

The Drongo

Number 138 May 2015



Ray Sutton

Shorebirds Owls Crakes



FROM THE PRESIDENT

At the Annual General Meeting on 14 February, there were only subtle changes to the committee. Warren Charlton has stepped down as Secretary, but will still be available to help out with the role when Wal Threlfall is away.

NQ Dry Tropics are developing a Natural Resources Management Plan for the Burdekin Dry Tropics. On 24 March, Norm Rains and I attended a four hour NQ Dry Tropics workshop where we were able to have input into this plan. It was a good chance to make sure bird habitat is on the agenda as well as an opportunity to do some 'networking' with other volunteer groups and local agencies.

At the March meeting the committee presented the latest, and hopefully, final outings safety plan. We needed to develop the procedures and processes to meet the requirements of BirdLife Australia's Insurance Policy. Now that all the uncertainty has been laid to rest, we can all get on with having a good time out there looking for birds. There was a positive response from all those present. Over the last year there have been several instances where the leader of an upcoming outing has had trouble locating the pack and sign-on book. To overcome this, Janet Cross, Safety Officer will hold all the packs. When a pack is needed, the leader will only need to contact Janet C to access a pack. It is recommended by BirdLife Australia that everyone who comes to activities carries their own snake-bite kit (three crepe bandages) – wouldn't take up much room in a backpack and would weigh next to nothing. Just something to think about. If you have any queries about these procedures, or for that matter, any other queries, contact one of the committee members or send an email to the committee on contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au.

The Owl Nesting Boxes project is progressing very well. The Mens Shed has the shell of the boxes complete so once the finishing touches are done, they will be ready to install. There will be two placed at the Town Common, one at the Bush Gardens, one at Anderson Park and one at the Palmetum. Norm Rains is also self-funding and installing one on his property. The next stage of the project will be to monitor the boxes regularly. Hopefully the owls will settle in and start raising families again in these areas where the nesting trees were lost through fire or cyclone activity

The club took part in the Celebrate the Sea day at Robertson Park, Palleranda on Sunday 1 March. We had an information stand which was kept pretty busy the whole time. Philip, Lily and Julia Haig set up an area for kids to have a go at doing their own bird paintings. This was a great success with a lot of interest from kids and the not-so-young kids all getting stuck in to have a go.

On Sunday 22 March some lucky members gathered at Bushland Beach to farewell the shorebirds. I say lucky, because we had some fantastic views of shorebirds in their breeding colours. The tide was on the way in so the birds moved closer and closer to us. It was a pretty special experience.

Wal, Norm and Janet Cross attended Reef Guardian Schools network meetings in March. We will also have a presence at the meeting in Home Hill in April. The network is a great way of letting schools in our region know about our education programs and offer support to teachers to raise awareness of habitat protection for the birds.

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino
Secretary: Wal Threlfall
Treasurer: Nina Doyle
Conservation Officer: Garrie Douglas
Education Officer: Norm Rains
Safety Officer: Janet Cross
Committee : Warren Charlton

Newsletter Editor Annette Sutton amsgreat@gmail.com

BARKING OWLS

I heard from some friends that they had seen an owl in the vicinity of our house.

This got me excited as I don't often see them, so I asked our friends what the owl looked like and found that it was a Barking. Out walking the next day I saw one perched on a lamppost. A few days later we set off at dusk to see the owl again.



Barking Owl

Ian Boyd

I went owl-watching along with my mum and Lily on the night of the blood-moon and after we had a few hopeful looks at bats the owl flew right over our heads and disappeared somewhere in a tree. It managed to silently fly away and all we saw with our torch were bats and a possum. All this time there was a "wook-wook! wook-wook! grrrWOOK-wook!" coming from the owl's mate further down the clearing. After about three quarters of an hour of slipping through the foliage, unseen except for the occasional glimpse, the first owl flew low down and landed, still unseen, with a few throaty growls and then flew to join its mate. There was a loud fusillade of barks but they slowed to normal quite quickly. We decided to walk towards the noise and try to find them though I thought that it was hopeless.

However, after a short time, we walked out into the open from behind a bush and there, sitting in a small dead tree, were both owls. My torch was flat but I managed to get a last little bit of light out on the owls, and in that split second I decided something that I had been unable to ever since I came to love birds as I do: my favourite bird. Unfortunately, they stared at us intently for only a short time before they were off with steady, silent wingbeats. One returned to where we were before so we started walking back

but decided to return and lie in wait for the owls to come back. This was fortunate as it managed to fly right past us *in the clearing* without us seeing anything! When we got back they were both sitting there. One owl stayed while the other left. We lay there with the owl right in front of us for about fifteen minutes while it took off occasionally to catch beetles and then returning to feed. That whole time there had been a constant conversation between them but the other Spotted Craker owl suddenly stopped. The owl we were watching continued, looking rather confused, until the other owl gave a loud "WOOK-WOOK" and landed next to the first owl. They both flew off to roost after a while and we went home happy.

Philip Haig

CRAKE CENTRAL IN PERTH

During my recent spell in Perth I became aware that the metropolitan area was perhaps the best place I had experienced for crakes and rails. Perth is built on the Swan coastal plain, a deep sedimentary landscape dominated by a series of linear dunes and swales from the coast to the scarp with increasing age. Between the dunes the swales have many freshwater lakes and swamps. It is these features that provide splendid habitat for waterbirds.



Spotted Crake

Many of these lakes have been destroyed by development and some of the remaining ones are also threatened (for road corridors for example). But in recent times many of the local governments have come to value these and have promoted both their protection and their use by birders. Luckily the barbaric practice of duck-shooting is long gone.

I had the good fortune to meet some local birders who gave me advice on getting to know the crakes better. Placing your self within their habitat and being very patient is the key to successful views and photographs. For this a pair of knee high gum boots is essential kit.

Local birders often celebrate what they call the CLAMB. This is the crake slam and buff-banded rail. The three local crakes are Spotted (Australian), Spotless and Baillon's Crakes. These are most visible as the lakes dry out and they feed out on the exposed

mud; summer is perfect crake viewing time. Different lakes dry sooner or later so crake chasing may move from one lake to another as each in turn dries out.

I cut my teeth at Lake Claremont where I had magnificent views of two crakes and a rail. By the time I got there the Baillon's had moved on. My local birder friends advised me to sit in an area of exposed mud between reedy patches and simply wait. It did work a treat (I took a small plank with me to sit on). Within a short time the crakes started feeding on the edge of the reeds and then more and more in the open. I had some walk right up to me, within a metre, along the edge of reeds and in the open. It was an experience I had never imagined. I did wear dark clothes and avoided movement. However I was busy taking photos some of the time. I also had close views of Little Grass-birds and Reed Warblers.



Spotless Crake

My second patch was Lake Bibra where a relatively new floating hide proved exceptional. From a seat on the hide deck (not even inside the hide) I soon enjoyed all three crakes and a rail within two metres. Amazing experience. The best views were along the edge of the water as the birds fed but other crakes were visible along the edges of the reeds and out on exposed mud.

The final exceptional crake adventure was at North Lake (just to the north of Bibra Lake). Here the approach was similar but different. Donning the gum boots we would wade out to the central reed beds (patchy) and using one patch as cover set up camp. Eventually the crakes would emerge from their reeds and start hunting and feeding along the edge and out from the reeds. Whenever a Swamp Harrier buzzed by there would be a scramble for cover, but within a short time out they came again. One local birder watched a Hobby take a Spotless Crake.

Another former Branch member, Martin Willis, joined me on two occasions at North Lake while he was visiting Perth in February and we had wonderful views. I have certainly become addicted to these wonderful little birds.



Baillon's Crake

As the season extends other deeper lakes become key crake-viewing locations including Joondalup where many of us were delighted to view the visiting Crested Honey-buzzards in February this year. I am not sure the technique would work well in the coastal wetlands in northern Queensland - a certain green lizard might be a concern.

Peter Valentine

BIRD RESCUE 1

Before Easter Warren and I played rescuers to two Magpie Geese goslings when they were separated from their mother and two siblings who went off and left them caught in a neighbour's yard. They were trapped behind a wooden fence.

Eventually we were able to catch them, and put them in our cat box. Mother MG was nowhere to be seen so we walked to the nearby Ross River with two screeching babies (they were worse to put up with than the cat when she goes to the vet).

As we got near to the high grass on the river bank, an adult Magpie Goose started to call and suddenly erupted from the grass, landing half a metre in front of us. We released the babies and they quickly disappeared into the grass in front of us.



Pat Charlton

Photograph RaySutton

NEW FACE

BirdLife Australia is spreading its wings

The collaboration with our branches and bird conservation in Northern Australia are both set to get a boost with BirdLife Australia placing a staff member in Far North Queensland by the middle of this year.



Dr Golo Maurer

Dr Golo Maurer, who formerly ran BirdLife Australia's Shorebirds 2020 project and developed our Conservation Partnerships, is up for a new challenge. Golo has recently taken on the role as National Important Bird and Biodiversity (IBA) Program Manager in addition to his duties as Conservation Partnerships Manager.

BirdLife Australia's aim is to work more closely with Natural Resource Management Authorities (NRM's) and other groups in Queensland on protecting bird habitats, environmental monitoring and community engagement. The IBA program is a perfect vehicle for this task as the collaboration with environmental managers such as NRM's, landholders and traditional owners is key to protecting these areas.

Or as Golo put it: "If we can ensure IBA's are looked after we can prevent extinction of our birds and the species sharing their habitats. Many of our branch members might not even know it but they have the diverse set of skills and knowledge needed to make a real difference to the conservation of IBA's. I hope being in FNQ I can help unearth that potential of our members here and across the country."

Golo has been a birder since his early childhood in the Black Forest in Germany. At the beginning of this Millennium he swapped continents and moved to Australia to do an Honours degree on White-browed Scrubwrens at ANU in Canberra followed by a PhD in Darwin on the Pheasant Coucal. After working in BirdLife Australia's national office in Melbourne for four years he is now taking his wife and 2 year old daughter to tropical northern Queensland to ensure she gets 300 species on her bird list by the time she turns three.

RAISING CURLEY

Curley came into our lives as a very young chick, probably only day old judging by his size, after being "rescued" by a well-meaning human whose equally well-meaning offspring had noticed him/her squatting in a local parkland in the instinctive "freeze" position common to this species.

It appears that a lad had taken the chick home to show to his mother who promptly surrendered it to a vet, where, after a health check, he was allocated to a wildlife carer to raise and eventually release back into the wild. Curley will be a 'him' for the purpose of this article as we have not been able to determine his gender during the many years he has spent running free on our property.

Curley is a *Bush Stone-curlew*, previously known as *Bush Thick-knee* or simply (and incorrectly) as a *Curlew*. I rather like this bird's two alternate common names of *Weeloo* and particularly *Willaroo* (both of indigenous origin?), but these attractive names are seldom used these days, more is the pity. In 1802 John Latham, naturalist, bestowed on the bird the binominal name *Burhinus grallarius*, which translates to **bull nose on stilts**. The genus name *burhinus* is derived from Greek *bous* an **ox** and *rhis*, **nose**, therefore **bull nose**, and the specific name *grallarius* from Latin *grallae*, **stilts**. I much prefer *Willaroo* or *Weeloo* though, as these names seem to fit neatly with this strange bird's lifestyle, distinctive habits and unique haunting calls.



Mark Horvath

Curley's poor parents, if they witnessed the kidnapping of their child, and I suspect they did, must have been in a state of panic as they watched their recently-hatched young one being snatched away by what they could only regard as a very large predator. While many ground-dwelling birds will 'plant' their young ones for short periods while they go off alone, these same parents are seldom, if ever, out of sight of their offspring so I reckon Curley's parents would have witnessed the theft of their baby in this instance. They must have been devastated. No doubt they did their best to scare off the intruders,

posturing with out-stretched wings and necks and spreading erect tails to appear large and aggressive, but in this instance it was to no avail. Humans, and especially their kids, need a more thorough education about native species and in particular leaving young ground-nesting birds as they find them. Chicks should only be removed when it is certain the parents have met a bad end through vehicles and/or predators such as cats and dogs. In these circumstance the young birds should be taken to a vet where they will quickly be passed to an experienced wildlife carer.

Anyhow, to cut a long story short, Curley arrived at our place late one afternoon after being collected from the Vets' surgery where he had spent the hours following his kidnapping packed in tissues in a small cardboard box. He was cold from lack of a heat source (his mum) to keep him warm, hungry and very lonely as evidenced by his plaintive cries which went unanswered. In spite of his early life setback he put on a brave show of resistance to capture by hardly audible hissing and spreading of his 25mm long wings as he was transferred from his transport box to a small chook-egg incubator to warm up in preparation for a much needed feed and drink.

Feeding Curley was not much of a challenge as precocial bird species of this level, including Bush Stone-curlews, rarely feed their young directly, but have a range of alternate strategies to ensure their offspring are properly nourished. These include indicating what to eat by various signals such as "feeding" voices and pecking at or near edibles, or alternatively they simply rely on instinct where the young imitate the parents and where the chick's hunger initiates the feeding process by pecking at moving and/or contrasting coloured objects on the ground.

I have witnessed both day-old Masked Lapwing and Bush Stone-curlew chicks instinctively peck at printing on a newspaper which is why it is easiest to feed these very young orphaned birds on light, plain absorbent paper initially, until they recognise their prepared food.

Domestic chooks are a classic example of the feeding behaviour of precocial birds, where the mother hen, by lots of clucking and ground pecking, indicates the edibles to her offspring which are hatched with a strong instinctive urge to peck. Often the mother will pick up a juicy morsel and drop it in front of the chicks. Bush Stone-curlews may also do this but I have never witnessed it and I dare say I never will as these birds usually feed at night. In many years of chook-watching, I have never seen a mother feed her chicks by placing the food into the gaping mouth of the youngsters as the altricial species do. I surmise this is also the case for Bush Stone-curlews, given the chicks are mobile with a strong instinct to peck, within hours after hatching. On the other hand, altricial chicks, born naked usually with eyes closed, are always confined to their nest and wait for hard-working parents to keep their bellies full and bottoms clean (in some species) until they fledge.

The feeding behaviour of Bush Stone-curlews described above makes it easy to feed very young

rescued chicks, even at a day old. The trick is to initially feed them small balls of prepared food (ideally low fat minced beef mixed with vitamin-enriched commercially available insectivore powder) by either placing or rolling these in front of the chick to mimic a moving insect, and then pecking near the food with a finger to indicate the presence of food. The youngsters think the finger is a parent's bill and even day old chicks catch on very quickly and will readily "capture" their substitute prey this way. Like their parents, young Bush Stone-curlews are alerted to prey by sight, sound and movement, and will often stare at the substitute food for some seconds waiting for it to move before pouncing. With young birds it is sometimes necessary to repeat the meatball rolling procedure for a day or two before getting the idea. In the end they all do and are able to recognise food when paced before them.



Mark Horvath

Older chicks are another matter though, as they are often more traumatised by capture than the very young because of the time spent bonded to their parents. It may then be necessary to force feed for a few days until the birds eat by themselves. Getting young birds of this species to drink water is also relatively simple as they quickly learn when small to take water on board from an eye-dropper, and then as they learn and grow, from a water dish. One of the big threats to the welfare of young Bush Stone-curlews is over-feeding. Willaroos are truly the Labradors of the bird world because they never seem to be satisfied at feeding time. Over-feeding seems to produce a too-rapid development of the body which the legs are unable to cope with. More frequent small meals is the best feeding regime for these young birds provided there is sufficient for growth and healthy development. Curley survived his early weeks with us very well and thrived on his alternate diet and lifestyle.

He was certainly a nice looking chick with tight greyish downy cover, well marked on the back and head with lateral darker streaks for camouflage which is the bird's first line of defence in the wild, and very effective too. I always refer to this stage of growth as the *woolly* stage because of the texture of the down.

Curley's night accommodation until the weather warmed and his down commenced to be replaced by feathers, was the chook-egg incubator with

temperature set a few degrees lower than that for hatching domestic poultry eggs. His daytime accommodation was a series of cages on the ground where he received dappled sunshine and importantly, where he had room to stretch and move about as he grew. When old enough, he also spent time in a cocky cage at night out on the patio for a few hours before bed time, to get him used to night sounds and in particular the calls of others of his kind. He was always alert at these times and responded strongly to the calls of the local Willaroos. These birds love to sunbake all through their lives and are often seen on their sides enjoying this pastime, with their eyes wide open and facing upward. As Curley grew, his down was gradually replaced by feathers and the woolly stripes became lines of darker feathers, again for camouflage. When he was fully fledged, the next stage of his life was rehabilitation as a self-sufficient bird in his natural environment.

Unfortunately it is easy for these birds to bond with their carers, especially where they are handled frequently and hand fed. In Curley's case, his twice-daily movement between day and night accommodation required some handling but it was always kept to a minimum. This handling was impossible to avoid because it was necessary to provide security from predators, protection from the elements (orphaned woolies do not last long without parents to protect them from the cold and wet) and he needed to more closely interact with his environment.

Curley's rehabilitation commenced when he was close to being fully feathered and signalling his desire to fly. His finishing pen was the open fenced garden adjoining our house where he had a pond, shallow wading dish and plenty of exciting nooks and crannies to explore. Importantly he had plenty of room to practice his flying. Initially he would rush to the gate every time it was opened, expecting food. I took real effort for quite a while to resist his charming advances before he caught on that the approach of a human didn't necessarily mean it was feeding time. Our strategy to try to remain distant from this young bird, through not hand feeding and minimal handling as far as practically possible, was paying off----albeit slowly!!

Curley's release was a "soft" one. Rather than taking him on a stressful journey to an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar landmarks and unknown dangers, Curly was left to decide for himself when it was time to go. When his flying capabilities had progressed beyond the initial quick low level short flits across the lawn to full circuits of the garden, we knew it wouldn't be long before he left us. Even this was a gradual process as he would fly out at night to socialise with the other Willaroos and return in the morning to be found waiting at the gate to be let into his daytime refuge. Of course we fed him initially when he returned but in ever decreasing amounts until there was no real reason for him to return.

Willaroos appear to look and behave the same, however some have very distinctive personalities and behaviour. At one time some years after Curley's release, we had a number of sub-adult birds wandering around the fenced garden in preparation

for release. They had favourite resting spots during the day, and sometimes there would be four or five happily grouped together laying about enjoying their surroundings. On one occasion I arrived home with a young woolly chick, probably about two or three weeks old, when one of the older layabouts in the garden, more inquisitive than the others, came over to check it out. This bird's behaviour indicated that she had to be a female as she immediately took the youngster under her wing and threatened me with violence when I tried to retrieve it. This little bird was readily accepted by the others and fed and grew up with them. The substitute mother stayed on after the others of her cohort took their freedom, sometimes in and sometimes out of the enclosure, until the young bird was also ready to go. Although at an earlier age than normal, we simply opened the gate one day for the youngster to walk out to her adopted mum waiting patiently outside. A sweet moment!!!



Ray Sutton

On another occasion some years later, I arrived home to see a Collared Sparrowhawk (or was it a Brown Goshawk---I have difficulty with these two), harassing a group of multi-aged chicks in the garden. One of the larger birds was in full defensive mode, feathers fluffed up, wings, and neck outstretched, tail fanned out and erect, protecting a younger chick from the predator. The hawk flew off when it caught sight of me but I wondered how long this brave and almost defenceless Willaroo had kept that hawk at bay. Another sweet moment!!

Adult Willaroos are very difficult to tell apart by looks alone, and Curley, or at least we think it is him by his demeanour, now hangs out with a heap of other Willaroos, ranging over ours and a number of adjoining neighbouring blocks. Some of these birds are wild, attracted to our place because of available water and the presence of other members of their species. Others we have raised and released over time. Curley no longer appears every day but we do see him from time to time. He is not as friendly and confident with humans as he used to be but nevertheless, when he does grace us with his presence, his big yellow eyes stare thoughtfully in our direction as if reminiscing happily about his childhood with us.

At least this is what we like to believe.

Norm Rains

BOWER TRINKETS

I regularly check the bower in my garden to see what the latest treasure is. Since the distressing episode when the Great Bowerbird got a large plastic ring caught over his neck, I always take scissors with me so I can cut any circular objects in half. He never ceases to amaze me with the stuff he acquires and manages to carry back to the bower. In the last few weeks I have found three blue plastic rings from milk bottles which required a snip or two. I'm not sure if this is just a one-off deviation from normal colour preference or a permanent addition to the range. He certainly pays the blue treasures a lot of attention, moving them around the bower and display area. Today, one blue ring had pride of place in the very centre of the bower.



PS 22 April. Just sat down to breakfast this morning and as usual could hear the five regular Brown Honeyeaters having a lovely little sing-a-long. For a minute I thought they started to sound a 'bit different'. Realised that the reason they sounded a 'bit different' was that they had been joined by a Grey Fantail. As I haven't had Fantails in my garden for many years, I abandoned breakfast and went out to have a look. There were three Grey Fantails having a lovely time, diving through the spray from the sprinklers. They were there for about thirty minutes and I have neither heard nor seen them since. Maybe just a brief refreshing stop on their way through Townsville.

Story and photographs

Janet Robino

DEATH BY FRIARBIRD

This happened on a late afternoon in January when I was looking for Pied Imperial-pigeon (PIP) nests in Cairns.

In a big paperbark tree there were two nests occupied by brooding adult PIPs. A third nest had a large juvenile PIP sitting quietly on its own. (When young PIPs are nearly fully grown, it is not uncommon for them to be left alone sometimes.)



Pied Imperial Pigeon on nest

Annette Sutton

While I was jotting down these observations, I heard a sudden flurry of wings high up in the tree. The juvenile PIP was flapping frantically away from its nest, closely chased by two Helmeted Friarbirds.

In what was presumably its first-ever take-off, the young PIP managed only a fast downward trajectory with the friarbirds buffeting it on both sides. It reached the opposite side of the road and landed on its feet among small shrubs. The attackers abruptly veered off and disappeared.

Several minutes later the PIP had not emerged from the surrounding vegetation and I set off cautiously, hoping I might be able to return it to its nest tree.

I found the unfortunate bird lying on its side, lifeless. There was no visible damage to its body. Could it have suffered heart failure from the stress of sudden extreme exertion?

And why did this happen? Friarbirds are known to be aggressive in defending their food sources and nests but they did not seem to be defending anything in this paperbark tree.

At the time, the tree offered no significant food supply and no friarbird nest could be seen. The friarbirds were not in the tree when I arrived.

Furthermore, if the friarbirds had been using that tree at all, they would have been accustomed to sharing the space with incumbent PIPs. The nesting PIPs would have been in residence continuously for 3 to 6 weeks before the sudden attack took place.

Maybe someone can come up with an explanation?

Julia Hazel

FAREWELL SHOREBIRDS

Few birds inspire birdwatchers more than shorebirds; they are elegant, active and carry out some of the most amazing migrations in the world. Right now over five million shorebirds are migrating from Australia to breed in the Arctic; for some that can be a 30,000km return journey, with one or two feed stops along the way.



Birdlife Townsville

With this in mind and the tide just right, nineteen members and seven visitors, gathered at Rumbala Court Park, Bushland Beach at 7 am on Sunday 22 March to participate in the "National Farewell Shorebirds Challenge".

The weather was warm and sunny with very little wind, and with anticipation of hundreds of Great Knots, Bar-tailed Godwits and Lesser Sand Plovers running high, we moved off towards the beach and our first obstacle --- dogs!! Why people don't obey the signs and keep their dogs on a leash is beyond me. Of course the dogs did exactly what dogs do -- they chased the shorebirds --- and the shorebirds did what they do -- they all took flight down the beach and out of sight!

The day was not progressing very well. We stopped, and took stock of the situation, as well as a few photographs of a Great Knot and us Birders (selfies I think they are called) waving goodbye. We had just agreed to retrace our steps, when back along the beach came the shorebirds in their hundreds -- you little beauty and no dogs in sight! Up went the scopes and binoculars and out came the Shorebirds I.D. book. This was going to be a good day.

What a sight; literally hundreds of shorebirds and quite a few in their breeding colours(certainly makes it a lot easier to identify) a truly magnificent sight -- in all 34 different species. The Great Knots were the standout with approx. 1200 birds spotted; we spotted 6 Eastern Curlews, 5 Whimbrel, 17 Bar-tailed Godwit, 137 Lesser Sand Plover, 32 Greater Sand Plover, 6 Red-capped Plover, 19 Caspian Tern, 12 Lesser Crested Tern, 2 Whiskered Tern, 7 Crested Tern, 3 Gull-billed Tern, 2 Brahminy Kite, 1 Osprey, 25 Australian Swiftlet, 2 Welcome Swallow, 2 Australian Pelican, 13 Silver Gull, 6 Australian White Ibis, 3 Black Kite, 2 Whistling Kite, 12 Plumed

Whistling-Duck, 25 Australian Pied Oystercatcher (the most I have seen in one place) 1 Blue-winged Kookaburra, 1 Dollarbird, 1 Olive-backed Sunbird, 1 Bar-shouldered Dove, 2 Eastern Great Egret, 4 Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, 1 Rainbow Bee-eater, 1 Cattle Egret, 1 Sacred Kingfisher, 3 Mangrove Gerygone, 25 Magpie Goose.

It was 9.30 am and the tide was on the rise as we headed back to the park, with wet feet from navigating our way through the shallows, but glad the day had turned out so well. Once we reached the park, our four junior birders tried their hand at painting some of the shorebirds, whilst the adults talked and some lucky ones had a cup of tea.

Almost all shorebirds live in open habitats such as tidal flats, ocean beaches, rocky shores and inland wetlands, which today are all under threat from either development, recreational use and/or climate change. From late March to late April BirdLife Australia conducts the "National Farewell Shorebirds Challenge" in order to collect data on the species, number, and general health of these inspiring birds and BirdLife Townsville has again played our part in this most important activity.

Wal Threlfall

The Club also took part in Celebrate the Sea.



Kirra Sleigh and Hayley Stone



Rosa Minns



Lewis Minns



Leif Lundmark-Aitcheson



Lily Haig



Liam Perryman

BIRD RESCUE 2

In Winton, Warren rescued a stunned Sacred Kingfisher which had flown into a lit wall at a service station.

When picked up it was breathing and it didn't have any obvious physical injury but was unconscious. We put it in a box acquired from the service station and left it in the Acton's unit while we went out for tea. The sign at the units said "no dogs allowed" but didn't mention birds.

Our thinking was

- (a) release if it was mobile
- (b) take it to a wildlife carer if still alive
- (c) if deceased, it would be a new specimen for the taxidermists at the museum in Townsville.



Sacred Kingfisher

Ray Sutton

SK was left in our unit (inside the box to recover) at the Caravan Park while we went off to tea at the pub. An hour or so later on entering the unit, I heard a strange noise and, looking up, saw SK perched on our curtain rail. Now the new problem was how to get it out without actually injuring it any more. I had opened the door and was about to step back and cross my fingers that it would go out the opening. Then after a mad flight around the room, crashing into a couple of things, it made a bee line at my head and as I ducked it shot out the door into the night and landed in the tree at the gateway. A very pleasing end to what could have been deadly for one little bird.

Pat Charlton and Marleen Acton

CAT PROOFER From the ABC

A fashion relic of the late eighties and nineties, the humble scrunchie, is preventing the slaughter of wildlife by domestic cats. West Australian researchers found putting a scrunchie-like collar on cats reduced the amount of native wildlife killed by more than half.

"Bright colours are very noticeable to songbirds, they should see the cats further away, allowing them to escape earlier," Murdoch University PhD student Catherine Hall said.

WINTON MOON

A group from Birdlife Townsville spent the Easter weekend, birding, in and around Winton and Bladensburg National Park, led by John Lowry. One of the most memorable sights of the weekend for some of us was the Moon !!!!!

It was still dark as we left Winton on the Saturday morning, to drive out to Bladensburg to meet up with everyone else. Directly ahead of us was the most enormous Golden-yellow Moon sitting on the horizon, we felt we were driving into it, as it gradually sank below the horizon. It was the largest I have ever seen the Moon, and so hard to describe the size and how beautiful it was.

That night, returning from a meal at the North Gregory Hotel, we could see the Eclipse had started and the part already covered was blood red. As we watched for the next hour or so, the moon was gradually covered, until about 10.00pm when the eclipse was total and the full moon was this beautiful colour red! The Stars were so bright sparkling in the dark night sky. A memorable occasion.

Barbara Reidy

A LITTLE BIT OF LUCK

Some of the exciting moments in bird watching are down to a little bit of luck. You need to be in the right place at the right time and just happen to be looking the right way. I've had the odd moment of good luck lately. I just happened to glance out of my lounge window on 1 March to see in amongst the foliage on the Grewia tree a very buff coloured belly! A quick dash out the back door allowed me to see the whole of the bird which was a Black-faced Monarch. A first for my garden, or at least the first time I've seen it here.

I had a few little bits of luck on 24 March. At 6pm, I was getting some washing off the line when I was distracted by a dragonfly floating past. I was following it as it flew in front of a Callistemon. There, sitting very still, was a Collared Sparrowhawk! I was just deciding if it was worthwhile rushing inside for the camera, took my eyes off it for a nano-second, and it was gone without making the slightest noise.



Collared Sparrowhawk

Ray Sutton

Just after this episode, I went for a walk around the neighbourhood. Two Willie Wagtails were flitting around on the powerlines.....haven't seen them close to home for three years. And just to round it all off nicely, just as it was getting close to being too dark to see clearly, a pair of Zebra Finches flew off the footpath in front of me in Fitzroy Street.

Janet Robino

NEWCASTLE

Digital Photography in the Bush.

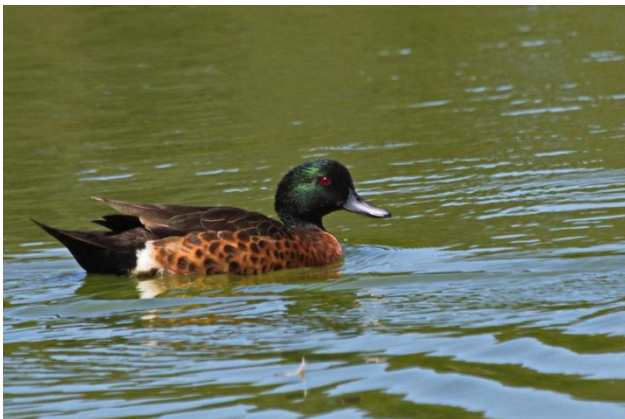
We set off in mid-February for Newcastle, with Cyclone Marcia breathing down our backs. We knew it wouldn't hit Townsville but it did all it could to catch us on the way down. We holed up in Dalby instead of heading straight for Brisbane to see our son, but that meant we had to spend an afternoon in the Bunya Mountains. Hard to take.

The Hunter Valley Wetlands was the setting for the get together and it made a wonderful venue.

The first lecture, Seven Deadly Sins Found in our Gallery, set out to show where we could all improve our photography. Dr. Wilson, the speaker, pointed out that there are many good photographs in the online Birdlife Photography Gallery but also a lot that needed improving. In the future there will be two galleries, one for excellent ID shots that can be used in publications and another one for general exhibition.

Some of the faults were insufficient depth of field, ISO too high or too low, and slow speeds resulting in blurred shots. He emphasised the need for more care to be taken with camera settings and composition. The aim is to publish a gallery of very good images for use by Birdlife and the members and for general enjoyment. The idea is also to nurture photographers to help them improve their photography.

Ian Boyd gave a lecture on photographing birds in flight. He put a lot of research into the talk and it was accompanied by dazzling photos. The research suggests that for this kind of photography ISO should be set at 400, the stabiliser should be turned off (allowing more power to go to the focussing), and the drive should be set on high speed. Welcome to the spray and pray group of photographers.



Chestnut Teal

The Canon Collective showcased some very expensive equipment but it was good to be able to try out different lenses and cameras. The Canon girls encouraged us to try manual settings as opposed to letting the camera's on board computer do most of the thinking. I prefer to set some parameters myself and let the camera adjust the rest. I haven't got time to keep changing manual settings – the bird would be long flown.

Dr. Dave Hollands' talk on *Owls, Frogmouths and Nightjars of Australia* was the standout paper for me. He paid tribute to John Young for building viewing towers that rivalled the Empire State Building, if a little flimsier. He went on to discuss the ultimate challenge to photographers – photographing birds in flight in the dark. He described how he set up an infra-red beam to trigger the camera and multiple flash lights. At one site, the owl varied his flight path back to his nest in order to avoid tripping the infra-red beam and thus avoided being blinded by the flash. A very wise owl. Looking at the towers, I decided that this specialised photography was best left to the Young rather than the not so young.



Sooty Oystercatcher

Processing with Lightroom and Photoshop and also Printing the Epson Way revealed how to enhance photographs taken in the field with all the wrong camera settings. It was just a very short look at Lightroom, pointing out some of the features, not least of which was the cataloguing tool. You need years to learn these programs thoroughly. We took away two nice large prints that the Epson team printed off the camera.

Each morning and on other days there were bird watching trips conducted by the Hunter Bird Observers Club. This included a pelagic trip which was well attended. During the outings, some interesting birds were found, including the Powerful Owl which displayed beautifully one day but completely disappeared when we went to see it the next day.

Newcastle itself was a great setting. There were lots of birds near the bridge over to Stockton, including Avocets, Tattlers and Pied Oystercatchers. The sea baths was a good spot for Ruddy Turnstones, Little Terns and Sooty Oystercatchers. There are plenty of places to explore. The Hunter Wetlands itself is a good place to spend the day. You might even spot a Magpie Goose.

As always, the best part of the gathering was meeting other bird photographers and, like fishermen, talking about the one that got away. Thanks to Birdlife Photography and the Hunter Valley group for staging the conference.

Story and Photographs

Ray Sutton

8 YEARS AT OPALTON

My husband Graham and I were very fortunate to have lived for 8 years at Opalton south of Winton in outback Queensland.

In this time we experienced the best and the worst of the weather conditions. In the years 2010-12 we had unusually wet seasons and by February 2012 saw many birds that we had never seen before. The Striped Honeyeater, Striated Grasswren, Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush, and the Spinifexbird came very close to where we lived and we were able to photograph and observe these birds within 10 metres of our camp.



Crimson Chat

The bird breeding numbers flourished and there were greater numbers of a lot of the birds that we regularly saw. The Splendid and Variegated Fairy-wrens were a prime example of these.



Splendid Fairy-wren

The summer of 2013 however was drought times with the area not having had any rain since early in 2012. It was soon obvious that the birds were really struggling and we found dead birds while walking. We always kept water outside our camp and were amazed one day when a female Black Honeyeater turned up for a drink. We had seen a male once a couple of years before, but never a female. She was very distressed and we never saw her again. On the way to Winton, near a leaky windmill, we photographed a Crimson Chat that ignored us

completely; it was more interested in the nearby water. A regular was the Crested Bellbird.

We always found that in times of drought and heat birds are definitely not easily found.



Crested Bellbird

We were lucky enough to photograph nearly 90 species of birds in a 2 year period and what do you know, we are still addicted.

Story and Photographs Denise and Graham Holder

CROWS

A fact you won't soon forget...

Researchers for the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority found over 200 dead crows near greater Boston recently, and there was concern that they may have died from Avian Flu.

A Bird Pathologist examined the remains of all the crows, and, to everyone's relief, confirmed the problem was definitely NOT Avian Flu. The cause of death appeared to be vehicular impacts. However, during the detailed analysis it was noted that varying colors of paints appeared on the bird's beaks and claws.

By analyzing these paint residues it was determined that 98% of the crows had been killed by impact with trucks, while only 2% were killed by an impact with a car. MTA then hired an Ornithological Behaviorist to determine if there was a cause for the disproportionate percentages of truck kills versus car kills.

He very quickly concluded the cause: When crows eat road kill, they always have a look-out crow in a nearby tree to warn of impending danger.

They discovered that while all the lookout crows could shout "Cah", not a single one could shout "Truck."

Angela Ward



BIRD OF THE MONTH

RADJAH SHELDUCK

The Radjah Shelduck or White-headed Shelduck (*Tadorna radjah*) is a species of shelduck. It is more commonly known as a Burdekin Duck.



Appearance

Both the male and female of the species are mostly white, with dark wingtips and a distinctive "collar" of dark feathers. Seen from above in flight, the birds have green bands on the tops of their wings.

Calls / Vocalizations

The female has a harsh rattle and the male has a breathy, sore-throat whistle.

Distribution and Habitat

The Radjah Shelduck inhabits the mangrove forests and coastline of New Guinea and Australia. In Australia, its primary range is coastal tropical northern Australia, from central Queensland through northern Northern Territory (including Kakadu National Park) to the Kimberley in Western Australia.

The species prefers the brackish waters of mangrove flats and paperbark tree swamps, but will visit freshwater swamps, lagoons, and billabongs further inland during the wet season.

Protection Status

This duck is listed as a protected bird in all states of Australia and extremely harsh penalties exist for harming or disturbing them.

Breeding / Nesting

The Radjah Shelduck forms long-term pair-bonds, and is usually encountered in lone pairs or small flocks. During the wet season the males commonly become very irritable, and have been observed attacking their mates.

Pairs start searching for nesting sites during the months of January and February. They nest close to their primary food source, often in the hollow limbs of trees, which makes habitat destruction a particular issue.

Radjah Shelduck does not use nesting materials except for some self-supplied down feathers. Egg-

laying is usually done by May or June, but depends on the extent of the wet season. The clutches range from 6 to 12 eggs. Incubation time is about 30 days.

Diet / Feeding

The diet consists mainly of molluscs, insects, sedge materials and algae.

Taxonomy

Placed in the genus *Tadorna*, it differs markedly in external morphology, and mtDNA cytochrome *b* sequence data (Sraml *et al.* 1996) suggests its status should be reinvestigated. The genus name *Tadorna* comes from Celtic roots and means "pied waterfowl", essentially the same as the English "shelduck".

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WOODSTOCK

Woodstock is always a good place to visit.

Over the last few weeks we have been seeing White-browed Woodswallows along with Masked Woodswallows and Plumheads and even Budgerigars. The presence of these birds tells us lots about the state of things out west.



The Masked Woodswallows and the White-browed seem to keep company. A Masked was sitting in a tree, preening a White-browed. There were many juveniles amongst the flocks. We also seemed to find Zebra and Black-throated Finches hanging around where the Plumheads were. Probably just a nice spot for finches.

There are quite a few Red-winged Parrots about, feeding on the Hyptis which is in plentiful supply. Red-backed Kingfishers have made a return as well.

Story and Photograph

Annette Sutton

CALENDAR

May

17th - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet in the Dam car park for a 6.30am start. Leader Ian Boyd.

31st - Sunday - Outing - Mingela/Clare Loop. 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 TBA.

June

6th - 8th - Saturday to Monday - Queens Birthday Long Weekend Campout. El Arish / Tully region. More details closer to the date Leader Janet Cross.

7th - Sunday - Town Common Survey - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a 7.00am start. Visitors welcome. Leader Rosemary Payet.

9th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme for the night will be Flight. A 7.00pm start at a venue TBA.

10th - Wednesday - Wongaloo Survey -- Leader: Ian Boyd -- 6.30 am, meet at Palmetum car park, bring morning tea.

13th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker TBA.

17th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra for a 6.30am start. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

20th and 21st - Saturday and Sunday Birdlife Townsville Bird Quest Challenge Count. Leader Pat Charlton. (To count bird species and numbers in numerous areas within a 40km radius of CBD)

21st - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet in the Dam car park for a 6.30am start. Leader Ian Boyd.

28th - Sunday - Outing - Paluma or Gunadoo Road (Depending on weather). Meeting place and leader TBA.

July

Friday 3rd to Monday 6th - Sunday - Townsville Show Long Weekend Campout - Mt Zero/Taravale. Leader Ian Boyd. More details closer to the date.

Sunday - 5th - Town Common Survey - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a 7.00am start. Visitors welcome. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

8th - Wednesday - Wongaloo Survey -- Leader: Ian Boyd -- 6.30 am, meet at Palmetum car park, bring morning tea.

7th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is - Bird Photos from a Club Campout. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

11th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker TBA.

15th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 7.00am.

19th - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey. - Meet in the Dam car park 7.00am. Leader Ian Boyd

26th - Sunday Outing - Ross River Dam Cruise with Pop Sullivan. More details closer to the date.

August

2nd - Sunday - Town Common Survey- Meet at the main gate 7.00am. Leaders - Gloria and Rick.

4th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is The Mangroves and the Seaside. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

5th - Wednesday - Wongaloo Survey -- Leader: Ian Boyd -- 6.30 am, meet at Palmetum car park, bring morning tea.

8th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell. Guest speaker TBA.

Contributions for the next Drongo should be in by 31st July, 2015. amsgreat@gmail.com