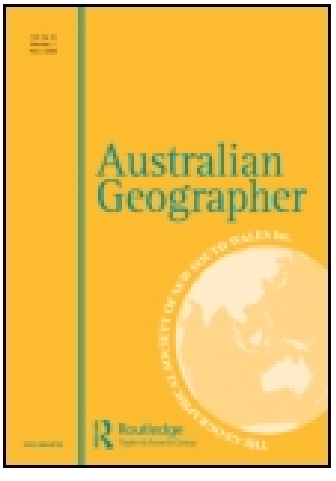

Australian Geographer
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cage20

Understanding Place as 'Home' and 'Away' through Practices of Bird-watching

Carrie Wilkinson[a], Gordon Waitt[a] & Leah Gibbs[a]
[a] University of Wollongong, Australia
Published online: 14 May 2014.

To cite this article: Carrie Wilkinson, Gordon Waitt & Leah Gibbs (2014) Understanding Place as 'Home' and 'Away' through Practices of Bird-watching, Australian Geographer, 45:2, 205-220, DOI: 10.1080/00049182.2014.899029

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2014.899029

Australian Geographer, 2014
Vol. 45, No. 2, 205–220, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2014.899029

Understanding Place as 'Home' and 'Away' through Practices of Bird-watching

CARRIE WILKINSON, GORDON WAITT & LEAH GIBBS,
University of Wollongong, Australia

ABSTRACT *Bird-watching is an increasingly popular leisure activity. Previous research has taken for granted the identity of people who watch birds, often categorised by their level of skilled practice as 'dude', 'birder' or 'twitcher'. Feminist geographers encourage us to explore identity work as an outcome of the reciprocal relationships between practices and place. Our feminist approach illustrates that the practices of bird-watching are always much more than categorising birds as species. This paper illustrates how the practices of bird-watching are integral to the making and remaking of sense of place as 'home' and 'away', to sustain identities beyond accepted categories of 'dude', 'birder' and 'twitcher'. The creation and application of different types of 'bird-lists' helps to explain the ways in which practices of bird-watching facilitate making sense of place as simultaneously 'home', 'away' and habitat, as well as the identity work of home-maker, citizen-scientist and tourist. Our insights into these leisure practices of bird-watching are drawn from analysis of data gathered from 21 people who actively bird-watch and reside on the South Coast, New South Wales, Australia by combining research methods of talking, walking, drawing and photography.*

KEY WORDS *Embodied geographies; bird-watching; non-human; home; leisure; practice.*

Introduction

> So the things that come to mind are beauty, relaxation, creation, rest; they're amorphic sort of things that I can only draw if I drew a calm scene, because they're the sorts of feelings. It's more to do with, yeah, the aesthetics and the calm and the slowness and the um … just being able to be quiet, it's not busy, it's not rushed, it has a lot more to do with the emotional connection with where you are. (Lyn, 60s, school counsellor, club-member, Eurobodalla)

The emotional bonds traced through Lyn's words illustrate the aim of this paper, namely to explore the practices of bird-watching in relationship to place. Walking around her property, Lyn emphasises the body and sensory engagements as central not only to learning how to bird-watch but also why she continues to actively

encounter and list birds. Using an iPhone app,[1] Lyn keeps a digital list of the birds she has encountered and identified. Lyn is not alone among participants in this research, with hectic paid or unpaid working lives, who emphasise the therapeutic and emotional place-based attachments sustained through the practices of encountering and listing birds. The aim of this paper is to better understand the embodied spatialities of the practices of bird-watching and listing. Lyn keeps a list that documents the birds she encounters and identifies on her property, and she can quantify how many, and which birds she has identified over the past 3 years. However, rather than numbers or names of birds, she emphasises the sensory experiences: relaxation, rest, calm, and slowness. Lyn values the sense of calm she feels from encountering and listing birds, which then helps her forge emotional place-based attachments. For Lyn, it is the sense of calm and emotional connection with where she is that inspires her to continue to bird-watch and keep a list. We argue that research that focuses on categorising people who watch birds by their listing practices overlooks the spatial imperative of the practices of bird-watching and listing that are crucial to ongoing actualisation of the self and everyday conceptions of places, including those understood and experienced as 'home' and 'away'.

The promise of fleeting visual or sonic encounters with free-ranging, charismatic birds is an increasingly popular leisure activity in capitalist societies, including Australia. As evidenced by the growth in both domestic- and international-based tourism (Jones & Buckley 2001; Connell 2009; Green & Jones 2010; Kim *et al.* 2010), and recent social commentary on bird-watching and 'bird-watchers' in popular media (*Best of the Drawing Room: Twitchers* 2013; *Hello Birdy: The Boofhead's Guide to Bird Watching* 2014; *Long Story Short: Birds* 2014), birds are enrolled in capitalist production of value the world over. At the same time, fleeting encounters with charismatic birds provide one example of an environmentalism that continues to rely primarily on visual or sonic encounters, rather than providing opportunities to touch, hold, or pat (see Cloke & Perkins 2005; Lorimer 2012). Birdlife Australia (2013), Australia's largest non-governmental bird conservation organisation, currently boasts a membership base exceeding 10 000 people. The skills of a further 25 000 people play a key role in the generation of environmental knowledge through citizen-science projects run by Birdlife Australia nationwide. In addition, many thousands of other individuals are involved in citizen-science through localised public conservation networks or private arrangements. Citizen-science is normally characterised as volunteering to collect data for biodiversity monitoring projects, using methods of observation, identification and record-keeping that conform to notions of scientific rigour and validity.

In this context, we began researching people who actively encounter and list birds. Academic and social norms 'naturalise' bird-watcher identities and relationships through practices such as keeping lists. For example, keeping a bird-list is one way to differentiate a *bird watcher* from a *dude* or a *twitcher* (Connell 2009). Overlooked in these accounts are the everyday lived experiences of encountering and listing birds in particular places. With the notable exceptions of Lorimer (2008) and Hui (2013), missing from the literature is a sense of personal bird-watching geographies, detailing explicit embodied geographies of encounter and listing as spatial practices. To help fill this gap we designed a project that explicitly explores the links between bird-watching practices and spatial decisions, and between place and identity. Drawing on the work of feminist scholars we think about the practices

of encountering birds and generating bird-lists, not in terms of a particular market category or level of skill, but in terms of the spatial imperatives of bird-watching places, identities and subjectivities.

In what follows, the first section reviews the bird-watching literature to help contextualise our conceptual framework. We offer a performative approach to understanding the spatial imperatives of the practices of bird-watching, which involves the entanglement of lists, bodies, binoculars, field-guides and other technologies across geographical space. Next we discuss the research design and methods; the findings are based on narrative and discourse analyses. The third section draws on the empirical data to highlight how the spatial imperative of bird-watching places, identities and subjectivities collide to produce distinct understandings of birds, self and place. Drawing on personal geographies, we detail how the embodied spatialities of encountering and listing birds involves a relational process between sets of ideas that fashion places as 'home' and 'away'. In conclusion we outline some of the implications of attending to embodied geographical knowledge and personal geographies for researching bird-watching, and appeal for further research.

Progress in research on bird-watching

Bird-watching in affluent capitalist economies is increasingly drawing the attention of leisure studies scholars. One strand of literature focuses on how bird-watching practices are mediated through different technologies. For example, Chambers (2007) incorporated Urry's (2002) concept of the 'tourist gaze' to appraise the practice of viewing birds through CCTV at three bird-watching centres in Scotland. Likewise, Dunaway's (2000), Sheard's (1999) and Watson's (2011) discussions of the bird-picturing practices of naturalists and bird-watchers alert us to how the way we look is always a selective and learnt practice, embedded in particular sets of ideas, technologies and audiences. These authors conclude that the practice of viewing birds mediated by the picturing practices of cameras serves to further enforce dualist understanding of nature as 'out there', separate from humans.

Classification of practitioners is, however, the dominant strand of research into studies of bird-watching. The recreational specialisation approach to bird-watching normally employs surveys and inferential statistics to cluster and classify practitioners according to shared motivations (McFarlane 1994; Scott *et al.* 1999; Hvenegaard 2002; Moore *et al.* 2008), knowledge and skills (Scott & Schafer 2001; Scott & Thigpen 2003; Moore *et al.* 2008), conservation involvement (Hvenegaard 2002), setting preferences (Martin 1997; Cole & Scott 1999; Scott & Thigpen 2003), expenditure (Moore *et al.* 2008), and personal or behavioural commitment (Scott *et al.* 1999; Scott & Thigpen 2003). The outcome of this recreational specialisation approach is the segmentation of people who watch birds into categories broadly defined as *casual*, *novice*, *intermediate* and *advanced* (see McFarlane 1994, p. 361; Cole & Scott 1999, p. 45). This social hierarchy, underpinned by identifiable differences in bird-watching practices, has also gained traction in the contemporary understanding among high-profile commentators advocating for bird-watching. For example, comedian and entertainer Bill Oddie (2006) (formerly of *The Goodies* fame) discusses, in common British vernacular: *dude, birder* and *twitcher*. A social hierarchy of bird-watchers is central to Western thinking about this leisure practice.

The categories produced by the recreational specialisation approach are largely taken for granted and extend to other areas of bird-watching literature (see McFarlane 1994; Martin 1997; Cole & Scott 1999; Scott *et al.* 1999, 2005; Sheard 1999; Hvenegaard 2002; Scott & Thigpen 2003; Burr & Scott 2004; Eubanks *et al.* 2004; Moore *et al.* 2008; Tsaur & Liang 2008). A case in point is the work of Connell (2009). In reviewing the bird-watching literature and establishing a research agenda for geographers, Connell (2009) discusses the pre-existing social categories used to create a social hierarchy among people who watch birds as leisure activity. These categories include *birders* and *twitchers*. According to Connell (2009, p. 204) *birders* are:

> a subset of birdwatchers who are not merely looking with pleasure, but are interested in scientific classification, environmental issues and the more detailed study of birds, though they reject any obsession with lists.

Instead, Connell (2009) ascribes an 'obsession with lists' to the *twitcher* subset. He defines *twitching* as, 'a particular kind of "collecting" tourism, as twitchers travel great distances to see rare species and accumulate lengthening lists of birds' (Connell 2009, p. 206). He asserts that the list is a key point of reference for discerning between those he classifies as *serious* and *hobbyist* bird-watchers, and draws attention to the allure of the practice of watching and 'ticking-off' coveted bird species from a list. Yet, in emphasising the making of lists, birds are transformed to a 'fact' and people are transformed into categories of bird-watchers. Consequently, Connell (2009) follows the long-established practice of attempting to categorise people who watch birds within particular criteria, rather than thinking about the reciprocal spatial relationships that constitute a 'bird-watcher' *in situ*.

In this context, we adopt a feminist approach that enables us to examine the embodied spatiality of bird-watching and listing practices. We are not the first to reconceptualise the practice/study of bird-watching. For example, in her study of bird-watching and patchwork quilting mobilities, Hui (2013) draws on the work of Reckwitz (2002, pp. 249–50) to foreground the concept of *praktik*; that is, the relationship between practices, mobilities and performance. In this way, to understand bird-watching and listing as performance—as practices inseparable from mobilities—highlights the role of non-human bodies and objects in shaping bird-watching subjectivities. Instead, to help us to reposition and foreground lived experiences as central to our spatial thinking, we take our lead from feminist scholars to investigate the spatial imperatives of the practices that forge bird-watching subjectivities and identities without resorting to pre-existing social hierarchies and labels.[2] We borrow the term 'spatial imperative of subjectivity' from Probyn (2003), who describes the reciprocal relationships between subjectivity and space; as we shape space, space shapes us. Space and subjectivities are rethought as relational achievements, power-laden constructions emerging from a constellation of trajectories with the potential for differentiation. This scholarship and approach is helpful in at least two ways. First, the focus on the spatiality of subjectivity offers new ways of thinking about bird-watching as an immanent process of 'becoming' that involves humans and non-humans, the living and the dead, the past and present, as well as the here and elsewhere. Rather than containing bird-watcher within prescribed categories, these ideas open up possibilities to think about the creative potential of lived

experiences through interplay between bodily reaction and consciousness, stimulus and reaction, affect and emotion. Thus, Probyn (2003) encourages us to think of bodies that learn to encounter birds as elements of an unpredictable relational geography that is simultaneously biological, psychological, physiological, social and cultural.

Second, this thinking underscores the importance of how the personal is entangled within social structures. The practice of bird-watching is framed by the historical weight of wider cultural, economic and political structures including those of ecotourism, environment and wilderness. Encountering and listing birds disciplines the body in particular ways. However, bird-watching is not just about the ways in which bodies are disciplined through field-guides, technologies, or social norms; embodied practices and lived experiences are also extremely personal. The subject of the bird-watcher is therefore conceived to involve embodied histories (including memories, skills and affects) that are allowed to fluoresce, or fade, within particular spatial and temporal contexts. The subjectivity of a bird-watcher is conceptualised here as always being the outcome of an ongoing, situated, reciprocal relationship between human bodies (differentiated by skills, experience and biology), non-human bodies (including birds, trees, water, sand, mammals and insects), technologies (including clothes, binoculars, phone apps and audio-recorders), as well as being entangled in ideas communicated and circulated through texts (including field-guides, websites and brochures). The next section considers the methodological implications of researching lived experiences alongside the social, cultural and political structures that fashion the practices of bird-watching.

Research design

Fieldwork for this paper was conducted in April–June 2013 on the New South Wales (NSW) South Coast, Australia. The research area crossed six Local Government Areas from Wollongong to the Victorian border. The recruitment of adults who consciously encounter and list birds relied on tapping into the administrative networks of five bird-watching organisations. Of these, the fieldwork focused on three organisations: Illawarra Birders, Eurobodalla Natural History Society, and Far South Coast Bird Watchers Inc. The presidents of these institutions gave consent for us to speak at a club meeting or to circulate a Participant Information Sheet to members. In total 17 participants were recruited from these bird-watching organisations. An additional four participants, who were not members of clubs, were recruited through personal networks. The participants were differentiated by their employment status: 14 were retired or semi-retired, 7 were in full-time employment. In terms of sex, 14 were women and 7 were men. Only one participant was less than 40 years of age. None claimed an Indigenous Australian identity. Omitted by this recruitment process were also children and younger people who encounter and list birds. Participants shared ideas of the South Coast as a 'rural idyll' in which to live, bird-watching as a leisure practice and the stigmatised identity from the practices of bird-watching. Ours is an analysis of the experiences of encountering, identifying and listing framed by older, Anglo-European Australian, middle-class sensibilities. All participants consented to use of their actual first name.

None of the authors identify themselves as bird-watchers, nor do we possess the practised knowledge or skills. Instead, we arrived at this project intrigued by how

our family members relate to birds and fashion attachments to place through their bird-watching practices. The research project was facilitated by our familiarity with some of the organisations, texts, technologies and skills enrolled to facilitate practices of bird-watching. Having witnessed family members bird-watching, there was also some familiarity with the emotions and affects of encountering, or not, an (un)anticipated bird. Therefore, the author who conducted the fieldwork (Carrie) had points of commonality with most participants but was inexperienced in the practice of bird-watching. Through the fieldwork she was constantly learning the skills and embodied knowledge from experienced practitioners. Hence, there are undoubtedly silences in what was asked, noted, felt and recorded.

To better understand the embodied, the fleeting and the ephemeral in practices of encountering and listing birds, the project design used semi-structured interviews alongside participant observation. As part of the consent process, participants were asked to provide a copy of their bird-list(s) at the interview. Semi-structured interviews were normally conducted outside, in places where participants regularly encounter birds, and varied in length from 40 to 120 minutes. Participants responded to open questions structured around six themes: (1) bird-watching history; (2) travel and bird-watching; (3) lists and listing; (4) skills, technologies and practices; (5) learning about yourself; and (6) learning about birds. Open questions were employed as starting points rather than end points in generating a bird-watching life-narrative. To help explore the first theme, participants were asked to convey their experience of bird-watching through a sketch. For some participants the picture helped convey that bird-watching was not just about ideas of watching birds but also the affective ties and pushes often difficult to convey in words. For example, in reflecting upon her sketch, Sylvia (60s, retired public servant, club-member, Bega Valley) said:

> I don't draw, but it [bird-watching] means something more to me than I could possibly draw—that is the problem … I could draw a lot of birds, that gives you the idea, but it's about being outside, it's being about, out in the countryside; a bit of social contact, and it's communing with nature.

Drawing on arguments outlined by Kearns (2010), Anderson (2004) and Harper (2002), employing a multi-faceted qualitative mixed methodology ensured that the empirical data gathered were rich in detail. The methods chosen were integral for a project aiming to explore the intersections of discourse, surveillance, performativity, embodied histories, embodied encounter, skills, emotions and affects of encountering and listing birds. Eighteen participants consented to one of the authors joining them while walking and bird-watching. Talking, walking, photographing and watching birds provided an opportunity for participants to share bird-watching skills-in-practice and narratives about their personal lives, as well as emotional attachments to specific birds and places informed by experience and previous knowledge. This context provides a spontaneity to the narratives, which was missing from the semi-structured interview. Photographs were taken along the walk to help trace the affective responses triggered by (un)planned encounters with birds. At the end of the walk, the photographs were used as prompts in a follow-up conversation, and provided insights to affective and emotional relationships.

The methodological challenges posed by studying embodied experiences, skills, affective ties and emotional attachments are well versed in the literature. Following the advice of Dewsbury *et al.* (2002), in this paper we move beyond critiques that position texts as 'blunt' instruments to instead explore bodily sensations, moods and emotions. Our interpretation of bird-watching life-narratives and talking, walking, photographing and observing relies on a form of analysis, termed by Gubrium and Holstein (2009) as 'narrative ethnography'. This analytical approach is attentive to how the language that participants draw upon mediates how they make sense of bird-watching in their lives. Narrative ethnography demands being alert to how stories are told, as well as the tone, speed and rhythm of speech. When combined with the photographs and participant observation, notes such as alertness allow us to consider the active, ambiguous role that bodily judgements play in bird-watching; narrated as emotions, moods or sensations. Together, the participant observation and semi-structured interviews provide insights into the reciprocal relationships between the lives of birds and participants. In order to explore the spatial imperative of bird-watching subjectivities the next section examines how the practices of bird-watching help fashion ideas and sustain understandings of self and place as 'home' and 'away'.

Birds, bird-watching, bird-lists and spatialised selves

'Home' and 'away' were key emergent themes of the personal geographies of participants. Narratives explicitly revolved around the spatial practices and experiences of bird-watching and listing, which illustrate that subjectivities are constituted through relational processes and negotiations between sites understood as 'home' and 'away'. Each narrative of the practices of bird-watching and listing revealed a great deal about the reciprocal relationships between birds, home and travel. For all participants, vital to structuring their bird-watching life narrative and bird-watching experiences is the capacity to identify, classify and differentiate between birds through the social norms of ornithology; that being the study of birds as 'species'. The capacity to name and list birds 'naturalises' bird-watching identities and relationships in most everyday environments, enabling performances of bird-watching identities and relationships that are both planned and spontaneous, facilitating participants to shape and reshape spaces of identity-affirmation, relationship-building and community-identification. Our discussion explores the particular role of bird-watching and bird-listing in constituting spatialised selves in and through places of 'home' and 'away'. First, we explore bird-watching as a home-making practice in which the past and present, and here and elsewhere are linked. We then turn our attention to bird-watching as a travelling practice in which 'home' and a sense of belonging, comfort and familiarity are fashioned in 'away' places.

Bird-watching as a home-making practice: linking 'past' and 'present', 'here' and 'elsewhere'

How bird-watching subjectivities and home are entangled with and mediated by notions of past and present, and here and elsewhere, is illustrated by Janet (70s, retired, club-member, Eurobodalla). For 60 years, and at three different properties, Janet has kept comprehensive, diarised records of the birds she has encountered. For Janet, in the socio-spatial relations of each property, homemaking is tied to her

ability to identify and produce written accounts of bird species. Reading an entry from one of her diarised bird-lists, she reflected:

> There's the Grey Falcon—that's the only time I ever saw the Grey Falcon! [Janet reads from the diary entry]. 'Two perched on top of the Redbox Gum and the first one flew away and I had a good look at the other'. And I remember I rang up my good *birdo* friends in Melbourne and they came up especially but it had gone of course the next day! [Laughs] And then that's all about the Mallee Fowls. We did have a Mallee Fowl's mound on the property so we watched that for a whole year.

Janet illustrates the emotional and social dimensions of bird-watching and bird-lists. She demonstrates how places become 'home' through practices of bird-watching. Janet illustrates the emotional work of bird-lists in remembering homes past. To follow Rose (2003) and Edwards and Hart (2004) in their discussion of photographs, although physically and temporally separated, Janet's relived feeling of belonging hinges on the bird-list. For Janet, the bird-list is an equally powerful prompt for facilitating place-based attachments and belonging. In this sense, bird-lists illustrate how the process of home-making combines the past and present to create a powerful prompt for feelings of comfort, proximity, connectedness and belonging, with the severed physical and social relationships of homes past.

Likewise, Julie (50s, retired business consultant, club-member, Eurobodalla) illustrates how self and home as places of belonging are mutually constituted through the emotional work and spatial practices of bird-watching and listing. Julie illustrates the entanglement of notions of home, migration, bird species, biodiversity, and environment:

> We outgrew our Southern Highlands property so we looked for a larger property and bought one at Moruya Heads and when we arrived there, there were all these new bird calls, all these new birds! And I started to learn and bought more books and more CDs and tapes and what have you because it's a larger property and I really wanted to measure the biodiversity of the property through the species of everything, of birds and all types of animals and flora as well.

Julie illustrates the concept of home-making as an oscillating process of reassigning and reprocessing pasts and elsewhere; in this case her knowledge of the birds she encountered in the Southern Highlands inspires her to continue bird-watching at her new property. Julie's sense of home is grounded in a working scientific knowledge of birds, flowers and trees on her property. In her words, 'I like to know about what's in my environment.' Julie's understanding of 'home' follows that of Massey (1992) in that 'home' is not defined in terms of the bricks and mortar of a physical household. Rather, Julie talks of 'a place called home', a place that is simultaneously understood as 'habitat', a place that encompasses relationships configured by an enhanced scientific knowledge of plants, frogs, the lake and birds. The yearning for place-based attachments of home motivates an ongoing process of learning to identify and familiarise herself with bird species. The process of learning to identify bird species becomes part of the emotional work of home-making.

In doing so, Julie links her house, home, property, biodiversity and species of birds into a single narrative.

But Julie's sense of home extends far beyond the relationships confined within her property's physical boundaries. Her skill in identifying bird species has facilitated relationships with franchised naturalist societies. When making bird-lists for biodiversity monitoring Julie illustrates the reciprocal relationship between self and place through practices of citizen-science and making places to call home:

> There's nothing I enjoy more now than doing bird-surveys and being under pressure, you know, a twenty minute period of time to identify each and every call, there's nothing more rewarding and satisfying than doing that … I mean it's [the Bush Heritage Survey] a real challenge, and it's exhausting, but it's very rewarding and I know it's going into biodiversity monitoring for those properties.

Julie's bird-lists help confirm her sense of self as a citizen-scientist, while at the same time shaping places as home within the technological, social and regulatory networks that comprise a scientific community. For Julie, the pressure to correctly identify birds according to their taxonomical classification becomes fuel to reinforce feelings of responsibility for, and sensitivity to, the non-human world, her sense of self as member of a naturalist community, and also her place-based attachments to Moruya Heads as home. Julie reveals how her sense of self and space are mutually constituted and reconstituted through bird-watching practices and experiences.

The community-building function of bird-watching that flourishes from weaving together the history, identity and environmental politics of citizen-science, biodiversity, endangered species and nature reserves cannot be overemphasised. As well as providing an understanding of individual identity, personal interrelationships with the collective identities and practices of bird-watching social groups help to shape and reshape notions of self and place. For example, Barbara (70s, retired teacher, club-member, Bega Valley) left behind the collective practices and self-actualisation offered by a bird-watching social group in Sydney when she retired to the Far South Coast of NSW with her husband, about 20 years ago. This spatial and social transition reinforced for Barbara the importance of becoming oneself through identification with home, bird species, bird-lists and a like-minded community of bird-watchers. As a personal response to moving to the Far South Coast, Barbara founded a bird-watching club. As she explained:

> My world, whether I wanted it to or not, has revolved around the club because I've been so determined to see it succeed, that I've really put an awful lot of time into that.

As Ahmed (2000) suggests, when leaving home is narrated as a journey towards a new home, this may result in reinforcing the idea of home as familiarity, comfort and belonging. In doing so, for Barbara, creating a sense of 'home' on the Far South Coast is underpinned by a longing for comfort, safety, and becoming oneself through relationship-building in a bird-watching community. Home is not fixed to the house, but to the unending home-making practices needed to sustain a bird-watching club and all kinds of subjectivities including and beyond that of the

citizen-scientist. As Blunt and Varley (2004, p. 4) suggest, Barbara's 'geography of home' influences and is influenced by 'social relations not only within, but also far beyond the household'. Barbara's narrative confirms the notion of home as a process of establishing connections with like-minded people and creating a sense of belonging (Blunt & Dowling 2006). For Barbara there is a symbiotic relationship between the practices of bird-watching, home-making, self-actualisation, community-formation and citizen-science. For Barbara, the practices of encountering, identifying and listing birds informed by the historical weight of ornithology was important to building scientifically informed and environmentally responsible communities:

> Well if you're interested in birds, you may as well make use of it—use the knowledge and store the knowledge and share the knowledge, help other people to understand birds and learn about birds and have an interest.

Arriving on the South Coast, Barbara's sense of 'belonging' and sense of place as 'home' hinged on sharing her passion for bird-watching with others; in particular her knowledge of identifying and listing birds encountered for the purposes of citizen-science.

Barbara later comments that bird-watching is 'an interest which can take me anywhere and can be a communication tool with other people; it can be an interest forever'. Following Lorimer (2007), Barbara's feelings of belonging are experienced as both sited and mobile. Home is not just a place of domestic living; rather, Barbara understands that people can belong and feel at home anywhere, as long as they are linked to the social, regulatory and technological norms that fashion the practices of bird-watching. She emphasises that bird-watchers share a sense of collective identity, thus regardless of where they go there is a common bond between people who watch birds. We further explore this theme of belonging and home-making through mobility and travel in the next section.

Bird-watching as a travelling practice: home-making in 'away' places

In this section we turn our attention to how the capacity to understand and feel at 'home' in places 'away' when travelling is shaped by practices of bird-watching. Travel attains a critical role for people who watch birds. Participants described in different ways how their place-based attachments and self-fulfilment is facilitated through journeys to encounter birds and list birds in places away from the NSW South Coast. Crucially, participants spoke about how different bird-watching practices are called upon to enable a sense of belonging while travelling.

The construction of a bird-list in itself is a form of identity work. The practice of maintaining a 'life-list'[3] offers insight to travel geographies and intimate connections between places and identities, over a life-course. Take, for instance, Chris (60s, retired, club-member, Wollongong City) whose life-list plays a key role in mediating his bird-watching practices and travel. Of the approximately 800 bird species native to Australia, according to his list Chris has encountered and identified 700. In the process of creating a life-list of bird species, Chris reveals an inherent spatial process fashioned by the scientific gaze of ornithology. For example, Chris spoke about his detailed knowledge of the biography of particular species of birds prompting travel to specific places:

> Some of them [bird species] are very restricted. Like, you know, some of the Grass Wrens they're very restricted in their habitat, so we'll travel to Mount Isa to see two species because they're only found around Mount Isa.

Becoming a bird-watcher is essentially a spatial matter, underpinned by knowledge of biogeography and ornithology. Chris's practice of keeping a life-list is not a simple assertion of a need to differentiate himself within a social hierarchy of bird-watchers. There are important embodied spatialities that convey insights to the links between place and identity, bird-watching practices and travel. For example, as Chris explained:

> Carrie: What is it that fascinates you about birds?
>
> Chris: I dunno, it's just interesting, you know. I think it's like you work out how to see a bird and then you make your plans and then you go somewhere and then you finally get there and see it and it's like a game, I suppose. And you've succeeded even if you didn't see it; you still succeed getting there and you've enjoyed yourself.

Acquiring specific knowledge of birds before departing is an important aspect of the practice of maintaining a bird-list when travelling. Learning about places far away from the NSW South Coast as 'habitat' and sensitising human bodies to the movement and sounds of a particular bird species is essential to the emotional rewards of actively encountering, identifying and listing birds.

Like Chris, Paul (40s, Australia Post, club-member, Wollongong City) illustrates that the pleasures derived from travelling and 'doing' bird-watching 'well' requires ongoing learning about places as habitat and a heightened sensitivity to bird-life, even if birds themselves are never witnessed. At the time of our fieldwork, Paul was in the process of planning a trip to Lake Cargelligo, in central NSW, for bird-watching. Fundamental to this was consultation of other people's bird-lists to help configure his sense of self, birds and place when travelling:

> These are Lake Cargelligo lists; for the sewerage ponds, the railway line and the Lake Condobolin Road, the wetlands there. And these are all lists of people who have seen birds, as well as the percentage of times they have actually been recorded, when people have been out at that time of year. So what I'm doing now is going through all these birds and, 'Oh I don't know that one', and I look it up in the book so that I can get there and know what I'm looking at. So that it's not something that I'd never done before. So this is my list. That list came from the Eremaea site.[4]

Paul illustrates how texts serve as mediating artefacts, which simultaneously intercede and facilitate proximate encounters between people, birds and space. As Lynch and Law (1998) argue, texts participate in the process of learning and knowing birds as both a cultural framing and a sensitising device that shapes where, when and what birds people encounter, identify and list. In the words of Lynch and Law (1998, p. 321), 'there is thus a reflexive relationship between the literary phenomenon of the list and the embodied and interactional performance of observation and representation'. Moreover, shared bird-lists become part of a spatial network and a means to

foster both individual and collective identity formation. Chris and Paul sustain a sense of identity as bird-watchers when travelling through their use of texts. Employing their highly specialised knowledge to travel to specific destinations in order to identify and list birds is crucial for promoting a sense of belonging, familiarity and connection to places 'away' from the NSW South Coast. Chris's and Paul's accounts reveal how practices of bird-watching disrupt ideas of 'home' and 'away' as discrete spaces. Instead, the pleasures of bird-watching while travelling involve seeking out and implementing codified and tacit knowledge to gain close proximity to bird species across geographical scales categorised as home and away.

Likewise, David (60s, retired manager with NPWS, club-member, Eurobodalla) demonstrates how making sense of being and becoming a bird-watcher is essentially a spatial matter. Unlike Chris and Paul, for David bird-watching is not the fundamental reason for travelling, but it may influence the choice of sites he visits. David explains:

> Yeah, it's [birds] not the reason we travel. But it's the reason sometimes you go certain places. And I'll use last year as an example. We decided to take the camper away for a couple of months and see some parts of Australia we hadn't seen … We spent about a week in the Port Lincoln area walking and bird-watching and generally enjoying ourselves, eating really good seafood and things like that … and it was a two month trip and we did a lot of bird-watching and a lot of walking. And we kept a list for the trip and that sort of thing.

Following Hui (2013, p. 14), David's 'trip-list' traced his 'stuttering patterns of travel-as-a-birder'. At the end of each day David recalled the pleasure derived from bird-watching through writing a trip-list. The bird-list was then deployed in spatialised travel narratives not only in terms of 'collecting' different parts of Australia but also in making sense of places as 'home' for particular bird species. Again, the identity work of the trip-list for David is not to differentiate himself within a community of bird-watchers but rather to help make sense of the places he travels through. He discusses explicitly how visiting certain locations and keeping trip-lists contributes to self-actualisation and making sense of places by learning where and how to look and identify birds. David recalls the sense of fulfilment and pleasure he experienced through keeping a trip-list while travelling in South America:

> David: We've got a list of what we saw on Galapagos. We ticked the book on that because we got a book on the wildlife of the Galapagos so you went [makes noise and motion to indicate ticking down a list]. On the Amazon trip the organisers provided a check list of what we were likely to see and I think we ticked that off and it's in a cupboard somewhere [laughs].
>
> Carrie: Yeah, just because it was given to you? Like you wouldn't have necessarily made a list if it wasn't given to you do you think?
>
> David: Um well we were there for ten days and by the end of the ten days there were probably close to a hundred birds that I could recognise by

> sight and put a common name to because the guy who was leading the trip knew his stuff and said, 'That's a Bat Falcon' and you'd go 'Hmm, alright, memorise!' And you develop search images and things like that. So that was that sort of thing. Ecuador we went down to a rainforest, but just to look at Hummingbirds for a day; again with a guide who said, 'That's that, that's that, that's that' and you'd go 'Hmmm … tick, tick' [laughs].

Life- and trip-lists are just two ways to detail one's travel practices and relationships to birds and place. Listing becomes a way through which people who watch birds communicate their experiences to others, particularly like-minded people. Life- and trip-lists represent more than a collection of bird species. The writing of lists reveals how the practice of bird-watching is shaped by personal histories, experiences and life-courses and in turn shapes future travel and travel practices that blur the boundaries between 'home' and 'away'. The dissemination and consumption of personal narratives around lists and listing practices contribute to the production of the collective geographies, histories and identities of a community of bird-watchers.

Conclusion

We have centred our paper on the spatial imperative of subjectivity to rethink practices of bird-watching. Thinking about the spatial imperative of these skilled practices enables us to better understand what motivates people to actively encounter, identify and list birds without recourse to pre-existing social hierarchies and categories. Through this analysis, we have argued that the practices of bird-watching and listing are inherently geographical questions. Our findings illustrate how the motivation to encounter, identify and list birds is always more than becoming familiar with the taxonomic classifications found in field-guides, and disciplining the body in particular ways in terms of where and how to look. While the skilled practice of encountering and listing birds is embedded in long historical, social and cultural geographies of ornithology, there are important personal geographies to these practices, identities and knowledge. Keeping a bird-list may have little to do with accruing social and cultural capital. Instead, the pleasure of the practice of keeping a particular type of list was spoken about in terms of relations between subjectivities and spaces, both home and away. Our research illustrates the pleasures of bird-watching and listing as spatial practices that make possible connections with like-minded people as part of a convivial community of practitioners.

Implications of this study for future research are at least twofold. First, we urge scholars to move beyond the notion that bird-watchers' motivations, practices and experiences are premised on pre-configured hierarchical categories playing out against an environmental backdrop. Paying attention to the sensory and situated encounter with birds foregrounds the importance of knowledge-in-practice in the production and contestation of subjectivities, places and environmental knowledge. There is much more work to be undertaken to better understand the embodied geographical knowledge underpinning the practices of bird-watching and listing, including the therapeutic affects that circulate in encounters with birds. Second, bird-watching potentially offers a way to think through the relationships connecting environmental responsibility with pleasurable experiences. Lorimer (2012, p. 182)

draws attention to the emergence of the 'experience economy' that underpins nature-based tourism. Rather than dismissing bird-watching as a middle-class indulgence by focusing on ecotourism, we argue that it is possible to think of the joyful experiences of watching birds as part of what Soper (2008) termed a 'new hedonist imaginary', which does not rely on notions of the 'good life' underpinned by affluent consumption. This idea opens up possibilities to critically reflect on the ethics of bird-watching; and better understand how people who practise bird-watching may, or may not, take responsibility for maintaining the places/environments that support their lives.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on research undertaken by Carrie Wilkinson as part of her BSc (Hons) degree, supervised by Gordon Waitt and Leah Gibbs. We thank participants who generously gave their time.

Correspondence: Carrie Wilkinson, Department of Geography and Sustainable Communities, Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research, University of Wollongong, Northfields Avenue, Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia. E-mail: cw979@uowmail.edu.au

NOTES

[1] The *Michael Morcombe eGuide to the Birds of Australia* (Morcombe 2012) is essentially a digitisation of a popular textual field-guide by the same author, but with the addition of audio files of bird-calls. The app provides users with the opportunity to document their own lists of observations, which can then be sorted by date, location or species.

[2] While the objective of this paper is, in part, to do away with the labelling and restrictive categorisation of people who watch birds, in the interests of clarity it is impossible not to discuss and explore an assemblage of practices and subjects without some reference to descriptive terminology. For the purposes of this article we adopt the term *bird-watcher* to describe anyone who participates in the activity of watching birds. We do not use *bird-watcher* as a label or hierarchical category; rather, we use *bird-watcher* interchangeably with the phrase *people who watch birds*.

[3] 'Life-list' is the term given to a list of all of the species a person has encountered and identified in their life, usually with details about the sighting, such as date and location, and whether the bird was identified audibly or visually.

[4] *Eremaea Birds*, now operating as *Eremaea eBird* (2014), is a web interface that enables participants to upload and retrieve observation records from lists of birds encountered at a specific location and/or time period.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S. (2000) *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality*, Routledge, London and New York.

Anderson, J. (2004) 'Talking whilst walking: a geographical archaeology of knowledge', *Area* 36(3), pp. 254–261.

Best of the Drawing Room: Twitchers (2013) Radio segment, Radio National: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australia, 7.23 pm, 10 June 2013, available from: http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drawingroom/twitchers/4740608 (accessed 15 June 2013).

Birdlife Australia (2013) *History*, Birdlife Australia, available from: http://www.birdlife.org.au/who-we-are/our-organisation/history (accessed 25 August 2013).

Blunt, A. & Dowling, R. (2006) *Home*, Routledge, London.

Blunt, A. & Varley, A. (2004) 'Introduction: geographies of home', *Cultural Geographies* 11, pp. 3–6.
Burr, S. & Scott, D. (2004) 'Understanding Great Salt Lake bird festival visitors: applying the recreational specialization framework', *Event Management* 9(1–2), pp. 27–37.
Chambers, C. (2007) '"Well its remote, I suppose, innit?" The relational politics of bird-watching through the CCTV lens', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 123(2), pp. 122–134.
Cloke, P. & Perkins, H. (2005) 'Cetacean performance and tourism in Kaikoura, New Zealand', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23, pp. 903–924.
Cole, J.S. & Scott, D. (1999) 'Segmenting participation in wildlife watching: A comparison of casual wildlife watchers and serious birders', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal* 4(4), pp. 44–61.
Connell, J. (2009) 'Birdwatching, twitching and tourism: towards an Australian perspective', *Australian Geographer* 40(2), pp. 203–217.
Dewsbury, J.D., Harrison, P., Rose, M. & Wylie, J. (2002) 'Enacting geographies', *Geoforum* 33, pp. 437–40.
Dunaway, F. (2000) 'Hunting with the camera: nature photography, manliness, and modern memory, 1890–1930', *Journal of American Studies* 34(2), pp. 207–230.
Edwards, E. & Hart, J. (2004) *Photographs objects histories: on the materiality of images*, Routledge, London and New York.
Eremaea eBird (2014) *About Eremaea eBird*, available from: http://ebird.org/content/australia/about/ (accessed 12 February 2014).
Eubanks, T., Stoll, J. & Ditton, R. (2004) 'Understanding the diversity of Eight Birder sub-populations: socio-demographic characteristics, motivations, expenditures and net benefits', *Journal of Ecotourism* 3(3), pp. 151–172.
Green, R. & Jones, D. (2010) *Practices, needs and attitudes of bird-watching tourists in Australia*, CRC for Sustainable Tourism, Gold Coast.
Gubrium, J. & Holstein, J. (2009) *Analysing narrative reality*, Sage, London.
Harper, D. (2002) 'Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation', *Visual Studies* 17(1), pp. 13–26.
Hello Birdy: The Boofhead's Guide to Bird Watching (2014) Television programme, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australia, 6-part series, premiered 6.30 pm February 1 2013, available from: http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/hello-birdy/ (accessed 3 February 2014).
Hui, A. (2013) 'Moving with practices: the discontinuous, rhythmic and material mobilities of leisure', *Social and Cultural Geography* 14(8), pp. 888–908.
Hvenegaard, G.T. (2002) 'Birder specialization differences in conservation involvement, demographics, and motivations', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal* 7(1), pp. 21–36.
Jones, D. & Buckley, R. (2001) *Birdwatching tourism in Australia*, Wildlife Tourism Research Report Series, no. 10, CRC for Sustainable Tourism, Griffith University, Brisbane.
Kearns, R. (2010) 'Seeing with clarity: undertaking observational research', in Hay, I. (ed) *Qualitative research methods in human geography*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 241–258.
Kim, A., Keyning, J., Robertson, J. & Kleindorfer, S. (2010) 'Understanding Birdwatching Tourism Market in Queensland, Australia', *Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research* 21(2), pp. 227–247.
Long Story Short: Birds (2014) Radio segment, Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australia, 3.05 pm, 26 January 2014, available from: http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/longstoryshort/birds/5159542 (accessed 3 February 2014).
Lorimer, J. (2007) 'Nonhuman charisma', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, pp. 911–932.
Lorimer, J. (2008) 'Counting corncrakes: the affective science of the UK corncrake census', *Social Studies of Science* 38(3), pp. 377–405.
Lorimer, J. (2012) 'Touching environmentalism: the place of touch in the fraught biographies of elephant captivity', in Paterson, M. & Dodge, M. (eds) *Touching space, placing touch*, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 169–190.
Lynch, M. & Law, J. (1998) 'Pictures, texts and objects: the literary language game of bird-watching', in Biagioli, M. (ed) *The science studies reader*, Routledge, New York, pp. 317–341.

MARTIN, S. (1997) 'Specialization and differences in setting preferences among wildlife viewers', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal* 2(1), pp. 1–18.
MASSEY, D. (1992) 'A place called home?' *New Formations* 17, pp. 3–15.
MCFARLANE, B. (1994) 'Specialization and motivations of birdwatchers', *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 22(3), pp. 361–370.
MOORE, R.SCOTT, D. & MOORE, A. (2008) 'Gender-based differences in birdwatchers' participation and commitment', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal* 13(2), pp. 89–101.
MORCOMBE, M. (2012) *The Michael Morcombe eGuide to Australian Birds*, smartphone application (Apple and Android), version 1.3, available from Apple iTunes store: https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/michael-morcombe-david-stewart/id397979505?mt=8.
ODDIE, B. (2006) *Bill Oddie's little black bird book*, Robson Books, London.
PROBYN, E. (2003) 'The spatial imperative of subjectivity', in Anderson, K., Domosh, M., Pile, S. & Thrift, N. (eds) *The handbook of cultural geography*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 290–299.
RECKWITZ, A. (2002) 'Toward a theory of social practices: a development in culturalist theorizing', *European Journal of Social Theory* 5(2), pp. 243–263.
ROSE, G. (2003) 'Family photographs and domestic spacings: a case study', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28, pp. 5–18.
SCOTT, D., BAKER, S. & KIM, C. (1999) 'Motivations and commitments among participants in the great Texas birding classic', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal* 4(1), pp. 50–67.
SCOTT, D., DITTON, R., STOLL, J. & EUBANKS, T. (2005) 'Measuring specialization among birders: utility of a self-classification measure', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal* 10(1), pp. 53–74.
SCOTT, D. & SCHAFER, C. (2001) 'Recreational specialization: a critical look at the construct', *Journal of Leisure Research* 33(3), pp. 319–343.
SCOTT, D. & THIGPEN, J. (2003) 'Understanding the birder as tourist: segmenting visitors to the Texas hummer/bird celebration', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal* 8(3), pp. 199–218.
SHEARD, K. (1999) 'A twitch in time saves nine: birdwatching, sport, and civilizing processes', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 16, pp. 185–205.
SOPER, K. (2008) 'Alternative hedonism, cultural theory and the role of aesthetic revisioning', *Cultural Studies* 22(5), pp. 567–587.
TSAUR, S. & LIANG, Y. (2008) 'Serious leisure and recreation specialization', *Leisure Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 30(4), pp. 325–341.
URRY, J. (2002) *The tourist gaze*, 2nd ed, Sage Publications, London.
WATSON, G. (2011) 'Field birding and digital objects: immaterial technologies and their implications for one practice of coming to know the more-than-human', *Environmental Education Research* 17(6), pp. 789–799.