

The Drongo

Number 156 November 2019



Janet Robino

Letterwings

Wongaloo

Changing Seasons

FROM THE PRESIDENT

In August several members made the most of the Spotlighting Trips that Wal Threlfall organised at the Town Common. There weren't all that many birds but a good time was had by all.

Thanks to a lot of hard work by Julie Goldsbury, we have been successful in getting an ABEF grant to develop six roll-up banners to complement our education and community awareness activities. Julie, Mark Horvath and Annette Sibson are working on the designs.

Wal Threlfall, Mark Horvath and I are working with the Townsville City Council (TCC) on updating the Birdwatching in Townsville Brochure. So far the new design looks so much better. Britt Falco and the rest of the staff in TCC Marketing and Communications have been really good to work with and the process is moving at a very swift pace.

Wal and Leta Threlfall and I took a road trip out to Hughenden to St Francis School to talk about Birds and their Habitats. We also had a hands on session on how to use binoculars and telescopes – always a big hit with kids (and the grown-up kids as well). On the way, we visited Prairie State School, a smaller group but just as enthusiastic.

As usual, it has been rather hectic on the Education and Community Awareness front. We have attended the Reef Guardian Schools Program Information Sessions at the Burdekin, Ingham and Townsville. These sessions provide an opportunity to promote our Birds in Schools Program to teachers throughout the region.

Wal and I attended the St Benedict's School's Ecofest at Shaw. We took the Box of Bits from the Museum and of course, the binoculars and telescopes. We had no idea how busy it was going to be. Next time we will take a few extra helpers!

During the September School Holidays we were invited to attend TCC's 'Nature Play' at the Palmetum. The target group was 3-8 year olds. Wal and I were thankfully supported by Beth Snewin and Ian Eadie from the Museum of Tropical North Queensland. Beth and Ian looked after the Box of Bits table while Wal and I did binos and scopes. We had over 400 'interactions'. It only went for a few hours but we were all absolutely exhausted at the end of it all! Again, more helpers next time.

Wal and Tony Grice were guest speakers at the University of the Third Age (U3A) in October. Wal spoke on the Birds of Townsville and of course, Tony spoke on the Black-throated Finch. Apparently it was the largest attendance they have had for a long time and the feedback was very positive

Norm Rains and some other members attended TCC's National Water Day at the Sustainability Centre. Again, bird display cases from museum and binos and scopes. Always well attended and busy.

We had our usual busy, busy October. Library Displays were mounted in the three City Libraries using the Museum specimens. The aim of the displays is to promote Bird Week and the Aussie Backyard Bird Count. Unfortunately, the promotional material for the Backyard Bird Count didn't arrive until well into October so the display had to be 'up-dated' to include this information. The Library staff are always so supportive and eager to assist in any way. We had three all-day shopping centre displays at Castletown, Fairfield Waters and Northshore. Thank you to all the volunteers who made these events possible and successful. Volunteer hours for surveys, educational and community activities so far this year comes to the impressive total of 1488.

Several members took part in the Black-throated Finch Waterhole Survey on 19 and 20 October.

Birdlife Townsville had two teams in the National Twitchathon on the last weekend of October. The Grey-tailed Tattlers managed to get 166 well and truly beating the Varied 'Villers on 147. The totals are still pretty good when you consider the weather. It was very, very windy and despite the rain early in the year, very dry. Between the two teams we raised \$600. All the money raised in Queensland will go to help the Eungella Honeyeater. You still have time to make a donation to support one of the teams.

Go to <https://twitchathon2019.everydayhero.com/au>. Go to leaderboard, click on the icon of the team you wish to support.

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino	Janet Cross	Annette Sibson
Secretary: Wal Threlfall	Mark Horvath	Julia Goldsbury
Treasurer: Nina Doyle	Jill Staunton	Peter Staunton

Newsletter Editor Annette Sutton amsgreat@gmail.com

[Deadline for next Drongo is January 31st. Please send articles as Word documents, photos as attachments.](#)

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BOURKE'S PARROTS

We decided we'd camp out along the Coopers Creek after a few nights at Windorah Caravan Park. So we had a drive out there without the van to scope out a good spot. It was an interesting area, though quite dry and dusty along the top bank of the river.



As always, I kept an eye out for birds along the way. At one point I leapt out of the car to photograph some Bourke's Parrots that were feeding on the ground just near the road. I was thrilled as I'd never seen them before and they were quite approachable.

We returned the following morning with the van, found ourselves a great spot and got set up. First things first are always a cuppa and a wander about to see what birds are around. I was thrilled to find a family of Bourke's Parrots were in the area. They appeared to be the same ones that I had photographed the day before.

Over our time there (2 nights) this family of Bourke's spent a lot of time in the spot that we had chosen. There was mum and dad, then two young birds still demanding to be fed a couple of times a day and a sprinkling of sub adult birds.

Mum was pretty distinctive with her two very pale back feathers and dad had a lot of blue about his face. The two youngsters stood out as they had pale beaks and beautiful unworn feathers, and of course, they made the most noise!



It was fascinating to watch the birds going about their feeding routines. The ground had been badly broken up by a herd of cattle that had been driven through a week or so before hand so there was little grass around. But there must have been plenty of seeding grass before hand

and the birds, both Bourke's Parrots and Budgerigars, happily dug through the dirt for the seeds.

I noticed that the Bourke's Parrots liked to feed while in dappled shade. They flew between areas of tree shade, not liking to be in the full sun at all. When the shadow of a raptor went over they would all freeze on the spot. That area has a very large population of Black Kites, so there was plenty of raptor shadows going over. Given the colouring of the parrots and the colour of the dirt, their stillness worked a treat to keep them unseen.

The Bourke's Parrots came very close at times. We would just sit and enjoy watching them. One day they fed in the solid shade of our car. This gave me the opportunity to lie down and get some lovely photographs of these gentle birds.

It was a wonderful way to learn about a new bird and really spend some time getting to know them.

Annette Sibson

NB. We were shown photographs and video of the cattle being driven through the area by a fellow traveller. And the telltale signs that cattle had gone through were plentiful!

HOW TO MAKE MONEY

While out looking for birds today I ran into Debbie Gibson up near the dam. She then told me a true story of hers. Back in the 70s she was newly married and her husband had got a job on a property down in Eidsvold which paid about \$100 a fortnight. Of course they had free accommodation and power, meat was plentiful and the vegie patch was good, but they were finding it pretty tight as far as the money goes. So off to the show they go and discover that a pair of Blue Mountain Parrots (Rainbow Lorikeets) sold for \$10. A nice little money earner if they could catch some of the hundreds that were at the farm.

While talking with a neighbour who had lots of chickens, he told them a sure fire way of capturing plenty was to get sorghum seed and soak it in wine, then put it out so the Blue Mountain Parrots would eat it, get drunk, lay on the ground, and all they would have to do was go around and pick up the birds. Well they didn't need to put any money into the sorghum as the farm could provide that, but the wine cost them about \$20 for a couple of flagons (that hurt, but they figured they would get that back with two pair of the birds).

So the sorghum was loaded with wine and set out for the birds to get stuck into but what should show up but Lousy Jacks (Apostlebirds). There were hundreds of them, all falling over each other making a heck of a racket, eating and then trying to fly, or climb up onto the fence, which they promptly fell off, landing on their backs, wings outstretched and feet in the air. (Debbie was sitting on her quad bike at this stage doing all the actions of the distressed bird; I of course couldn't stop giggling). She said they sat around for half the day but not one Blue Mountain Parrot showed up, so they put water out for the Lousy Jacks to sober up. The left-over sorghum was fed to the pigs who, sleep all day anyway! They were down twenty bucks and that was the end of their money-making venture.

Marleen Acton

A TIME OF CHANGE AS THE YEAR DRAWS TO A CLOSE

I am very fond of, and always look forward to, this time of year from September until the wet season arrives, mainly because in this part of Queensland we get to experience the local weather changing from our relatively mild dry winters to hot, humid and sticky summers, all in a very short few weeks. These changes, while not as dramatic as the 'spring' in other parts of the world, do bring new life with them which gives me a sense of well-being, knowing that the 'system is working OK'.



Feltham Cone from Pandanus Point

One of the major local effects of this seasonal change is the annual drying up of ephemeral swamps and the resultant changing composition of bird populations in places like the Wongaloo Wetlands and the Town Common Conservation Park. Also, local migratory native bush birds such as the Grey and Rufous Fantails and Lemon-bellied Flycatchers have all but disappeared from vine thickets and coastal lowland rainforests, while others such as Dollar Birds, Brush Cuckoos, Channel-billed Cuckoos and Eastern Koels willingly taking their place.



Albizia lebbec with last year's seed pods

This time of year is also remarkable for vegetation changes. Trees such as the native Cocky Apple (*Planchonia careya*) have been flowering progressively in the district for some weeks now, leaving a ring of fresh spent blossoms around the drip-line each morning as the result of its night-flowering behaviour. The introduced (?) Indian Siris (*Albizia lebbek*), which until mid-October in my area, appeared as stark, leafless, giant rattles

(when the seed pods are stirred by breezes), are now completely covered in new foliage and fresh flowers which attract nectar/pollen eating birds and insects as well as the insectivorous birds that feast on those pollinating insects. Interestingly, these trees always carry-over some full seed pods from the previous season, perhaps as a seed bank as security against fire just as the bottle-brushes do. By the end of November when flowering has finished, an ankle-deep carpet of spent lime-green blossoms sits on top of the layer of leaves dropped in earlier months to act as an effective mulch for moisture retention as well as a barrier against the germination of weeds and other competitive plants.

One of my favourite local birding spots is the Wongaloo Wetlands at Cromarty just north of Giru. Besides attending the monthly bird counts at this remarkable place, I was last there recently for the annual Black-throated Finch count in October, and although I did not spot any BTF at my designated site around the waterhole at the Emmet Creek crossing near the railway bridge, I did see a host of other birds and wallabies on both days of the count. My bird species list included: Double-barred Finches; Peaceful Doves; Pheasant Coucals; Torresian Crows; Brush Cuckoos; Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes; White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes; Bar-shouldered Doves; Grey Fantails; Australasian Figbirds; Leaden Flycatchers; Little Friarbirds; Helmeted Friarbirds; Blue-faced Honeyeaters; Brown Honeyeaters; Brown-backed Honeyeaters; White-throated Honeyeaters; White-gaped Honeyeaters; Bush Stone Curlews; Dollarbirds; Mistletoebirds; Red-winged Parrots; Little Shrike-thrush; Varied Trillers; White-breasted Woodswallows; Pacific Emerald Doves; Channel-billed Cuckoos; and Red-tailed Black Cockatoos.



Saddle Mountain and drying wetlands

After the 9am knock-off on the Sunday of the BTF Count, I went to all of the other sites at Wongaloo normally visited on our official bird surveys on the first Thursday of each month. Most of the water had disappeared and with it most of the water birds. Unfortunately, there were a few unfledged Black Swans which I noted to myself would probably not make it to maturity given the lack of food and water and the nearby active White-bellied Sea-Eagle's nest.

Surprisingly there were two separate large flocks of Grey Teal, together I estimated to be well in excess of 1500 birds. However I doubt if they will still be there in Early November for our next official survey as the water will be gone by then. There were also nine Black-necked Storks hunting in the diminishing water, including two sets of adults and their fledged offspring. The pair that nested in their usual place on the southern side of St Margaret's Creek opposite Cromarty House on Cromarty Road, raised

three chicks this year, one fewer than their remarkable effort of four in 2018.

Aside from the usual Stilts, a small number of Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, a few Pelicans with their attendant Little Black Cormorants, Masked Lapwings and a few Ibis, there were no other species in any numbers on what was left of the water. Of the Magpie Geese, estimated to be in their thousands in early September, there was nary a feather.



Breakfast

Speaking further of Wongaloo, I was very happy with the turnout of members from our branch together with guests from Wildlife Care, for our trip to the wetlands on Saturday 21st September. Although many of the Magpie Geese present in large numbers earlier in the month had departed the scene by then, everyone who attended remarked on the great diversity of the birdlife on the place and I believe they all enjoyed the outing. We will try to fit in another weekend visit next year for those who are unable to attend the week-day monthly surveys. The annual aggregation of water birds at Wongaloo is a remarkable event and we are privileged to be able to witness one of nature's better spectacles.

Bird numbers at my place at Alligator Creek have also been affected by the seasonal change. My family of Magpie Geese who laze around and consume large quantities of my chook food during their 'off season' each year, have arrived for their annual R & R. They returned at the same time as the Wongaloo geese departed. Coincidence?--- I don't think so. The group has now grown to fifteen, all with white backs this year which means they either nested early and the young ones have grown out of their black back stage, or alternatively they did not breed successfully. There are certainly smaller and therefore younger birds in the flock. Last year I had up to thirty five Magpie Geese on some days. Talk about 'fun on the farm'.

There are also well over 200 Plumed Whistling-ducks in temporary residence now; these would not have originated from Wongaloo as I have never recorded any there on the many trips to that location since we commenced bird surveys some years ago.

Scrubby, our resident male Brush Turkey, is well into breeding mode again. I started pumping from my bore some weeks ago to try to keep the area around my house and sheds a little green to mitigate against dust and possible bushfire. Old Scrubby thought this was very considerate of me and showed his approval by commencing to re-make his mound which has fallen into disrepair over recent months, using the newly moistened material. I never cease to wonder at his dedication to his mound-building. His work ethic is incredible, starting at

day-break each day and with the exception of a few hours off in the heat of the day, he works until near dusk with occasional short breaks after which he has a final drink for the day and flies/climbs almost to the top of a nearby large 20m Albizia tree for his well-earned nightly rest. He was 'on the job' early a few days ago when I went out to the road to collect my newspaper at around 5.30am, and I mean 'on the job'. The mating was a fairly vigorous affair with the hen bird quite dishevelled and had a 'not happy Jan' look about her when the steamy activity was all over.

Scrubby and his females also like chook food. On some occasions, aside from my own chooks and three community Guinea Fowl, there are up to seven native species enjoying breakfast at my expense each day at this time of year. The list includes Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Little Corellas (infrequent), Brush Turkeys, Australian White Ibis, Magpie Geese, Plumed Whistling-Ducks and Agile Wallabies. There is a strict pecking order at mealtime. The male Magpie Geese are 'top dogs', maintaining their position by lots of tail-pulling and pecking of the other birds but these are easily displaced by old Scrubby who disperses the mob by a very fast, head down rugby-forward style frontal attack when he feels it is his turn for breakfast.

Yes, the changing seasons are refreshing for me as they indicate that 'change is good' and 'life goes on'. Who would live anywhere else but North Queensland eh!?

Norm Rains

BIRDING UP NORTH

In the second week of October, six of us set off for the Daintree. The excuse was to run in a new vehicle. Well, ours isn't new but it sounded as good a reason as any.



The highlight of the Daintree part was the early morning boat trip. Ray and I booked later than the others so we went with Sauce on his 6.00 am trip while the others went with Murray at 6.30. I was the only one on either trip (out of the guides and everyone) to spot The Great-billed Heron. I glanced back to the rear of the boat, just in time

to see one flying into the forest. Only a brief glimpse but I saw it. The Azure Kingfisher zipped past a couple of times but the Little Kingfisher stayed well hidden. We found a sleepy Papuan Frogmouth on the branch of a tree. Shining Flycatchers had nests in trees along the bank and we saw both sexes. A pair of young Black-necked Storks completely ignored us. At the end of the trip we found the obligatory saltie.



We stayed in the units at the caravan park right beside the river. The damage from the February floods could still be seen. A flock of Metallic Starling were busy building their nests in a tree opposite. As we stood on the veranda in the late afternoon, we saw something coming down river. It was a big saltwater crocodile. I said it was about five metres and the guides confirmed it at 4.5. It looked like a train swimming along. I am glad we were on the veranda.



The next stop was Mount Molloy where we stayed in the pub. That was quite an experience. Each couple had a room and the bathroom and toilet were along the veranda. There was a communal tiny fridge and cereal, tea and coffee. The meals were very good but the first day we went to the little café next door and had breakfast. It was legendary.

We drove up Mount Lewis but no Blue-faces Parrot-Finches alas.

A visit to Hastie's Swamp on the way home finished off the bird watching. Saw a few Nankeen Night-Herons but no Pink-eared Ducks and not a sign of a Brolga or a Sarus. Next time.

Annette Sutton

WONGALOO

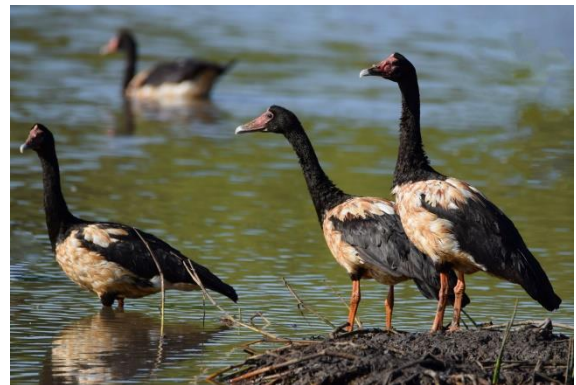


On Saturday 21st September I attended my first Birdlife Townsville outing, since arriving in Townsville only a few months before. Along with nine other Birdlife members and four NQ Wildlife Care members, we set off from our homes in the early morning light. We assembled at the Alligator Creek Roadhouse, as instructed, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and then headed off to Wongaloo for a guided tour by the delightful Norm Rains.

I found out a great deal about Wongaloo from online research and the Park's 2015 Management statement.

Wongaloo Regional Park is no ordinary swamp. *"It is part of one of the largest coastal wetland complexes on the east coast of Australia and has remained a natural ephemeral hydrological system."* Meaning that it dries up, but has a good support system not just for birds but for a seasonal movement of wildlife across the coastal plain.

The park adjoins the Bowling Green Bay Ramsar site in Townsville and is part of one of the largest coastal wetlands on Australia's east coast.



Wongaloo's swamps and grasslands also provide valuable habitats for birds such as the endangered Black-throated Finch. The park provides important wetland habitat and breeding sites for many bird species. For example; up to 8000 Brolgas have been recorded congregating in the wetlands.

While the water levels were far from capacity and described as *"soupy"*, there was a great deal of aquatic life and hundreds of birds seeking breakfast. It kept us all very busy counting and spotting different birds and wildlife.

Janet Cross recorded 66 species of birds and I was fortunate enough to see or hear an additional seven. Other members probably saw a few other species as well. Morning tea was then had by all and we soon resumed our prowl around the wetlands.



Aside from the abundant numbers of Magpie Geese, many different species had their own "zones" and Norm knew where to find them. My favourite bird, the Spoonbill, was there in great numbers, both the Royal (black beak) and the Yellow-billed.

A huge flock of Pacific Black Ducks took to the sky at one time, making quite a sight. The small lily pond held a number of Green Pygmy-geese and a solitary Whistling Duck, as well as a diving male Darter, that looked like a right "Nellie." There were also a lot of dragonflies and insects around the lily-pad covered pond.



The Black-necked Storks had juvenile youngsters all finding their way and negotiating flight with an instructor. Several of the Black Swan families had cygnets.

Also heard (no photo) a Mangrove Honeyeater, who was too shy to come out - making 73 birds for the morning. It was a fabulous visit and I look forward to recovering from surgery so I can attend another outing soon.

Melissa BEE

Wongaloo Fans Aggregation, Wongaloo Swamps Aggregation, and Burdekin-Townsville Wetland Aggregation are listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia (DIWA). These feed into the Bowling Green Bay Ramsar site. They provide important connectivity for wildlife and a significant breeding site for Brolga, Magpie Geese and Black Swans.

COORABULKA ROAD

I'd been trying to prepare myself for disappointment. After all we only had a gps point from a few months ago with which to find these magical birds.

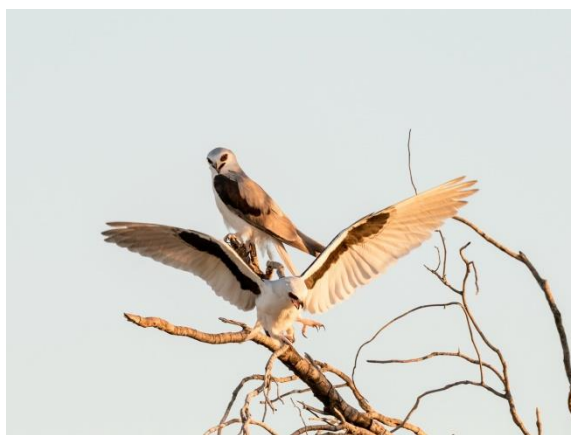
We finally arrived at 'the' spot! Well, I couldn't see anything in the trees so I went for a walk along the cattle track. I thought I could hear something, a deepish squawk every so often, couldn't pinpoint where it was from though.



Now what was that, a tinkling sound, oh a Fairy-wren is in there somewhere. There it is, a male White-winged Fairy-wren in full colour oh wow! A first for me.

My husband joined me where I'd stopped and said 'There's one', pointing up into a leafy tree. And there, sitting quietly, was a Letter-winged Kite, trying to sleep. I left my husband to guard the spot and rushed back for my camera. I managed to photograph the Kite, in between the wind blowing branches in the way. How exciting a Letter-winged Kite and a White-winged Fairy-wren in one go!! whoot...

Little did I realise just how many Letter-winged Kites we would get to see.



After setting up the van and waiting impatiently for the shade to come over, I finally got the scope set up and peered through it at one particular tree in the distance. There they were, nine Letter-winged Kites sitting in various spots around a tall leafy tree. Occasionally they would take to the air and rearrange themselves into a more shady spot. There was one Letter-winged Kite that was in a tree closer to us and every so often it would give out a deepish squawk. It had at one stage been joined by

another Kite and they seemed to have a bit of a spat (?) or something. I missed seeing exactly what happened.

Late in the afternoon we were joined by another couple. They were looking for the Letter-winged Kites too. They pointed out another group of birds further up the tree line.



The Letter-winged Kite that was squawking occasionally came to perch in a dead tree quite close to us, and was joined by a second kite. Then there was a lot of squawking and calling and mating! Right there, in front of us, while I watched through the scope!! I grabbed my camera and managed to sneak closer and hid behind a shrub to get some shots. There was no mating but I got shots of the male preening and the pair calling to each other when the male shifted position.

In the morning we managed to see twenty-six Letter-winged Kites variously perched about on the low dead trees and logs lying on the ground. It was a magical experience and it made for wonderful memories and photographs.

The mating pair were at it again, making lots of noise while creating the next generation. As the morning warmed up the all Letter-winged Kites took off for the distant leafy trees to keep cool.

We packed up the van and headed off to see the rest of Coorabulka Road.

Annette Sibson

Night to Morning Maleny

Today it's raining in Maleny; the frogs are croaking, the birds are hiding and the dog is on the deck. A storm is expected this arvo, I'll bring some rain back with me!!

Birding starts on dusk with my grandson rushing to tell me that a big black eagle had flown past the bathroom window. Such excitement! Birding from the bathroom revealed four Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos sitting in a dead tree. We all watched them come and go, seventeen in total, constantly squeaking, until it was too dark to see them but could still hear. A Barn Owl flies past, a Tawny Frogmouth is 'ooming', then later a Southern Boobook is sitting in a front tree and calling. Music to dream by.

Early morning and the Whipbirds dash across the road while raucous Pied Currawongs are dominating the scene, Laughing Kookaburras are cackling, a lone Wompoo 'bollops', the Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets feed in the bottlebrush while joyfully calling, many Silvereyes

fly by with alacrity, the Red-backed Fairy-wren family appears down near the dam while constantly darting in and out of the shrubbery. Lewins call repeatedly. Pied and Gray Butcherbirds along with Magpies sing in the sunlight.

As the sun rises further (yes I am up very early making school lunches!!) I hear a Monarch, a beautiful Black-faced. In a nearby bush is the Bar-shouldered Dove pair, Brown Cuckoo-Doves call, King Parrots call and perch in the tall trees, the Striated Pardalotes, Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Pheasant Coucal, and Mistletoe Birds turn up while the Brush Turkey struts in as though he owns the place.

On the drive to school the Pale-headed Rosellas live around the corner, many Spangled Drongos appear, the Noisy Miners are ubiquitous, a pair of Maned Ducks are hovering over 8 ducklings (a favourite sight), Masked Lapwings abound, Crimson Rosellas, Dollarbirds, Little Wattlebirds, Torresian Crows, Spinebills, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Sacred Kingfishers are in the trees along the road. Of course the Cattle Egrets are many, occasional Straw-necked Ibis in the fields.



Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo

Ray Sutton

The best sighting daily, near the school, are the 8 or 9 Scarlet Honeyeaters darting about and feeding in a weeping red flowering bottlebrush, *melaleuca viminalis*, so the birds are relatively close.

The Black Shouldered Kite is soaring over the valley and the Black Ducks are on the dam. All is well.

Cecily

PALLARENDA

I was to lead the monthly outing at the quarantine station (or Pallarenda conservation park) on Sunday 29th September. For a while I thought it was going to be a fairly quiet affair as no one had let me know they would be attending. A couple of days before the outing I started getting phone calls to say they would be coming. What put the wind up me was the high expectations! When we did this outing last year everyone was very excited by great views of several Lovely Fairy-wrens, a couple of White-eared Monarchs and a little group of Fairy Gerygones. I was alarmed to hear that some people 'assumed' that I would somehow conjure up such wonderful birds again.

Twelve of us turned up. I tried to dampen any anticipation of the same birds making an appearance but still felt the pressure to produce something spectacular. As expected, the area was very dry. We started out with the usual

birds: Figbirds, Drongo, Varied Trillers, Pheasant Coucal, Brush-turkey and lots of Brown-backed Honeyeaters.

And then.....much to my relief, the call of the Lovely Fairy-wren. We were able to watch a beautiful male and two females hopping around in a dead Chinese Apple Tree. I was now able to just relax and enjoy the birds. Everyone was so pleased with this sighting that I figured that I wouldn't be expected to produce anything else too special. We didn't find any Monarchs or Gerygones. We did find just one Fantail which didn't 'act' quite like a Grey Fantail. As it got closer and we were all able to observe it clearly it was identified as a Northern Fantail. No one could remember ever seeing one at this site before so again all were very pleased.



Northern Fantail

Ray Sutton

As we headed back to the car park for a well-earned cuppa on the foreshore, a Barking Owl who was disturbed as it had been 'sleeping' too close to the track did a fly-over. It's hard enough to see owls in the day time, let alone see them in flight. It goes to show that you never know with Birding. You've just got to be out there on the off-chance that you will be treated to something wonderful.

For the full list, go to <http://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=2994188&h=758310c0>.

Janet Robino

A BIT HARD TO SWALLOW

After photographing a couple of juvenile Comb-crested Jacanas displaying at the Palmetum's lagoon one afternoon in late June, I noticed an Intermediate Egret in shallow water near the shore, staring fixedly into the mud and engrossed in finding its next meal, quite oblivious to my presence. I believe this bird is the same one I see often when I visit the site.

Anyhow, while I was admiring the bird's attractive snowy white attire, complete with wispy body plumes blowing in the breeze, it launched its spring-loaded bill into the mud and came up with small Eel-tailed Catfish about 80mm long. The scaleless, slimy-skinned fish was not happy about the situation, writhing defiantly and escaping quite a number of times. During the capture the bird managed to seize the fish again and again, trying to swallow it whole, head first, only to have its meal escape repeatedly, until it was eventually subdued.

The reason for birds swallowing small live fish head-first is because all fish, when caught, will expand their spiny

dorsal and pectoral fins as a defensive tactic to make their overall size much larger, which in turn makes them more difficult to swallow. Any predator that unwisely tries the 'tail first' method will quickly learn that, aside from the size factor, the fine spiky projections from the dorsal and pectoral fins are most unpleasant when they embed in throat and mouth tissue. A safety-wise bird will sagely adopt the head-first approach which causes the fins to lay flat against the fish's body. These catfish also have another arrow in their quiver, the ability to inject a very painful venom into unwary hunters.



My first experience with the highly effective defences of an Eel-tailed Catfish, and I must say a most memorable one, was as a young 10 year-old angler, fishing with my much wiser (he thought) 12-year old brother near Brandon in the Lower Burdekin area. Like most bottom feeders, Eel-tailed catfish tend to suck the bait rather than snap and run, as do more aggressive feeders such as bream and perch. Moving the bait slowly on the bottom from time to time attracts the catfish and also induces them to snap and run but only a short way, which in turn alerts the angler. On this the occasion of my first encounter with a 'catty', being unaware of the capabilities of this species, I was reeling in my line rapidly in the belief that I had been either 'baited' or that there were no fish at this particular spot.

To my surprise, there was a strike on the bait just before it emerged from the water and instinctively I flicked the fish onto the bank where it promptly 'spat the bait' and headed for home. Again, instinctively, I tried to retrieve the escapee by hand before it could reach the water. This manoeuvre resulted in the fish employing its instinctive defences which left me writhing and yelping in pain from the effect of the venom on the palm of my hand.

Again I must digress, as this story has another dimension. As a young lad in Brandon I was always chaperoned by my faithful 3 year old Kelpie-cross 'Skippy' whom I had raised from very young pup. He was a 'one-boy dog', completely faithful to me and only just tolerant of my brother and parents and other potential 'hostiles'. On many occasions when my brother and I came to fisticuffs, Skippy would knock me to the ground, sit on me and dare anyone to come near. I loved him for this. At this catfish episode, my yelping was misinterpreted by Skippy as originating from an attack on my person by my unsuspecting brother. My faithful dog took appropriate action and my brother sought refuge in leech-infected Sheepstation Creek to avoid being set upon. (Skippy and water didn't mix). My brother only re-emerged after Skippy was 'counselled' and tied up. The intense pain

eventually subsided but my hand was sore for some days following. I treated catfish with much greater respect after that.



Back to the Egret and the Catfish. I lost count of the number of times the fish escaped and was retrieved by the bird. On many occasions, when its prey was covered in mud and debris, the bird washed it at the water's edge, I guess to make it slip down the throat more easily. The catch-escape-wash drama went on for about 20 minutes, over quite a distance of shoreline until the fish became exhausted and the bird was rewarded with a fresh meal, swallowed head first.



Halfway through this piece of real-life drama, I decided to move to a better position to continue to photograph the action as it moved further away. As I started to walk, I tripped over one of the metal plant-name signs that are a trap for the unwary. I hit the ground fairly hard but managed to cushion the fall of my new camera. Fortunately a couple of American students from JCU were on hand to get me on my feet so I was able to carry on after I staunched the flow of blood with my trusty handkerchief. About 125mm of skin from my left shin was left dangling off the metal sign, but I retained my dignity.

After the bird/catfish drama was over and I had plenty of shots, I drove to the Townsville Hospital and had the wound dressed. The dressings were repeated every three days for over month at home or at a surgery during which time I used about a cricket pitch and a half of Glad-Wrap, keeping the wound dry at shower time.

Who said birding wasn't a challenge!!!!!!!!!!

Norm Rains

ALWAYS CHANGING

One thing you quickly learn as a bird watcher or any nature watching is how quickly things change. They change with the seasons, the weather and from year to year.

A few weeks ago there were lots of birds at the borrow pits near Ross River Dam. There were a few Pelicans, dozens of Royal Spoonbills and Australian White Ibis and quite a few Straw-necked Ibis and Glossy Ibis. Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets, Masked Lapwings and White-necked Herons added to the mix. Then the water dried up considerably and most of them moved on.



Brahminy Kite

Ray Sutton

The Town Common had been a bit empty for a while but when we went down last Monday the Meleleuca viewing point was jam packed. There must have been over twenty Pelicans. A Brahminy Kite put on quite a flying show. There was an adult Black-necked Stork and two young ones, lots of Egrets of all species apart from Little, Wandering Whistling-Ducks, Little Black Cormorants, Royal Spoonbills and Black-winged Stilts and others I can't remember. Back there again on Thursday and not a Pelican to be seen but the ducks had ducklings and three Brolgas showed up. The Black-necked Storks were still there as were the other species as well as Jacanas which I didn't spot on Monday.



I usually have quite a few species in my back garden but over the Backyard Bird Count week, hardly any of them showed up.

You never know what you will see next or where you will see it.

Annette Sutton

BIRD MOMENTS

I heard lots of little birds kicking up a real ruckus so of course, went to investigate. One Blue-winged Kookaburra was sitting on the power pole out the front trying to maintain some sort of dignity while being harassed by several birds: Three White-gaped Honeyeaters; Two Little Friarbirds; One Helmeted Friarbird; Four Blue-faced Honeyeaters; Three Magpie Larks and Six Brown Honeyeaters. He hung in there for a few minutes before he started to 'snap' back when one Blue-faced Honeyeater became a real pest. Eventually this episode ended as expected – the Kookaburra gave up and flew away with as much gravitas as he could muster, being hotly pursued by the insistent Blue-faced Honeyeaters.



Pheasant Coucal

Ray Sutton

Just as this racket subsided, another started in the side garden. A Pheasant Coucal and a Great Bowerbird were having a heated 'discussion' about the ownership of the



Tooth-billed Bowerbird Annette Sutton

birdbath. The Great Bowerbird bowed out and waited his turn.

Got a phone call from my sister who was walking the track at Lake Eacham. She had been approached by two visitors asking if she could tell them what bird was making that particular call. (They had only had a brief glimpse of the bird as it flew across the path and disappeared into the rainforest.) She said, "No, but I reckon I know someone who will!" Lucky for me it was a bird call that is very distinctive. It was a very persistent Tooth-billed Bowerbird. After checking their bird guide they were able to determine that it was the bird they had seen. My sister

continued on her walk and left two very happy birdwatchers waiting and hoping for a really good look at a 'lifer'.

While I was having breakfast on the back patio, a Yellow Honeyeater 'hovered' just like a Hummingbird about a meter in front of me, looking directly into my eyes. In reality, it was probably checking out its reflection in my glasses, but I like to think he was just saying hello.

There have been Great Bowerbird bowers in my garden for several years. I have often wondered how successful they have been in the quest to attract females. I heard the Bowerbird making a different screechy type call. Worried that he may be caught up in some of his very strange treasure objects, I rushed to his aid, only to find this particular call was one of triumph. He was not in any way distressed. I finally had proof that he is indeed very successful in his quest!

Janet Robino

BIRDLIFE TOWNSVILLE CHRISTMAS PARTY



DATE: SATURDAY 14 DECEMBER 2019

TIME: 6.30 PM for 7PM

VENUE: SUN HOTEL (FUNCTION ROOM)

COST: AT OWN EXPENSE

PRIZES TO BE WON

TRIVIA: by NINA

RSVP: contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au

"COME ALONG AND HAVE SOME FUN"

QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Ian Leach	309	31-08-19
Marleen Acton	298	17-09-19
Annette Sibson	270	24-08-19
Janet Robino	265	22-09-19
Pat Charlton	243	31-08-19
Warren Charlton	232	20-08-19
Elna Kerswell	229	10-07-19
Rosemary Payet	225	13-08-19
Wal Threlfall	224	12-08-19
Mark Horvath	207	26-07-19
Janet Cross	199	18-07-19
Janet Cross	199	18-07-19
Cecily Messer	171	20-06-19
Barbara Reidy	166	15-06-19
Wendy Kaus	166	15-06-19
Annette Sutton	155	04-06-19
Julia Goldsbury	102	24-03-19

