

The Drongo

Number 137 February 2015



Tasmania

Challenge
Count

Unusual
Birds



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Report to the Annual General Meeting

14 February 2015

Welcome to the fourth Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Townsville. I believe we have come a long way since we became BirdLife Townsville in 2012. There has been a lot of work involved in getting our processes to meet BirdLife Australia's requirements. It has sometimes been a stressful journey but I think we are finally there!

Our education programs in schools have been negatively impacted by the change in emphasis on the importance of conservation matters in a well-rounded education. Our Education Group, under the direction of Norm Rains, installed displays in Aitkenvale and City libraries in October as part of Bird Week. We publicized the Backyard Bird Count and there was a pretty good response with quite a few lists. Feedback from library staff is always very positive with lots of people spending time looking at the displays and taking books on birds out on loan. The displays would not be anywhere near as attractive without the support of the Museum of Tropical Queensland's bird taxidermists. Norm has also organized a few other community education sessions as requested. A small group of educators visited schools in the Ingham area and were very well received by the kids and teachers alike. Norm has managed to squeeze into his busy life negotiating agreements to do surveys at the Barrattas for WetlandCare Australia's '*Building Biodiversity Dividends for the Barratta Creek Catchment*' Project and at Inkerman for NQ Dry Tropics.

Nina Doyle has continued developing our financial records system. We now manage most transactions on internet banking. This makes it a lot more efficient and a lot easier for all concerned.

Mark Horvath keeps a good eye on our equipment and ensures it is in good working order and available when it is needed.

It's a fact of life nowadays that everything is governed by Health and Safety issues, so we just need to bite the bullet and do what is needed to comply. During discussions with Fiona Blandford on her visit to the branch in November, we managed to sort through a lot of the outstanding issues with Insurance. We have really only had to make some minor changes to the Health and Safety procedures we already had in place. Safety Officer Janet Cross is in the process of establishing a register of Leaders' Packs and a system for ensuring their availability for outing leaders. Annette Sutton is assisting Janet in printing our Sign-on Books. A simplified copy of BirdLife Australia's Insurance Policy will soon be available to view on the website.

Our Conservation Officer Garrie Douglas has had a few

hiccoughs over the year with accidents and family illness. He has nominated for the role again this year and is keen to 'really get into it'. There are still some major conservation concerns facing birds in our region so the fight needs to continue.

Members who attended the November meeting had the chance to meet Fiona Blandford, Branch Liaison Officer, BirdLife Australia. As I said before, Fiona was able to assist clear up some issues we were having with Health and Safety and Insurance. The visit shows that National Office is very interested in supporting the local branches. One subject discussed was the possibility of a full-time staff member in the North. This is being very seriously discussed at present. The title of the role is a bit of a mouthful - 'Conservation Partnerships Manager and IBA coordinator in Northern Queensland'. The focus of the role would be to support branches, collaborate with agencies involved in conservation in North Queensland and assist in funding applications. The committee believes this is a very exciting move and can only be good for our conservation efforts for birds.

The Christmas Party was once again a resounding success with some fairly impressive games of bowls and the quiz, making it a very entertaining evening. A big thank you to Nina for all the hard work to make it happen.

Our regular surveys continue with several members taking responsibility for their particular area: Ian Boyd – Ross River Dam; Lenore and Malcolm Calvert – Bush Gardens; Len and Chris Ezzy – Bohle Revegetation Area and Cunggulla Shorebirds; Ivor Preston – Lucinda Shorebirds; Niel Bruce – Coastal Bird Monitoring Program; and Ian Leach – Bushland Beach Shorebirds. Unfortunately, access has not been granted to the Cluden Water Treatment Plant throughout the last year. The roster for leaders for the Town Common surveys was successful throughout the year. This system will continue. There is one vacancy in the roster for 2015 and that is for April when so many members will be away on camp. If you can lead this outing please contact Wal Threlfall. Many members continue to have a very good relationship with the Traditional Owners at Mungalla, which means we all enjoy the opportunity to visit that great wetlands.

Annette Sutton continues to produce an excellent newsletter. The Drongo gets better and better with great stories and great photographs. Please support Annette by submitting materials – a couple of sentences or a major article – so long as it is interesting to birders!

Malcolm and Lenore Calvert ensure all our outings and meetings which are open to the public are well advertised in the local media. This has proven to be an effective way of encouraging members of the community in appreciating the birds in our area.

Our meetings are always very interesting thanks to the high quality of presentations from our guest speakers. The Members' Presentation days are always very good and lots of fun. And, of course, no meeting would be considered a success without a good 'cuppa'! Gloria and Rick have taken on the role of ensuring afternoon tea is ready on time and coordinating lots of goodies to eat.

I attended the Branch Delegates Forum in Melbourne in May. It is a good opportunity to meet other branch representatives and discuss day to day issues we all have in common. The Forum was a well-planned day to work on how BirdLife Australia can become a much more effective voice for our birds.

Warren Charlton has been kept busy with monitoring the gmail account on top of the myriad of chores a secretary has. We get many enquiries from birders planning a visit to Townsville and local residents wanting to join one of our outings to try birding, or just check out what's available in their local environment. We also get a lot of emails from people wanting to know what the bird is that they have seen in their backyards.

BirdLife Townsville's Website seems very popular with lots of 'hits'. Ian Boyd and Graham Cheetham do a good job of managing it. We have a very busy birding calendar of events as is obvious if you look at the Activities Page on the website. Please let the committee know of any ideas you have for an outing or camp-out or if you are interested in becoming a leader.

You would all be aware that Cyclone Yasi blew down a lot of trees in our area. This resulted in a big loss of nesting hollows. An Owl Boxes Project has been talked about for a while. Norm Rains, Ian Boyd and Wal Threlfall have taken on this project, and in cooperation with NQ DryTropics it is now well underway.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing committee and the many non-committee members who do a lot of jobs for the club, for their hard work and support over the last year. Despite the time, effort and bumps in the road involved in being President of a busy group like BirdLife Townsville, I have enjoyed the role and appreciate the chance to help it to become the vibrant and active club it is today.

Janet Robino



Club members at Duckworld

Ray Sutton

BLAKEY'S CROSSING UPGRADED

When I moved to Townsville some decades ago now, Blakey's Crossing was just a 900 metre long section of the Bruce Highway heading north.

Every wet season Blakey's Crossing flooded and severely disrupted travel to and from Townsville, sometimes for weeks at a time. Stretching between Duckworth and Mather Streets, now it is only a secondary access road to the general Bohle Industrial/Commercial Estate precinct. In 1995 the multi-lane Woolcock Street extension was opened and became the new and flood-resistant Bruce Highway north out of Townsville. It was built parallel to, and only ½km to the south, of Blakey's and is bisected by the North Coast Railway.



Red-backed Fairy-wrens

In 1993 Chris and I moved to Mount Louisa, on the "other" side of Blakey's. We would always try and commute to our workplaces in the city via Blakey's Crossing, mainly because of the wetland birdlife we encountered as we crossed it. There was nowhere for any vehicles to stop to take in the sights though, unless one was prepared to walk the 20cm-wide road shoulders, continually conscious of the 80km/hour trucks and traffic, while the Louisa Creek wetland waters lapped the embankments only centimetres below the patchwork-repaired road pavement.

Blakey's' birding has been generally always good though. There are only 97 bird species on the Eremaea eBird list and there are some great sightings recorded there over the years. Some exceptional sightings that Chris and I have made also (we have not always recorded our sighting on Eremaea eBird; but did use Birddata) are Black Bittern, Eastern Grass Owl, Eastern Barn Owl, Black-shouldered and Brahminy Kites, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Wedge-tailed Eagle and, just last weekend, we found a Pale-vented Bush-hen just off the western end of Blakey's Crossing. Then there are the ever-present Tawny Grassbirds, Golden-headed Cisticolas and Red-backed Fairy-wrens that make this area so inviting. Terrific !

For many years a major upgrade to Blakey's Crossing was such a hot political football, which inevitably resulted in continual broken election promises.

Now though, \$19million later, the Upgrade Project has finally been completed. After suffering almost 2 years of a Blakey's closure for the upgrade project to be effected, as of December 2014 the red ribbon was finally and officially "cut". The Mather Street intersection was opened in January this year and it is now a reality. We use it daily and it has our "thumbs-up" as well as from everyone we know who has used it.

Costs and Project Details courtesy the Townsville City Council Web Site.



White-browed Crane

AS BIRDERS, what we like most about the new Blakey's Crossing is its heightened elevation of about 2½metres above the old Blakey's. This gives far-reaching opportunities to stop (YES there are 2 designated stopping bays each capable of safely containing a couple of vehicles; one is near Peewee Creek and the other near Louisa Creek) and have a look at previously hidden lagoons and wetlands and swampy grasslands. Stay on the road-way as there is no legal access to the adjoining Defence lands. Now if you want to look at White-browed Crakes in Townsville, then Blakey's Crossing is THE place to be... Last Sunday morning Chris and I counted 8 at the Peewee Creek Lagoon, upstream from that stopping bay and another 4 on Louisa Creek just upstream from Blakey's Crossing.



Tawny Grassbird

Story and Photographs

Len and Chris Ezzy

MUSEUM UPDATE

The Little Kingfisher has been a challenge to skin and even more so to stuff but it is done.

It is such a privilege to be able to handle these wonderful specimens and to examine them closely. The difficulty lies in the fact that the little body I needed to remove was about the size of the top joint of a lady's thumb! The trouble with such a tiny project is that it must all be done with tweezers and a large magnifying glass. Still, after much fiddling it was done.

I carefully carved a replacement body from taxidermy foam and inserted the various wires. I placed it into the now empty skin and sewed up the skin carefully - for the first time (yes there was to be a second time). Unfortunately, as I bent the tiny leg to a sitting position, there was a crack and my bird's leg hung limply! I muttered and abandoned it while I had a cuppa then returned and started unpicking. The leg wire had broken off a piece of the body as there wasn't enough of it to take the tiny bit of pressure I had exerted.

I repositioned the wire, added cotton wool to fill the gap, and started stitching once again. They have lots of feathers and it was difficult to even see what I was doing. Finally, after three days of fiddling it is done. He now sits on his perch with a little cloak of yellow chux tied over his head. This helps to keep the feathers lying flat on his head as the skin dries out. A fine web of cotton crisscrosses his body for the same purpose. Now he will rest till next week when his coverings come off and he can join the collection. Please come and see him next time you visit.



Little Kingfisher

Len Ezzy

This Little Kingfisher, with his large bill and beautiful blue plumage, is a new addition to our continuing attempt to develop a collection of the birds of North Queensland. We do have a very old specimen. However I had to stitch it to a card as the legs were no longer attached to the body. On the card folk can at least see the size and colour of this special little North Queenslander....and his legs look as if they are attached!

Thanks to all those birders who collect when out and about. Please remember we also need the 'common' ones. I have a little display done with two juvenile magpies that sit begging...but there is no adult about to feed them. We have finch nests with no finches to take up residence and as for those birds that live near the sea.....we don't even have a seagull!

Beth Snewin

BRINGING UP TEENAGERS

Some years ago we took on two teenage
Maggie Geese to prepare them for the wild.

Both could fly quite well but were very much bonded to humans, a common occurrence with many waterfowl species, hand- raised from a very young age. These two birds had been raised separately in other locations. One, we were told, was brought up at a country pub but we had no idea of the other's "family circumstances". Both were omnivores, eating anything put down in front of them and were relatively easy to look after.



Maggie Geese are generally regarded as quite clever birds and these two were no exception. One was obviously a little older than the other because of its overall size and this bird we thought to be a male as the knob on the top of its head was noticeably larger. We also thought the other to be a female as she seemed to have finer lines and a "softer" face than the larger bird. As it turned out we were quite right.

Both birds were well bonded to humans and liked to "hang out" with any member of our family working outside. If we were mowing, they would both settle a safe distance from the action and watch the proceedings carefully until the ride-on was put away. They would then investigate the newly mown patch, burying their faces in the rilled grass and turning it over, all the while softly talking to each other as if in wonderment of the capabilities of the magic machine they had been so keenly watching in action. They also loved to watch activities such as hole-digging, tree planting and working in the veggie patch, and would offer advice and generally get in the way on these occasions.

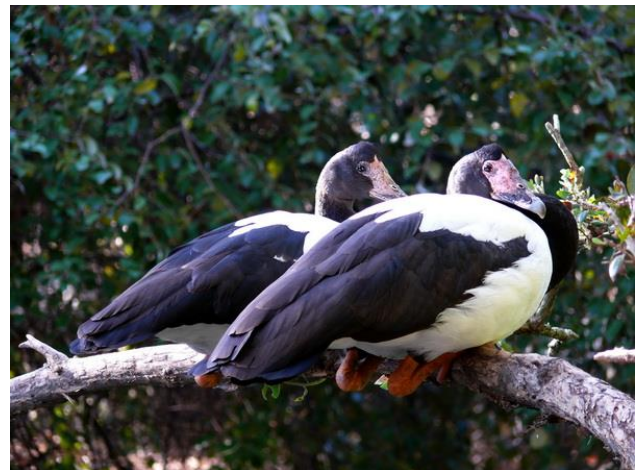
The birds also enjoyed accompanying us on our afternoon walk around the back section of the block. We had a set rectangular circuit of about 400 metres following the boundary fence and they would waddle along, sometimes out in front leading and other times trailing well behind. Frequently when they fell too far to the rear, they simply stopped at a corner then flew diagonally to the other corner and waited until we "caught up", greeting us like long lost relatives and honking in laughter all the while. They were really quite endearing birds that seemed to have a sense of humour.

They were very tactile creatures that had obviously been handled frequently by their previous keepers as they loved nothing better than to get their heads and under wings scratched. They would nibble at dangling hands or

at one's feet in order to get attention. Sitting on our feet was also a favourite pastime. They were also curious creatures and liked to investigate any new goings-on about the place.

I recall one day lying on my back with my head and shoulders partly under my ute, positioning a hydraulic jack in order to lift the vehicle to change a wheel. Silly, incautious me had a pair of loose-legged shorts on which presented a situation that the male bird just could not resist. For a fleeting moment I thought my luck had changed, but only for a fleeting moment as I soon discovered the capabilities of that hard hooked bit on the end of his beak. I also discovered there was nothing amiss with my reflexes either as the bruise on my forehead could attest to. There were more things hurt that day than my pride!!! I still chuckle to myself about this event whenever I hear or see Maggie Geese.

Eventually the birds matured and left home, a gradual process that involved one or the other, or sometimes both birds staying away over night at first and extending to a few days and then weeks until we didn't see them for months. During this transition period, the little female arrived home one day with a big mature wild male in tow. She just said hello briefly and took off again to make a new life living free as nature intended. We did not ever see her again. The male however returned more often and would stay a day or two until one day he too failed to show up. Well after the following breeding season a pair of mature birds and three sub-adult young turned up out of the blue. The male was very sure of himself and approached me, albeit with caution while the others hung back, wisely not wanting anything to do with mankind. Even today we are occasionally visited by a small family of geese but they never approach or allow us to go near them. They sometimes overnight in the tops of the gum trees but always disappear around dawn next day. This is as it should be.



We loved sharing the lives of these birds for the many months they were with us and we regard the raising of these teenagers to maturity and their final return to the wild as one of the real success stories of our bird-caring experiences.

Story Norm Rains

Photographs Annette Sutton



PALUMA



Golden Bowerbird

The New Years Eve fireworks on the Strand were good, but the next day brought something better for those who went on the New Year's outing to Paluma. We walked through the dim rainforest until we came to the Golden Bowerbird's large bower. There we stopped. We listened to the persistent calls of a Brush Cuckoo. Everyone was waiting with binoculars at the ready. Then the lovely golden-coloured male bowerbird came into sight. We watched him until he flew off and then turned our attention to a Grey-headed Robin and Rufous Fantail before we left.

Story and Photographs

Philip H.



Golden Bowerbird's Bower

Footnote During the mating season, the polygamous male tries to fertilise as many females as possible. The female assesses the male's song, plumage, display and bower structure before selecting and mating. The mating season lasts from late September to early February. The female raises one or two young in a small cup nest in a tree crevice approximately two metres above ground.

CHALLENGE COUNT DECEMBER 2014

Firstly thank-you to all that helped with this count, as is the norm you did a splendid job. The heat was not helpful and the dry was another factor making finding birds difficult.

This count we recorded seven species not seen for some time. **Varied Sittella** (3) last seen 1 in June 09, **Oriental Plover** (23) only other time recorded was 7 in Dec 05. **Bar-breasted Honeyeater** (1) only 3 other records of 1 in June 09, Dec 05 & Dec 97. **Brown Cuckoo-Dove** (4) Dec 08 with 1. **White-throated Needletail** (20), previously 6 in Dec 09. **Little Curlew** (2) previously Dec 04 with 3, **Guineafowl** (10) last record Dec 10 (2).



Helmeted Guineafowl

Ray Sutton

Orange-footed Scrubfowl & Emerald Dove, (to be expected), Barking and Boobook Owls, Wandering Whistling-Duck, Mangrove Gerygone, Sooty Oystercatcher & Little Curlew were only recorded on Maggie. We had no counts for Great-crested Grebe, Brown Quail, Brown Booby, Coot, Grey Plover, Shining & Little Bronze Cuckoos, and Peregrine Falcon. Low counts for all cormorants and Darter.

We had our lowest count for Brolga (13) since Dec 09 (12). This count saw us with our highest number ever of Pied Oystercatchers at 93.

Birds that have only been recorded once since our club started with the Challenge Count in Dec 1995 are; Emu Dec 03 (1), Shovelers June 05 (2), Spotted Harrier June 02 (1), Grey Falcon June 06 (1), Bush-hen Dec 02 (1), Black-tailed Native-hen Dec 03 (4), Wood Sandpiper Dec 04 (1) Sanderling Dec 06 (1), Oriental Pratincole Dec 06 (2), Avocets June 02 (8), Painted Snipe Dec 08 (1), Grass Owl Dec 02 (1), Barn Owl Dec 13 (1), Collared Kingfisher Dec 04 (1), Barred Cuckoo-shrike Dec 2000 (1), Spotted Bowerbird June 05 (1).

As you will have noticed some unexpected birds amongst them. We never know just what will turn up. That is what makes this and the June counts so interesting.

We were down on breeding records this time with only 18 species recorded; we managed 25 in 2013. So please remember to note breeding records in future counts.

Thanks to the 29 contributors we managed to count 11,200 birds = 190 species so WELL DONE.

Marleen Acton

Tree Nesters

At the Town Common walk on 1 February we saw Green Pygmy-geese high in trees. I had never seen them off water before. Phillip Haig and I happened to come across three sitting on a dead tree about ten metres off the ground. We then noticed that one looked like a very young bird. It had a very buff looking breast – could be staining from the nest??? This bird appeared to be sitting in a hollow. The adult birds flew into a nearby tree and started calling. The youngster took a jump-start and flew in a rather wobbly fashion to the adults. I hadn't ever thought about where Pygmy-geese made their nests so had to check that what we thought we saw was correct.



The guides we had with us, Morecombe, Slater, Pizzev and Knight, did not describe the juvenile so we had to go with working that out for ourselves. They did, however, confirm that Pygmy-geese nest in hollows, near water and usually about ten metres above the ground.

This is an exciting breeding record for the Town Common and a really, really exciting sighting for those of us who saw it.

Story and Photograph

Janet Robino

From Australian Bush Birds

Green Pygmy-geese

Nesting takes place in January to March near Darwin and in northern Queensland. Nests are made in swampy vegetation, on the ground, or in hollows of trees standing in water. The male finds several possible nest sites but the female makes the selection. There are eight to 12 eggs, hard-shelled, smooth and lustrous, cream or white, blunt ovals, about 44 by 32 millimetres. Incubation takes 26 days, the female broods the eggs. The male defends the nest area while the female is brooding and helps rear the young after the eggs hatch. Chicks can dive to escape danger and freeze under water lilies until the parents return.

Found along a broad coastal strip from Broome along the north coast to the Queensland coast south of Rockhampton. Locally common and sedentary or nomadic.

A BOO-HOO STORY

My son living on the Gold Coast sent me some photos of three birds sitting in his Palms surrounding his pool, which he asked me to identify. He said one of the birds seemed smaller than the other two, and did I know what they were as they were there on a regular basis nearly every day. In fact they were Boobooks !!! At the time I wondered if it was a family of Male, Female and Juvenile. I was staying there a few weeks later whilst they were on holiday in Japan, and one afternoon heard this incredible noise coming from the area just outside their garden, adjacent to the reserve at the back of the garden and went to investigate, where there were at least 7-10 Noisy miners dive bombing something from a tree overlooking this area. When I arrived I could see it was a very dead Boobook. I don't know if it died from natural causes or whether they had in fact killed it. Does anyone know if they could have done this or it was just unfortunate that it happened there?



Boobook in James's tree

Barbara Reidy

From Birds in Backyards

Southern Boobooks are found throughout mainland Australia and Tasmania, and on some coastal islands. Closely related species are found in New Zealand, New Guinea and Indonesia.

INTERESTING SIGHTING

I recently met a birder (Brin) at Queen's Gardens while we were both waiting for an appearance by the family of Red-necked Crakes recently reported in that location

I met Brin again by chance at the Wetlands Sunset event held last Friday afternoon. On this occasion Brin advised me that he had seen and photographed a single Great Knot amongst a heap of other shorebirds at Bushland Beach, only a few days before. Brin advised me that he reported the sighting to the Australasian Wader Study Group and kindly forwarded the AWSG correspondence in reply to his Report. I have copied this reply below for the information of the readers of "The Drongo".

From: AWSG Flagging

Date: 5 February 2015 4:50:51 pm AEST

Subject: AWSG ref #59993: Great Knot 01 Jan 2015 - Report of flag sighting to Observer

From: Australasian Wader Studies Group
c/o Roger Standen Australia

Email: flagging@awsq.org.au

Dear Brin,

Thank you for recording the details of the flagged wader that was recently sighted. We appreciate your action in reporting this information, which will contribute to our understanding of the migration of birds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. If you are not already doing so, could you please send in future sightings via the AWSG website form if possible. This form can be found at <http://www.awsq.org.au/reportform.php>.

Please check the information given below and advise me if any details appear incorrect.

A Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* was sighted by Brin Crowther at: Bushland Beach, north of Townsville, QLD, Australia 19deg 10min 0sec S, 146deg 38min 0sec E on 1/01/2015 with flag(s) as follows:



LEFT leg: nothing/unknown on tibia (upper leg) above metal band on tarsus

RIGHT leg: white flag on tibia (upper leg) above orange flag on tibia

This bird was flagged in Korean Peninsula, approximate co-ordinates 35deg 54min N, 126deg 42min E, which uses the flag combination White/Orange.

The resighting was a distance of approximately 6475 km, with a bearing of 158 degrees, from the marking location.

Thank you for contributing to shorebird research studies in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. The information you have helped to collect is valuable for scientific and conservation purposes.

Please report to us any further flag sightings you may make in the future.

This can be direct to flagging@awsq.org.au, or via the electronic form on the Australasian Wader Studies Group website:

<http://www.awsq.org.au/reportform.php>.

Yours sincerely,

Roger Standen, Leg Flag Sighting Database Operator,
Australasian Wader Studies group

Processed 04/02/2015, our reference: 00059993 (UNH14186).

Note: this report has been sent only to you (the correspondent), and no copy has been sent to the observer.

Well, here is positive proof of the good works that amateur birders do to contribute to the overall knowledge of birds, and in this instance, the named migratory wader species. Congratulations and Well Done Brin!!!!

Story Norm Rains

Photograph Brin Crowther

SURPRISE

On New Year's day our next door neighbour called us over to look at a bird in her yard. It was a male Superb Fruit-Dove. We managed to get some photos before it flew off in to a palm tree. This was not the last we saw of the bird. Two days later we found it sitting on a fallen palm branch in our backyard. It was very calm and was just looking around. I got my camera but it had moved further into the back of the tree, we still managed to get a few good photos.



I rang Marlene Acton and asked her if she would like see it. She did and also sent out word to fellow club members. In all, eight people came to have a look, take photos and mark off a great bird for the beginning of the Bird Quest for 2015. There has been no sign of it since the 3rd January.

Story and Photograph

Bob Murphy

LIFERS

It's not every day you get to see three 'lifers', but that was my experience on the 16th of January.



Ruff

The previous evening I read Peter Valentine's report of a Ruff and the Red-rumped and Barn Swallows being sighted on the tablelands, so I made the spur of the moment decision to check the report out, reasoning that if I saw just one of the three, it would be worth the trip.

An early start saw me at the Tinaroo Lake end of Harper Avenue, just out of Yungaburra, at around 7.30 am. Following directions provided by Peter, I saw and photographed, within five minutes, the Ruff, exactly where it had been reported. I could scarcely believe my luck, as my experience with birds has been a lot like



Red-rumped Swallow

fishing, 'you should have been here yesterday'.

Buoyed by this success, I proceeded the half kilometre or so down to the Tinaburra boat ramp, and parked opposite the van park. I immediately saw flocks of swallows sitting on the power lines. They appeared to be a mixed bunch of Welcome Swallows, Tree and Fairy Martins.

With the sun rising directly behind them, glaring through the white cloud cover, positive identification to separate the species was difficult. The swallows wouldn't sit still for long, so it was a case of following up and down the power line, and eventually I was able to get in a position where I was able to get a rear view of the birds with the sun at my back. Immediately I saw the red rumps of several of the swallows and, having isolated them from the others, went to the front side and was able to see the striations which were prominent once you knew what to look for. Soon after I was joined by Peter, and we spent some time observing the many birds and their antics.

It was soon after that it became apparent that one bird amongst all the others, looked different. It was constantly preening and its feathers were ruffled, but we could see a definite band and its chest was white. We had an elusive Barn Swallow, one of only two recently sighted in the area. As I had seen my targeted species, I decided to check out the Curtain Fig Tree, where Pied Monarchs were due to fledge soon, from a nest directly above the boardwalk. I was twenty minutes too late, as some tourists told me they had seen the young fly. As a consolation I saw a Black-faced Monarch and several

Buff-banded Rails in the vicinity of Yungaburra. I was back in Townsville in time for happy hour, having been away just on 12 hrs and having felt like I had been to a different world. A big thanks to Peter and the club for providing the information without which I would probably have never seen these uncommon birds.

Story and Photographs

Roger Mortlock

THE IRISH MILLIONAIRE

Mick, from Dublin, appeared on 'Who Wants To Be a Millionaire' and toward the end of the program had already won 500,000 pounds.

"You've done very well so far," said Chris Tarrant, the show's presenter "but for a million pounds, you've only got one life-line left to phone a friend. Everything is riding on this question. Will you go for it?"

"Sure," said Mick. "I'll have a go!"

"Which of the following birds does NOT build its own nest? Sparrow, Thrush, Magpie, or Cuckoo?"

I haven't got a clue" said Mick, "so I'll use me last lifeline and phone my dear friend Paddy back home in Dublin." Mick called up his mate Paddy, and told him the circumstances and repeated the question to him. "Blooming hell, Mick!" cried Paddy. "Dat's simple - it's a cuckoo."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure." Mick hung up the phone and told Chris, "I'll go with cuckoo as me answer."

"Is that your final answer?" asked Chris.

"Dat it is."

There was a long, long pause and then the presenter screamed, "Cuckoo is the correct answer! Mick, you've won 1 million pounds!"

The next night, Mick met Paddy at the pub to buy him a drink.

"Tell me, Paddy? How in Heaven's name did you know it was da Cuckoo that doesn't build its own nest?"

"Because he lives in a blooming clock, ya half-wit!"

Angela Ward

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Victoria's Riflebird

The Victoria's Riflebird, one of Australia's four birds of paradise, is a common sight for birdwatchers visiting Paluma, North Queensland. The sounds of their wings are like taffeta rustling. The glorious shiny feathers of the male are in stark contrast to the browns of the female. They were first identified and described by Gould in 1850.



The Victoria's Riflebird belongs to the family Paradisaeidae and is in the genus *Ptiloris*. Its close cousins in this genus are the Magnificent Riflebird (found in far Northern Queensland and New Guinea), the Paradise Riflebird (found further south in Queensland and New South Wales) and the Growling Riflebird (found in New Guinea). It may come as a surprise to learn that its closest evolutionary relatives are the crow and jay family, the monarch flycatchers and the Australian mudnesters (White-winged Chough and Apostlebird). The fourth bird of paradise in Australia is the Trumpet Manucode which is in the genus *Phonygammus*.

Although the loss of habitat for Victoria's Riflebird is of some concern, they are not considered vulnerable on the IUCN listing.



While the Victoria's Riflebird eats a lot of fruit, it also eats insects which it often dislodges from under tree bark, using its powerful beak and claws. They are a common sight in Paluma if residents put out some fruit on their feeding stations. They have been observed peeling fruit. They are so tame that they often fly into the house, check everything out and have no trouble finding their way back out the door, unlike a bird which accidentally flies in. One such bird at Paluma was

wearing a leg ring and was identified as having been ringed in the Innisfail region.

The breeding season is from August to February. The male displays on a prominent branch or even the top of a power pole. He raises the beautiful iridescent feathers on his throat and chest, throws back his head and raises his wings in a circle above his head. He then flips from side to side and calls in a raspy voice. If the female is impressed she will hop towards him. The pair then face each other closely, and each bird raises and extends its wings forward alternately in an increasingly rapid rhythm. Finally the male embraces the female with both wings, and copulation ensues. The female goes off on her own and builds the nest and cares for the young alone. The male is busy attracting the next female.

So next time you go to Paluma, keep your eye and ears out for the Victoria's Riflebird.

Annette Sutton

Photographs Ray & Annette Sutton

RARE BIRD

I was checking my emails on the 18th January and saw that a Ruff had been seen at the Tinnaroo Dam, so we decided there and then that we would head up that way and see if we could spot it. We left Monday afternoon and drove straight through to Yungaburra. Finding a motel in the dark is not on my list of favourite things. Before we left we had contacted Peter Valentine for directions. They were the best directions ever, so detailed and accurate. It was so easy to find the bird just where Peter said it would be.



Ruff

We took some long range photos, not the best but definitely good enough to identify the bird. In the rush to get away we forgot the bird book but this was not a problem. I googled it on my iPad and we had multiple photos to check it against. We returned again that afternoon and the next morning and the bird was still in the general area of our directions.

This was Tuesday and Peter had also given us directions to find Red-rumped Swallows so off we went, following the directions to the Tinnaburra Caravan Park and there they were on the power lines just as he said they would be. That night there was a huge thunderstorm with heavy rain. The Ruff was still in his spot but the Swallows had disappeared. Not a one was visible.

Story and Photograph

Bob Murphy

TASSIE BIRDING

In November John and I had a holiday in Tasmania.

As it was our first time there I mapped out an itinerary of all the historical and interesting places that I wanted to visit and thought we could include a 'bit of birding'. Well somehow (John's influence maybe?) it turned into a birding holiday first and foremost with a few touristy extras thrown in.

I would need to write a novel to tell you of all the incredible places we visited so I'll just highlight a couple. We bit the bullet and paid to bird on Inala, Professor Tonia Cochrane's property on Bruny Island, with a birding guide she arranged for us. As Tonia was hanging out the washing, she called us over to see a magnificent white Goshawk that habitually flies in. She has just built a fabulous tall bird hide right next to the blue gums where the Forty-spotted Pardalotes feed. What an eyeful! You could almost reach out and touch them. They are very busy little birds, constantly moving and eating and it was fascinating observing them. We were so close I could hear them eating on the lerp deposits on the leaves. It was hard to drag ourselves away and move on. We walked around the property seeing Flame Robins, Scarlet Robins, Dusky Robins, Olive Whistlers, Green Rosellas, and Thornbills, accompanied at times by the rain and freezing conditions.

We ventured over to the other side of the island to Adventure Bay and saw our very first Albatross, albeit way in the distance. The guide took us for a rainforest walk (in the middle of the island) and then down to the lighthouse on the southern tip (dramatic scenery) where we searched unsuccessfully for the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater. The guide spent eleven hours with us as he decided we may as well keep birding till the last ferry departed. What a fruitful and enjoyable day! In the gum trees at the ferry terminal we spotted the Swift Parrots (though we had even better sightings in Strahan). Unusually, the Beautiful Firetail was not to be seen and we had to wait ten days till Binnalong Bay before sighting him.



Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo

The scenery alone is enough reason to go to Bruny Island. We stopped at the northern end of the isthmus – the Neck – and I climbed an awful lot of stairs (200) to the lookout between the two parts of the island for a fabulous, unique 360 degree view and a big bunch of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos flew noisily right over my head.

Another place worth mentioning because of its difference is a Mountain Wilderness Nature Reserve near Loongana (middle of nowhere) in the north-west. There are two ways to get there and we picked the long, windy, mountainous, uninhabited two hour journey – we were relieved to find the place actually existed. Six basic huts (with necessary fireplaces) in a beautiful valley surrounded by mountains. Most of the endemics are there, plus very big platypus in the creek, easily seen on dusk. But the best part is the fact that the Tassie Devils visit your cabins at night as the owner leaves out food for them. You don't venture out – just watch them through the window or glass door. Then you can hear them



Albatross

fighting under the floorboards. The quolls sometimes come too but we dipped out that night.

There were a group of German birders staying there and a couple of Americans. They were the only birders we saw throughout Tasmania which seemed really odd to us. Of course John could impart some birding knowledge to help them (despite the language barrier), though the owner is very knowledgeable about the birds also.

We visited many beaches and they were stunning. However, there were never many waders though we often saw Pacific and Kelp Gulls and quite a few Hooded Plovers, some with babies. On a cruise to Wineglass Bay we saw our second Albatross – a stunning sight. For once we didn't have to figure out the Ravens from the Crows as there are no crows in Tasmania, just Forest Ravens. Fairy Penguins visited us near our lodgings at Stanley. The Pink Robin was my favourite and we saw him in quite a few places. We dipped out on the Orange-bellied Parrot as the flight we had booked to Melaleuca in the remote south-west was cancelled due to bad weather. We saw plenty of Scrubtits and Scrubwrens, Brush Bronze-wings and local Native Hens. There were astonishing numbers of Superb Fairy-wrens. Yellow Wattlebirds were plentiful and we saw many Crescent, New Holland, and Black-headed Honeyeaters. Peter Murrell Reserve (near Hobart) and Fern Glade (near Mt Wellington) are worth walking through for birds.

Aside from our birding exploits I recommend the walk around Dove Lake, Liffey Falls (near Deloraine), Mt Field National Park (Nelson Falls), Franklin River nature trail, Rocky Cape National Park, quirky Sheffield with its murals, the Mole Creek Pub (Tassie Tiger theme including skins), Bay of Fires, Freycinet NP, and the Tarkine in the north-west (ancient rainforest, deserted beaches).

Story and Photographs

Chris Stewart

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WEEK MAKES

On Sunday the 18th January, I was returning from a weekend in Charters Towers, so of course called in at Woodstock to check on the birds.

There had been some grass rain, so it was quite green, but no water lying around and Toonpan Lagoon was quite dry when we reached it. Scarcely saw a bird anywhere and the silence was almost deafening. Nothing to excite.

The following Friday, I drove my sister and brother-in-law down to Cungulla for a picnic lunch as they hadn't been there for some years and after the three wet days they'd suffered since arriving from Mossman on the Tuesday, we thought we should get out and about. The tide was in so I didn't really see any interesting birds and was happy to move on. We continued south to the Woodstock turn-off and headed that way. What a delight. Water lay in all the drains, little dams were full, birds flew about and Ibis fed happily in most paddocks along with the contented cows, which were rapidly filling their hungry bellies. Of course, I went straight to the Community Park, near the Gymkhana grounds, hoping to see something of interest. I was greeted with a flock of about thirty Double-bars which flew from tree to tree as we moved slowly under them. I focused my binoculars on them when they sat still long enough, and was pleased to see some Zebras amongst them. Good! Didn't have Zebs. At the far edge of the tree line, I noticed that Finches were dropping to the grass where it was shorter, so again, found my mark. Zebras – yes – AND Black-throats mixed in with them. Great stuff! I passed the binoculars around so the rellies could see these little beauties, then felt obliged to phone Beth to skite about my good luck. She wasn't home so left an excited message (we hadn't seen any Black-throats in 2014), but that was enough to let her know we'd have to go out there again the next day.



Double-bar Finch

Ray Sutton

So on Saturday, I picked Beth and a friend of hers up and off we went. By this time there was water in the Toonpan Lagoon, too, so it was alive with Magpie Geese and a couple of Egrets and Spoonbills. We poked about, checking the usual spots for Budgerigars, Diamond Doves and anything else exotic, but only found a really beautiful Great Bowerbird bower, opposite the goat paddock. It is a particularly good one, well hidden under the tamarind trees. Finally to the Park where it was almost a repeat of

what I'd seen the day before. We sat under the shady trees having our morning tea while the Finches fed on, and an Olive-backed Oriole sat on a nest almost above our heads. Good viewing of both and birding at its best and easiest. Who cares how hot it is if you are rewarded with such delights. Called in at Oak Valley but drew a blank except for a couple of Channel-billed Cuckoos in a fig tree. After that we repaired to Beth's place for a late lunch and a cold drink, still feeling chuffed after a happy morning's birding.



Zebra Finch

Ray Sutton

Elna Kerswell

BIRTHDAY CREEK

Gloria, Rick, Barbara and I had a couple of days up at Paluma. Today, on the way back from Paluma Dam, we decided to have a quick look at the club's favourite lunch spot at Birthday Creek. Unfortunately, our entry was blocked by a large pine tree across the road. On closer examination it was evident that the tree did a little more than block the road. This was not the only tree causing problems. There were two trees across the road between Paluma and the turn off to the Dam and another couple causing part blockages on the road from there to the Dam.



Janet Robino

CALENDAR

February

- 15th - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet in the Dam car park for a 6.30am start. Leader Ian Boyd
 18th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra for a 6.30am start. Leader Malcolm Calvert.
 22nd - Sunday - Outing - Lucinda Shorebirds. Meet adjacent to the RAAF Base Duckworth St gate for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Leader Ivor Preston.

March

- 1st - Sunday - Town Common Survey - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a 6.30am start. Visitors welcome. Leaders Warren and Pat Charlton.
 8th - Sunday - Outing - The Burdekin With John Stewart. Meet at the Palmetum for a 6.30 departure. This an all day outing so bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling is encouraged.
 10th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme for the night will be Birds of Prey. A 7.00pm start at a venue TBA.
 14th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker: Birdlife Townsville Committee - 'Guidelines for Leading Groups on Outings and Participants Responsibilities'.TBA.
 15th - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet in the Dam car park for a 6.30am start. Leader Ian Boyd
 18th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra for a 6.30am start. Leader Malcolm Calvert.
 28th - Saturday - Campout Broadwater State Forest. This will be weekend camp with day visitors attending on the Sunday on the monthly outing. More details closer to the date. Leader TBA.
 29th - Sunday - Outing - Broadwater State Forest. See previous entry. Meet adjacent to the RAAF Base Duckworth St gate for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Leader TBA.

April

- 3rd to 6th Friday to Monday - Easter Campout at Bladensburg (Winton). Details later Leader John Lowry.
 5th - Sunday - Town Common Survey - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a 6.30am start. 7th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme for the night will be Rainforest Birds. A 7.00pm start at a venue TBA.
 11th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker Deborah Carter (Wildlife Care) 'Flight4Flight - Caring for Raptors'.

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino
 Vice-President:
 Secretary: Warren Charlton
 Treasurer: Nina Doyle
 Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton
 Conservation Officer: Garrie Douglas
 Education Officer: Norm Rains
 Safety Officer: Janet Cross
 Committee Members: Wal Threlfall

Cover Photo Ray Sutton

Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton amsgreat@gmail.com Please send articles for the next Drongo by 31st March.



Willie Wagtail and nest B.Crowther