

The Drongo

Number 133 June 2014



Pentland

Kaikoura

Paluma

Cover Photo

Janet Robino



FROM THE PRESIDENT

I made the trip 'down south' at the end of May to attend the Annual Branch Network meeting and the BirdLife Australia AGM. The Branch Network meeting was very well organized and a lot of issues were addressed. The main focus was review of the Five Year Operational Plan – where we are now and what we need to do to ensure BirdLife Australia continues to be a strong voice for birds and birders. Membership is now 10700 with ongoing efforts to at least triple that number over the next few years.

A discussion was held on monitoring surveys and Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Main points were ease of recording survey results and coordination of monitoring efforts. It seems that most branches agree that there is a need for a dedicated Coordinator of the Bird Atlas and a link created between programs such as eBird and the Atlas.

It was good to see the educational material being developed which should be available to branches in the near future. The Backyard Bird group has got some really good stuff planned which I'm sure we will all be able to make good use of.

After the AGM the Melbourne Branch had organized a trip to Werribee Treatment Plant. They did a great job with the transport planned down to the least little detail so that all the visitors made it to the airport in plenty of time for a coffee before our flights. As always, Werribee put on a great show even though the Orange-bellied Parrots decided not to put in an appearance (they had been there a couple of days before).

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

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RESCUE OF THE WHITE-EARED HONEYEATER

Easter 18th–21st April 2014, Chris and I were spending some time late afternoon birding at Bungaree Creek Dam area in the White Mountains NP -that's about 35kms west of Pentland.

We had just been watching and photographing some first of year ticks such as White-eared Honeyeaters feeding on flowering Grevillia Decora, Buff-rumped Thornbills working their way through the sparse and still noticeably burnt vegetation on the edge of the riparian greenery, an eclipse male Variegated Fairy-wren leading his one female through the shrubbery and yet another Buff-rumped Thornbill, which flew in and perched high on an open twig for a couple of quick shots. We also had great views of Weebills, White-throated Gerygones and Dusky Woodswallows.



White-throated Gerygone Len Ezzy

Chris headed back to the car while I stayed to photograph three Peaceful Doves. On my eventual return, I saw Chris running over to the water's edge, clapping her hands and making all sorts of ruckus. Chris yelled to me to quickly find a long stick to fish out a bird which was flapping frantically in the water. It looked like it was entangled in fishing line and appeared to be tiring and sinking quickly. It looked like a White-eared Honeyeater, about five metres off-shore in deep water. I didn't fancy going for a swim so I had a quick look around for a long a stick or something similar. I found a tall, burnt dead sapling, which I knocked over and dragged to the shore. I swung it out over the water and floated it beside the bird, attempting to give it a lifeline-perch, which it eventually clambered on to. I then carefully swung the sapling over to shore so that the bird wouldn't fall back into the water. It was clearly a totally

exhausted and drenched White-eared Honeyeater. I gently took hold of it and, with a dry towel, tried to bring its feathers back to shape. Its claws were like needles as it fastened on to my finger. Fishing line wasn't what had ensnared this bird; rather, it was very strong Orb-web Spider web that had completely disabled it. After having done as much as I could there, by removing the web and towel-drying this bird, I placed it on a safe perch in full afternoon sunlight. We waited and watched as it sat there warming-up with the occasional shake to get its feathers back into form. About half an hour later it flitted up the tree to reach a safer height in the sunny crown, where it continued to preen and dry itself. Yaaay!



White-eared Honeyeater Len Ezzy

It feels good to know that we've given another chance of life to one of our most remote and favourite honeyeaters of the Townsville region. Everyone's happy.... especially one little White-eared Honeyeater.

Len and Chris Ezzy

LOST AND FOUND

The Queen's birthday long weekend and it's a cold windy overcast day around noon.

Just off the vehicle track, in a stand of flowering Grevilleas, is a lot of bird call and movement. The amount of movement is enticing so I decide to take a short stroll to see what is about. I head off into the wind for the first group of flowering Grevillea. Browns and White-throated Honeyeaters and as expected female Rufous Whistlers. There's a lot more movement further in. A quick look over my shoulder to check of my location in respect to the car. Good I can still see it directly behind me so deeper in I go. A large group of White-winged Trillers drop down to

check me out. I take a couple of photos although the light is very poor. Not what I'm after though they do keep me entertained for a few minutes. I then notice a lot of movement and noise coming from a stand of green flowering Melaleucas, just a little further in and a little off to my left. Another glance back towards the car. If I go in further I will not be able to see it so I pick another land mark. A large dead tree there with a fairly distinctive structure looks good so I decide to use that as my reference point and move off. Can I see the tree from this grove? Yes so all is good.



Brown Honeyeater

Unfortunately there are only more Browns, oh and a couple of Singing Honeyeaters in these Melaleucas. Both I have already seen. While standing around waiting for some action to start I spot some Woodswallows on a dead tree some distance in front of me. Can't see them very well in this light and at this distance and so I move a little further in. Damn just Black-faced. Once again a large group of flowering Melaleucas, this time to my right, attracts my attention. I go and stand near them for a while however nothing exotic turns up, just more Browns. By this time the wind is starting to cut through the front of my shirt and it's nearing time for something to eat. Time to head back to the car.

I walk for a little while in the direction in which I believe the car is located however after a short time I start to have doubts. The distance I have been walking seems much too far and I don't believe I could have walked that far into the bush. The doubt starts to strengthen even though I haven't travelled very far. I walk a little further and then without any sign of the car or track I decide to pause. I look for that dead tree I identified earlier as it will verify my location. I identify a dead tree that looks similar to the one I identified earlier however it is not in the direction it should be and doesn't precisely match the image in my head. Also there are other similar trees within my arc of vision further confusing me. By this

stage I am starting to believe I am lost. It's marvellous how the brain shuts down sometimes when it's under stress. I decide to climb a tree, as it may afford me a better view of my surroundings. I reach the top and feel like Bilbo Baggins when he climbed the tree in Mirkwood. It all looks the same as far as the eye can see and no sign of the D-Max or the track. I return to the ground and contemplate my next move. Do I trust myself and continue in the direction I believe the car to be or consider some other option. The first rule when lost is to remain where you are and being a stickler for rules I decide, at this time, to do just that.

I know I have phone coverage as I am on a ridge and was only speaking, via phone, with Bronwyn the missus before setting out. I still have coverage so I decide to try to contact someone from the club. I may be lucky and they'll be in a location that also has coverage. If so, and they are so inclined, they could simply pop round and rescue me. I dial the leader's number and low and behold I get through first time. Luck is with me. I explain my predicament and they advise they will be on their way immediately. Feeling relieved I find a comfortable spot to sit and review my predicament.



Female Rufous Whistler

Thinking through my situation, I wonder what else could I do to rescue myself if I didn't have help on the way or phone coverage. As previously stated the first rule is to stay put but surely there are some things I could do to improve my chance of getting out of the situation. I think back to when I started walking and consider the direction of the wind. It's not likely to have changed in the relatively short time I have been in the bush so to continue with the wind directly behind me should have me heading in pretty much the right direction. However that is not fool proof so I would need a method of marking my trail so I could return to where I am now. The ground here is rather open and sandy so dragging a stick through the sand would provide a fairly distinctive trail for me to follow back if I didn't find the track in a

reasonable time. If needed I could then radiate out in other directions, marking my trail as I go, always able to return to this spot if I have no luck. I was confident that the car couldn't be too far away just not its direction.

By the time I had thought of these things and my brain began functioning at a reasonable rate I heard a car horn. I started walking in the direction of the noise and phoned the leader to advise that I could hear the horn and that I was on my way. By the time I hung up I could see a white 4WD and some crazy character standing on its roof. Relief washes over me.

I had been heading in the right direction and had paused less than 50 metres from the track, however I did not know that. I just couldn't believe that I had walked in as far as I did although in reality it wasn't very far. My rescuers and I had a good chuckle and discussion about the whole event. I won't mention the ribbing. I was happy that I did not have to spend several more hours waiting for the SES to get organised and come and find me. Shouting my rescuers a beer or two was the least I could do.

Is it easy to get disorientated in the bush? It's dead easy. Trust me I know.

Anon

PENTLAND

Another successful camp-out has been and gone, with this event being based in Pentland over the long weekend of June 7-9th.

Most participants arrived on Friday and stayed at the Pentland caravan park, which was clean and tidy with a laid back and friendly staff to set the tone for a pleasant stay. For a few lucky ones, a spotted bowerbird was seen scratching around the park that first day, which had me keen to get out into the field ASAP.



With the Pentland dam bone dry, we had to contend with the usual dry woodland species until we could hit the White Mountains NP. on Saturday morning. A 7.00am departure and we were soon at our first stop at Bungaree Creek with the White eared Honeyeaters feeding on the flowering melaleucas being

the highlight. Despite the permanent waterhole and the flowering trees the birds were not plentiful.



Buff-rumped Thornbill

On to the gravel pits, opposite the turnoff to the WMNP, and Variegated Fairy-wrens, Singing Honeyeaters and Brown Honeyeaters predominated. We had morning tea two hundred metres down the track towards the railway line, and were soon joined by Buff-rumped and a couple of Yellow Thornbills accompanied as usual by a pair of Grey Fantails. As with our previous stops, the birds were conspicuous by their small numbers and lack of diversity.

We then entered the WMNP proper and after several brief stops, soon realised the birding was going to be tough going with few sightings despite some promising stands of flowering trees. One species seemed to predominate each area. Brown Honeyeaters in one, Friarbirds the next.

We speculated that a large fire which has badly affected the park, combined with the drought has adversely impacted the bird numbers. It was pointed out to me that the introduced buffel grass, used for cattle feed, has taken over many areas, including national parks, and when a fire occurs the heat produced is up to twice that of a native grass fire, resulting in the trees being destroyed and the seeds in the ground being cooked so that regeneration is slow and weeds proliferate. Seems this would rival the folly of introducing the cane toad.

A mini drama arose when one of our group, staying at Canns Camp Creek camping ground, managed to get a mobile phone call out to say he was lost. After a frenetic dash to locate his car and sound the horn, he was soon found and birding resumed with the realisation of the possible perils and how easily it is to get disorientated in heavily timbered areas, particularly on heavily overcast days.

As the birding was quiet, the group made its way back to Pentland with several short stops on the way, with the resultant usual mono-culture sightings. A few who detoured to the Pentland dam on the way back were rewarded with a sighting of a White-browed and Little Woodswallow along with some

Double-barred Finches, a lone Zebra Finch and some White-throated honeyeaters.



White-browed Woodswallow

The Sunday was pretty much a repeat of the first, with a foray further along the Poison Valley track to Shovel dam. A beautiful area which must be spectacular when filled with water. Some Yellow-throated Miners were seen here. Again the birding was slow, offset by the interesting and scenic terrain.

A quick trip down to the dam before departing on Monday back to Townsville and I was lucky to sight a pair of White-browed Woodswallows, which was a first for me and which capped off a very enjoyable couple of days with very pleasant company.

Certainly an area to revisit after a good season.

Story and photographs

Roger Mortlock

Georgetown Surprise

On Thursday before Easter Janet C and I set off early for Georgetown. Along the way we checked every paddock for Emus but not a one but we did see 6 Wedge Tailed Eagles.

It was a beautiful sunny day with stops for nourishment, tea and birding. As we neared Georgetown in the afternoon Janet saw a 'drive on' car wash facility for washing off weeds & seeds. What a good idea. On I drove and the water started immediately spraying under the car, along the sides and we had an unexpected shower and inside windscreen wash!! We had both forgotten to wind the windows up! Ah well, it was a hot afternoon so we were soon dry and the inside windscreen was dotted with artesian water.

The pool at the caravan park was welcome and Janet and I dusted off in there after each day birding. The day trips into the cattle properties, checking out the dams, creeks and paddocks were wonderful. Birds seemed to be everywhere, calling us all to run hither and thither in case we missed something. Our escort on Flat Rock Station took us to all the birding spots, gave us a cuppa and scones and said to come back in September when the Emus with their chicks come close to the household and eat blossoms off nearby trees. Some of the highlights for me were Freckled Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Common Bronzewing, Owlet Nightjar, Red-browed Pardalote, Pictorella Mannikins and Plum Headed Finches (the last 2 seen at the racecourse) and the Masked Finch.

The bird call at the end of the day was accompanied by the Apostlebirds gossiping in the trees and visiting all their neighbours, apart from the birdos having a refreshing drink or two and the usual irreverence!

A couple of us opted for accommodation in the hermetically sealed ice chests; white boxes which were used at the local gold mine site. All mod cons, toilet & shower, jug and frig; nothing like a cuppa in the early morn to fire me up before setting off for more birding delights.



Red-browed Pardalote

Roger Mortlock

There were three of us driving home on the Monday and I chose the bulldust road to Einasleigh upon which many locals were returning home from Einasleigh after the weekend. The locals drove at breakneck speed, pulling large horse trailers and putting up huge clouds of dust; this city slicker drove at a moderate pace and avoided a red truck drifting towards us, exciting trip but impossible to stop for birds. All of us looked out for Emus but not a one was spotted so there is no option but to return to Georgetown for another weekend in September. It was a memorable and very enjoyable Easter.

Cec Messer

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

Once again, our resident Carlyle Gardens Dotterels have succeeded in breeding – unfortunately, only one chick this time, but what a delightful ball of fluff it was a week ago.

They grow amazingly quickly and as I watch it each day, the growth is evident. One day a ball of fluff then 4 days later a recognizable Dotterel – no black front, of course.



Black-fronted Dotterel

However, what I'm most amazed about is the fact that even one chick has been hatched successfully, when about a month ago, the Council mowing tractor came roaring in doing his thing and surely would have wiped out any eggs if they were along the banks. So where does she lay her eggs? I've looked and looked each year, but never seen them.

But alas! About a week after the mower had finished, a huge excavator commenced digging out the beds of reeds where our Carlyle street drains enter the large Council drain. He dug deeply, leaving huge pits for the mosquitoes to breed in (well done, Council!), leaving the reeds in great bundles along the bank. Next – a truck and front-end loader appeared to load the mud and reeds, which were all soon gone to some land-fill. During these two weeks, I kept seeing one Dotterel each day and wondered where "she" was, trying to hatch her eggs.

You can imagine my delight, after all that, to approach the bridge one morning to hear a great chirping and peeping from the Dotterels, and saw five Masked Lapwings flying away, protesting loudly. True! I think the Dotterels had attacked. There in the drain were my two friends plus the ball of fluff, which quickly hid under mother's body and stood still. Dad went on feeding. Ain't Nature grand.

Elna Kerswell



WHERE ARE THE GALAHS?

We did see some Galahs at Pentland on the June long weekend but certainly not as many as usual. From Pentland, Warren and I travelled back to Charters Towers and then headed south to Toowoomba and then on to Canberra where we are at present. Just north of Clermont on the Gregory Development Road, we came across a large flock of Galahs feeding happily on a crop of grain sorghum and just across the road, a large flock of between 50 and 60 Brolgas were hanging out together near a dam. The Galahs are noticeably plentiful in the southern states where water and feed are available.

Although we haven't had the opportunity to do any concentrated bird watching as yet, we did add to our yearly tally with White-winged Choughs along the Gore Highway – east of Goondiwindi.

Pat Charlton

KAIKOURA

With a 4.00 am wakeup call, I was on the road from Christchurch to Kaikoura, where I had a 9.00am Pelagic Albatross Tour booked.

The road north is in excellent condition, but I was surprised to find a single lane bridge on this main highway, albeit it had passing nooks in the middle! We made a quick stop at Cheviot for a cuppa, and then on to Kaikoura. This part of the road follows parts of the very scenic coast, and the speed limit of 80kph is very realistic.



Salvin's Albatross

The drizzly rain didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the twelve of us on the tour, as we were bussed from Albatross Encounters office to the harbour jetty. Our tour vessel was the *Delphinidae*, a 14 m boat built at the Bluff, by Stabi-Craft Marine in February 2003, (for those interested, powered by a 680HP Volvo diesel, pushing it along at a cruise of 22 kts)

The boat was a great platform for an absolutely marvellous tour. Gary and Jan, the crew and guides, were very knowledgeable and were only too happy to repeat the identity of the many birds that were around the boat.



Northern Giant Petrel and Wandering Albatross

All up there were fourteen species sighted, including six species of Albatross, (six of the thirteen species of Albatross, sighted throughout the year in the Kaikoura area).

The three hour tour finished with a cruise along the harbour coastline, and dusky dolphins and NZ fur seals were in abundance.

The bird list: Royal Albatross Nth; Royal Albatross Sth; Wandering Albatross; Black-browed Albatross; NZ White-capped Albatross; Salvin's Albatross; Giant-Northern Petrel; Westland Petrel; Cape Petrel; Hutton's Shearwater; Pied Shag; White-fronted Tern; Black-backed Gull; Red-billed Gull.

A tour to recommend to anyone!

Story and Photographs

Graeme Cooksley

BIRDING AS AN ADD-ON!

Recently we went on a non-birding holiday out west with non-birding friends with no birding on the agenda.

And without even trying, we managed to see many of the special northern birds. Of course, we did have our binoculars close to hand – just in case – and our friends were aware of our compulsion to see birds and made some allowances.

No sooner had we got to the caravan park in Mt. Isa, ensconced in our chairs looking out over the Barkly Highway than two cheeky Cloncurry Parrots flew into the tree in front of us followed by Varied Lorikeets and of course the ubiquitous Brown Honeyeaters. Non-birding friends even picked up the binoculars and oohed and aahed at the colour of the Red-Wing

Parrots in flight and the stunning colouring of the Ringnecks.

Next stop, Adels Grove. We camped up the top and had it all to ourselves, which is probably why so many birds also liked that spot. Trying to relax one afternoon, we became aware of the chatter of a horde of Grey-crowned Babblers seemingly playing on the ground near our tent and in the low foliage and around the rocks. I was able to stand within a few metres of them for a long period and watch them. Then a group of cute Double-bars arrived and played in the dirt. We became aware of a distinctly different sound coming from the tree above us and couldn't resist searching for it. A flash of gold alerted John to what it could be and sure enough, the magnificent Golden-backed Honeyeater revealed itself. His call was insistent and yet he wasn't easy to find. His gold eye was striking. Each afternoon he arrived to check us out but did not stay long.

You couldn't miss the Buff-sided Robins everywhere and even our friends were pointing them out, especially around the swimming hole.

Every night we could hear Barking Owls. The Great Bowerbirds were plentiful. They would come close to us, searching for treasures, and sometimes sat on our tables and camping gear. There were no visible bowers close to us but we did see some in other parts of the grounds. Our friends thought their antics amusing, especially when they did their sideways prancing.



Grey-crowned Babbler

Chris Stewart

On one of our walks in Lawn Hill National Park we came across the Long-tailed Finch on the track. I had remembered him from last time and desperately wanted to see him. I find him quite stunning, especially his red beak and crisp colours. He stayed around for a while, flying amongst the small trees. Another birder who came along was pretty excited to see him.

The Purple-crowned Fairy-wrens didn't disappoint. A male and his harem flitted around the pandanus next to the canoe hire place. The canoeists coming and going didn't seem to bother them. The male was very popular with all the females who were fussing and flirting around him. I didn't get to photograph them this trip but they were a joy to watch.

While canoeing down the Gorge we heard the distinctive call of the Sandstone Shrike -thrush amplified by the cliffs and spotted one landing on the rock face. Diamond Doves were plentiful, at the campsite and at Lawn Hill.

We often saw flocks of Budgies while travelling (non-birder was surprised that they are only green and yellow). While driving the Burke and Wills to Cloncurry section we had a close-up sighting of a Grey Falcon in flight and a possible sighting of another.

So all in all, our western sight-seeing trip ended up being quite a successful birding trip after all.

Chris Stewart

PALUMA AGAIN

Having planned to have a weekend in Paluma at the end of March when BirdLife Townsville had scheduled a day trip up there, it seemed at first that it was going to be a nasty, wet one. However, on the Saturday, I went along with Wendy and Roger Kaus to test the weather for the Sunday. We drove through thick cloud for the last four kilometres of the road up and by the time we actually reached the Village it had become rain. Didn't look too good for spotting birds. Wendy and I braved a walk in mid-afternoon, peering hopefully through light cloud as we wandered through the Village. Not much moving and nothing singing really. Finally, we found a few different Honey-eaters in a flowering Penda at the end of Smith Crescent, near the Community Hall, so we worked that tree over very thoroughly. Yes, there were Bridled, White-cheeked, Dusky and Macleay's Honeyeaters, Spinebills, Rainbow Lorikeets and – a Scarlet Honeyeater, just starting to colour down his back. Hurrah! That encouraged us to walk around the Ivy Cottage Track, but only Brown Gerygones had the grace to appear.



Eastern Spinebill

Ray Sutton

That night the short drive to and from the Restaurant was one of luck in being able to discern the guide posts through the very thick cloud that blanketed everything. The meal was well-cooked, but they have no licence for the bar, so it was BYO. We went without. Reminder here – you must phone them and book before 4pm on the Saturday if you wish to eat there that night. They do lunches most days, though.

Well, Sunday morning arrived without the thick cloud, and so did the birds. They soon found our fruit and goodies on the verandah and hung around until the Birders arrived about 9 a.m. A pair of Tooth-billed Bowerbirds added pleasure to the occasion by giving everyone close views, as they moved around at the bottom of the garden.



Grey-headed Robin Annette Sutton

So far so good and a slow walk around the forest nearby and the main street provided them with more species. Again, the Penda proved popular for both birds and birders. Off to Puzzle Creek, where the only excitement was provided by a good sighting of a Scarlet Honeyeater, but others were scarce and likewise in The Grandis. Where were they all? The Eastern Yellow Robin? The elusive Golden Whistler, singing loudly but not showing himself until we'd searched diligently for some time? The Fantail and White-throated Treecreeper were also hiding, until at last, while we were in our lunch circle, both were spotted. The last one to show itself was a Yellow-faced Honeyeater. Hard work, but rewarding in the end. After we'd eaten our fill, we journeyed back to the Village and I decided it was rest time, so headed for my bed, while the others drove back to Townsville. Beth had arrived with the birders in the morning, so she and I stayed in Paluma, while Wendy and Roger headed home for work on Monday.

Monday was quite different. The early morning chorus was delightful – Chowchillas and others sounding off in full blast, birds at the feeder and in the garden – and a sunny day. We drove out to The Grandis again, taking Roy McKay with us and were rewarded by seeing all our usual favourites almost immediately. There they were in the parking area waiting for us. Again, the chorus that greeted us upon arrival was as it should have been, though we decided that it was mostly made by the noisy Bridled Honeyeaters and a couple of Fantails, feeding busily nearby. Back at the house, we also saw the Grey-headed Robin which had been absent all weekend. As always, the weekend in Paluma gave us that satisfied feeling of having been part of Nature in its glory. May our bush heritage remain for future generations to enjoy and not be destroyed by human greed and development.

Elna Kerswell

BYE-BYE BIRDIE

Continued

Early this year we released a Plumed Whistling-Duck and two Pacific Black Ducks. When we took them on, the Whistling-Duck, although still a youngster, was a few weeks older than the others which were only day-olds. After staging through various accommodations over several weeks, they all ended up together, sharing an 11 x 2 x 2m flight pen where they did a lot of wing stretching and flapping exercises as well as low altitude short trips involving plenty of takeoff and landing practice. By this time these three birds had bonded to a degree and we decided to release them together.



Pacific Black Duck

Ray Sutton

For some weeks before their release, large numbers of Plumed Whistling-Ducks (up to 400 on occasions) would visit the poultry pens each morning and afternoon in the hope of finding some spilt grain. The young Whistler would get excited at these visits and, as all three birds were fully fledged and ready for the big wide world, we decided it was time to see them off. On the afternoon of release day we simply opened the door of the flight cage to set them free. After several minutes giving us quizzing looks, they eventually waddled out of the pen, checked out the surrounding area and promptly returned to the security of their cage. At dusk we locked their gate because marauding dogs can be a problem.

This procedure went on for several days until one evening they decided to stay out at lock-up time and refused to be herded back to their pen. Next morning they were waiting outside their gate and rushed inside their pen when the gate was opened, glad to be home. This routine went on for several more days until one afternoon the Whistler decided to join up with the wild visiting birds. He was shocked when they ignored him initially and then eventually drove him off. Happily, he persevered with his membership application and after a couple of weeks he became a fully fledged member of the gang. For some time after, when the flock visited, he would separate from the mob and say hello but the mob has moved on now and I guess we won't see them again until after the wet is well and truly over.

The Black Ducks are another story. One afternoon one bird crouched down and then took off, heading straight toward Mount Elliot. He soon realized that he couldn't just keep going straight so he gingerly made some adjustments and eventually managed to circle and return home. My heart was in my mouth as I watched him come in to land. His strategy was simply to glide low until he hit the ground, without using his wings as air brakes. His strategy worked except that his excessive air speed resulted in a number of spectacular and comical tumbles on impact with mother earth. He survived the experience, albeit with hurt pride. His mate watched these proceedings with interest, returned herself to the pen and crouched in the corner in what appeared to be deep despair.

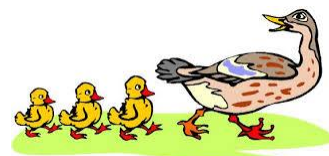
Next afternoon, on opening the gate, the first duck took off again, executed a much more professional circle and a far safer and well executed landing. Perhaps he had thought about things overnight. After a couple of crouching false starts, Duck two (a smaller bird) then took off with much the same result as Duck one's maiden flight, same undignified landing. After that the two birds flew frequently, sometimes individually and sometimes together, executing an aerial ballet at high speed that was quite entrancing to watch.

After a week or so both birds failed to return at lock-up time. They were missing for several days until one morning, as I was feeding the chooks, one of the birds landed close by and ate some cracked corn before taking off again. A few days later there were two black ducks, one much larger and wilder than either of the two we had raised. He and his girlfriend (she always quacks as she takes off) visit every few days and today, at the time of writing, all three birds were here at the one time. The larger bird has a 15 metre rule (no closer than 15 metres to a human), while the others are happy to waddle around our feet.

We now have a juvenile Magpie Goose and two more Plumed Whistling-Ducks to finish off. All three birds were raised together in the city, and besides being sooks, they show no outward signs that city life has damaged them in any way. They are now in the flight cage and doing well and will be released in a week's time. It should be interesting as a family of wild Magpie Geese (4) have been showing great interest in the young one of their species over the last few days.

Releasing birds after raising them or caring for them after illness or injury, has its own special rewards. While most birds we care for and release are quite common species, we think it worthwhile because these birds enrich our lives both during their period of care and when we see them eventually become wild and free again as they are meant to be.

Norm Rains



NEWS FROM THE UK

After 4 months of immense effort we have almost completed the northern migration from our ten years in Australia to the colder and crowded southern coast of the UK. Our new home close to Southampton will be completed by the end of June and until then we are staying in a flat on the seafront at Portsmouth. This has given us the opportunity to kick start our UK birding activities. Our last real birding survey was at Werribee poo farm in February so we had to dust down the binoculars and camera before starting. Our first trip was to Farlington Marsh, a coastal nature reserve managed by the local wildlife trust.



Sedge Warbler

George Baker

We did little birding when we previously lived in the UK so there is much to learn. There are many birds that migrate from Africa to breed in the UK in the spring. However at present many are just 'little brown jobs' to us. The many different bird songs are also new to us and of course make identification so much harder. Still it is good to learn these new birds but we still compare each new sighting to an Australian bird. Shorebirds, gulls and terns are a particular challenge at present as they are all in breeding plumage. However the Common Tern is so much better looking in breeding plumage.

We have joined up with a couple of local birding groups, the Hampshire Ornithological Society and the Hampshire Wildlife Trust. Both organisations appear to be very active and have a good events calendar so hopefully we can learn much from the local members as we did in Townsville.

George and Teresa Baker



WHERE IS THAT BARKING?

The lovely little Barking Owls nest in the next street to mine (Mundingburra) each year so their barking and growling is familiar to me.

The adults appear around August and call to each other over many nights; she has a higher pitched woof. There have been three chicks hatched each year until Yasi when their nesting tree was damaged and removed.

The Owls are roosting around my suburb at present so I have been on the hunt each night when I hear the first 'woof woof'. I grab the binos and stealthily creep along the street in the direction of the barking. The big problem is not alerting the local other woofers; the resident dogs. Also the neighbours are a bit surprised to see me creeping down the street late in the night--I just wave my binoculars and point to the trees.

This week has been successful after many nights of following the woofing sounds up and down the street and not finding one Owl. Sometimes I take my big torch but only shine in trees where I won't frighten the neighbours or the dogs!! After many unsuccessful nights of Owling I was rewarded on Thursday night when the moon was crescent and on the rise.



Barking Owl

Ian Boyd

The usual creeping along the footpath towards the power pole and its light was interrupted by passing only one puzzled neighbour and not one dog barking (the stars must have been in alignment!!). There on the light strut, barking loudly, was a Barking Owl looking down at me. I stood still for about five minutes, enjoying the perfect view of the Mundingburra Magician; the Owl that appears like magic. Another woof in the distance and the Owl quickly turned its head, then gracefully and quietly flew off down the street. As Jock would have said, "It was an 'owling success!'"

Cecily Messer

BIRDING ALONG THE WAY

On February 23 I left Townsville to drive to Sydney, visit relatives and friends and some chosen birding locations along the way. I enjoyed seeing the countryside and variations in ecology as I travelled from place to place. Each section had its own richness and beauty whether a rich tropical green, a dusty dry or just struggling to survive.

My first stopover was Bowen where I birded the mouth of the Don River at low tide and then went looking for Sooty Oystercatchers on the rocky beaches. There they were! Several pairs. So easy to find when you look in the right place! It was low tide and a pair of Wandering Tattlers was resting on some rocks in the sun. In another shallow lagoon, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers fed hungrily, their plumage indicating an imminent departure for breeding grounds.



Sooty Oystercatcher

Ian Boyd

Setting out from Proserpine next morning, I noticed a very upright Black Bittern on the bank of a small lagoon but it had disappeared by the time I'd stopped the car and walked back to look. McEwan's Beach Road, just south of Mackay, was a delight in that the wetland section towards the beach end was rich with waders and wetland birds. I was able to use my scope to see through the netted fence and identify Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. At the village a single Rajah Shelduck seemed quite at home with the Plumed Whistling-Ducks, almost like a local resident. Disappointingly, the beach itself was heavily eroded and even the Masked Lapwings were sheltering from the wind. Pied Oystercatchers were abundant, making the most of the low tide.

Thinking more of birds than petrol, I began the long stretch to Rocky too late in the day. I made several detours looking for an evening meal. At St. Lawrence I was able to get a drink at the local pub and heard that because a Chat is often seen in the nearby samphire, a bird area and trail has been established and visitors can use the free camping/caravan area on the outskirts of town. There was talk of a Bird Weekend. It was too late for me to look for the chat so I ventured on to Marlborough where I did get a meal but no petrol. As it was getting late, I decided

that if I did run out of petrol it would be easier to negotiate getting petrol in the morning, so pulled over into one of the many bays on this stretch and tried to sleep as trucks rumbled by. I knew that there was a place with toilets about 35 kms out of Rocky and when I drove on there in the morning I found Yaamba abuzz. The storekeeper complained about the mosquitos because the river was so close. A river? The Fitzroy? Close by? Early morning? What more could a birder ask for? So I turned on to the dirt road. Besides the Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, two Squatter Pigeons were strolling into town; there was a wetland on the right side of the road, and a cuckoo calling down at the river.

Rockhampton had had abundant rain so The Woolwash, other wetlands and farms in the area were teeming with birds. Bajool was a stark contrast. I walked along the road adjacent to the Cheetham salt works looking for the Yellow Chat which is sometimes reported from there but was unlucky. What I did find was Straw-necked and Australian Ibis, Royal Spoonbills and waders feeding in the samphire and shallow pools. In one pond next to the Salt Works at least one hundred Red-capped Plovers fed hungrily as the tide withdrew. In other areas small groups fed in little bays and in one particular one the lone Common Sandpiper was being ousted continually. After my visit the Chat was seen so I have learned that I need very specific information about where to search and if possible, the company of a local birder.

High tide meant I didn't see many waders at the Yeppoon Causeway but I spent the day with a novice birder whose car was more capable of handling the road through the Yeppoon Wetlands than mine. Last time I visited these extensive wetlands birds were very easy to see but now the trees have grown and birding is generally restricted to the roadway. We did manage to see the Varied Honeyeater. We took advantage of the farm (now owned by the Resort) gate being open for horse riders and went in to see Plumed Whistling-Ducks, Purple Swampheens, Pied Stilts, Royal Spoonbills and two resident Brolgas who mingled with the riders.



Varied Honeyeater

Ian Boyd

Hervey Bay was my point of departure for Lady Elliot Island. What a treat! Birds flew up off the air strip as our small plane landed. Our pilot was quite used to this scenario. Seabirds everywhere. Bridled Turns

sat on low rails around the resort as I made my way from check-in to my more than adequate canvas tent (with wooden floor, power, 4 bunk beds, crisp linen, lighting, a fan, a cupboard, mirror and fly screened windows that could be zippered up at night so that the light didn't affect the birds). Buff-banded Rails pecked over the sand like chickens and Ruddy Turnstones looked for what they could find.

I had been advised to opt for spending at least two nights on the island rather than do a day trip as I had planned. This was good advice for I would have missed about 200 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters fly in after dark, serenade each other all night long and fly out before daybreak. As there are very few burrows on the coral cay (previously mined), the Shearwaters roosted on the ground, some just behind and alongside my tent. Bird-wary visitors decry the noise they make but I saw this as a once in a lifetime experience. Ear plugs are provided in the bedside drawer.

The breeding season is from September to March so was nearing its end during my visit (5-7 March). Although the Roseate and Sooty Terns had gone, both Common and Black Noddies were still nesting. I was able to see chicks at various stages of development. One lot nest on the ground, again beside the runway, and the other in small pisonia trees, shrubs and casuarinas. Crested Terns raise their young in crèches, one of which was near the runway and another further along the beach. I found these terns much bigger than I expected and was delighted to see the details of their plumage.



Ruddy Turnstone

Annette Sutton

The Island is very small so it is possible to walk around it. Doing this I saw Pacific Golden Plovers and Bar-tailed Godwits in breeding plumage. Great and Lesser Frigatebirds hovered overhead most days. I had a rude surprise when walking past a section of the Island known as the Rookery. I was successfully swooped and shat upon by two Black-naped Terns as I walked past. They are fairly slender white terns which reminded me of the White Terns of Lord Howe but, unlike them, they are vicious defenders of their breeding site. I fluked a photo of one and later saw two sitting quietly on the beach so was able to identify them.

Gary, a Brisbane birder, advised me to sit in some shade near the Rookery and just watch what went on

for a morning. I did this as the tide came in. Both White and Grey Eastern Reef Egrets searched for food and a single Whimbrel fed along the waterline. Sooty Oyster Catchers had their spot on the rocky platform. Besides watching a Ruddy Turnstone turn over rocks to see what was there, I also watched two small Black Finned Sharks feed in the deepening water. Their small black and white fins always alerted me to where they were but the clarity of the water enabled me to see their every move as they purposefully pursued their prey.



White-winged Chough

Ray Sutton

Leaving Hervey Bay I made my way to Tiaro, (where despite the drought, a friend's property was home to Grey-crowned Babblers and White-Winged Chough), Caloundra and then to Bribie Island searching out Buckley's Hole to see Chestnut Teal and Australasian Shoveler. Low tide there gave me the opportunity to check out more waders at close quarters. It was hot by the time I found and explored another conservation area on the Island so, inspired by Marleen's presentation on North Lakes, I drove there and did a quick sortie. I found it was a large suburb so checked out the Lake near the main shopping centre, finding a Black Swan with several cygnets.

Brisbane has many good birding areas but I chose to spend a morning with Merryan Kershner who led us through the maze of freeways and port roads to see Broad-billed Sandpipers. A lifer for me! We then tried to find the Yellow Wagtail at Sandy Camp Wetlands but by this time it was midday and the bird couldn't be seen. I visited the wetlands again before leaving Brisbane, walked for hours, never found the spot again, but did manage to flush the Black Bittern that was being seen and photographed there regularly. Another lesson learned - take detailed notes of the surroundings and don't assume remembering where to go.

On to Toowoomba to visit a relative in hospital. I made a sunset detour into Lake Gallately at Gatton to find water being pumped into the lake to make it viable for the 60 Pink-eared Ducks, 5 Australian Shovelers, lone Marsh Sandpiper, numerous Wandering Whistling-Ducks and other waterbirds who made this their sanctuary. Driving out, I surprised an owl (possibly a Southern Boobook) on the footpath tearing into a Magpie Lark. To my delight, my cousin lived out of town on acreage so I was grateful for the Cockatiel I saw on the wires and

surprised by the twenty Little Lorikeets, all in pairs, preening each other in the tree near my car.

Eager to get to Sydney, I decided to drive straight down the New England Highway over two days and limit my birding to refreshment stops along the way. From Toowoomba through to Tenterfield the country was very dry but Tenterfield had had rain just in time for the camp drafting that weekend. By the time I reached Armidale the rain was torrential. Next morning I had breakfast in a local park observing a feeding party of Buff-rumped Thornbills and other small birds. My lunch stop at Tamworth looked unpromising but to my delight, two Crested Shrike-tit (that couldn't be ticked on my Quest list) appeared in the trees. I knew I wouldn't make home that evening so after ringing 000 to report a fire and negotiating cyclists who were riding the narrow, bumpy Cessnock road in the dark, I stayed with friends at Killarney Vale and drove into Sydney the next day. I had been on the road for a month, travelled over 3000 kms and seen many wonderful birds and new birding locations.

My thanks to Niel Bruce whose brain I picked about the many locations he has birded up and down the Bruce Highway and around Brisbane and to Rosemary Payet who taught me to identify several waders during my time in Townsville.

Joan Wharton

QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Chris Ezzy	319	15/11/2014
Len Ezzy	317	13/11/2014
Ian Leach	286	13/10/2014
Niel Bruce	285	12/10/2014
Cecily Messer	271	28/09/2014
Marleen Acton	267	24/09/2014
Pat Charlton	260	17/09/2014
Joan Wharton	256	13/09/2014
Warren Charlton	254	11/09/2014
Annette Sutton	253	10/09/2014
Ian Boyd	242	30/08/2014
Elna Kerswell	235	23/08/2014
Rosemary Payet	208	27/07/2014
Alf Acton	201	20/07/2014
Janet Robino	127	7/05/2014

Calendar

July 2014

5th - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am. Leaders - Gloria and Rick

8th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is The Town Common - Birds and Scenes. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

12th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker Miriam Supuma - Birds of Paradise (To be confirmed).

16th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 7.00am.

20th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 7.00am.

27th - Sunday Outing - Mingela and Beyond - (Alternative - The Palmetum). Meet at the Palmetum for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Leader Ian Boyd.

August 2014

2nd - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am. Leaders - Len and Chris Ezzy

5th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Bush Birds. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

9th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker John Lowry (To be confirmed).

Articles for the next Drongo and Quest numbers should be in by Monday August 4th 2014.

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