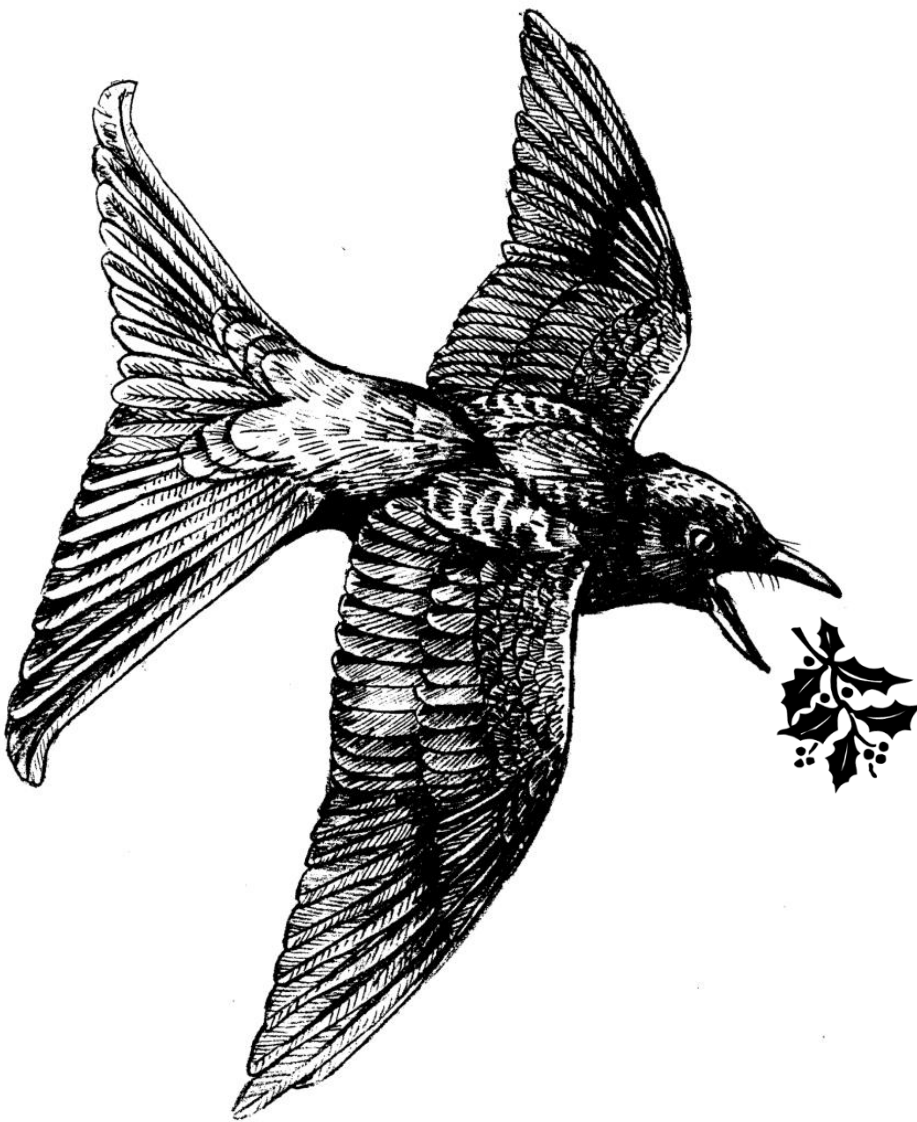


# The Drongo

Number 148 November 2017



Bird Week

Red Centre

Twitchathon



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

As expected, October was a particularly busy month for BirdLife Townsville. During Bird Week there were several activities to promote the Aussie Backyard Bird Count. Wal Threlfall and I attended The Weir State School to catch up with the 'Deadly Dukes'. (see The White Ibis and The Deadly Dukes story). Nathalie Fernbach from Local ABC radio came along and used the opportunity to promote The Backyard Bird Count. Wal and I also had a trip up to Tyto Wetlands to take part in the local FLEC (see newspaper article reprinted in Drongo). These were both really great days with the kids showing a lot of interest in birds and how they can all take part in looking after the habitat for birds. It is always a pleasure showing the kids - and their teachers - how good birds look through binoculars and scopes.

Members manned displays at three shopping centres during the week to raise community awareness about the Backyard Bird Count and try to get people involved. It is a good opportunity to speak to people face-to-face about their favourite and not-so-favourite birds.

As part of Bird Week promotions, Sean Dooley, editor of Australian Birdlife, was the guest on Conversations with Richard Feidler on local ABC radio. This was a most entertaining hour of radio. It is available on Podcast and is well worth listening to.

The Black-throated Finch Waterhole Survey had to be cancelled in October because the rain had made a lot of the waterholes inaccessible. It will now be 25th and 26th November so there is still time to get involved. If you want to take part in the survey send an email to [yvette.williams@jcu.edu.au](mailto:yvette.williams@jcu.edu.au)

The Christmas Party will be at the Sun Hotel on Saturday 9th December (in place of usual monthly meeting). If you haven't put your name down yet and want to join the fun send an email to [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au).

It is time to start thinking seriously about becoming more involved with the work BirdLife Townsville does. I say work, but the great majority of community activities we take in are just a whole lot of fun. Of course, the aim of these activities is to improve the lot for our birds so that they and birdwatchers have a good future. I believe that BirdLife Townsville will be kept alive and vibrant by having new input at a committee level. Everyone has something to contribute. Fresh ideas and new ways of looking at things are what keeps an active group like ours progressing. Remember the AGM will be in February 2018 so that leaves a few months to consider nominating for the committee.

*Janet Robino*

### **YOUR COMMITTEE**

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Secretary: Wal Threlfall  
Treasurer: Nina Doyle  
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*The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Birdlife Townsville.*

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## RED CENTRE DELIGHTS

A couple of months ago John and I visited The Red Centre. The main aim was to see the iconic landmarks and do some walks but who can resist a bit of birding here and there. The three birds we most wanted to see were the Grey Honeyeater, the Redthroat, and the Dusky Grasswren but we weren't too fazed if it didn't happen.



*Dusky Grasswren*

The Grey Honeyeater was top of the list but not usually around at that time of year so we weren't too hopeful. Early on the very first day, outside the vicinity of the Desert Park, we birded with Mark Carter whose local knowledge was invaluable. After an hour's birding, we had almost given up on the Honeyeater and were heading back to the car when we struck it lucky, spotting a Grey Honeyeater eating the red lerp on the mulga – apparently not all mulga has this red lerp. Then to top it off, two Redthroats turned up together and, unusually, both were males.

We birded all day around Alice until dark, keeping an eye out for the Dusky Grasswren but no joy. Two days later we visited Ormiston Gorge. We headed off on our planned Ghost Gum walk overlooking the Gorge but unfortunately it was a shocker of a day – 33 deg. Still, even though it was middle of the day, we were determined to do the walk, go down into the gully and walk back along the creek.



*Orange Chat*

We'd been told that the Dusks could sometimes be found up the top of the mountain (early in the day) but we thought it was still worth a try so diligently searched the grasses and Spinifex, to no avail. As if the heat and sweat wasn't enough to bear, the disappointment of missing this bird left us dejected. Down we trudged to the bottom, each step taking us further away from the possibility, telling ourselves, 'the walk is the thing', when flukily, I glimpsed a movement on the rocks (brown on

brown). Eureka! a Dusky Grasswren. Why it was out at that time of day in that heat was a mystery but it hopped around for ages giving us such a good look. Then to top it off, two more appeared below on the sand of the creek bed. Triple delight! Our wide smiles and high-fives alerted some non-birders to the joys of birding and they genuinely seemed pleased for us. Funnily enough, our high-spirits enabled me to negotiate the jumble of rocks and boulders loosely termed the 'track' and get back to our starting point.

We had plenty of other birding highlights on the day we spent with Mark around Alice. As he had access to the sewerage works we spent a big chunk of time there (decked out in our orange high-vis vests). Numerous Orange Chats were hopping about on the track, near the water and on the rocks, looking for food. We had lovely sightings of the male White-winged Fairy-wren who was courting as he was carrying around a single white feather to impress the girls. There was a Spotted Crake cowering in the weeds but then, to our surprise, he swam duck-like out into the water to evade another crake. A male Variegated Fairy-wren added colour to our day.



*Variegated Fairy-wren*

We drove out towards Santa Teresa and picked up a very obliging White-browed Treecreeper who hung around long enough for us to see his distinctive markings. We came across a lone Banded White-face but soon discovered he was on sentry duty as a mob of about 10 burst out of the grass and flew off. On one hill-top a White-backed Swallow entertained us with an impressive aerial display.

A few days later a guy from the Glen Helen homestead took us out to Roma Gorge and Palm Valley as John and I wouldn't have been able to negotiate those tracks in a fit. We were admiring the Gorge and the 50 or so Zebbies in a bush on top of a cliff (near the only waterhole) when they erupted en masse as a Hobby came swooping down and nearly knocked John's head off.

Our driver took us the back way to Tyler Pass on a little-used private road/track. Whenever we stopped, we were amazed at how much bird call we could hear down the slopes and gullies and would have loved to linger but had to cover a lot of territory. On one occasion we were trundling down a hillside, when eagle-eyed John yelled out to stop. We raced across, ignoring the Spinifex grabbing at our legs, to be rewarded with a beautiful Rufous-crowned Emu-wren. Gary, a non-birder, now knows a special spot for the next birder he has on one of his trips.

Over ten days we saw 104 species of birds while walking, and admiring the scenery so it turned into a fabulous trip. Every day there was a surprise of some sort. In a rest area on the highway we came across a Major Mitchell



Cockatoo and a dingo. Near Roma Gorge we saw a Brown Falcon in flight with its prey in its talons. One day a Buzzard flew right in front of our windscreen. We were mesmerised and regrettably were too stupefied to reach for our phones for a photo. In the Goss Bluff crater we saw a Western Bowerbird and its bower adorned with white items and one standout green piece of glass in the centre of the bower.

If you're ever out that way, the Desert Park outside Alice Springs is worth visiting because it's very well done and easy to see the birds in the aviaries. Going back at night time for a guided walk in an isolated section of the Park and encountering bilbies, mala and bandicoots was special too. There were lots of wow moments on our trip besides the birds and Uluru, the Olgas, the West McDonnells and Kings Canyon were stunningly impressive.

*Chris Stewart*

## EASY BIRD WATCHING

Recently (Sept) on our journey from Townsville to Toowoomba, we stayed on a site at the rear of the Yuleba (pronounced Yool-bah) Hotel – a small village between Roma and Miles. We were the only people camping there although there were people in the motel units (mostly energy workers). The weather was cool and windy, so I found a sheltered spot to observe the Athel pine trees behind us as I could hear lots of bird sounds. Here is the list of birds seen from my chair –



Pied Butcherbird : Laughing Kookaburra : Red-winged Parrot : Galah : Little Friarbird : Apostle Bird : Splendid Fairy-wren : Yellow-rumped Thornbill : Grey Fantail : Willy Wagtail : Zebra Finch : Sparrow : Restless Flycatcher : Crested Pigeon : Striated Pardalote : White-winged Triller : Whistling Kite : Torresian Crow : Australian Corella : Welcome Swallow : Fairy Martin : Tree Martin : White-breasted Woodswallow : Yellow-throated Miner : Brown Honeyeater : White-plumed Honeyeater : Magpie Lark : Pied Currawong.

Both Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills flew over which led us to believe there was a wetland nearby.

Looking at locally produced tourist information, we discovered Judd's Lagoon, complete with a free camp site – five kilometres from the hotel. There we saw Pelican, Magpie, White-necked Heron, Intermediate Egret, Masked Lapwing and White-throated Gerygone. This will definitely be added to our stops. Incidentally, the meals at the hotel were delicious and the service was good.

*Warren and Pat Charlton*

## COLD IN THE A.C.T.

In late August I flew to Canberra for my grandchildren's birthdays. I incorporated a car drive to Wangaratta and back during the three weeks that I was there.



The suburb Crace is in northern ACT and has some brilliant areas of parkland and bush for bird watching. I have visited there a number of times and have found one area in particular that I return to with anticipation. You have to walk past the shops, up and down a hill, climb a stile into a paddock and avoid the roos. The bird life is interesting, especially for a north Queenslander. Over my visits there I have seen Scarlet Robin, Spotted Pardalote, Brown-headed Honeyeater, Red Wattlebird, Weebill, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Red-rumped Parrot, Varied Sitella, Grey Shrike-thrush, and Shining Bronze Cuckoo among others.



*Yellow-tufted Honeyeater*

In another area that I visited for the first time this year I found Yellow-tailed Black- Cockatoos and Choughs.

I managed a visit to Mulligans Flat too this year, only my second time there. It's a brilliant park to visit. I spied a Scarlet Robin pair while there; she was busy building a nest and he was busy catching a caterpillar. I also came across a White-throated Treecreeper that was busy extracting what must have been a large grub from a tree. It was in the one spot for quite a few minutes.

My drive to Wangaratta and back was great. I spent a morning at three different spots in Chiltern (half an hour north of Wangaratta). I found White-browed Babbler, White-plumed Honeyeater, Dusky Woodswallow, Fuscous Honeyeater, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater with nestlings and another family with three young and I saw my very first Crested Shrike-tit.

I stayed overnight in Gundagai and spent the morning exploring a few places nearby. I saw quite a few familiar birds and added Diamond Firetail to my list of new birds. I also spent a bit of time photographing an *Antechinus* sp, (identified as probably Yellow-footed *Antechinus*) not a bird I know but very exciting none the less.



*Striated Thornbill*

I used google to identify places to bird watch and was pretty pleased with what I found considering I was new to the area, driving a tiny hire car and it was one degree overnight. Ice on the windscreen was a whole new experience!!



*Antechinus* sp.

Annette Sibson

## ORANGE-BELLIED PARROTS

The Weekend Australian October 28 – 29 carried a story about releasing Orange-bellied Parrots in Melaleuca, Tasmania.

The species is almost extinct and millions have been spent, trying to preserve the species. They migrate between the mainland and Tasmania each year, where they breed. Last autumn there were only about thirty-five left in the wild at Melaleuca. The average migration loss is about thirty-five percent. Not many females have appeared this year so far. More mainland releases are proposed and new strategies were planned, including a scheme to swap infertile eggs in the wild with fertile ones laid in captivity. It is a moot point whether these birds can be saved.

What is the fate of these iconic birds?



## DOWN SOUTH

In early November we went to Binna Burra, high up in the mountains behind Surfer's Paradise, for six nights. As Ray is temporarily in a wheelchair, we confined ourselves to the lodge but the other two couples we travelled with did lots of walking and bird spotting.

Our delight was a Satin Bowerbird called Nigel NoFriends by the locals. Apparently, when he first built a bower, many years ago, he didn't have much luck attracting the girls. He has come on in leaps and bounds ever since.



*Male Satin Bowerbird - Nigel*

Nigel has placed his bower in the side yard of the Honeymoon Cottage (so if you go to Binna Burra book that one). You can sit on the back verandah and enjoy his comings and goings and meet his girlfriends at very close range. He doesn't mind humans at all and often hops along the verandah near your feet. The occupants of the Cottage invited us to sit on the verandah so we were very lucky. (Luckily they were not on their honeymoon but they knew Nigel was a bonus.)



*Female Satin Bowerbird*

Nigel flitted from rooftop to branch and then landed near the bower. He called from time to time and several times we saw a female fly down to sit in the bower and watch his antics. He was very quick to remove any stray leaves or orange flowers that he saw as spoiling his beautiful blue display. He had a blue toy soldier, several plastic spoons, Vicks bright blue throat lolly papers and other bits and pieces – not a huge display but very bright. Once we think he mated with the female but they went behind a bush. Very coy.

Around the lodge we saw King Parrots, Crimson Rosellas and lots of Noisy Miners. It was very cold, wet and windy while we were there, a nice respite from the heat and



humidity of coastal North Queensland. The second night we thought we were all gone when a huge clap of thunder burst just above our heads.

Then on to Kenmore to stay with our son and his family. Kenmore is a bushy suburb and all the yards are well planted. He has a resident Brush-turkey who wanders inside the house if you are not looking, seeking the cat's biscuits. In the back yard there is an assortment of bare branches, fashioned to make a feeding station.

When we arrived, a lone Laughing Kookaburra was sitting on top of the folded pool umbrella, surveying the yard. It wasn't long before the usual Rainbow Lorikeets and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos arrived at the feeder. Surprisingly, a pair of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets flew in, maybe a first for the garden. Another visitor was a Pale-headed Rosella.



Most days a pair of King Parrots come in. The male turned up and had a good look at us. He even came in and sat on the rail of the verandah where we were taking photos and had a good inspection. He mustn't have liked what he saw because he didn't return for our whole visit and he warned the wife off as well. The day after we left he returned. Very smart birds.

As well we saw Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Pied Currawongs, Helmeted Friarbirds and also Galahs in the distance.

*Annette Sutton*

## THE VARIED 'VILLERS

The Varied 'Villers started the Twitchathon on Friday afternoon with a leisurely drive up to Paluma. We officially started our count at 5pm, sitting on the patio having a cuppa. We then had a relaxed stroll around the village, of course ticking off birds as we went. After dinner we had another walk around the village but didn't see any night birds at all. We even drove out to the Dam road – again, no success. We still had a very nice evening chatting to all the locals out walking, some with their dogs. All were interested in what we were up to.

We made an early start on Saturday, heading out to Running River. There were Fuscous Honeyeaters everywhere! On the way back to Paluma we stopped in at Puzzle Creek, Grandis Forest and Birthday Creek. We had good views of the Golden and Tooth-billed Bowerbirds and some other very nice birds. We made it back to Paluma in time for morning tea which we had at the Ivy Cottage. As well as a lovely cup of coffee, we had very nice views of a male Satin Bowerbird.

We went back to the house, packed up and headed down the hill. We stopped in at both Little and Big Crystal Creeks - lots of people but very few birds. After a lunch break, we set off for Bushland Beach with the aim of getting there as the tide was coming in. It was pretty hot by then so we stood in the shade of a very obliging tree in front of the pub and 'scoped for waders.



*Barbara, Janet C, Nina Janet R*

We were not overly happy with our numbers and the fact that we hadn't picked up any night birds so we headed back to my garden where I was hoping the Boobook was still happily sitting in my tree. He was! And the Great Bowerbird was busy at the bower so two more ticks! We then decided to round off our Twitch at the Palmetum. Finally called it quits at 5pm Saturday with a total of 138. We were pretty pleased with the results and even more pleased that we got that many birds while having a lovely relaxed time. Mind you, I did sleep very well on Saturday night. Would I do it again? You bet I will. It was fun, and satisfying to know we were contributing in some small way to help with the conservation efforts for our birds.

*Janet Robino*

## BIRDLIFE TWITCHATHON

I was awoken at 4.00 am by the shrill sound of the alarm --dressed, a quick bite, grabbed my gear and then on my way to Mark's place. We had arranged to meet there at 5 am, to allow enough time for us to drive to our prearranged starting location -- Woodstock and commence birding at 6 am.



*Ian, Mark and Wal*

Who are "We" I hear you ask --- we are the "Townsville Twits" (Mark Horvath, Ian Leach and Wal Threlfall) and we were competing in the National Twitchathon held over the weekend of Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 October. The aim was to record as many species of birds within a designated time frame, have some fun and in the process raise money (Just Giving website) for bird conservation.

In Queensland's case all monies raised would go towards the conservation of the Black-throated Finch (listed as endangered on the National and Qld Register) and the Eastern Curlew (listed as critically endangered on the National Register and vulnerable on the Qld Register).

We had met two weeks earlier (at Mark's place -- thanks Bronwyn for morning tea ) to plan our strategy -- what event will we contest (24 hr, 12 hr or 3 hr race), map out a route, whose vehicle, starting point and of course a name --- after much discussion and soul searching the "Townsville Twits" were born !!!!

The "Townsville Twits" had decided on competing in the 12 hr Champagne Race (which included a 1hr lunch break in which according to the Rules, no birding could take place) -- our nominated starting point would be 6 am Saturday 28 at Woodstock and finishing 7 pm at Paluma, our planned route would include possible sightings of "Woodland", "Wetland", "Shorebirds" and "Rainforest" birds, if everything went according to plan. NOW it only required the birds to cooperate.

Then it rained (hallelujah) the Townsville/Ingham region received 100 mm to 300 mm in some areas (we certainly needed it, lawns turned green overnight, the Black-throated Finch Count was cancelled) -- but what effect would this have on the birds????

The day was fast approaching, anticipation was building, then we heard on the "bird vine" that another Birdlife Townsville team was competing, the "Varied Villiers" (Janet Robino, Barbara Reidy, Nina Doyle and Janet Cross) ---possible competition we thought???? -- but NO, they had at the last moment decided to enter "The Great 24 hr Twitchathon Race" (which included a 6 hr rest break -- someone (no names mentioned) didn't want to get up early). This was going to be so easy.

Woodstock, Saturday 6 am, the "Townsville Twits" were off and racing --- 40 species in 1 hr (including Squatter Pigeon, Yellow-billed Spoonbills and a great sighting of a Brown Songlark, but no Black-throated Finches), Ian, "The Driver" did the sums " at this rate, we will rack up 240 species in 6 hrs and that should be more than enough to win and break the NSW Dodgy Drongo's last year's



winning record". Our excitement was running high !!!!

Then onto the Hodel Road bird hide (we had planned to spend 30 mins.) and our first disappointment -- a couple of Cormorants, a Jacana and a few Lapwings (which we already had recorded). So we left early (not a good omen) for Reed Beds Road -- yes, this will be better, there are always Finches, Woodswallows, Kingfishers and the odd Brown Falcon --- disappointed again; are the Bird Gods conspiring against us !!!

Wongaloo, steadied the sinking ship -- Rose-crowned Fruit Dove (target bird), PIP'S, Honeyeaters, Kites, Black Swan, Black-winged Stilt, Common Greenshank, Pelican, Caspian Tern, Finches, Magpie Goose, Brush Cuckoo, Pacific Black Duck, Bar-shouldered Dove, Black-necked Stork, Brolga, Eastern Koel, etc--- Wal, "The Penciller" was working overtime, recording the species -- we were on a roll !!!

Next stop, AIMS turn-off area --- reality strikes again -- No birds !#\*#\*!!

The day was getting hotter and so were we; the Ross River Dam beckoned -- The "Townsville Twits" finally managed to bag all the Cormorants, a Wedge-tailed Eagle and a Barking Owl -- Yes !!!

Rumours of a Rufous Owl sighted at Riverside caused us to deviate from our planned route -- but a big tick ensured, as we had a really good sighting.

Time was ticking away and we had a lot of leeway to make up, we would have to bypass Bushland Beach and Masters Road -- so onward to Lucinda to catch the tide ( to save time, lunch to be taken, while driving - Mark, "The Tactician's", very devious suggestion). On arrival (Bush Stone-curlews everywhere, but we had already ticked off this species) we set off for the sand spit at the southern end of the beach, with the temperature hovering on 30°C and the wind picking up we were wondering what was in store for us. Then just as we reached the spit --- the dreaded sound of a Quad Bike and into view, two girls shouting and waving flashed by, up the beach, a U-turn,



back again, giving us the wave !!#\*^!! Still we were fortunate enough to pick up both the Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, Beach Stone-curlew and Eastern Reef Egret as well as the Crested and Little Tern. Just as we were about to retrace our steps, back to the car park, we observed two small shorebirds -- Ian identified them as Red-necked Stints but Mark and myself were unconvinced (their feeding behaviour was different as well as their plumage), so Ian compromised, "if they are not Stints, then they are Red-capped Plovers", okay we said we can go along with that. We trudged on another 50 metres and there were the two birds again, but this time amongst Red-capped Plovers -- they were different and yes, after examining the Field Guide, were identified as Red-necked Stints --- Ian's status as "The Driver" now included "Shorebird Expert".

The "Townsville Twits" had now recorded 120 birds, well short of the magical 240.

It was 3.30 pm and we were desperate, so a quick stop at the Tyto Tourism Information and Conference Centre, on

our way to Paluma, where we managed to bag -- Cotton and Green Pygmy- Goose, Rufous-throated Honeyeater, Yellow Oriole, Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Duck.

Ian had the pedal to the metal and a stop at Little Crystal Creek produced few birds -- onwards to Paluma our final destination and hopefully -- BIRDS !!!

With only 2 hrs left, we made the call to concentrate our efforts around the village -- Victoria's Riflebird, Lewin's Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Spotted Catbird, Crimson Rosella, Australian King-Parrot and Chowchilla.



The clock struck 7 pm and the "Townsville Twits" National Twitchathon Champagne Race was finished --- we had driven 425 km and managed to sight a credible (in our opinion) 136 birds in 12 hours --- was this enough ???

A quick phone call to the "Varied Villiers" Janet Robino gave us the bad news --- we had been pipped on the post --- they had recorded 138 birds in 24 hours, including the Satin Bowerbird (which required morning tea at the Ivy Cottage), Golden Bowerbird (their target bird) and the Tooth-billed Bowerbird. Janet's inside knowledge also delivered the Great Bowerbird and the Southern Boobook to their list of sightings. Perhaps grounds for a protest ???

Preliminary Queensland results (if they hold) place the "Log-strollers" in first place with 205 birds sighted in 12 hours, with the "Varied Villiers" holding sixth place with 138 birds sighted in 24 hours and the "Townsville Twits" in eighth position with 136 birds sighted in 12 hours. At this time the National results are unknown.

Both teams, the "Townsville Twits" and the "Varied Villiers", competed for the first time. We had fun. It was exhausting, but never-the- less FUN and we did raise some much needed funds for the conservation of Queensland birds.

We encourage all Members to have a go next year --- form a team, pick a name, decide on a route, compete and raise funds on behalf of bird conservation --- after all, it's for a good cause and who knows you may have some FUN !!!

To the "Varied Villiers" go the Birdlife Townsville bragging rights --- UNTIL NEXT YEAR !!!

*Wal "The Penciller" Threlfall*

*On behalf of the "Townsville Twits"*



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## A NOVICE'S VIEW

I was invited by the two Janets to be part of the Twitchathon team some months before the event. At the time I thought it was a good idea and also thought why not, it's months' away, so with this Bravado mind set, I happily agreed.

As the weekend was drawing nearer, I thought of hundreds of likely excuses not to participate such as "I won the lottery and have finances to sort out"; "my Great Grandmother passed away and the funeral is on the same weekend"; "I am a recipient of a Bravery Award and presentation is on the same weekend"; but no matter what I thought up, there was not an excuse good enough to let down the Team Members.

Janet C arrived at my place on the afternoon of the 27<sup>th</sup> October. A little while later Janet R accompanied by Barbara Reidy arrived to pick both of us up and off we went up to Paluma, me with heart palpitations. How was I to endure a 24 hours stint of birdwatching, and wait for it, a 5:30am wake up call? Everyone else seemed normal and looking forward to the weekend, no stress there.

Driving up the Paluma Range we stopped off at the designated viewing spot hoping to spot the BBPK, no luck.

We arrived at Beth's place in Paluma and my fellow Varied Villers promptly placed fruit on the birdfeeder. Right on cue, the Victoria's Riflebird arrived along with his Missus together with a number of honeyeaters and the resident Tooth-billed Bowerbird. A cup of coffee tastes so much nicer while sitting on Beth's verandah.



Around 6pm, we ventured out into the village and saw a variety of honeyeaters together with a Pitta scurrying around the bushes and a Pale-vented Bush-hen. The locals were very friendly and talkative when we mentioned the Twitchathon. We then returned to our home for dinner and some wine. After some wine (should have brought up the second bottle), I was thinking I can do this, just one sleep and another 12hours and it's all over.

It was 7:30pm and my fellow Varied Villers were getting torches ready (does Beth's power trip out at 8pm I was thinking). Well much excitement, we were going spotlighting. I was part of the Team, so thought I better muster some enthusiasm and join the three. Well we walked and walked, up and down streets and through to the McClellands Lookout. Nothing sighted in the way of feathered friends, but a dead gecko on the road was sighted. I was wondering whether the residents of Paluma, had there been a local constabulary would have



rung up and reported four persons acting suspiciously. End of night.

Next morning I was woken from a wonderful dream by Janet C rummaging in the kitchen at 5:30am, dead of night. Anyway we were all away by 6:00am to Running River where we saw many Fuscous Honeyeaters and the Spotted and Striated Pardalote.

Off then to Puzzle Creek and Grandis Forest. A few more birds ticked off. Birthday Creek to sight the Golden Bower Bird, what a beauty.

Returning to Paluma we had morning tea at Ivy Cottage to view the Satin Bower Bird.

Various sighting of the Top Knot Pigeon.

Back at Beth's we packed up and headed down the range to Little Crystal Creek. Very busy, with crowds of young folk frolicking and having fun in the water. Here we are in trekking boots, long trousers, hats and binoculars in tow, I kept thinking "we are inconspicuous". We didn't stay long and then headed to Big Crystal Creek for lunch and more birdwatching. Once again very busy not a hope in hell of sighting the Pied Monarch as the Birding Group did some one month before.

Well I thought, over half way, I can do this and smile, just some 5 hours to go.



Bushland Beach beckoned. What a wonderful surprise Bushland Beach was, such an oasis with a Pub as well. Though no Lemon Lime and Bitters or Rum n Coke, it was straight to the beach and telescope up before I even got out of the car. Barbara and the two Janets were most intent upon sighting the shore birds. I wandered off and sighted a Koel and a Brahminy Kite. Returning to the beach and looking through my binoculars at the shorebirds, I couldn't understand why Janet C was always asking for an opinion on establishing the identity of the shorebirds. My expert knowledge on shorebirds was overlooked. Truth be known, birds like Tattler, Tern, Caspian, Green Shank were quite foreign; however I did identify the Pied Oyster Catcher. Janet R was very impressed.

I am now getting enthused, home soon, but wait, a suggestion from our leader to stop off at the Palmetum via her home to view the Southern Boobook and the Great Bower Bird. Oh well, that's OK we are on the home run. Oh but wait, we haven't seen a Masked Lapwing, so a longer drive to get to the Palmetum, but we did sight a Masked Lapwing.

At the Palmetum, we sighted more TopKnot Pigeons and our first Sunbird by yours truly.

Wanting to sound enthused, I suggested we go to the Bridge Club on Wellington Street to see if the Magpie Geese were still there as they were on the previous Wednesday evening. Luckily a lone Magpie Geese was sighted as we drove through the Douglas/Annandale Roundabout.

Well the end of our journey had arrived and Janet R returned Janet C and myself safely back to Timbury Way.

I would wholeheartedly recommend participation in the 2018 Twitchathon. However would suggest a team of four. By being part of a team of four, two pairs can go separate ways to verify sightings together. We covered a little over 300 kms over the 24hours.

Our team had a wonderful time and formed a great team rapport. I think I may have had some cat naps during the drives to make up for the early start. So I do travel well.

Best of all we sighted a total of 138 birds, two more than our male counterparts and their travel was in excess of 400kms.

Not a Willie Wagtail to be seen.

For those who are falling over their binoculars to ask me to join their Twitchathon Team next year, I have a waxing appointment on that weekend, so sorry.

Nina

## A GOOD READ

Tim Low's *Where Song Began* takes us beyond the identification of Australian bird species into their origins and reveals the fact that many of our birds have very ancient forbears and that in fact songbirds most probably had their origins in Australia.

One of the theories he explores is that Australia has many loud songbirds because of our abundant eucalypts. Food sources need to be protected!

Did you know that parrots have larger brains than most birds and that their intelligence is on a par with that of apes, dolphins and elephants? That they have 300-400 taste buds and while most bird calls are innate, parrots learn part of their calls? That budgerigars know the calls of their mates, sub groups and owners and caged birds will develop a call that only they know?

Have you seen galahs and cockatoos play and wondered why most other species don't?

Did you know The Lake Eyre region was once home to three species of Flamingo, including the Greater Flamingo seen in Africa today?

Is the reason Kookaburras and Kingfishers thrive here because of our lizards?

These are just a few of the questions Tim Low explores. He is a keen observer of birds and landscape and leads us to see with new eyes both the birds he writes about and places we visit. Perhaps a few insights into his research and observation may entice you to delve into his very readable chapters to discover more for yourself. Enjoy!

Joan Wharton

## Kids and Birds

The Deadly Dukes is the primary school spin-off of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Kids volunteer to be members. The program aims to keep young students engaged in education while providing mentoring, life skills and discovering their own identity. The program's objective is to empower positive change in the young person and build capacity within the local community.

This group of students had contacted us a few months ago for information on how to deal with some bird problems in the school yard. The main problem was the large number of White Ibis spreading rubbish from bins left open by students. Following a session on bird behaviour by Norm Rains and Wal Threfall, the Deadly Dukes did an education program to encourage the proper closure of the bins and disposal of rubbish. This has been very successful. On our visit we only saw four White Ibis in the school grounds and practically no rubbish laying around.



Another problem bird was, not surprisingly, the Masked Lapwing. In breeding season, kids were being attacked in the playground by these vigilant parents. I just loved the solution the Deadly Dukes came up with: No children were to approach the area where the Masked Lapwings were nesting and raising chicks – if a ball accidentally goes into the area the playground duty teacher runs in quickly to retrieve it. No children have been attacked this season. No information on attacks on teachers was forthcoming.

The Deadly Dukes' next project is educating the younger grades about Bush Stone-curlews to encourage behaviour to avoid disturbing these birds. There are a lot of these birds breeding and raising young in various sections of the school grounds.

We did a walk around the grounds with the kids to get them started on doing a backyard bird count in the school grounds. Norm and Wal negotiated with the Townsville City Council to provide bird-attracting plants for another project of the Deadly Dukes to improve the habitat for birds and make it a lot more pleasant place for all students and teachers.

This was a most enjoyable 'job' for me. It was a pity Norm was laid up at the time and missed out on seeing how successful BirdLife Townsville's education session with these kids was.....but, I'm so glad it was me who had to take his place on the day.

*Janet Robino*

## BIRD WEEK

25 SEPTEMBER TO 1 OCTOBER 2017

Janet Robino and I spent a wonderful week in Eungella, during this time, at the Eungella Mountain Edge Escape. The view over the valley had to be seen to be believed; it was breath-taking. We spent time sitting on our verandah enjoying the view and the birds that flew past, but the most memorable time was seeing two Grey Goshawks circling and tumbling together for almost 10 minutes.



The week was organised by "The Wild Mob", a mainly Bushwalking group, in conjunction with the Mackay Birdlife Club. In point of fact the Mackay group organised the main part that we enjoyed, and are to be congratulated on the magnificent job they did. The Mackay members between them organised bird outings every morning and afternoon, and even a spotlighting trip (unfortunately, possums were the only wildlife seen!!!!). We had a welcome dinner the day we arrived and a final one on the Saturday evening, before we left on the Sunday, both held at the Memorial Hall. We had two speakers and a session with Daryl Barnes, the Mackay President, and a film, which were all interesting



*Eungella Honeyeater Janet Robino*

The target bird was, of course, the Eungella Honeyeater, of which everyone in the group had excellent views. Once it was known that the birds went for the flowers on the Climbing Pandanus Vine, we only had to be patient and wait, once the Vine was found. Eungella National Park is in the Clarke Range and is the only place in the world where the Eungella Honeyeater is found!!!

Because the area, like Townsville, is in a drought stricken area, birds that would normally be seen were not there. We still managed to see over a hundred species with many just heard.

We spent one or two morning at Broken River, and had good views of two Platypus swimming around, and we enjoyed a morning tea, with freshly baked scones with cream!!!!

We also visited a local property to see a family of Brolgas that had adopted it as home for a while, and it allowed us to get quite close for the photographers in the group to take advantage for some good shots.

Mackay Group hope to organise another Bird Week in 2018, and as this one was so enjoyable (despite the dust), I hope other Townsville members will think about going.

*Barbara Reidy*

## BELGIAN GARDENS BTF

Year 4 students at Belgian Gardens State School in Townsville, as part of the school's science program, are learning about threatened species. This term the spotlight is on the Black-throated Finch, an endangered bird found in Eucalypt dominated woodlands of Queensland.

One of our Biodiversity Project officers who is working with Black-throated Finches, Tamara Large, was invited to speak to the students today about the finches, their annual life cycle and diet, what habitats they live in, what might be the environmental threats to their habitats, and what can be done to promote an ideal Black-throated Finch habitat diversity. She was impressed with their enthusiasm, their level of knowledge and attentiveness throughout the class.



*Belgian Garden School Students -Sullivan Peters, Thomas Wilkie, NQ Dry Tropics Biodiversity Project Officer- Tamara Large. Image taken by: NQ Dry Tropics Media Officer, Nadine O'Neill*

The NQ Dry Tropics' Conserving Black-throated Finch Habitat project, funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme, works with landholders to support dwindling populations on grazing properties in North Queensland. The project involves managing invasive weeds such as rubber vine, lantana and chinese apple, as well as the installation of fencing. Not only does this work support finch habitat, but it also benefits pasture cover and productivity; a win win for Black-throated Finches and landholders.

*From NQ Dry Tropics*

## OUR SUNBIRD LOG

We had hung lengths of light rope around the house in the hope that we might attract a Sunbird nest. No luck for over a year but early this year in March, what we guessed to be a very young and inexperienced pair, came and tried to build a nest on a rope outside the kitchen window. You have never seen such a sad effort but they tried, gave up and flew away.

Then in September they returned. Or did they? Could have been another pair but I suspect it was the same ones. I have never seen a more sturdy Sunbird edifice anywhere so they had finally finished their apprenticeship.



12<sup>th</sup> September 2017. About today Sunbird began building. Male occasionally inspected.

20<sup>th</sup> September. Building still in progress. We went away for five days.

24th September. Nest looking pretty finished but no sign of Sunbirds. Looked it up on the internet and it said they go away for about a week after the nest is finished and then come back and lay. Babymoon?

1st October. Female returned and began sitting. She must have read the Internet.

9<sup>th</sup> October. Still sitting.

October 11th. Possible the babies hatched Monday or Tuesday. Hard to tell. She does pause at the opening when she returns to the nest. The male came on Tuesday and hovered in front of her and there was a good deal of calling. Quite a racket. I think I have heard some little peeps. Still sitting for long periods.



17<sup>th</sup> October. Feeding but not sitting, except at night.



19<sup>th</sup> October. First saw one baby's head. Quite yellow under chin. Male Feeding as well but not often.

20<sup>th</sup> October. Noticed female removing faecal sac.



22<sup>nd</sup> October. Baby's head coming right out of nest. Can only see one. Top of head not feathered yet.

24<sup>th</sup> October. Now two little heads coming out of nest. Parents (mainly female) feeding bugs and spiders.

28<sup>th</sup> October. Babies' heads now feathered yellow.



30<sup>th</sup> October. Babies left the nest. Hung around in the native bush behind the clothesline. Sat on the clothesline.

31<sup>st</sup> October Never seen again. Good luck, little birdies.

Annette Sutton

## THAT OLD SANDPAPER FIG

*a backyard treasure...*

Belatedly I realize that I have spent much of my life ignoring the old sandpaper fig in my backyard, just checking every now and then to see how it was going..

Earlier this year I relocated to Walker St, Townsville City where I now have a mature, self-seeded fig just by my back door. The tree lost its leaves as the cool months approached, allowing our beautiful winter sunlight into my patio. At the same time it produced an incredible number of fruits (perhaps in response to our severe dry). Over a number of months I watched innumerable birds of many different species enjoy this resource. The tree was alive with feeding birds from daybreak to dusk on a daily basis and a joy to have with me.

As summer approached the tree slowly dressed itself in beautiful soft green leaves and the fruit disappeared. It now stands tall and green and strong by my door, protecting me from our harsh summer sun. The birds still come along to perch and preen and sing and squabble.

Trish Pontynen

## MEMORABLE MOMENTS

A short while ago I spent a weekend with my eldest son in Canberra. He has a unit in Queanbeyan on a busy road. His little balcony overlooks a large tree, only a few feet away, and to my surprise there were between ten and fifteen Gang-Gang Cockatoos noisily calling, hanging upside down and generally playing with each other, as well as an Eastern Rosella and two Galahs. The reason for the bird life was because a lady in the unit across the alleyway fed them !!!!!!!

The next day we went up to the "Snowy", where we saw the rapid change of Magpies into the White-Backed Species, and later at Perisher we saw two small, mainly brown birds flying between the small areas of snow and some shrubs, which we finally identified as two juvenile Rose Robins.

I then travelled down to Ballan, Victoria for a few days with relations. My sister has a small bird bath in the front garden and we watched a family of Ravens. One of the adult birds put stale bread into the water and then fed it to a young one----Smart.!!!

Next day we went into Ballarat and spent time walking round a broad-walk at Lake Wendoree. There were two Musk Ducks, male and a female, and some Blue-billed Ducks, plus the usual Grebes, Black Swans, Coots and Black Ducks. We were almost ready to leave when we spotted two Great-crested Grebes which proceeded to do a little mating ritual with bobbing heads and "cosying-up" to one another, a great morning had by us, and an older couple taking phototgraphs of it all.

Barbara Reidy



## ANTILL CREEK DAM

Seven years have passed since I last took part in the annual Black-throated Finch (BTF) count at the dam adjacent to Antill Creek, a few hundred metres downstream from the John Joyce Bridge on the Flinders Highway. This year I teamed up with Janet Cross for the count, and while we didn't see any BTF or other finch species at the dam on the two days of the count, we did manage to spot five Double-barred Finches on our return walk from the dam to the car on the Saturday morning.

These Double-barred Finches were feeding in the bed of Antill Creek, close to a waterhole just a little way downstream from the bridge. This was an interesting encounter as the birds were the subject of attention from what looked like a young and quite emaciated raptor which we agreed was most likely a juvenile Swamp Harrier, desperate for a meal. Anyhow our presence disturbed the hunt and the finches escaped unscathed.



The dam itself has changed markedly since I last took part in the count there in 2010. The actual structure of the dam hasn't changed in the intervening years. However the dam bunds have become heavily infested with Chinese Apple (*Ziziphus sp.*), the introduced thorny tree that has spread to become a major weed of many parts of the tropics worldwide, especially in the drier areas. These plants have grown considerably on the dam bunds since my last visit and they have certainly reduced the number of suitable counting sites. In spite of this we managed to find a shady spot that met our needs with about a 95% view of the shoreline. Importantly we had a good view of a sandy beach directly opposite our site that was used by a range of other birds and animals as a suitable watering place.

Another major change in the dam since my last visit is the reduced amount of water remaining in the impoundment area. I estimate the original area of the dam to be a little more than a hectare (a rectangle with sides of 80 x 125m) but now the almost oval shaped remnant waterhole is little more than about 40 -50 metres in length and narrower across. Having said this, the reduced shoreline greatly increased the likelihood of spotting any wildlife using the dam which in turn reduced the

requirement for larger numbers of volunteers to do the count at this site this year under current conditions.

Another upside of the smaller impoundment was the quality of the waterhole as an important resource for other native wildlife that live in the area. The waterhole is fully matured in that there is a variety of aquatic life



present to sustain a variety of local wildlife. Plantlife includes water plants such as waterlilies (*Nymphaea sp.*) and carpets of Nardoo (*Marselia sp.*) covering some of the moist areas of muddy shoreline. Obviously there was also a variety of aquatic animal life suitable for waders as we received visits from a White-necked Heron as well as a Great Egret, resplendent in breeding plumage. We also recorded a single Little Black Cormorant which kept us entertained, trying to guess where it would emerge from the water surface for a breath of air and to swallow its prey. There were also Hardheads and Pacific Black Ducks on the water when we first arrived at the dam on both mornings but they didn't remain for the day, although two Hardheads, a male and a female, returned for a while on the first day of the count.

We recorded 35 bird species on Saturday and 32 bird species on Sunday but unfortunately this did not include any finch species at the dam. Nevertheless, It was an enjoyable three hour birdwatch each day as there were a number of memorable highlights that included:



A remarkable interaction between a pair of Masked Lapwings and a lone Black-fronted Dotterel that continued for the three hours each day we were on site. The lapwings took it in turn to harass the Dotterel which would fly off briefly only to return to continue what appeared to us to be a game of some sort. Finally after an hour or so we noticed three very young Lapwing chicks emerging from the surrounding vegetation and we thought these to be the reason for the Lapwings' aggression but it wasn't until the Sunday that we noticed a single Dotterel chick also in the mix. We reckoned that there was reason for



aggression from both sets of parents, protecting their offspring.

The appearance of a single White-necked heron on the Saturday, not long after we occupied the site. This bird stood stock still across the dam from us and gradually opened its wings (like a slow "flasher") to expose its full front for all and sundry to see. The attached photograph shows the bird's wingtips crossed near its feet in a pose that I had never seen before. Perhaps it was practicing for a mating ritual. This bird went on to hunt in the shallows for a while and then adopted its flasher pose again before flying off.

The appearance of a mature dingo on the Saturday that came down to wallow in the shallows opposite our position before having several long lapping drinks. The dog finally noticed us on the bund wall and mooched off through the vegetation without a backward glance.



The appearance of a single Great Egret in breeding plumage on Sunday. The bird's bill was very dark, the tops of the legs were cream with the bottom part and feet being black. The bird also had a host of lacy feathers hanging from various parts of its body. This bird posed for a while, and like the Heron on the day before, went on to hunt in the shallows before flying off when it noticed our presence.

The appearance of both Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Agile Wallabies that both came down to drink on both days.

The lack of finches at the dam site was regrettable. However there may be several reasons for this. One I would suggest is that the area for some distance around the dam had been burnt earlier in the year and the grass had not regenerated to the extent of producing seeds after the fire event and before the onset of the dry season. Another is that there are probably a number of watering sites for the birds that would not normally exist at this time of year but for the recent rains leading up to the count weekend.

All in all we had two enjoyable birding sessions on the dam. We saw plenty of birds and took several photos, one of which are attached. All things being equal we will be back for the BTF count in 2018 and look forward to the event.

*Norm Rains*

## Tyto Bird Count

Recently school children from the Hinchinbrook Region took part in identifying birds at Tyto Wetlands during a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority program.



Birdlife Townsville secretary, Wal Threlfall and President Janet Robino went along to assist the children with their bird identifications.

According to the Herbert River Express, 19 checklists were submitted, with 1255 birds sighted of which 71 species had been identified.

The exercise was part of the Aussie Bird Count. The program is run through Birdlife Australia through their Birds in Backyards Program.



The students were taking part in the GBRMPA Reef Guardian Schools Future Leaders Eco Challenge.

It is great to see children all over the region participating. Our birds' futures are in their hands.

*Janet and Wal*





## QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Niel Bruce	374	09-01-18
Chris Ezzy	331	27-11-17
Len Ezzy	329	25-11-17
Ian Leach	311	07-11-17
Janet Robino	281	08-10-17
Marleen Acton	262	19-09-17
Elna Kerswell	259	16-09-17
Pat Charlton	257	14-09-17
Beth Snewin	251	08-09-17
Graham Castles	248	05-09-17
Warren Charlton	248	05-09-17
Janet Cross	240	28-08-17
Rosemary Payet	237	25-08-17
Marleen Acton	222	10-08-17
Annette Sutton	204	23-07-17
Wal Threlfall	195	14-07-17
Annette Sibson	188	07-07-17
Kyran Staunton	176	25-06-17
Wendy Kaus	163	12-06-17
Philip Haig	144	24-05-17
Julia Haig	120	30-04-17
Carolyn Osterhaus	112	22-04-17
Julia Goldsbury	109	19-04-17
Norm Rains	81	22-03-17

## ***BIRDLIFE TOWNSVILLE***

### ***CHRISTMAS FUNCTION***

**DATE: SATURDAY 9 DECEMBER 2017**

**TIME: 6.30 PM for 7PM**

**VENUE: SUN HOTEL (FUNCTION ROOM)**

**FUNCTION REDUCED MENU (attached)**

**COST: AT OWN EXPENSE**

**PRIZES TO BE WON**

**TRIVIA: by NINA**

**RSVP: [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au)**

**"COME ALONG AND HAVE SOME FUN"**

