

Arctic Encounters

By Denise Illing. Photography by Denise Illing

A recent journey to the UK was the launching point for a trip to the Arctic to see the wildlife around Svalbard. Svalbard is a series of islands that are part of Norway but far to the north of the mainland. Flights from London to Oslo then to Longyearbyen, the main town on Spitzbergen, the largest island of the archipelago, were the lead-up to a week-long cruise around the islands, during which time we crossed the 80th parallel and came to within 1100 km of the North Pole. We also experienced perpetual daylight as the cruise was in late June and the sun never set. Days were cold but often sunny and we were warned about getting sunburnt. As the trip was a wildlife expedition, the 52 passengers on board the *Professor Multanovskiy*, an ice breaker, were people interested in the birds and mammals, and even the very low-lying vegetation. The guides were amazing, pointing out birds at very long distance. It was not unusual to hear something akin to "Ivory Gull at 10 o'clock!" or "Pomarine Skua at 2 o'clock!".

It was incredible seeing Walruses and Polar Bears in their natural habitat. We saw 14 Polar Bears during the course of the week (some very distant, some very close - but not too close!), more Walruses and seals and many more birds.

The expedition was organised by Naturetrek, a UK company specialising in wildlife tours around the world. For more information see www.naturetrek.co.uk.



This page, left: Black Guillemot. Above left: Barnacle Geese and goslings. Above: Long-tailed Skua harassing Svalbard Reindeer. Top: Nesting on the cliffs at Alkefjellet. Over 100,000 Brunnich's Guillemots nest there.

Opposite page, clockwise from top right: Little Auk, Ivory Gull cleans up after Walruses, Female Eider Duck, Arctic Tern, Brunnich's Guillemot.



AFO 50TH ANNIVERSARY

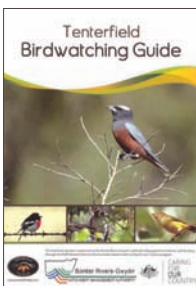
The next issue of *Australian Field Ornithology* marks a milestone: the 50th Anniversary of BOCA's quarterly journal *AFO* (formerly *Australian Bird Watcher*).

We hope that BOCA members will enjoy reading and thinking about the diverse articles in this edition – first records of not just one but two vagrant bird species to Australian territory, Ashmore Reef (and how likely is this area to be affected by oil spills/leaks?); a review of the biology and conservation status of Australia's only species of stork; the biology of one well-known and of one much rarer Australian bird of prey; examination of grasswren eggs in Len Harvey's historical collection in Museum Victoria; and a short note recording for the first time Magpie Geese breeding on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales.

Please read the editorial in this *AFO* particularly carefully and see if you can support BOCA over difficult economic times by subscribing to *AFO* (\$32.00pa or \$40.00pa overseas airmail) and encouraging your friends and colleagues to do likewise. BOCA hopes to look forward to *AFO*'s valuable contribution to field ornithology, bird observation and conservation over its second 50 years. In addition, if you have field notebooks tucked away, or make interesting observations over the holiday period, you could consider writing an article for *AFO*; editorial help is available if you do not feel confident about the writing process.

Julia Hurley

TENTERFIELD BIRDWATCHING GUIDE



If you are planning a trip to Tenterfield this little guide would be invaluable. Maps indicate birding spots within the town and in the surrounding region. Bird lists indicate where and in which season particular species can be found. Limited numbers are available from BOCA or contact Tenterfield Tourism 02 6736 1082. *Annette Cook*

BIRDS OF THE ILLAWARRA



Illawarra Bird Observers Club (IBOC) has produced a very attractive guide to birding sites in the Illawarra District. The brochure, with map, identifies 14 sites between Wollongong and Shoalhaven Heads and includes a short list of the key species for each site. There is also a long list of the common birds of the area, using nomenclature of Christidis and Boles 2008. *IBOC* is affiliated with *BOCA*. Website: www.iboc.org.au. A full list of bird walks is on www.wildillawarra.com. *Don Saunders*

VALE: BRIAN RYAN

My late husband, Brian, was a member of your organisation for about forty years. He recorded and sent to BOCA the birds seen on our travels around Australia and in latter years, birds seen in the Tingalpa Wetlands that abut our back fence. He took part in the Bird Atlas in the 1970s and 1990s.

Every fortnight he would 'walk his beat' in the wetlands. They are managed by an Environmental Group called B4C and many volunteers do planting, weeding, mulching and trying to keep the *Salvinia* weed at bay from the waters. The wetlands follow Bulimba Creek from roughly the mouth of the Brisbane River to the south-eastern suburbs. As well as sending his tally of birds to BOCA, every two months he would send the number of species to B4C. His count over the time was 107 species. Twice we saw Magpie Geese here. In latter years, because of his health problems, he would push himself to do this.

Earlier this year I was contacted by the Brisbane City Council and told that a seat was to be erected in the wetlands in his memory and on 24 June the seat was bolted into the cement. The words on the plaque read: "In memory of Brian J. Ryan – gone Birdwatching".

He was a most unassuming man, an Ambulance Officer for over 30 years. I did not need this to be proud of him, but it does full justice to my husband of 41 years. His bird watching gave him many hours of pleasure and I wish the same to all the members of your organisation.

Myrtle Ryan, Tingalpa, Qld

Editor's Note: *Brian Ryan joined BOCA in November 1975 and was our official Club Representative in the Brisbane area for many years before the formation of BrisBOCA.*



Photo: Ken Shingleton

Lesser Yellowlegs and Black-winged Stilt, photographed at Pelican Island, Jerseyville (NSW). The Lesser Yellowlegs has returned to the area for the third successive year - see Bird Notes page 24.