

Café at the Wetlands

Café Manager Greg Sinclair makes the most beautiful sweets to have with your coffee while you watch the birds on the ponds.

He also caters for weddings, birthdays, conferences and, sadly, for funerals and wakes as well. The café is open from 9.30am to 2.30pm SO COME ALONG AND ENJOY!
There’s always something to do at the Wetlands in the school holidays. Dipnetting is popular all year round but in the holidays we get out the magnifying glasses and take a closer look at what’s in those ponds. We also offer a free activity brochure to encourage families to keep an eye out for various animals and features as they explore the wetlands.

**Teddy Bears Picnics**

In the September school holidays, kids were invited to bring their teddies along for a special outing. There was a display of approximately 50 teddy bears, kindly lent to us by our volunteers. A bear storytime included acting out the *Story of the Three Bears* and *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt*. There were lots of games to play and music was provided by a trio of wetland volunteers (Geoff Nicholls, David Bowring & John Mills). Unfortunately, it rained on both picnic days but owners and teddies who braved the weather enjoyed themselves.

**Behind the Scenes Tours**

The Behind the Scenes tours in the July school holidays were very hands-on with participants assisting with cleaning tanks and feeding reptiles and ducks. They also visited the plant nursery where they potted on some seedlings (including a couple to take home). There’s always weeding to be done at the Wetlands so they donned gloves and set to work removing ‘velcro grass’ and ‘farmers friend’. The tour finished with the feeding of the frogs which proved very entertaining.
Water Bird Drawing Class

Natural History Illustrator Alison Ellis, who had a very successful exhibition in the art space at the Visitor Centre in June, kindly offered to present a workshop for kids in the July holidays. The group took a walk around the Wetlands to observe some of the water birds but also used photos and illustrations to take a close look at feathers and feet. Alison, ably assisted by art teacher Lynn Fabian inspired the participants to produce some impressive pictures.

Biodiversity Day

Hunter Wetland Centre was represented at the annual Biodiversity Day organised by the Office of Environment and Heritage at Blue Gum Hills Regional Park in the September holidays. Lots of families and OOSH groups took advantage of this free event and learned about the environment from the community and government organisations who set up stands. We displayed large images of endangered species in the maze at the site and the kids had to find and identify as many as they could. Volunteer, Teresa Purnell also presented two very timely talks on Snake Awareness and Safety.

Guided Canoe Tours

In the July holidays, the weather was perfect for canoeing and volunteers Aidan and Geoff took several families on guided canoe tours. After a safety briefing and paddling instructions, the groups headed off to explore the canoe channel and view the wetlands and its inhabitants from a different angle. At the Rainforest Shelter they disembarked to stretch their legs and enjoy a tea break before paddling back.
IS IT A MAGPIE OR IS IT A MAGPIE-LARK?
Margaret Stewart

You may have observed several black and white birds feeding on the ground at the Wetlands Centre. The larger ones are the familiar Australian Magpie but the smaller Magpie-lark is also often seen.

What is the difference?
The Australian Magpie was so named by early settlers because of its similarity to the black-and-white Eurasian Magpie, but is not related to it. At the Wetlands Centre you may have noticed them probing around the grassed areas near the Visitor Centre. You can watch them stalking around the ground, listening for movement underground, and then run to the spot and jab their beak in to extract invertebrates. You usually see them in family groups of several adults which patrol the feeding area, while young birds (whose backs are more grey than black) beg for food from the adults.

You have probably heard their wonderful range of songs, from soft melodious warbling to loud caroling.

The name Magpie-lark is quite misleading, as the species has no link with either magpies or larks. John Gould, the nineteenth century ornithologist, noted the name as being used by “the colonists of NSW”, possibly because it had features of birds they were familiar with in England. While both species are black and white, the Magpie-lark is noticeably smaller than the Australian Magpie. Magpie-larks are usually seen in pairs, where the male bird has a black face and chest, while the female has a white face and throat. These birds are ground feeders and are often seen in pairs on the muddy edges of the water, particularly in the Brambles and Water Ribbon Ponds, where they feed on small invertebrates.

The Magpie-lark is also known as the Peewee, which is an imitation of its call, which are actually duets between members of a pair.

And then of course we have our Magpie Geese.

Happenings at the Wetlands over the past couple of months:

Successful Plant sale in October

Paddy Lightfoot’s 80th Birthday Celebration

Angela Speering presenting CEO Ken Bayliss with a great donation from the Plant Sale
The HWC last year received $5,000 in funding from the NSW State Government to implement renovations to the main Freckled Duck enclosure and to support the management of the pond. We used this welcome subsidy to purchase construction materials to build a new viewing platform into the shelter and to buy a pump to supply water to the pond.

In order to undergo the construction phase all of the male ducks housed in the facility had to be transferred to the nursery pond.

The water level in the main enclosure had been at a very low depth due to an extended period of below average rainfall and soon became a bare mud bed. This enabled us access to address rehabilitation of the nesting tepees, which were stripped down of their old brush and rewrapped with brush fencing. The ramps were enhanced with a durable artificial turf covering and staged footholds. The baskets used for holding the bedding in the waterproofed shelters were attached to the new frames and legs. These were all reinstalled just after the Christmas break.

With time, the bare and cracked mud forming the base of the empty pond became the site for an explosion of mainly native water plant regrowth. We could also exercise a discriminating herbicide application on the invasive grasses.

While the pond area was being rehabilitated the corner of the enclosure that once housed the viewing deck and observation window was being opened up and redesigned. The coated fencing wire that forms the boundary for the enclosure was rolled aside to allow for the development of a platform that extended further out over the pond floor. This was done in order to provide the visitor with an hitherto unavailable view to the far reaches of the shelter. Observation of the ducks resting in the diagonally opposite corner had previously been restricted by the angle of the observation window. The extended platform also provided a view into the feeding area where the ducks congregate. A panoramic sense of the enclosed habitat was given with the improved outlook onto the Freckled Ducks’ pond and islands area. Credit must go to the maintenance teams who worked on this project in conjunction with their myriad of other tasks.

A few months ago we began using the new pump provided by the government grant to endeavour to re-fill the main enclosure’s pond. After a few weeks of intermittent periods of operating the pump between Water Ribbon Pond and the renovated shelter it became evident to us that the pond was not holding water adequately. At first we thought that the loss of volume was due to the excessively dry substrate on the pond’s floor, but, after a considerable while, it was concluded that the excavation had lost its seal. When the pond was first dug and filled in 1993 for the arrival of our Freckled Ducks for the then captive breeding program, the water drained virtually overnight so the surface of the basin was packed with an impermeable clay to contain drainage. While this correction has served the facility for nearly twenty-five years, in recent times the depth of water was not maintained.

We now face the challenge of finding a method for re-sealing the bed and walls of the enclosure’s pond in order to maintain it as the best practice display facility that we mean to offer. We may revisit the response of applying a sealing clay material – or we may institute a more comprehensive engineering solution. This option would involve excavating the viewing platform end of the pond deeper and lining it with a durable pond liner. A bund wall would effectively be constructed utilising the central island development as the core for a barrier across the area halfway down its length. For visitors this would give an exciting proximity to the ducks’ engagement with their aquatic habitat. The lower half of the enclosure would remain as a naturally vegetated swamp subjected to the height of the surrounding water table, rain events, and periodic enhancement thanks to the pump.

HWC appears to have failed in our long campaign to gain approval to release any of our current ducks, or their progeny, back to the wild. The Office of Environment and Heritage has provided us with a persuasive case for prohibiting this ambition. As a consequence we must keep our captive freckled duck population in a facility that meets best practice standards for display animals.

The recent renovating of the ducks’ habitat and the enhancement of the viewing platform, coupled with the challenges we face in storing water in the pond, and our commitment to resolving this, are evidence that we haven’t given up on giving our Freckled Ducks the best lifestyle possible.
Hi to all the volunteers at the Wetlands.
I have been a bit busy coordinating weddings and rehearsals this year. There are four weddings booked in already for early next year. This extra revenue for the centre will be very welcomed to start the New Year.

THE BUG MOTEL.

Have you examined the Bug Motel in the garden on the southern side of the Centre building. We have unpaid guests staying.
Take a peek when you get time.

A BIT OF USLESS INFORMATION:
Card boarding and deep mulching was first introduced by me during 1999 on the Farm Dam site.

BUNNINGS BBQ.
Big thanks to all the volunteers who helped at the second BBQ for this year at Bunnings. The amount raised was $1400.80. Money will be used for volunteer support.

THE CHRISTMAS VOLUNTEER BBQ.
The BBQ will be held under the Veranda on:
Thursday 5th December at 12.00 noon.

You can find the attendance sheet at the sign on area, please indicate if you will be attending.
I wish all a very safe and Happy Christmas
Cheers, Jenny Castles
**Daily activities:** dip-netting, pond bird feeding, self guided tours, canoe hire, reptile tanks and children's playground. Guided walks for groups and buggy tours can be booked in advance.

**School Holiday Activities:** Special activities are organised for children during school holidays. Check our website for details [www.wetlands.org.au](http://www.wetlands.org.au)

*If you need further information please contact the Hunter Wetlands Centre by phone, email or check our Website (Details below).*

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**DONATIONS**

June 2019 to November 2019

Our thanks go to all these people and groups. The HWC is always grateful for donations, big or small:

- Gwen Quinan
- Jesmond Lions Club
- Sue Homerlein
- Trevor Marsh
- Nance Adams
- Kay Imrie
- Dr Andrew Keyworth
- Robyn Fried
- Dion Moul
t
- Jill Harris
- Jannice Flemming
- Australian Plant Society
- Jade Hull
- Hunter Region Probus Association
- Toronto District Garden Club
- Hunter Plant Society
- Zvonko Mirhar
- Paddy Lightfoot

Also thanks to the many anonymous small donations that come from the Donation Box, Freckled Duck & Money Whirlpool - it all helps!

---

**HWC Staff Directory:**

CEO: ............................................ Kenneth Bayliss
Chairman: ................................. David Crofts
Officer Manager: ......................... Val Noake
Accounts Payable/Receivable: .... Marie Page
Functions Coordinator: .......... Frances Grandidge
Landcare Coordinators: ........ Paddy Lightfoot
.................................................... Jenny Castles
Wetlander Editors: ............... Lenore Horvath
.................................................... Denis Hilder

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**WETLANDS MEMBERSHIP**

Join our wonderful wetlands!

New Membership cost is only $15 per adult per year with unlimited entry

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**Our Supporters, Partners and Sponsors**

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**HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE**

1 Wetland Place, Shortland NSW 2307
PO Box 66, Shortland NSW 2287
Open 9am to 4pm - 7 Days

Phone: 4951 6466   Email: hwca@wetlands.org.au   website: www.wetlands.org.au

Café at the Wetlands - Open 9.30am to 2.30pm - 7 Days