

The Drongo

Number 121 June 2012



Daintree

Seed eaters

Curlew and
Kids



FROM THE PRESIDENT

The numbers for the June long weekend campout were low but those who did venture up to Julatten had a great time. Eight members from Townsville made the trek. During the weekend we were joined by our Northern fellow members. The local knowledge input made the whole birding experience so much better. The birding highlight of the trip for me was watching a Great-billed Heron stalking through mangrove roots only a few metres away on our trip with Murray Hunt along the Daintree River. The real highlight of the trip was getting to know more members of BirdLife Northern Queensland – a great way to promote working together for a better outcome for our local birds.

Lesley Murphy has stepped down from the committee for personal reasons. Lesley has been a hard working member of the committee and for several years was the treasurer of Townsville Region Bird Observers Club. Lesley was BirdLife Townsville's Publicity Officer. Thank you Lesley, for your contributions over the years.

We now need a new Publicity Officer. As Mark Horvath has proved, a member does not need to be on the committee to fill one of the vital roles for the club. Mark is still doing a sterling job as Equipment Officer, managing our equipment and making it easily accessible to members as needed, without being on the Committee. The Publicity Officer role mainly involves sending a group email -which is already set up, just needs dates and venue changes made - once a month. There may be the occasional request for information from the media but those requests are passed on to the appropriate member of the committee to be dealt with. If you would like to do that little extra for your club without the need to become a full committee member, this could be your opportunity. To get more information or nominate for this role, please contact me either by phone 47799933 or email contact@trboc.org.au.

Remember, Annette Sutton is always looking for articles for the Drongo, short or long, with or without photos. Keep them coming in, as this is what makes the Drongo such a successful newsletter!

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino
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Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton
Conservation Officer: Peter Valentine
Education Officer: Elna Kerswell
Committee Members: Marleen Acton Ian Boyd Pat Charlton



On the Daintree Doug Herrington



SO MANY SEEDS, SO FEW GRANIVORES

A granivore is an animal that eats seeds. Many Australian birds are granivores, including many parrots, pigeons, doves, and finches. All Australian finches are particularly reliant on seeds and the grasses are especially important for the seeds they provide.

Grasses dominate the understorey of many Australian vegetation types, particularly in dry or highly seasonal rainfall zones, so, not surprisingly, these landscapes are where the specialist granivores do best. Many landscapes of the Townsville region support woodlands with a grassy understorey. It is perhaps not surprising then that at least nine of Australia's 19 grass finches are found in and/or around Townsville. These are the black-throated finch, double-bar finch, chestnut-breasted mannikin, crimson finch, nutmeg mannikin, pictorella mannikin, plum-headed finch, red-browed firetail, zebra finch. In historical times, Gouldian finch and star finch also occurred in the region.

While the Townsville region is "finch-rich" in terms of the number of species present, it is interesting that many species are not more abundant. Why is it that very grassy landscapes often seem to support so few granivores? No doubt the answer to this question is not simple but five factors, operating in combination, are probably a large part of the explanation.



Black-throated Finch



Crimson Finch

1. Many grass seeds are protected. Though their flowers are small, all grasses are flowering plants. Grass flowers are arranged in characteristic seed-heads that consist of a number of structures that enclose the grain which is the only component that granivores are interested in for food. The seeds of many grass

species must be harvested by granivores while they are still enclosed in these structures and the granivore must separate the grain from the package that it comes in before they can ingest it. This incurs a cost (time and energy) to the granivore. Grass species whose grains are more heavily protected by the enclosing structures are harvested at greater cost. Very well protected grains may not be worth harvesting at all because the cost exceeds the benefit.

2. Some dominant grasses don't produce many seeds.

While some grass species are prolific seeders, others produce relatively few seeds. This seems to be the case with kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*); it dominates the grass layer over large areas, forming dense swards (provided it has not been grazed out by cattle). These places are very grassy but are not productive for granivores – the dominant grass leaves little scope for species that are higher yielding from the granivores point of view.

3. Many seeds fall in places where they are inaccessible to many granivores.

Granivorous birds harvest seeds either before or after they are shed from the parent plant. Finch species differ in their use of the two strategies. Crimson finch and chestnut-breasted mannikin, for example, often harvest seed before it is shed while black-throated and zebra finch more often forage from the ground surface. The availability of seed to ground foragers is influenced by the substrate in which they fall. Seed lying on a bare soil surface will be more accessible than seeds falling in a dense grass sward or in a heavy litter. Accessibility influences the cost of harvesting the seeds. The accessibility of seeds also changes after they have fallen. The long, twisted awns of species such as black speargrass (*Heteropogon contortus*) are active in burying the seeds into the soil where they become inaccessible. Ants and other organism also take seeds out of the reach of granivorous birds.

4. The seed supply is patchy

While the understorey of woodlands may be generally grassy, the ground layer of the vegetation is still patchy. Grass composition and density, and so its seed production, vary from place to place at many different scales and due to many different factors. This means that seed resources for granivores are also patchy. Part of the cost of foraging is in finding patches where seeds can be harvested efficiently. Granivores must have a capacity to move around to the

extent demanded by the patchiness of the seed supply. Some species are more mobile than others.

5. The seed supply varies over time`
Most grasses show distinct patterns of flowering and seed production. In the tropics, the temporal patterns of seed production are driven by the wet-dry rainfall cycle. Even so, grass species differ in the timing of seed release. This makes it more likely that granivores will have a year-round seed supply, but there are no guarantees. The early part of the wet season is particularly difficult for many granivores because much of the seed that remains on the soil surface germinates and so the supply of food for granivores is further depleted. This makes those grasses or other species that produce edible seeds early in the wet season especially important for the granivores. Cockatoo grass (*Alloteropsis semialata*) is notable for playing this role.

These five factors together mean that granivores are not always surrounded by an endless supply of accessible seeds, even in the grassiest of landscapes. They must search for productive patches of accessible seeds and then expend energy extracting the seeds from the structures that enclose them. They must access an ample supply of seeds all year round and in the breeding season their capacity to search out seeds is reduced by the fact that they must remain in the vicinity of the nest or less mobile fledglings. While some larger, versatile granivores have done extremely well in human modified landscapes, human influences have generally not been favourable for the smaller species. Grazing by livestock often reduces the seed production of the grasses most suitable for the granivores, or removes species that provide seeds at particular times of year. In addition, humans have introduced many new grasses to the grassy woodlands, not all of which produce a good supply of seeds suitable for granivores. Some introduced species have well protected seeds. Densely growing or bulky introduced grasses (e.g. Buffel grass *Cenchrus ciliaris*) may make it difficult for ground-foraging granivores.

Tony Grice



Red-browed Finch

Photos Ray Sutton

GUNNADO ROAD

Regretting not being able to go to Ingham for a long weekend with Birdlife Townsville, I set out for Gunnadoo Rd on Monday morning (7May), arriving about 8am. Toonpan was full of waterbirds including Magpie Geese, Royal Spoonbill, Comb-crested Jacana and a variety of Egret, but being unable to pull over safely, I decided to return later. After watching a flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos feed on Chiny Apples, a White-faced Heron and Willy Wagtail survey the railway lines, I was going back to my car when Greg Calvert came along looking for Black-throated Finches. Catching up with him by the creek, he suggested I hop in his car and that we bird together. Great!

During the morning we saw about 48 species, some of the highlights being:

Watching a Wedge-tailed Eagle, several Whistling Kites, Black Kites and Torresian Crows feast on road kill - an Agile Wallaby. As we moved closer in the car to photograph the event, most of the raptors took to the air or nearby trees but not one brave Whistling Kite. It held its ground and continued tearing portions off the fresh road kill till we passed by.

Finding a Black-throated Finch's nest. I always look at any dark blob that might be a nest. This time my eyes rested on a thick dark tangled mass almost at the tip of a Poplar Gum but Greg said it was just the remnants of old mistletoe. Looking again later, I saw the head of a finch which seemed to have a deep golden colour about it. Again later Greg actually saw a finch beside the old mistletoe and there in its more open roots was the nest of woven grass. Scope and Slater confirmed our find as the bird remained in full view. Before this I had no idea where Black-throated Finches build their nests and was only aware that Poplar Gums are a preferred habitat. This very tall Poplar Gum is in a patch with on the roadside of the Old Flinders highway.

About 4 in the afternoon I set out to see what I could at a dam on my brother's property on the Woodstock-Giru Rd, not far after Majors Creek but found the vegetation too dense. However, I was treated to a frenzy of Little Friarbirds flying in to roost in the trees near the dam - again, mainly Poplar Gums.

I will be looking more closely at the tops of Poplar gums from now on.

Joan Wharton

THOSE WEIRD "HONEYEATERS" - THE AUSTRALIAN CHATS

My very first chat was in Western Australia where the White-fronted Chat is relatively common. I knew them well as a boy, even finding nests around Perth.

Much more recently I enjoyed seeing them again on Rottneest Island amongst the marvellous red samphire shrubs; then subsequently at the Coorong in South Australia and on Kangaroo Island. For most of my life this was the only Chat that I knew.



Crimson Chat

All that changed in June 2008 when a trip to the Burra Range (White Mountain National Park) revealed the beauty of the Crimson Chat. That was followed in October 2010 by spectacular views of breeding Crimson Chats at Bowra Station, including several pairs and nests in a patch of dropped mulga about 5 ha in area. Seeing the males display and call from perches was brilliant. Last year they seemed to be everywhere we went in the north, from Gregory to Lawn Hill in the gulf, large numbers from Mt Isa to Lake Julius, a few at Kilcowera Station in the south and several at Welford NP. This year we got a taste again at Bladensberg NP in April.

I saw my third chat species in 2009 when visiting Broome and the Kimberley on a brief inspection. I spent a couple of nights at the Broome Bird Observatory (in September) and went on a search for Yellow Chats across the Roebuck Bay Station. This was a great success, seeing males and females in a patch of sedge within the extensive plains. There is no guarantee of success on these trips so I felt privileged to see them. In May 2012 I decided to take the opportunity of a working trip to Rockhampton to search for the Capricorn Yellow Chat. I had an excellent guide (Bob Newby, one of Wayne Houston's supervisors; Wayne being

the authority on this species having completed a Master's thesis on it in 2010 and having published most of what we know about the species). We looked mainly at the 12 Mile Creek area near Marmor, just south of Rockhampton where there has been some habitat rejuvenation work by QPWS and others. The local population, which numbers about 300, was elsewhere on the vast marine plains on the morning we were there but I have plans to revisit the area in the prime breeding season (December to March).

The fourth chat species was well seen in October last year while on a visit to Kilcowera Station in the far southwest of Queensland. We drove east on a rough track from the homestead to Lake Wyara on the western edge of Lake Currawinya National Park. Here there is a good population of Orange Chats that are active and appeared to be breeding when we were there. Males displayed on the top of samphire shrubs or from occasional dead branches sticking up out of the samphire. Females frequently perched on the tops of samphire shrubs before dropping to the ground to feed. This was a very enjoyable encounter, as was the sight of several Red-kneed Dotterel occupying the shores of drainage lines flowing into the lake.

My final chat species was a lucky break, again in October last year. Driving between Thargomindah and Noccundra in extreme south-west Queensland I noticed a bird on the gibber plain not far from the road. Sure enough it was a Gibberbird and this male gave us excellent views for an extended period. It was 100 km west of Thargomindah, a long way from anywhere, but perfectly at home on the gibber plain.

This distinctive group of Australian birds are always worth spending time with and shall remain on my hope-to-see list whenever I travel in future. Every species is recorded from Queensland but I have still to see the White-fronted Chat and the Yellow Chat in this state. Maybe 2012 will be the year?



Orange Chat

Story and Pictures

Peter Valentine

CURLEWS AT ANNANDALE STATE SCHOOL

For the last few years a pair of Curlews built a nest/scrape during the school holidays in the middle of the buildings - resulting in stressed birds and some frenzied protection methods once school started and all the students returned.

This year the birds laid their eggs in a small triangle of grass - (think a few square meters) surrounded by footpaths and shaded by a small sapling. This was fine while the holidays were on with just the occasional teacher or parent wandering past.....however once school returned the situation changed.

I'm sure you can imagine the panic for any bird to be faced with the sudden influx of children running madly back and forth as the sessions of work and play unfolded. The school staff arranged for the area to be fenced off and two of the staff appointed themselves "Curlew Champions" and stood guard. A task that became more difficult once the chick hatched and was moved out of the fenced area!

With the care of the parent birds and the school staff the chick survived.



The Year 4 students this year were encouraged to study Curlews when they learnt about Life Cycles. Wendy (my sister) works in the library at Annandale and had been one of the self appointed protectors of the Curlew family. She was asked by the teachers for books and resources on Curlews and kindly offered my services to bring along a museum specimen and do "Show and Tell". By the time the discussions went back and forth it became - Can she answer some questions?...Can she tell the children about.....? and the next thing I was preparing a PowerPoint presentation to four Year 4 classes.

I was impressed at the amount of knowledge the students already had about Curlews. They

listened carefully and contributed to the discussions. They asked great questions - some of which I had no answers for and could only discuss possibilities.

*How long do Curlews live?

* How many chicks would they have in their lives?

I now have a PowerPoint on the lifecycle of Curlews, which I will happily lend to others who may also like to give a talk about Curlews. The only casualty for the day was the blown egg which fell and broke. Please keep your eyes open for abandoned eggs so I can replace it in the display.

Beth Snewin

Photo Ian Boyd

WHY I LIVE WHERE I LIVE

Whenever we go away from North Queensland we realise just how lucky we are with birding here.

Just before the Queen's Birthday weekend we headed to Atherton. Down by Hasties Swamp in the field to the left were hundreds of Brolgas and Sarus Cranes, all mixed up together and very busily feeding. Behind the cranes were rows of Magpie Geese, all marching forwards like an army from right to left, very intent on going somewhere. Behind them again were scores of Masked Lapwings and some Wandering Whistling Ducks. The last layer was made up of maybe a thousand Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. At dusk, the noise of the Cockatoos was deafening. The cranes must have all flown off to Bromfield Swamp as none landed at Hasties. They probably wouldn't get any sleep with the noisy cockatoos.



Black-shouldered Kite

Annette Sutton

Black-shouldered Kites were plentiful. They are so lovely to watch when they hover and suddenly dive down after their prey. One sat on a bare stump and was very friendly. She went through a variety of coquettish poses like a model in a photoshoot for Vogue magazine (that is why I said "she"), even extending her

wing and scraping her foot down the length of it in a very welcoming gesture.

Cattle Egrets joined in with humans in colonising the world. They arrived in Australia in the late 1930s or early 1940s. They soon spread from the northwest of Australia and are now very prolific in North Queensland. The keeping of domestic grazing beasts by humans has greatly helped them to move around the globe. There has been a decrease in the dairy industry on the Atherton Tablelands but the Cattle Egrets don't care. It is quite common to see three, four or five birds around the one cow. Great flocks of them fly overhead to and from roosting sites. On our Daintree River cruise we were continually bombarded by flocks of fifty to a hundred as they flew downriver to their roosting site at dusk. They appeared suddenly out of the gloom, flying low and changing course to avoid us. One experienced observer with us estimated over 1500 flew past and I don't doubt it.

Cattle Egrets don't have to rely on cattle. Horses will do just as well and now cane harvesters are great favourites. We saw a cane harvester advancing down a paddock, having gone about three hundred metres chopping up the cane and along that three hundred metres was a solid line of Cattle Egrets, about a metre and a half apart, all staring into the cane and grabbing anything the harvester had stirred up. They looked like an army all lined up, ready to do battle.

We saw lots of rainforest birds as usual and enjoyed the birding at Kingfisher Lodge in Julatten. A pair of Pale-yellow Robins supervised the setting up of the caravan and came and said goodnight each evening. The sight of a small (maybe 2.5 metre) scrub python curled up on a neighbour's step reminded us of how precarious life is for creatures in the wild. Eat or be eaten.



Great-billed Heron Ray Sutton

The Daintree cruise was a great highlight.

Murray "The Boatman" knew where to go to fulfil all our demands and no-one was disappointed. The Papuan Frogmouth was well hidden and nobody would have spotted it but Murray knew exactly where it was. Little and

Azure Kingfishers and Shining Flycatchers teased us by darting up and down the river but we got some good views. A Sacred Kingfisher was more friendly. The Great-billed Heron was the icing on the cake. One sat briefly on a branch not far from the boat and then took off and flew majestically down the river. Later we found him on another perch where he posed for quite a few minutes. Then another one was hiding in the mud among the mangroves and we watched it stalking along. We even had a crocodile – albeit about a metre long but a crocodile nevertheless.



Little Kingfisher Ray Sutton

Radjah Shelduck, Black-winged Stilts, Large-billed Gerygone, Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, many different Honeyeaters and birds I can't remember all contributed to a great list for the weekend. Good company, beautiful weather and great birds. And all within less than a day's drive from Townsville and the wonderful birding available here. Why would you live anywhere else?

Annette Sutton

Birds have several different types of feathers and each type is specialized to serve a different function. In general, feather types include:

- **primary** - long feathers located at the tip of the wing
- **secondary** - shorter feathers located along the trailing edge of the inner wing
- **tail** - feathers attached to the bird's pygostyle
- **contour (body)** - feathers that line the bird's body and provide streamlining, insulation, and waterproofing
- **down** - fluffy feathers located under the contour feathers that serve as insulation
- **semiplume** - feathers located under the contour feathers that serve as insulation (slightly larger than down feathers)
- **bristle** - long, stiff feathers around the bird's mouth or eyes (the function of bristle feathers is not known)

THE GREAT-BILLED HERONS - 2012

This bird, the so-called Great-billed Heron (GBH), has eluded our lenses for almost 8 years when we'd previously seen only one (then a lifer) at very long distance, flying upstream along the mangroves at the mouth of the Pioneer River. So we were getting pretty desperate to find another; just to confirm they really still existed...

Len and I took a week's holiday off work to coincide with the ANZAC day Public Holiday. First part of our week away was based at Atherton Woodlands Tourist Park (campervan in tow), from where we had great birding on the Tablelands. The latter part of our week was based at Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers' Lodge, Julatten, where we were fortunate enough to see the last local Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher of the season as well as the first of the returning Noisy Pittas. The birding in and around Julatten was absolutely fantastic. One major highlight for us this sojourn was on our second trip up Mount Lewis Road in search of the Blue-faced Parrot Finch (dipped), where we came across this magnificent Southern Cassowary walking along the road, only a kilometre past the Bushy Creek Bridge. Even though they are known to inhabit this heavily-rainforested World Heritage Area, they are seldom seen, mainly because of the very limited public access.

THE HIGHLIGHT however, of our holiday was when we did a 'Daintree River Wild Watch' early-morning cruise. We were the only passengers on the boat on that cool and overcast ANZAC Day morning, so we had our guide, Captain (Sauce) Ian Worcester's full birding attention. As we boarded, we mentioned our target birds for the morning and as we idled up little streams and motored along, hugging the banks of the Daintree River, our targets were steadily coming to fruition: Little and Azure Kingfishers, Shining Flycatchers, Double-eyed Fig-parrot and many more.

We were cruising along at about 20 knots when I saw a strange but obvious shape skulking on a low branch of a dark and gloomy tree on the left bank of the river. We turned about, confirming that it was indeed a Great-billed Heron. We nosed in closer for some obscured views and then continued further downstream to see another GBH, this time more out in the open and in better light, which allowed Len to take a couple of photos. Even further downstream we hooked up a little tributary on the starboard beam. This returned yet another GBH, which seemed very unimpressed by our presence, grunting, croaking and roaring like a Crocodile; its head held erect, throat feathers hackling out with wings drooped and tail fanned

upwards. What an amazing and wonderful experience!

Chris Ezzy.



Great-billed Heron

Len Ezzy

PARTNERS

I was standing under the bridge at Eungella National Park in the brisk early morning watching a Platypus going about its daily routine. I started thinking back to the tour the night before when the guide had told me that sometimes Azure Kingfishers hunt alongside the Platypus, a notion I was at first sceptical about but then considered might be possible. This consideration was turned into fact as I saw a blue shape dart over the water to land on a log just above the splashing mammal. Within moments, the Azure started fishing, taking tidbits that were flushed out of the log by the Platypus. It was an amazing sight and one I feel very privileged to have seen.

Krystal Huff



SIMPLE PLEASURES

I'm always amazed by the number of birds that flitter around, or fly over this small area of the western suburbs.

At every opportunity, if I look out one of my windows or doors, there is usually a bird flapping past. At present, I have a fruiting Creek Premna, which has a multitude of small, black berries. Great Bower Birds seem to visit it regularly throughout the day, but I have also noticed Yellow Honeyeaters and Brown Honeyeaters enjoying the fruit. Yes, a blur of wings just passed the window in front of me - the Bower Bird leaving again. A few minutes ago a female Sunbird was sucking nectar from some pink pentis flowers near the Premna, and earlier on, a Brown Honeyeater had its long bill up the succulent flower of an agave. There are Welcome Swallows and Fairy Martins pursuing insects over the large drain behind my neighbour's house - oops - a wallaby just hopped past the window.



Buff-banded Rail

Ian Boyd

On my early morning walk each day, I search diligently for anything different and yes, during the week, I was thrilled to see two Bustards in the huge grassy paddock to the west of our Village and I'm sure a Tawny Grassbird was sitting on a fence in front of me. Didn't have my binoculars, so not positive, but don't think it was a Pipit as I see them quite often and it was different. The Bustards had been regular visitors for the first two months of the year, then disappeared, so I was quite excited to see them back, even if only for a brief visit. A pair of Kestrels sometimes appears over the paddock, or sitting on the lamp-posts nearby, while Black Kites are regulars. Not so regular was the Brown Goshawk that came and perched on my front guttering one afternoon, with his tail hanging down. I managed a quick look at

the rest of him before he took off, still pursued by Magpie Larks.

My very loyal Black-fronted Dotterel remains a daily joy as he pecks around in the algae of the drain. I'm just waiting for the second one to appear and then no doubt, another batch of chicks. Other walkers who go past as I admire his beauty, sometimes ask, "What are you looking at in that smelly drain?" I point out the birds to them and they say, "Oh," before walking off. My heart bleeds for their ignorance and lack of appreciation of our wonderful Nature.

Other occasional visitors to the drain include White-faced Heron, various Egrets, Royal Spoonbill, both types of Ibis, Buff-banded Rails and last year the wonderful Painted Snipe. I'm still waiting for it to re-appear! Masked Lapwings abide happily around the Village and at least one pair of Bush Stone Curlews call our place, their place. Plumed Whistling Ducks amused me during the "wet" of January, while a group of Golden-headed Cisticolas entertained my ears for the first 3 months of the year. Chestnut-breasted Mannikins can often be seen drinking and feeding there.

Chestnut-breasted Mannikin

Ian Boyd



Until April, I was often accused of allowing a Common Koel to annoy the other residents. Perhaps there was more than one, as reports differed as to whose ears had been subjected to his persistent, twenty-four hour calling. My sister actually witnessed a quick mating one day when she was alerted to the commotion in her trees. Spotted and Peaceful Doves coo from rooftops and in the evening, Black Cockatoos fly, squawking, towards their roosting trees near Dairy Farmers' Stadium. Lately a family of Magpies carols from some rooftops and Blue-winged Kookaburras can be heard in the trees along the Bohle River, or sitting on the electricity poles beside the drain.

How blessed are we who live in North Queensland's relative serenity and remaining bushland. What a pity we can't stop all development NOW!

Elna Kerswell

BIRDLIFE TOWNSVILLE CONSERVATION REPORT

In the May Conservation Report two aspects of concern were identified, duck-shooting in Victoria and feral cats across Australia. Now we have another topical issue, this time courtesy of the NSW Government, which provides concerns for both conservation outcomes and for the safety of birdwatchers. The Premier of NSW made a deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party to open up 79 National Parks and other Nature Reserves for recreational shooting despite an election promise not to do that. As I write the NSW National Parks Rangers are on strike in protest against this decision. It is interesting that some people support this decision to open up the Parks to shooters on the grounds that the target species will be feral animals. As everyone who has taken the time to look at the plight of the Australian environment is well aware, feral animals are a curse. It is ironic that many of them were deliberately let loose in Australia to provide targets for recreational shooting. Subsequently they have had extreme impacts on the environment and wildlife, including bird species.

What National Parks in NSW are affected by the Premier's deal? The list includes Brindabella NP, Warrumbungle NP, Bald Rock NP, Kosciuszko NP (except for the ski resort areas), Dorrigo NP, Piliga NP, Barrington Tops NP and others used often by birdwatchers. Of great concern, according to the National Parks Association of NSW, is the threat to people who use these parks.

Are there severe threats to wildlife, including birds, from feral species in our National Parks? The answer is obviously yes and each of the NP services across Australia has a program of threat reduction involving ferals. There have been only a few nature reserves in Australia that have managed eradication, mostly private reserves that were fenced to ensure no reintroduction. Peron Peninsula in Shark Bay is one. Another example was in the Whitsunday Islands where isolation and small size enabled a program of goat eradication to be completed on individual islands (not all). This did involve shooting as part of the program. It is certainly true therefore that shooting (ground or helicopter) may be a valuable part of feral animal control programs. However, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has concluded that on-ground shooting cannot successfully deal with feral pigs (for example). If we are to tackle this huge issue, with cats and foxes the number one concern for birds,

then allowing recreational shooters to shoot the occasional animal is not the way to go. The prospect of collateral damage may be very high also (consider the duck-shooting situation discussed last time).

As a bird conservation organisation we should be fully supportive of measures to eradicate feral animals known to impact our scarce protected areas (<5% of Queensland). But we also need to be realistic about the best processes to achieve this. Generally the park management agencies and their long-suffering rangers are simply under-resourced to do the job properly. Instead of pretending that letting recreational shooters into National Parks is anything more than pandering to the interests of a few over the interests of the whole community, State Governments need to fully fund a program of eradication using all the modern tools available. While that may include some specific controlled shooting, it will always be much more. Our indigenous species deserve a much higher priority for protection. It is almost as if the Governments do not appreciate the biodiversity crisis we are now in the midst of here in Australia.

A related conservation issue is the Biosecurity failures right on our doorstep. As though the 200 years of experience has taught us nothing, each year Governments fail to properly secure our borders from global biosecurity threats. For a fraction of the cost of adventurous and unnecessary wars we could have stopped the recent incursions. A good example on our doorstep is myrtle rust, now found in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and with consequences too difficult and horrifying to predict. Yellow Crazy Ant is another that has slipped through our fumbling attempts to protect the environment. When will we learn? I suspect we may return to biosecurity issues again.

<http://www.npansw.org.au/index.php/news-parentmenu-419/182-2012/752-premier-allows-shooting-in-nsw-national-parks.html>

Peter Valentine, Conservation Officer.



INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

| Birds | Date | Where | Observer |
|--|-------------|---|--|
| Diamond Dove | 01/05/12 | Bucks Road, Woodstock | I.Boyd,B.Holmes,P.Valentine,J.Richetelo |
| Shining Bronze Cuckoo | 01/05/12 | Castle Hill, Townsville. | Alexandra Canton |
| White-eared Monarch | 02/05/12 | Tyto Wetlands | Tony Ashton |
| Ground Cuckoo-Shrike | 04/05/12 | Corfield, (On Hughenden/Winton.Road) | Ivor Preston |
| Flock Bronzewing | 04/05/12 | Nr. Corfield. As above | Ivor Preston |
| Black-throated Finches & White-browed Robin | 06/05/12 | Oak Valley Env. Park | Ed Pierce |
| Spotted Nightjar (Deceased-very fresh road kill) | 05/05/12 | Abergowrie, Nr. Ingham | Bill Holmes, <u>et.al</u> Birdlife Townsville. |
| Australian Pratincole | 06/05/12 | Orient Station, Ingham. | Townsville Birdlife, per L.Ezzy |
| Black-shouldered Kite | 07/05/12 | Bushland Beach | Peter Valentine |
| Mangrove Robin, Collared Kingfisher. | 09/05/12 | Mangroves nr .end of Orient Rd., Ingham | Tony Ashton |
| Pink-eared Duck | 11/05/12 | Pentland Town Dam. | Margaret Merrill |
| Red-winged Parrot, Black-faced Monarch | 16/05/12 | Castle Hill, Townsville | Alexandra Canton. |
| Emerald Dove | 18/05/12 | Ross River Bush Garden | Alexandra Canton. |
| Channel-billed Cuckoo | 19/05/12 | Town Common Cons. Park, Townsville | Ed Pierce |
| Southern Boobook | 19/05/12 | Mt. Louisa, (in Garden) | Len & Chris Ezzy |
| Scarlet Honey-eater | 20/05/12 | Upper Bohle River, Kelso. | Peter Valentine |
| Scarlet Honey Eater, Channel-billed Cuckoo | 26/05/12 | Along" Plant trail", Townsville Town Common Cons. Park. | Ed Pierce |

QUEST 2012

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|-----------------|-----|--------------|
| Chris Ezzy | 337 | 2 December |
| Len Ezzy | 335 | 30 November |
| Ian Leach | 292 | 18 October |
| Peter Valentine | 265 | 21 September |
| Ian Boyd | 265 | 21 September |
| Marleen Acton | 235 | 22 August |
| Elna Kerswell | 231 | 18 August |
| Joan Wharton | 222 | 9 August |
| Janet Robino | 216 | 3 August |
| Rosemary Payet | 214 | 1 August |
| Beth Snewin | 209 | 27 July |
| Annette Sutton | 209 | 27 July |
| Alex Canton | 208 | 26 July |
| Pat Charlton | 196 | 14 July |
| Cecily Messer | 187 | 5 July |
| Malcolm Calvert | 180 | 28 June |
| Wendy Kaus | 179 | 27 June |
| Lenore Calvert | 177 | 25 June |
| Warren Charlton | 171 | 19 June |
| George Baker | 167 | 15 June |
| Barbara Reidy | 166 | 14 June |
| Teresa Baker | 164 | 12 June |
| Janet Cross | 159 | 7 June |

June 2012

24th - Sunday Outing - Laroona and surrounds. - Meet in the Reading's Cinema carpark in Canon Park, Thuringowa for a 7.00am departure. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged.

July 2012

30th June - 2nd July (Sat - Mon) Townsville Show long weekend - Campout at Pentland. Further details closer to the date.

1st - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am.

7th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.30pm) and General Meeting (2.30pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. **Guest Speaker** Luiz Mestre - From tales to science: the experiences of a Brazilian ornithologist in Amazon forest.

11th - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is City Birds. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

15th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 7.00am.

18th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am.

22nd - Sunday Outing - Wongaloo (Cromarty) Wetlands - Meet at the Palmetum carpark for a 7.00am departure. Will be home by lunch time - bring morning tea only.

29th - Sunday Outing - Ross River Dam Cruise with Pop Sullivan (Cost \$30.00 per head). Meet at the Ross River Dam car park 6.15am ready to move off at 6.30am sharp. Following the cruise there will be a free birders breakfast for members (for non-members the cost will be \$5.00).

August 2012

5th - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am.

8th - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Waterbirds. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

11th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.30pm) and General Meeting (2.30pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. **Guest Speaker** - Peter Valentine.