

# The Drongo

Number 126 April 2013



Scotland

Canada

Western  
Australia



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

The business side of the amalgamation continues. There has been a lot of confusion about what National Office requires of branches which led to discontent. Many branches sent a joint letter to the Board. Our branch submitted an individual letter clearly stating the areas that we have had difficulty with. The Board has taken the concerns expressed very seriously. Hopefully it is all about to be sorted. There will be a meeting late in May in Melbourne of branch representatives and National Office staff to iron out some of the issues. It is hoped that the outcome will be a clear and fairly simple document outlining branch working arrangements. The main areas of concern are funding arrangements and branch obligations under the BirdLife Australia Insurance Policy. Warren Charlton will be our representative and I'm sure he will be urging the KISS principal (keep it simple etc).

As a former Prime Minister once said 'life wasn't meant to be easy' but I believe that things are going to get a lot easier with the promise of a more open two-way communication between branches and National Office.

Three of our educators will be doing a presentation to the Home Schooling Group at Dan Gleeson Gardens on birds and looking after their habitat. As the gardens have a reasonably large Fruit Bat colony it will be a good opportunity to point out (through the scope – none of us want to get too close) between bats and birds. If you ever want to join in one of these activities have a chat to Elna. They are usually good fun and we certainly meet some great kids and parents.

Again, I ask you all to think about writing something for the Drongo. No article is too small or too big – they can always be published as a serial. This is a way that each member can make life a lot easier for Annette. It also makes life a lot more interesting for all readers of the Drongo.

Remember, if you have any ideas for improving our club, please contact one of the committee members or send an email to [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au).

*Janet Robino*

### **YOUR COMMITTEE**

President: Janet Robino

Vice-President: Alf Acton

Secretary: Warren Charlton

Treasurer: Nina Doyle

Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton

Conservation Officer: Peter Valentine

Education Officer: Elna Kerswell

Committee Members: Pat Charlton, Cecily Messer, Malcolm Calvert, Lenore Calvert



## BIRDING IN BRITAIN

Last year John and I had a birding trip to Britain. It was spring – ‘best time of year, said our Scottish friends, for birds and weather’.

Well, they were wrong about the weather but we did see some good birds, some great scenery and a castle or two thrown in. The most startling thing we saw were the bird hides. They were positively palatial compared to the Aussie rough and ready ones - beautiful pine walls and plush chairs. And the next most startling thing were the birders. So many of them, even mid-week, and they didn't just saunter down the tracks, they purposefully strode with all manner of gear strapped to their backs – telescopes, cameras, sundry coats and raingear (this was spring after all). Then to top it all off, the RSPB centres had restaurants, with the ubiquitous soup which we needed to thaw out. These are manned by volunteers. The centres also had shops with everything a birder could desire and comprehensive educational information.

Our first birding spot was Minsmere in Suffolk. Here we saw Ringed Plovers, Tits, Cetti's warbler and sundry other small birds. John and the others walked out to the ocean for the seabirds but I was too sick with the flu and slept in the car instead. We saw the Corn Bunting somewhere between Minsmere and Drummond Bay.



Puffin

Christine Stewart

We took a tiny ferry out to the Farne Islands in Northumberland (eastern side of England). Fortunately it was calm waters and the sun was shining at last! You would only venture here if you were a birder or, I suppose, a lighthouse aficionado. This little island was smothered in birds, the best one, for me, being the comical puffin. Well, they don't act comically, but look it nevertheless. Severe rains a few weeks prior to our visit meant that thousands of puffin eggs nestled in the hollows were washed out so their numbers were well down. There were hundreds of Arctic terns amongst the vegetation on top of the island and every nook and cranny on the cliffs was occupied by Razorbills, gulls, Guillemots, Kittiwakes and Shags. On our boat ride back to Seahouses we saw plenty of seals.

Our friends took us to a windfarm where they do bird surveys and we saw Common Redshanks, as well as eagles. Fowlsheugh, Aberdeenshire was an intriguing place. Spectacular cliffs and walks, and spectacularly cold. John and I struggled on the steep paths as we were still both sick with the flu but we were desperate not to miss anything. Here the rugged, rocky, towering cliffs harboured thousands of sea-birds, either nesting, resting, basking in the sun or gliding down the impressive cliff-faces. We saw the nasty-smelling Fulmar bird which has a reputation akin to a skunk – you don't get too close or you will smell for a week.

From there we went to the Cairngorms, the highlands of Scotland. The weather was steadily getting colder, minus 4, rain, and then, magically, snow. If this was spring, I thought, how would I survive winter? Anyhow, we still did lots of birding and were rewarded with a Dipper (John was 'choughed' about that). It was fascinating watching him (the Dipper, not John) dive under the water. One of the birds we encountered was nicknamed by our hosts as the 'John bird'. It was in fact a Chaffinch and it was uncanny how many of them appeared wherever John was. We visited the Queen at Balmoral (we know she was there because her signature flag was flying) and we roamed around her gardens and saw a song thrush. We saw colourful Goldfinches in the highlands also.

Like here in Australia, we would come across other birders in isolated areas and they would 'share the knowledge' as would we. However, some of their sightings turned out to be wild goose chases (not literally) but there's always a plus, as in beautiful scenery, especially the lochs.

We headed for the Isle of Skye. Never mind the birds, the scenery was the drawcard for me. Talk about dramatic! This island boasted the Cuillin Hills, and coastal vistas to die for. We went to Neist Point on the western side, overlooking the Atlantic,



looking for seabirds. It was so windy, we could hardly stand upright and absolutely freezing and surprisingly, quite boggy underfoot on top of the cliffs. We observed the Gannets gliding and diving into the water. We were excited to see Wheatears on Skye and from then on saw them often.

Travelling down the western coastline of Scotland, we explored the Silver Sands of Morar, and beautiful, unspoilt, deserted beaches (while the sun shone!) and were constantly on the lookout for birds scoring Turnstones and Golden Plovers and others.

We went across to the Isle of Mull, and if I thought Skye was beautiful, Mull managed to top even that. Mull is where the serious birders go to see the Golden Eagle, and the White Tailed Eagle. We saw these magnificent birds gliding off the cliffs on the majestic western side of the island. It's the same old story – you set up your telescope, and, like bees to nectar, a car full of birders will pull up with a 'what have you got?' and you share your directions and telescope with them and before long everyone is infused with excitement and satisfaction. You chat for a while, understanding about half of what the Glaswegians say. We also saw a few stately Grey Herons on Mull.



*Razorback*

*Christine Stewart*

On the way to the Isle of Iona (off the bottom of Mull), we stopped on top of a mountain pass and saw a Short-eared Owl. Unfortunately, by the time I got my camera he was gone. Three sorts of people go to Iona – birders, walkers and religious pilgrims. Our target was the Corncrake and it was a relief to finally see him after arduously searching for an hour. Many seek him, but not all find him. After that, I could explore the Columban Abbey.

Back in England, on the way from the Lakes District to Leighton Moss we stopped at a little stream and found Grey Wagtails (which were so colourfully yellow that I incorrectly named them that in my photobook). Then at the RSPB centre at Leighton

Moss (home of the plushest birdhides) we saw heaps of ducks, Avocets, Lapwings and other waders.

All in all, we saw about 120 birds. Our Scottish birder friends were disappointed we didn't see more but to John and me, every bird was a bonus and we were happy with that tally and the opportunity to see such beautiful country.

*Chris Stewart*

## DUCK HUNTING

*It's late Sunday and my wife is checking emails.*

She then informs me that a Freckled Duck has been reported at Pentland. "Hmmm, that would be a new bird for me," I say out loud, while musing. "Why don't you take tomorrow off and go out and try to see it", my wife quips. The globe shatters and I'm off getting things together. Damn. No scope and it's too late to try and organise one. No problem. There'll be someone from the club there with a scope, I try to convince myself.

Monday morning early and I'm off, after ringing my supervisor to tell him I'm taking the day off to go 'duck hunting'. He's an understanding sort of chap but being in Victoria he had to confirm I meant 'twitching'. A couple of hours+ later and I arrive at the Pentland dam. I'm in luck, others are there and they have scopes. Is the duck still there?

On walking up to the group what do I get but the usual, "Oh you've just missed it, it's flown." "Oh well I'll have to sit around in the hope it comes back. Good thing I've got all day." Luckily they were just taking the mickey and a couple of minutes later I was getting good views of a lifer through a scope. Good thing too as I think I would have had issues trying to find it with just my bins. That done I have a look around to see what else is present, half a hundred Pink-eared Ducks, too numerous to count Red-kneed Dotterels, and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, not to mention the usuals. Several photos and a couple of hours later and I'm quite content. Am I becoming a twitcher? I doubt it but when they're so conveniently located I'd be a fool to not give 'em a shot.

*Mark Horvath*



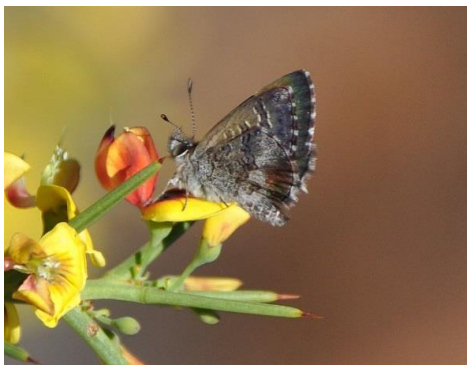
*Pink-eared Duck*

*Ray Sutton*

## BIRDS V BUTTERFLIES

### Birds Trump Butterflies In The West Australian Mulga

The Western Australian Goldfields is a broad area that is centred on Kalgoorlie, some 600 km east of Perth. Driving out from Perth, the Great Eastern Highway passes through much of the central wheat-belt, including large areas of saline soils that once grew wheat. Increasing aridity is evident but for the last 100 km or so we enter the Great Western Woodlands, a magnificent area (16 million ha, larger than Cape York Peninsula) that contains more than 3,000 species of flowering plants. The Great Western Woodlands have 25% of Australia's eucalypt species and associated diversity of mammals, reptiles, frogs and birds. The aridity of the goldfields ensures that thoughts turn to water and the amazing ingenuity of 19th Century engineer C.Y. O'Connor who conceived and delivered a pipeline that siphons water from the Mundaring Weir in the wetter hills above Perth all the way to Kalgoorlie.



Unnamed Butterfly Peter Valentine

Heading north from Kalgoorlie on the northern goldfields highway, the Great Western Woodlands eventually give way to mulga and salt lakes after 70 or 80 km. The average rainfall declines even more and the average temperature goes up. This is a semi-desert environment. The highway passes through abandoned towns and settlements that flourished in the gold rush days, Menzies, for example, with a population of <200 and a single hotel once had 17,000 people and 13 pubs. Our destination is Comet Vale, once a siding and town, now with nothing left but old dump sites and prospector's diggings. In 1979 a party from the Western Australian Museum did a survey near Comet Vale and associated Lake Goongarrie. Amongst their findings were two butterflies, each taken feeding at flowers. These butterflies are completely unlike any other WA species and probably represent a new species. They have never been seen since. I had previously been to Comet Vale searching for these in 1997 but with no joy (a single specimen may be the same, but it was so badly worn that only DNA could confirm it). Noting that the originals were taken in mid March we

decided to give it another go and despite various setbacks eventually arrived in late March 2013. Basing ourselves in the old Menzies pub, (just 20 km north of Comet Vale), we spent several days in solid search, all in the vicinity of Lake Goongarrie and Comet Vale. Conditions were hot and the flies were diabolical but we persisted from early morning to late afternoon.



Rufous Whistler Peter Valentine

I had of course brought my binoculars and my camera, just in case there were interesting birds. This was rewarded the first day when Mulga Parrots and Common Bronzewing were flushed and a feeding party of Varied Sitella was seen (the black-capped subspecies). Even more exciting were the many White-fronted Honeyeaters that were present (by far the most common species in our study area). There were plenty of Singing Honeyeaters and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters also.

Everywhere there was a constant call of the Crested Bellbird and occasionally one would show itself. Grey Shrike-thrushes also called frequently and a well-coloured male Rufous Whistler gave brilliant calls and proved very inquisitive. Many of the birds seemed shy and would offer only fleeting glimpses as they ducked for cover in the mulga or amongst the dune shrubs along the lake. With sufficient time, good viewing opportunities arose. We knew there were Fairy-wrens around and eventually a party displayed including two fully coloured male Splendid Fairy-wrens. A pair of Red-capped Robins came in for a look (this time in eclipse plumage) and two or three Weebills were busy feeding in a mallee eucalypt. Two separate family parties of White-browed Babblers chased each other through the mulga, always staying just a little ahead of us.

Not surprisingly there were Thornbills to enjoy. Inland Thornbills were very confident and displayed well, feeding in the mulga. A single Chestnut-rumped Thornbill gave good views. Most exciting were at least two Slaty-backed Thornbills who eventually showed very well after a period of hide and seek in the shrubs along one of the sand dunes adjacent to Lake Goongarrie. They seemed to join in a general singing and alarm session with a few other small birds in response to my presence. There were at least two pairs of Redthroats giving a close inspection and singing strongly. None obliged with an adequate photographic opportunity but great



views in the binoculars. Another songster that was very active was Gilbert's Whistler. The male with its rich bib of rufous orange stands out and is especially loud with its singing. One pair allowed good views while flying into and between mulga shrubs.

Grey Currawongs were flushed from a eucalypt tree and a single Grey Fantail sang and danced beautifully. It was the white-tailed subspecies, extremely distinctive. Of course there were plenty of more common inland species including Galah, Crested Pigeon and Mistletoebird. A pair of Zebra Finches was nest-building, presumably in response to the early March rainfall. Small groups of Little Crows flew over and Magpies and Magpie-larks were also seen. Raptors were scarce but we did see a single Brown Falcon flying over. A solitary Australian Pipit rounded out the list.



*Australian Shoveler* Peter Valentine

But what of the butterflies? Despite the presence of numerous species, clearly very active following the rain, we failed to see any trace of the mystery species. A different species in the same genus was abundant and breeding everywhere (*Jalmenus icilius*, an attractive blue), probably the first record from Comet Vale of a species that also occurs across southern Australia to western Queensland. In the end we abandoned the search and returned to Perth. This was a good place to top up with a few more birds, especially waterfowl including Musk Duck, Blue-billed Duck, hundreds of Pink-eared Ducks and Australian Shovelers. We did track down another little blue butterfly in the wheatbelt close to Perth, a species soon to be described as distinct from its close relatives. It was surviving in tiny reserves and roadside vegetation that is all that remains of much of the wheatbelt original vegetation. Generally the southwest of WA has been decimated by agricultural clearing and poor land management, perhaps something that the Queensland Government should consider before it endorses similar development in this state.

Although the butterflies were not cooperative on this trip, I had some marvellous bird views, especially the arid inland species. This was not a birding trip but I came away with 87 species, including one lifer. A good outcome.

*Peter Valentine*

## ESCAPEES

During Feb we were visited by a couple of escapees. The first was an Indian Ringneck that popped in on the 8th it then continued to visit every couple of days. So I started to put out feed for it and it was coming in daily until we had to leave on 15th March. Since our return it has not been back.

The other bird was a Lovebird of some sort. It came into our Golden Penda which was in flower on 23rd February through to 2nd March. The Rainbow Lorikeets chased it a lot but it persisted, I have not seen it again either.

*Marleen*



*Two fugitives who took refuge in Acton's garden.*

*Photos Marleen Acton*



## EASTER AT ATHERTON

As the Club had arranged to spend the long weekend over Easter, doing birding trips around the Atherton Tableland, Beth and I decided that we'd join them, but en route, visit relations.



*Orange-footed Scrubfowl*

*Ray Sutton*

I dropped her off at her mother's cousin's place near Lake Barrine, then drove on to Mossman to stay with my sister for a couple of nights. I had hoped to spot many birds on the Mossman farm, but the birding was poor, apart from an interesting session with Fairy Martins, Welcome Swallows and about 40 Australian Swiftlets hawking around for nearly half an hour, over a small grassed area, just above the ground, dodging me and the nearby fence with great skill. I stood there for quite some time, just fascinated and enjoying the good views of the white rumps of the Swiftlets and the cinnamon heads of the Swallows and Martins.

On the Friday morning, I headed to the Tableland, calling en route to chat with Lindsay and Keith Fisher and of course to try to spot a Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher. I did. One was sitting on a vine just beside the entrance road where I saw him last year. There was also a pair of Orange-footed Scrubfowl scratching around in the mulch nearby and an Emerald Dove pottering around beside the road. I had my sandwich lunch at the Heritage Park on the western side of Mareeba and after a while of searching, managed to find the birds making a different call. Weebills – several of them and good views to be had as they fed in the foliage. On to Hasties Swamp for the Pink-eared Ducks and all the others which inhabit that delightful place, if there is enough water in it. The wet season hasn't been good to the Tableland as far as run-off water is concerned, but the whole area is a sea of green at present. Beth had been picked up by her sister, Wendy and husband, Roger, so we met at Hasties, then they followed me to Herberton where we were to stay with some old friends of mine. As Colleen feeds two Grey Butcherbirds and three Laughing Kookaburras, plus half a dozen Rainbow Lorikeets, we enjoyed that feeding frenzy while drinking a very welcome cup of tea. Later, Frank treated us to a

huge dinner of fish and vegetables. Accommodation of the 5 star variety all weekend.

On Saturday morning we met the rest of the birding gang in front of Woodlands Caravan Park before heading off to the scrub at the back of the Tolga sports' field. An interesting walk ensued along a hidden track, giving us: Large-billed Scrubwren, Little Shrike-thrush, Figbird, Catbird, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Scrub Turkey, Lewin's Honeyeater. and much unidentified chirping. As we emerged from the scrub we saw a Rufous Fantail and then a Black-headed Monarch. Onwards to Mareeba where the Centenary Lakes provided us with: Azure Kingfisher, Scarlet Honeyeater, Rufous Night-Heron, Striated Pardalote, Little Bronze-Cuckoo, lovely views of a Fairy Gerygone and various other more common species. Smoko was also enjoyed at this delightful place.

Off we drove to Nordello's Lagoon, which was extremely disappointing as there is no access and it is very difficult to see over the bushes and reeds, though the telescopes picked out a few different water birds. It was then necessary to back-track to Granite Gorge which was interesting, packed with campers, but well set out so we could enjoy lunch at shady tables while looking out over the scene. Fun to sit there chewing, while watching Squatter Pigeons perambulating around in the dirt. Janet had also found us a couple of Grey-crowned Babblers so that made the long back-track well worthwhile. Pale-headed Rosellas flew and chattered about at the rim of the gorge. The energetic ones did a short walk/scramble into the gorge along with myriads of other day trippers. At this point most of the gang headed back to Atherton to walk the Halloran's Hill track where they were pleased to see Riflebird, White-headed Pigeon, Treecreeper, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Silvereye and more Scarlet Honeyeaters. We four headed back to Mareeba to say hello to Beth and Wendy's parents and grandparents in the Mareeba cemetery, before stopping to inspect the trees at the Heritage Park in case the Weebills were still feeding. They were!



*Grey-crowned Babbler*

*Annette Sutton*

Sunday morning saw us all gathered at Lake Barrine, where half the party headed off at speed around the Lake, while others of us wandered slowly along the boardwalk listening and searching for Boatbills and Pigeons, or Double-eyed Fig-Parrots,



or whatever it was that was showering us with chopped up fruit. No luck at all. However a juvenile Pied Monarch did entertain us for a while on the track leading up the hill. I guess the highlight there was really the Atherton Scrub Wren in the car park and the raft (212) of Great Crested Grebes feeding at the far side of the Lake. There was also a large Python curled on a low branch at the edge of the forest near the water and a Musky Rat Kangaroo was also sighted near the hill track. Many other common species were seen or heard. The Cathedral Fig tree area was disappointing apart from a field of Australian Swiftlets, Spotted Harrier and Bower's Shrike-thrush. Yungaburra Park was our lunch venue. I might say that the whole of the Tableland was having an influx of day trippers, or week-enders and there were droves of people everywhere we went. The weather was glorious so it was truly an Easter bonus. While chomping happily on our sandwiches, someone called, "White-headed Pigeon", so off a couple went to the tree where it had landed. Not one pigeon but a whole flock (20) emerged one by one from the surrounding trees. Great thrill as they flew overhead to the next grove of trees and this was soon complemented by a flock of (25) Topknots seen flying further away over the Village. All this while enjoying lunch. To top off our visit, we then saw a White-throated Gerygone and a Rufous Whistler. My group headed home via The Crater, but possibly because of the large and continuous number of visitors, there was nothing of much interest, so we went back to Herberton to cook our dinner and have an early night.



*Brown Cuckoo-Dove Ray Sutton*

Wendy and Roger drove back to Townsville on Monday, while Beth and I spent nearly 6 hours at The Tin Pannikin Village in Herberton. This Museum has been revived and improved since the owner of Jeans West bought it and spent a couple of million dollars to clean it up. I use the word "excellent" to describe this Village if you are interested in our early history of the north: its buildings, its people, their ways of living and other memorabilia of the past. Memories of my early school days were enhanced by visiting the old Herberton State School

building with its rows of long wooden desks, bench seats, slate and slate pencils, history books, a copy book, ink wells and wall charts. WW1 and WW2 artefacts are housed at the other end of the building. For lunch we strolled across a suspension bridge over the river, to a delightful treed area where they have set up a bush camp-shed and fire places. While enjoying the calls of Pardalotes and Sittellas, we partook of a pannikin of smoky billy tea and delicious damper with cocky's joy poured on it. I do believe the damper was even better than the ones my mother made and she was a pretty dab hand at such things. It was cooked traditionally in a camp oven, of course. They are holding a Heritage weekend at the beginning of May and this would be a good time for a visit, with active work displays being conducted. The Village is spotlessly clean, all buildings are in good repair and there is something of interest for everyone. It was good to see many grandparents escorting young ones around and explaining what, how and why many of the 'things' were.

Beth and I drove home on Tuesday, taking the scenic route around Masters Road where a Latham's Snipe and Black-shouldered Kites added their presence to our personal list of 126 species for the weekend. Good one. Thanks to all for your company and cheer.

*Elna Kerswell*

## Mingela and Beyond

There was a good turnout for the Mingela and Beyond trip. The main points of interest were several flocks of budgies seen from Mingela onwards. Plum-headed Finches had everyone peering through telescopes at Mingela. Golden-headed Cisticolas and Tawny Grassbirds were flitting through the long grass. A group of Emus grazed by the side of the road. We spotted a Spotted Harrier and followed an Azure kingfisher along a creek.

"Beyond" involved lunch at Clare and then we pushed on to Horseshoe Lagoon and Morrissey's Landing where the Zitting Cisticola obliged very nicely.

*Annette Sutton*



*Photo by Amy Diedrich JCU*



## TOP RAPTORS

Alf and I missed the February outing to Mingela and beyond due to its being too much time sitting in the car so soon after Alf's hospital visit. Instead we decided to visit Gunnado Road and the Old Flinders Highway, before heading to brother Bill's place (Majors Creek) for a BBQ lunch.



*White-bellied Sea-Eagles*

*Marleen & Alf*

This turned out to be a great decision as we managed to see some great birds. Firstly there were Bustards (4-3-2 & 1) close to the road so out came the cameras. There were still 5 Pink-eared Ducks and 1 Red-kneed Dotterel on the Mount View dam. Then I noticed 3 Wedge-tailed Eagles sitting in a tree off to the right so put the binos on them then proceeded to scan the area and noticed 5 more feeding on a carcass on the ground. The tree sitters then joined in so all 8 were feeding that was a great sight although a little far away.

Then a screech off to our left alerted us to a pair of Sea-Eagles. They had just landed in one of the few trees near the dam, then in flew junior making a great amount of noise so we sat not knowing quite which way to look, Sea-Eagles or Wedgies? To top things off we also had a pair of Jabiru.

So on to Bill's where the BBQ was lit, and generally sitting around having a chat when low overhead flew a Square-tailed Kite (my first since 2006) and not long after that a Spotted Harrier cruised up the fence line. All in all a great day for Raptors.

*Marleen and Alf*

## NEXT DRONGO

Please have your stories in by 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2013.

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## CHRISTMAS IN CANADA

Warren and I had a white Christmas last/this year visiting family in Ottawa, the capital city of Canada. Because of the time of the year we did not expect to see many birds but on the off chance, we packed our binoculars.

The first birds we saw were Mallards feeding in a small unfrozen area of water near the locks on the Rideau Canal and on a section of unfrozen water on the Ottawa River which divides Ontario and Quebec provinces, a flock of Golden- Eye Ducks. There were other ducks there but without a scope, we could not identify them.

Everywhere we saw Black-capped Chickadees – some people put out nesting boxes and feeders for these cute little birds to survive the harsh winters.

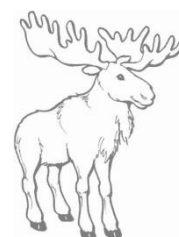
White-breasted Nuthatches were seen in some of the parks looking for insects under the bark. They reminded me of Sitellas, similar in size and shape and they tended to go head first down the trees. From David's unit in Sussex Drive, we saw American Crows and Rock Doves regularly.

One day we walked to the frozen Rideau River and falls - there we saw a flock of Bohemian Waxwings feeding on berries. They only visit the eastern side of Canada in winter as they follow the food supply. Fortunately we were able to photograph these birds to enable us to differentiate them from the Cedar Waxwing, more frequently seen in eastern Canada.

When the weather cleared a little, our son took us to visit "du parc Omega" in Quebec Province – really to see the animals which roam freely within the park – Bison, Elk, Reindeer, Red Deer, White-tailed Deer, Fallow Deer, Wild Boar and Ibex and behind fences we saw Moose, Arctic Fox, Wolves, Coyotes, and a lonely Black Bear which should have been hibernating. Again we were on the lookout for birds and here we saw a Blue Jay, some Hairy Woodpeckers, more Chickadees, a flock of Wild Turkeys, Hoary and Common Redpolls, Slate Coloured Juncos, Snow Buntings, American Crows and a Cedar Waxwing.

Even though we didn't see many species of birds, we enjoyed seeing the ones we did. Ottawa had the heaviest snow fall in years while we were there which curtailed many activities, but it made for spectacular scenery when the snow falls eased. On the way home we had time at Vancouver airport and from the viewing deck we saw Great Blue Heron in some drains and a Red-tailed Hawk soaring as well as Herring Gulls – a great finale to a wonderful four weeks.

*Pat Charlton*



## FRESHWATER LAGOON

On Sunday 24 March I joined a group from Wildlife Townsville to walk the 7.8km of the Freshwater Lagoon Loop recently completed at the Town Common, to be delighted by their company, their knowledge of grasses, plants, trees and butterflies as well as their interest in the 50 species of birds we saw. After a non-birding meeting time (7.30am) we began walking from the Freshwater Parking Area at 8am and completed the normally two hour walk at 12.30pm, having had ample time to stop, look, photograph, name and consult guides on butterflies, trees, plants, grasses and birds.



*Brown Goshawk*

*Laurie Hall*

Recent rains ensured the area was green and lush, water plentiful and insects and butterflies abundant. I was amazed at how many birds we saw at close quarters and had time to identify and record. Julia Hazel took very clear photos of a shapely Darter drying out and captured a female Osprey in flight. Janet Cross added her expertise and other participants had a very sound knowledge of birds – I learned a few things!



*Little Kingfisher*

*Ian Boyd*

Seven species of raptor were seen. For me the highlights were being in the right place at the right time to notice a juvenile Brown Goshawk fly into a tree in front of me, only a couple of metres from the ground; watching the Swamp Harrier search for prey over the wetlands while its white rump gleamed in the sun; and seeing the Little Kingfisher (2) again at the figtree waterhole.

My list is on Eremaea. I'll happily do the walk again, maybe walking in from Pallarenda (9km) or ride my bike - but there seem to be a few bindies to dodge. Anyone like to join me?

*Joan Wharton*

## WINTON and BEYOND

*Highlights of a few days in a special birding area familiar to many Club members.*

First stop Pentland for a late lunch after 'scoping the much diminished dam for the solitary Freckled Duck - yes! still there- among about 40 Pink-eared Ducks, Wood Ducks and other water birds.

At the Burra Range, the view from the Main Road lookout was one of devastation as reported in an earlier 'Drongo'. No chance of a Striated Pardalote there. We turned in by the Telstra tower to see the extent of the fire damage which was fortunately patchy except in the deep burnt out gullies. Some calls in a stretch of green woodland alerted us to a hotspot of activity. Thornbills, Honeyeaters, Grey Fantails, Apostlebirds, a Grey Shrike-thrush and Pale-headed Rosellas cheered us up as we were not expecting much bird life. No Grevillea species were in flower. It seems that it will be a late flowering season and White Mountains NP will take longer to recover.

Continuing on to our over night stop at Hughenden, we decided to investigate Prairie Creek, not a regular stop. It proved to be a good birding site. Over the Railway line the creek widens out into wetlands with more Pink-eared Ducks, Grey Teal, Coots, Grebes, and two Native-hens. The bushes revealed Zebra and Double-barred Finches, Red-backed Fairy-wrens and a female Red-capped Robin. Our first day's list was beginning to look very respectable.

After a pleasant early morning walk along the river bank at Hughenden (Diamond Dove and flocks of Corellas), we turned on to the Winton Road, checking dams as we traveled, also keeping an eye out for raptors such as Kestrels at frequent intervals on telegraph poles plus a few Brown Falcons. The late afternoon was overcast and windy and the flies nearly sent us back to base early but it was worth the discomfort at Pelican Point. Large flocks of Budgerigars, also mixed flocks of Woodswallow species and Rainbow Bea-eaters aerial feeding. The White-backed Swallows were lifers for both of us.

Lark Quarry and the Opalton loop was the plan for the next day as Chris had not been there before. My memory was of a Club visit in 1994 when it was almost impossible to open your lunch box because you ate more flies than chicken sandwich. It now features an impressive auditorium covering a much larger 'Dinosaur Stampede', displays and good facilities. Flocks of Woodswallow species, 'Zebs' and Budgerigars, Yellow-billed Spoonbills and a Hooded Robin made it an exciting morning. We had not allowed enough time to do the loop especially at Opalton. That area really needs a day on it's own. A highlight was a pair of Malley Ringnecks and numbers of Jacky Winters and Grey-headed and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters on some flowering Melaleuca.

Bladensburg NP is well known to Club birders, but we decided to call in at Long Waterhole first to

check for waterbirds, finding Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels . The surprise was that almost every tree (on the non-camping side) was loaded with flowering mistletoe. What a feast for Diamond Doves, Mistletoebirds, over five species of honeyeaters including another lifer for Chris, Painted Honeyeater. There was very little activity around the Shearing Shed and creek unless you count dozens of family groups of three different species of macropods, so we moved on to the Homestead and checked with the rangers.

Scrammy Gorge for a late lunch, but not before hunting through the spinifex for elusive sightings of Emu Wrens. The weather was deteriorating with increasing cloud and wind, distant storms on the horizons and spits of rain. A quick check to ID a pair of Crested Bellbirds then time to head back to let the ranger know we were OK and get off the black soil plains. The day had one more treat for us as we moved off for home. A pair of Crimson Chats near the road followed by a flash of colour. A small flock of Orange Chats flew into some Acacia scrub next to the 4WD just before the creek crossing. How good is that?



*Squatter Pigeon Annette Sutton*

Heavy rain overnight closed the roads from Julia Creek and all points south. We waited until a little later for the rain to ease, and took advantage of the time to check some sewerage ponds adding Weebills and Reed Warblers to our lists. The drive back to Hughenden was uneventful except for one sticky tricky detour. We continued to add to our sightings with Brown Goshawk, Hobby, Squatter Pigeons and White-winged Fairy-wrens, but missed out on one target bird - Spotted Harrier. Missing out the Quarry at White Mountains on the way out, we turned in for a quick afternoon tea break. The Variegated Fairy-wrens played 'very hard to get', and with the G.decora only just starting to flower, there was little bird activity, so on to the Caravan park at Pentland to be greeted by a Spotted Bowerbird on arrival at the Office and well earned Sundowners.

Before heading home we spent the next early morning checking the Cape Road, for those elusive Babblers. No luck. Why? A close up of a Baza/Crested Hawk and chasing family parties of

Thornbills and Gerygones was a challenge. The Morcombe App certainly got a good workout.

Finally, thanks for the excellent Winton Bird brochure (a TRBOC and 'Ezzy' initiative).

Our final tally as we headed down to the coast and home was 129 species, although Chris may have got a few more thanks to her spotting and hearing skills. Another great birding experience.

*Rosemary Payet Chris Corbett*

## VIEWS FROM THE BREEZEWAY

Late this afternoon I was standing out in the breezeway chatting to Marleen on the phone when a pair of Pacific Bazas circled overhead in what appeared to be a lead up to mating.

A short while later I was again out there seeing off some visitors when I noticed a few birds flying around high above the tree tops. Grabbed the binos and watched three Drongos and eight Dollarbirds doing all sorts of fantastic twirls and whirls. I can only assume they were having a feed on insects but couldn't see clearly enough to see the insects as it was all happening a little high and the light was getting a little poor. I have struggled to find Dollarbirds this year with only an odd one here and there so it was a wonderful sight.

Speaking of wonderful sights, this morning, as one of the many who have been making our way to Gunnado Road to chase the very uncooperative Australian Painted Snipe, I was lucky enough to get a reasonable look at her skulking in the grass. But what was really wonderful was getting pretty close to some Budgerigars in trees close to the road and then watching as they took off in a flock of several hundred, wheeling through the skies like little green and gold gems. This was all topped off with watching a pair of Striated Pardalotes digging a nest hole in a pile of dirt in Bucks Road.

All in all, a very nice day!

*Janet Robino*



*Striated Pardalote Ray Sutton*



## CONSERVATION COLUMN

For waterfowl in Victoria this is not a happy time of the year. It is now duck-shooting season in that State and there is no doubt this group of birds suffers as a result. A number of good people are trying hard to monitor what is happening, despite legal attempts to make such monitoring impossible. The Liberal Party State Government has required an exclusion zone surrounding duck-shooting wetlands to prohibit all but licenced shooters. Even so, many volunteers risk fines to try and rescue the wounded waterfowl. In an earlier column last year I pointed out the farcical licence conditions that do not require ability to differentiate between protected species and others. As a result many "non-target" species get shot by reckless or ignorant shooters. Already in this 2013 season species such as Eurasian Coots, Red-necked Avocets, Black Swans and Grebes have been killed or wounded by duck shooters.

Many birds get abandoned to their fate when the same reckless and ignorant shooters wound but do not retrieve their targets. According to Debbie Lustig, who may be known to some members for her posts on Birding-AUS, the grim total of birds shot and left on a couple of wetlands in Victoria so far this season include 103 Pink-eared Ducks, 5 Blue-billed Ducks, 83 Freckled Ducks and numerous others including grebes, swans and avocets to a total so far of 330.

That 83 Freckled Ducks were wounded and left speaks volumes to the degree of ignorance, recklessness and incompetence of Victorian Duck-shooters. It is surely past time that Victoria joined more enlightened states with regard to Duck-shooting. The principal reason for states like NSW, Queensland and Western Australia banning duck-shooting is the cruel and unnecessary nature of the activity.

As long as Victoria continues to allow this activity there is a risk that other states (including Queensland) might decide to reintroduce the practice. Birdlife Australia should be strongly behind those community groups expressing their horror at such barbaric activities. Civilisation has moved on. Cruelty to animals is no longer acceptable in recreational activities.

On the Queensland front, a new cause for conservation concern is the proposed changes to vegetation management with implications for a return to destruction of large areas of native vegetation (and of course the birds that these support). It is time to remind the Government that this is not just knocking down a few pesky trees to allow more agriculture, but entire ecosystems and ecological processes get damaged as a result, including huge numbers of wildlife.

*Peter Valentine*

## BUDGIES

Wild budgerigars average 18 cm (7 in) long, weigh 30–40 grams (1.1–1.4 oz.), and display a light green body colour (abdomen and rumps), while their mantles (back and wing coverts) display pitch-black mantle markings (blackish in fledglings and immatures) edged in clear yellow undulations. The forehead and face is yellow in adults but with blackish stripes down to the cere (nose) in young individuals until they change into their adult plumage around three to four months of age. They display small, purple cheek patches and a series of three black spots across each side of their throats (called throat spots). The tail is cobalt (dark-blue); and outside tail feathers display central yellow flashes. Their wings have greenish-black flight feathers and black coverts with yellow fringes along with central yellow flashes, which only become visible in flight or when the wings are outstretched. Bills are olive grey and legs blueish-grey, with zygodactyl toes.

The beak does not protrude much, due to the thick, fluffy feathers surrounding it, giving the appearance of a downward-pointing beak that lies flat against the face. The upper half acts as a long, smooth cover, while the bottom half is just about a half-sized cup-piece. These beaks allow the birds to eat plants, fruits, and vegetables.

The colour of the cere (the area containing the nostrils) differs between the sexes, being royal blue in males, pale brown to white (nonbreeding) or brown (breeding) in females, and pink in immatures of both sexes. .

Like many birds, budgerigars have tetrachromatic colour vision, but all four classes of cone cells operating simultaneously requires the full spectrum provided by sunlight. The ultraviolet spectrum brightens their feathers to attract mates. The throat spots in budgerigars reflect UV and can be used to distinguish individual birds.<sup>[</sup>

Breeding in the wild generally takes place between June and September in northern Australia and between August and January in the south, although budgerigars are opportunistic breeders and respond to rains when grass seeds become most abundant. They show signs of affection to their flockmates by preening or feeding one another. Budgerigars feed one another by eating the seeds themselves, and then regurgitating them into their flockmate's mouth. Populations in some areas have increased as a result of increased water availability at farms. Nests are made in holes in trees, fence posts, or logs lying on the ground; the four to six eggs are incubated for 18–21 days, with the young fledging about 30 days after hatching.

*From Wikipedia*

## A GUIDE TO GREAT BIRDING

1. Make last minute arrangements, don't leave at sun up.
2. Take the essentials -- thermos first, binoculars too.
3. Laugh all the way to Gunnado, enjoy the scenery.
4. Meet a fellow birder just over the railway line and thoroughly enjoy the flocks of Budgies flying across the road, settling into a bare tree and looking like leaves. Sigh.
5. Look through his scope at the 2 Red Backed Kingfishers, one displaying the red back perfectly. Another sigh.
6. Mosey down Gunnado Road, stop and laugh with all the Apostle Birds and gaze at the exquisite colouring of the male Red Winged Parrot.
7. Answer call from friends (with another thermos) and join up at Old Flinders Highway. Casually Malcolm says "There's a Yellow Billed Spoonbill"--yeah, another 5 cents.
8. Then he spots a snipe in the grass along the side of the waterhole -- a Painted Snipe. Gasp with pleasure, spend hours getting views of this rare sighting and enjoy a well earned cuppa while watching Kites and Wedge Tail soaring over, Brolgas landing in the paddock. The Pink Eared Ducks and Teal tend to take pale into insignificance. Gasp
9. Talk to all fellow birders who arrive and enjoy the Snipe again, climb up on running board of car for better view. Ahhh.
10. Go home when you are too hot, drunk all the tea, seen the snipe again and then wave to a Pacific Heron on the way out. Sigh.

*Cecily Messer*

*PS We saw a hundred or so budgies on Gunnado Road on 21<sup>st</sup> April so they are still about.*



Name	Quest Number	Date
Chris Ezzy	296	23/10/2013
Len Ezzy	294	21/10/2013
Niel Bruce	289	16/10/2013
Rosemary Payet	259	16/09/2013
Janet Robino	250	7/09/2013
Ian Leach	247	4/09/2013
Greg Calvert	240	28/08/2013
Ian Boyd	238	26/08/2013
Peter Valentine	238	26/08/2013
Marleen Acton	237	25/08/2013
Elna Kerswell	235	23/08/2013
Beth Snewin	232	20/08/2013
Lenore Calvert	223	11/08/2013
Wendy Kaus	221	9/08/2013
Cecily Messer	220	8/08/2013
Malcolm Calvert	219	7/08/2013
Joan Wharton	214	2/08/2013
Pat Charlton	204	23/07/2013
Mark Horvath	199	18/07/2013
Warren Charlton	197	16/07/2013
Alf Acton	177	26/06/2013
Annette Sutton	162	11/06/2013

## CALENDAR

### April 2013

28<sup>th</sup> - Sunday Outing - The Burdekin. 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.

### May 2013

5<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am.

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

11<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker Guest Speaker Greg Calvert - Hi-Tech Bird Surveys.

15<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 7.00am.

19<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 7.00am.

21st to 28th: Artemis Station Cape York - Golden Shoulder Parrot Campout. A joint venture with BirdLife Northern Qld. Clean level camping area, toilets and hot showers available adjacent to the Artemis homestead. Arrive and leave on which ever of these days suite you. You will need to be self-sufficient with your camping gear and food and drinking water. If you want something with a bit of comfort there may be accommodation available at the nearby Musgrave Roadhouse (<http://www.musgraveroadhouse.com.au>) which is about 25k north of Artemis. This campout would be suitable for high clearance vehicles only. For further information please contact Ian Boyd.

26<sup>th</sup> - Sunday Outing - Paluma - Meet adjacent to the RAAF Base Duckworth St gate for a departure at 7.00 sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged.

### June 2013

*(Note - Due to Queen's Birthday long weekend, general meeting has been changed to 3rd Saturday)*

1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> - Saturday & Sunday - Winter Challenge Count. Further details closer to the dates.

2<sup>nd</sup> - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am.

5<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Anything Goes. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> - Saturday to Monday - Queen's Birthday long weekend. Campout at Mungalla via Ingham. More details closer to the date. Suitable camping and caravan sites are available on the property as well as rough bunkhouse accommodation at a cost. Other accommodation is available at Ingham (14K away) and Forrest beach (4k away).

12<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 7.00am.

15<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00pm) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker Ian Boyd - A Bird Watchers Year.

16<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 7.00am.

29<sup>th</sup> June to 1<sup>st</sup> July - Townsville Show Long Weekend. - Campout at Pentland. More details closer to the date.





## INTERESTING SIGHTINGS MARCH – APRIL 2013

Birds	Date	Place	Observer
Little Kingfisher	2 March	Townsville Town Common - lagoon between Freshwater and Jacana hides.	Ed Pierce
Freckled Duck, Pink-eared Duck, Red-kneed Dotterel and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	2 March	Pentland Dam	Peter Valentine
White-eared Honeyeater	3 March	Near Cann's Camp - White Mountains NP	Peter Valentine
Pied Heron, Purple Swamphen and Latham's Snipe	16 March	Townsville Town Common	Ed Pierce
White-throated Needletail and Australian Swiftlet	17 March	Above the Bruce Highway Rollingstone	Joan Wharton and Rosemary Payet
Grey Goshawk	18 March	Tyto Wetlands	Tony Ashton
Spotted Turtle-Dove	18 March	Townsville Town Common	Ed Pierce
Little Kingfisher	25 March	Townsville Town Common - lagoon between Freshwater and Jacana hides.	Joan Wharton
Brown Goshawk (Juvenile)	25 March	Townsville Town Common – near Bald Rock	Joan Wharton
Glossy-black Cockatoo (3), Varied Sittella and Little Lorikeet	30 March	Grandis Forest via Paluma	Joan Wharton, Rosemary Payet and Cecily Messer
Grey Falcon	30 March	Star Valley Lookout via Paluma	Cecily Messer
Gouldian Finch	1 April	Townsville Town Common – between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> viewing areas.	Annette and Ray Sutton
Budgerigar (20-25)	5 April	Bamford Lane Mount Louisa	Annette and Ray Sutton
Yellow-billed Kingfisher (4) with breeding plumage	6 April	Townsville Town Common approach road.	Ed Pierce
Crimson Finch (nesting) and Red-backed Kingfisher	10 April	Townsville Town Common	Joan Wharton
Square-tailed Kite	16 April	Jourama Falls	Tony Ashton

If you haven't reported your interesting sightings on Birdline North Queensland please report them to Ian Boyd at [ninox45@bigpond.com](mailto:ninox45@bigpond.com) as other members like to know what birds are about.

