

# The Drongo

Number 145 February 2016



Bowerbirds

Black-throated  
Finch

Songbirds



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2017

In the last year BirdLife Townsville has had its usual busy year. Trying to condense all our activities into a report makes me feel exhausted just thinking about it all.

BirdLife Townsville completed 57 Surveys which include our long term monthly surveys at the Town Common, Ross Dam, and Ross River Bush Garden. These are always well supported by members and visitors alike. We have now established monthly surveys at Wongaloo for the Wongaloo Grassland and Wetlands Foundation. It is well worth trying to try to get to this survey – it's the first Thursday each month and listed in the activity page so you can maybe plan a day off if you are still in the workforce – but let us know by email as we do have to keep the car numbers down. Regular Shorebird 2020 surveys are done at Lucinda, Bushland Beach and Cungulla. Other surveys were conducted at Alma Park (Spotswood's at Inkermann), Barratta Creek and Insulator Creek for various organisations such as North Queensland DryTropics, National Park and James Cook University.

BirdLife Townsville members turned out again in good numbers to support the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team's Waterhole Survey in October. Members also participated in BirdLife Australia's programs such as Aussie Back Yard Bird Count, Challenge Count, Torresian Imperial Pigeon Count.

BirdLife Townsville displays at the Townsville City Libraries were very well received in October. Thanks again go to the Museum of Tropical Queensland for the loan of specimens which really attract a lot of attention.

BirdLife Townsville was approached by Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries – Biosecurity Division to take part in the Asian Honey Bee/ Varoa Mite Eradication Program. Our role was to identify roosting sites for the Rainbow Bee-eater and collect the pellets. Wal Threlfall coordinated our input for the 20 week program. Pellets were collected three times each week with a total of 247 pellets collected. So far, 6 Asian Honey Bee hives have been detected but no more varoa mites. The program has been extended for 3 years. We may be involved again when the Rainbow Bee-eaters return in numbers to breed. For more details check out the August 2016 Drongo.

Beth Snewin continues her fortnightly 'Bird Talk' with Paula Tapiolas on local ABC radio on behalf of BirdLife Townsville. If you haven't done so already, do yourself a favour and tune in on every second Tuesday morning at 1030. It is not only very educational, it is great fun to listen to.

As a result of attending a meeting concerning the Townsville Port Expansion, BirdLife Townsville lodged a submission. We have been requested to do surveys to assess any impact on birds. We are awaiting a formal approach to establish the process for the surveys.

The Owl Boxes project is on-going. 5 boxes have been made and 2 have been placed in situ. It's now a matter of waiting to see if the owls take up residence.

Another on-going project is the Beach Signs about dogs on leashes. The signs are being developed in conjunction with the Townsville City Council and have been placed at various locations so far.

Seven outings were held this year. Unfortunately, three had to be cancelled due to not being able to get a leader. Two campouts were held successfully but again, two had to be cancelled due to not being able to get a leader. The outings and campouts are the fun side of our activities, but sadly, more will have to be cancelled if members do not step up to take on the role of leader. It is not an onerous task. For more information of what is required of a leader, please speak to one of the committee members.

The Birders' Breakfast and Outing to the Heritage Tea Rooms, Hervey Range, was very popular. The Tea Rooms can only accommodate us during the week so it's another outing that workers will need to take a day's leave for – well worth it if you can. Three nights spotlighting at the Town Common were well supported. Understandably, numbers need to be limited for this particular outing so when a notice is sent out, get your name on the list quickly if you want to go.

The really good news is that 2016 was another safe year with no safety incidents or accidents involving members or visitors being reported on any Birdlife Townsville activity – keep up the good work.

Janet Cross is BirdLife Townsville's representative on the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team, Wildlife Hazard Management Committee Townsville Airport. Wal Threlfall is on BirdLife Australia's National Safety Committee. Nina Doyle attended the Branch Network Meeting in Melbourne.

BirdLife Townsville's Education program has been incredibly busy with activities including:

- reviewing and updating our digital education resources and images for displays at Libraries and other public events.
- production of a new BirdLife Townsville Brochure
- production of 'BirdLife Townsville -What we can do for you' pamphlet targeting schools
- several networking meetings with Townsville City Council, North Queensland Dry Tropics, Reef Guardian Schools and others.
- Supported NQ Dry Tropics 'Landscape Resilience' program at Horseshoe Lagoon
- Townsville City Council's Get Active Expo
- Townsville City Council World Wetland Day
- 2 Primary Schools' FLEC (Future Leaders Environmental Conservation)
- 7 School Presentations
- presentation at Good Shepherd Nursing Home
- Rollingstone Coastcare Group Information night and Bird Walk at Balgal Beach
- Landcare Volunteers
- Science Week at Museum of Tropical North Queensland
- Reef Guardian Schools Meetings
- Townsville Region Beekeepers Association

Thank you to all the members who made these activities possible by their support.

There was a very smooth transition for one of our most important activities.....the afternoon tea at meetings. Beth, Wendy and crew have kept up the high standard we've come to expect. Don't forget to make your gold coin contribution each meeting so that we can continue to have such a feast provided for us.

The Photography Group is still powering on thanks to Mark and Bronwyn's generosity. Mark coordinates the group and Bronwyn provides a marvellous supper. This is a venue for budding bird photographers to display their work in a non-judgemental venue where you can pick up a lot of hints from the more experienced members. This group provides all the photographs for our brochures and library displays.

The Christmas Function had to be cancelled again in 2016 due to a lack of numbers. It is a shame that after so much effort on Nina's behalf to organise what would have been a great night it all fell through. If you have any suggestions or comments to make for the Christmas function or indeed on anything about the club, please let the committee know by email [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au).

Warren Charlton has been a long-standing member of the committee but is taking a well-earned break this year so he can fit in a lot more travel. Thanks to Warren for his hard work and dedication throughout his many years on the committee and wish him and Pat happy times out there in the caravan.

All the activities above are only possible because you have had a very hard-working committee. Thank you to the outgoing committee and the many non-committee members who worked hard over the year to keep BirdLife Townsville such a vibrant group.

*Janet Robino*





## ANOTHER "FEEL GOOD" RESCUE

An older friend of mine, who lives at Carlyle Gardens, phoned me to tell me about a baby Sunbird she had rescued. I drove around to see her and the wonder bird as requested and was amazed to see the results of her efforts to save such a tiny morsel of life.



A Sunbird had built its nest on her back patio which is enclosed by slats for privacy and therefore sheltered from most of the weather. Billie had watched its progress during the construction process, then the quiet period while the parent sat on a single egg, until one day she was pleased to see that the egg had hatched. A day or so later, during some wilder weather, she discovered the nest with this morsel of beating heart lying on the floor. The nest had been blown apart by a particularly strong gust of wind and the hatchling, still in its comfy hollow, was now exposed, as the nest had come apart just above the hole. Billie debated with herself about what to do, then decided to gently pick up the "large maggot" and its nest, placing it carefully in the top of one of those glass aquarium bowls she had on her back table.

Shortly after, the female returned with food, flew to the original nest, then looked around, followed the cheeps of the baby to its new home and quickly fed it. This continued to happen all day, so Billie kept watch once more. Next day, when she went to look at it, the wind had again blown the nest and baby off the bowl and onto the floor. She rescued them both again and this time, used some sticky tape to secure the nest on the top of the bowl so the wind could not blow it away a third time. Meanwhile, the female kept returning and feeding, while the male sometimes sat on her clothes line just outside the patio, to watch. When I first saw it, the feathers were still changing from their pin-feather state and the baby bird still looked ugly and

vulnerable. I stood with Billie in her kitchen for quite a while but the mother didn't come while I was there, as she said it had come in just before I arrived.

The next week, I saw Billie again and she was bursting to tell me that she actually saw the little bird flapping and jumping around on top of the nest, until suddenly it hopped, flapped furiously and took off to the bushes at the back of her house. Shortly after, the mother bird arrived and again couldn't find her baby, but then she obviously heard much cheeping from the bushes at the back, so she about turned and flew around to feed her treasured little one. Billie said it was just three weeks from the hatching of the egg until the lucky chick took flight.

*Elna Kerswell*

## CAPERTEE VALLEY and DUNN'S SWAMP

Returning from our recent holiday via Lithgow (NSW) where we visited relatives, we decided our next stop would be at Dunn's Swamp, known as Ganguddy by the local Wiradjuri aboriginal people. It is in the Wollemi National Park and we had made a day visit there some years before and was on our bucket list to return for longer.

From Lithgow we travelled towards Mudgee, turning off at Capertee and heading towards Glen Davis through the beautiful Capertee Valley. The road meanders through spectacularly rugged mountainous scenery. The road is bitumen to the bridge before Glen Davis and here we had good views of Plum-headed Finches, Jacky Winter, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Little Eagle and Kestrels.



*Diamond Firetail*

We had a quick trip into the small community of Glen Davis along a VERY rough road. A loud school group were setting up camp as we arrived so we weren't hopeful of seeing much. However, in 20 minutes in the camp ground we saw White-browed Babblers, Brown Treecreepers, Jacky Winter, Grey Shrike-thrush and White-winged Choughs.

Retracing our steps to the bridge, we continued north towards Rylstone with several stops enroute, picking up Hooded Robin, Eastern and Crimson

Rosellas, Diamond Firetails (a Lifer for Warren), and Superb Fairy-wrens to name a few.

After lunch in Rylstone we headed 30 kms out to Dunn's Swamp. It was cold and wet with rain threatening, so we set up quickly – only three other groups were camping there. Dunn's Swamp covers quite an extensive area formed by the trapping of the Cudgegong River at Kandos Weir. The camping area is situated amongst pagoda-like rock formations. We did some short walks around the camping area – a few water birds, most of interest was a male Musk Duck. We also heard and saw a flock of Gang-gang Cockatoos flying over. The highlight was a pair of Spotted Quail-thrush feeding around our campsite. These were Lifers for both of us.



*Spotted Quail-thrush*

Other birds seen at Dunn's Swamp included Olive-backed Oriole, Australian Reed-Warbler, Eastern Spinebill, White-winged Triller, White-throated Gerygone, Brown Thornbill, Rufous and Golden Whistler, Satin Bowerbird, Scarlet Robin and White-throated Treecreeper.

Next time we would like to stay longer and explore some longer walks.

*Pat Charlton*

## GETTING RID OF THE KIDS

A couple of years ago I wrote an article for the Drongo about two teenage Magpie Geese, (one male and the other a female) that were raised elsewhere in the Townsville area and which we finished off at home by encouraging them through food withdrawal, (a long process), to become the wild birds that they were meant to be.

When both birds could fly quite well they used to do 'day trips' together, returning in the late afternoon to camp overnight in the tops of a tall gum after ensuring that not one piece of grain from the chooks' dishes went to waste. Eventually both birds felt the need to go it alone, the female heading off first and the male some weeks later. We thought that this would be the last we would see of them.

The female returned a few weeks later with a big powerful wild gander in tow. She was quite friendly but the wild bird would not have a bar of us. She

left again after a short visit and has never returned that we know of. The male however came back a few times in the first couple of months but his visits became shorter and eventually we thought that he too had "partnered up" and was living happily in the wild.

About three years ago, a few weeks after the wet season ended, the male bird turned up again but this time he was accompanied by a wife and two offspring. They stayed for a few days, looking the place over and camping in the tops of the tall trees each night. We are sure it is the same male because his wings are quite noticeably crossed when they are folded, more so than others. He is also a friendlier than the others.

His short visits have occurred each year for several years now, each time with a new batch of kids. His latest visit came in November 2016 when it was beginning to get very hot and of course it was dry as well. His kids were larger than those of previous visits so they would have been with the parents for about 18 months, about six months longer than in a normal year.

After a few days settling in, the parents began to act quite aggressively toward their offspring, with much tail pulling and other bullying behaviours, obviously trying to drive the kids away so that they could prepare for the next breeding season. The kids would have none of it and would simply escape to the back of the paddock and then return to where the parents camped during the day when they thought it was safe to do so. The male bird got sick of this and eventually set about dominating his kids properly through a stepped up campaign of tail and wing pulling that ended up with him sitting on top of the younger birds while nipping their wings and bodies, especially around the joints. This was more successful; the kids didn't depart entirely but they kept their distance and no longer hung out with the parents.

About six weeks ago another family of geese took up residence and our long time female bird disappeared. All very mysterious.!!



Then on the day after our first good shower of rain in early January, the female appeared early in the morning with seven goslings that looked to be only a day or so old. I have absolutely no idea where she hatched them out as there was no water in my lagoon and no long grass to use as a nesting site. Mysterious!!!!!! Additionally, it appeared that the youngsters from the previous year had returned to

the fold as they joined up with the parents and newly hatched birds.

Anyhow, to cut a long story short, I dashed upstairs for my camera and was able to get a few shots of the family before they disappeared through the neighbouring property and I haven't seen them since. There are plenty of undisciplined dogs about so I hope that nothing untoward has happened to them.

*Norm Rains*

## ATHERTON TABLELANDS

In the second week of January we set off for Atherton. Not really a bird watching trip as our son, his wife and four children also brought their van along and we had a lovely family holiday. But a few birds got in the way occasionally.

First stop with the kids was Hasties Swamp. It had recently been dry but there was a little water. Wandering Whistling-Ducks and Purple Swampheens were all we could find. And of course it was drizzling. It rained for the first couple of days then we got two days of finer weather and then the rain came back.



*Double-eyed Fig-Parrots*

We parked the car under a fig tree in the carpark right by the Lake Eacham swimming area. There were funny little noises coming from the top of the tree which was very gloomy in the dull weather. Finally we spotted about half a dozen Double-eyed Fig-Parrots. They were having a lovely time, feeding on the figs. Photographing them was a challenge and not all that successful.

In a eucalypt beside the fig tree I searched for Barred Cuckoo-shrikes which Peter Valentine assured me I would find there. After a while I found three so that was a good sighting for the Quest. Then I spotted a White-throated Treecreeper on the trunk of the fig. We went around to another car park where there was a Euodia in full flower. Here we found Bridled, Dusky and Lewin's Honeyeaters and some Silver-eyes. Just before we left there was a flash of yellow and a Yellow-breasted Boatbill filled the binoculars. What a treat. Another day, a female Victoria's Riflebird visited the Euodia. We drove down a side

road and came immediately on a Brown Cuckoo-Dove.

After a tip off we went hunting and found a Sooty Owl. Never seen one in the wild before. We followed the directions and found him after a bit of hunting. I am usually rubbish at finding birds on directions.

On the Saturday evening we had the edges of a thunderstorm, lots of thunder but not a lot of rain. In Malanda, one of the huge Bunya pines near the showgrounds toppled over. There was quite a bit of tree damage in Malanda. The power went off and the pub had to shut so our baby-sitting came to an early end for the night as our son and daughter-in-law had been at a birthday bash there. They managed to have dinner so all was not lost.

Something we did with the grandchildren was to have morning tea at Gallo's Chocolate Factory. We never spare time for such things when we go up birdwatching. It teemed the whole time we were there. We had a walk around the animals and brought home some delicious cheese. We made the usual trip to Nerada tearooms to see the tree kangaroo. We also visited the Barron Falls which had quite a lot of water flowing over them. I have seen a photo taken since and there was twice as much water.

Pity we couldn't bring the rain back with us.

*Annette Sutton*

## FEEDING TIME

I just happened to catch, out of the corner of my eye, a brown blur disappearing around the side of the house. I grabbed the camera and crept around the back and managed to click off a few quick shots of a Pheasant Coucal having breakfast. It had obviously stolen an egg from a nest in the syzygium in the front garden, and was now making a meal of it. There was a little embryo which went down in one gulp. The remaining yolk was then 'sucked up' leaving the shell completely clean.



*Janet Robino*



## BOWERBIRDS BLUEWATER

As part of the BirdLife project to monitor Bowerbirds across the Wet Tropics, I visited the Bluewater State Forest on Dec 16.

No bowerbirds were detected here at elevations 600-700m.

In order to investigate if there have been any reductions in the range of the Bowerbirds it is useful to determine if they are still present at the geographical extremes of their range. There are relatively few records from both the Northern and Southern limits of the Wet Tropics. This may be due more to difficulty of access than lack of birds.



*Tooth-billed Bowerbird*

The most southerly records of Tooth-billed Bowerbirds are from South of Townsville on Mt Elliot and the adjoining Saddle Mountain (Williams (Steve?) 1990, Wildnet). Higher elevations of this isolated range are rather difficult to access. It would be very useful to try and determine if they are still present in this location, which does not actually form part of the Wet Tropics WHA.

Heading North, the next few records are from the Bluewater State Forest. This is the most southerly part of the contiguous rainforest about 40-50km South of Paluma. There are five BirdLife Atlas records of Tooth-billed Bowerbirds from this area. Three are from wintering birds wandering to lower altitudes but there are two records from summer, 2000 & 2001, which could have been birds with courts.

On Dec 16, Ian Montgomery and I drove to the end of Forestry Road, Bluewater. Shortly after passing an old hut we reached concrete blocks in the road preventing further vehicle access. We then walked

7.5km each way along an old forestry track leading to the area of the old bowerbird records.

The rainforest in this area appears to have been severely impacted by cyclones. While the path is clear and easy to walk, there are relatively few tall trees left standing and little canopy cover. There was fairly heavy growth of Lawyer Vine in places. I didn't see any areas that looked like typical bowerbird habitat.

Despite its condition, a good number of rainforest bird species were recorded. Victoria's Riflebirds were common and Noisy Pittas were calling most of the way along. We noted Crimson Rosellas, King Parrots, Catbirds, Monarchs and Boatbills. A Red-necked Crane I heard calling in a distant gully below was queried as a range extension by the BirdLife Atlas website system, but does also occur further South at Townsville, Queens Gardens. On our return walk, a Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher perched above the track and another was calling a short distance further along.

Other wildlife recorded along the track included a pair of Red-legged Pademelons near the start and two Red-bellied Black snakes sunbathing on the track, one of which I came within inches of stepping on!

I am sure this forest will bounce back and will be worth exploring again for Bowerbirds in another 5-15 years.

BirdLife Atlas records were completed for each 1km from the start of the walk.

*Dominic Chaplin*

## BOWERBIRDS MT HALIFAX

As part of the BirdLife project to monitor bowerbirds across the Wet Tropics, I visited Mt Halifax on Dec 17/18.

Just one Tooth-billed Bowerbird was recorded here at an elevation of 1061m.

Heading about 10km North from Bluewater, the next record of Tooth-billed Bowerbird is from the summit of Mt Halifax, about 35km south of Paluma. This was recorded by Williams (Steve?) on Wildnet, Dec 1990 and April 1991. There are no BirdLife Atlas or eBird records from Mt Halifax.

Mt Halifax can be accessed via an approx 10km return walking track from the end of Pacey's Road, Rollingstone. This is the toughest walk I have yet tried for this project. The pathway is relatively easy to trace by following reflective orange markers nailed to the trees. The first half is mainly on and around rocky creeks, requiring considerable caution in the rain. The second half involves a series of rather steep climbs. In places ropes are attached so climbers can drag themselves up rock scree and steep slopes. The top of Mt Halifax seemed to be permanently enshrouded in cloud. It

had a rather wet, dark, dank, dismal atmosphere and a large population of leeches.

After walking the track I am not surprised it had been the subject of such little survey activity!



*Tooth-billed's court*

The forest on Mt Halifax appears to have survived in better condition than that around nearby Bluewater. There was little cyclone damage evident in the lower reaches. Above the lower rainforest one enters an area of casuarina and grass tree habitat which did have some cyclone damage. But this had been cleaned up, presumably by National Parks personnel. Closer to the peak, the rainforest starts again. While there was some damage on the summit ridge, the forest behind and to the west of the ridge looked in relatively good condition with tall canopy and it was possible to walk in the open understory. This fern clad forest actually looked very similar to areas where I have been finding Golden Bowerbirds recently.

The summit is slightly confusing as there are really two peaks separated by a few hundred meters. The first area marked 'Mt Halifax' at 1063m was rocky and unpromising with stunted trees. Indeed I was just about to turn back before I found a path continuing along the ridge line, through better forest, past a good flat camping area to a second summit of the same altitude. This is the point marked Mt Halifax on Google Earth. There was rather more bird activity in this area, especially in the early morning.

I found just one Tooth-billed Bowerbird close to the second summit. This one had two rather shabby looking courts, about 10m apart. Images are attached. The courts were different to the previous 99 that I had recorded, in that no attempt had been made to clean the ground beneath the leaves. I speculated that this could be a new behaviour of an isolated small population with less competitive pressure to build impressive courts, but Cliff Frith tells me this is typical behaviour of first year males.

No other bowerbirds were detected. The track which continues southwards along a plateau then perhaps down towards Bluewater would be worth

further investigation. One species of interest seen here was a Fernwren. This was queried as a range extension by the BirdLife Atlas website system, but Fernwrens were also recorded here by Williams on each of his earlier visits. Other high altitude species included small numbers of Grey-headed Robin, Golden Whistler, Bridled Honeyeater, Crimson Rosella and two groups of Chowchillas. Noisy Pittas, King Parrots, Spotted Catbirds and Victoria's Riflebirds were also obvious.

In terms of other wildlife, again I nearly stepped on a nice Carpet Python curled up on the track after a good meal. A rodentlike animal seen exploring up in a tree during the day, was suspected to be a Yellow-footed Antechinus.

At lower altitudes I did more easily avoid a Northern Tree Snake on the track. Other birds of interest at lower altitudes included Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfishers at 160m and at 600m. Also a Little Kingfisher at 350m was a surprise.

BirdLife Atlas records were completed for each 1km in a direct line from the start of the walk and 200m



*Carpet Python*

around the two summits. Wildnet records were also compiled.

Graham Harrington maintains the overall database for records of all bowers.

Next I am hoping to get to Mt Finnigan and Mt Amos at the Northern end of the Wet Tropics.

*Dominic Chaplin*

If you wish to see the records of Dominic's findings, please email [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au) or [amsgreat@gmail.com](mailto:amsgreat@gmail.com) or visit Dominic's website. The records are too long to print in the Drongo.

Dominic Chaplin (AIPP Accredited Photographer) & Lisa Tanner

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## LUCK RAN OUT - RAIN

During our last trip to visit relatives in four states we were able to do some bird watching and the "tourist thing", visiting some areas we hadn't been to for a long time or seeing other things that we had missed before.

Everywhere that we went, it had either rained before, during our stay or after we left. Some places were closed due to the rain. It had rained at Bowra. We tried twice but didn't see the Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush – at least this was not due to the rain.

Further west it was obvious that lots of rain had fallen as it was a pleasant sight to see the Cooper flowing fast and high in SW Qld. At Innaminka, the track to Coongie Lakes was closed as were some other locations and water was flowing over the causeway at Innaminka to an estimated depth of six inches – a very pleasant sight.



Down the Strezlecki Track, it was a pleasant sight to see the myriads of wild flowers in bloom but no Sturt's Desert Pea (none at the Arid Lands garden, either!) Obviously there had been rain there too at some stage before.

Port Augusta – no rain here but that part of SA and Eyre Peninsula had received good rains.

Adelaide – yes it rained.

Adelaide to Robe via Kingston (SE). A nice bakery is at Kingston. The weather at Robe was good for one day – but a gale blew in for the second – yes, rain. There were lots of wetlands there and Real Estate prices were good but I wonder about some of the effects of the "Roaring 40s". There was a nice cafe there.

Warrnambool – more rain and gales. We saw the Hooded Plovers there at our favourite Killarney Beach and friendly Superb Fairy-wrens at Tower Hill. A visit to Cobb's Bakery at Port Fairy was DEFINITELY worth the visit!

Chiltern (where the Regent Honeyeater is often seen but not by us this time) – more rain

Canberra – yes it rained but it didn't impose on our favourite birding haunts there.

Dunn's Swamp – we left under the threat of rain. We hoped the Musk Duck enjoyed it.

Barraba – 50mm over night and packing up in the rain wasn't very pleasant!

Toowoomba – yes, more rain.

Up to Belyando Crossing from Banana, it rained lightly most of the day.

BUT NORTH OF BELYANDO, we apologise for not bringing it all the way HOME!

Warren and Pat

## BLACK-THROATED FINCH UPDATE

Black-throated Finch identified as a conservation priority

The Townsville Coastal Plain is home to one of the largest known populations of Black-throated Finch (*Poephila cincta cincta*) and the survival of this population is critical for the long term conservation of the subspecies.

Independent, not-for-profit natural resource management organisation NQ Dry Tropics has been working with the regional community (including the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team) via a series of planning workshops to produce the first instalment of a Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for the Burdekin Coastal Plains and Adjacent Ranges. This multi-dimensional biodiversity blueprint identifies conservation priorities and outlines shared strategies for how we can best protect the region's most prominent natural assets.



During the initial planning processes, the Black-throated Finch was identified as one of the two main priorities for conservation as the subspecies is under increasing threat in the Townsville region.

Using the CAP as a guide with funding via the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme, NQ Dry Tropics will allocate resources to establish an integrated management programme, focussing on priority areas where

suitable habitat occurs and Black-throated Finch are consistently recorded.

Key regional stakeholders have been involved in developing the project and are committed to its implementation and ensuring its alignment to the Black-throated Finch Recovery Plan. The project was activated in July 2016. Works are currently being undertaken to ground truth a selection of properties to ensure suitable habitat and the presence of Black-throated Finches. Management plans for the properties will be developed and on-ground works resourced to improve existing habitat over the next 18 months.

Future assistance will be requested for monitoring – more details to come.

### Review of Recovery Plan

The current Black-throated Finch Recovery Plan (accessible at <http://www.environment.gov.au/resource/national-recovery-plan-black-throated-Finch-southern-subspecies-poephila-cincta-cincta>) has been in place, approved by the Commonwealth, since 2007. It is currently under review in accordance with Commonwealth requirements for Recovery Plans. In late September 2016 a workshop was held in Townsville as one of the steps toward a revised Recovery Plan.

### Waterhole Count

The annual Black-throated Finch waterhole count has been organised by the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team since 2004. The count for 2016 was conducted on 22-23 October, in keeping with previous years, to coincide with the season during which the birds have fewest options in terms of where they can find a drink. In spite of the poor 2015-2016 wet season, there was water in water sources that had been dry at the same season in 2015.

The count followed the usual methodology. Each water source was observed between 6am and 9am on each of the two days of the count. Each observer recorded the numbers of birds drinking at the water source in each 15-minute interval. Other seed-eating species, in addition to Black-throated Finches, were also recorded in the same way: Double-barred Finches, Zebra Finches, Plum-headed Finches, Peaceful Doves and Squatter Pigeons. Recording the numbers of "drinking events" gives an index of abundance rather than an absolute measure of abundance as it does not attempt the often impossible task of determining whether individual birds come to water more than once.

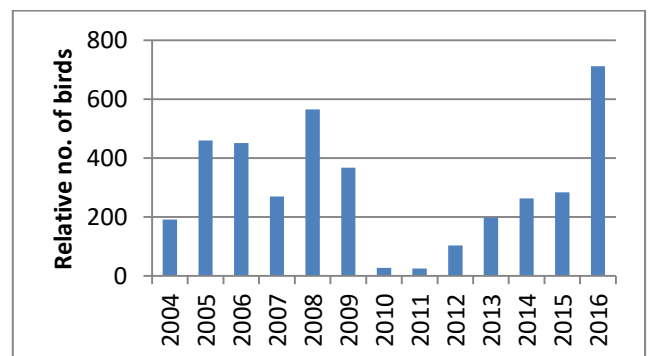
Generally, Black-throated Finches approach a water source by landing in a nearby tree, often quite high up in the tree, often dropping to a shrub closer to the water's edge if one is available. They move to the water's edge itself. They may remain there for a very short time, sometimes only a few seconds. Birds may make contact calls as they approach the water but are generally silent whilst at the water source.

This year 38 volunteers participated in the count, collectively covering 18 mostly man-made water sources. Black-throated Finches were observed at 10 (56%) of the water sources watched with a total of 711 drinking events by Black-throated Finches. This is the largest number recorded in the history of the count.

By comparison, the numbers of drinking events for other seed-eating birds recording during the count were: Double-barred Finches 2393; Plum-headed Finch 18; Peaceful Dove 964; Chestnut-breasted Mannikin 215; Squatter Pigeon 85; Crimson Finch 6; Zebra Finch 1. The numbers of Black-throated Finches, Double-barred Finches, Squatter Pigeons and Peaceful Doves were considerably higher than recorded in 2015 (when the numbers of Black-throated and Double-barred Finches, Squatter Pigeons and Peaceful Doves were 284, 1462, 35 and 806 respectively). In 2016 there were far fewer Plum-headed Finches (18 versus 1146) and Chestnut-breasted Mannikins (15 versus 215) than in 2015. No Crimson Finches had been recorded in 2015.

In October 2016, Black-throated Finches were using water sources that had been dry in 2015. It is particularly encouraging that the species was recorded at a high proportion of water sources that were watched. The considerably higher numbers of Black-throats could be related to generally better conditions or to the availability of water at sites to which the count had access. Even though the 2015-2016 wet season had been poor, it may have suited Black-throated Finches especially given that there was some rain in the early to mid-dry season. The conditions seem not to have suited the Plum-headed Finch which is more mobile or the Chestnut-breasted Manikin which tends to rely on green seed more than fallen seed.

The Black-throated Finch Recovery Team would like to thank all volunteers. The count is one way of systematically assessing trends in the distribution and abundance of Black-throated Finches on the Townsville Coastal Plain.



*Tony Grice*

## MY SURPRISE BIRTHDAY GIFT

My birthday card for my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, which I celebrated in November, noted "many great days ahead, especially the 10<sup>th</sup> January". Well thoughts came to the fore of a "romantic" sojourn or perhaps a trip to Brisbane to see Fawlty Towers. I received a further two clues one week before the 10<sup>th</sup> January, "I would be going alone" and "departing by plane from Cairns". Well I thought that rules out Orpheus Island, Lizard Island and Fawlty Towers. Maybe the gift is a trip to Iron Range, but if I mention Iron Range and the gift is a scenic flight over the Tablelands, how would that make Nina feel? Nina gave me the full details the Sunday before departure.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> January, we flew SkyTrans, an aviation company partly owned by Jonathan Thurston, to Lockhart River. Our three nights' accommodation was at the Iron Range Cabins.

My tour group included eight trippers and our two tour guides David Crawford and his wife, owners of "Up Close Birding Adventures", based at Mount Molloy.

The first night was taken up with spotlighting with no sightings. The second and third night we ventured out spotlighting, and viewed Marble and Papuan Frogmouths.

Each day was an early start and finished birdwatching at 1pm due to the heat. We rested in our air-conditioned cabins until 3:00pm at which time we would be off again birdwatching until 7pm. A number of the tour group were more interested in the photography aspect of birdwatching, so some time was spent waiting around for all to get that "just right" photo. During this time another colleague and I would spend the time looking for new sightings. Got lucky, and spotted a Black-winged Monarch. The Red-bellied Pitta was the prize trophy, and one was sighted quite elevated in a tree. Wonderful birds were sighted, including Fawn-breasted Bowerbird, White-streaked Honeyeater, Northern Scrub-robin, Spotted Whistling-Duck, Yellow-billed Kingfisher, Yellowlegged Flycatcher and Eclectus Parrot on a nest just to name a few of the 80 birds sighted. Over the three days, the tour cost me \$2.50 towards the 2017 Bird Quest.

The tour guides were excellent at locating the birds. The weather was good, food excellent, including one dinner at the Portland restaurant.

*Ian Leach*



## GREAT BOWERBIRD ANTICS

I am the proud host of another Bower. Fortunately, this one is in clear view of where I sit to have breakfast on the patio.



There was a lot of activity in the garden for about six weeks with up to six Great Bowerbirds putting sticks in piles and knocking each other's piles down. The battles raged all day, day after day. Eventually, one bird seemed to be getting the upper hand. Slowly a bower started to take shape. Just when I thought the construction was almost finished, it would be completely destroyed. I could never work out if it was the 'builder' or a rival that did the damage. I was able to watch the process a few times. It was frenzied and deliberate. The destroyer was very determined.

At last, after at least four building/destroying cycles, one Great Bowerbird is in complete control. He does a tidy-up each morning, removing any fruit that has discoloured and any leaves that have fallen into the bower overnight. He is also very defensive and chases off all interlopers. I have only seen one successful episode of his enticing a girl into the bower and having his wicked way with her.

*Janet Robino*

## PHOTOGRAPHER'S LAMENT

Day 1 - Rigged up in all the gear, camera in hand, binos around the neck, everything on for a day's bird photography, the only thing missing is the birds... where the h.... are they?

Day 2 - Go for a nice gentle walk along the river with husband, no camera, no binos and there, sitting in the perfect photographic spot is THE Long-billed Corella, just idly watching us get closer and closer. Yes I can see that long bill so clearly. Walk further along and, oh, what's making that sound? Oh look - very small yellowy birds in the tree, no binos so can't id them and it sounded like a young one calling for food, no way to id the bird by that sound.

Oh yes, I love bird photography.... lol

*Annette Sibson*



## THE WORLD'S SONGBIRDS ISLAND- HOPPED OUT OF AUSTRALIA

BY Karl Gruber in *Australian Geographic* August 31, 2016

New research disentangles the role Australia played in the evolution of songbirds.

We know Australia was the birthplace of all songbirds, a diverse family including mockingbirds, lyrebirds and sparrows. But when and how these birds dispersed and diversified into the rest of the world has remained a mystery – but new research may help shed some light.

In a study [published in \*Nature Communications\*](#) today, researchers analysed the genomes of over 100 species of songbirds representing 70 per cent of all songbird families from 25 different countries, as well as fossil remains from several species.

"One of the challenges with deciphering songbirds evolutionary history is that they diversified so rapidly that previous studies had a difficult time estimating the branching pattern of the songbird family tree," said lead author Dr Rob Moyle, from the University of Kansas, USA.

"With advances in DNA sequencing technology, we were able to collect an unprecedented amount of DNA sequence data that helped clarify songbird relationships," Rob said.

Using this approach, Rob and colleagues generated a massive dataset of more than 2.5 million DNA bases for each bird species, which, along with fossil data, allowed them to make new estimates about when and how songbirds spread and diversified across the globe.

For instance, it turns out songbirds started dispersing out of Australia some 23 million years ago, much more recently than previously thought.

"Our estimate for the age of songbirds is about half of most previous estimates, placing songbird evolution in a very different geological landscape than previously thought," explained Dr Carl Oliveros, study co-author and postdoctoral researcher at Louisiana State University, USA.

Previous hypotheses suggested that songbirds' first stop was Africa or New Guinea, but the timing proposed in this new study changes everything.

"Thirty-three million years ago, Australia was thousands of kilometres away from any continent, and New Guinea barely existed," explained Rob.

Instead, the songbirds' early dispersal coincides with extensive island forming in a region called Wallacea between the Asian and Australian continental shelves, suggesting they may have island-hopped their way out of Australia.

Another significant finding of this study also involves the place where songbirds first diversified. According to the researchers' DNA analyses, songbirds first started diversifying in Australia around 33 million years ago, and colonised New Guinea some 10 million years later, when these islands formed.

The findings provide new insights into songbirds evolution, however not everyone is likely to be convinced, commented Tim Low, biologist, AG [columnist](#) and author of *Where Song Began*.



*House Sparrow*

"The genetic evidence is clear about songbirds having come out of Australia, but not at all clear about when it first happened," said Tim, who was not involved in the study.

"Moyle's interpretation is satisfying, but not likely to convince everyone. The extreme shortage of old songbird fossils leaves scientists with limited data to work from, and plenty of freedom to produce competing theories."

*Thank you to Australian Geographic for permission to reprint this article by Karl Gruber*

## NEAR CLERMONT

On a recent trip south, I had an opportunity to spend a day in Clermont with some birding friends, Bob and Olive McTrusty. Unfortunately, it was not a good day for photography as it was drizzly and grey. We did find a few birds, nothing unusual, but all within a few kilometres radius of Clermont. We saw Double-barred and Zebra Finches, Crested Pigeons, Red-backed Fairy-wrens, Rufous Songlarks, Singing Honeyeaters, Dollarbirds, Purple Swamphens, Red-winged Parrots, Pale-headed Rosellas and quite a few others along with some ducks. There were a mix of ducks – Pacific Black, Plumed Whistling-Ducks and some Mallard X Pacific Black Ducks. Bob tells me, "The original Mallard had a leg band on but its long gone and there were twenty-four of the crossbreed ones on the lagoon but they have dwindled to only a few now." So while nothing exciting emerged, it was a very enjoyable day.

*Sandra Sampson*

## CHALLENGE COUNT

A very hot and extremely dry weekend in December 2016 once again saw teams of members participating in Birdlife Australia's "Challenge Count".

The aim was to count the species and number of birds within a 40 kilometre radius of the Townsville GPO. Members were allocated specific sites within this radius which included such diverse areas as wetlands, parks, gardens, beaches, rivers, creeks, dams, dumps, ranges, woodlands, Magnetic Island and not forgetting everyone's backyards. Members did a magnificent job surveying forty three (43) sites within such a large area and on such a hot, dry weekend.

The final count for the weekend was 178 different species with the total bird numbers being 9350.

With Townsville experiencing its fourth year in succession of failed wet seasons, there were some surprising omissions of birds not being reported - White-necked Heron, Black-throated Finch, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Mangrove Gerygone, Yellow-spotted Honeyeater, Whiskered Tern, Black-winged Stilt, Australian Bustard, Grey Teal, Australian Wood Duck, Australian Grebe and surprisingly only two Straw-necked Ibis were reported.



As this is my first year of organising this event, I'm not sure how these results compare to past results, but hopefully I can report on this in a later edition of "The Drongo"

I will also take this opportunity to thank members for their participation in this event and remind everyone we have another "Challenge Count" on the first weekend in the hopefully cooler month of June, 2017. A special thank you also goes to Ivor Preston for the unenviable job of consolidating the survey results.

*Wal Threlfall*



## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT BIRDS

The chicken is the closest living relative to the Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Many birds kept as pets, including doves, parakeets, and lovebirds, enjoy living in pairs for companionship.

The smallest bird egg belongs to the hummingbird and is the size of a pea. The largest bird egg, from which the ostrich hatches, is the size of a cantaloupe.

A bird's eye takes up about 50 percent of its head; our eyes take up about 5 percent of our head. To be comparable to a bird's eyes, our eyes would have to be the size of baseballs.

The penguin is the only bird that can swim, but not fly. It is also the only bird that walks upright.

Owls turn their heads almost 360° (a complete circle) but they cannot move their eyes.

Chickens have over 200 distinct noises they make for communicating.

When it comes to birds, the males tend to have the more glamorous feather shape, coloration, songs, and dances. Female birds choose their mate based on how attractive they find them!

It is estimated that one third of all bird owners turn on a radio for their pet when they leave the house.

According to National Geographic, scientists have an answer for the age old dispute over which came first, the chicken or the egg. Reptiles were laying eggs thousands of years before chickens appeared. The first chicken came from an egg laid by a bird that was not quite a chicken. Therefore, the egg came first.

The first bird domesticated by humans was the goose.

Some breeds of chickens can lay colored eggs. The Ameraucana and Araucana can lay green or blue eggs.

The common phrase "eat like a bird" should mean something quite different! Many birds eat twice their weight in food each day. In fact, a bird requires more food in proportion to its size than a baby or a cat.

A group of larks is called an exaltation, a group of chickens is called a peep, a group of geese is called a gaggle, a group of ravens is called a murder, and a group of owls is called a parliament.

Chickens that lay brown eggs have red ear lobes. There is a genetic link between the two.

Crows have the largest cerebral hemispheres (brains), relative to body size, of any avian family.

Mockingbirds can imitate many sounds, from a squeaking door to a cat meowing.

<https://www.mspsca.org>

## The Quest 2017

Niel Bruce	258	13-09-17
Chris Ezzy	188	05-07-17
Len Ezzy	188	05-07-17
Rosemary Payet	170	17-06-17
Marleen Acton	164	11-06-17
Ian Leach	163	10-06-17
Wendy Kaus	163	10-06-17
Beth Snewin	157	04-06-17
Elna Kerswell	147	25-05-17
Janet Robino	130	08-05-17
Wal Threlfall	128	06-05-17
Annette Sutton	110	18-04-17
Annette Sibson	94	02-04-17
Kyran Staunton	91	30-03-17
Norm Rains	81	20-03-17
Janet Cross	74	13-03-17
Graham Castles	61	29-02-17
Carolyn Osterhaus	44	12-02-17



*Grey-crowned Babbler*

*Sandra Sampson*



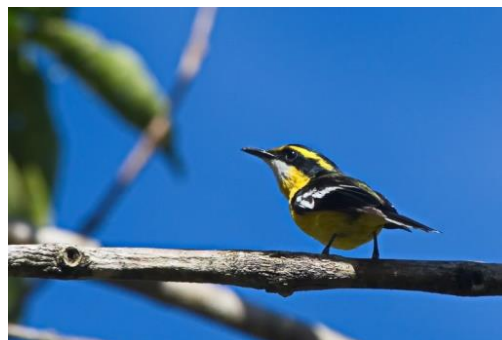
*Rufous Songlark*

*Sandra Sampson*



*Willie Wagtail*

*Sandra Sampson*



*Yellow-breasted Boatbill*

*Ray Sutton*



## CALENDAR

### February

15<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Ross River Bush Garden Survey - Meet 6.30 am at end of Thompson St, Mundingburra. Leader: Malcolm Calvert.  
 19<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet 6.30 am in the Dam car park. Leader: Cecily Messer  
 26<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Paluma Outing (weather dependant) - Meet 6.30 am at the Reading Cinema car park, Thuringowa Central. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Leader: Wal Threlfall  
 28<sup>th</sup> - Tuesday - Reef Guardians Network Meeting - Meet 3.00 pm at the VMR Building, Ayr. Education Committee activity - Theme: "Urban Water Quality". Leader: Norm Rains

### March

2<sup>nd</sup> - Thursday - Wongaloo Conservation Park Survey (weather dependant) -- Meet for 6.30 am at the Alligator Creek Roadhouse, Alligator Creek. Bring morning tea. Leader: Norm Rains  
 5<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Town Common Conservation Park Survey - Meet 6.30 am at the Town Common main gate, Rowes Bay. Leader: Mark Horvath  
 7<sup>th</sup> - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Meet 7.00 pm at 10 McLaren Court, Kirwan. Theme: "On the Ground". Any shot of a species with its talons, claws or whatever you wish to call them physically in contact with soil, rocks and maybe even grass, but not on a log, stump, dead tree etc. Let's make it within 2.5 cm (1 inch) of the soil layer. Contact: Mark Horvath  
 8<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Reef Guardians Network Meeting - Meet 3.00 pm at the Belgium Gardens State School, Townsville. Education Committee activity - Theme: "Urban Water Quality". Leader: Norm Rains  
 11<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Monthly Meeting - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Bicentennial Building (Sound Shell) meeting room, Kirwan. Guest speaker: Bob Murphy - "Photos from around the World"  
 15<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Ross River Bush Garden Survey - Meet 6.30 am at end of Thompson St, Mundingburra. Leader: Malcolm Calvert.  
 15<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Reef Guardians Network Meeting - Meet 3.00 pm at the Tyto Wetlands Conference Centre, Ingham. Education Committee activity - Theme: "Urban Water Quality". Leader: Norm Rains  
 19<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet 6.30 am in the Dam car park, Kelso. Leader: Cecily Messer  
 26<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Town Common Conservation Park - Night Spotlighting - Meet 6.15 pm inside the main gate. Bring spotlight, camera, binoculars. Limited to 3 vehicles (12 members). Leader: Wal Threlfall  
 27<sup>th</sup> - Monday - Town Common Conservation Park - Night Spotlighting - Meet 6.15 pm inside the main gate. Bring spotlight, camera, binoculars. Limited to 3 vehicles (12 members). Leader: Wal Threlfall

### April

2<sup>nd</sup> - Sunday - Town Common Conservation Park Survey - Meet 6.30 am at the Town Common main gate, Rowes Bay. Leader: TBA  
 4<sup>th</sup> - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Meet 7.00 pm at 10 McLaren Court, Kirwan. Theme: "raptors, Kingfishers, Woodswallows, Martins and the like. By the like I am suggesting species that in general catch prey on the wing. Terns". Contact: Mark Horvath  
 6<sup>th</sup> - Thursday - Wongaloo Conservation Park Survey (weather dependant) -- Meet 6.30 am at the Alligator Creek Roadhouse, Alligator Creek. Bring morning tea. Leader: Norm Rains  
 8<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Monthly Meeting - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Townsville City Council Bicentennial Building (Sound Shell) meeting room, Kirwan. Guest speaker: TBA  
 12<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Ross River Bush Garden Survey - Meet 6.30 am at end of Thompson St, Mundingburra. Leader: Malcolm Calvert.  
 16<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet 6.30 am in the Dam car park. Leader: Cecily Messer  
 19<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Spotswood Station Survey (weather dependant) -- Meet 6.00 am Alligator Creek Roadhouse, Alligator Creek. Bring morning tea --- Leader: Norm Rains  
 30<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Outing - Mingela / Clare Loop. Meet 6.30 am at the Annandale Central Shopping Centre, Annandale. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Leader: Wal Threlfall

### May

4<sup>th</sup> - Thursday - Wongaloo Conservation Park Survey - Meet 6.30 am at the Alligator Creek Roadhouse, Alligator Creek. Bring morning tea. Leader: Norm Rains  
 7<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Town Common Conservation Park Survey - Meet 7.00 am at the Town Common main gate, Rowes Bay. Leader:  
 9<sup>th</sup> - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Meet 7.00 pm at 10 McLaren Court, Kirwan. Theme: "Inverted" Nothing with the image just inverted. The species in question needs to be its normal way up. Contact: Mark Horvath  
 13<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Monthly Meeting - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Bicentennial Building (Sound Shell) meeting room, Kirwan. Guest speaker: