

The Drongo

Number 125 February 2013



Swifts

Tasmania

Challenge
Count



FROM THE PRESIDENT

It appears I missed a great Christmas Party. Thanks to Lesley and Bob Murphy for providing the venue and organizing the food.

Elna is now working with Linda Venn from the Paluma Education Centre to coordinate presentations on Rainforest Birds with the classes who are going to Paluma for school camp. This could be another busy year for the educators. They could do with a bit of assistance. If you think you might like to get the feel of what we do in the schools let Elna know. You never know, you may turn out to be one of our key educators!

Annette is constantly chasing up content for the Drongo. It is such a great newsletter it seems a shame that it is so hard to get the material out of the members. Remember we are all interested to hearing about your experiences with birding.....big or small. Half the fun of having a great experience is sharing the story with others. What better way of sharing then to send it in for the Drongo.

This week we will hold our first Annual General Meeting. No, we didn't miscount. Yes, it has only been 11 months not 12. We needed to bring the meeting forward so that our minutes, financial reports etc can be sent to National Office in time for them to prepare for the Annual General Meeting in May. The Annual Report will be in the next Drongo.

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino
Vice-President: Alf Acton
Secretary: Warren Charlton
Treasurer: Nina Doyle
Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton
Conservation Officer: Peter Valentine
Education Officer: Elna Kerswell
Committee Members: Pat Charlton, Cecily Messer, Malcolm Calvert, Lenore Calvert



CATTANA WETLANDS

Having made several visits to the Cattana Wetlands in recent weeks, Teresa and I can recommend the site to fellow birders. Directions are provided from the roundabout at Smithfield on the Cook Highway just north of Cairns.

Site access is easy, the place is well maintained and there is a good variety of different birds to view. The walking tracks allow good access to the water bodies, the rainforest and the open paddocks on the site. There are bird hides, an elevated boardwalk and well maintained toilets.



Black-winged Stilt Ray Sutton

Cattana was originally a sugarcane farm then used as a sand quarry resulting in a series of fresh water and saltwater man-made lakes and lagoons. The site was purchased by the Cairns Council in 1993, primarily to protect the remnant lowland rainforest and feather palm forest on the western end of the site. The council has since planted over 70,000 native plants and undertaken extensive weed removal so creating excellent bird habitat on the site.

Eremaea surveys have recorded 138 different bird species on the site. While many of these are wetland birds, there are good numbers of woodland birds in the paddocks and re-planted areas. We particularly enjoy the section of track that runs from midway along the elevated boardwalk to the car park where we have recorded many good birds feeding on the flowering trees and shrubs. We also like the bird hide overlooking the swampy areas on the eastern side of the site. From here we had good views of wetland birds including the Red-kneed Dotterel.



Red-kneed Dotterel Ray Sutton
George and Teresa Baker

ONE SAVED.....

While waiting for mum at a specialist along Ross River Road late January I was sitting on the verandah when I noticed a small bird that had been hit by a passing car. I thought the bird was dead when all of a sudden it flew about two feet and collapsed again. I thought I would go and check to see if I was able to help it. Before I got there about 20 cars drove over the top of it. I was surprised when I finally managed to pick it up (in between cars passing) to discover that it was still alive and that it was a White-gaped Honeyeater. I took the bird back into the shade of the verandah and checked it out for broken bits. Finding nothing wrong, I then held it in my hand. After a while its heart rate slowed down but was still in distress. After about 20 minutes it had finally settled down enough to fly. First stop was another man standing in front of me (who just happened to be the owner of the FJ Holden café in Hughenden, who says he sell good pies?). From there it flew into a bottlebrush where it remained until I left. So one was saved!



One lost.....

On the 4th of February I walked under the house to ask Alf if he would like a cup of coffee when I noticed a Black-faced Monarch sitting on the remnants of our old broadband line. The fan was going so I asked Alf to quickly turn off the fan. Before he had a chance to do that the bird flew

White-gaped Honeyeater Ray Sutton

through the door out to the other side. We both expected it to keep going out the open doorway but instead it flew over our heads back inside. We turned off the fan but unfortunately it was still moving slowly when the bird flew into it, breaking its neck. One lost!

I rang Beth at the museum to see if she needed one for their collection to be told they did not have one. Now it will be around for many more years once she has done her taxidermy magic. One for many to admire!

Marleen and Alf

A BIT OF LUCK

Our son and Daughter-in-law in Brisbane presented us with a new grandson on November 1st, my birthday.

However, I was lying flat on my back with two new knees which I had acquired the day before. So we left it until January to venture forth to greet him.

Well, you can't spend a week just gooning at a new baby so we fitted in some birdwatching and tried to add a few into the Quest. First stop was O'Reilly's and the Lamington National Park. We were greeted in the car park by a very friendly Crimson Rosella who sat on our hands and heads. The King Parrots were nowhere to be seen – they were up in the feeding area getting a free breakfast.

There were Yellow-throated Scrubwrens hopping everywhere in the leaf litter and the lower branches of shrubs by the board walk. An Eastern Whipbird flew right down beside us. The strangler fig at the beginning of the tree walk is always fascinating and the tree walk was breathtaking. Especially with new knees. It was so wonderful to be able to do the whole walk. In the gloom of the forest we spotted a Satin Bowerbird and other visitors said they saw a Regent Bowerbird but we couldn't see it. We heard Catbirds calling but they, too, stayed well hidden.

Gatton was certainly worth a visit so we set off into forty degree heat for the day. We ate lunch in the car with the air conditioner going although we did enjoy some morning tea under a big tree on the Gatton Campus. The bird hide at the lake was quite exciting. First we had to walk in underneath and alongside Cattle Egret nests. Nesting was in full swing and there were babies everywhere. The adults were so hot they were panting. Peeping through the hide, we saw our main target bird – the Pink-eared Duck. There were many birds sitting in the shade on the island opposite the hide, including a few Pink-ears. A little Black-fronted Dotterel was busy along the shoreline while the other birds just sat there, conserving energy. Looking out the side window of the hide, we saw quite a few Black-winged stilts foraging and in amongst them were Red-kneed Dotterels. That was a bit of luck.

The Bunya Mountains were the last destination. We drove there on our way home, stopping at the van park at Yarraman. On the way up the mountain to Yarraman we found the road is open in both directions at last. The last two years it was only open one way every half hour. We stopped where the road works (still in progress) start and listened. Sure enough – Bell Miners chiming their hearts out. We had stumbled across them in this spot last year when we had been held up by the road works for twenty minutes. Another bit of luck.

Up in the Bunyas we pulled up at a picnic spot. Ray walked off with the camera but I sat still with the binoculars and suddenly a male Regent Bowerbird flew across the clearing. He went in a low arc, giving me time to see quite clearly what he was. That was a lifer. Then there were some Satins flying around but the Regent didn't return. When

we arrived at the village proper, we found our first Superb Fairy-wrens at the campsite. They had eluded us everywhere, probably because of the intense heat. We even drove to Southport where we know there are some but their vine thicket has disappeared completely and we couldn't find them anywhere. White-browed Scrubwrens played about in a tree in another picnic spot. Back at Yarraman we searched for the Black-chested Button-quail in the forest where we had been assured they would walk up to us but no luck. We did find a lot of Silveryeyes though.

Needless to say we were surrounded by Noisy Miners and Crows in Brisbane.



Superb Fairy-wren

Ray Sutton

Back to Townsville up through Biloela and Dululu. Good toilets at Dululu and plenty of room to turn the van around. We stopped at Clairview on the way but no Beach Stone-curlews. Why did I even look? Armstrong Beach near Sarina yielded a Mistletoebird and a Varied Triller. We reached home on Saturday afternoon, the 19th January. Next weekend all hell broke loose with Oswald and its march down the coast so our timing really was a big bit of luck.

Oh yes. The baby was beautiful.

Annette Sutton

COUNTING BIRDS (MASS GROUPINGS)

Methods of counting mass groupings of birds vary with each particular situation... and also from person to person. Below are a few different methods we use.

1. Confined Airspace

With the counting of massive numbers of birds such as Fork-tailed Swifts that are in a feeding situation, hawking for rising food, I find the surest way is to take photographs of sections of the flock. You can then count the number of birds visible in each image frame. You know many other factors also; such as the focal length of your camera at the time of exposure (EXIF data); you know the physical size of the bird species and therefore you know at approximately what distance or height the birds will disappear from view. You know they eventually <http://www.birdlifetownsville.org.au/News.html>



Great Knots

Ray Sutton

2. Migrating

If you notice that the birds are on the move (or migrating) and flying in a particular direction, you can stand in one spot and envisage a start line, or a geographical semicircular plane through which the birds are flying. You then physically estimate/count the number of birds that are passing through that plane for a particular period of time (say 5 minutes, which can be a hard task if you're alone and do not have eyes in the back of your head). Then it's a simple matter of multiplying that time period for the duration of the entire flock to pass. For example if you counted 500 birds pass through in 5 minutes, then you could roughly estimate that 6,000 birds per hour are passing through. They were flying through your plane for 3 hours so you can roughly estimate 18,000 birds passed you while you were there...

become impossible to see with binoculars and more importantly you will know at what distance they will disappear from you camera's resolution capabilities. The size of the frame at absolute resolution distance can be calibrated using multiples of visible wingspans. You can then estimate how many frames would cover the entire flock.... and very generally and eventually arrive at a most educated count of numbers that can be defended.

The methodology is important here because others can use the same method to count any other huge flocks or even check your count. This method works well if the birds are in-flight-feeding and sustained in a particular area of confined airspace.

This is the basis of the method we used Australia Day 2012, in collaboration with all the birders who were in the area witnessing the extraordinary event simultaneously... We counted/estimated 215,000 (minimum) Fork-tailed Swifts in the Cungulla - Cromarty - Cape Cleveland area. That report is published on the Birdlife Townsville's web site on the News Page. [h](#)

Questions ... were you there at the start?... or did you arrive mid-flock?

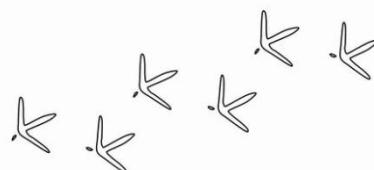
3. Migratory shorebirds

If you are counting big flocks of shorebirds, then that is a whole different kettle of wings or legs or heads. A spotting telescope is a necessity. A camera is an important tool here too, because you can photograph a whole roost, sort the percentages of species present... usually mostly only a few different species in a roost, not forgetting any loners or lone pairs etc; and then take counted sample blocks of the roosted flock and estimate how many of those blocks comprise the entire roost. Similarly, if the shorebirds are in a group feeding situation, like is usually the case with Great Knots, take the photo, or panorama if necessary, and count them in honest blocks in the field and then validate your field count back home when you download your images on your computer.

4. Aircraft

We have met some people who are experienced in identifying and counting bird species from the air, either by a slow, low-flying fixed-wing aircraft or by helicopter. This is a particularly difficult skill to master, but can be quite efficient and economical, especially if counting waterbirds or shorebirds in remote locations.

Len & Chris Ezzy



IN THE THICK OF IT

Last year I was envious of those who sighted the thousands of Swifts around Cunggulla after an outing to Alligator Creek on Australia Day.

I have seen only a few Swifts over the years, the biggest congregation being at Jourama Falls on an outing with Rosemary Payet and Marjory Cook a few years ago. Several species were feeding in the area above our heads.

On Australia Day this year, driving back from Alligator Creek, about half way between the camping area and the Bruce Highway, Rosemary and I came upon a mixed flock of hundreds of Fork-tailed Swifts and White-throated Needleetails feeding above the road and all around us. We watched them for 10 minutes (10.20 -30am) until they disappeared towards the west. Then on Monday (28/1/13) at Toomulla we noticed one or two Fork-tailed Swifts; then around 8am became aware of thousands of Fork-tailed Swifts and a few White-throated Needleetails flying north above the revegetated area and the road.

On Sunday (26/1/13) Rosemary, Larry Corbett and Chris Corbett had also seen a dense flock of thousands of Swifts - mainly Fork-tailed Swifts and a few White-throated Needleetails - when driving from Cunggulla westward along Goodsell Rd and Carty Rd to the intersection of Cape Cleveland Rd - In the same area and on the same day as last year's extraordinary phenomenon of 215,000 Fork-tailed Swifts, which was 125,000 more than any other estimate of Fork-tailed Swifts ever recorded in Australia.

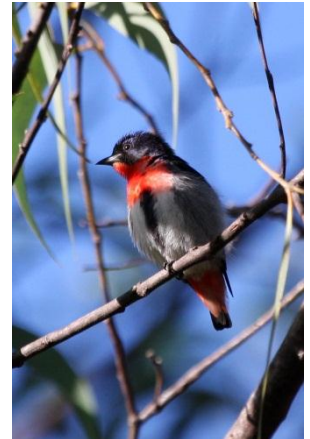
So to Birdline North Queensland and Birding- aus with the news! This is where my learning curve began: Mike Tarburton wanted to know the number and proportion of each species we had seen; Len fixed up my notifications to Birdline; I needed a lesson in counting birds, let alone Swifts; I've learned that I need to carry a camera (as well as scope, binoculars and field guide - getting serious now) and be able to take relevant photos; then do the maths to estimate the number of birds; it also helps to read maps - if you have one - and name the roads correctly. So much for some quick ticks for the Quest! I am now on a much bigger one! ☺

Joan Wharton



MISTLETOEBIRDS

A while back I was advised by Greg Calvert to plant a Grewia if I wanted to attract Mistletoebirds to my garden. So I did and it did! The Grewia is a small tree with nice open foliage so looks good in the garden. A few weeks ago I had a pair of very busy Mistletoebirds visiting the tree constantly throughout the day. I assumed they were feeding chicks but the nest was in a neighbour's yard somewhere.



Mistletoebird Ray Sutton

Eventually a very young Mistletoebird appeared in the tree. At first I thought 'how cute' the little fellow was sitting in the tree calling to its parents to be fed, opening its huge orange mouth every time they were anywhere near. Next day his or her little sibling turned up. After a week of constant demanding squeaks just outside my lounge window, I no longer thought them all that cute.

Despite all the noise it was a lovely experience and I now have four independent Mistletoebirds visiting the tree each day, just giving their nice gentle little squeak occasionally.

Something I discovered was that the male gives a trill. I did not know that the Mistletoebird made this sort of call but after much searching for the source, I observed him sitting in one spot and trilling for several minutes at a time. It is a sweet, high-pitched trill.

I have some of those plastic clothes hangers outside (cross-over arms with pegs hanging from them). Two are multicoloured and two are a pale purple. One of the pale purple ones had mistletoe or grewia seeds stuck all over it. It wasn't all that easy to clean as all the seeds were sticky and well-stuck. Not sure if it was the adults or the young fellows getting confused



about where to deposit seeds.

Pale-vented Bush-hen

In December 2011 I was surprised to see a Bush-hen in my neighbour's garden. The next morning it strolled across my garden while I was having breakfast on the patio.

On 13 January 2013, again while having breakie in my favourite spot, I saw 'something' dash into a big clump of lomandra. All I saw at that point was a brown bottom on what appeared to be longish legs. I then heard a call coming from the same spot, a clear piping call. A couple of books I checked didn't help so I turned to the old iPod to check what Morecombe said. I played the call to see if that was what I had heard and next thing, out popped the Bush-hen, stood in the open for about three seconds and scuttled off. And yes, it was the call and I have been hearing it off and on for quite some time. I had just assumed it was one of the exotic birds in a cage a couple of houses away.

Today, January 19, it was back again. I watched as it moved around between four adjoining gardens. Of course, it only 'dashes' when in the



Sacred Kingfisher

Ian Boyd

open so no success with the camera.

Sacred Kingfisher

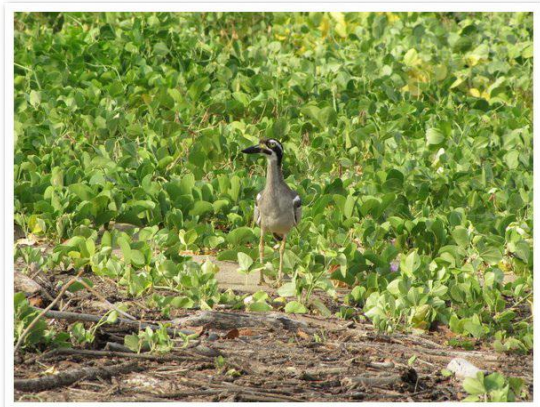
I got a reminder of how hot, humid and unpleasant the weather has been lately (1 February 2013) when I opened the door into the breeze-way. I startled a Sacred Kingfisher who had taken shelter from the oppressive conditions. It had been sitting on the table that I was heading for as it is the only place around my house that I can get a bit of a cool breeze. He (I'm making an assumption here, have no idea if it was male or female) obviously agreed with me. He flew straight up, bumped his head on the ceiling, regained his composure and flew off. Last I saw, he was heading into a tree with nice thick foliage, so I hope he found another cool spot where he is less likely to be disturbed.

Janet Robino

BEACH COMBING



At Mission Beach we walked along the fantastic beach line each afternoon and some mornings. Not really birding, more exercise. However we spotted a lone Beach Stone-curlew chasing crabs up and down the beach. We and others walked past him and he just kept on feeding. When people got too close, he moved away but did not fly away. As you know, they are normally very timid birds but not this one. He was in the same place for 3 days running - perhaps providing food for his partner on a nearby nest???



While watching shorebirds at Lucinda we disturbed three Beach Stone-curlews as we moved towards a mangrove lagoon. One bird flew away while the other two moved quickly away. However one bird then turned back and walked directly towards us - in fact he moved to within ten metres of us before walking away in a different direction. Amazing really. Perhaps he was also protecting a nearby nest. Best photo opportunity I will ever have.

George and Teresa Baker

HIGHLIGHTS OF A CAPE YORK ADVENTURE

In October 2012, Gil Crabtree and I were lucky enough to be invited to join eight others on a BirdLife Northern Queensland organised survey of selected areas of Cape York in search of the Fawn-breasted Bowerbird.

The start point of the expedition was Cooktown and, for us, the end point was to be Captain Billy Landing on the east coast, roughly 100k (as the crow flies) south of the tip of Cape York. With several stops along the way, our first day took us from Cooktown along the Battle Camp Road, through Old Laura Station then up through Lakefield National Park to our camp site on Saltwater Creek on the western end of the Nifold Plain. It was late afternoon by the time we had set up camp so there was little time for bird watching. After an evening meal we set off to do some spotlighting along the Nifold Plain. This proved successful with regular sighting of both Grass and Barn Owls.

The next day was an early start to search the Plain for Star Finches. It was at a drying waterhole that we found them in good numbers, drinking with the northern form of the Black-throated and Double-barred Fiches. Bustards, Brolgas, Zitting Cisticola, Spotted Harrier and Red-backed Button-quail were some of the other species sighted during that excursion.

We then packed up camp and headed off in search of the Red Goshawk which were easily found at the well know nest in Lily Vale Station Road. There were two well developed young on the nest with an adult bird not too far away.

Heading north up through Lily Vale Station, we followed rough station tracks to an unnamed creek about 35k north of the station homestead where we camped for the night. This area was reasonably thick tropical vegetation which in some ways reminded me in parts of Iron Range. About 1k from the camp site was a large lagoon circled by a thick melaleuca forest, a good spot for bird watching. We did some spotlighting that night and found a Papuan Frogmouth along the track and a Nankeen Night-Heron in the creek near the camp.

The next morning, while having breakfast, our ears pricked up at the unmistakable screech of the Palm Cockatoo. How lucky could we be as one landed in the tree above our heads and quizzically looked down at us as much as to say, "What's for breakfast?" You can well imagine how quick Gil and I were to get our cameras into action. While the cameras were out we did manage to get some long range photos of a Yellow-billed Kingfisher that had

been calling since sunrise. These birds are generally heard rather than seen. Today we were lucky.



Yellow-billed Kingfisher

Ian Boyd

After breakfast we were split-up into groups to search the area for signs of Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds. Gil and I were allocated an area near a lagoon. We found a bower but it belonged to a Great Bowerbird.

By mid-morning we were on the track again, heading for our next camp on Silver Plains Station, roughly 55k away over some fairly rough country. After arriving at the Silver Plains Homestead we signed in at the homestead and were on our way to the camp site on the Massey River about 8k away. The river was arched by gallery rainforest and although there were no facilities at all, it proved an ideal site for the two nights we were camped there. The fresh water in the river was cool and clean. Were told that salt water crocodiles inhabited the area but the water proved to be too inviting to the group who all needed a wash down after a couple of dusty days on the track.

After we set up camp the group split up to conduct a survey in the general area, looking for signs of the Fawn-breasted Bowerbird. None was found but we did spot a Papuan Frogmouth, a pair of Shining Flycatchers and an assortment of other bush birds. While bird watching a little further afield before dinner we found a Spotted Cuscus moving around in broad daylight. To me that was a real thrill. I had only ever seen one before and was only fleetingly glimpsed in Iron Range some years before.

Spotlighting that night for Gil and I turned up a couple of Large-tailed Nightjars, seven Papuan Frogmouths, a Tawny Frogmouth and a Barn Owl. On returning to camp I turned green with envy when told that others had good sightings of a Masked Owl. A subsequent search of the area where it was spotted proved fruitless.

The next morning while preparing for the day's activities Gil spotted a Yellow-billed Kingfisher that had been calling elusively since daybreak. This bird was very accommodating by posing in the open on a branch about 6m above the ground. More pleasing photos!

Today we were to survey an area of mangroves about 6k away from the camp. On the trip out a Fawn-breasted was spotted so it was an all out search, looking for any bowers in the area.



Red-headed Honeyeater

Ian Boyd

None was found so it was onto the mangroves. Boy, did this turnout to be a good spot. I found a female Red-headed Honeyeater in the mangroves but I was upstaged by another in the group who found Red-headed Honeyeaters building a nest not far from where we parked our vehicles. This caused a bit of excitement.

Northern forms of the Fairy Gerygone were easily found but it was Mangrove (Collared) Kingfisher that next caught our attention. I was then fumbling again with my cameras as a brightly coloured Red-headed Honeyeater obliged by posing for some photos. Wow! How good can this get!

The next day the group split into two with one half to head north of the Jardine River towards the tip of Cape York and the other (ours) to head into Captain Billy Landing. Our trip would

take us through Coen where we refuelled, on through Archer River and then an overnight stop at Bramwell Junction. The next day it was the drive into Captain Billy Landing. The main road was in good condition but the access road of about 65k into the landing was a different matter. It was rough with corrugations. We did stop in several places searching for the Fawn-breasted Bowerbird.



Spotted Cuscus

Ian Boyd

None were seen.

Captain Billy Landing is set in a slight cove with wide clean beaches and with its high imposing cliffs proved to be an ideal camping area. The only facilities were a drop toilet and covered picnic tables. There was a constant breeze, (sometimes strong wind) to keep the temperature down a little. As my ute sustained damage to one of its shock absorbers on the way in I was reluctant to drive anywhere for the two days we were there. Still, the walking tracks and long wide beach provided plenty of area for activity. While the bird watching was not brilliant there was enough to keep us occupied with shorebirds, Frigatebirds and an assortment of species in the surrounding bush. The caves in the cliffs contained colonies of bats that proved interesting. While spotlighting at night it was easy to spot Large-tailed Nightjars on the roadway with the bats circling overhead.

After two days it was back on the road, heading off on the long drive to Townsville. As my ute was damaged I left a few hours earlier than the other two vehicles. This was a mistake because the others on the way out discovered six Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds and two active bowers. Excuse for a return trip?

Our trip back to Townsville was uneventful but Gil and I were taking with us memories of an exciting adventure; one that I would certainly do again without hesitation.

My thanks go to the members of BirdLife Northern Queensland, in particular Graham Harrington and Kath Shurcliff, for organising the trip.

Ian Boyd

CONSERVATION COLUMN

"Since the year 1500, we have lost over 150 bird species – an extinction rate far higher than the natural background.

Today, one in eight bird species is threatened with global extinction, with 189 species Critically Endangered, and Red List assessments show that things are getting worse. Particularly alarming are sharp declines in many formerly common and widespread species. This is a signal of wider environmental problems, and of the erosion of biodiversity as a whole." This worrying statement is from the opening paragraph from Birdlife International's website on the State of the World's Birds. Perhaps of even greater concern, none of these conditions is yet due to climate change, a very significant threat that is sure to become greater in the future.

At our local scale, the work of James Cook University's Professor Steve Williams and his team in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area has shown the potential species loss from global warming is very high for our high altitude endemics. Much depends on the degree of thermal increase but even at the level of a 2°C average global increase there will be serious reduction in habitat. At a world level Birdlife International say: "A global average temperature rise of 2°C in the next century will almost certainly lead to numerous extinctions, but leave open some practical management options for the conservation of biodiversity. Temperature rises beyond this level are predicted to lead to catastrophic extinction rates, with few management options and a bleak future for both biodiversity and people."

Unfortunately the 2°C rise may be an optimistic scenario in the light of the widespread failure to address human-caused climate change. This is of course a choice that we humans make.

In a previous issue of *The Drongo* the plight of seabirds was raised as a particular concern globally, including the marvellous Albatross species. Add to this the concerns about the survival of habitat for our migrant waders and we are clearly part of a global issue. We need to join together with people from other countries to tackle this problem. Birdlife International seems to making a start.

Another critical issue globally is the threats from invasive species. According to Birdlife International *"Invasive species of animals, plants and disease-causing micro-organisms have already caused numerous extinctions, and remain a particular threat to birds on oceanic islands. Certain diseases appear to be spreading to previously unaffected bird populations, some of which are already threatened by other factors. Global travel, worldwide trade and a*

changing climate are encouraging the further spread of invasives."

Again, in an earlier issue of *The Drongo* some of the frightening new alien invasive species in our region such as Myrtle Rust and Yellow Crazy Ants were discussed. The fact that Yellow Crazy Ants have been discovered on the Townsville Town Common is a cause for serious concern. The Town Common is acknowledged as the prime birding site in Queensland (by Eremaea). Yellow Crazy Ant is the same species that devastated Christmas Island and which now continues to adversely affect the wildlife there because we have abandoned eradication as a goal. Add in the disastrous effects of feral cats; according to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, 75 million native animals are killed every day by feral cats in Australia. Every day! A lot of these are birds. In southern parts of Australia the fox creates a significant impact on birds also.

There are many special birds in Australia - special because they are endemic (that is 45% of all our birds); or because of fascinating behaviour or glorious appearance (everyone will have their own special species, mine tend to cover most of our birds!).

As an indicator of the problem our wildlife faces, some people point to the extent to which we humans have appropriated net natural productivity of the planet. At some time in our past, pre-agricultural era, we may have used as little as 0.01% of the planet wide productivity (or even very much less for our first 500 millenia). The combination of agriculture and industry over the past 5000 years has seen more and more net productivity become sequestered to our species at the expense of all other species. Today it seems we may appropriate around 40% of all primary productivity of the planet. The other 20 million species make do with the rest. While the acceleration in recent decades is a combination of growing consumption and growing population, the future shows little sign of change.

Is the happiness induced by our consumerism so fantastic that it is worth saying goodbye to other forms of life? For some interesting summer reading on that question as a moral dilemma, see this week's Conversation and the article by Freya Mathews of La Trobe University entitled "Is an ethic of biodiversity enough?" (7th February edition)

The Conversation is an online discussion sponsored by universities with pieces on all sorts of topics; free and stimulating in a way the usual media in Australia has failed to achieve. Can be found: <http://theconversation.edu.au/> Also visit the Birdlife International website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb>

Peter Valentine

EASY BIRDING IN TASSIE

Certainly was a cool start to the holiday when my sister and I landed in Hobart in January; we were hastily putting on the layers as we were driven west to Copping. May as well look out for birds along the way I decided, and was rewarded with many Banded Lapwings and Native Hens and two Yellow Tailed Cockatoos -- nothing like armchair birdwatching! Of course the Common Starlings were swirling in great numbers along with many sightings of the Common Blackbird; both are introduced. The Kelp Gulls were flying around the waterway near Sorell (founded 1821) along with Musk Ducks on the water.



Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo

Ray Sutton

Our route was a narrow, winding one along a dirt road as the Arthur Highway was closed due to the fires. Sorell was untouched by the fires but we had to bypass Forcett and go through Wattle Hill to Copping. The dirt road wound through beautiful tall trees. That evening we had a lightning conducted tour (more layers!) of the 65 chooks, maybe Orpingtons, in five separate areas, ten ducks with two females sitting on downy nests amidst the shrubbery in the garden (about a dozen eggs in each), four rabbits in cages and the goat down the path. My sister said she remembered all the instructions so what a good start!

Only 9C overnight so doona weather; a quick look out the window to check the duck in the shrubbery and then chase the Superb Fairy-wrens around the paddock until they played happily in the garden while I had a cuppa inside. The Welcome Swallows were in abundance with four nests around the house, one with four little yellow gapes showing over the edge of the mud. An early morning stroll down the hill revealed Noisy Miners, Forest Raven, Goldfinch, Striated Wren, Eastern Rosella, Magpies, Brown Thornbill, Eastern Spinebill, Yellow-throated Honeyeater and White-bellied Sea-Eagle. Not a bad start!

It was sobering to look across the valley to the burnt grape vines on the side of the hill and the line of burnt trees along the top, so close. The drive into Dunalley, about 8km, was haunting with the devastation of homes, trees, fences and animals. Many homes and the service station at Dunalley were saved although there were signs of blackening on the outside; the fire fighters had done an amazing job. The service station was fully operational. The school and police station were destroyed. The highway remained closed to all except locals with the speed limit down to 40 and 60km/hr as all fencing was burnt and cattle and sheep were able to stray onto roads, police were at every junction, fire fighters and trucks coming and going plus a very large number of Aurora Energy trucks, poles, insulators, rolls of wire and cranes.



Noisy Miner

Ray Sutton

Close to us at the bottom of the hill was a very large dam which was used by helicopters to scoop up water to fight the fires. A walk to the dam one morn revealed Black Ducks, Wood Ducks, Black Swans, Grebes, Coots, Chestnut Teal and Grey Teal all in abundance. A Brown Falcon and Swamp Harrier flew over the paddocks. The farmer was leading his 250+ milking cows, Holsteins, across the road into another paddock for two months drying up; the other milking herd was grazing in a paddock watered by the dam. All cattle were in excellent condition. I stopped along the road to look closely at a beautiful black glossy snake; unfortunately I drew out my camera too quickly and it slithered away -- or perhaps fortunately as it was a Tiger Snake!

Marion Bay, a few km from Copping, was a beautiful bay with long stretches of sand. The Short-tailed Shearwaters were feeding out at sea with a couple of dry specimens on the beach -- too smelly and too far to take home to the Museum!! As we walked along the sand we noted many droppings from wallabies and wombats. There were White-fronted Chats, Little Wattlebirds and New Holland Honeyeaters amid the usual suspects of cormorants, terns and gulls.

The road trip up to Launceston did not yield any Cape Barren Geese but the family history seeking trip into Bagdad and the one to the Callington Mill in Oatlands were great recompense. The mill was originally built in 1830's and has been restored over many years to become again a grain grinding windmill; great flour and oats!

Of course I went to the Tamar River



Purple Swampphen

Ray Sutton

Conservation Area where early morning and low tide revealed an Australian Spotted Crane, many Australian Shelducks and the change to Pacific Gulls. The Black Swans, Black Ducks, Egrets, Purple Swampphens, Gulls were in large numbers as were the beautiful Superb Fairy-wrens. One Clamorous Reed-Warbler came into view while a couple of little furry animals hopped through the bush -- later identified as Tasmanian Bettong. At Riverside, just out of Launceston, the Yellow Wattlebirds were seen regularly and the white morph of the Grey Goshawk flew overhead (my friend had a photo of one sitting in her back yard). Grey Fantails and Brown Thornbills bathed in the bird bath.

I flew out of Launceston (at 12C), had a hurried change in Melbourne and came into 38C here in Townsville. I knew I was home - with that heat and the Curlews calling at night!

Cecily Messer

PS: The Dunalley School was cleared, trees trimmed and 5 demountables in place by 22nd January. The power poles were replaced and power restored to most areas within 2-3 weeks.

Remarkable.

2012 DECEMBER CHALLENGE COUNT

Many thanks to all 31 of you that helped with our annual Summer Challenge Count. This year Pat Charlton took on the job of allocating areas to be counted and following up to collect count sheets. I then collated the results. This worked out really well for both of us. I had been doing it on my own since 2000 so it was time for a change.

We recorded our second highest number of Magpie Geese with 3454. Of those, 670 were at the Town Common. A week later almost all the TC water had completely dried up and they had moved on. It is good to see that the Black Swans are at long last starting to return to the Ross River dam area; this year Ian managed to locate 277 there. Still a long way off our highest tally of 4643 back in 2001. Grey Teal were absent for both the June and December count, returning to the Old Flinders Highway/Gunnado area beginning of Feb 2013.

We first noted Spotted Dove back in 2000 with 3 recorded. Since then they have continued to make inroads into Townsville with our tally for this count at 76.

Lovely Fairy-wren (2) were last recorded in Dec 2009. Back in for this count thanks to Cecily Messer and Janet Cross visiting Forestry Road.

We missed out on Brown Booby for the first time since Dec 2007. Black Bittern, Great Crested Grebe, Peregrine Falcon, Dusky Moorhen, Terek Sandpiper and Lewin's Honeyeater were all noticeable by their absence.

Our final number of birds was 21611 making up 186 species. So well done to you, hope you will join us for our June Challenge Count.

Marleen



Grey Teal

Ray Sutton

CHRISTMAS TRIP

I spent three weeks with my sister and family in Ballan, Victoria, over the Christmas period.

Every morning and every night we had a chorus from the Long-billed Corellas that lived in the area, at times as many as thirty birds, digging up the lawn each day, and in the Parkland just across the road. The Yellow-rumped Thornbills and Red and Brush Wattlebirds were also frequent visitors.



White-plumed Honeyeater

Ray Sutton

We were able to have a trip to Kerang and the Ramsar site there for a couple of days. Apart from the hundred Native-hens running madly about when they saw us, we saw other birds common to the area, including a Swamp Harrier sitting on a post, a lifer for my sister, and as it was really close we had excellent views.



Pacific Black Duck

Ray Sutton

Other birds on the water were Australian Shelduck, Grey Teal, Coot, Moorhens, Pelican, Pacific Black Ducks, and Little Pied and Black Cormorants. In the surrounding bush, which was alive with Superb Fairy-wrens, were Red-rumped Parrot, Eastern Rosella, Little Raven, Dusky and White-browed Woodswallows, New Holland and White-plumed Honeyeaters, Noisy Miners and many other more common birds. A visit, even though the temperature reached 41° C. by 10.0 am, was well worth the trip.

Barbara Reidy

NEW YEAR'S DAY

As usual, New Year's Day was the time to get the Quest going for the year. The Club's chosen outing was to Pallarenda and it turned out to be quite a good day.

One of the first birds spotted was a Helmeted Friarbird along with a Great Bowerbird in the mangroves near the beach. Then a friendly Nankeen Kestrel sat on a power pole for quite a while, crunching on a very large grasshopper. A Brahminy Kite flew in the distance and some Gull-billed Terns wheeled past. Walking back through the car park, Ian let us all walk on and then pointed out we had walked under four, yes four, Barking Owls and not one of us had seen them. The cameras worked overtime. In amongst the office buildings a Tawny Frogmouth sat resolutely on his branch, pretending he couldn't see us. Some Pied Imperial-Pigeons, Royal Spoonbills and Channel-billed Cuckoos flew overhead.



Barking Owls

Ray Sutton

A "rare" sighting were several Little Curlews on the Town Common. They had been hanging around for a few days. They are not a common sight around Townsville so a very good tick indeed. Then we went off to Samphire Drive and found the Golden Plovers, another harder to find bird (to us, anyway).

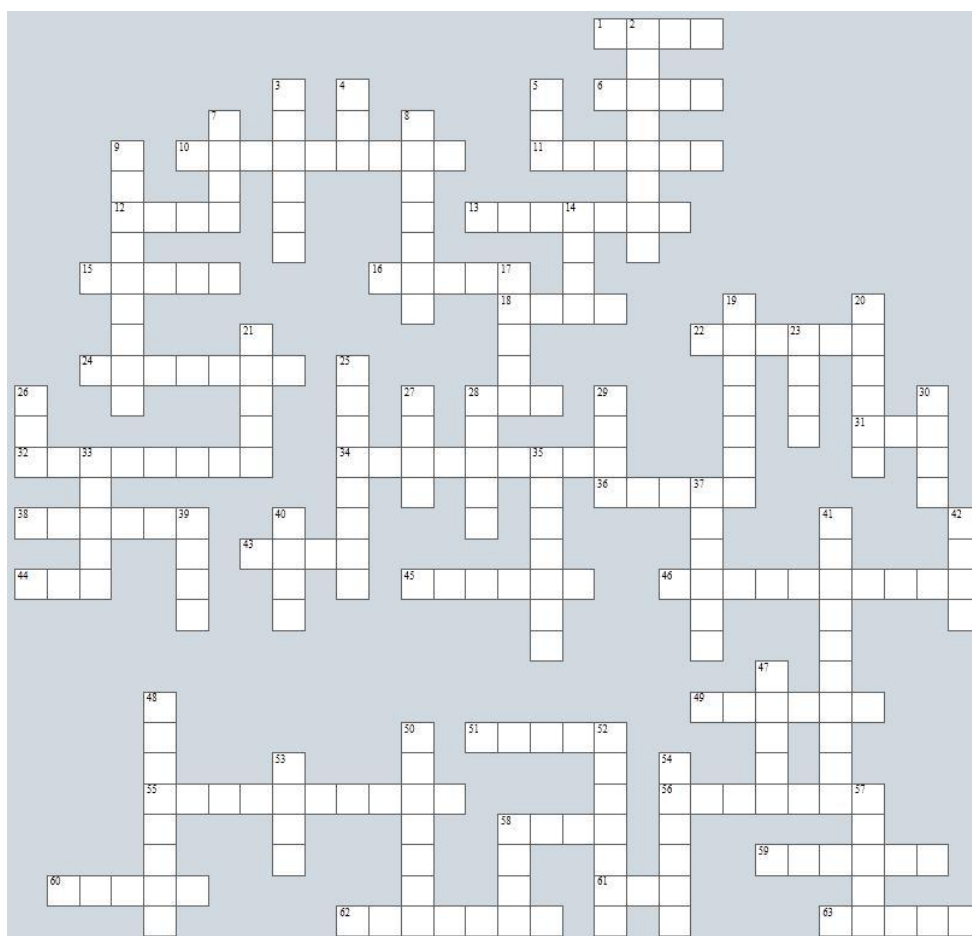
Later in the afternoon we drove up along the side of Ross River Dam and found quite a few bustards.

All in all, we chalked up fifty-four birds for the day, a nice solid start for the year. (The club as a whole got sixty-six at Pallarenda and the Common alone).

Annette Sutton



Birdwatchers Crossword Ian Boyd



Across

1. Black or Mute
6. Overall impression of a bird
10. Saltwater Habitat
11. Has a sharp bill
12. Chess piece
13. Old name for Gerygone
15. Petroica
16. They bring birds closer
18. Talk
22. Nest parasite
24. Owls produce these
28. Palagic Habitat
31. Emblem
32. Record of sightings
34. They form a birds beak
36. Sharp claw
38. Introduced from abroad
43. Fleshy base of bill
44. Birds Enemy
45. My tail is barred
46. Australian and Oriental
49. Our smallest Ibis
51. Ground dwelling owl
55. Coins on wings
56. Birds of prey
58. Raptors do this
59. Has large feet
60. Was once domesticated
61. Birds beginning
62. Our heaviest flying bird
63. Banded or Black-winged

Down

2. Golden -----
3. Seasonally territorial
4. Pigeons do this
5. Rare Goshawk
7. Black over eyes
8. Ocean going
9. Bird Guide
14. Crested Hawk
17. Used to view distant birds
19. Small secretive gallinule (2)
20. Bright Bowerbird
21. Calidris
23. Great
25. Long billed wader
26. Skin between toes
27. Royal Quail
28. Fast in name
29. Birds nursery
30. Teal is one
33. Resting place
35. Unusual courtship
37. Padiou haliaetus
39. Talon
40. Back of the neck
41. Royal angler
42. Black and white
47. Shed feathers
48. Has a white eye
50. Crows and Ravens
52. ----- Honeyeater
53. Black Cockatoo
54. Grus rubicundus
57. Main stem of a feather
58. Sharp wing projection

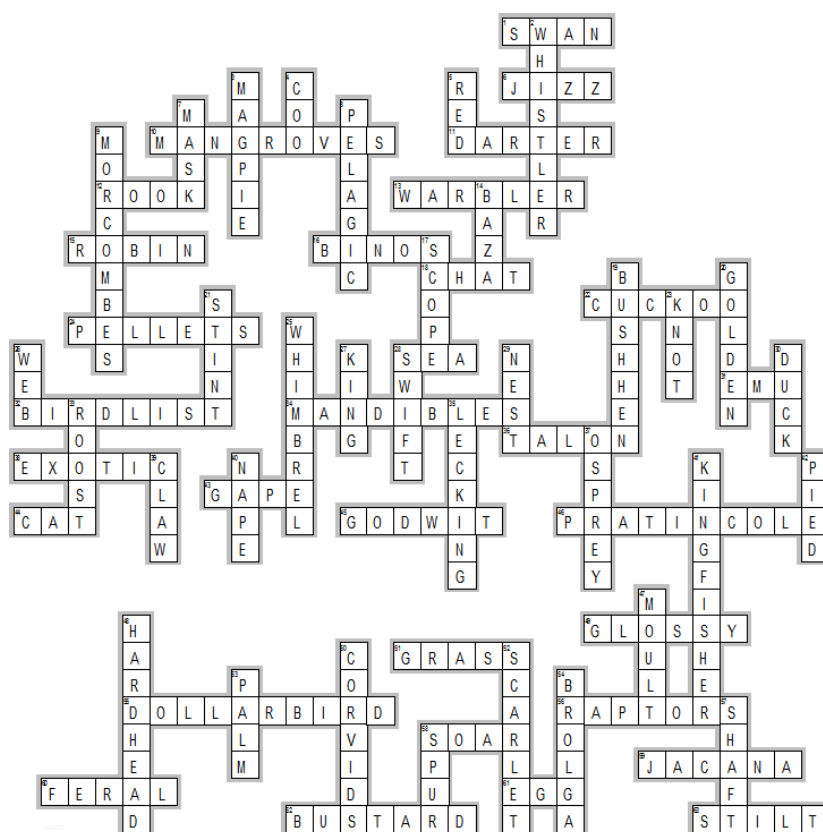
INTERESTING SIGHTINGS January – February 2013

Birds	Date	Place	Observer
Eastern Grass Owl	3/1/13	Private property Woodstock	Ian Boyd and Peter and Leonie Valentine
Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher	3/1/13	About 4.2k before Paluma on the way upto the range.	Ed Pearce
Black-tailed Native-hen	5/1/13	Mungalla via Ingham	Tony Ashton
Orange-footed Scrubfowl	6/1/13	Toomulla Beach	Alexandra Canton
Little Curlew	6/1/13	Townsville Town Common	BirdLife Townsville outing
Eastern Grass Owl	8/1/13	Beeva Rd, about 10k west of Ingham	Tony Ashton
Pale-vented Bush-hen	13/1/13	Cranbrook	Janet Robino
Australian Swiflet, White-throated Needletail and Metallic Starling	17/1/13	Bowling Green Bay NP (Alligator Creek)	Joan Wharton and Rosemary Payet
Shining Flycatcher	19/1/13	Townsville Town Common	Ed Pearce
Bridled Tern	25/1/13	Townsville Breakwater	Len and Chris Ezzy
Fork-tailed Swift and White-throated Needletail	27/1/13	Cungulla	Joan Wharton and Rosemary Payet
Pale-vented Bush-hen	28/1/13	Kelso	Cheryl-Anne Murkin
Black-throated Finch	28/1/13	Near Alligator Creek Bowls Club	Janet Robino and Barbara Reidy
Pink-eared Duck	2/2/13	Old Flinders Hwy Woodstock	Joan Wharton
Cockatiel and Red-backed Kingfisher	5/2/13	Old Flinders Hwy Woodstock	Len and Chris Ezzy
Black-tailed Native Hen	5/2/13	Gunadoo Road	Peter Valentine
Budgerigar	6/2/13	Alligator Creek	Ian Boyd and Gil Crabtree
Zitting Cisticola and Mangrove Honeyeater	6/2/13	Near Morris Creek boat ramp, Giru	Ian Boyd and Gil Crabtree

If you haven't reported you're interesting sightings on Birdline North Queensland please report them to Ian Boyd at ninox45@bigpond.com as other members like to know what birds are about.



Crossword Solution



QUEST 2013

Name	Quest Number	Date
Chris Ezzy	257	14/09/2013
Len Ezzy	253	10/09/2013
Janet Robino	200	19/07/2013
Ian Boyd	193	12/07/2013
Marleen Acton	180	29/06/2013
Peter Valentine	168	17/06/2013
Ian Leach	156	5/06/2013
Wendy Kaus	141	21/05/2013
Beth Snewin	139	19/05/2013
Elna Kerswell	137	17/05/2013
Annette Sutton	132	12/05/2013
Joan Wharton	131	11/05/2013
Alf Acton	117	27/04/2013
Warren Charlton	64	5/03/2013
Pat Charlton	31	31/01/2013

Peter Valentine's Wish List 2013



Palm Cockatoo



Gibberbird



Spinafex Bird



Chestnut-crowned Babbler



Black-tailed treecreeper