

WETLAND BIRDS

of the Townsville Region



Australian Government



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COUNTRY



Wetland Birds of the Townsville Region

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Townsville Region Bird Observers Club

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Contents

Introduction..... 4

Wetland Birds of the Townsville Region8-57

Index of Common Names58



Introduction

Wetlands are recognised as the most critical ecosystems in Australia. They provide the water and habitats that form the foundation of every other environment across the landscape. Wetlands range from freshwater systems such as swamps, lakes and lagoons through to salt water environments such as reefs and other oceanic ecosystems to six metres depth. In between are the tidal habitats such as saltmarsh, mangrove forests and mud flats that are amongst the most productive ecosystems in the world. Maintaining healthy and dynamic wetlands ensures we have clean water, productive natural environments, sustainable agricultural landscapes and diverse flora and fauna. This all contributes to our communities, our lifestyle, our health and our economy.



The Burdekin Dry Tropics region is home to some of the most outstanding wetlands in the world. Over fifty of the region's wetlands are recorded on the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia and the Bowling Green Bay wetlands are internationally recognised under the RAMSAR Convention due to the diverse coastal wetland ecosystems that occur across its 35,000 hectares. Of the amazing 224 species of birds that have been recorded at this site, at least 103 species are known to breed within its confines.

In North Queensland, the seasons influence a wet and dry cycle in wetlands and this in turn affects the habitat availability and productivity of the wetlands, rivers and floodplains of the region. Wetlands have evolved to sustain life throughout these seasons. The build up of clouds in November signals the end of the dry season. Rain starts to bring relief to the parched, cracking soils in the beds of the waterholes and river channels. Come December, the flooding rains start to connect the waterholes that have been isolated for the past months. Fish start to appear as eggs that have laid dormant in the dry wetlands start to hatch; other migratory fish species instinctively begin their journeys up the creeks and rivers from the ocean to the wetlands that are now teeming with life.

As the wet summer sets in, the wetlands display diverse and rich communities of insects, frogs, fish, reptiles and birds, all of whom are seizing the opportunity to feed and breed. Water lilies, whose tubers have laid dormant in the dry soils, spring back to life, providing shading and cooling of the waters, shelter and ambush habitat for creatures below the water surface and platforms for frogs and Jacanas to roost and forage. The dominant freshwater sedge, Bulkuru, plays a vital role in the wetland. Its leafless stems form meadows of green in the shallows. Birds will trample the stems and use the material for building nests. The tubers of Bulkuru provide the major food source for populations of Brolga and Magpie Geese which congregate on the wetlands after breeding. Migratory birds from the northern hemisphere start to arrive to take advantage of the optimum feeding and breeding conditions provided.



Soon enough, the wet season comes to an end and circling kites become the most visible bird species. Gradually the prolific life and activity slows down and the wetlands and rivers once again disconnect into fragmented waterholes as they will remain for the dry season.

Wetlands across the Australian landscape have been dramatically altered or lost altogether as a result of human land use and

activities. These threats and impacts continue today and our wetlands remain severely undervalued – more seen as a resource to be exploited without proper regard for the short and long term impacts on water quality, water quantity, and biodiversity values. Where the effort has been put in to reducing and reversing these threats, great success has been made in restoring wetlands to their former health and vitality.

Across the landscape, individuals, farmers, communities, government agencies and non-government organisations such as Wetland Care Australia have instigated improved land and water management practices and have seen the recovery of our precious wetlands and their associated biodiversity.

Now, the greatest challenge in the ongoing protection and rehabilitation of wetlands is ensuring that the wider community, decision makers and land managers recognise and understand the significance of wetlands and act accordingly. Only when wetlands are appreciated and valued will their future survival – and that of their amazing birdlife – be certain.

Scott Fry
WetlandCare



The Townsville Town Common Conservation Park

"At certain seasons "The Common" has a charm all its own. Swamps are lily covered – deep hyacinth blue blooms showing at the end of long tender green stalks, and lovely cool green leaves. Bird life abounds in and around the swamps. The place at times is alive with birds, white herons, black ibis, red legged native companions, black and white jabiru". No, not my words, but an extract from 'Portal of Tropical Isles and Coral Seas', a book written by Freda Barrymore in 1933, yes 1933.

In his book 'Where to Find Birds in Australia' (1987 edition), John Bransbury states *"Townsville Town Common Environmental Park is well known to bird watchers throughout the world, this splendid environmental park has been likened to the Camargue in France and Slimbridge in England. It is one of the best places in Australia for waterbirds – a site of international importance."*

The foregoing paragraphs highlight the importance of the Town Common as an internationally important wetland and also give a good indication of what condition the Town Common once was in; and hopefully what it could be again.

The Town Common is a wetland conservation park of about 3000 hectares, situated on the Bohle River flood plains between Rowes Bay and Pallarenda, some six kilometres from the centre of Townsville city. It contains extensive salt marsh areas bordered by mudflats and mangrove forests which give way to grassy plains and freshwater swamps. Bordering the swamps are reasonably large areas of scrub and open forest.

Many Peaks Range is prominently situated on the northern end of the Common with vegetation ranging from open forest on the hills to vine thickets in the steep gullies. Shelly Beach and the Bohle River form the northern and western boundaries respectively. The Townsville Airport, including RAAF Base Garbutt, forms the southern boundary. Stone artefacts and remains of shell middens and rock paintings indicate a time when indigenous people inhabited the area. One can envisage what a bountiful existence they may have had in those pre-settlement days, given the undisturbed nature of the environment at the time.

In the late 1860's, during early European settlement of Townsville, a tract of land stretching from the base of Castle Hill to the Bohle River was proclaimed a pasturage reserve. This was to provide an area where livestock could be grazed by those living in the town. Bullock teams were also grazed on the area between their long journeys to service the outlying areas around Townsville.

It was during those early grazing years that the area became known as the Town Common, no doubt a name given by the early settlers because of the similar land usage in their home country.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, large tracts of the Common were taken for military purposes. This saw the annexation of further land from the Common that now forms the airport and RAAF base.

The impact of urbanisation and its associated commercial and industrial development over the years have reduced the Common to about twenty percent of the original size. That, coupled with the introduction of exotic flora and fauna, has seen a degradation in the diverse habitats, especially the fresh water lagoons.



In 1980 the Town Common was declared a Conservation Park which gave it some legislative protection. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service now manages the Common to protect its natural values as an important wetland habitat with its large diversity of fauna and flora.



During the winter months, good numbers of waterbirds flock into the area, including Magpie Geese, Egrets, Ibis, Herons, Black-necked Stork and various species of water fowl. However, as a result of habitat degradation, there has been a gradual decline in the size of the waterbird population seasonally present on the Common. In the mid-1900's the Brolga population ran to many hundreds if not thousands. Today it would be less than a hundred.

Over the years, the Common has become, and remains a Mecca for bird watchers. With around 280 species recorded within its boundaries, it is not hard to understand why. Birdlife is not all that is offered. There have been about twenty-four mammal species recorded along with numerous species of reptiles and amphibians. There are untold numbers of species of spiders, insects, butterflies and moths. The botanist is well catered for with a large number of native and exotic plants of terrestrial and aquatic origin.

Visitors to the Common are well catered for with walking tracks and strategically placed wildlife viewing points. Regular visitors are rewarded with the constant change in the bird population and species as the Common undergoes constant change through the wet and dry seasons.

The Common's wetlands have been under constant pressure and degradation due in part to the dense mat of introduced Para Grass spreading across them, effectively reducing the open water surface area and choking the native flora, in particular the Bulkuru Sedge, a rich source of food for the Magpie Goose and Brolga. The wetlands cannot continue to cope with the invasive grasses and remain an important waterbird sanctuary. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us all to become involved in the protection and rehabilitation of the Townsville Town Common and maybe, just maybe, we can get it back to the days experienced by Freda Barrymore those many years ago.

Ian Boyd
Townsville Region Bird Observers Club

IMPROVE LOCAL WETLANDS

The Townsville Region Bird Observers Club (TRBOC) has been awarded a Community Action Grant to improve the protection of the local wetlands through community skill building. This project is supported by Bird Observation and Conservation Australia (BOCA) through funding from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country.

This award gives TRBOC the opportunity to make the local school children more aware of the importance of wetlands and wetland birds.

The Wetland Protection program will follow on from the previously successful Community Coastcare program, featuring TRBOC's Coastal Birds book, and the Healthy Habitat program, featuring TRBOC's Woodland Birds book, which were both presented at Reef Guardian Schools.



Magpie Goose

Anseranas semipalmata

DESCRIPTION:

Size 75-90cm. A black and white goose with a distinctive knob on the head and partly webbed feet. The face has no feathers and can be between a yellow to flesh colour. The legs are yellow/orange.

FEEDING HABITS:

These geese often gather in large numbers to feed on aquatic vegetation. They can be found in most wetlands of North Queensland and in newly ploughed farm paddocks. These gatherings are very noisy, with loud honking.

BREEDING:

The male does most of the nest building. The nest is a large dish shape, often built on a floating platform or trampled vegetation near water. Pairs mate for life but some males have two females, sometimes sharing the same nest. The average clutch is seven though larger clutches are common.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Any swampy area or wetland. The Town Common is a popular site for these birds.

THREATS:

Draining of swamps.



Plumed Whistling-Duck

Dendrocygna eytoni

DESCRIPTION:

Size 40-60cms. Tall and goose-like with distinctive long buff flank plumes edged in black extending over the back. Head, neck and upperparts are pale brown/buff, the tail and back darker brown, chestnut breast with fine black barring. Legs and feet are pink. Bill pink with black patches. Shrill whistling on takeoff, in flight or while roosting.

FEEDING HABITS:

Walks gracefully on land, appears clumsy in water. Grazing on short green grass usually at night, they camp by day in large roosts by dams and lagoons. In the dry season they feed on sedges, grass seeds and legumes.

BREEDING:

Breed during the wet season, becoming active as the first storms begin. Both parents share in selecting a nesting site, a shallow scrape lined with grass. 8-12 eggs are laid. They then incubate and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Wetlands in coastal areas in the dry season, dispersing to flooded inland areas during the wet.



Wandering Whistling-Duck

Dendrocygna arcuata

DESCRIPTION:

Size 55-61cm. Crown, back of neck, bill and legs black. Belly and breast deep rufous with brown scalloped edges to feathers. Back is darker with chestnut scaly edgings. Short creamy-coloured flank plumes. Upper breast, neck and face pale buff. In flight, head is lowered, giving a humped-back appearance. Often seen in small groups or flocks mixed with Plumed Whistling-Ducks on edge of swamps, rivers or dams. Voice: High pitched twittering whistle; often heard flying overhead at night.

FEEDING HABITS:

Usually feeds in large flocks, mostly on seeds and vegetation on surface of water or by diving. Will also eat young grass and insects.

BREEDING:

Breeds in the northern Wet Season. Most likely pairs for life. Nest is a scrape on the ground, lined with grass, hidden in tall vegetation above water line.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Wetlands, mainly deep vegetated lagoons and swamps. Also seen at sewage farms or irrigated pastures.



Black Swan

Cygnus atratus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 1.1 - 1.4m, wingspan 1.6 to 2.0m. Sexes are similar. Predominantly black, white on the wings is seen when in flight, long slender neck, red bill with white bar at the end. Legs and feet are black. Juveniles are grey/brown. Call is a musical, clear bugling. Black Swans moult after breeding, losing their flight feathers. They are unable to fly for approximately one month when this occurs and prefer to settle on large water bodies for safety.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on underwater vegetation, emergent vegetation on mudflats, pastures and crops.

BREEDING:

March - May but also breeds at any time after good rains. Builds a large nest consisting of reeds and grasses, usually in shallow water or on islands. Strongly defends nest, making a loud hissing sound.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Widespread, prefers large lakes (Ross River Dam) or open waters, salt, brackish or fresh, flooded areas and tidal mudflats.



Australian Wood Duck

Chenonetta jubata

DESCRIPTION:

Size 47-50cm. Distinctive endemic goose-like duck. The male has a chocolate/brown head with short black mane while the female's head is lighter with pale stripes above and below the eye and brown/grey speckled body. Both have two black stripes along the back and small black bills. The dark wing tips and trailing white panel are visible in flight; the call is a very nasal 'now'.

FEEDING HABITS:

Mostly grazes in flocks by night on herbage on short grasslands near water. Rarely swims but dabbles in shallow waters.

BREEDING:

Mainly January - March. Builds a down nest in a tree hollow and lays 9-11 cream eggs. The young leap from the nest hole and are lead to the safety of a nearby water body by their parents.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Often seen during the day in pairs, small groups or large flocks camped beside dams, lake edges or ponds.



Cotton Pygmy-goose

Nettapus coromandelianus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 35-38cm. Smallish surface feeding ducks with a short, goose-like black bill. The male has a white face, neck and underparts, dark glossy green cap and upperparts with a narrow dark breast band. Females are duskier brown and have a dark stripe through the eye and a white eyebrow. Completely aquatic, they seldom leave the water but will rest on submerged logs.

FEEDING HABITS:

Vegetarian feeders in freshwater wetlands containing patches of waterlilies and other floating or submerged aquatic plants and seeds. In the wet season the birds take advantage of fresh aquatic growth in temporary pools and swamps.

BREEDING:

November-April, nests in a tree hollow high above the ground in or near a freshwater swamp. Down feathers protect a clutch of up to 10 white eggs.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Inhabiting a wide variety of freshwater wetlands, you are most likely to see them amongst the waterlilies in natural waterholes, dams, lakes or rivers.



Green Pygmy-goose

Nettapus pulchellus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 30-36cms. Head, neck and back are glossy dark green with a white cheek patch, especially noticeable in the female. Rest of neck, breast and flanks are grey/white, with feathers outlined in green or brown, giving a patterned, scalloped appearance. Stubby, goose-like bill. Webbed feet are grey/green. Moves awkwardly on land. In flight, note the prominent white 'windows' on the wings.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on aquatic vegetation, seeds and grasses. Cruises among waterlilies, grazing on buds or diving for submerged plants. Can also filter floating seeds.

BREEDING:

These birds probably mate for life. After courtship, a nest is built either in a tree hollow over water or hidden in rank grass near water. The 6-12 eggs are incubated by the female, aggressively defended by the male. Both share in rearing the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Generally in pairs or small family groups. Prefers deep waterlily lagoons, dams and swamps.



Grey Teal

Anas gracilis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 37-46 cm. Both sexes are similar. Small, nondescript mottled to scaly grey/brown duck, with a whitish throat and short black bill and dark legs. Holds head high, showing slender neck, high rounded crown, eye red. In flight, noticeable narrow green and white bands on upper wing. Also white wedge is noted underwing. Juveniles are paler than adults.

FEEDING HABITS:

Dabbles, feeding upended to reach bottom in shallow water. Also feeds on the surface looking for seeds, aquatic plants and aquatic insects and their larvae.

BREEDING:

Breed at any time after rain when conditions are suitable. Builds a down lined nest on the ground, in tree hollows, under rocks near fresh water lakes and marshes. Female lays 6-9 eggs, incubates and cares for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Highly nomadic, can be in large numbers – prefers wetlands. Try Ross River, Ross River Dam or the Town Common.



Pacific Black Duck

Anas superciliosa

DESCRIPTION:

Size 47-61cm. Dark brown duck with light scalloping on wings. Blackish crown, buff face with a dark line through the eye and a chin strap. Iridescent blue/green wing panel and white under wing with dark trailing edges noticeable in flight. Feet and legs yellow/green.

FEEDING HABITS:

Dabbling duck; (head down-tail up). Aquatic insects and larvae, seeds and floating vegetation, taken from, or just below the water surface.

BREEDING:

Nest is a down-lined tree hollow or grass cup in dense grass or reeds. They occasionally use old nests of other water birds. They breed Jan-April, incubation 20 days. The female is the only carer.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Town Common, Ross River, roadside ponds, rivers, freshwater and brackish swamps, parks and dams.

THREATS:

Continuing drainage of swamps. Interbreeding with the introduced Mallard may lessen its ability to survive droughts.



Hardhead

Aythya australis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 45-65cm. Mainly chocolate brown diving duck with white belly and under-tail. In flight, under-wings are white edged with brown; the white belly patch is obvious. Bill is pale slate/blue at the tip. Males have a distinct white eye, while the female's eye is brown. When flying, the wings make a distinctive whirring sound.

FEEDING HABITS:

Diving for their food, they eat aquatic plants, seeds, insects, mussels and freshwater shellfish.

BREEDING:

Breeding is probably influenced by rainfall with nests in low, thick vegetation, in or near water along rivers and around billabongs and dams. The nest is a trampled platform of reeds, sticks and vegetation, with some down lying. Female incubates the eggs alone.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Freshwater swamps and densely vegetated wetlands, the Town Common and occasionally sheltered estuaries. Rarely seen on land and tend to roost on low branches and stumps near the water. Numbers may suddenly increase after good rain.



Australasian Grebe

Tachybaptus novaehollandiae

DESCRIPTION:

Size 23-26cm. Australia's smallest grebe. Adult breeding, head black, with yellow oval facial mark at the base of the bill, neck black with chestnut stripe extending from behind eye to side of neck. Bill, dark with cream tip, eye yellow, back dark brown, flank pale chestnut, underparts pale grey. Non-breeding, duller with white foreneck and underparts, border between crown and cheek passes through eye. Juveniles face and neck streaked black and white. Usually seen in pairs, excellent swimmer, dives head first to feed or when threatened – swims away under water.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on surface and also under water on small aquatic life, mainly small fish.

BREEDING:

Varies but often during the wet, usually December-April. Builds floating nest attached to water plants. Lays 3-8 eggs, covering eggs with nesting material when danger threatens. Both parents incubate eggs and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Fresh water lakes, dams and swamps.



Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 48-61cms. Distinctive large, long-necked grebe with a fine dagger-like brown/red bill. Back: dark brown with silvery/white underparts. Black ear tufts on each side of crown, dark edged chestnut neck frill, eye red. Wings have two white patches, seen only when flying. Sexes are similar. Juvenile: dark brown with white stripes on head and body.

FEEDING HABITS:

Dive for food, staying under water for nearly a minute, often covering a large distance. Diet mainly fish, includes insects and larvae, tadpoles and plant material.

BREEDING:

August-December, nest is an anchored floating mat of water plants, with 3-7 eggs. They have an elaborate courting display, including head shaking, diving, and bringing up weeds which they present to each other. After young hatch they ride on the back of an adult.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Found on open sheets of water, lakes, and lagoons, usually with abundant aquatic vegetation. Occasionally seen in large numbers on Ross River Dam.



Australasian Darter

Anhinga novaehollandiae

DESCRIPTION:

Size 86-90cms. Distinctive bird with very long, kinked neck and dagger-like yellow bill, pink or grey fleshy feet. Male: almost entirely black with white neck streak, front of neck chestnut. Female: generally grey/brown above, white fore-neck and breast, with white neck streak. Juveniles are similar to the female. Can often be seen drying outstretched wings on shoreline or dead branches over water.

FEEDING HABITS:

Hunts under water, and swims with body submerged, only the head and neck visible, 'snake-like'. Often seen, stalking its prey, suddenly striking, spearing its victim on its bill. Swallows prey head first.

BREEDING:

Mainly February-April, but can breed at anytime if food is available. Nest is a bulky platform of sticks in a tree above water. Lay 2-5 eggs - these are incubated by both parents.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Common birds, found on rivers, dams, swamps and lakes, fresh or salt. Easily seen along Ross River or at the Town Common.



Little Pied Cormorant

Microcarbo melanoleucos

DESCRIPTION:

Size 58-64cm, wingspan 84-92cm. This is the smallest Australian cormorant. Sexes are similar. White breast and face, white extending to above the eye. Back is glossy black with greenish tinges. The white often has a rusty appearance. Bill is stubby, hooked and yellow with black borders. Often seen sitting on branches/ground with wings stretched for drying.

FEEDING HABITS:

Forages alone and feeds on small fish and most other aquatic creatures, including crustaceans in relatively shallow water. Usually stays underwater for 15 to 20 seconds.

BREEDING:

Throughout the year when conditions are suitable, mostly in trees which are overhanging or adjacent to water. Nest is a rough platform of sticks and bark with leaves lining a slightly depressed centre. Lay from 3 - 5 eggs. Often in small colonies with Little Black Cormorants.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Widespread, found in most aquatic habitats from fresh, brackish or saltwater wetlands to park lakes and farm dams.



Great Cormorant

Phalacrocorax carbo

DESCRIPTION:

Size 79-85cm. Largest black cormorant with slender dark hooked bill, ochre/yellow throat pouch and facial skin, has slight crest, white edges to facial skin and white thigh during breeding. Wing feathers coppery brown with dark margins. Body glossy black with blue/green sheen, tail long. Non-breeding: duller - no crest and less white. Immature - dull brown with dull yellow throat pouch. Flies with wing beats between glides, may be in a long line or V formation.

FEEDING HABITS:

Hunts for fish in fresh or salt water; can dive to considerable depths, and then brings prey to the surface to consume.

BREEDING:

Any time depending on water level and food supply. Builds a bulky stick platform nest in treetops over water, or on rocks or cliffs, usually in a colony with other species. Lays 2-4 eggs, both parents incubate.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Dead trees near coastal and inland water, sandspits. Try the pylons at the Townsville breakwater.



Little Black Cormorant

Phalacrocorax sulcirostris

DESCRIPTION:

Size 55-65cms. Small, slim, all black cormorant with dark grey/black facial skin and hooked bill, black feet are webbed. Often form flocks to fish cooperatively. Flocks also gather in trees over water to dry off wings. Tend to congregate with other cormorants, darters and pelicans.

FEEDING HABITS:

Forages alone and feeds on small fish and most other aquatic creatures, including crustaceans in relatively shallow water. Usually stays underwater for 15 to 20 seconds.

BREEDING:

If conditions are right, they will breed at anytime of the year. Nest is a rough platform of sticks, reeds and debris, lined with feathers, in trees standing in water, mostly in colonies with other wetland species. Lay 3- 4 eggs.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Can often be seen at the Town Common, along Ross River, or at Ross River Dam. Also inland waters, lagoons, lakes, farm dams or reservoirs.



Australian Pelican

Pelecanus conspicillatus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 160-180cm. Large and unmistakable. General body is white, tail and wing edges are black. Plumed shoulders are white. Bill is pale blue with pink ridge and pouch pink/yellow. Thick legs and webbed feet are leaden. Yellow skin circles the brown eye.

FEEDING HABITS:

Mainly fish. Pelicans feed alone or sometimes in large groups. A flock of pelicans will work together, driving fish into a concentrated mass, using their bills and beating their wings. The fish are herded into shallow water where they are easy prey.

BREEDING:

Breeding depends on environmental conditions. They are colonial breeders with up to 40,000 birds, grouping on islands or suitable breeding areas. The female digs a scrape in the ground and lines it with scraps of vegetation or feathers. 1-3 eggs are laid and are incubated by both birds.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Freshwater wetlands, lakes, swamps, rivers and beaches, Ross River Dam and the Town Common.



Black-necked Stork

Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 110-130cm with wingspan to 2.20m. Easily identified, Australia's only Stork, often called the Jabiru. Tall and impressive black and white bird with long red legs. Glossy dark green and purple neck and massive black bill. The female has a yellow eye, and the male a dark eye. Juvenile birds have dark to pale brown plumage. Rather solitary or seen in pairs, sometimes family parties.

FEEDING HABITS:

This species feeds in shallow, still water on a variety of prey including fish, frogs, eels, turtles, crabs and snakes.

BREEDING:

Often March – May but if conditions are suitable most months. Its nest can be up to 2m wide in a live or dead tree, in the vicinity of a freshwater swamp. With 2 - 4 eggs, both parents share the incubation and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Permanent freshwater wetlands, including margins of billabongs, swamps, the Town Common, occasionally along inter-tidal shorelines.



White-necked Heron

Ardea pacifica

DESCRIPTION:

Size 75-105cm. Large heron with white head and neck. The back and wings are slate grey/blackish and the underparts are grey and white. The bill, legs and feet are black. Long maroon/bronze nuptial plumes are present on the back and upper breast in the breeding season. In flight, 'white headlights' are noticeable on the leading edge of the wings. Non-breeding and juvenile birds have a narrow row of black spots running down their fore-neck.

FEEDING HABITS:

Hunts in shallow water and wetland grass areas for insects, fish and crustaceans. Occasionally found in inter-tidal zones but mostly prefer fresh water.

BREEDING:

Both parents incubate the eggs which are laid on a loose platform of sticks, near or over water, usually after heavy rain. The average clutch is four.

PLACES TO LOOK:

They are often found in farm dams, waterholes and roadside ditches.



Eastern Great Egret

Ardea modesta

DESCRIPTION:

83-100cm. Tall, graceful, extremely long-necked white bird with long black legs and feet. Bill and facial skin are yellow with a dark line extending from the base of the bill to behind the eye. In flight legs extend well beyond the tail and the neck has an abrupt kink. The wing beats are slow and deliberate. During breeding the bill turns mostly black and the facial skin becomes green/blue around the eyes, legs turn reddish. Long lacy plumes are grown across the lower back.

FEEDING HABITS:

Usually feed alone, standing motionless or slowly stalking fish, frogs and insects in shallow water.

BREEDING:

Nest in colonies with other waterbirds, on a large rough platform of sticks in tall trees standing in or near water.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Fresh water wetlands, rivers and mudflats anywhere from Crystal Creek to Bowen.

THREATS:

Many breeding colonies have been lost as a result of clearing and filling of swamps.



Intermediate Egret

Ardea intermedia

DESCRIPTION:

Size 55-65cms. Plumage uniformly white, bill yellow, legs black below knee, yellow, grey or reddish above. Line of gape extends to just below eye, not past it. In breeding plumage, a veil of fine erectile filaments on back and breast are lifted and spread during courtship. Extended head and neck are about the same length as the body.

FEEDING HABITS:

Small fish are its main diet, but also takes frogs, insects and crustaceans. It hunts slowly and methodically, with neck extended, and stirs with foot in vegetation at water's edge. Occasionally dives on prey in deeper water.

BREEDING:

Small, untidy nest in trees, usually in freshwater or mangrove swamps with other egrets. 3-6 eggs, laid in late summer in northern Australia. Both sexes share nest building and incubate the eggs.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Found in freshwater wetlands, pastures, tidal mudflats, and floodplains. Often found at the Town Common and along Ross River.



White-faced Heron

Egretta novaehollandiae

DESCRIPTION:

Size 66-70cm. Sexes are similar. Body blue/grey with white face and throat, long yellow legs and a very sharp bill. Rufous/grey plumes grow on the neck, breast and back during the breeding season. Immature birds are duller.

FEEDING HABITS:

Usually seen alone, stepping slowly in fresh or saline waters looking for small vertebrates, insects, grasshoppers, worms and vegetation but will boldly take fish from garden ponds.

BREEDING:

December-March; however will breed at other times in the year if conditions are suitable. They lay 3-5 eggs in an untidy flat nest of sticks on a leafy branch high in the trees, usually near water.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Wetlands, intertidal flats, dams. Often seen in wet paddocks or along road verges. A common bird that likes to take up a vantage point on telegraph poles, high tree tops and house roofs.



Little Egret

Egretta garzetta

DESCRIPTION:

Size 55-65cm. Fine, small, all white egret. Long neck, black legs. Slender bill always black with part-yellow base and bright yellow facial skin. Breeding plumage: two long, fine plumes trailing from the back of the head with fine lacy plumes on breast, and over the back.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on small fish, crustaceans, aquatic insects and other small water creatures. Usually forage in shallow open waters, swamps, billabongs, mudflats and mangroves. The only egret that runs about when feeding, lifting its wings to startle prey. Sometimes rakes the water with a foot.

BREEDING:

Breeds in colonies, often with other waterbirds in trees over fresh water, or in mangroves. Nest is a rough platform of sticks up to 45 cm across. Parents share nest building, incubation and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Town Common, Ross River Dam, swamps, billabongs, shallow pools and tidal flats from Crystal Creek to Ayr.



Nankeen Night-Heron

Nycticorax caledonicus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 55-65cm. Stocky heron with rich chestnut upperparts, buffy/white underparts, black crown, yellow legs and feet. The head is large, neck short, legs relatively short compared to other herons. During breeding the back of the head bears several white nuptial plumes. Bill is dark olive-green, and the eyes are yellow. Adult sexes are alike, with young birds quite different, being heavily spotted and streaked white and brown all over.

FEEDING HABITS:

Being nocturnal, feeds mainly at night in shallow water on a wide variety of insects, crustaceans, fish and amphibians; also known to take chicks and eggs of other waterbirds.

BREEDING:

Throughout the year, depending on food availability. Breeding takes place in colonies, often together with egrets and cormorants. The nest is a loose stick platform over water. Both sexes incubate the eggs.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Roosting during daylight hours in well-vegetated wetlands along shallow river margins, mangroves, floodplains, swamps, and parks.



Glossy Ibis

Plegadis falcinellus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 48-61cm. The smallest Australian Ibis. Sexes are similar, dark purplish brown body; wings have glossy iridescence of bronze, green and purple. Bill is long, olive brown, downward curved. Eyes, legs and feet are brown. Breeding plumage is richer in colour and quite iridescent. Immature birds are duller.

FEEDING HABITS:

Walks or wades slowly to feed, mainly upon fish, frogs and insects by probing in mud or plucking food from plants and water.

BREEDING:

Erratic. When conditions are suitable, builds a platform nest of sticks over water, lined with aquatic plants. Usually breed in dense colonies in trees but can also nest in shrubs and areas of flattened reeds on the ground. Lay 2-6 eggs. Both sexes share incubation and care for the young. Mix loosely with other species when nesting.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Usually found in wet grasslands and pastures, fresh water and saline wetlands, shallow lakes and swamps.



Australian White Ibis

Threskiornis molucca

DESCRIPTION:

Size 65-75cm. Mainly white with bare black head and neck. Long downward curved black bill. Black lace-like feathers over the tail. Plumage often soiled. Black tips to wings noticeable in flight. Legs red/dark grey. During breeding; stiff pale yellow breast plumes and bare red skin underwing. Voice; harsh grunts, often when landing or taking off.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on crickets, earthworms, insects, snails and frogs. Often seen probing in the soil or under water. They have become scavengers around people.

BREEDING:

Breed over water in established colonies which are used for several years. The male collects the branches and the female constructs a platform nest. Both birds share in incubating the eggs and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Mangroves, fresh water, brackish and saline wetlands, beaches, parks, gardens and rubbish dumps. There is a breeding colony at South Townsville National Park opposite the boat ramp.



Straw-necked Ibis

Threskiornis spinicollis

DESCRIPTION:

Size 59-76cm. A large waterbird with a naked black head, long down-curved black bill, black legs, glossy blue/black back with metallic purple, green and bronze sheen. A white nape and sides of neck, white underparts and straw-like cream/yellow neck feathers. In flight it has a white body and black-edged wings.

FEEDING HABITS:

It feeds mainly on terrestrial invertebrates, especially grasshoppers and locusts. It also eats frogs, small reptiles and mammals. It forages by probing or takes prey from the surface of water.

BREEDING:

Form large breeding colonies, mostly after flooding, often with Australian White Ibis or egrets. The low nests are large, trampled platforms of reeds, rushes, or sticks in trees over water and are reused over many years. 2-5 eggs are laid. Both sexes build the nest, incubate the eggs and feed the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Wetlands, dry and wet pastures, farmland, suburban parks and gardens.



Royal Spoonbill

Platalea regia

DESCRIPTION:

Size 74-80cm. Sexes are similar. Tall, pure white waterbird with a distinct spoon-shaped black bill and bare face and long black legs. In breeding plumage, buff washed breast, beautiful flowing white head plumes, orange or rich yellow patches above the eyes and small red patch on the forehead. Non breeding, no head plumes or colours on the head.

FEEDING HABITS:

Often seen feeding in groups; uses the spoon bill in a side to side movement to stir up fish, crabs and frogs in well vegetated shallow pools of water.

BREEDING:

February – May. Form small colonies with other waterbirds in tall trees, high above water. Male fetches and the female builds an untidy nest of sticks, forming a shallow platform. Usually lay 2-3 eggs. Both then incubate and care for the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Large shallows of fresh or saline wetlands, billabongs, tidal mudflats and mangroves. Often seen at the Town Common.



Yellow-billed Spoonbill

Platalea flavipes

DESCRIPTION:

Size 75-90cms. Endemic to Australia. Sexes are similar with a long, pale yellow spoon-shaped bill, creamy white plumage. During the breeding season the naked facial skin, outlined in black, flushes with a little colour and hackles develop on the breast.

FEEDING HABITS:

Walks slowly through shallow water, sweeping the bill from side to side, stirring up debris, mud and prey from the bottom. Feeds mainly on insects, crustaceans, small fish and molluscs using the sensitive broad bill tip to filter food.

BREEDING:

September – April, they breed mainly in the south and inland, using the same site every year. A large nest of sturdy sticks and trampled reeds is built in trees, often singly but sometimes in mixed colonies. Up to 4 eggs are laid. Both sexes share in incubating and feeding the young, defending the nest aggressively.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Freshwater swamps, dams and lakes with shallow edges.

THREATS:

Loss of habitat by draining wetlands.



White-bellied Sea Eagle

Haliaeetus leucogaster

DESCRIPTION:

Size 70-85cm. Adult white head and body, dark grey wings and back, short white wedge shaped tail, dark at the base. Juvenile; mottled brown and buff, tail whitish with black band. When soaring, wings are up-curved.

FEEDING HABITS:

Food includes mammals, tortoises, sea-snakes, fish, juvenile ducks and swans. May also be seen flying slowly over foreshores searching for offal and carrion left by the tide.

BREEDING:

Always near water in large trees, the nest is a huge pile of sticks lined with seaweed and leaves, often up to 30m above ground. Built by both sexes and often used over several years. Female does most of the incubating and brooding, and is fed by the male.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Along foreshores, large rivers and swamps. Often perch conspicuously on a high limb that gives a good view of the surroundings. Ross River Dam and Toomulla good sites.

THREATS:

Clearing of suitable nesting trees.



Whistling Kite

Haliastur sphenurus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 50-60 cm. Identified in flight by the long pale rounded tail, black and fawn patterned under-wings and its shrill whistling call. At rest the bare stone coloured legs, fawn with brown streaked body and lighter head are noticeable. Juvenile birds are more streaked and heavily spotted.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on fish, lizards, rabbits and carrion often picked up from road kills. They will harass other birds for an easy meal.

BREEDING:

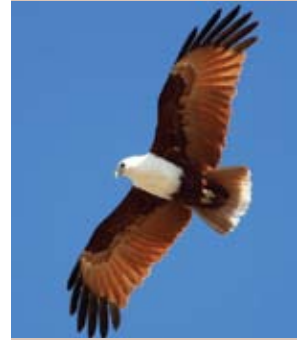
At anytime though mainly Feb-Sep. The nest is built on a large platform of sticks in the forks of tall eucalypts or melaleuca trees near water. Often used for many years. 1-3 eggs, most of the incubation is done by the female.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Often seen soaring over open woodlands, lakes and tree-lined watercourses, road edges, feeding on carrion. Its presence made known by its whistling call.

THREATS:

The loss of suitable tall nesting trees and the laying of poisoned bait.



Brahminy Kite

Haliastur indus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 45-51cm. Head, breast, and neck white. Shoulders, back, belly and tail rich chestnut, open wings tipped black. Reddish brown eyes, pale bone coloured bill and cream feet. Juvenile is mottled brown.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on fish, often relying on fish stranded or cast up by the tide. Offal and scraps are part of the diet along with frogs, crabs and insects. Most food is eaten on the ground but is sometimes taken to a perch to be devoured.

BREEDING:

Pairing only to breed, they build a bulky nest of sticks in mangroves or other suitable trees. The female does most of the incubating while the male hunts and brings her food. When the chicks are big enough, both parents hunt and drop food at the nest for them to feed on.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Coastal foreshores, mangrove lined creeks and inlets, Ross River and Ross River Dam.

THREATS:

Clearing of suitable nesting trees



Black Kite

Milvus migrans

DESCRIPTION:

Size 47-55cm. Easily identified when perched or in flight by its forked tail. It is uniformly dark brown with a yellow area around the nostrils (cere) and a wingspan of 120-140cm. Young birds are lighter in colour with a more streaked and spotted appearance.

FEEDING HABITS:

Food scraps scavenged from camping grounds and picnic areas. They can often be seen in very large numbers in slow circling flight over rubbish dumps. Bushfires are another source of food as they circle waiting to prey upon small mammals, lizards, and insects, especially grasshoppers as they flee the flames.

BREEDING:

A large platform of sticks, lined with wool, fur or dry vegetation, usually high within the canopy. The female sits on the eggs and the male provides food. After fledging, the young rely on the parents for about 2 months.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Town Common, beaches, tidal flats, rubbish dumps or patrolling roadsides looking for "roadkill".



Brolga

Grus rubicunda

DESCRIPTION:

Size: 100-125cm. Wingspan 1.7-2.4m. Tall, elegant grey crane with long wing feathers hanging over tail like a bustle. No feathers on head. Grey skin on crown, scarlet skin across face and around nape. Dark dewlap looks like a double-chin. Eyes yellow, legs dark grey, bill pinkish/grey, long, and dagger-like. In flight, long neck outstretched, legs trailing well past tail. Both sexes and birds of all ages perform spectacular courtship and group socializing dance displays. Voice: Loud whoops.

FEEDING HABITS:

Mainly vegetarian, tubers, roots and will also take insects and amphibians. Sometimes eat mice.

BREEDING:

Probably mate for life. Nest: a large mound of vegetation on a small island in shallow wetland. Both partners very protective of nest territory and participate in the incubation of eggs and care of young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Town Common, large open wetlands, irrigated pastures, coastal mudflats, sometimes along creeks and grasslands. Singly, small family groups or large flocks.



Purple Swamphen

Porphyrio porphyrio

DESCRIPTION:

Size 44-48cm. Large and conspicuous: dusky black above, deep blue/purple breast with black belly. Flicks its tail up and down when walking, revealing the white under tail. The bill is red and legs and feet are orange/red. They like to wander on the edges of the water, among reeds and floating vegetation. Generally found in small groups.

FEEDING HABITS:

Diet consists of soft shoots of reeds and rushes, frogs and snails. Will also steal eggs and eat baby ducklings when they can catch them.

BREEDING:

Mainly December-April, though often two broods will be raised in one year. All family members share in the incubation and care of the young. 3-8 eggs are laid in a nest that consists of a platform of trampled reeds with the surrounding vegetation sometimes being used to form a shelter.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Permanent freshwater swamps, streams and dams with ample cover of reeds.



Dusky Moorhen

Gallinula tenebrosa

DESCRIPTION:

Size 35-38cms. Sexes similar, sooty plumage, washed brown on back. White edges to either side of under tail, very obvious as tail flicked up and down. Red frontal shield with red bill tipped yellow. Feet green with reddish knees, turning all red when breeding. Eyes dark brown. Immatures are duller than adults, with greenish/black bill, and undeveloped frontal shield.

FEEDING HABITS:

Forage on land or water for small insects, seeds, green shoots and various aquatic plants, as well as molluscs and worms.

BREEDING:

August - March. Nest: a bulky saucer of aquatic vegetation built among rushes or at the base or on low branches of a waterside tree. 7-10 eggs are laid. They also build resting platforms among the reeds.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Often seen on land or swimming, not far from cover, in parkland lakes (Anderson Gardens). Creeks, dams and well-vegetated freshwater wetlands.



Eurasian Coot

Fulica atra.

DESCRIPTION:

Size 35-38 cm. Plain and quite plump slate/grey waterbird with darker grey head, bill and head shield pure white or bluish with red eyes. It has strong dark grey legs and lobed feet to assist swimming and diving. Chicks have black down and an orange/reddish head.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds mostly on aquatic plants, often seen in deep water diving below to retrieve plant materials before feeding on the surface. Sometimes comes ashore to graze.

BREEDING:

Influenced by rain. A floating nest of sticks, grass and swamp vegetation is formed into a large bowl, often on low islands or attached to shallow logs. Usually 5-6 eggs. Both sexes share building, incubation and raising the young. They can be very aggressive towards other birds during the breeding season.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Commonly found in large permanent wetlands with brackish or fresh water and plenty of aquatic vegetation and in some parks.



Black-winged Stilt

Himantopus himantopus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 33-38cm. Distinctive, graceful wader with very long thin pinkish legs and pied plumage. Adults, back, back of neck and wings black, underparts and foreneck white. Red eye, long thin pointed bill. In flight, long legs trail well behind tail. Juvenile patchy black nape and head; all white neck; back and wings brownish. Voice: high-pitched puppy-like yap.

FEEDING HABITS:

Wades through water to take aquatic insects off the surface. Will also take molluscs and crustaceans. Long legs enable feeding in deeper water than other waders. Usually found in small groups.

BREEDING:

Variable when conditions suitable. Nests either singly or in small colonies, on low islands or on the edge. Usually building a scrape on the ground or a mound of vegetation in shallow water, mated pairs will strongly defend their nests. Both incubate the eggs and care for young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Fresh and saline wetlands, shallow lakes, marshlands, estuaries.



Black-fronted Dotterel

Elseyornis melanops

DESCRIPTION:

Size 16-18cm. Easily identified, head cap streaked brown, black forehead and band running through the eye to the back of head, joining with bold black V band on breast. Upperparts brown with chestnut shoulder band. Eyebrows, cheeks and throat white. Bright red eye ring and legs, black tipped red bill. Immature lacks chest band and chestnut shoulder. In flight, white wing stripe seen.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on insects and seeds along waters edge. Runs quickly, stopping frequently to peck with rapid bobbing motion.

BREEDING:

August-February but any time when conditions suitable. Lays 2-3 eggs in shallow scrapes on ground among stones or sand – not necessarily near waters edge. Both parents incubate the eggs and defend the nest by playing injured to lure predators away.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Australia wide, preferring freshwater wetlands, edges of billabongs, lakes and shallow temporary waters. Generally sedentary, occupying habitats on a mainly permanent basis but can travel considerable distances.



Masked Lapwing

Vanellus miles

DESCRIPTION:

Size 35-38cm, Black cap, dusky brown back with white neck and underparts. Some have a black band from the back of the neck and around the shoulders. Each wing has a yellow spur. The bill and eyes are bright yellow, with a yellow mask above the eyes extending to wattles hanging down each side at the base of the bill.

FEEDING HABITS:

They feed alone, in pairs or small groups, looking on the ground for insects, larvae and earthworms.

BREEDING:

They lay their eggs in a scrape on open ground, defending the nesting area aggressively, diving at intruders and sometimes striking with their wing spurs. The male shares nest preparation, incubation and raising the chicks.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Man-made mown areas such as parks, roadside edges, and golf courses, natural open areas near swamps, lagoons, salt marshes and beaches, Palmetum and Anderson Gardens.



Comb-crested Jacana

Irediparra gallinacea

DESCRIPTION:

Size 20-24cms. Female larger. Adult forehead and fleshy comb is red or orange, has bi-coloured bill. Crown, back of neck, breast band and tail are black. Back and upper wings are olive brown, neck and belly white. Legs, feet and toes are olive green. The exceptionally long toes spread the weight and help them to walk and run easily on waterweeds and lily pads.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds mainly along water's edge, pecking at floating vegetation and seeds or probing for insects.

BREEDING:

Nest is a small pile of floating vegetation supporting 3-4 eggs. Nest building, incubation and rearing of chicks is performed by the male alone. When disturbed or threatened, the male has been known to move the eggs or tuck the fluffy young birds under his wings, flying to safety, chicks' legs trailing.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Permanent deep fresh water swamps, ponds, and billabongs covered with abundant vegetation; edges of rivers (Ross River).



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

Calidris acuminata

DESCRIPTION:

Size 17-21cm. Males are larger than females. Bill grey/brown, slightly down-curved. Length of bill is slightly less than length of head. Legs are dull olive-yellow. Crown of head is chestnut, pale coloured eyebrow which broadens behind the eye, pale eye ring. Feathers of upperparts have pointed dark centres with rufous edges. Underparts are whitish, streaked dark brown on the breast.

FEEDING HABITS:

Works its way along tidal mudflats and edges of wetlands, picking up food by sight or probing. Feeds on any aquatic insects, worms, small crustaceans and other aquatic animals. Usually feeds in small groups or singly. Often found with other waders feeding in shallow water.

BREEDING:

Migratory, breeds in Arctic Siberia from June to August. A common summer migrant to coastal and inland Australia, it resides here from August - April.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Widespread, usually in small flocks. Can be found in freshwater or saline wetlands, rivers, tidal mudflats, sewage farms.



Caspian Tern

Hydroprogne caspia

DESCRIPTION:

Size 48-55cm. The Caspian Tern is the largest tern in the world and easily identified by its large red bill. Upper parts of the body are pale grey while the neck and underparts are white, the legs and feet are black. The head has a solid black cap during breeding and a streaky cap in non-breeding birds and juveniles.

FEEDING HABITS:

Patrols the water with long slender backswept wings, diving headlong into the water to catch fish which are usually swallowed in flight, head first.

BREEDING:

A shallow hollow in the sand serves as a nest. Both parents share incubation and rearing. Young are fed regurgitated whole fish. Often nest singly but sometimes in large colonies.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Found on beaches, wetlands, offshore islands, estuaries and freshwater dams. They can be found at Bushland Beach, the Town Common and Ross River Dam, as well as other areas along the coast.



Whiskered Tern

Chlidonias hybrida

DESCRIPTION:

Size 23-26cm. Chunky tern with large head. Tail appears square at tip but is slightly forked. Breeding plumage: Upperparts medium grey, underparts dark grey/blackish, under tail white. Head - black crown extending down nape, white band across cheeks (whiskers), bill and legs red. Non-breeding: Similar but underparts white. Forehead white and crown has white streaks, black line through eye into black nape, bill and legs blackish. Direct flight with steady wing beats. Voice: Harsh rasping, piping. The smaller White-winged Black Tern is similar in appearance, having a white collar instead of the black nape and a more erratic and buoyant flight.

FEEDING HABITS:

Hawks over water for insects, preys on small aquatic creatures by scooping from surface or shallow diving.

BREEDING:

Breeds in loose colonies September to December in south-eastern Australia.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Town Common and Ross River Dam, freshwater wetlands, dams or rivers. Usually found in flocks, widespread and nomadic across northern Australia.



Sacred Kingfisher

Todiramphus sanctus

DESCRIPTION:

Size 21cm. The back, rump and tail are turquoise. The throat is white with the rest of the underparts cream/buff. Above the white collar is a broad black band passing through the eye to the nape, and there is a buff patch between the base of the bill and the eye. Juveniles have a mottled breast.

FEEDING HABITS:

Eats insects, small reptiles and crustaceans. They swoop down on their prey from an open perch and fly back to the perch to eat it. They only occasionally feed over water.

BREEDING:

The nest is unlined in a hollow part of a tree or even in a termite mound. Both sexes look after the eggs and young. Outside the breeding season the birds are solitary.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Anywhere along Ross River, woodlands, open eucalypt forest, paperbark swamps, mangroves and gardens.

THREATS:

Loss of old trees with hollow branches.



Rainbow Bee-eater

Merops ornatus

DESCRIPTION:

23-28cm. (Including tail shafts). Beautiful green and blue body with golden crown. Black line through the eye. Black bib beneath the yellow throat. Red eyes, black legs and slender curved black bill. Immature is paler and minus the black bib on the throat. Call, a sweet "prrrp prrrp" given in flight.

FEEDING HABITS:

Bees, dragonflies, wasps and other insects taken on the wing. This food provides most of the moisture required so they seldom need to drink. Often seen singly and sometimes in large flocks.

BREEDING:

Nests are constructed by tunnelling into banks or bare sandy ground. The end is enlarged to form the breeding chamber which is lined with grasses. Tunnels can be up to a metre long. Both parents construct the nest, incubate the eggs and feed the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Town Common, local parks, gardens, beaches, dunes, open woodlands and riverbanks.



Leaden Flycatcher

Myiagra rubecula

DESCRIPTION:

Size 15cm. Male; head, back, wings, tail and throat deep leaden grey; rest of underparts white. Black feet, dark eyes and bill. Female; head and nape leaden grey, back, wings and tail mid grey/brown, throat and upper breast orange/rufous; rest of underparts white.

FEEDING HABITS:

Capture their food in flight, picking insects off foliage or out of the air, in short circling dashes from a perch. Their diet includes small dragonflies, termites, cicadas, beetles, weevils, flies, native bees and wasps.

BREEDING:

Nest is a neat, shallow, broad-based cup made of fine bark strips and grass matted together with cobwebs, decorated with lichen and small strips of bark. It is built on a limb or fork in the open. Both parents build the nest, incubate the eggs and feed the young.

PLACES TO LOOK:

From Crystal Creek to Ayr, in coastal scrub, mangroves, eucalypt and paperbark woodland and along watercourses.



Magpie Lark (known locally as peewee)

Grallina cyanoleuca

DESCRIPTION:

Size 26-30cm. Black and white distinctive markings. Male has a black head and throat and a white eyebrow. Female has a white forehead and throat. Both have whitish bills and white/cream eye ring. Legs black. The loud "peewee" call gives them their name. Not related to magpies.

FEEDING HABITS:

Feeds on the ground, eating insects, caterpillars and earthworms.

BREEDING:

Both parents share in building a cup-shaped mud nest, lined with grass and feathers, often on a man made structure or high up on a horizontal branch. Both sexes incubate and raise 3 to 5 young. They may raise more than one brood each year.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Pairs and family groups can be seen in back yards, parks and bushland throughout the region. Although small, they are often seen chasing kites and other larger birds.



Welcome Swallow

Hirundo neoxena

DESCRIPTION:

Size 15cm. These sleek birds are streamlined for aerobatic flight. Head and shoulders glossy blue/black, the lower back, wings and tail feathers are a dull dark brown/black. The forehead and throat are bright chestnut, the underparts are pale grey. When flying overhead, the long forked tail with small white spots near the tip, and long tapered wings, help to identify this bird.

FEEDING HABITS:

They tend to feed in groups and can be seen wheeling, swooping and diving, catching insects in flight.

BREEDING:

Build a mud cup, lined with grass and feathers, under cliff overhangs or in hollow tree branches. Around towns their nests are found under shop awnings, verandahs, and bridges. Males share building and incubation.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Along Ross River and wetlands where they swoop down to dip their bills in the water to drink. They are easiest to identify when perching on powerlines or sitting on wire fences.



Fairy Martin

Petrochelidon ariel

DESCRIPTION:

Size 12cm. Sexes are similar. Small, aerial, swallow-like bird with blue/black back and wings, whitish rump and underparts, with a rufous head. The tail is slightly forked when the bird is perched but appears square in flight. Juveniles are duller. Voice is a distinct high pitched twittering. In flight, the white rump and rufous head distinguishes the Fairy Martin from the similar Tree Martin.

FEEDING HABITS:

Often found in groups flying swiftly and erratically, chasing insects high in the air.

BREEDING:

Builds bottle shaped nest of mud. Each mud ball is painstakingly rolled in the bill of the bird and added to the nest. The nests are often in large colonies, under bridges and culverts around water. Both parents care for the eggs and young. Average clutch is 4 - 5.

PLACES TO LOOK:

Hawking for insects above wetlands and rivers, or near nesting sites like culverts and bridges.

Index of common names

Australasian Darter	20	Kite	
Australasian Grebe	18	Black	40
Australian Pelican	24	Brahminy	39
Australian White Ibis	33	Whistling	38
Australian Wood Duck	12	Lapwing, Masked	47
Bee-eater, Rainbow	53	Lark, Magpie	55
Black Kite	40	Leaden Flycatcher	54
Black Swan	11	Little Black Cormorant	23
Black-fronted Dotterel	46	Little Egret	30
Black-necked Stork	25	Little Pied Cormorant	21
Black-winged Stilt	45	Magpie Goose	8
Brahminy Kite	39	Magpie Lark	55
Brolga	41	Martin, Fairy	57
Caspian Tern	50	Masked Lapwing	47
Comb-crested Jacana	48	Moorhen, Dusky	43
Coot, Eurasian	44	Nankeen Night-heron	31
Cormorant		Night-heron, Nankeen	31
Great	22	Pacific Black Duck	16
Little Black	23	Pelican, Australian	24
Little Pied	21	Plumed Whistling-Duck	9
Cotton Pygmy-goose	13	Purple Swamphen	42
Darter, Australasian	20	Pygmy-goose	
Dotterel, Black-fronted	46	Cotton	13
Duck		Green	14
Australian Wood	12	Rainbow Bee-eater	53
Pacific Black	16	Royal Spoonbill	35
Dusky Moorhen	43	Sacred Kingfisher	52
Eastern Great Egret	27	Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed	49
Egret		Sea-Eagle, White-bellied	37
Eastern Great	27	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	49
Intermediate	28	Spoonbill	
Little	30	Royal	35
Eurasian Coot	44	Yellow-billed	36
Fairy Martin	57	Stilt, Black-winged	45
Flycatcher, Leaden	54	Stork, Black-necked	25
Glossy Ibis	32	Straw-necked Ibis	34
Goose, Magpie	8	Swallow, Welcome	56
Great Cormorant	22	Swamphen, Purple	42
Great Crested Grebe	19	Swan, Black	11
Grebe		Teal, Grey	15
Australasian	18	Tern	
Great Crested	19	Caspian	50
Green Pygmy-goose	14	Whiskered	51
Grey Teal	15	Wandering Whistling-Duck	10
Hardhead	17	Welcome Swallow	56
Heron		Whiskered Tern	51
White-faced	29	Whistling Kite	38
White-necked	26	Whistling-Duck	
Ibis		Plumed	9
Australian White	33	Wandering	10
Glossy	32	White-bellied Sea-Eagle	37
Straw-necked	34	White-faced Heron	29
Intermediate Egret	28	White-necked Heron	26
Jacana, Comb-crested	48	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	36
Kingfisher, Sacred	52		

Notes

