

# The Drongo

Number 129 October 2013



Mark Horvath

Mungalla

Bowra

Yaraka



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

At the time of writing this, a big issue for us is that we do not have a Conservation Officer. As I said in the last newsletter the support from National Office for branch Conservation Officers is consistent and very good. We may only tackle 'small' issues but sometimes these small issues can have huge impact for our birds. In the last year we have had a big impact on the sandspit at Cungulla, a known breeding site for the Little Tern. The spit was a favoured option for mining sand for replenishing the local beach. Following a submission on its importance to the Little Tern, this option was removed from the proposal. I believe that is a pretty impressive achievement. I would ask all members to think about this role. If you want to get an idea of what the role would involve, Peter Valentine has made it very clear that he is happy to give whatever information and assistance he can to help the new Conservation Officer to get started.

As part of Bird Week we have had displays in the Aitkenvale and City Libraries to promote Australia's Favourite Bird competition. We hoped to encourage votes for the Drongo. Feedback indicates that the displays have attracted interest from the library users but it is not easy to say whether it has done much for the Drongo vote.

The BirdLife Photography in the Bush campout at Mungalla was a huge success according to the feedback from participants. BirdLife Townsville members who attended to act as local guides also had a great time. Read more about it in the articles in this Drongo. The organizing 'committee', Ian Boyd, Norm Rains and Marleen Acton did a great job and did BirdLife Townsville proud.

Christmas is fast approaching. The Christmas Party will be held at the Thuringowa Bowls Club on Sunday 15 December from 4.30pm onwards. The cost will be \$30 per person which includes BBQ meal with sweets. There will be drinks available at the bar. For those who are keen to have a game of bowls the cost will be \$10 per person. We would require firm bookings with pre payment. You can either do this at the November meeting or by contacting Nina at [ninadoy@hotmail.com](mailto:ninadoy@hotmail.com).

*Janet Robino*

### **YOUR COMMITTEE**

President: Janet Robino  
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## MUNGALLA

Digital Photography In The Bush –Workshop  
and Campout 4-7 October 2013



Mungalla

Len Ezzy

Chris Ezzy - Mungalla certainly lived up to its reputation and expectations with many wonderful bird species seen and of course photographed by many. We also were able to add quite a few new species for the Mungalla Bird List. We had some of Australia's best bird and wildlife photographers from around the country concentrated at Mungalla, as well as Tyto Wetlands. This made for some very interesting sights. The highlight for me was watching these photographers, scrambling, ducking and weaving, some even crawling and belly-sliding to get the best out of the many photography opportunities over the long weekend. I enjoyed rekindling old friendships as well as making friends with fellow-minded birders and photographers.



Eastern Barn Owl

Len Ezzy

Len Ezzy – It's amazing what we take for granted here in North Queensland. I mean, the wonderful selection of birdlife that we are privileged to encounter here almost every day: To compile a species lists in excess of 100 birds for a morning's group outing around the Mungalla property is

absolutely astounding. I found it interesting to see our visiting photographers jostle for subjects like Great Bowerbirds, Bustards, Red-backed Fairy-wrens, Eastern Koels, White-gaped Honeyeaters, Blue-winged Kookaburras etc. After a very short while I knew that I would be doing exactly the same if we were visiting their respective areas around the rest of Australia.



White-browed Robin

Len Ezzy

It was a privilege to be leaders on a couple of morning outings and to share our visitors' enthusiasm.

The other aspect of the weekend which I thoroughly enjoyed was the Photographers' Workshop at the Tyto Convention Centre in Ingham on the Saturday and Sunday. Such a smoothly-run event is a credit to the entire organising committee. Sincere Thanks to them all, having made this entire event come together so well.



Rufous Songlark

Len Ezzy

Len and Chris Ezzy



## LETTER TO RAE AT TYTO WETLANDS

Ian Boyd sent this letter after the Digital Photography in the bush had concluded.

Rae

Over the long weekend 4-7 October 2013, BirdLife Photography, a special interest group of the national body, BirdLife Australia, with support from members of BirdLife Townsville, held a forum in Ingham entitled Bird Photography in the Bush. There was close liaison with Jacob Cassady at Mungalla Station, valuable support from the Hinchinbrook Shire Council, Rae Domin from Tyto Wetlands information centre and Mary Brown from the Ingham Chamber of Commerce.



*Australian Pratincole  
Annette Sutton*

Around 80 people from around Australia were involved in the forum and most chose commercial accommodation throughout the region. Evening meals on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday were provided by Mungalla Station staff and consumed on the lawns at the station homestead.

Six photography workshops and four information sessions were held in the impressive facilities offered by the Tyto Conference Centre. To complement the workshops, two Nikon Australia staff attended and set-up a display of their photographic and bird watching gear worth around \$60,000.00 in the conference centre. The general public were also invited to attend that display where they were free to handle and operate the cameras, lenses, binoculars and spotting scopes on offer.

Another feature of the forum were the field outings arranged and led by members of BirdLife Townsville. Those outings were to:

- ☐ Tyto Wetlands
- ☐ Mungalla Station
- ☐ Mark Everett's Mt. Cudmore
- ☐ Broadwater State Forest
- ☐ Lucinda and surrounds
- ☐ Jourama Falls

Attendees of the forum were high in their praise of Ingham and its friendly people. Most were overwhelmed with the bird watching and bird photography opportunities on offer in the region. Of particular note was the interest raised in what Mungalla Station offered. Over the weekend, around 120 species of birds were recorded on the property. This is amazing for a property of this size.

Attendees agree that Ingham has much more to offer the bird watcher than just the excellent facilities at



*Rainbow Bee-eater  
Ray Sutton*

Tyto Wetlands. By raising the profile of Mungalla Station and offering easily accessible, accurate and up to date information on other bird watching areas in the region there is the potential for visiting bird watchers to spend more time in the town. For example, most keen bird watchers travelling north from Townsville will spend time in Tyto Wetlands and then probably move on to accommodation in towns further north. By raising the profile of Mungalla Station and other bird watching areas in the region there is potential for the bird watcher to spend more time in the area and probably seek overnight (or longer) accommodation in Ingham.

Should you require additional information please feel free to contact me.

Cheers,

*Ian Boyd*

*BirdLife Townsville*

## BIRD PHOTOGS AT TYTO

Try and imagine fifteen fanatical bird photographers (Photogs) in a location they have never been, eager to snap images of birds they have never seen.

This is close to the scenario that unfolded at Tyto Wetlands during the Digital Photography in the Bush weekend in Ingham. Poor little me was assigned the enviable task of leading the walk on the Saturday at Tyto. Most of the people in the group had not visited the area previously and were anxious to add new species to their photographic endeavours.



*Peaceful Dove*  
Mark Horvath

The morning started out peacefully enough with idle banter and the occasional happy snap being taken as we walked down to the Tyto Wetland entrance. Once we entered Tyto proper, that's when the casual demeanour was dropped and the fanatical shutter happy alter egos took over. We had not gone more than ten metres when the sound of mirrors slapping shattered the morning quiet. I walked forward to see what all the activity was about. A Peaceful Dove? Apparently they are not that common in some of the areas from which these Photogs originate. Three more steps and it's on again. What this time? Red-browed Finches! What's going to happen when we actually come across an uncommon species?



*Crimson Finch*  
Mark Horvath

Made five steps this time and then Crimson Finches were spotted in the brush to the left of the track. Off went the shutters again only for longer and more rapid. Then a brilliant male Crimson Finch had to fly forward and sit on the wooden fence. It's a wonder the crescendo of mirror slap didn't stun the poor fella. This sort of thing went on every few steps and made for an interesting morning I must say. We

eventually arrived at the first viewing platform some one and a half hours or so after setting out. There was no chance of circumnavigating the lagoons in the remaining time so I gave the Photogs free reign to do as they pleased. Suffice to say most ambled to the hide to the left and then back to the cars. Considering we started out at six thirty and it was now after ten we didn't cover much ground.



*Red-browed Finch* Mark Horvath

Although it was slow going, the chance to meet some interesting people and talk about birds and birding, not to mention bird photography, made for one enjoyable morning. I can't wait for the next get together.

Mark Horvath

## MORE MUNGALLA

There is more to be found at Mungalla station than just birds.

Firstly there are the beautiful Brahman cattle that never seem fazed by humans driving by. Mostly they amble out of the way but sometimes they stand their ground and stare balefully at you.

The spotlighters found a few nice snakes and some salt water crocodiles. I surprised a two metre crocodile as I crept up on two Black-tailed Godwits by the water's edge. I nearly died as he raced off and slithered into the water. And we all saw the big fella that lives on our camping lagoon. Then there are the big goannas as well.

You are never lonely.

Story and photograph

Annette Sutton



## THE AMAZING FEAT

On Sunday 6 October 2013, as part of the Photography in the Bush Campout at Mungalla, I took a group of the participants to Lucinda – along with some very impressive camera equipment. We had a very productive morning with some very cooperative birds – some of them were real 'posers' so I think the photographers were pretty satisfied.

The highlight for me was watching a Red-capped Plover chick. The little fellow must have just made its way out of the egg that morning. We found a 'red cap' still sitting on a nest in the same spot. Maybe another nest or still sitting on another egg?



*Red-capped Plover  
Jan and Ian Wilson*

Anyway, back to the chick. It was about the size of a walnut, all fluffy, and held up on what looked like toothpicks. But, boy, could it move!

The parent birds flew across from the sandbar to the beach, a distance of about 4-5 metres. Our gallant little chick jumped into the water and looked as if it would just sink. One person thought we should maybe rescue it. While we were having the debate about the pros and cons of interfering, it took off. It may not have been able to fly, but it sure could swim. It stopped after about a metre and caused lots of concern for the watchers. However, the parents called insistently from the beach and off it went again! This happened three more times and eventually this tiny ball of fluff scrambled up the beach to be reunited with its parents. There was almost a cheer from the group of birders at not only the amazing feat of swimming such a distance for such a little thing, but how on earth did it manage with those skinny little legs!



*Red-capped Plover chick Jan and Ian Wilson*

*Janet Robino*

## QUEENSLAND ON SHOW

*Imagine you have visiting overseas birders to impress. Where would you pick to give them a good cross-section of Queensland birds?*

Well this was our predicament in September and October. Before we met up, they had already visited Mareeba wetlands and Iron Range – a tall order trying to compete with Iron Range – but we were up for the challenge.

First stop – Daintree. As usual, it was moist and lush and beautiful. On our afternoon walk the most exciting finds were a Wompoo Pigeon and Superb Fruit Dove. Murray, the boat birding guide, didn't let us down. The Papuan Frogmouths won the prize for best camouflage and as for the Little Kingfisher, well it was travelling so fast that if you blinked you missed it. The yellow tree snakes draped around the branches were a bonus and the crocodile was well-hidden with only a fraction of his head and a fraction of his tail visible (and a fair bit in between). We had frequent views of the Shining Flycatcher. Because it was high tide, we all had to duck our heads to get under Baxter Creek bridge which was fun. However, on the return, the tide was even higher and there was only enough clearance for the boat so we had to lie on the floor of the boat to get under. However, the drama was worth the reward of a Great-billed Heron (a first for John and me).



*Pied Monarch*

*Chris Stewart*

We drove up to Cape Tribulation and did some of the walks along the way which are really worth doing for the birds and the scenery. The stand-out bird here was the Pied Monarch who was not afraid to pose for us.

Tyto was the next birding hot-spot and didn't disappoint. There seemed to be clusters of frenetic bird activity. Our best birds here were the Spotless Crake and the Buff-banded Rail. They were a surprise and it was down to good fortune that I was lagging behind and glimpsed the crake. He was quite bold and we all got good looks. We ducked into Jourama Falls and picked up a Northern Fantail and Little Kingfisher. We had forgotten how beautiful the creek crossings are there.

After the obligatory morning tea stop at Crystal Creek (which always impresses visitors) we headed up to Paluma and seeing the Golden Bowerbird was magical for all of us (thanks Malcolm for your explicit directions). We scored some brownie points for that one. What the Tooth-billed Bowerbird lacked in beauty it made up for in noise – its performance impressed the visitors. They got their first view of the Crimson Rosella and admired it. They oohed and aahed over the male Victoria's Riflebird which showed itself on the walk behind Ivy Cottage. The Eastern Yellow Robin was a photographer's delight, bold and out-there – if only all the birds made it that easy.



Major Mitchell

Chris Stewart

In Townsville we didn't have to go far to show them something special. In the gully beside our unit, we accidentally flushed out a Rufous owl. I don't know who got the biggest fright – the bird or us. They found the Town Common interesting, especially as they are into water birds, and Marlene and Alf shared their telescope and knowledge while we were there. Pallarenda, Rowes Bay, the Port and the Palmetum all got a going-over. To get to Ayr we went via Mingela, Ravenswood and Clare and saw all the regulars. They marvelled at the White Blow. One unusual site was dozens of Brolgas in a paddock that was being harvested in Clare. Our resident Yellow White-eye (Plantation Creek road) did the right thing and greeted our visitors. We had an excellent morning of birding on Jerona Road seeing 69 species. One of the surprise findings at Alva Beach was a Spotted Harrier gliding along the base of the sandhills a few metres from the ocean, not too far from an Eastern Reef Egret (white).

We took them to observe a cane fire. As usual, lots of Black Kites came to the fire to feed and to John's amazement he spied a Brown Goshawk in amongst the mob.

So after birding every day locally it was time to go farther afield. First stop was Eungella. Talk about good birding! We stayed at Broken River and there were so many birds we didn't know which way to look. We saw the Eungella Honeyeater, heaps of vivid Scarlet Honeyeaters and a few Eastern Spinebills and very friendly White-browed Scrubwrens. The King Parrots looked magnificent. An added bonus for our visitors were the platypuses we saw.

Our ultimate destination was the birding Mecca of Bowra. Our visitors didn't know what to expect and were blown away with how good it was. The highlight for me would have to be the time spent at the waterhole, both evening and early morning. Along with Malcolm and Lenore, Cwe huddled under the trees, sitting in the dirt, keeping as still and silent as possible and waited with anticipation to see who would come for drinks. It was a fantastic experience. I gasped in astonishment at the thirty Major Mitchell Cockatoos with their colourful crests illuminated by the setting sun. Bold Galahs cavorted on the stumps in the water. Ringnecks turned up, one or two at a time. A lone Common Bronzewing, along with Crested Pigeons and Diamond Doves, graced us with their presence. The birds shared the waterhole with an assortment of kangaroos who cautiously approached the water for a drink. You couldn't wipe the smiles from our faces. At our morning stakeout we finally jagged a couple of Bourke's Parrots and Budgies.

We stayed in the old cottage on Bowra. A Spotted Bowerbird had its bower near the house and we were fortunate to see it perform, trying to entice the female into the bower. The resident Striated Pardalote often called from the TV antennae, sometimes accompanied by a Brown Treecreeper climbing up it. The Striped Honeyeater had a nest hanging over the fence. Our visitors were thrilled to see mobs of emus as well as red kangaroos pounding across the dirt early morning.

It would take too much space to name all the birds we saw in this birding paradise but some of our favourites were the White-winged Fairy-wren, Red-capped Robin, Black-eared Cuckoo, Splendid Fairy-wren, Variegated Fairy-wren, Southern Whiteface, three different Thornbills, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, and Crested Bellbird. We were disappointed not to find Hall's Babbler but you can't quibble when there are so many good substitutes.



Bristlebird

Chris Stewart

After leaving Bowra we stayed on a property at Karara, between Inglewood and Warwick, owned by an experienced birder who took us and some other visiting birders on a long walk through a neighbouring property harbouring a big variety of birds. The Crested Shrike-tit was the most spectacular and we saw all six Woodswallows that morning. We lunched around the waterhole in

Durikai State Forest and saw many Yellow-tufted and Fuscous Honeyeaters. Nearby we saw Diamond Firetails, a first for us.



*Yellow-tufted Honeyeater Chris Stewart*

Together with birding friends from Brisbane we explored the Border Ranges National Park (out of Qld, but still close). We stayed in an old cabin just outside the Park. It was not without incident – we had a distraught Channel-billed Cuckoo in the toilet block that had to be rescued, valiantly, by John's brother (up close they are very big and menacing); car keys were lost for a night and morning; and one of us needed an emergency hospital visit. On the birding front we were thrilled to get a brief view of the male Albert's Lyrebird and a long view of the female Lyrebird scrabbling around in the dirt. But what topped that was a fabulous viewing of the rare Eastern Bristlebird. It's worth visiting – a beautiful area, with good birding. The view from the Pinnacle Lookout is one of the best we've ever seen and we saw a Peregrine Falcon at the base of Blackbutt lookout.

Well, we travelled over 5000 kilometres in our quest and scored 275 species so we didn't do too badly and I do know our visitors were impressed with the variety of Queensland birds, and the friendliness of birders, and they have very full memory cards to take home. Their favourite comment was 'brilliant'.

*Chris Stewart*

*There have recently been a lot of Fairy Martins flying 10cm-3m but mainly 20cm above the ground on our street and it is quite thrilling to stand there while they fly 5cm away. The Magpies are clacking at them. A Pacific Baza flew over calling. That was my first time hearing their call.*

*Philip*



*Pacific Baza  
Philip*

## BOWRA

September 15<sup>th</sup> Mal and I headed for another trip to Bowra, via Barcaldine. At Bowra we camped near the shearing shed so we could plug into power. Bird Call was held there each night as the Shearers' Quarters were fully occupied with a group of environmental consultants who were carrying out a survey of Bowra.

The Lagoon in front of us had Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels, Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Black-tailed Native Hens and Black-winged Stilts. Fairy Martins frequently flew overhead. Chestnut-crowned Babbler were also seen.

The smaller dam, past the cottage, was our favourite spot. There were always plenty of Galahs and the beautiful Major Mitchell's Cockatoos and Bourke's Parrots put on a good display so we spent a lot of time sitting under the trees watching their antics. Common Bronzewing, Emus, Roos, Peaceful and Bar-shouldered Doves, Red-rumped, Ringnecked and Mulga parrots, Budgies, Crested Pigeons and Double-barred Finches also visited this dam. There were 40 Major Mitchells there on one occasion. The White-plumed Honeyeaters were constantly in and out of the water.



*Major Mitchell Cockatoos*

The Stony Ridge had a pair of Chestnut-breasted Quail Thrush. They have been in this area every time we have been there and were really easy to find. They were carrying what appeared to be nesting material. The Hall's Babbler weren't so co-operative and we spent a lot of time looking for them in the same area and beyond to no avail.

Saw-Pit Gully had about fifty Emus which came for a drink then disappeared back over the hill. Little water remains in the waterholes of the creek. White-winged Choughs were also seen in this area. A pair of Collared Sparrowhawks were keeping close to a nest in the trees along the main road which branches off to Sawpit Gully.

The Tablelands track is so absolutely appalling that we abandoned the car and ended up walking. Found Brown and White-browed Treecreepers and Hall's Babbler. We were amazed when we got to top of the track to find a beautiful grassy plateau, especially when a Little Eagle wafted overhead.

We stopped at a place where Peter Valentine had seen a Painted Button-Quail some time ago. The very

first tree under which we looked had fresh platelets and then a bird started sneaking away. Quickly heading it off, we managed to get some rough photos which were good enough to make a positive ID. Sure enough, it was a Painted Button-Quail; a lifer! In the same area, Red-chested Button-Quail have also been seen recently. We were advised after we had returned home, that other visitors had videoed a bird there and positively identified it as a Painted Button-Quail.



*Southern Whiteface*

Also in the same area, flowering eucalypts attracted hundreds of Woodswallows; all except Dusky were identified. They make a tremendous racket that can be heard from a long way off.

The main bore drain is still operating but any offshoots have been blocked off. Water supplied to a couple of places in the Western Paddock has also been closed off. The dam out the back of the Western Paddock is dry. As a result, there was reduced activity in this area. Yellow-rumped, Buff-rumped and Chestnut-rumped Thornbills were the most frequent. There is still plenty of water at Gumholes; lots of pigs, goats and emus were in the area.

The Crested Bellbird proved to be most elusive. As soon as we moved toward the call, the bird went silent. If we sat and waited, it still disappeared. Next time!

Some of the best birding to be had is just around the camp and house areas. Walking through these areas, we saw Red-capped Robins, Jacky Winter, Pallid Cuckoo, Striated Pardalote, Noisy Friarbirds, Double-barred Finches, Restless Flycatcher, Striped Honeyeater, Singing Honeyeater, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Spotted Bowerbird, Rufous Whistler, Southern Whiteface, Apostle Birds, Ringneck Parrots. Variegated Fairy-wrens were numerous with lots of juveniles.

Going off the main entrance road, along a rough track, we came upon Grey-crowned Babblers, Splendid, Variegated and White-winged Fairy-wrens, all with lots of juveniles in tow. The birds all seem to have or are having, a successful breeding season. Many species were seen with juveniles; particularly the Red-capped Robin with juveniles of several stages which are a headache to identify at times.

A young bird, barely fledged, with a perpetually angry look on its face, was photographed. We had no

idea what it was but when comparing notes with another camper, he had seen the same bird being fed by a White-browed Woodswallow.

As usual, we enjoyed Bowra. Hopefully, if the birds are a reliable indicator with widespread breeding, rain is on the way.

For once in my life, I wish our Brush Turkey at home would do more than the odd desultory scratch. I am sure that it is a reliable indicator of the forthcoming wet season as it made no attempt to breed last year.

*Lenore*

## SUNDAY MORNING WALK

Once again our Sunday morning survey (Oct 20th) at the dam proved to be a beautiful morning. As you are well aware, the heat is now starting to creep in and things are very dry. On the drive down to the parking area Bustards were seen in flight and on the ground. Many Magpie Geese were in amongst the Mango trees. Brown Falcon and Nankeen Kestrels were seen on the power lines. Janet spotted Budgies but I dipped on those.

Down the back there is still some water and what a feast of birds was waiting there for us. A good number of Pelicans and Royal Spoonbills were busy feeding in the now quite shallow water. All the egrets, 4 Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, White-necked Herons looking very flash with their breeding plumes on show, 2 Red-kneed Dotterels, cormorants and ducks. Plus several bush birds, Red-wings, Corellas and Rainbow Lorikeet presented themselves.

Then down to the mining area where we spotted Wood Duck, Fuscous Honeyeater, Great Crested Grebe and Cotton Pygmy- goose. To finish off on our way back to the cars we watched as a Pacific Baza cruised overhead giving everyone lovely prolonged views. Then suddenly from out of nowhere a second one appeared and went into the wings held aloft display flight, a fitting end to a great morning's birding.

The morning walk gave us a tally of 68 species and back home by 9am so certainly better than lying in bed.

*Marleen Acton*



*Pacific Baza  
Ray Sutton*

## YARAKA – THE END OF THE LINE

### THE TRAINS DON'T COME HERE ANY MORE

The town of Yaraka is a clean and green oasis in the Queensland Outback. It was at the head of the railway line which ran 180km west from Blackall; that was until QR sold all their light-class locomotives to developing countries in the east, leaving this light-class line to Yaraka unable to carry the heavier locos that now make up the QR National loco fleet, so this particular line and its entire infrastructure was taken up and recycled in about 2008.

<http://yarakamixed.capebyron.com/>



Yaraka is located at the foot of the Macedon Ranges between the range escarpment and the flood plains of the Barcoo River. Today Yaraka supports a permanent population of 14, with about 80 people residing in the surrounding district. That is according to Mr Bob Long, local town person, General Store manager, Town Water Treatment Plant manager, Automotive Repairer, Diesel fitter, air-conditioner mechanic and town historical tour guide. (Being multi-tasked is an essential trait of anyone living in such remote areas?) Yaraka has a tennis court, a 40m swimming pool, one hotel which provides drinks, meals and accommodation, as well as a General Store which supplies most convenience items such as bread and milk and fruit and vegetables. ULP and diesel can also be purchased there.



Inland Bearded Dragon

After we left Idalia National Park (4 days), en route west to Welford National Park, we were having some hot issues with our car engine's cooling system. So we stopped at Yaraka to see if we could get the

problem fixed. We met the very versatile Bob Long, working under a local grazier's Land Cruiser across the road from the General Store and Fuel Bowsters. "I'll just get cleaned up and meet you at the bowsters," he said. While filling with fuel, Bob asked all the usual visiting tourist questions and was happy to see that this was our third visit to Yaraka. Bob suggested we kill some time in town while our engine cooled enough so he could release the radiator cap and have a look at the problem. He suggested that we consider staying at least over- night.

"Camp at the Yaraka Caravan Park," he said. "It's just 50 metres down the street, behind the Community Centre... and it's free." So we set up camp and eventually Bob was able to inspect the cooling system. All we needed was a new radiator cap and, luckily for us, Bob had a replacement cap in his cache of automotive products.

We were safely mobile again, so we jumped in the car (with campervan off) and headed just 5km north of town up the extremely steep drive to the vistas of Mount Slocombe, a beautiful sandstone, plateau-topped mountain with outcrops bulging from its flanks. Cameras a-clicking, we had some beautiful views of Raptors thermalling the updrafts of the side-slopes. Peregrine and Brown Falcons shared the same air, but they were not as comfortably bold as the Wedge-tailed Eagle that scoured the picnic area right above us. Little Woodswallows hawked overhead.



Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters

Driving back down the winding restricted vehicle-type (Trucks, Busses, Caravans and Trailers) road to the plains 300 metres below, we were watching Pipits, Hooded Robins, Woodswallows and Bustards, when Chris said, "STOP!!... There is something back there in that tree on the left!" We had just passed the tree at around 80 km/hr. U-turn and a short hunt provided fantastic views and photos of a camouflaged Inland Bearded Dragon taking a nap on a tree. On our way back to camp, we decided to check the twin Town Dams for birdlife. Earlier, from the caravan park, we had seen flocks of Budgies and Cockatiel continually coming in for drinks at the dams, so we knew there had to be some water there. As we peeked over the high walls, about 10 species of expected and common water-birds welcomed us.

Back at camp now: - the amenities, very clean. We enjoyed beautiful hot showers (after having bushed-it

and bathed in a bucket for the previous 4 days). Watching a beautiful sunset, we settled for sundowners and planned our next day. Totally unexpected and unaccounted for was the rain which fell on the canvas overnight and in the early daylight morning. Really it only just settled the dust, but the early morning freshness made for terrific lighting and clarity in all our photographs. The adjoining Tennis Court caught the run-off from the roof of the Community Hall and so we ended up with a swimming pool for birds; maximum depth about 1cm. This is in the middle of a drought, so we had many birds come in to enjoy the frenzied event. Spiny-cheeked and Brown Honeyeaters, Little Friarbirds, Restless Flycatchers, Grey Shrike-thrushes, the more common Apostlebirds, Willie Wagtails, Galahs and Spotted Bowerbirds and Red-winged Parrots. This was a very exciting pool party, fuelled also by the flowering Bottle-brush shrubs. I recall Bob Long saying there has not been any rain what-so-ever since April 2013; so these few showers proved most welcome for everyone, including the local birdlife.



Mount Slocombe

Yaraka is extremely good-value outback birding and most definitely worth considering a couple of nights here of (Free and Powered) Camping at the Yaraka Caravan Park in your travel plans in Outback Queensland. Did I say Free? A donation to the Royal Flying Doctors Service is always appreciated.

Story and photographs

Len and Chris Ezzy

## A NEW HOBBY

Hi fellow Birdwatchers. I am a new member and local resident of Townsville.

For the past five years I have been travelling around Australia in a small camper trailer, with lots of trimmings. Travelling is not all that unusual but as a 55 year old Quadriplegic it does have its difficulties. Initially birdwatching was just casual, with a cheap pair of 7 x 50 bins. Soon in my travels I learnt my first birdwatching experience. I found a small group of green and yellow birds in Tasmania (parrot like). Grabbing my book (Michael Morcombe) and identifying the pretty little bird, my birdwatching life began. It was a Green Rosella. I wondered whether to mark the book to say that I found it. So I did, my first tick. But I didn't put a place or time. That was my first mistake!

My next trick was to work out how to get into the centre of the bush and build a hide? Coz that's what Birdwatchers do, this has never really been solved but huge lessons were learnt from an old mate who is one of Australia's best flora and fauna photographers, Leo Meier, as well as the only other Birdwatchers I knew, Deidre and Steve Baker. Just get near the bush and birds will come to you!!! Great mentors. Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike was my next bird. It fascinated me, flying in and out of this Port Jackson fig. So elegant. Then Striated Heron and Forest Kingfisher. Now I knew what I was doing!! Hahah I thought.



Black-faced Cuckoo –shrike

Ray Sutton

Arriving in Kakadu well!!! I was hooked. I could birdwatch from bed.... This was perfect, I was learning that birds come to you rather than traipsing up a jungled mountain only to get a flat tyre and drop my bins. Mamukala Wetland had a bird hide the size of a wheelchair basketball court, so I would set up my tripod, cheap video camera, even cheaper bins, and 3 books. Magpie Geese, Black-necked Stork, Black-winged Stilt, Azure Kingfisher, this was heaven. I should have sold the video and bought a decent pair of binoculars. Soon I bought a pair for \$250 from Brisbane. WOW what a great pair these were!! Bushnell 8 x 42's. Deidre had pointed me in the right direction.



Azure Kingfisher

Ray Sutton

So I got my kayak delivered to me in Darwin as there were safe places to paddle and birdwatch. This was better than being in the bush! Then I thought rather than just ticking the birds in my book, I should put a date and place there as well because my list was

getting long (40 birds) and I was forgetting which birds I had seen. Some days you would go out and find 10 new birds and only identify 3, ahhhhh what a pain. So how do I fix that up now?? Contact a birdwatching club!! Fixed. Darwin Birdwatchers club, where in meet a real mentor, a tight head prop rugby player, 110kg of muscle and a great Birdwatcher..... Marc Gardiner. We went out one morning and got 11 new birds for me, my best day ever and still is in Australia. From memory, Australasian Grebe, Weebill, Bar-breasted Honeyeaters, Silver-crowned Friarbird, Brown Honeyeater, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Yellow Oriole, Crimson Finch, Golden-headed Cisticola, Brown Goshawk, Brown Falcon. What a fabulous morning was 11/4/2009. Oh I cheated, checked my bird diary. My next outing was back to the same..... 10 new birds and only identify 3. It was becoming apparent that my knowledge was letting me down. I knew how much I didn't know and that was scary! Oh my God how do you fix this problem..... Easy, do the crime, do the time.... Birdwatch all day and all night done.

That's it for this episode but next issue will include, "How to be a Bad Birdwatcher" and even more inspiring stories.

Cheers All  
Richard Cordukes.

Ps. Oh this is my first bird writing attempt. Hope you like it.

## CASTLE HILL FLIGHT SHOW

A couple of days ago we had friends staying in Townsville for two days so upon their arrival, Christine and I took them late in the afternoon to Castle Hill for the magnificent views. Kaye is an experienced birder from Brisbane and she was travelling with her sister Cherie, who has some interest in birds. As we headed out to the eastern-most lookout I mentioned to Kaye a couple of birds we might see and said, "We may even see a Peregrine Falcon", even though I hadn't seen one there yet. She was unconcerned, saying she sees them often, and I recalled she had seen many falcons including 6 or 8 sightings of Grey Falcons. None of us even took our binoculars.

Not long after arriving at the lookout, a bird was spotted rising from below, reaching our height and continuing to glide upwards. It was quite close and we quickly realised it was a Peregrine and I rushed back to the car for binoculars. When I returned, the falcon had gained considerable height and was effortlessly soaring high above, although maintaining a steady position despite the high winds that afternoon. It wasn't long before we realised that there was a second falcon, this one flying even higher in the same fashion. Then Cherie, who seemed the

most persistent of the four of us, spotted another sitting on a rock just below the furthest lookout on the opposite ridge. This is the southern lookout which I had avoided because it's higher and more difficult to walk to. It was clear that this was a juvenile bird and as it sat there in its exposed position, it was being buffeted by the strong winds.



Even though we had seen Peregrines before, this was getting good, so led by the determined Cherie, we headed off to the opposite lookout hoping for a close-up view of the juvenile. On the way we saw something I will never forget. One of the adults began a dive which took it not far from us as it continued on down until it went from sight. The speed of the dive was amazing and being so close to us, it was a sensational sight, certainly the fastest thing I've ever seen. Our walk up to this lookout was equally rewarding as we could see the juvenile from a distance of just 5 to 10 metres.

We began to head back, when the juvenile shifted, landing on a rock on the side of the ridge not far from us, so we stopped again, peering over the side for a look. Then the juvenile took to the air again, somewhat clumsily in the windy conditions, in the region between the two ridges housing the lookouts. Then suddenly, the female came screaming from behind us at great speed toward the juvenile, so close to us that I instinctively ducked. Upon reaching it, the pair went into a tumbling flight with talons outstretched, reminding me of falcons when they transfer food from one to another. But this was different – this was the mother protecting its young, most likely guiding it as it learnt to fly in these very windy conditions. The juvenile headed back to our ridge and tried unsuccessfully to land on a stunted tree just a few metres from where we watched, wide-eyed and smiling. It managed to land on rocks just a few metres further on.

When the two birds were together it was possible to see that the juvenile was about three-quarters the size of its mother. Another thing which stood out on the frequent occasions when we had a close view was the brightness of the yellow legs and bill.



When we left after an amazing hour of aerobatics and birding, the juvenile had managed to reach the opposite ridge and perch itself on a rock not far from the lookout we first walked to, while the adults were keeping guard from high above. Kaye was delighted to have witnessed this display, as we all were, no longer nonchalant about seeing a Peregrine Falcon. Even though the next day we went to Paluma where Kaye saw 4 or 5 "lifers", including the famous Golden Bowerbird, it seemed to me that the flight show of the falcons on Castle Hill was the highlight of her visit to Townsville.

John Stewart

Photographs Christine Stewart

## LAWN HILL

The lure of Lawn Hill became too much to resist and we set out on 12 August 2013 along with Ian Leach, Cecily Messer, Rick Nuttall and Gloria Zaverdinos.

This would be our fourth visit but the first visit for the others.

Overnight at Julia Creek caravan park, which is good, gave us an appreciation of how dry it is out west. Travelling on next day, the drought conditions were very evident. Stopped at Gregory River for lunch, at picnic tables across from the pub. Ian prowled around the flowering trees and spotted a Painted Honeyeater, much to everyone's delight. Totally unexpected in that location. We did not go down to the river as it was jammed with campers and just kept going.

We camped at Adels Grove with most of the group in the Grove where there is excellent shade. We took a place up the hill, less shade but sun for the solar

panel. Next morning, Wednesday, we drove to the National Park, 10 km, walking along the water's edge and to where the climb commences to the rocky plateau. Very few birds to be seen along the water. At the top of the climb, fortunately nobody needed resuscitation. Gloria asked what bird is this that sitting there looking at us. Unbelievable – it was a Sandstone Shrike-thrush, our target bird for the trip! It was quite unconcerned and proceeded to sing its glorious song while we all took photos. It has been such a hard bird to find on previous visits and this time was so easy. That was the one and only sighting of the Sandstone Shrike-thrush for the trip. On the return walk, we found Weebills and Long-tailed Finches.

Funnily, when I was talking to a fellow camper at Adels Grove, he was heading off next day to the Kimberley to look for the Sandstone Shrike-thrush. He was quite taken aback when I told him that the bird was here. Had not done his homework.

Birds were hard to find. Adels Grove staff were blaming cats, particularly for the reduction in numbers of the Purple-crowned Fairy-wren. We saw several cats on the top of the rubbish bins at night. Cats are devastating our wildlife. Not just birds but anything that moves. Governments and local councils say that control of feral animals is a landowner responsibility but there must be recognition that this has gone far beyond their capability. At government level, there must be a long term national strategy for the control of cats, otherwise there will be nothing left in our outback.



*Relaxing in The Grove after a hard morning's birding*

Canoeing up the gorge next day was a pleasant experience. Portaged and then paddled along the upper stretch of water. We finally found a family of Purple-crowned Fairy-wrens right at the top end of the gorge. Buff-sided Robins were finally found upstream from the falls between the two lagoons.

A trip to Louie Creek followed the canoe trip. Louie Creek is approximately 10 km along the road to Riversleigh and is an excellent birding area. I expected it to be dry but it was actually flowing. We visited the memorial plaque for the Chinese couple who lived there up to the 1930's and 40's. and then walked along the creek. Northern Rosella's, Silver-crowned Friarbird and some very secretive Purple-crowned Fairy-wrens were seen.

The last trek was to the Constance Range lookout. A rough track but the views are well worth the effort. A large, well fed Freshwater Crocodile was seen sunning itself in the lower gorge on our return trip.



*Sandstone Shrike-Thrush*

Back at Adels Grove, we saw Varied Lorikeets, White-browed, Masked, Black-faced and Little Woodswallows, Olive-backed Oriole, Yellow-tinted Honeyeater, Golden backed Black-chinned Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Grey-headed Honeyeater, Grey-fronted Honeyeater, Yellow-

rumped Thornbill; Little Eagle; Grey-crowned Babblers, Spotted and Great Bowerbirds, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Crimson Finch, Bar-shouldered Dove, Little Friarbird, Rufous Whistler, Restless Flycatcher, and White-winged Triller.

Everyone enjoyed their visit to Lawn Hill. We plan to go again next year but will see how things go.

To cap off the trip, we stopped at the remnant puddle that was the Pentland Dam. A large flock of Plumhead Finches were feeding on the ground. Another tick for the Quest!

*Story and Photographs*

*Malcolm Calvert*

## TOOTH-BILLED BOWERBIRDS

Early afternoon Sunday October 6, acting on a tip from Beth Snewin, Trish Pontynen, Marjory Cook and I set out on the H Track at Paluma in search of Tooth-billed Bowerbirds. We thought we had missed them- we began at the wrong end of the track! - when we heard one calling loudly. Could we locate it?

After a long time we eventually did - a few metres through the rainforest, barricaded by Wait-a-while vines, in the fork of a smallish tree almost the same colour as the bird. With a wide open mouth, it was giving out a variety of calls. Trish eventually located its court, spread with large leaves. Encouraged by our success, we continued on the remainder of the track only to be surprised by the calls and sightings of two more birds.

On Monday we visited the track again to show Ian

Montgomery our "finds", only to be surprised by a fourth bird in the same vicinity as the other three. Ian's photographs and a sound bite featured in his Bird of the Week (9 Oct 13). He gives a very informative account of the birds and their formation of a lek. How fortunate were we to spend hours listening to their calls and imitations of other rainforest species such as the Grey-headed Robin, learning about their behaviour patterns, the location of their courts and the particular leaves they adorn them with. We even saw one drop a leaf and then bite off another, putting its tooth to good use. Where were the females? Maybe a future trip in this breeding season will surprise us with the response of females to this fascinating behaviour of their male counterparts.

*Joan Wharton*



*Tooth-billed Bowerbird*  
*Annette Sutton*

## WHITE-BROWED CRAKES AT MUNGALLA



*Ray Sutton*



*Annette Sutton*

## CHALLENGE COUNT JUNE 2013

This year our Challenge Count for June turned out really well with 29 counters. Many thanks to all who helped with this count. Magnetic Island came on board again, boosting our overall numbers, although they only managed to add 3 species not seen over here. (Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Purple Swamphen and Fan-tailed Cuckoo)

Our very first Challenge Count was done in December 1995 and gave us our master start list of 181 species. By December 1997 we had increased that to 199 species. I have no info on 1996, 1998 and 1999. I do know that we did count one of those years but not sure which one - 1996 would be the most likely.



*Metallic Starling* Ray Sutton

I took on coordinating and compiling the numbers in December 2000 when we had a total of 212 species on our master list. Our June Counts commenced in 2002. At the end of this article you will find out how far we have come, adding new species. Most counts I am surprised to find that we manage to add something. This time was no exception with one Metallic Starling seen at Alligator Creek and 6 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters counted at the Breakwater. Well done to those members.

There are many interesting stats to be gained by reviewing old counts. A few of the interesting sightings are 4 Black-naped Tern last included 20 in the Dec 2004 count. 20 Pink-eared Duck (2- June 2005) 1 Spotted Harrier (1- June 2008) 1 Little Kingfisher (1- June 2011) 2 Mangrove Robin (1- June 2011) and 3 Brown Songlark (1- December 2009).

Another bird of interest is the Freckled Duck which has been popping up all over Queensland this year (but not in this count). We saw 350+ on our Dam Cruise in August. They were first included in a count

way back in June 2003 when we managed to see twenty-five of them. We also scored seventeen in December 2003 but they had not been seen here since then.

This year you managed to find 190 species =15208 birds. With the 2 new species added to our master list for our 40km area, now at 312 species since 1995 I think you would have to agree that is impressive.

I hope that after reading this you are inspired to become Challenge Count members and go forth and find birds for the 2013 December Count, because even though it will more than likely be hot, you just don't know what is out there. Please get in touch with Pat Charlton on 4779 9885 as she is now the coordinator of areas to be covered.

Once again a big thank-you to all involved. Let's see how we go this December.

*Marleen Acton*

## ANNUAL MISSION BEACH PIP SURVEY

(Pied Imperial-Pigeon)

2nd November - Meet at Mission Beach C4 centre at 2.00pm for update and orientation  
Counts at allocated locations to start at 4:00pm  
Dinner after at Mission Beach Resort at 7.00pm  
Possible walk next morning  
Contact: Trish Pontynen Mob: 0417735410 Email: [tpontynen@yahoo.com.au](mailto:tpontynen@yahoo.com.au)

If you are not going to Mission Beach you are also encouraged to note PIP activity around Townsville, especially any nesting behaviour and any sightings of flying between the mainland and Magnetic Island.

To get forms you can go to [pipwatch.net](http://pipwatch.net) and click on Coast Count button. Julia Hazel would also like photos of people counting and count sites.

[Julia.Hazel@jcu.edu.au](mailto:Julia.Hazel@jcu.edu.au)



## QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Chris Ezzy	373	8/01/2014
Len Ezzy	371	6/01/2014
Niel Bruce	351	17/12/2013
Ian Leach	343	9/12/2013
Janet Robino	326	22/11/2013
Ian Boyd	305	1/11/2013
Marleen Acton	304	31/10/2013
Rosemary Payet	300	27/10/2013
Greg Calvert	280	7/10/2013
Joan Wharton	279	6/10/2013
Lenore Calvert	278	5/10/2013
Malcolm Calvert	276	3/10/2013
Peter Valentine	264	21/09/2013
Annette Sutton	257	14/09/2013
Cecily Messer	252	9/09/2013
Elna Kerswell	245	2/09/2013
Alf Acton	233	21/08/2013
Warren Charlton	225	13/08/2013
Beth Snewin	223	11/08/2013
Wendy Kaus	221	9/08/2013
Pat Charlton	221	9/08/2013
Alex Canton	212	31/07/2013
Mark Horvath	199	18/07/2013

## CALENDAR

### October 2013

27th - Sunday Outing - Townsville Town Common Out To Shelly Beach - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a departure at 6.30am sharp. Gate out to Shelly Beach will be locked after we enter so late comers will miss out. Bring morning tea - will be home by lunch time. Car pooling encouraged - high clearance vehicles only.

### November 2013

3<sup>rd</sup> - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am.

6<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Raptors. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

9<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00pm) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. No guest speaker as it will be members short presentations instead.

13<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am.

17<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am.

24th - Sunday Outing - Cungalla for the shorebirds - 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.

### December 2013

1<sup>st</sup> - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am.

11<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Coastal Birds. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

14<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - No meeting. Christmas party on 15th instead. For details see President's Report.