

# The Drongo

Number 128 AUGUST 2013



Los Angeles

Lawn Hill

Mungalla



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Following the Branch Representatives meeting, National Office held a teleconference early in August to ascertain what the branches want to have presented to the Board at the upcoming meeting. There was a very robust discussion about Branch Funding Model. This is a complicated issue for the Board to sort out because of the wide variety of branch structures throughout the organization.

A Conservation Advocacy Teleconference was held on 6 August. National Office has developed guidelines to help branches with advocacy at a local level; media releases, letter templates to candidates for elections, submission writing and so on. There is now consistent and very good support for branch conservation officers from National Office. Our Conservation Officer, Peter Valentine will be leaving Townsville around about October so BirdLife Townsville is actively seeking someone to fill his shoes. If you have an interest in this area, please speak to Peter or a committee member. Peter is happy to assist his replacement into the role in whatever way he can.

Bird Week will be 19 – 25 October. BirdLife Australia will be holding a competition to find Australia's favourite bird. There will be an opportunity for us to promote our favourite bird on a list of fifty to encourage lots of votes. We will keep you updated as information comes to hand.

*Janet Robino*

### **YOUR COMMITTEE**

President: Janet Robino  
Vice-President: Alf Acton  
Secretary: Warren Charlton  
Treasurer: Nina Doyle  
Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton  
Conservation Officer: Peter Valentine  
Education Officer: Elna Kerswell  
Committee Members: Pat Charlton, Cecily Messer, Malcolm Calvert, Lenore Calvert



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## PAYETS TOWER

This observation tower is so named in recognition of the many years of dedicated volunteer work on the Townsville Town Common by Rosemary Payet and her late husband, Jock Payet.

With particular reference to the Town Common's birds and their habitats, the Payets were always willing to escort and advise visitors and locals alike, passing on their extensive knowledge of natural history and historical aspects of the Town Common.

The Payets' passionate relationship with the Town Common has mentored new understandings and appreciations of the profound importance of conservation, monitoring, promotional and advisory values with many. Their energy and enthusiasm has been instrumental in creating an environmental awareness among the general public that has had a positive influence on the protection and promotion of the Townsville Town Common that will confidently ensure its preservation into the future.

Rosemary continues her Town Common activities today. (2013)



*Rosemary Payet at the Tower*

## THE TOWN COMMON

It appears things have not changed a lot in nearly 80 years when it comes to Townsville citizens wanting something better for the Town Common. The letter below is an example. Only minor corrections have been made to the letter, otherwise it appears as written all those years ago.

Ian Boyd

Photographs by Ian Boyd

**Letter to the Editor of the Townsville Bulletin  
Thursday 4 January 1934**

Sir.— Please allow me to ventilate a grievance which should be attended to, so that it will suit all classes. A few ladies told me they were going to hire a car through the holidays and they were first going to the jetty to see the big sailing ship, and then to the Country Women's homes and new baths. Then they were going for a drive along Heatley's Parade to

Palaranda, thence Shelly Bay, and the mouth of Bohle; then on to the New Weir on Ross River, and then home. So I said I would make a tour of inspection; so I made arrangements with a particular friend of mine, who has a sulky turnout, and is leasing a bit of sand in Cockle Bay off the Government, to take me out and spy out some of the country beforehand.

So just before Christmas, on one sun- shiny morning, we set off through the town at a fast trot. We came to our late Mayor and member of Parliament W. H. Green's old home, but now occupied by Mr. Watty Mather and nearby is where Mr. John Cummins spent many happy days, years ago. Across the road where Wright Heaton and Co.'s, the noted carriers, had their stables, and the residence where Mr. J. Pease, merchant, resided in his early married life and now occupied by Mr. Jim Cole, retired railway station master, Townsville. Then just at the back in Harold- street, lives Mr. Charlie McGovern and Captain Romer. So on we go till we turn the corner into Bundock-street, named after Alderman Bundock, of the firm Hayes and Bundock, who had the wool stores where Messrs Hayles landing is.

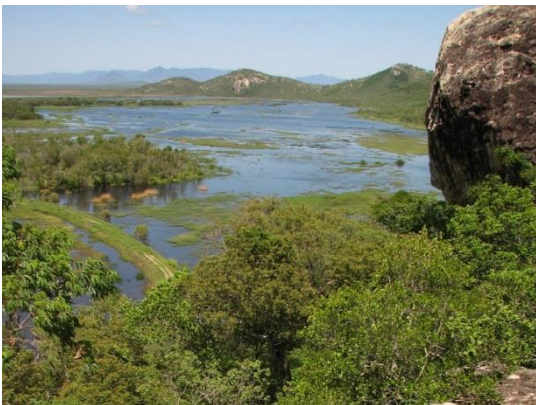
We are now at the Belgian Gardens, where Mr. Fred Robinson has a whole terrace of houses on the site of the garden, there is no spare ground as it is covered with mango trees. Close by is St Columba's Chapel and across the road are a few ponciana trees, which marks the spot where the police stat- ion once occupied and Sergeant Scully in charge about the time when Jack Flick the bushranger was captured, at Mr. Hanns station. Lawn Hills;

Then we come to some large acacia trees, the old site of the residence of the first Town Common Ranger, Mr. George Rintoul, who died quite recent- ly down south. Over the road is "Old Dad" Camps blacksmith shop. I under- stand Gladys Moncrieff used to catch the sparks from this, old anvil. This was one of the first businesses of Townsville. As we continue into the Common we cross a causeway which divides the Lagoon in two, and the ducks are there in hundreds, then we pass the new cemetery on the right and the little hill alongside called "Jimmy's look out", called after a white boy who was the only survivor of a ship wreck near Cape Cleveland, and the aboriginals kept him amongst them for seventeen years. This, was before Townsville was thought of, and when the Palmer gold- field broke out, and strange ships came in close to the shore, the aboriginals allowed Jimmy to gaze on them from this look out; and when Jimmy came back to civilisation, the pioneers al- lowed Jimmy to buy that allotment where Woolworths are now for the upset price of £6. And the allotment where Dr. Taylor's surgery stands in Sturt Street was purchased for the first male child born in Townsville named Boyce at upset price. We are travelling on a fairly good piece of road built by the Commonwealth Government towards the Quarantine Buildings at Cape Pallaranda, and on our left is a large sheet of fresh water held here by a small dam built by the Council. We pass on here a great number of big ti-



trees, ideal for butchers' shop blocks which shows that a big watercourse was here at a remote time. Then we come to Burdekin Plum and big picnic inviting fig trees. Then the two windmills hove in sight with the dry sand hills and hundreds of cattle roving about and the big fresh water lagoon on the left running nearly all the way from the town to the turn off to Shelly Beach, going toward the track on the point of the mountain. This is the point I want to get at, and why I am writing this article, to open the eyes of the alder- men to the injustice they are doing the settlers in Shelly Bay and the Bohle. After leaving the windmills, and going over the salt pans toward Shelly Beach, it is something awful. I have known this route for over forty years when a bit of a track was made by a fisherman to bring his fish from the mouth of the Bohle to supply the town, and when he made the track, bullock teams went over it to get the red mangrove for fuel to burn the bricks which were being made near the new cemetery at that time. At any rate when we got near the mountain there was a boggy, slippery, slimy river, about fifty yards wide and I'm told the Council save a man three days' work to make a causeway over this pud muddle, and there's no doubt he well earned his money, with the amount of stones he carted there, but in the name of common sense, why didn't they give him a two foot concrete pipe or culvert for the centre, for it's not a dam that is wanted there for it's a dam in many ways as it is. Young man go on the land, is the slogan.

It's enough to break a man's heart to go out there and see how those people are treated; they have taken out leases from the Government and they are working them. The Council is piling in their rate notices on the unfortunates, even serving lighting rates. Just fancy when will the electricity extend out that far. O ye Gods. I think every alderman in the Council should take a pride in this Common, and its surroundings, and not let the pioneers who put their earnings and labor, and the best part of their life in this particular spot have to swim and crawl in and out of town every wet season, high tide and shower. I am not talking through my neck, or from information second hand, I am writing from experience.



Every inch of this bay would be taken up if only one alderman would stand out and show that he had a good bit of Old John Bull stubbornness in him and

make all the others come for a ride over this awful track: but not in the most comfortable cars, but in cabs, or even better in delivery vans. I guess the doctors and chemists and also the ambulance would have to patch up their anatomy for a week after. No one with a bike can live in this sub- urb, as it would have to be carried on their backs, and while the



aldermen are on the spot let them have a look at that salt water creek running parallel with Shelly Beach, and about a hundred yards from it. If a stony causeway was made over that as a motor car could safely negotiate it that would be an added attraction, as it is a better beach than Rowe's Bay. The causeway would only be about fifty feet long, and about two feet high. If a nice road were made to this locality, the Council would see that the money was well spent, for it would be a lovely drive, and every moving vehicle would make use of it. We talk about "Tourists" yet we don't cater for them. Well they say there are further worlds to conquer. We have let that British tourist ship Ulysses go by twice; why? Don't we want any of Old England's money?

About this lantana and weed cutting, where hundreds of pounds go up in smoke; hasn't it been proved there are insects and poisons to deal with them, quite harmless to stock, and much cheaper. There is a nice new lot of lantana maturing. What's to stop a syndicate starting to make salt on that large salt pan on the Bohle, and the back of the Police Paddock; Is it the lack of a road? I am sure Townsville is a drier climate than Bowen, and has everything in its favor. Why don't the Returned Soldiers' Association get the name of the Town Common altered to Anzac Bird Sanctuary. And also Castle Hill could be altered to Remembrance Hill, and when the road is finished up there, the statue of a soldier (the same as stands on the road at Indooroopilly, Brisbane), placed on top, and a revolving light or flame appearing, and disappearing, like on a lighthouse, as at Singleton, N.S.W.

Well sir, I reported adversely on the projected hiring of the car for the picnic, so we all walked over and back to the jetty, and saw our wool and sugar going away in the big German boat We admired everything aboard. The pet bantam; the garden; the glass of lager; the plate of sour kraut; and the nice polite young Germans, especially when they said they were not born when the war was on. — Yours, etc.  
"ADVANCE AUSTRALIA."

## RECYCLING NEST MATERIAL BY WHITE-BROWED ROBIN

While we humans appreciate the good sense in recycling material goods, there may be many reasons why this approach would not work for birds with regard to nest-building material. Birds that use tree holes do re-use the site, but that is clearly due to the shortage of these resources and strong competition for tree holes by many other species of birds and mammals. Our resident pair of Barking Owls continues to use the same nest hole in a very large blood wood tree each year. With cup nest builders I imagine re-use of nest material might be quite uncommon due to various negative factors. For example, residual bird odours from the previous nesting activity may be more likely to attract a predator. There could also be some ectoparasites (eggs) in the old nest material. I have previously found numerous small birds' nests on our property but have not noticed any being reused with the exception of an Olive-backed Sunbird nest. I was therefore surprised on the 18th July this year to see our resident pair of White-browed Robin scavenge material from a nest used last year. This particular nest was a well-made sturdy nest built within some hanging vines in our large shadehouse (see photo). They laid two eggs and were sitting on them when the nest was predated (presumably by a tree snake). Subsequently they abandoned this nest and went on to build another elsewhere on the property.



*White-browed Robin nest remains*

While cleaning up the shade house recently, I removed the nest (still in good shape) and left it sitting on the side bench of the shade house. A few days later I noticed that the nest was looking somewhat dishevelled and reduced in size and wondered what might have caused this. The next day, while up a ladder repairing damage to the roof of the shade house (stitching shade cloth) I was amazed to see one of the robins fly into the shade house and land next to the nest. Over the next few minutes I watched while the robin (probably the male) pulled the nest apart and retrieved lengths of fine rootlets. These were tugged free from the nest and eventually one was selected and carried off. Over the next couple of days the remains of the nest were further reduced (see second photo). I wonder if

others have noted this phenomenon with other species? I have previously reported that these White-browed Robins had four nest failures last year (with 2 eggs in each predated) and it now occurs to me that they may be setting up for another failure by recycling last year's nest material. I will try and keep



*White-browed Robins' nest*

an eye on them again this year.  
Story and Photos

*Peter Valentine*

## ELUSIVE WRENS

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> August, Beth Snewin, Wendy Kaus and I decided it was time to add the Lovely Fairy-wren to our list for the year.

We had dipped on seeing them on our last trip to upper Bluewater and to the railway line area at Crystal Creek, so reckoned that we'd have to make a more enthusiastic search. We set off full of expectations and cruised slowly along the Bluewater Road towards the little creek where we'd seen them in past years. Earlier in the year, we were actually halted from proceeding that far by the Police and the Army, who were apprehending some serious criminals (Marihuana growers?), so this time hoped for a more positive outcome. Alas! The creek was bone dry and scarcely a bird called. An extended search racked up a couple of Grey Fantails, two female Rufous Whistlers, a Mistletoebird and a couple of unknowns which escaped before we could check them out properly. No Wrens gave voice or put in an appearance.

OK, so let's go further. Great joy – the next creek was actually flowing gently over the granite boulders and birds called all round us as we drew to a halt in the middle of the narrow concrete bridge. No traffic, so we abandoned the car in the middle of the bridge and stepped out to check the surreptitious movements in a Callistemon that was growing in the middle of the creek not far downstream. Elusive little critters, but finally Beth said, "Yes! I can see the bright blue head and some orange." It was quite dark in there among the multitude of tiny branches and leaves and for the life of me I couldn't manage to focus the binoculars on one of the darting little fellows long enough to see the colours clearly. I



thought I'd seen one dive down behind a rock in the creek, but it never reappeared so after some time we gave up, staring hopefully at the now motionless tree and moved off along the road in two different directions. After some time Wendy called out, "Got one here." Of course I was further up the road in the other direction, so had to totter (my normal motion these days) as quickly as prudently possible back across the bridge to where she was still peering into a group of small wattles, right beside the road. There he was, clearly visible every so often, poking around in the twigs and little branches less than three metres away. We watched entranced, enjoying the glorious beauty of his splendid colours, until they (females too) moved further back into the bushes and disappeared.



*Lovely Fairy-wren*

*Len Ezzy*

As it was time for a cuppa and there was an open area near the creek, Wendy reversed the car into a shady spot and we gathered our thermos, cake and cups and wandered down the track to sit on the lovely granite boulders where we had a good view across the little creek at various callistemons, grevilleas and wattles. A few different Honeyeaters fed in the grevilleas, then, sure enough, a couple of Wrens made another appearance, giving us excellent views by sitting in patches of sunlight, as they darted around on their important missions. Half an hour later, after enjoying the seclusion of the pretty little dell, we were having a last look beside the road when Wendy saw two male Wrens in the bushes where we'd seen them before. So again, we watched and exclaimed in delight at these wonderful little creatures, before climbing back into the car to head happily home.

Isn't life grand when you find your target bird, enjoy several clear sightings and are able to revel in its grace and beauty.

*Elna Kerswell*

*Lovely Fairy-wrens are restricted to N.E. Queensland.*

## A DIFFERENT VIEW OF MUNGALLA STATION

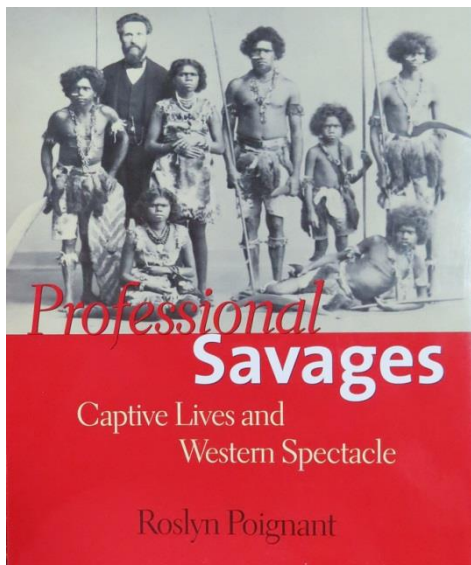
Members of Birdlife Townsville have come to know Mungalla Station near Ingham in recent times because of its fantastic birding opportunities. Thanks to the work of Ian Boyd and other branch members, the owners of the station have welcomed our visits and we have enjoyed field outings last year and this year when numerous excellent bird species have been seen, including Oriental Pratincole, Grass Owl, Stubble Quail, Pied Heron and Australian Pratincole. The branch has contributed to the development of a list of bird species on the station with new additions most visits. This contribution has been much appreciated by the owners, the Nywaigi Aboriginal Land Corporation, who represent the traditional owners of this country. Recently a very important ceremony was held on the property, which saw the declaration of the Girringun Region Indigenous Protected Area covering large areas of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Mungalla Station Indigenous Protected Area is part of the Girringun Region IPA. Jacob Cassady has been the contact person for our branch activities and he has welcomed members on their various visits. He has taken the lead role in developing Mungalla Station for cultural and natural heritage tours.

I attended the dedication of the Girringun IPA on behalf of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and while there took the time to view the Captive Lives display which is housed in the main building. It is remarkable and tells a tragic story that was previously not well known but which now is available for all. I was astonished to learn that in addition to the violent dispossession of Aboriginal peoples in the region during the 1850s and 1860s, even later some poor souls were sent off to the USA (and Europe) to become part of circus acts. This is the story told in the Captive Lives display in the homestead.



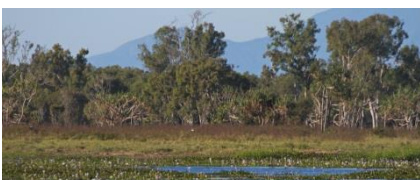
Captive Lives was prepared by anthropologist Roslyn Poignant and as a display toured around Australia under the auspices of the National Library. It is now on permanent display in the old homestead at Mungalla Station. What is the story? In a nutshell, an

agent for PT Barnum's Circus in the USA (RA Cunningham) "took" nine Aboriginal people from Ingham to the USA in 1883 where they were displayed in the circus as "Australian Savages", part of a larger entertainment display of Indigenous people from around the world, together with more traditional "circus freaks". There were six men, two women and a young child. Three were from Hinchinbrook Island, the rest from Palm Island. Two of these died in the USA. One man, called Tambo, was mummified after death and displayed in a museum until just by chance his identity was discovered and eventually he was returned to country for a proper burial (in February 1994). The surviving 7 people were then taken to Europe and toured around different countries. Most of these people died in Europe. A second group was also taken by Cunningham to Europe in 1892 and these were all from Mungalla Station itself, then owned by James Cassady who was a good friend of Aboriginal people and supported them living on country. The groups were promoted by Cunningham as "cannibal" boomerang throwers. Most of these also died in Europe. Little information is available about their eventual fate but it seems they were abandoned by Cunningham in Europe. Why they went (and how "persuaded") remains a mystery.



The most comprehensive detail is available in a book written by Roslyn Poignant and published in 2004 called "*Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle*". The photographs are from that book. The display in the Mungalla homestead is remarkable and makes fascinating but sad viewing. If members have an opportunity on their next visit to Mungalla I recommend taking the time to see the display.

Peter Valentine



## HARVEYS RANGE TO MINGELA

On the 29<sup>th</sup> July I went for a casual drive to check out birding along the road from Herveys Range to Mingela.

As always I arrived at Keelbottom Creek for the sunrise. The most notable bird was the Rainbow Lorikeet feeding on the flowering Eucalypts and bottlebrush, often fighting with the Noisy Friarbirds; the most interesting birds here were a Rufous Night-Heron trying to hide in a tree just above the water (the white chest however was really giving the bird away) and a Black-shouldered Kite.



On to the road to Mingela, most of the common bush birds were sighted, the Bustards and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes were making the most of the freshly burnt ground which was still smouldering in places. Smoko was at the grid-bridge crossing of Keelbottom Creek. It was very enjoyable watching a Striated Pardalote carrying nesting material into its hole in the bank in the middle of the creek. The Little Friarbirds were dipping. As with Keelbottom on Herveys Range, there were many Lorikeet and Noisy Friarbirds in the flowering Eucalypts and bottlebrush. The real highlight of smoko were two male Scarlet Honeyeaters chasing each-other about.

After smoko it was time to move on, more of the common bush birds were seen, of particular note was the large numbers of Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes which slowly dwindled (although not completely) as I got closer to Mingela, and the Magpies and Pied Butcherbirds increased. Birds worth mentioning were a flock of about forty Budgerigars, and Diamond Doves which were often mixed in with the Peaceful Doves.

All up for the morning fifty-eight species were seen, unfortunately no Plum-headed Finches or White-winged Choughs.

Shane Crees

Photographs Ray Sutton



## LOS ANGELES

### From city to nature in southern California

Recently I had the opportunity to spend a couple of weeks working at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles county. I arrived in mid-April, which is the turn-around time of the winter migrants leaving to head north and summer migrants, particularly the New World warblers, arriving from the south. I have visited LA many times over decades past, but back then I was strictly work oriented. This was the first time that I had time to see a bit of nature in southern California.



Western Kingbird

Niel Bruce

LA County Museum (as it's known) is in the centre of the city, while where I stayed was close to the port of LA, right on the coast, at San Pedro. A short walk away is Cabrillo Beach, the cliffs of Point Fermin and some suburban and semi-natural parks. California's climate, as is well known, is arid, but there is a big difference between the cool coastal climate and that of the city. I arrived on a sparkling clear sunny day, rested up and went for an afternoon walk in the nearby Angel's Park, immediately seeing my first Western Kingbird. Initially I struggled with identifying this attractive yellow and grey bird until I realised that there were two similar species in the same small park, Cassin's Kingbird and Western Kingbird. Birding for the rest of the week was in the backyard and at the Museum's newly established nature garden. Diversity in the nature garden was inevitably not high, but both American Goldfinch and Lesser Goldfinch were always present as was Allen's Hummingbird (and once a Rufous Hummingbird) along with Mourning Doves, Mocking Birds, Black Phoebe, and once a Black-throated Gray Warbler. In the adjacent park was a resident Cooper's Hawk, and the endearing Bushtits were ever present.

Come the weekend I was determined to get down to Cabrillo Beach and the sea wall to see what remained of the winter shorebirds, ducks and loons, and to find the resident Black Skimmers. I set off early Saturday morning, straight into a dense fog. I could hardly see my feet, let alone terns and ducks on the ocean. I dithered, up to high ground above the fog (still

bleak), and then as the fog slowly eased I went back down to the sea wall; along the shore were Surfbirds, Marbled Godwits, Semipalmated Plover and Western Sandpiper, and while I could hear terns and gulls, the fog was too thick to see anything. Further along there was an immature Heerman's Gull among the Western Gulls, and eventually, out of the grey murk I could see Surf Scoter drifting and diving, and drifting very slowly into view, a Pacific Loon; among the sea wall rocks I was really pleased to see a number of Black Turnstones. The beach was entirely tern and skimmer free. Looking across the bay to next beach, I could see a group of birds and a brisk walk got me there in near sunny conditions. Right in front of me were about 70 Black Skimmer—a really special bird, a genus of only three species and the only bird that has the lower beak exceeding the upper beak; the beak of a skimmer is huge and presumably heavy, and a number of the birds rested with their beak flat on the sand; with the skimmers were Caspian Tern, Elegant Terns, one Royal Tern, and Ring-billed and Western Gulls.

The following week we headed to an amazing place—**Salton Sea**. Situated to the south of Palm Springs, this is an inland lake, 69 metres below sea level, and is some 60 km in length, 20 km at the widest. It was formed by an engineering 'error' that in 1905 resulted in the Colombia River overflowing and diverting for 18 months and flooding the valley. Being in a desert, the lake has subsequently become hypersaline (and possibly toxic from agricultural runoff), but hosts large numbers of shorebirds and water birds, while the surrounding agricultural and desert area has dry-country bush birds. Salton Sea has justifiably been described as the "*crown jewel of avian biodiversity*" with more than 400 recorded species, and hosting major populations of White Pelican, Black Skimmer, Yellow-footed Gull, American Avocet and is a major rest stop for shorebirds on the Pacific Flyway. At the southern end is the Sonny Bono Wildlife Refuge that, together with the Ramer Lake Reserve, provides for marvellous bird watching. My day there was memorable to say the least, a spectacular desert landscape, calm blue lake, flocks of White Pelicans, shorebirds in large number, the small Bonaparte's Gull, and a diversity of dry-country bush birds, such as Gambel's Quail, White-winged and Common Ground Doves, and the beautiful Yellow-headed Oriole.



Long-billed Dowitchers

Niel Bruce



The most challenging of shorebirds to identify were Short-billed and Long-Billed Dowitcher. Fortunately they seem particularly tolerant of humans, and I got many poor photographs. In the field they are debatably harder to separate than Grey-tailed and Wandering Tattlers. Breeding colour doesn't improve the situation; their calls are not very different (and they are mostly silent), and despite the names, beak length overlaps. I used three books, two being wader-specific guides, the most useful being *The Shorebird Guide* (O'Brien, Crossley & Karlson), which has many photos. One flock I could identify by call, but the remainder I identified from my photos. Photo here shows a group of Long-billed Dowitcher.

Returning from Palm Springs to LA we took in a morning at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, a wet valley with willows and other greenery set among the hillside desert. This valley was well populated with migrant warblers, including Townshend's, Yellow, Wilson's, McGillivray's Warblers and Yellowthroat—as well as the famous and resident pair of beautiful Vermillion Flycatchers. The 'surprise' in this dry place was a circling flock of White-faced Ibis (which I had failed to find at Salton Sea).

The last 'hot spot' to mention is the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve—a managed 'wilderness' in the city, just south of Long Beach. This site has a series of large tidal ponds, freshwater flows, saltmarsh, and smaller amounts of scrub and trees. It is famous for the winter ducks, shorebirds and holds a major population of the threatened Belding's Savannah Sparrow, Clapper Rail (heard but not seen on the day) as well as significant populations of Forester's and Least Terns. I visited on my last day in LA, early May, and too late for most of the migrant duck species, but was rewarded with Brant, Northern Shoveler, Lesser Scaup, Redhead, Gadwall and Blue-winged Teal, as well as a four species of grebe, resident Ruddy Duck and large numbers of Brown Pelican, Elegant Tern and Forsters' Tern.



*Ruddy Duck and Blue-winged Teal*



*Niel Bruce*

My final 'best' sighting was going up to the local Angel's Park at Point Fermin and noticing a bulky mass of twigs in the top of a eucalypt tree—when I put the binoculars on to it I was looking into the eyes of a Great Horned Owl.

*Niel Bruce*



*Skimmers*

*Niel Bruce*

## LAWN HILL

*A few weeks ago we took our caravan out to Lawn Hill for three days.*

Four years ago when we went to Lawn Hill, there was water around and we saw lots of Australian Pratincoles, hundreds of Budgerigars and quite a few Cockatiel. This year was very dry and we saw three Pratincoles, four Budgies and no Cockatiel.



*Golden-backed Honeyeater (Black-chinned) Ray Sutton*

A sprinkler was on at the Julia Creek caravan park and it was spraying onto a drain outside the fence as well as the grass inside. About eight Black-fronted Dotterels were playing around in the spray. A lone Masked Lapwing, a few Galahs and some Crested Pigeons made up the numbers. Next day a big group of Apostlebirds chased everyone around for bits of lunch at the Burke and Wills Roadhouse. We saw a few Wedge-tailed Eagles on road kill as well as lots of Black Kites and Crows.

We arrived at Lawn Hill about 3.30pm and set up down in the Grove. It was so dark down there. The Grey Shrike-thrush greeted us and stayed nearby all the time we were there. His song was the background noise all the time. We walked up to the top and there, in a little low shrub, we were greeted by a male Mistletoebird with a Mistletoe berry in his mouth. He sat perched about four feet above the ground and posed for endless photos, cocking his head on the side from time to time as if querying us strange two-legged creatures.

The tank was not overflowing so one of the staff ran a hose for us to fill up the little pool at the bottom. The Yellow-tinted and White-throated Honeyeaters were quick to arrive for a drink and a splash. I wandered off and Ray photographed a beautiful version of the Black-chinned Honeyeater known as the Golden-backed Honeyeater. It has a luminous green strip above the eye. I found the Buff-sided Robin in a garden patch.

Next day we took off for Lawn Hill National Park (Boodjamulla) in search of the Purple-crowned Fairy-wren. I eventually found two in the gloom by the side of the creek but Ray dipped. Back near the car park was a magnificent flowering gum which hosted Little and Silver-crowned Friarbirds, and Banded and

Brown Honeyeaters. We could hear lorikeets but could not see them.



Silver-crowned Friarbird

Annette Sutton

That night I became ill and spent the rest of the time sick in bed but Ray found the Varied Lorikeet, a Restless Flycatcher and a few others. Around Adels Grove there were Grey-crowned Babblers, White-browed Woodswallows, and Great Bowerbirds but no sign of the Long-tailed Finch. The staff said they have been overrun by feral cats and the Long-tailed Finches haven't been seen for a while. Ray saw a cat sitting in a tree just near the caravan. They are trapping as many as they can.



Mistletoebird

Annette Sutton

It is amazing how big a difference there can be in the birds you see from one year to another in the same place. 2009 was much more rewarding than 2013.

Annette Sutton

*The Aboriginal Waanyi people have lived in the gorge area for at least 17,000 years and know it as Boodjamulla, or Rainbow Serpent country. The Gorge is sacred to them. Midden heaps, camp sites, grinding stones, and rock art evidence the importance of this place. Today, the Waanyi people help manage the park.*

## CONSERVATION COLUMN

### The election issue.

Here is the petition from Birdlife Australia available to be signed:

*Dear Minister/Shadow Minister,*

*This election, we seek your support to commit annual funding to implement recovery plans for nationally threatened birds listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act).*

*Of utmost priority is funding for the 20 birds identified under the EPBC Act and Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010 as Critically Endangered. These birds are considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the near future.*

*BirdLife Australia has examined the known costs required to implement existing Australian Government threatened bird recovery plans for these birds and estimate imminent extinction could be prevented for an average \$380,000 per species.*

*Although we have lost more than 2% of our avifauna, Australia would have lost many more bird species had it not been for the concerted efforts of organisations and individuals to save birds and the funding provided for threatened species recovery. Australia has been remarkably effective at conserving threatened bird species where dedicated funding has been provided.*

*Despite the significant time that has been invested in listing and drafting recovery plans, progress in implementation has been poor. Resources available to the protection of Australia's most threatened species are grossly inadequate.*

*Over 25,000 BirdLife Australia supporters generously give their time and money to saving Australia's birds, but we are losing ground. We urgently need a commitment to the recovery of our most threatened birds.*

If members wish to support this relatively mild action, please go to the website and sign up. Very easy:

<http://www.savethebirds.org.au/give-threatened-birds-a-voice/>

Members might also look at poor decisions that adversely affect birds. Birdlife Australia has another petition to strengthen powers under the EPBC Act. Please have a look and perhaps sign the petition:

<http://www.savethebirds.org.au/save-our-birds-from-bad-decisions-and-weak-laws/>

These simple steps are really the least we can do as Birdlife Australia members to try and draw attention to the biodiversity crisis and the impacts our precious birds are feeling. The overall investment in conservation of birds in Australia is truly pathetic and yet our generation has a huge responsibility to stop



the decline now. Can we at least do a little bit in this election year? If you have a more active intent, perhaps write to the Federal Member for Herbert and seek commitment to conservation ahead of development in the case of bird species. Perhaps highlight this to all the candidates. One critical need is a means of combating feral cats across Australia, especially the present plague in all the National Parks. Who will try and address this?

*Peter Valentine 8th August, 2013.*

## ROSS RIVER DAM

Recently the club went for the annual cruise on Lake Ross with Pop Sullivan.

It was a magic day and the 6.30am start found everyone looking forward to some good birding. There were plenty of Pelicans and Black Swans. We cruised past a spit where a Whistling Kite was busy devouring a Glossy Ibis for his breakfast. Then before the startled eyes of those up the front, a juvenile White-bellied Sea-Eagle dived down and plucked a luckless coot from a line of four swimming along. And then there were three. It was reminiscent of the capture of a cygnet a couple of years ago.



*Male Bustard*

*Annette Sutton*

We went for a long ride up towards the Toonpan area in search of a male Bustard in full breeding behaviour. There he was on the bank, his sac inflated and his tail cocked. *Australian Bustards breed once a year. When mating, the males clear a display area, then inflate a large throat sac, producing a loud, deep roaring noise, while they strut around with their tails cocked high. (Australian Museum).*

Back towards Kelso we came to a group of melaleucas which contained a breeding colony of Pied Cormorants. At least one had three young in the nest.

Further on we disembarked on an island. Out came the scopes to check out the ducks in the distance. Over 350 Freckle Ducks and more than 260 Pink-eared. Not bad for a morning's work.



*Pied Cormorant and young*

*Annette Sutton*

Welcome Swallows danced around the boat and we made our way back to the embarkation point and finished up with a great brunch of delicious fruit, bacon, eggs, baked beans and toast, thanks to the catering skills of Malcolm and Lenore.

*Annette Sutton*

## SURPRISE AT MUNGALLA

While on BirdLife Townsville campout at Mungalla in June I spotted a Drongo in a tree near the homestead. On closer inspection I saw that it was eating a young bird. I suspect that the meal was a young White-breasted Woodswallow that were plentiful and probably nesting in the area at the time. I was able to get reasonably close to the Drongo as it was too interested in its fresh meal. When photographing birds you have to be lucky every now and again!

*Story and Photo*

*Ian Boyd*





## A BIRDING ADVENTURE

Last year I went on a cruise around the world for three and a half months.

I travelled to thirty-two countries and thirty-nine ports. I was hoping to see a variety of birds in various places but was disappointed to find that so many areas are virtually devoid of birds and other wildlife of any kind.



The first place I saw any birds after leaving Australian waters was at the Jurong Bird Park in Singapore. This park is very well kept and is a pleasure to visit. So many of the birds from all over the world are free to fly and go where they please. Only some species are kept in huge aviaries.

Many species of parrots and lorikeets, including several Australian parrots, were in a vast enclosure. It was wonderful to see so many beautiful coloured birds being able to fly around among the trees without being too restricted.

I really enjoyed watching the flamingos from different countries. I saw at least three different flocks feeding around lakes and they were free to fly anywhere. The flamingos were different colours, depending where they came from. Besides the pink flamingos from some areas of Africa there were bright orange ones from the Caribbean. Their colour probably depends on what they eat. These birds seemed very content in their surroundings and the regular food supply keeps them there.

There were pink ibis, pink spoonbills and lots of beautiful blue and gold macaws flying about. The bird park has many birds along with magnificent orchids growing everywhere and a great penguin display of several species of these amazing birds. Jurong Bird Park is well worth a visit if you are in Singapore.

After travelling through the Panama Canal, our ship called into Puntarenas, a port in Costa Rica. I was really looking forward to a cruise through the mangrove forests on small boats. After leaving the cruise ship in Puntarenas, we travelled several kilometres by bus through rainforest. Soon we came

to where the small boats were waiting to take us on a trip down through tall mangroves forests. So much of their rainforest is still intact and unspoiled.

Soon we saw what we hoped to see. Several crimson macaws were seen at close range and flocks of others flying overhead. It was a great trip down through the mangroves as we saw several other birds close up as we cruised along in the small open boats. The small waterway opened out into a tidal region where we also saw twenty crocodiles, only smaller than our crocs in Australia.

The birds seen on this trip included the following:- Cattle Egrets, Great Egrets, Small Blue Heron, Large Blue Heron, Striated Heron, Yellow-crowned Heron, Green-backed Heron, Tiger Heron (as big as our Jabiru), Boat Bill Egret, Black Buzzards, Mangrove Warblers, Frigate Birds, Mangrove Swallows, Stork Brown Pelicans, and more. We also saw green and brown iguanas squirrels and the noisy Howler monkeys. For the time we spent on the cruise in the mangroves we saw an amazing number of birds.

In the north island of New Zealand on the north – west coast we saw a colony of gannets on the tall cliffs above the sea. There were at least two thousand of them, nesting in the grass. This was a wonderful sight. They were white with buff colour on their wings with yellow bills and some black markings on their faces.

I saw areas in Egypt where the Egyptians breed homing pigeons in large rounded bee-hive shape nesting areas. They eat the young squabs.



Flamingoes

Annette Sutton

The only other place I saw any birds was in Hawaii. These were domestic hens that had escaped from chook farms years ago after destructive storms. Now these chickens run wild all over the place and have bred up over the years.

It was so great to get back home to Australia and back to Townsville as we have so many birds here, even if it was to hear the screeching cockatoos in my back yard.

Flo Hemsley

## QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Chris Ezzy	349	15/12/2013
Len Ezzy	347	13/12/2013
Ian Leach	315	11/11/2013
Janet Robino	310	6/11/2013
Niel Bruce	304	31/10/2013
Rosemary Payet	293	20/10/2013
Ian Boyd	287	14/10/2013
Marleen Acton	283	10/10/2013
Joan Wharton	279	6/10/2013
Lenore Calvert	278	5/10/2013
Greg Calvert	276	3/10/2013
Malcolm Calvert	276	3/10/2013
Peter Valentine	264	21/09/2013
Cecily Messer	252	9/09/2013
Annette Sutton	248	5/09/2013
Elna Kerswell	245	2/09/2013
Alf Acton	233	21/08/2013
Warren Charlton	225	13/08/2013
Beth Snewin	223	11/08/2013
Wendy Kaus	221	9/08/2013
Pat Charlton	221	9/08/2013
Alex Canton	212	31/07/2013
Mark Horvath	199	18/07/2013

## CALENDAR

### September 2013

**1<sup>st</sup> - Sunday - Town Common** - Meet at the main gate **6.30am**.

**11<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Small Birds** Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

**14<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00pm) and General Meeting (2.00pm)** Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. **Guest Speaker - Peter Valentine.**

**15<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam** - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am.

**18<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Bush Garden** - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am.

**29<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Sunday Outing - Bluewater Range** - Meet adjacent to the RAAF Base Duckworth St gate for a departure at 6.30 sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch.

### October 2013

**5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> (Saturday to Monday) - Mungalla Campout.** This campout will be run in conjunction with the national BirdLife Photography 'Photography in the Bush' forum being held in the Ingham area over this long weekend **6<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Town Common** - Meet at the main gate 6.30am.

**9<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Anything Goes. 12<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00pm) and General Meeting (2.00pm)** Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. No guest speaker as there will be trivia quiz.

**16<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Bush Garden** - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am.

**20<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam** - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am.

**29<sup>th</sup> - Sunday Outing - Serpentine and Horseshoe Lagoon Loop** - Meet at the Palmetum for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged.

## INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

Birds	Date	Place	Observer
Little Kingfisher	3/7/2013	Ross River, near Rossiter Park	Malcolm & Lenore Calvert
Collared Sparrowhawk	June 2013	Hermit Park	Pat Robinson
Night Parrot	26/5/2013	Western Queensland	John Stewart (accompanied by John Young)
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	23/7/2013	Barramundi Lagoon	Angela Ward & Ian Leach
Freckled Ducks 350+	28/7/2013	Lake Ross Outing	Birdlife Townsville members
Pied Butcherbirds 2	17/7/2013	Camp St, Mundingburra	Cecily Messer
Little Bronze-Cuckoo	29/7/2013	2nd viewing area at Common	C.Messer, Beth Snewin, Elna Kerswell, Wendy Kaus
Tawny Grassbird	29/7/2013	2nd viewing area at Common	C.Messer, Beth Snewin, Elna Kerswell, Wendy Kaus
Lovely Fairy-wren	5/8/2013	Creek at foot of range at Forestry Rd, Bluewater	Beth Snewin, Elna Kerswell, Wendy Kaus
<i>Azure Kingfisher</i>	<i>8/6/2013</i>	<i>Rollingstone</i>	<i>Geoff Brown</i>
<i>Black-chinned Honeyeater</i>	<i>6/8/2013</i>	<i>Ross River Dam Borrow Pits Kelso</i>	<i>Ivor Preston</i>
<i>Latham's Snipe</i>	<i>4/8/2013</i>	<i>Ross River Dam Borrow Pits Kelso</i>	<i>Ed Pierce</i>
<i>Australian Little Bittern</i>	<i>27/7/2013</i>	<i>Tyto Wetlands, Ingham</i>	<i>Tony Ashton</i>
<i>Australasian Shoveler</i>	<i>20/7/2013</i>	<i>Mungalla Station (Forrest Beach, Queensland)</i>	<i>Tony Ashton</i>
★ <i>Freckled Duck, Pink-eared Duck</i>	<i>18/7/2013</i>	<i>Townsville Town Common Conservation Park</i>	<i>Niel Bruce</i>
<i>Lesser Sand-Plover, Red-necked Stint</i>	<i>14/7/2013</i>	<i>Benwell</i>	<i>Ed Pierce</i>

Entries in Italics are taken from Eremaea 7/8/2013

## RED-KNEED DOTTERELS

This month it is Red-kneed Dotterels that seem to be everywhere. They are outnumbering the Black-fronted at Mungalla and Masters Road. It is so great to see so many of them locally.

