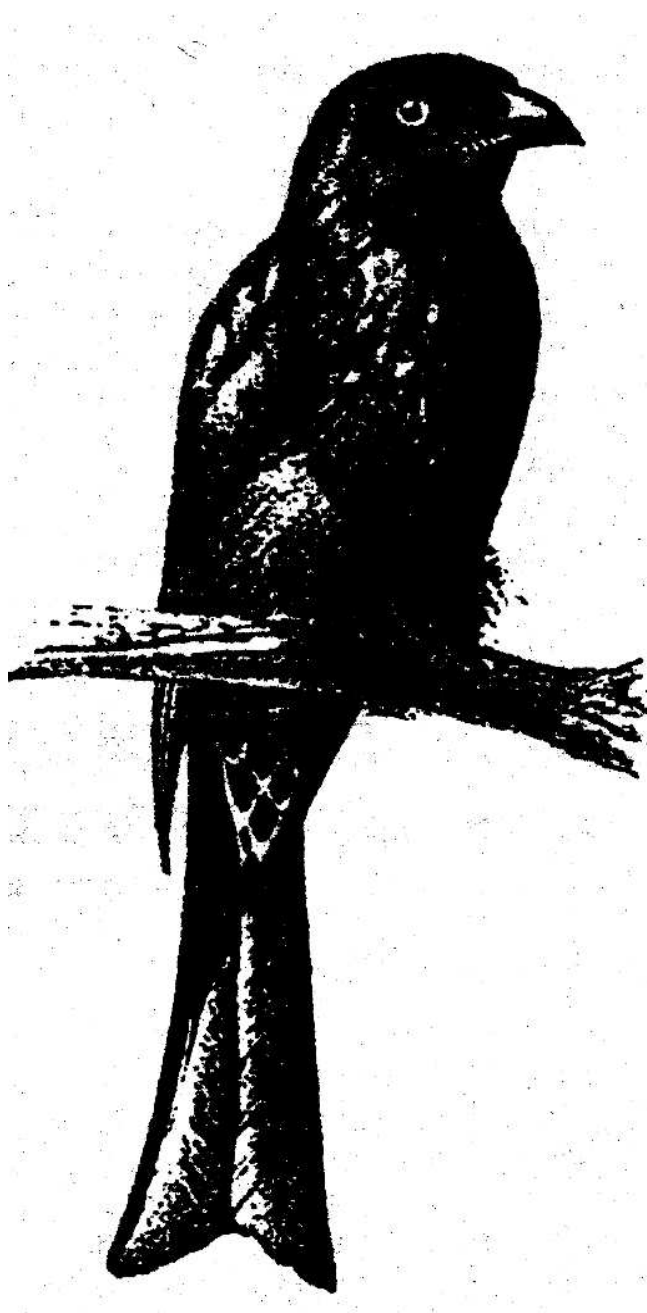


# The Drongo

Number 132 April 2014



Gulf Country

Antarctica

Western  
Australia



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

There have been a couple of recent changes to the committee. Alf Acton, Vice President, has resigned from the committee for personal reasons. Garrie Douglas nominated himself for the position of Conservation Officer and his nomination was very happily accepted by the committee. We have had difficulty filling this position since Peter Valentine left for the North, so it is great for the club that we have a person of Garrie's experience and background willingly stepping up to the plate. It is important for our club to have someone ensuring we maintain contact with all the relevant Government and non-Government bodies locally with which we have had very good working relationships for more than twenty years.

Watch for Norm's article asking for interested persons for the Education Group. Raising community awareness of the importance of habitat protection is vital for the future of our birds. In the past our educators have spoken to a wide cross-section of the community, from Kindy Kids to Aged Care Residents, Government and non-Government groups, and of course, many local schools. I can speak from personal experience here. It is great fun and very rewarding to be part of one of these presentations.

Also look for the item on the Surveys at Inkermann.

As I write this, a lot of members are away on the Georgetown-Karumba trip. Feedback so far is that they are having a great time and seeing lots of good birds and everyone is very happy with the way the whole trip has been organized by Alf and Marleen Acton. Quite a few BirdLife Northern Queensland members have joined in the trip. Once again, my body let me down and I am stuck at home missing out!

Janet Robino

### **YOUR COMMITTEE**

President: Janet Robino  
Vice-President:  
Secretary: Warren Charlton  
Treasurer: Nina Doyle  
Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton  
Conservation Officer: Garrie Douglas  
Education Officer: Norm Rains  
Safety Officer: Janet Cross  
Committee Members: Wal Threlfall



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This edition features the club's trip to Georgetown and Karumba as well as other stories from everywhere.

## GEORGETOWN, KARUMBA

The Georgetown Karumba trip took me further north-west than I had previously been.

Having lived at Lyndhurst, half way between Hughenden and Mt. Garnet in the 60s, I was delighted to see some of that country again and traverse roads, now bitumenised.

Karumba gave me several "lifers" but I learned I had to be very quick to see them - the Mangrove Fantail, Paperbark Flycatcher, Mangrove Robin, Arafura Fantail (on the boat trip), Red-headed Honeyeater (an initial flash of red) and Star Finch (a flash of greenish yellow). I learned to identify juvenile Mistletoebirds and White-throated Gerygones (Thanks Marleen). An unexpected surprise was the flock of White-winged Black Terns in full breeding plumage, sighted just after leaving Karumba.

Georgetown gave me several unexpected sightings of Black-throated Finches - at the Racecourse, Flat Creek Station, and a small waterhole in the "Banded Honeyeater" creek where two came in to drink and bathe. Seeing Picrorella Mannikins after seven years was a treat!

I particularly enjoyed the camaraderie of the group, the very careful and thoughtful planning by Marleen and Alf enabling the trip to run so smoothly, and the way information was passed on. A wonderful Easter experience.

Joan Wharton



*Picrorella Mannikin*

Roger Mortlock

## GEORGETOWN FAVOURITE

The combined BirdLife Townsville/Northern Queensland Easter campout at Georgetown in my opinion was a howling success. It was a little hot but the bird watching around the waterholes and creeks was terrific. My bird list contains gems like the Black-throated Finch, Masked Finch, Picrorella Manikin, Cockatiel, Owlet Nightjar, Tawny Frogmouth, Southern Boobook, Yellow-tinted, Banded and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters just to name a few but my favourite turned out to be the Spinifex Pigeon. This bird always seems to catch my attention. Maybe it's the dry conditions it thrives or maybe it's just its brilliant colour and how it blends into the environment. It took a couple of days but we finally got onto a few.

We did not get any Star or Gouldian Finches but then you can't be too greedy. Best to leave something to go back to!

Ian Boyd



*Spinifex Pigeon*

Ian Boyd

## BEST BITS OF EASTER TRIP

Georgetown was really the unknown for us but thanks to Karen from the Midway who put us in touch with Cleta and Lloyd we soon had great dams close by to visit. That along with Peter and Adam from Flat Creek provided a selection of habitats.

Georgetown for me was all about Apostlebirds. They woke us each morning with their happy chatter and sent us to bed each evening, while also providing a distraction at bird call each afternoon. The other beautiful sight was of a Masked Finch with his display feather.



Our final bird call was a watermelon feed, thanks to Lloyd and Cleta, who provided the very large watermelon.

Karumba was Pied Heron central. It started about 20km out with them lining the roadside around small



*Masked Finch*

*Alf Acton*

waterholes and in the long grass. Then once in Karumba almost everything that flew overhead was one. On our night out to tea they were everywhere like little guards standing sentry duty, lining the roads and across the road, refusing to move any time soon. It was great to see. Then on leaving Karumba, they were noticeable by their absence. So for us they were the highlight of our trip. I must add that when Alf and I visited Karumba back in September 2011 we did not see one Pied Heron.

As we were back in Georgetown for Anzac morning we were two of the Twenty-one that turned up to the dawn service. A pleasing end to our trip, as later that night, after 600km via the Tablelands and lots of rain, we were back in Townsville.

*Marleen Acton*

## KARUMBA TRIP

Thanks to Alf and Marleen for organising such a great trip.

Everything was thought out, from providing name tags so the North Queensland and Townsville Groups could identify each other to arranging dinners and bird calls. They did a lot of work preparing the day trips, contacting people in Georgetown and Karumba to find the best places to go and even having people

allotted to two groups with leaders so everyone knew what was going on.

The trip to Flat Creek station was a highlight for me and Ray. The four wheel driving over the rough tracks was great fun. After lunch Marleen and Alf led us off on a trip to a dam. Along the way we encountered a drop of about fifteen feet at a 45° slope. Into lowest four wheel drive and down we go, the rear end slipping around until we were just about to meet the bank when we slipped the other way and slithered into the creek bed. Just then we get a radio message from Marleen. "I think we have gone the wrong way. Back again". So it was back up the cliff for those of us who had been beguiled by the Acton magic. Some hadn't started down so they were spared the fun.



*Acton's new Isuzu climbing out of the creek Ray Sutton*

The Spinifex Pigeons on the way to Flat Creek were a definite highlight as were the Gouldian Finches being bred by Peter and Adam at the homestead. Also high on the list were the scones, jam and cream provided by the boys.

The boat trip in Karumba was another highlight. Best nature view I had was of the rather large crocodile lurking in the mangroves fifteen feet from the boat. Suddenly there was a splash, a giant swirl and he was gone, passing under the boat in a millisecond. Don't think you can ever outrun a crocodile. Another good view was of the Ospreys on the nest, right out in the open. As for all those little mangrove birds, they were flashes in and out of the branches, some glimpsed, some good views for a second or two. I got a few lifers there so I am not grumbling.



*Pied Heron*

*Annette Sutton*

It was Pied Heron Heaven. Pied Herons are one of my favourite birds so I was happy. Star Finches. Another hoodoo bird for me. Ray and everyone else saw them. So they say. Roger saw a strange pied bird that looked like a cross between a Little Egret and a Pied Heron at Karumba. As we drove back into Normanton we saw one too, but it looked more like a White-necked Heron on first sight but it was strangely coloured.



Osprey

Ray Sutton

There were lots of other highlights. After our return to Georgetown we headed across to the Atherton Tablelands to join the Townsville Photography Club on an outing in which the club chartered the Ravenshoe to Tumoulin steam train on the Saturday afternoon. That was a lot of fun and, as a bonus, we picked up quite a few birds around Lake Tinaroo and the Caravan Park at Malanda Falls.

Annette Sutton

## NORTHERN ADVENTURE

My first trip ever to Georgetown and Karumba provided a great opportunity to photograph and observe species I had previously not seen.

I was not disappointed, as fourteen newbies were ticked off the list.

I lost little time getting my swag set up upon arrival at Georgetown and I was soon out at Cumberland Dam which was unusually devoid of birdlife as recent rain had filled the creeks and dams in the area, giving the wildlife plenty of alternatives of watering holes. The smaller of the two dams did provide a moment or two of excitement when I thought I had photographed a black eared cuckoo. It subsequently turned out to be a very juvenile Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo, which was later sighted being fed by two duped Red-backed Fairy-wrens.

Off to investigate the dirt road bordering the dam, I came across two creeks which, over the next three days, provided some good sightings. The first was a popular watering spot for Double-barred, Masked and

particularly Black-throated Finches. A small flock of Grey-crowned Babblers kept up a constant racket. The second creek and surrounding woodlands had the finches. Striated Pardalotes were working nests in the creek banks. Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters and a couple of elusive Banded Honeyeaters were feeding on the only flowering melaleucas in miles and a group of five Brown Treecreepers, the darker variant, were seemingly working in tandem with a large flock of White-winged Trillers. White-throated gerygones were quite common here.

The crowning glory to this location was the Owlet Nightjar which was flushed when somebody who shall remain nameless, stuck his head in a hollow and scared it out through a bolthole in the top of the log. It then alighted on a nearby perch and afforded those of us there an uninterrupted view for a good five minutes.

Trips on alternate days to Flat Creek Station and a selection of dams on Durham Station and others provided many good sightings. The usual waterfowl, including Green and Cotton Pygmy-geese with young were abundant, and set in amongst the many flowering waterlilies, made a beautiful and lasting impression. One of the dams had quite a few Great Crested Grebes and it was good to get a relatively close view, as they like the larger bodies of water from my previous observations. Amongst the many ducks we saw a solitary Freckled duck, a first for many. A Little Eagle obliged by flying overhead here. Black-throated, Masked, Zebra and Double-barred Finches kept cropping up, with the Black-throated in particular in good numbers.



Black-throated Finches

Roger Mortlock

Flat Creek Station provided a real workout for the 4wds, but was worth the effort as my first Spinifex Pigeon was photographed. Quite a striking looking bird. One group saw a Grey-fronted honeyeater. I missed that one.

My first Sarus Crane sighting was here, flying over one of the beautiful dams. A Latham's Snipe surprised us all by taking flight from a seepage line from a dam from which a group of us walked very close by without seeing it. Very sneaky bird.

For those who had not had their fill of birding, it was off to the racecourse in the evening to spot the Pictorella Mannikin which frequent this area. Sure enough, they obliged by turning up around 4.00 pm each day, often in large numbers of predominately



juveniles. Masked Woodswallows and Rufous Songlarks were also in good numbers. To my surprise when I downloaded my days photo's, I noticed a Red-browed Pardalote in place of what I thought was a Striated, the call being very similar. This was a bonus first sighting and had a few others on its tail the next day. It didn't oblige so will be one for the next trip.



*Star Finch*

*Roarer Mortlock*

After three and a half days at Georgetown, those of us who could, made their way the 370 kms or so to Karumba. The last 25 kms or so provided a glimpse of what was in store for us, with a plethora of waterbirds and raptors lining both sides of the road, with fields of swaying grasses interspersed with bodies of water. Obliging the farmers had provided fences on both sides of the road for the birds to sit on, as there were very few trees. Swamp Harriers, Black and Whistling Kites, Sarus and Brolga cranes, Heron, Ibis, and White-winged Black Terns in breeding plumage were just some of the birds sighted as we streaked by. Once again little time was lost throwing the swag down and so quickly back into the hunt.



*Red-browed Pardalote* Roger Mortlock

The boys from Ayr provided the first break, with a reporting of Yellow White-eyes in good numbers near the school. I ploughed through waist high prickles chasing a pair of the above in what turned out to be a wasted effort as following days provided the Yellow White-eyes at practically every habitat and location. Rufous-throated Honeyeaters were common, but the

more unusual at this spot was a Tawny Frogmouth and a juvenile Channel-billed Cuckoo.

At 9.00 am sharp the next day we headed off in great expectation on the Ferryman Cruise. Nesting Osprey provided the shutter finger some exercise before the serious business of the 'mangrove species'. The first few spots provided not a sighting and you could almost feel the threat to consign the captain to join the 'saltie' we saw hiding at the mangroves edge, unless things picked up. Luckily for all, at the next attempt we saw a Mangrove Grey Fantail, quickly followed by an

Arafura Fantail. The captain, who had broken out with a bead of sweat on his brow, was visibly relieved. He knows how serious we birders are.

The next spot provided a glimpse of the Mangrove Robin, the White-breasted Whistler and the Broad-billed Flycatcher. In the rush to see these birds flitting about in the depths of the mangroves, I got a lovely shot of the back of somebody's head. Overall not a photographer's delight, but a great introduction to what potential was to be had.

Left to our own devices, we spent the next two days delving into mangroves, backblocks, and into front yards (invited of course) and were rewarded with good shots of Arafura Fantail, Leaden Flycatchers very close up Red-headed Honeyeater, feeding on a coconut tree flower and a few Yellow Orioles to name but a few. Finally after several attempts I managed to 'shoot' the Star Finch. These were active near the rubbish dump and everyone got to see these colourful birds. Lots of juveniles as well.



*Red-headed Honeyeater* Roger Mortlock

One of the overriding memories of Karumba was the volume of Pied Herons. They were literally everywhere in large numbers, and were even feeding under the streetlights at night. With the abundance of frogs, they had plenty to eat. Despite the multitude of choice, a Pied Heron and a little White Ibis had it off and produced a hybrid which I have photographed and which added a novelty to end the wonderful trip.

Thanks to the great company and thanks for all the organising which made this trip so enjoyable.

*Roger Mortlock*

## MYSTERY BIRDS

These are the birds that caught our eye up in the Gulf at Karumba and Normanton. Are they just colour variants or crosses? Try googling hybrid birds. Makes interesting reading.

Annette Sutton



Photographed near Normanton Annette Sutton



Photographed near Karumba

Roger Mortlock

## ANTARCTICA

Early December 2013 I went on an expedition to what is called the Galapagos of the Southern Ocean.

This area includes the Sub Antarctic Islands south of New Zealand. There are five groups of islands in this area. I went on a cruise to Snares Island, Enderby Island, which is in the Auckland group of islands, Campbell Island and Macquarie Island. Macquarie Island is about halfway between New Zealand and the Antarctic.

The waters of the Southern Ocean can be extremely rough and several of the 48 passengers spent several sea sick hours on the journey. I usually get seasick but I took my doctor's advice and took along a packet of Phenergan tablets which were wonderful for people who get sea sick. Not once did I have any sign of being ill. The first island that came into view was Snares Island unfortunately we were not allowed to land there as it is a nature reserve. There are two main islands and about five smaller islands in this group and some claim that there are more nesting sea birds here than in the whole of the British Isles. We sailed along part of the coastline and saw Snares Crested Penguins on the rocky outcrops in the distance. There were several other types of sea birds flying about.

On the second day out from New Zealand, one of the passengers fell down the steps and broke her leg and hip. The ship had to return to Stewart Island, just off the south coast of New Zealand so the injured passenger could be picked up by helicopter and taken to a hospital. Once more we started out on our journey after losing several hours. Our next stop was Enderby Island in the Auckland Island group. We had to go ashore in the zodiacs, about ten people to each zodiac. It was very tricky getting ashore here as everywhere there were great strips of giant kelp. It was extremely slippery to stand on and one had to be very careful. Apparently at one time a very large strip of kelp was measured and was about thirty metres in length and weighed about 310 kilos. It is like very thick slippery leather. We were greeted by sea lions on this beach and we had to avoid them as much as possible as they were quite aggressive.

Up from the beach there was a boardwalk which went for about two kilometres. Before you got onto the boardwalk, one had to walk across this area that was like peat bog. It was lovely and green but very spongy to walk on and one got very wet boots. The board walk trip was wonderful. I had never seen such an array of the most interesting vegetation, a real botanists dream.

I saw Yellowed Eyed Penguins but there would only be one by its self or maybe two together at a time, not in vast colonies like other penguins. There were so many shrubs in flower and there were Wandering Albatross nesting among the grasses off the boardwalk. We saw Tom Tits, a small black and white bird, Bell Birds, dotterels, pipits, terns, several types



of albatross besides the Wandering Albatross and Red-capped Parrots. After we got back from the walk once again we had to run the gauntlet of the sea lions. After getting back on board the ship which was named the Enderby, we headed off to Macquarie Island which was another two days cruising away.



Gentoo Penguins

[www.komar.org](http://www.komar.org)

We were to have spent two days at Macquarie Island but, as we lost time taking the injured passenger back to New Zealand, we only had one day at Macquarie Island but what a magic day it was. On arriving at Macquarie Island an Orca or killer whale was seen attacking a seal and it was surrounded by lots of sea birds scavenging for bits and pieces. We went ashore at Buckles Bay where the Australian Antarctic Research Base is. What a lovely greeting we received as there were a group of the Gentoo Penguins standing right there on the beach like a welcoming committee. They looked so cute as the Gentoo penguins are very cute and have orange-red feet and beaks. They were not the least bit scared and just stood there with no sign of fear. There was a colony of Gentoos on this beach which they shared with dozens of Elephant seals which were not bothered by our presence either. They were much more docile than the sea lions. We were invited up to the base where the scientists worked and were welcomed with a lovely morning tea of home baked scones etc. There are fifty scientists who work out of the base.

They released a weather balloon while we were there. Many years before sealers slaughtered up to two hundred thousand Macquarie Island Fur seals and totally decimated the population. The seal skins were in demand for clothing. It is only in the last couple of years that any sign of fur seals have been recorded back on the island, maybe up to thirty in number after 200 years. Thousands upon thousands of penguins were also slaughtered for their oil. Compactors can still be seen where these birds were slaughtered. The rabbits that were released on the island many years ago had virtually destroyed most of the vegetation but in the last 2-3 years all of the rabbits have been exterminated and once more the

vegetation is showing signs of making a good recovery. Macquarie Island is looked after by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service. It is also a World Heritage listed area.

After leaving Buckles Bay we passed a rocky cliff area where you could see Rock Hopper Penguins standing around on the rocks. The day on Macquarie Island will always live in my memory as one of the most remarkable days I have ever had. When we went ashore on Sandy Bay beach, a most spectacular sight greeted the visitor. As far as the eye could see there were thousands of Royal Penguins and King Penguins on the beach. They were mostly in their separate groups but in one area the two species intermingled. Plenty of fresh water was running down off the sand cliffs to the ocean. There was a board walk that went up off the beach to a very noisy colony of about twenty thousand nesting Royal Penguins. Many were feeding their chicks. It was fantastic to be able to walk among the King and Royal Penguins on the beach. There were many young King Penguins with part of their brown fluffy down still attached.

The weather started to turn very rough as we were leaving the island and we were very lucky as sometimes people arrive at Macquarie Island and cannot go ashore as it is too dangerous because of the big seas. Next stop was Campbell Island. It was shrouded in mist but going ashore and doing the trip on the boardwalk was very interesting. The vegetation was like something out of the Lord of The Rings movie. Lots of sea birds were seen here along with the Campbell Island Snipe.

I really enjoyed this trip as I saw five species of penguins here compared to only one species I saw in the Antarctic when I went there last year. Most of the penguins had left their colonies as we got there too late. It was mid March but best to go there before February if you wish to see more species of penguins.

*Florence Hemsley*

## INTERNET LINK

Graeme Cooksley sent this link for you to share.

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/collections/birds>





## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In October 2013, Beth Snewin and I flew over to Perth where we hired a car for 3 weeks of leisurely touring in the south-west corner of Western Australia.

While wandering around Perth, we happened upon Government House Gardens, where we saw Singing Honeyeater, Red Wattlebird, Buff-banded Rail, White-cheeked and New Holland Honeyeater, Wood Ducks, Australian Shelducks, and a whole host of common ones seen around Townsville. Our first day on the road south towards Albany was wet and rather disappointing – too wet to stop anywhere and as it was a Sunday, everything seemed to be closed, but we had a look around the bush near the Canning Dam, finding Golden Whistler, Silvereye, Striated Pardalote, Grey Fantail and a White-breasted Robin, which took a bit of identifying. We'd decided to stay at Katanning, north of the Stirling Range so we could spend most of the next day in that Range. Katanning was so dead it was almost buried, but we found a "Chicken" place and bought some takeaway for dinner.

Fortunately the next day was much more interesting. Janet had written a report in 2010 to say that they'd



stayed at the Stirling Range Resort, so we called in there to see if we could find any of the birds she'd written about in her report. Made contact with the owner and the manager who gave us permission to use their large open Camp Shed as our base when we had to dodge the rain showers. We walked around, overjoyed to find some interesting birds – Baudin's Black-Cockatoo, Elegant Parrot, Western Yellow

Robin, Dusky Woodswallow, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Grey Currawong, Common Bronzewing and others. Whenever a heavy shower came, we retreated to the shed, to be entertained by the Restless Flycatcher which seems to call the shed his home. We had our lunch there, boiled their jug, washed up in their sink and were extremely grateful to the owners for their hospitality. Did a drive through a couple of roads in the National Park, where the wild flowers were in greater profusion than the birds – delightful.

On to Albany to a huge apartment which was our accommodation for the next two very cold nights. Next day off to Cheyne Beach – seeing Brown Falcon, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Inland Thornbill, Superb Fairy-wren, Swamp Harrier, Pacific Gull and Crested Tern; some along the way and others near the beach. It was still showering with a bitterly cold

wind blowing once we got to the sea. Called in at Twofold Bay on the way back to Albany, to find Yellow-rumped Thornbills scurrying around under the trees and a flock of Shy Heathwrens dodging among the leaves in some other scrubby trees. The next morning we visited Stepping Lake – that was good. A walk around the edge, dodging puddles showed us Musk Ducks, Blue-billed Ducks, and Great-crested and Hoary-headed Grebes be-sporting themselves in the little waves, while a Red-winged Fairy-wren, Golden Whistler, Ring-necked Parrots and Western Rosellas entertained us along the track. Next morning, I had to find a Pathology Unit to have an INR test for my Warfarin, but luckily we happened upon a recently opened one where the nurse was pleased to have a customer. That done, we took the scenic route to Denmark. Along the way, we added a Kestrel, Osprey, Pipit and Great Cormorant to our list, as well as adding to the number of common species we'd been seeing since arrival.

Denmark, as always, was delightful and our second-floor unit in our Motel provided great bird-watching. The main garden plants/trees which were in flower during our three week tour were Callistemons. They were everywhere, so the Red Wattlebirds and New Holland Honeyeaters were also prolific. We'd allowed three nights in Denmark, so were able to do leisurely drives along the coast, calling at nearly every look-out and beach. Of course Ospreys, Pied Oystercatchers, a Reef Egret and different Terns seemed to be everywhere, but the real thrill was in having a ten minute fly-past by a Square-tailed Kite as we stood talking to a local at a lookout. The best part was in seeing the Kite from above as he hunted along above the waves below us. Our new friend told us where to find the Sea Eagle too, so we added that to our list. It was in Denmark that we first found the absolutely beautiful Splendid Fairy-wren – large numbers of them in many places where we were searching for birds and wild-flowers. On the second day we drove around in the Karri forests and visited the Alpaca Farm which had many beautiful birds we'd already seen but also a Blue-breasted Fairy-wren and the Western White-browed Scrubwren, which we saw time and time again during the next week or two. I always get a thrill when driving through the Karri forests on a narrow dirt road. Just magnificent. It



was interesting to note that the most common birds in the short, wind-blown bushes along the cliffs were

Singing Honeyeaters and Silveryeyes and the common ducks around the farm dams were Wood Ducks.

Our accommodation in Walpole, which we reached via another scenic route the next day, was on the slopes of a hill which went down to the western side of the Inner Inlet. Apart from still being in a semi-freezing wind every time we ventured out, Walpole was also a beautiful and interesting area to explore, but the only new bird of note was an Emu which was drinking from a puddle at the side of the road as we again headed along a narrow dirt road towards beach lookouts. We hadn't seen an Emu all year, so were pleasantly surprised to find one so unexpectedly, though the next day we saw a male and 2 Juveniles beside the main road to Manjimup.



In Manjimup we stayed at Fonty's Pool Caravan Park, which has to be one of the loveliest Van Parks in W.A. and were quite delighted to find that the Manager was a Townsville woman who then upgraded us into a larger cabin at the top of the hill. We had stayed in this Park in 1996 in my Campervan, during our trip around Australia and loved it then. Scarlet Robins, Red-winged Fairy-wrens, Common Bronzewing, Grey Fantails, Western Rosellas, Baudin's Cockatoos and Red Wattlebirds also loved the Park. From Manjimup we circled around westward to the various waterfalls, creeks, "Big Climbing Trees", Pemberton and back to Manjimup. The thrill of the day was a couple of Spotted Pardalotes feeding on the dirt road right in front of the car. We saw them, slowed and crept forward without them taking off. We were too engrossed in enjoying them through our binoculars to take any photos though. A grandstand seat of two beautiful birds. The Gloucester Tree provided us with the Rufous Treecreepers which we'd seen there in 1996 and had hoped to find again. Yes, there they were feeding in the roof gutters of the toilets. Great! We also found White-browed Babblers a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Western Gerygone and a Wedgetail that day.

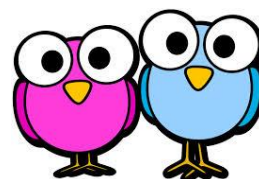
However, the best was yet to come. Having arrived at Augusta, we proceeded immediately to the Lighthouse at Cape Leeuwin to look for the Rock Parrots and yes, there they were, feeding just inside the wire fence around the Restaurant/Entrance Pay Place. We watched enthralled with only one couple

daring to ask what we were looking at so intently. Aren't people blind. I don't think anyone else even saw the birds feeding on the grass right near the car park. After that excitement we shouted ourselves a milk shake – for the princely sum of \$9.00 each. That was the first and last milk shake! Beth also found some Sooty Oystercatchers feeding down below the cliffs beside the beach to the south of the car park. We seemed to have hit the jack-pot, and didn't care if we couldn't find any more new birds for the rest of the trip. That doesn't mean that we didn't look and of course we did visit more cliffs, where we saw Hump-back Whales heading south. Near Cape Naturaliste, we visited Sugarloaf Rock to see the Red-Tailed Tropicbirds, which were flying around, then sitting on a nest? That lookout also provided extended and delightful views of the Hump-backs, very close the cliffs. We thought it was so good that we returned the next day to have another look. Saw the Tropicbirds again, but no Whales. Busselton is a good centre to stay in and we spent one whole day travelling around various wonderful Wetlands to the north of the town. There were a few Waders and many water birds plus a huge rookery of Australian and Straw-necked Ibis and --- 2 White-fronted Chats. I think they were the last of our new birds for the trip, but we continued to journey slowly northwards, ever on the lookout, enjoying the scenery of beaches, inlets, dams, forests, birds and an occasional visit to an interesting Historic House. Perth (where we had three nights with my niece, husband and two tots) was beautiful and Lake Monger entertained us happily one day and King's Park, another. Of course we had to spend a day at the Perth Zoo where the Wetlands and Bush Birds Aviary are both full of those rare species we'd been chasing and it was good to have such close-up views of them. They don't have any Bristlebirds or Noisy Scrub-birds and we late risers didn't manage to see any at their preferred sites, so we missed out on them. Beth ensured that we visited the Taxidermy Department in the Museum, too. They do have an excellent collection of 'stuffed' birds and animals. Very well worth a visit.

I can heartily recommend a relaxing, slow-moving journey around that south-west corner, taking time to enjoy all the wonderful aspects of Nature that it offers. The five hour flight is not too arduous and apart from the high cost of living in that land of the Mining Giants, everything is geared for a delightful holiday. The roads are good, traffic is limited, the towns are beautiful with parks and gardens, and birds and wild-flowers are there for the eagle-eyed traveller to marvel at. It was worth waiting another twelve years to enjoy again. That was our fifth visit – the first one being in 1972 – and the most leisurely.

*Story and Pictures*

*Elna Kerswell*





## PALUMA – MARCH 30<sup>TH</sup>

It was a small group of birders that “braved” the weather conditions on the last Sunday in March. After several phone calls to the council during that week and looking at websites and emails, I decided that the trip to Paluma was to go ahead.



*Macleay's Honeyeater*     *Annette Sutton*

The best spots – Little Crystal Creek (Barred Cuckoo-shrike and Silver-eye), Puzzle Creek (Scarlet, White-naped and Bridled Honeyeaters), the Grandis Forest (Golden Whistlers – including two males being interested in a female, White-throated Treecreepers and Eastern Yellow Robins), and Smith's Crescent, Paluma (Brown Gerygone, Lewins and Bridled Honeyeaters, Crimson Rosellas, Australian King Parrots, Eastern Spinebills, Pale Yellow Robins, and Spectacled Monarchs to name a few.

A Golden Penda tree was in full bloom at the corner of Smith's Crescent and the Paluma Road. It was a haven for several breeds of honeyeaters including Macleays, Bridled, Dusky, Scarlet, White-cheeked and Eastern Spinebills. We saw only one Tooth-billed Bowerbird from Beth's veranda; the Golden's season had ended in February so we found out after reading the book! We found only one bower but it showed no recent work.

A wash out? We were in cloud for only a short period in the Paluma Village and I recall about four spots of rain hitting our hats as we walked around – the rest of the time was overcast, yet perfect. The only error was me not checking that I had a card in my recently repaired camera!

*Warren Charlton*

## IN SEARCH OF THE POWERFUL OWL

During a visit to Victoria in March this year I posted a notice on Birding-Aus, seeking assistance in locating Powerful Owls in the Bendigo region. The last time I saw a Powerful Owl was about 35 years ago. The response from Birding-Aus was positive with three members offering to help out.

From information received, my brother-in-law and I visited the Loddon River at Newstead, about 50k from Bendigo. The info was that a pair had recently been seen in a large Black Wattle tree on the banks of the river on the edge of town. We did not find the birds but we did find a well used roost which was evident from the amount of white droppings and regurgitated pellets on the ground.

Next lot of info was that Powerful Owls were regularly seen at the racecourse at Hanging Rock about 80k from Bendigo just off the freeway on the way to Melbourne. Just near the old toilet block outside of the race track were the directions. Being two old blokes, we felt a bit uncomfortable loitering around a toilet block so we split up to search the surrounding area. It was about 30 minutes before I finally sighted our quarry; a Powerful Owl about five metres up in the branches of a Black Wattle. Someone must have been smiling on us as there was a bonus; it had a dead Magpie in its talons.



*Powerful Owl*

*Ian Boyd*

Two weeks later, after returning from a holiday in Tasmania, I received an email to say that the owls had been spotted a couple of days before in their usual spot on the river at Newstead. We were there the next morning and there they were; a pair only about four metres of the ground. They were sitting about five metres apart but it was relatively easy to



see the difference in size between the male and female (the male being the larger).

All in all, I consider myself lucky to know that there are bird watchers out there who are prepared to assist others in finding birds in specific areas. Without the assistance of the fellows in central Victoria, my search for a Powerful Owl on this trip to Bendigo would more than likely have had the same results of my searches over the past dozen or so years; zero!!

*Ian Boyd*

## ON OUR DOORSTEP

The April Birdlife Committee meeting was due and I was right on time as I approached the garden just outside the Soundshell, when from the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of movement in the undergrowth. What was that? There it is again. Bird or what?

I stood perfectly still and imagine my surprise when a Noisy Pitta hopped onto the pathway about two meters from a very delighted Bird Observer. He looked at me and I looked at him, I don't know who was more surprised, but he stayed there long enough for me to have a good clear look. A truly colourful little bird.



*Noisy Pitta*

*Ray Sutton*

Then having arrived at the Committee meeting and announcing my unusual sighting, the members immediately rushed out and began searching the garden and were rewarded with a number of sightings. It just goes to show that if you remain observant you never know what you will see on your doorstep.

*Wal Threlfall*

## BIRD SURVEYS AT INKERMAN

The NQ Dry Tropics organisation has a Sustainable Coasts Project currently under way in the Inkerman area, south of Home Hill. The project aims to improve the health of some Burdekin wetlands through better control over the supplementary/excess water that is currently entering these areas and which in turn facilitates the invasion and domination of these habitats by weeds and undesirable native plants. NQ Dry Tropics has requested BirdLife Townsville's assistance in this project by conducting bird surveys in the project area as part of the overall monitoring of expected changes over the next three to five year period.

Our committee has agreed to assist in this project by undertaking bird surveys on a quarterly basis, and Norm Rains has been appointed to liaise with the the NQ Dry Tropics Project Team and the property owners in the conduct of these surveys. The Branch's involvement is an official activity of BirdLife Townsville and therefore attracts the benefits of BirdLife Australia's insurance arrangements and OH&S responsibilities currently in place for all other Branch activities.

At this stage it is intended to conduct the surveys on week days so as not to interfere with the Branch's annual planned activities already in place. Please contact Norm (email [ngrains@bgpond.net.au](mailto:ngrains@bgpond.net.au) -phone 47788107) if you are interested in being part of the survey team.

*Norm Rains*

## CALL FOR EDUCATORS

A feature of our Branch for many years has been a most effective Education Sub-committee, made up of members interested in providing information on local and regional birds and their habitats to a range of audiences in our area. Some of the activities in the past have included visits and presentations to schools and community groups such as Land Care and Progress Associations as well as static displays at various community events including the City's Libraries in October each year. No doubt many other BirdLife Australia Branches throughout Australia are involved in similar activities to promote the welfare of birds in their own areas. Engaging with the public to promote birds is considered a core activity of the organisation. It is important that BirdLife Townsville continues this work in 2014 to raise awareness of birds and their various local habitats in general, and also the many issues that affect the wellbeing of this appealing, attractive, interesting and vital element of our natural environment. This work requires a team of interested members who can spare a few hours a few times each year.

While some members will make the actual presentations to the various groups, others are

needed as essential support in these activities. There is a job for everyone in the Education Team and we would welcome a full squad of interested members to be part of the Education Sub-committee in 2014.

Please express your interest in this valuable work by emailing [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au) or [ngrains@bigpond.net.au](mailto:ngrains@bigpond.net.au) as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made to conduct an informal get-together early next month. Please include your Blue Card details if you have one; if you don't have one, we can arrange an application for you.

*Norm Rains Education Officer.*

## WUNJUNGA

*This is another great spot to go birding.*

On the 4,5,6 April 2014, Chris and I were invited to go camping at Spotswood's property at Inkerman, about 20 kms SE of Home Hill. That place in itself is good for birding, with both water birds and forest birds. This visit we were interested to see just how good since the recent heavy rains down that way. The cattle are very healthy looking. The mozzies are absolutely atrocious right through the days and nights, but I'm sure that situation will improve as the year dries and cools.



*Rainbow Bee-eater*      *Len Ezzy*

Best birds for me were the one Baillon's Crane and the two White-browed Crakes which we scope-watched from the comfort of our shady camp site on Saturday. We heard their calls other times but we did not see them again. Interesting also was watching the Jacana chicks of various ages learn how to handle life on the water. How quickly their fathers would gather them up under-wing as the patrolling Swamp Harrier and White-bellied Sea-Eagles threatened overhead. There were a handful of Australian Reed-Warblers and a couple of Little Grassbirds that were out and about (and vocal) during the early to mid-morning; but they all quietened during the heat of the day. A flock of 34 Plumed Whistling-Ducks rested for the Saturday on the levee bank directly in front of our campsite.

Friday night we walked around the campground and forest and up to the chained gate, where there was a Barking Owl perched high in one of the dead trees. Its calls woke us at 5am Saturday, but we couldn't relocate it again in a two hour after-breakfast forest walk. However we did count 58 Bush Stone-curlews. Our Saturday night spotlighting revealed one Tawny Frogmouth and three Brush-tailed Possums.



*Brush-tailed Possum*      *Len Ezzy*

George and Lyn Spotswood and a few of their friends came over to our camp for "Sundowners" late on Saturday afternoon. George suggested that we should take a Bird-Drive down to the Township of Beachmount (Wunjunga) the next day, so we did ☺.

The well sign-posted turn-off the Bruce Highway to the left to Wunjunga is 4.0km south of the Inkerman General Store and Servo. Then it is a good 15km gravel road (Birding-GOOD also) to the end of the road at what they call the Township of Beachmount. There are lots of wetlands along the way, salt on the left and fresh on the right. Absolutely heaps of waterbirds. Scope is essential. On reaching the coast, there is a great beach access point. About a kilometre past here is a small Caravan Park (which we didn't check out) and then 2.0km further on is the Township of Beachmount. Good for a look and a scope at the moment while there are some shorebirds remaining. Some of the stand outs for us were 58 roadside Brolgas, 2 Latham's Snipe that flushed from salt couch in front of us, and a Brown Songlark traditionally posed on the top of a corner wooden fence-post while he sang his cheerful song. We saw 6 Golden-headed Cisticolas in the rank grasslands, but it's also the right habitat for Zittings. Because of the swarming Mossies, we didn't stop near the coastal Mangroves either... but I would say that there would most likely be Yellow White-eye and other mangrove species around there. We tallied 59 bird species on our 2 hour drive down Wunjunga Road. You can see our complete list and numbers on Eremaea eBird - in the Wunjunga 10' Cell. Or Click this link <http://ebird.org/ebird/australia/view/checklist?subID=S17784653>

Maybe Birdlife Townsville might plan another long weekend campout down at Spotswood's and include from there a day's outing to Wunjunga for a decent look around?

*Len and Chris Ezzy*

## THE LONG WAY HOME

The final part of our relocation from Townsville to Malanda involved a trip down to Caboolture in March to pick up our caravan.

It was being repaired from a nasty ironbark branch attack and then we had to bring it home to Malanda. Val was in Canberra enjoying the new grandson so I drove down to Brisbane, sorted out the caravan and did a little local birding. I had read about some artificial wetlands near Bli Bli so went across for a look. Great decision as there was a pair of Little Bitterns in residence and with patience eventually got excellent views. Baillon's Crake was also present. I can recommend these wetlands (Bli Bli Parklakes) for visiting birders.



*Crested Shrike-tit* Peter Valentine

When I picked up Val from the airport we did a quick day trip to Lamington National Park, which is always wonderful for birds. Then back to Caboolture, hitched up the caravan and out the D'Aguilar Highway. We had decided we were definitely NOT going up the Bruce Highway so struck out for Durikai State Forest, west of Warwick. Len and Chris Ezzy had told us about this wonderful place so we headed out the Cunningham Highway and found ourselves a nice little campsite for a couple of days. We did not see another person and our camp and other parts of the forest were terrific for birds. I was particularly after the Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters and these were abundant and beautiful birds. But there was a lot more. Val earned her keep (and more) by pointing out a pair of Crested Shrike-tits, which were very obliging. They sat about two metres off the ground and watched us for at least five minutes while we enjoyed them from five metres away. What a treat and less than fifty metres from our camp!

At that stage we decided to keep heading west and meet up at Bowra Station with former friends from Townsville and new Malanda neighbours, Martin and Sam Willis. That was a great decision. Even before we got to Cunnamulla the Major Mitchell Parrots were plentiful, feeding on the melons along the side of the road. There were good birds at Bowra including a Black Falcon sitting on a dead tree - much nicer view than the 100 km per hour "swoosh" I have usually seen with this species. Some of the station roads were closed from recent rain but there was plenty of action. After a couple of days we headed north, all

the way to Barcaldine, to Aramac (camped at Cornish Creek) and then on past Moorrinya to Torrens Creek and home. It was distressing to see that a lot of money has been spent on fencing, gates and cattle grids and that there were still huge numbers of cattle inside Moorrinya even though the whole area was covered in tall green grass. The disrespect to the environment from the present State Government is hard to comprehend. We finally got home to Malanda and parked the caravan in its shed. This signals we have now finally moved six months after we left Townsville.



*Major Mitchell's Cockatoo* Peter Valentine

It was such a pleasure driving the inland roads. We saw almost no semi-trailers and very few vehicles of any kind. We did see great numbers of Brolgas, Bustards and other birds all the way. From Cunnamulla to Torrens Creek the grass was green and knee high. Wonderful to see recovery after the long drought. We enjoyed the travel so much that from now on the Bruce highway will be relegated and we will head south by one of the inland options. We plan return trips to Durikai State Forest and of course Bowra is a real pleasure to visit anytime. Despite dipping on a few species (Black-breasted Button-quail at Inskip, Diamond Firetail at Durikai) we had a wonderful time and recommend the long way home any time.

*Peter Valentine*

## BYE, BYE BIRDIE

I first became involved in caring for injured, sick and orphaned birds after being "sucked-in" by what I considered, at first, to be my daughter's over-developed sense of responsibility for all creatures great and small.

Her enthusiasm knew no bounds; she attended and qualified at various training courses which only added fuel to the fire of her passion for animals, especially birds. It wasn't very long before her other half became involved and I am happy to say that after more than fifteen years their devotion to this "duty" has not waned at all.



I found it difficult not to join in as well, especially as "the kids" had full time jobs while I had the luxury of being semi-retired at that stage, "with plenty of time on my hands". I find caring for birds, whilst frustrating at times, to be very rewarding and would recommend it as a worthwhile thing to do for anyone with time to spare and a lot of patience and compassion for our fellow creatures.

Many are the tales that could be told about caring for birds, especially at the time they are released.



*Juvenile Blue-faced Honeyeater*  
Ray Sutton

In the early weeks of caring, my daughter put up her hand for everything available. I recall having at one time two young Australian Figbirds, four young Blue-faced Honeyeaters and as many Magpie-larks, all of which were fully feathered and flying, albeit not well enough to release. All had arrived at the same time from another carer who was going on holidays. The plot was for these birds to be finished off (not literally, just in terms of rearing) at our place and released locally when ready. These birds had insatiable appetites for insects and it was almost a full time job keeping up with the supply. At that time we hadn't discovered *Wombaroo Insectivore Mix*, a nutrient powder added to minced meat as a convenient way of providing a good supplement of insects to make a complete diet for this class of birds.

In the meantime, no grasshopper, locust, moth, beetle, earthworm, katydid or other like creature was safe in our yard. Each afternoon my daughter and I would scour our back paddock, collecting the next day's meals for the young ones. I had a small terrier type cross-breed dog at that time who was quite adept at catching grasshoppers----she seemed to be able to anticipate precisely where they intended to land and then pounce on them. She was a great help and loved the game. We would also wander around the trees and grassy areas at night by torchlight and catch quite a few insects, many of which were "double-deckers" perched high up on the dry stems of Hyptis plants. It was during one of these night forays that we came across a round yellow tennis ball size mass on a low fig tree branch. On investigation it was found to be a Yellow Honeyeater in its night attire, all fluffed up against the elements and

blissfully unaware of our presence until rudely woken by a curious prodding finger.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, eventually the time arrived when these young birds were considered to be ready for release. The cage doors were opened at dawn one morning and we sat back to see what would happen. As it turned out, it was nothing spectacular; all the birds eventually flew out of their cages and sat in line on the garden fence, raucously demanding food. The only real change that day was that breakfast was eventually served *al fresco style*.

Now it is my habit to walk the sixty metres or so down the driveway around first light each day to collect my Townsville Bully. The young birds were used to me feeding them early each day so on that release day they accompanied me, hovering closely for the full trip to and from the footpath, all the while loudly demanding their breakfast. Just as I bent down to pick up the paper, complete with my airborne entourage, a friend of mine drove past and witnessed the scene. He later said facetiously that he thought I looked like Clifton Clowers, the bearded Arkansas backwoodsman of Wolverton Mountain fame. (Young readers may need to ask their oldies who this Clifton bloke was)

I am happy to say that these birds eventually left home successfully after a week or two of gradual weaning them off human dependency. They had been spoiled by their first carer who was still hand feeding them well past the usual time.



*Magpie-lark* Ray Sutton

We release many birds from home. Some, like rainbow lorikeets and blue-faced honeyeaters stay around for a day or a week or two and join up with the locals, while others, like Eastern Koels, always disappear as soon as the cage door is opened to set them free. We also have "soft releases" from time to time where the bird simply has had enough jail time and escapes of its own accord during feeding or water change or when the door is inadvertently left slightly ajar. Whichever way the bird finds its freedom, we are happy for it. We are also satisfied in the knowledge that we have prepared it for life in the wild as best we could. (to be continued)

*Norm Rains*

## CALENDAR

### May 2014

10th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker Neil Bruce.

11th - Sunday - Lucinda (To see if the shorebirds are still there) This is an extra outing. Meeting place will be the Palmetum for a 6.30am departure but for those living in the northern beaches and that side of town they could meet at the Forestry Road turn off (at the community hall) in Bluewater. They would then be able to join the others as they pass around 7.00am. They should have their radios on channel 9 listening for the call that the other group is approaching Bluewater and to get ready to join the convoy. This is an all day outing so bring morning tea and Lunch. Car pooling is encouraged.

14th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 7.00am.

18th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 7.00am.

25th - Sunday Outing - Laroona - Meet in the Reading Cinema Carpark in Cannon Park Thuringowa for a departure at 7.00am sharp. This is an all-day outing so bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Suitable for high clearance vehicles only.

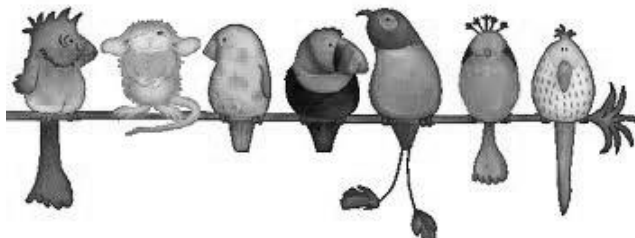
### June 2013

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

7th -9th - Saturday to Monday (Queens Birthday Long Weekend) - Pentland Campout. Accomodation available for cabins, caravan or camping available at the Pettland caravan Park (07) 4788 1148 or at the Pentland Hotel Motel (07) 4788 1106. About 240 km from Townsville with bitumin road all the way. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

10th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Anything Goes. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

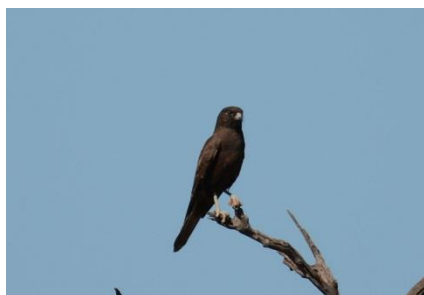
14th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker Ed Pierce.



The next Drongo is due out by the middle of June. Could you please send in all contributions by 5<sup>th</sup> June.

Could you also send in Quest numbers. Then we can print them in the next Drongo.

[amsgreat@gmail.com](mailto:amsgreat@gmail.com)



*Black Falcon Peter Valentine*



*Banded Honeyeater Roger Mortlock*



*Sharp-tailed Sandpiper Len Ezzy*