



user experience
engineering and
design

UXED PTY LIMITED

ACN 159 812 209

POSTAL

PO Box 392
Oatley NSW 2223

PHONE

0419 20 4648

EMAIL

daniel@uxed.com.au

August 9, 2018

The Executive Officer
c/o Benjamin Clarke
Interpretation Australia
PO Box 77
North Perth WA 690

Dear Mr Clarke,

Re: Interpretation Australia Awards 2018

The Walka Bird app is part of a bigger strategy to help engage new audiences at the Walka Water Works site. Clare James, from Maitland Council has been working towards reimagining how the site could be better used by the local community and attracting other visitors. At the same time, considering how we promote the value of the site to an education audience, in particular helping to raise the profile of Walka Ecology.

Through conversations Clare and the ecological community had initiated with the Hunter Bird Observers Club, it became apparent that the reservoir at Walka was part of an important bird corridor in the Hunter region. There were few immediate resources that could help visitors to Walka identify the birds that have made Walka their home.

My role was the designer and developer of the Walka software app. I was involved with the early conversations with the members of the Hunter Bird Observers Club (HBOC), Maitland Council staff and Morpeth Primary School. From the various conversations, photographs and emails on the topic of bird observation it became evident that a colourful photographic catalogue of the birds would not provide a good understanding of identification. At the same time, this project was not intended to provide a full tutorial in the process of bird identification. Our objective was to consider a design that did help the user go through identification process step-by-step and consider the broader site context. Understanding the process of identifying birds by shape and features led to a design that first focussed on the silhouettes as the initial image that the user would see. The goal was to consider how to reveal the overall shape and emphasise features such as neck length, beak shape and overall body shape. This, according to the club members, is the correct approach and not to start with "what colour is it?".

Working closely with team designing signage and furniture led to the use of markers also following the silhouette idea.

In the app, the design of the page for each bird tries to move away from the standard text based table view representation, to something that is more infographic in its approach. Some of the icons on the right are data driven (e.g. frequency of sighting or "Numbers" - low, medium and high) so they vary depending on the values maintained in the underlying database. Tapping the icon also reveals help text that explains the feature.

We do include a range of beautiful images that were supplied by members of the HBOC. So users are not denied the privilege of seeing some amazing images of the birds close up; just delayed a little in terms of the user experience time line. It is not just a single image of the bird. Based on important features that HBOC advised, close up photos of those features are also presented.

We also made sure that the text works with the screen reader technology (VoiceOver) that is built in to iOS.

When one initially visits the Walka site they are first drawn to the Pump House and then the reservoir and then possibly the stone wall embankment. Interpretation of the site due to its historic use as the town's water supply is an obvious direction. Choosing to consider the ecology as one of the first directions is an exciting and refreshing rethink to explore how to bring more people to the site. The software is only part of the bigger picture. The bird observation deck and the new seating designed for small group teaching come together with a strategy to help mobilise outdoor education.

I believe this is just the beginning. When we first visited the site there was no available Internet data, even from the major 4G suppliers. There is no site wi-fi. So this constrained what was possible in the digital sense. Everything had to be self contained on the device. There was no real opportunity for media sharing when on site. This is slowly changing with a recent measurement of one megabit per second to download content (most consumer plans are 20-30Mbps). So people could start sharing photos from the site and in theory we could start to build a community that is counting and sharing bird observations. But in 2018 Maitland Council has taken the very first steps towards making a historic site a place where citizen science can begin and opening people's eyes to understand that the ecology matters.

Sincerely,

Daniel Woo, PhD