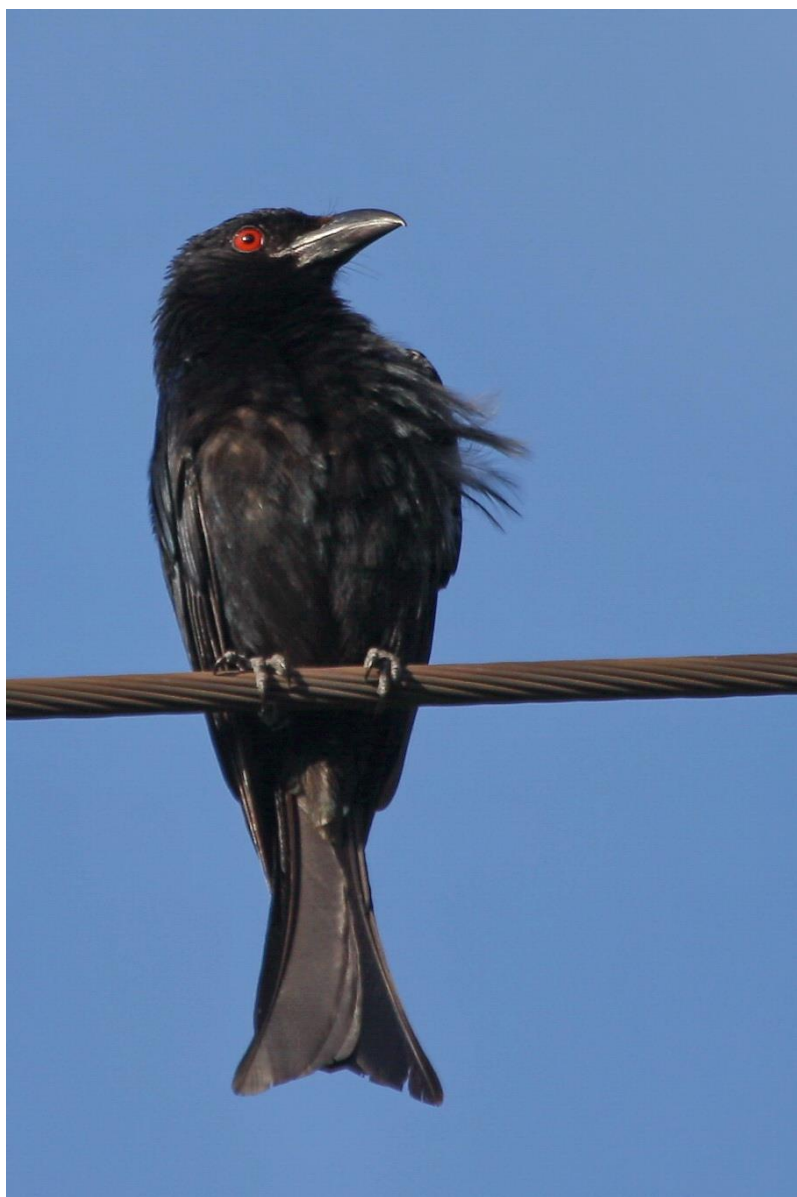


The Drongo

Number 131 February 2014



Malaysia

Julatten

Paluma



PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2014

The last year seems to have whizzed by. For BirdLife Townsville it has been the usual busy old time with lots of great outings, both planned and impromptu – when word spread about some exciting avian visitor. As the western parts of Queensland got dryer and dryer, birds that very rarely visit us took refuge in our many wetlands. Many members will remember the wonderful sight of hundreds of Budgies swishing through the sky at Ross River Dam and Woodstock – and of course, the smaller flocks darting through the suburbs. On the annual Ross River Dam Cruise we were amazed by the sight of 340 plus Freckled Ducks and several hundred Pink-eared Ducks.

As well as all the fun stuff that the Committee organizes for members, there is a lot of hard slog to keep everything on the straight and narrow. Nina Doyle has continued to keep up with modern banking. We can now do most of our financial transactions on the 'net'. I had to be dragged into the 21st century but am finally able to approve transactions – the modern way of countersigning cheques! Nina has shown infinite patience to get me there. Just to make Nina's life a little more interesting, we were one of the branches chosen at random for a financial audit by BirdLife Australia.

Annette Sutton continues to produce a very high standard newsletter. The Drongo is not only a good read but has many great photographs, most taken by BirdLife Townsville members. As a little sideline, Annette stepped up to the plate to adapt our sign-on books and leaders' packs for outings to meet the requirements of BirdLife Australia's insurance policy.

Ian Boyd has been very busy all year maintaining and improving our website with assistance from Graham Cheetham. The great majority of contact with the club is now done through the website which means it is much easier for members and non-members to keep in touch with what's going on. Warren Charlton looks after the email messages as well as looking after all the other stuff that secretaries do. It's a big job! We still make sure that those members who are not computer users don't get left out. Warren maintains a list of members who have phone contact only.

Conservation matters kept Peter Valentine very busy early in the year. Peter has now moved to Malanda to live in the cool, damp climate of the Tablelands. Hopefully we will be able to attract a Conservation Officer for the 2014 committee.

Elna Kerswell and the Educators delivered presentations and Rainforest Birds of The Southern Wet Tropics books to some more schools. We still have a few books left so still have some work ahead to make sure the message gets out there.

Niel Bruce continues with the Marine Parks' Coastal Bird Monitoring program. Ian Leach has had a set-back in his work at the Cluden Water Treatment Plant due to safety issues at the site. Len and Chris Ezzy continue with the Cunggulla and Bohle Revegetation Site surveys.

The roster for leaders for Townsville Town Common monthly surveys is working well. You may notice that the BirdLife Townsville sign to advertise the surveys has been altered so that it can remain in position permanently. Ian Boyd is coordinating regular surveys in two particular areas of Wongaloo to access the results of weed management activities. Marleen Acton still assists with the coordination of the Challenge Counts.

Mark Horvath is now coordinating BirdLife Townsville's Photography Group as well as maintaining our equipment. In October 2013, BirdLife Townsville hosted the BirdLife Australia's Photography in the Bush Campout at Mungalla. It was a great success! Feedback from the attendees was really good. Ian Boyd, Norm Rains and Marleen Acton did a great job of planning, not only the campout but extra activities pre and post campout for visitors – a lot from interstate. They were ably supported by a little band of helpers to prepare the camp site and guide the photographers during the weekend.



We continue to support the work of the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team. Remember to send all sightings of the BTF to the team.

Of course, apart from all the work, we have had a great year packed with some wonderful outings. Ian Boyd is taking a step back this year and allowing other members to organize and lead outings. Ian will continue to put the Calendar of Activities on the website. We have had our usual very high quality guest speakers for our meetings. And, of course, the Trivia Quiz was very popular as usual.

I think Marleen Acton is going to have a lot of trouble retiring from doing the quiz.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the Christmas Party last year and by all reports, I missed a real goodie! I've had lots of feedback letting me know just what a great night I missed. The bowls seemed to be taken up rather well and Nina's trivia quiz was a winner. It does appear we are a club who love trivia quizzes!

As you can see from all the above, BirdLife Townsville has a busy and varied calendar of activities for members. These events don't just miraculously happen. They take a lot of hard work by the committee and a few very supportive non-committee members. A few long-term committee members are standing down this year for a much earned rest. Lenore and Malcolm Calvert will still manage the public notices but will not stand for a committee position. Pat Charlton has extra family demands on her time, which means she is no longer able to continue after many years.

If BirdLife Townsville is to continue to provide all these activities then members need to step up to the plate. We need fresh input into the committee so that the load can be shared and the branch kept vibrant. We need an active committee to ensure we have a branch.

BirdLife Townsville is proud to host John Young's talk – Rediscovery of the Night Parrot. James Cook University has provided us with a venue to accommodate the number of attendees expected. This will be John's only public talk on this important discovery of a bird that many thought had completely disappeared.

Janet Robino President

ANDERSON GARDENS

MY LOCAL PATCH

Living in Gulliver for 2 years, I often walked to Anderson Gardens in the mornings and observed the bird life noting between 20 and 30 species. Sometimes something special would catch my eye such as a Chestnut-breasted Mannikins' nest in a fir tree, a Bush Stone-curlew sitting inconspicuously on eggs under the eucalypts, or a Brown Goshawk or Collared Sparrowhawk looking for breakfast.



Plumed Whistling-Duck

Ray Sutton

Just before Christmas I moved to Wellington St and can now look out of my bedroom window onto the large figs and ponds in the Gardens. I have become much more aware of the sounds of the morning chorus, the richness of the bird life there and the importance of having an oasis in suburbia. The ponds provide food and a haven for waterfowl. Plumed Whistling ducks have been stopping over in their hundreds. I can hear them taking off of an evening or be alerted to a new flock arriving. Magpie Geese honk away while Australian Ibis probe the well watered lawns. Brilliant white in the sunlight reveals a Great Egret fishing in the ponds while Little Black Cormorants dry their wings on the edges.



Pacific Baza

Ray Sutton

Bush Stone-curlews are there early morning and late evening when they emerge from their hiding places trying to remain unseen in the twilight. Recently two small striped chicks caught my attention and I'm watching them grow, still carefully supervised by their parents in a secluded grassy section of the Gardens.

Recently Rosemary alerted me to a Pacific Baza which I've noticed again from my windows. It flew into the big figs at the ponds - rich in tucker. I've also seen a Collared Sparrowhawk fly from the same area back into large rain trees in a neighbour's yard. These trees provide good cover for predators.

Seven Laughing Kookaburras, some still very young and fluffy, have also spread out visiting neighbouring clothes lines. A housemate described the interaction of one with a Rainbow Lorikeet I'd rescued from the loungeroom. I put it outside on a tree and saw it later at the base of another. Easy tucker thought the Kookaburra. It flew down to attack but two Magpie Larks came to the lorikeet's defence and we think it survived. It had possibly been stunned by flying into a glass door when I found it sliding around on the polished floorboards.

It is easy to know when the Red-tailed Cockatoos are hungry but not easy to spot the Buff-banded Rails which are known to frequent the park and have been seen by

Larry Corbett, Marleen Acton and Neil Bruce. Hopefully I might see them before I move on reluctantly from such a memorable front yard.

Joan Wharton

WARRNAMBOOL 2013-2

Three months after returning home after our family visit in the southern states, we again drove to Warrnambool for Christmas. It was not comfortable in the heat.

Due to family commitments, we knew we would not get much time to pursue birds so we took a day for ourselves before the others arrived and went to Port Fairy to partake in what I then thought were the best pies in Australia. Now I know differently with meat pies. However one cannot better the garlic prawn pie from Cobb's Bakery!

On the way we dropped into Killarney Beach – an area that has BirdLife Australia signs asking people to protect the Hooded Plovers. We did not see any this time but we did find White Chats, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Red-necked Stints. In the wetland behind the sand dunes we saw that the swans had an excellent breeding period. Also seen were Hoary-headed Grebes, Coots, Grey Teal and White-winged Black Terns. The Musk Duck wasn't showing this time.

We walked along the causeway from the port at Port Fairy to Griffiths Island where there is a conservation area for the Short-tailed Shearwaters (mutton birds) and we knew that they arrived in the summer to breed. On the way out we saw a Pied Cormorant sitting on a water pipe and it was still there on our return – I thought it was glued to the pipe! It was within one metre of the walking path. Pat also saw a Black-faced Cormorant.

We were disappointed as we only saw a couple of dead Shearwaters – one near the entrance of a nesting hole. We did suggest to each other that we should return one evening which was the best time to see these birds but we didn't get that opportunity as our family kept us very well occupied. Next time?



Pied Cormorant

We took our pies with us to one of the Port Fairy surf beaches and as we sat in the car eating them a White-backed Magpie came and sat on the bonnet. It made an interesting picture with the "surfer magpie" having the surf rolling in behind it. We also saw a couple of Australian Gannets flying through.

Back in Warrnambool, we saw Yellow-tufted and New Holland Honeyeaters and Pat took a picture of some Chestnut Teal in the Hopkins River. On going through her photos that night, she was surprised to see a Latham's Snipe behind the Teal!

So for a period that offered little time for bird watching, we saw some good birds.



Red-necked Stints

Story and photos

Warren and Pat Charlton

PS – excluding WA and Tasmania, I now know where the best pasties, pies and sausage rolls are in Australia

PIED IMPERIAL-PIGEON COUNT 2013

BIRDLIFE MISSION BEACH

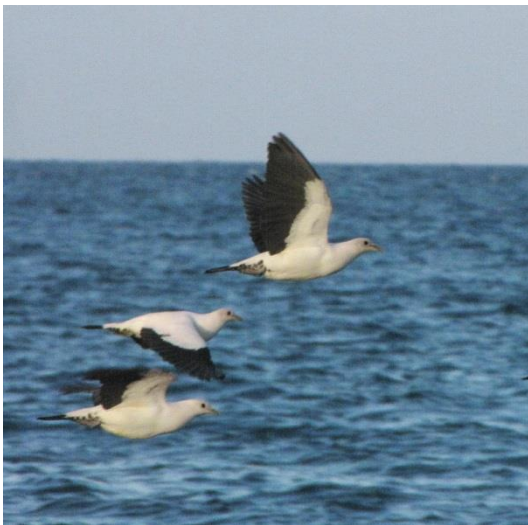
Annual monitoring of Pied Imperial-Pigeons (PIPs) at Mission Beach is conducted jointly by Birdlife NQ and Birdlife Townsville. On one afternoon in November several count teams keep watch from 4.00PM to 6.30PM at designated sites. They record the numbers and approximate flight directions of PIPs that fly out to sea, heading back to their breeding colonies and roost sites on various islands.

The latest count took place on 2 November 2013. The afternoon was greatly enhanced by the inspiring participation of North Queensland conservation

champion Margaret Thorsborne AO and Suzie Smith, Secretary of Wildlife Queensland Cassowary Coast - Hinchinbrook branch. Thanks to these two expert observers and new volunteers and local residents, we had sufficient counters despite a rather low turnout of Birdlife members.

We had less than perfect weather for the first time since these counts began. Fortunately the occasional showers were brief and all count teams were able to successfully complete their monitoring. Afterwards most people got together for a sociable dinner.

The result for the four long term count sites at Garners Beach, Bingil Bay, Wongaling and South Mission Beach was a total of 1,500 PIPs. Within the seven year history of the project (graph below), this could be regarded as a fairly typical number. However, year-to-year comparison is inexact due to changes in procedures, dates and sites. Only three of the sites began in 2007; Bingil Bay was added in 2008 and Kurrimine in 2012.



Pied Imperial-Pigeons

Julia Hazel

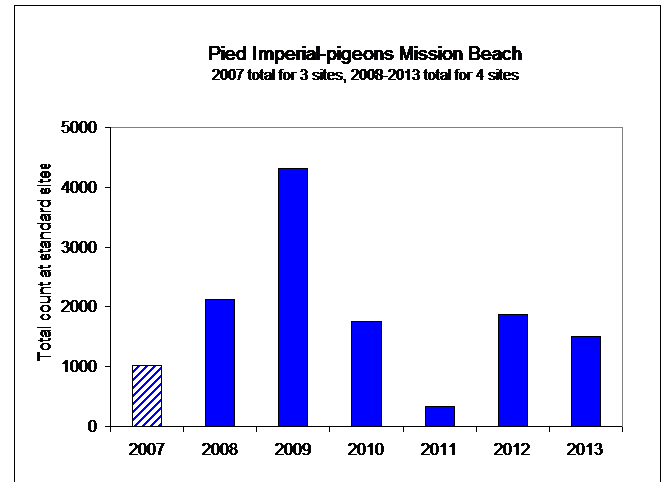
The extremely low total in 2011 is probably a consequence of severe habitat devastation caused by Tropical Cyclone Yasi but we have no convincing explanation for the very high count in 2009. Kurrimine (not included in the graph) is another puzzle: a total of 1,311 PIPs in 2012 but only 200 in 2013. Perhaps a longer series of counts may shed light on the extreme variation.

For better insight into PIP dynamics the counts need to cover a much wider geographic range. We took the first step towards that goal by calling for people anywhere along the Queensland coast to count PIPs (following the standard procedure) at any site convenient for them during the month of November 2013.

A modest number of wonderful people responded. They provided useful new data and made helpful suggestions for next season. I am currently collating the additional records and will report on them in a future newsletter.

Many more participants will be needed to extend coverage in the coming PIP season. Please consider helping with this project. You can choose any coastal site - it does not have to be a place with many PIPs. Zero counts provide valuable data too. This only needs a few hours of your

time, on any afternoon that suits you in November 2014. How about putting it on your calendar now?



Julia Hazel

SAVING THE NUTMEG PIGEONS

MARGARET THORSBORNE AO



Margaret Thorsborne (photo above), together with her late husband Arthur, has been campaigning tirelessly over half a century to protect Queensland natural habitat and wildlife. Many species have benefitted – most of all the birds that were known as Nutmeg Pigeons when their plight first caught the Thorsbornes' attention. (The name Pied Imperial-Pigeon was officially assigned much later.)

At the Birdlife NQ meeting in November (photo below) everyone listened enthralled to Margaret's story. In the mid 1960s she and Arthur discovered that intensive shooting of Nutmeg Pigeons at island breeding colonies was having a devastating effect on pigeon numbers.

The Thorsbornes immediately began campaigning for effective protection of breeding islands and, with incredible courage, they confronted shooters in person. They also consulted wildlife experts who explained the importance of long-term monitoring.

In response Margaret and Arthur began systematic pigeon counts at the devastated breeding colony on North Brook Island in 1965. Margaret showed us the battered notebook in which she recorded their original counts and year after year tracked the very slow recovery that followed. Her notebook is a wonderful piece of conservation history.

Regular PIP counts at North Brook Island have continued, with additional help, up to the present season. Unfortunately the future is in doubt. December 2013 saw the end of invaluable logistical support from Parks and Wildlife at Cardwell. Hopefully Birdlife and other conservation organisations may consider helping to keep these island PIP counts going in future seasons.



Story Julia Hazel

Photographs Jeff Larson

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

The Great Cormorant is a large black bird, but there is a wide variation in size in the species wide range. Weight is reported from 1.5 to 5.3 kg, with a typical range from 2.6 to 3.7 kg. Length can vary from 70 to 102 cm (and wingspan from 121 to 160 cm. It has a longish tail and yellow throat-patch. Adults have white thigh patches in the breeding season. Great Cormorants are mostly silent, but they make various guttural noises at their breeding colonies.

This is a very common and widespread bird species. It feeds on the sea, in estuaries, and on freshwater lakes and rivers. Northern birds migrate south and winter along any coast that is well-supplied with fish.

The subspecies found in Australasian waters, *P. carbo novaehollandiae*, has a crest. In New Zealand it is known

as the Black Shag or by its Māori name; Kawau. There are various other sub-species in different parts of the world.

The Great Cormorant breeds mainly on coasts, nesting on cliffs or in trees (which are eventually killed by the droppings), but also increasingly inland. Three to four eggs are laid in a nest of seaweed or twigs.



The Great Cormorant can dive to considerable depths, but often feeds in shallow water. It frequently brings prey to the surface. A wide variety of fish are taken: cormorants are often noticed eating eels, but this may reflect the considerable time taken to subdue an eel and position it for swallowing, rather than any dominance of eels in the diet. In British waters, dive times of 20–30 seconds are common, with a recovery time on the surface around a third of the dive time.

Many fishermen see in the Great Cormorant a competitor for fish and it was nearly hunted to extinction in the past.

Thanks to conservation efforts its numbers increased. At the moment there are about 1.2 million birds in Europe (based on winter counts; late summer counts would show higher numbers). Increasing populations have once again brought the cormorant into conflict with fisheries. For example, in Britain, where inland breeding was once uncommon, there are now increasing numbers of birds breeding inland, and many inland fish farms and fisheries now claim to be suffering high losses due to these birds. In the UK each year some licences are issued to shoot specified numbers of cormorants in order to help reduce predation. It is however still illegal to kill a bird without such a licence.



Cormorant fishing was practiced in China, Japan, and elsewhere around the globe. Fishermen tie a line around the throats of cormorants, tight enough to prevent swallowing, and deploy them from small boats. The cormorants catch fish without being able to fully swallow them, and the fishermen are able to retrieve the fish simply by forcing open the cormorants' mouths. This form of fishing has largely died out.

In Norway cormorant is a traditional game bird. Each year around 10,000 cormorants are shot to be eaten. In North Norway, it is said that cormorants are traditionally seen as semi-sacred. It is regarded as good luck to have cormorants gather near your village or settlement. An old legend states that people who die far out at sea spend eternity on the island Utrøst – which can only occasionally be found by mortals. The inhabitants of Utrøst can only visit their homes in the shape of cormorants.

PALUMA

It was a courageous piece of forward planning in that the committee decided upon Paluma as the area to visit for the Club's first trip for 2014.



Grey-headed Robin
Annette Sutton

Usually a planned trip to Paluma early in the year results in cancellation or an alternative venue; this day we struck it lucky with a day perfect for bird watching.

As it happened, there weren't a lot of birds around to watch but we had a good start at Little Crystal Creek.

Our band of nine people found some birds on this outing that had taken nearly all of last year to find. At Little Crystal Creek., we found Pied Monarch, Spectacled Monarch, Noisy Pitta, Boatbill, Dusky Honeyeater, Varied Triller, Red-browed Finch, and Little Shrike-thrush. Graceful and Lewin's Honeyeaters were also seen.

Dragging ourselves reluctantly away, we stopped along the road at Post 98, the traditional site to see the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher. As we had not seen the

elusive bird at that place for years, it was gratifying for Marleen to spot the BbPK this time and to know that the site is still active.

Scaly-breasted Lorikeets also seen here. I still have not seen it.

Paluma has been short of birds for all of 2013 and that still stands. Little rain in the area and the rainforest was very dry. Walking down Smith Rd and then along the track behind Ivy Cottage produced very poor results. Found along Smith Rd were Eastern Spinebill and White-cheeked Honeyeater.

Found along the H Track were Spangled Drongo and Bowers Shrike-thrush, Silvereye, and Grey-headed Robin



Spectacled Monarch

Ray Sutton

Next stop was the Grandis – also very dry and few birds. Seen were Fan-tailed Cuckoo, White-throated Tree creeper, Grey Fantail and Golden Whistler. Not a Robin to be seen!

Puzzle Creek was totally unproductive.

Onto Birthday Creek to check out the Bowerbirds. The Tooth-billed Bowerbird was at his noisy best and in the usual place at the start of the track to the falls. The Golden Bowerbird was also quickly found. Then Janet found a Black-faced Monarch sitting on its nest not far from Birthday Creek; great sighting. Other sightings along the Dam road were Brown Gerygone and Large-billed Scrubwren. We felt that we were doing rather well, all things considered.

We did not visit the Dam as there were likely to be lots of people there camping plus day trippers judging by the number of vehicles on the road. Everyone enjoyed the day. It was hard work to find the birds and we tramped many kilometres of tracks but it was worth it.

Malcolm

PHALAROPE PHENOMENON

Well, haven't we had our fill of birds lately. The backblocks of Brandon has been a bonanza of birds. John and I have never had so many visitors, phone calls and emails.

It all started in December when John was scouting for the best birding spots to show a birder from Canberra who comes up here periodically. On the off-chance, he thought he'd check out Duck World, though it had been a bit tame the last time he'd ventured out there. He thought all his Christmases had come at once! Birds galore!



Pied Heron and Black-winged Stilt Chris Stewart

The word soon got around and the locals were wondering why their quiet little corner of the world suddenly had traffic. They came singly, they came in pairs, they came in convoys and many cars came repeatedly. Some vowed the morning was the best time, others the late afternoon. Some didn't leave it to chance and came both times. The



numbers grew, (both birds and birders) and the excitement and enthusiasm was catching.

The owner generously allowed us to tramp all over his property even though he probably doesn't understand birders and their compunction to explore, find and record and their determination.

At first we were cautious, setting up our telescopes on the road. Then we ventured a little way in, getting better

views but careful not to scare the birds away. Then we got bolder and ventured quite close to the water and spreading in all directions and were rewarded with good sightings.

As if the 3000 Pink-eared Ducks, the 1000 Avocets, the Freckled Ducks and the dozen Shovelers weren't enough, someone had to go and spot a pair of Phalaropes. The call went out – rare bird! Then the hunt was on. Everyone was re-energised and keen and a little desperate to see them – a lifer for most of us. These rare birds performed admirably and on one occasion conveniently isolated themselves from all the other ducks competing for our attention. They bobbed around on the water looking like toy ducks or at least a child's drawing of a duck and swam in circles and valiantly swam against the wind.

We would all have our own 'best moments' of the Duck World phenomenon. For some it may have been the Phalaropes, for others, maybe all the Avocets bum-feeding, or just the sheer number and variety of birds. The flying formations of so many birds was spectacular, especially the glorious avocets in their black and white flight. One of my 'bests' was the sight of half a dozen Pied Herons flying just above the water. For a select few birders, a Peregrine came to the party.

I've mentioned the 'special' birds but the others were no less significant – Terns, Wandering Whistling-Ducks, Grey Teals, Sharpies, Stints, Black Ducks, Curlew Sandpipers, Marsh Sandpipers. Throw in some Black Swans, Sea-Eagles and Pelicans and we have a birding hot spot.



Red-necked Avocets

Chris Stewart

It will be interesting to see how long the birds stay once the wet arrives but it will be closely monitored I'm sure.

Chris Stewart

THE BORROW PITS

On a hot and dry Sunday 19 January eight intrepid bird observers arrived for the regular monthly club outing at the Ross River Dam. However, due to the lack of water in the wetlands at the back of the dam, the team decided the Borrow Pits were our best option.

On first inspection the Borrow Pits didn't look too promising as the water level was as low as most people could remember, but we started off full of enthusiasm and were soon rewarded from the main bird hide with our first sightings of Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck, Hardheads, Pacific Black Ducks, Australian Ibis, Royal Spoonbills, Pied Stilts, Great / Intermediate and Little Egrets, Australian Pelican, Darter, Black-necked Stork, Whiskered Tern, Gull-billed Tern and Caspian Tern or as one Observer called a "Capsicum Tern"----- we won't mention names!!



Sacred Kingfisher

Ray Sutton

We then continued around the Borrow Pits via the circular track and ventured into the surrounding woodlands, sighting Forest and Sacred Kingfishers, Red-winged Parrot, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Leaden Flycatcher, Double-barred and Zebra Finches, Tawny Grassbird, Yellow / Fuscous/ Brown-backed/ Rufous-throated/ Brown and White-throated Honeyeaters. The morning was only getting better!!

On completing the circular track the team decided to investigate the possibilities from the dam wall and also get in a bit of exercise by first walking up the ramp and then tackling the stairs leading to the old bird hide site --- - we all made it!! The vista was breathtaking with a "raft" of some two hundred Great Crested Grebes with the inclusion of the odd Silver Gull and further afield numerous Magpie Geese and Black Swans.



Great Crested Grebe

Annette Sutton

All in all a great day birding was had by everyone with our final tally of eighty one (81) species which was more than satisfying.

Wal Threlfall

WONGALOO

The early start is always a bit difficult but eventually we were all ready at the Palmetum to head off in a convey of twelve vehicles to Wongaloo. The large numbers keen to go showed how keen we birders were to check out what was beyond the fence and the locked gate.

Arriving, we found Mark Stoneman waiting to let us through and while we spied some Egrets, Cormorants and a Kookaburra off to the side we were keen to get to the water. The first stop was reached and we spread out in all directions. Stilts and Grey Teal were in quite large numbers on the shallow billabong. Sadly, despite the pig controls in place, there was a great deal of evidence of their digging, especially on the edges of the billabong.

We had to look hard for the little bush birds. Red-backed Fairy-wrens, Willie Wagtails, Sunbirds, Yellow Honeyeaters and a Mistletoebird were spied on the track and we also admired the majestic flight of a group of Brolgas landing on the salt pans some distance away. Just before we left I spied a Brahminy while others admired a snake heading up a tree.

The horn blew and we obediently headed to the cars for the short drive to the next spot. We walked to a forested area where Ian B. said he has previously seen Owls - but not today. The area had lots of paper bark trees and was quite picturesque. We did score Varied Triller, Forest Kingfisher, PIP, Yellow Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler, Leaden Flycatcher and a Little Shrike-thrush. Here, as in some of the other spots, we were able to compare the quality of insect repellants with the mosquitos homing in on any uncovered spots in large numbers. I think it was here that we saw a Pelican fly over while a Sea-Eagle was also spied checking out the shorelines for food.

Heading over to the "Rainforest" area, we stopped at a billabong where, with the scopes, we could see a Sharp-tailed and a Marsh Sandpiper in with the Stilts and Grey Teal. As we arrived at the Rainforest area where there were more trees and a creek, a Channe-billed Cuckoo was seen by some. Other birds spied in this area included: White Browed Robin, another Leaden Flycatcher, a Dusky and Yellow Honeyeater and a Brush Turkey.

Food was next - an eagerly awaited stop. We found our seats and eskys and enjoyed a much needed cuppa. The place chosen by our leaders was near an old trough and under a lovely shady tree and, wonder of wonders, not many mossies. A Forest Kingfisher entertained as he used the trough to bath. In this area we were able to delight in a White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike feeding its young in a nest, some acrobatic Bee-eaters and a family of Double-barred Finches. Wendy and I collected some feathers from under a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo roost for Julia who continues with her research on PIPs. Please

remember to report any nests on the webpage, pipwatch.org.



Yellow Honeyeater

Ray Sutton

From here we were dismissed to make our own way home. Some went via the Reed Beds, some to Cungulla and others straight home. Thanks to Mark Stoneman and the trip organizers for a great outing.

Beth Snewin

BLOOD, SWEAT AND BIRDS

Malaysia is marvellous for exotic birding—a safe country, good infrastructure (better roads than northern Queensland), great food and some stunning birds.



Greater Green Leafbird Female

Niel Bruce

Malaysia itself is relatively easy to get to with budget airlines, and there are many excellent birding spots within 150 kms of the capital Kuala Lumpur.

Birding habitats present a real challenge as the climate is hot and very humid, in my experience it rains nearly every day, and the foliage is thick wherever one birds. The rainforest is incredibly dense, and the usual cloud cover means that light levels are very low and birds consequently very hard to see, and harder still to photograph. If you wear spectacles an added burden is

sweat running over the lenses and also the lenses fogging up.

Diversity is high, in part because there is a marked change in species composition with altitude, with 'high country' species appearing from 700 metres and up. There is a bewildering array of unfamiliar groups, and it certainly pays to prepare in advance as much as possible. Just seeing the birds in forest and dense habitats is both



Orange-bellied Flowerpecker

Niel Bruce

challenging and frustrating. With speciose groups such as green pigeons, bulbuls, barbets, woodpeckers, cryptic babbler and the diverse and fast-moving sunbirds, many species are missed. An added dimension in the lowland forests are the abundant and apparently underfed leeches! I was visiting Panti Forest in Johor, and was very careful about the leeches, but in the excitement of the chase I clearly forgot about them—I looked down and the left leg of my pants, from thigh to ankle, was drenched in blood. It looked like I had been mauled. Unlike Australian leeches, in my experience, these left a large haematoma and the bites itched for weeks.

The rewards of birding in Malaysia are great. Daily species totals may not be high, 50 for a full day seems good, but the species one does see and identify are very satisfying! The absolutely wonderful broadbills (they don't look real), hornbills, the intensely green leafbirds, brilliant barbets. Highlights of our recent (January 2014) short visit include a flock of Crested Fireback in the gloom of the Taman Negara rainforest, males displaying and then fighting, and equally watching a Mountain Peacock Pheasant with two chicks at Bukit Tinggi, but the top was a species I had always 'missed', the Red-bearded Bee-eater.

Niel Bruce

NORTH LAKES

While visiting Craig and Lucille in North Lakes (near Redcliffe) at the end of October beginning of November 2013, I once again visited a beaut spot that I had discovered in 2012.



Spotless Crake

Marleen Acton

I was sure there was plenty of potential for some interesting birds for me. This proved to be the case as on my first visit I got two Latham's Snipe and one Pink-eared Duck. So the next morning I took the camera and arrived on site about 5.45am, even early for me. But it was worth it as I pulled in Spotless & Baillon's Crake and Freckled Duck. A couple of mornings later at the later time of 6.45am I pulled in my best bird, Little Bittern, plus two Spotless Crakes.

I was fairly chuffed with that as you would have guessed. My look at the Little Bittern was excellent as it flew from close to me in to reeds right in front of where I was standing. This small lake is really for the run-off of rain water and really not all that inspiring to look at as there is quite a lot of rubbish floating about. But I managed to see Azure Kingfisher and Superb Fairy-wren almost every visit.



Latham's Snipe

Marleen Acton

Behind 'The Grove' (name is on a rock wall hidden by Lomandra) is the North Lakes Environmental Park. This can be accessed a little further to the right (metal rail/post). Walking through there I managed to see Red-backed and Variegated Fairy-wrens (giving me 3 types of

Wren in a very small area), White-browed Scrubwren, Silvereyes, Grey and Rufous Fantails, Scarlet and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Chestnut Teal.



Freckled Duck

Marleen Acton

If you are interested in visiting it while down that way, I created a site on Eremaea. I have called it 'North Lakes, The Grove'. The last time I checked the site had 108 species recorded.

Marleen Acton

A QUICK TRIP TO KINGFISHER PARK

With the likelihood of the wet season starting to kick in, Ivor Preston, Gil Crabtree, Bill Holmes and I decided on a quick visit to Kingfisher Park at Julatten in an effort to see the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher and the Blue-faced Parrot Finch. And with fingers firmly crossed Gil and I were hopeful of some photo opportunity with both species.

By 6.00 am on the Tuesday morning, we were on the Ring Road heading north. It was an uneventful trip to Atherton where we stopped at Hastie's Swamp for good views of the Freckled Duck but little else of interest. There were plenty of Plumed Whistling -Ducks and Pink-eared Ducks but the water level was so low it did not attract anything else of note on our visit. After lunch in a park in Atherton it was off to Julatten.

We stopped at Abattoir Swamp just short of Kingfisher Park for a quick scout around. This stop rewarded us with views of a Black Bittern and a Varied Sittella. Sadly, this once picturesque birding spot has fallen into a state of disrepair.

We arrived at Kingfisher Park early in the arvo and were greeted by Keith and Lindsay Fisher. After a chat and

being allocated our accommodation, we decided we had time to venture up into Mount Lewis in search of the Parrot-Finch. We saw very little on the way up there but there was some activity in the clearing at the top. Bill and I had a quick glance of a Parrot-Finch just as we arrived. Further searching saw plenty of Red-browed Finches. A couple of Bar-breasted Cuckoo-shrikes held our attention for a few minutes. While searching for other birds, Gil spotted a Nankeen Night-Heron. A Nankeen Night-Heron in the rainforest at an elevation around 1000m above sea level. The rest of us had to see that. Gil wasn't seeing things! After a bit of hunting around we saw about eight Blue-faced Parrot-Finches with both Gil and I getting some reasonable photos.

Back at Kingfisher Park later in the arvo, Keith told us that there were about eight nesting pairs of Buff-breasted Kingfishers on the property, some with chicks and some with eggs. The hunt was on. Some were found relatively easy. In the late afternoon gloom of the rainforest photography was not all that easy so we headed off to the pond and creek at the back of the property in an effort to spy the elusive Red-necked Crake. Bill, Gil and Ivor sat at the Crake Pond while I went to creek. Guess who spotted the Crake. It wasn't me.

That evening we spotlighted for owls along Wetherby Road. We had really good sightings of two Barn Owls on the fence line beside the road



Blue-faced Parrot-Finch

The next morning was spent in and around Kingfisher Park. Keith kindly showed us a family of Papuan Frogmouths. The two adults and a well grown chick were sitting fairly low in tree just outside of the park. With better light came better photography with the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfishers. It was interesting to watch the routine of a pair feeding their chicks in a hollow of a termite mound about 30cm of the ground. With the amount of trips the pair made to and from the nest the chicks were certainly looked after well as far as food went.

That afternoon we venture further afield around Julatten. We visited several places that looked good but the birding was fairly slow so we headed back to Kingfisher Park to again search for the Red-necked Crake. Gil found and photographed it but the rest of us didn't. As a consolation there was pleasure in watching the birds come in for the afternoon bath in Bushy Creek at the back of the park.



Buff Breasted Paradise Kingfisher

The next day we headed off early on our way home via the Cairns Esplanade. We visited an area just north of Mossman looking for the Red-rumped and Barn Swallows. No luck there. Then it was onto Cattana Wetlands on the northern outskirts of Cairns. Birding was very slow here. For acres and acres of wetland covered with waterlily we had to work hard to see just two Jacanas. The White-browed Crake was easily spotted though.

Our visit to the Cairns Esplanade turned up the usual assortment shorebirds including Terek Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler, Great and Red Knots, Curlew Sandpiper etc. Plenty of Varied Honeyeaters and a sole Nankeen Night heron were also spotted. As the rain was now steady we decided to head for Townsville. The only diversion was into Etty Bay where we were lucky to see an adult and a young Cassowary about two bends before the beach. You have to be lucky sometimes. Driving through a number of heavy falls of rain, which petered out just north of Rollingstone, we arriving back home about 6.00 pm on the Thursday.

A quick trip that proved worthwhile. Birding among friends is always a pleasure and this trip was no exception. In all, we ended up with a Townsville to Townsville bird list of 157 species. Out of that lot I was up for \$1.25 (25 species) in my 2014 Quest.

Story and photographs

Ian Boyd

MOUNT ISA INTERLUDE 2013

Late September is possibly not the best time to visit Mount Isa, especially if the area is in drought.



Much of the immediate area around Mount Isa has been burnt off the last year or so, some more recent. Recognized birding spots such as Mica Creek, Sybella Creek, McNamara Road and, in town, the Pamela Street "water-tank hill" had all been recently and not so recently burned. The town itself has "good" birds for those from the east coast, such as Silver-crowned Friarbird, Varied Lorikeet and White-plumed Honeyeaters, all common while I was there. The city water-treatment plant adds extra diversity nearby with the ponds and adjacent wet paddocks attracting a good mix of species.



Wood Sandpiper

I arrived 0830 on the Friday, picked up the hire car and drove straight out to Lake Moondarra, cruised in, and stopped at the first sight of water, a bitumen turn-off to a locked water board gate, a piece of the lake known as Clear Water Lagoon. Reed beds, boggy grass, spinifex, tall gums, and it seemed that the place was just overrun by honeyeaters coming in to drink at a soak just outside the fence line. The first honeyeater was an irate White-plumed Honeyeater that scolded me from a metre distance, while lots of Grey-headed and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters were busy all around; a single Yellow-tinted Honeyeater made an appearance. Rufous-throated Honeyeaters were abundant, constantly flying out to the

dead reed stems and back. At the soak there was a constant stream of Little Friarbirds, as well as the other honeyeaters and Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, Double-barred and Zebra Finches; out on the lagoon and further round the fence line were Great Crested Grebes, Black Swans, a variety of ducks, three Brolga and a sizeable Johnston's Crocodile.

The burnt areas were largely bird free apart from the omnipresent Black Kites. But adjacent areas did yield some nice surprises. Just north of Sybella Creek, south of Mt Isa on the Diamantina Development Road was an unburned area where I heard and then watched Crested Bellbird call—one called, then another and then I could hear four of them. Three moved to tree-top positions to carry on calling, giving very satisfying views.

Grasswrens are a focus at Mount Isa, namely Kalkadoon Grasswren and Carpentarian Grasswren. The recognized sites having been burnt were non-starters. One afternoon I decided to try and get to the Warrigal waterhole. This was also a largely bird-free walk though all habitat wasn't burned. Early on my walk what I took to be a honeyeater hopped in and out of the base of a eucalypt on the hillside. As I walked up I could hear a faint "cheep" of a contact call, and then one Kalkadoon Grasswren jumped onto a branch a few metres away, and then moved off. That was it! Very happy.



Spinifex Pigeon

Of course I had a wish list, and one species on that list was Spinifex Pigeon. Not rare, but I definitely wanted to see it. I searched track after track and rocky spinifex hills, including known sites, all without success. On my last day, on the way to the airport, I stopped by the turnoff to Lake Moondarra, and decided to take a look at a small rocky hill near the junction—and there they were on the rock rubble between the spinifex clumps—and remarkably tame. In addition there were White-winged Fairy-wren and Purple-necked Rock Wallabies. An excellent finish to a short visit. The country around Mount Isa is rugged and dramatic with rugged gorges, mesas, Spinifex and mulga habitats, definitely a rewarding place to visit.

Story and Photographs

Niel Bruce

ALLIGATOR CREEK BY ACCIDENT

Ignoring my early onset 'Oldtimers' and the fact that I stuffed up the location for the club outing on the Australia Day holiday, I had a good morning out at Alligator Creek.

With only two campers and no day trippers when I first arrived at 0624, I virtually had the place to myself. The sky was overcast, the ground was damp, and there was a good cool breeze blowing.

I set off to find the White-browed Robin and, if lucky, spot the Owlet Nightjar. Tick the Robin, dip on the Nightjar. I slowly and quietly wander around, pausing often. What's that sound? A Bronze-Cuckoo and very near. Stealthily, with eyes acute, I move in the direction of the call and yep, there they are, three Little Bronze-Cuckoos chasing each other in the shrub nearby. I watch their antics for a little while until they move off. That was a bonus I wasn't expecting.



Lemon-bellied Flycatcher

I wander around a little more with little to keep me interested. Fairly quiet so far. I return to the day use area and slink over to the fence line and the creek embankment. Talk about unexpected! I happen upon a Black Bitten hunting in the deep shade of the bank side vegetation. It doesn't take long before I am spotted and off he flies. That's one observation I had to chalk up for research later on, as I was not aware that you could come across them in that type of habitat. Apparently you can.

Not a lot else happening, just the usual like the Little Shrike-thrush, Brush Turkey, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Bar-shouldered Dove and Spangled Drongos making appearances.



Leaden Flycatcher

I head off to the fire trail closer to the park entrance and walk across the creek. A note of caution here – the largest rock in the creek is not necessarily the most stable. Luckily I remained vertical and was able to continue on, dry. I headed downstream as the habitat was a little less dense and the walking looked easier than the upstream vista. I found a nice shady spot under some Callistemon and waited.

A Noisy Friarbird caught my attention in a Callistemon not far from where I was standing. You could see by its demeanour that it knew I was there, but felt comfortable enough to continue with its feeding. While entranced by the Friarbird's actions, two Large-billed Gerygones flitted about in the branches above my head. My gaze shifted to them until it was torn away by the raucous sound of Dollarbirds. Two, apparently young birds, land on the exposed branches of a dead tree. Shortly they are joined by two more of similar appearance. My presumption was that they were all young birds and then one proceeded to feed another. Am I missing something here? While pondering this dilemma another buzz attracted my attention high up and off to the left.

There in the open was a male Leaden Flycatcher harassing a hapless White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike. The Shrike was kind enough to venture quite close and dispatch an insect or two not far from my location. Once again you could see it was aware of my presence but paid me little heed. Other species lingering in the vicinity were Helmeted Friarbirds, Yellow, Brown, and White-throated Honeyeaters, along with the usual Spangled Drongos and Rainbow Lorikeets.

After a while I thought it was time to depart, as the temperature was starting to rise. I retraced my steps, plus or minus seven metres (doesn't sound right – 20 feet – that's better!), back to the creek crossing. However, part of the way back I made a misstep and my foot impacted the ground with some force, and noise. This I believe was too much for two Tawny Frogmouths that shot off across the creek from a low branch just in front of me. I continued past the location where they were perched and looked back. I couldn't help but think that I'd only walked past that spot earlier and they must have been there then. How did I miss them? I probably would have missed the cryptic little fellas this time too if it wasn't for the misstep.



Dollar Bird

After an uneventful crossing of the creek, I remembered the large rock, and on return to the car park I heard a kaka-kaka-kaka sort of noise coming from across the road. I stood and waited and searched from afar. Nothing! Probably moved to the back of the trees and flew out that way. Damn! Oh well I'll cross the road and have a closer look. That I do and as I walk under the trees a couple of

Drongos are going ballistic off to my left. I turn to see what all the fuss is about and there, quite close, is a Pacific Baza being harassed by the Drongos. A nice finish to my morning. All in all a peaceful and fruitful couple of hours wandering around somewhere I was not supposed to be.



White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
Story and photographs

Mark Horvath

Looking for an interesting and entertaining read? "NEST The Art of Birds", written by Janine Burke, is both interesting and entertaining. Available from Townsville library".

Angela Ward

CALENDAR

February 2014

12th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

16th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am. Leader Ian Boyd

23th - Sunday Outing - Cungulla - Good chance to catch up with the shorebirds as they will be departing soon. Meet at the Palmetum for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing so bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Leader Len Ezzy

March 2014

2nd - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am. Leader Annette & Ray Sutton

4th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Flying. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

8th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker Tony Grice.

12th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

16th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am. Leader Ian Boyd

30th March - Sunday Outing - Paluma - Meet adjacent to the RAAF Base Duckworth St gate for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing so bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged.

Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Drongo. Copy for the next edition is due in by 25th March. Send it to amsgreat@gmail.com.