

The Drongo

Number 134 August 2014



Sandra Sampson

Bamaga

PIPs

Inkerman



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Plans are in full swing for celebrating Bird Week, but as usual, BirdLife Townsville will have Bird Week for the whole month of October. Norm is in the process of organizing displays in the Aitkenvale and City Libraries. We are also hoping to do a couple of community education sessions on Back Yard Birds. If you would like to be involved, please contact Norm at contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au.

The Christmas Party will be on Saturday 13 December. Venue is to be the Suburban Bowls Club. So put the date in your calendar and brush up on your bowling skills! Nina has promised to confuse us all with a Christmas Trivia Quiz once again. Even if you don't get to any of the birding events, the Christmas Party is a fun way to get to know other members of the club and have a really great time in the process. All the details will be provided closer to the date.

The green club shirts have proven to be very popular with members. Members look very smart in the shirts at meetings and when doing presentations on behalf of the club. We have had several requests for a long-sleeved club shirt for out-door activities. The committee is working with the suppliers and will be in a position to 'launch' the new shirt and take orders in the next few weeks.

BirdLife Australia's Branch Liaison Person, Fiona Blandford will be attending the November Club meeting. This will be a good opportunity to ask questions about how BirdLife Australia and the branches work together. The committee will be asking Fiona to clarify some real concerns we have about the Safety and Insurance issues. If you have any particular queries, let us know by sending an email to contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au. We can send the queries down to Fiona so she can get the right information for us.

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

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Conservation Officer: Garrie Douglas
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GANNET COLONY (NZ)

During my trip to NZ in November 2013, after the Pelagic Tour out of Kaikoura, I headed north, to visit the Gannet Colony on Farewell Spit, at the top of the South Island. Farewell Spit runs off Cape Farewell, the most northerly point in the South Island.

I overnighted on the 3rd November, at Richmond, Nelson, and was on the road early to Collingwood. This takes one through two small towns, Motueka, then over the Takaha Range to Takaha, and some small settlements, and numerous one-way bridges.. (At Motueka I found a pork and apple pie – to die for – it became lunch at Collingwood!) Collingwood is the start point for the tours. It is a pleasant little village, with a sheltered harbour. These days there is no hint of gold rush pioneering days, when it was touted as a possibility to be NZ's capital city.



Californian Quail

Over lunch, I had a great view of a local Californian Quail putting on a spectacular dust bath storm. Other birds that were viewed in this time were Blackbirds, Little Shag, Red-billed Gull, and Welcome Swallows. There was only one other couple on the 1p.m. tour, and Murray Marshall, the driver of the mini bus, was to prove to be a capable guide. It was a perfect day for the tour, blue skies, light cloud, and a light breeze, and from the beach one could see to the north-west, on the horizon, Mt. Taranaki (Mt. Egmont), in the North Island.

The fauna on the beach included many NZ Fur Seals, and birds sighted included Caspian Terns, Bar-tailed Godwits, Oyster Catchers, Varied Oyster Catchers, and Lesser Knots. It takes about 2 hours to drive to the a near point for the Gannet colony, and then a further twenty minute walk, (part of which is in muddy, sloppy, wet sand), to reach the actual viewing point for the colony..

There are some 5000 birds in this colony, the only one at sea level. Not only the Gannets have a colony here, but so do the Caspian Terns. The Gannets have two distinct colonies, with a Caspian Tern colony between them. Viewing is as close as 50 metres, and it is two way, as inquisitive Gannets checked us out, with low level passes around us.



Gannet Colony

On the walk back to the van, we were introduced to Lesser Knott poo, much of which was evident on the ground. Evidently the deposits had been the recent subject of intense study and analysis by a PhD student.

After leaving the colony, we headed back up the Spit, and stopped at the lighthouse and the three light house keepers cottages for afternoon tea. The light house is in remarkable condition for a 116 years old steel structure. Now fully automated and electric, the houses are no longer in use. There is a complete Minke Whale skeleton on view near the lighthouse.



New Zealand Fur Seal

One more stop on the return trip was to climb one of the spectacular Barkhan (name is of Russian origin), sand dunes. These dunes are formed (and move a few km/yr), by the predominately westerly winds. The gently sloping face to the ridge is into the wind, and the steep slip face and "horns" are away from the wind. It is great to run down the steep face and trigger avalanches of sand!!

A great afternoon! Highly recommended!!

Story and Photographs

Graeme Cooksley

www.farewellspit.com

BAMAGA

Ever since knowing I have relatives working on Thursday Island, I have wanted to visit Brian and Ghislaine and explore the region. However I found that birds were being reported from Bamaga rather than TI. Bamaga is only a ferry ride (1 & 1/4 hrs) from TI so I contacted Rob Reed and was thrilled to be invited to go birding with him. He would make sure he was rostered off for the weekend I would be there. What a treat! Rob has lived in Bamaga for many years, has studied the topographic maps and knows the area, birds and their calls intimately.

I arrived at Seisa and was driven the 7 kms to Bamaga where I settled into a comfortable eco tent with fridge, jug and toaster all close to the shower block. The Resort sits on Mosby Creek, a typical rainforest creek with Yellow Orioles and Helmeted Friarbirds contributing to the dawn chorus. Other large Eucalypts dot the Resort and can be resting places for Palm Cockatoo. Bamaga is a small township equipped with a store, hotel, service station and hospital and is close to the rainforest of Lockerbie Scrub, the huge dense mangroves of Muddy Bay, wet sandy heathlands near the Jardine River as well as areas of open forest woodland.



Lockerbie Scrub

Joan Wharton

Day 1. Equipped with a mud map (maps of the township seem not to exist) I hired a car from the Resort at \$150 a day - not to be taken off the bitumen but covered in red dust - drove 13 kms - a good lesson: next time walk! The creek crossing about 3 kms from town was the ideal spot to set up my scope and watch several species of honeyeater come in to drink and bathe: White-throated, Brown, Brown-backed, Yellow and White-streaked, the afternoon sun highlighting the yellow patch along its throat. My first Lifer! Rob met me at 5 on Friday evening and we were off to see Trumpet Manucode and Tawny-breasted Honeyeater.

Day 2. Saturday morning was spent at Lockerbie Scrub with Rob naming species as they called and my getting familiarised with calls differing somewhat from those around Townsville - even for the same species (eg Brown Honeyeater). At Muddy Bay (open forest, mangroves, flooded

paperbark and rainforest) we had very clear views of Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Red-headed, Yellow-spotted, Dusky, Tawny-breasted and Varied Honeyeaters. The male Fairy Gerygone's black throat with white tear drops was a surprise and it was wonderful to see Trumpet Manucode, a Palm Cockatoo feeding and other rainforest species such as Spectacled Monarch, Large-billed Gerygone and Tropical Scrubwren.

Birding continued late afternoon, travelling past the local sewerage ponds and tip through open woodland ... where I was surprised to see that the Pale-headed Rosellas seemed a little different from those normally seen around Townsville. To me they were more squat and their red vents very obvious as they flew in front of the car just above eye level. Maybe it was the angle at which I saw these birds that gave me an impression of their differing size and colour so I would love to hear what other people report when visiting the area. A sandy Heath area was alive with honeyeaters and while we listened for Bar-breasted we did hear a Banded Honeyeater call. It was a little early in the season for them to be there in large numbers.

The Jardine River at sunset was tranquil, the ferry inactive and campers were preparing for the night on the other side. No sign of the crocodiles which ply its waters. On our return journey we encountered a Southern Boobook by the side of the road at Sanamere Crossing and about 10 kms north of the Jardine an Eastern Barn Owl flew up almost onto the windscreen.

Day 3: We targeted several species I had only heard the previous day. Highlights included good views of Tropical Scrubwren as they moved like lightning through vines; a pair of Frilled-neck Monarchs; and a colourful party of Lovely Fairy-wren including at least 2 males, 2 males in eclipse and 6 females. A delight!

The evening expedition took us to the eastern side of the Cape, past a WWII Military Encampment, the wreck of a Beaufort Bomber and the Jacky Jacky Boat Ramps to the Woomera Creek Terminal Extent where mangroves and paperbark meet and Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds come in to roost in the evenings. We waited as the sun went down and birds flew into the tops of dead trees. Two stayed and we were able to study then through the scope for at least 10 minutes. A very good Lifer!

Day 4: After a very full weekend I set about a more leisurely day, visiting the Bakery and store before setting out on foot to find the Northern Scrub Robin. However I was accompanied by a one-eyed dog (Pirate) who would not leave me. While I did have an interesting sighting of a Palm Cockatoo with only half a red face patch and saw a pair of Grey Goshawks circling over the tip with other kites, I had no luck with the Robin with a dog in tow.

Each night I heard the familiar "woof woof" of the Barking Owl but surprisingly the one I saw near the cemetery was much darker than our Townsville species. The experience of the evening was being "up close and familiar" with a Marbled Frogmouth who was not disturbed by our presence. We heard the call

of the female as well and a few minutes further on another was perched low down on the side of a tree as we passed.



Joan at the Tip

My time at Bamaga was concluded by a boat trip with fisherman Tim Freebody who took me to Woody Is to see Yellow and Pale White-eye and Mangrove Golden Whistler (f) and on to Greater Woody to sit and watch Mangrove Robin (darker in plumage than those at Cairns) feed happily almost at our feet. I wasn't one of the many tourists whose dusty red vehicles ploughed on to THE TIP but the tourist in me still wanted to go there so I did it in style, boating past islands and historical landmarks, sighting a Brown Booby, and enjoying the ocean and sunshine.

Birding in Bamaga was an experience of a lifetime. Rob was a delightful companion who was able to fill in gaps in my historical knowledge of the area and personalities such as the Jardine Brothers, as well as broaden my horizons with stories of living in a remote community such as Bamaga. He documents his sightings on Ebird, hoping that the birds of the area will become better known and that birders such as myself will be tempted to venture there as well.

Joan Wharton

THEY'RE BACK

The Bush Stone-curlews are back on Woolcock Street, outside the showgrounds, just before you reach the drain/canal. Drove past there yesterday afternoon about 2.45pm and counted 15. Could be more hiding behind the trees. Have never seen such a large gathering in one place before.

Angela Ward



Bush Stone-curlew Family

Annette Sutton

PIPS

Pied Imperial-pigeon foraging habitat – an unsolved puzzle

Monitoring of Pied Imperial-pigeons (PIPs) in the Mission Beach area began on the recommendation of Dr John Winter, with the first counts organised in 2007 by Jo Wieneke. The project was supported initially by BA and BOCA and now by Birdlife North Queensland and Birdlife Townsville.



Individual PIPs sometimes forage in parks and gardens, like this one in Cairns, but important foraging areas for island-breeding PIP colonies remain unknown. [Photo Julia Hazel]

The original objective was to understand the use of mainland habitat by the PIP colony on North Brook Island. The island colony was decimated fifty years ago by recreational shooters. PIP numbers have shown a gratifying partial recovery since protective legislation was enforced. However, the increase has been very slow, probably due to loss of foraging habitat.

PIPs choose to nest and roost on small islands that offer safety but lack food. To breed successfully, the birds must make daily trips to the mainland to feed. However, no one knows which mainland areas are most important for them, and potentially in need of long-term protection.

For the past seven years, total PIP numbers observed at our regular Mission Beach sites have been modest (details in *The Drongo* no. 131, February 2014). If North Brook Island was the destination of all PIPs observed heading in that direction, the birds we counted would have comprised only a tiny proportion – on average 1% – of the island colony.

So, where do 99% of North Brook PIPs forage? And where do PIPs from other island colonies forage? To find answers, we are working to extend the PIP monitoring project's coverage. New sites were counted for the first time in 2013 and we are hoping for more participants this year.

Please help with the next round of counts if you can. It only needs one afternoon at a pleasant coastal site,

on any day in November that suits you. Choose your own site, or team up with others. Please contact Julia Hazel (julia.hazel@jcu.edu.au) or download count information from pipwatch.net

NEW SITES IN 2013

The first stage of expanding the PIP monitoring project began last year with great help from people spread out between Portland Roads and Hay Point. They conducted independent counts while travelling or near their home areas, following the standard afternoon count protocol. We received record sheets for 32 new sites and some people also did follow-up counts at their sites, very valuable for assessing day-to-day variation. Huge thanks to all participants!

Biggest numbers were observed at beaches near Cooya, Newell and Wonga. Counters in that area had a combined tally of 2,702 departing PIPs, all apparently heading for Low Isles. A non-concurrent count at Low Isles (conducted 10 days later by the island caretakers and local volunteers) reported a total of 22,942 incoming PIPs.

These counts suggest that forests inland of the Cooya to Wonga coastline were providing forage for more than 10% of the Low Isles colony at that time. And where were the foraging areas for about 20,000 other PIPs that flew out to Low Isles? No one saw them depart. Hopefully more observers in November 2014 will help to fill in the gaps.



Philip Haig, youngest of many wonderful contributors to the 2013 coast count, kept watch at Saunders Beach with the help of his Mum and little sisters. [Photo courtesy Julia Haig]

One other site reported a large number: Weary Bay had 1,465 PIPs flying out, potentially heading for Hope Isles. The birds observed could have represented around 3% of the Hope Isles PIP colony, if it had maintained numbers reported in 2008. There is no recent data for Hope Isles.

Portland Roads, the northern-most new count site, had no PIP flocks heading off the coast. In mangroves nearby, over a hundred PIPs were observed roosting but no nests were seen. Rocky Island, close to Portland Roads, had no PIPs although a large colony existed previously. On the positive side, anecdotal accounts were passed on, indicating large numbers of PIPs (not counted) at some islands in the far north.

Surprisingly, no one reported PIP flocks flying out near Cairns, although PIPs can be seen in and around the city throughout the summer and many nest nearby at Green Island. Palm Cove and Yorkey's Knob, the only count sites in this area, had no departing PIPs.

Counts along the next stretch of coast indicated some PIPs apparently nest or roost on the Frankland and Barnard Islands. However, there was no evidence of very large numbers. Highest totals were Russell River 228, Cowley Beach 108 and Kurrimine 200. Three other sites reported zero to 15 PIPs.

A little further south, Hull Heads, Googara and Cardwell seemed well-situated to observe a substantial proportion of the North Brook Island population, but there were very few PIPs to be seen. The combined tally for these three sites was only 266.

The Townsville region had counts at scattered sites between Saunders Beach and the Ross River mouth. Three sites reported no PIPs, 4 departures were reported from Saunders Beach and three to six PIPs (on different days) were seen leaving Rowes Bay, potentially heading for Magnetic Island.



From the archives: the first Mission Beach PIP count in 2007. Organizer Jo Wieneke is second from left. [Photo courtesy Ian Montgomery]

Further south there were no departures at Cape Gloucester and zero to 12 at sites near Sarina. According to anecdotal reports, rats had devastated the breeding colony that existed previously on Irving Island. More encouraging was the report of 400 to 500 PIPs (on different days) flying out near Hay Point. These birds were thought to be roosting on a small island nearby but there was no confirmation of nesting.

Considering the November 2013 coastal observations overall, it was worrying that more than half the new sites had zero counts, although all sites were within flight range of islands currently or previously hosting breeding PIPs.

This might indicate former colonies have diminished or disappeared. On the other hand, many PIPs could have flown out unobserved due to very wide spacing between count sites. Hopefully many more PIPs will be recorded if we have more count sites this year.

Please help with the next round of counts if you can. It only needs one afternoon at a pleasant coastal site, on any day in November that suits you. Choose your own site, or team up with others. Please contact Julia Hazel (julia.hazel@jcu.edu.au) or download count information from pipwatch.net

Julia Hazel

TORRES STRAIT

During my stay on Thursday Island I asked my cousin if she knew any birders and mentioned John Wren's name as I had heard he was living in the Torres Strait even though I had never met him. Providentially Laura happened to ring Ghislaine at work and she made the connection. So John and Camilla picked me up in their boat one morning and took me to where they live self sufficiently on Prince of Wales, the largest of the Torres Strait Islands.

After a specially prepared morning tea we went in John's very capable little vehicle to The Homestead Waterhole where an Azure Kingfisher kept us entranced. Fish were jumping to catch mating dragonflies and the kingfisher caught three while we watched and photographed it. I later saw a TV program which explained how special oils on the Azure Kingfisher's eyes enable it to see clearly through the water and dive precisely at its target. This "technology" has been replicated in aircraft so that objects below the surface of the ocean can be detected.

From the spring-fed waterhole, once the water supply and site of a cattle property homestead, we bumped and thumped our way to The Fly Trap, so called because a remnant trap remains hanging from a tree. In the past flies were caught here and examined in the hope of detecting any diseases that might enter Australia through the islands. The Tip of the Cape is only 180 kms from PNG.

Although we didn't see a great number of birds we did see an Osprey with nesting material - a large bent stick - that it was carrying to a known nesting site at Blue Fish Point. In the eucalypt woodland we saw Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Black-faced and White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike. Wattle was just coming into flower so the only Honeyeater species seen was Yellow-spotted.

Among the 13 species seen were Varied Triller, Rainbow Bee-eater, Bar-shouldered Dove, Rainbow Lorikeets, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Blue-winged Kookaburra.

John sends his greetings to all and his sightings will be on Ebird. I even had the privilege of seeing him perform The Pelican Dance!



John Wren and Family

Joan Wharton

Joan Wharton

TREK TO WA

Warren and I recently completed a ten week



Gang-gang Cockatoo

Nick Gibson

trip starting at Pentland (Qld) with our annual camp with members of BirdLife Townsville. It was very dry this year with no water in the dam and this resulted in fewer species of birds but we did see White-eared Honeyeaters, Spotted Bowerbirds, Fairy and Buff-rumped Thornbills, Variegated and Red-backed Fairy-wrens, Little and White-browed Woodswallows to name just some.

Although our trip's purpose was not specifically bird watching, we did take note of what we saw along our route and I'll mention some of the highlights. Between Moree and Narrabri (NSW), there were large numbers of Black-shouldered Kites and on the road verges were Blue Bonnet and Red-rumped Parrots.

Canberra - the weather was not favourable and because of high winds we couldn't visit the Botanical Gardens but at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, the highlights were Australian Shovelers, Spotted Pardalote, Double-barred Finches, and driving around we saw Wedge-tailed Eagles, Gang-gang Cockatoos and White-winged Choughs. Next stop at Chiltern (Vic) - a Regent Honeyeater was in a similar place to where we saw it last year; high in an ironbark tree. In the caravan park, Flame and Scarlet Robins were entrancing - also good views of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters.

Cobram - there were good views of Eastern and Yellow Rosella, Australian Shelduck, Little Eagle and Pink-eared Ducks. Waikerie (SA) - a walk along the Murray River gave us Red-kneed Dotterel, Superb Fairywren, Yellow Rosella, Pink-eared Duck, Spotted Harrier and Chestnut-crowned Babbler. White Dam Conservation Park - a long lunch stop between Waikerie and Port Augusta where we saw Southern Whiteface, Red-capped Robin, Variegated Fairy-wren, Shy Heath-wren, Yellow and Chestnut-rumped Thornbill and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater.

Port Augusta - Lots of Singing Honeyeaters and Yellow-throated Miner, also Yellow-plumed and White-plumed Honeyeaters. The White-winged Fairy-wren at the Arid Lands Botanical Gardens were fairly elusive but showed themselves fleetingly along with

Port Lincoln Ringneck Parrots and Southern Whiteface. On the salt flats at the eastern entrance of the town, there were approx one thousand Pied Stilts and two Black-winged Stilts. (sic)

Lake Gillies National Park – another long lunch stop near Kimba on Eyre Peninsula: here we saw Striated Pardalote, Weebill, Red-capped Robin, White-browed Babbler, Inland Thornbill, Port Lincoln Ringneck, Splendid Fairy-wren to name just a few. Ceduna: the last major stop before heading into WA. As we used to live there, visiting friends was a priority but we did manage to get the binoculars out and see one Banded Stilt and one Avocet on salt flats behind the Fruit Fly Checkpoint on the western side of the town. Also Bronzewing, Pied and Sooty Oystercatcher, Black-faced Cormorant and Marsh Harrier were seen.

Our next stop was Head of Bight near Nullarbor Station and where the nearby aboriginal community at Yalata have a tourist venture to view Southern Right whales when they come in to calve. A lot of whales were seen along with two Kestrels perched on the cliff edge and two Singing Honeyeaters (one was quite tame and very photogenic at the visitors centre).

Continuing into WA between Mundrabilla and Madura, we saw five Wedge-tailed Eagles and a number of Brown Songlarks. A quick stop at Newman Rocks gave us good views of Southern Whiteface, Gilberts Whistler, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, and Crested Bellbird. Our next stop for the night was Fraser Range Station – Grey Currawong was the first bird we saw, then Emu, Port Lincoln Ringneck and Purple-crowned Lorikeet. Travelling on, our next stop was Esperance with glorious scenery in the Cape Le Grande NP. Here we saw our first Western Spinebill, Western Wattlebird and Tawny-crowned Honeyeater. Also seen were large numbers of Australian Shelduck. A good spot to visit around Esperance was the Lake Monjigup Nature Reserve. A new bird for us was the Red-capped Parrot; we also saw Hoary-headed Grebe, Chestnut Teal, Musk Duck and more Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters. Fan-tailed cuckoos were calling everywhere.

Bremer Bay on the Western side of the Fitzgerald NP



Australian Shelduck

Annette Sutton

was our next stop and although we were a bit early to see lots of wild flowers, there were some to be seen here. Also there were SR whales at Pt Anne with distant views of Orcas. White-crowned Babbler and Brown Falcon were also seen. We continued west to

Cheynes Beach and our bird list here was quite extensive. The highlights were Western Rosella, Red-eared Firetail Finch, Noisy Scrub-bird, White-fronted Robin, Carnaby's Black Cockatoo, Splendid Fairy-wren, Boobook Owl. Grey Fantail (different to the eastern one) and more SR whales. On to Two Peoples Bay near Albany and we saw more Canaby's Black Cockatoo and Bush Bronzewing.



Red-rumped Parrot

Ray Sutton

At Albany we visited a friend and did some side trips including the Porongurups and had good views of the Purple-capped Lorikeet, Red-winged Fairy-wren, Rufous Tree-creeper, White-fronted Robin, Ringneck Parrot (28) amongst others.

Heading home we visited the Stirling Range NP and stayed at the retreat there. Here we added the Elegant Parrot, Western Yellow Robin and White-naped Honeyeater to our trip list. Later in the year, this is a good place to view wild flowers but we were too early. Hopetoun on the east side of Fitzgerald NP was an extra on our itinerary and well worth it for the spectacular scenery and gave Reef Egret (dark morph) and a flock of Red-necked Avocets.

We returned east via the Eyre Highway as far as Wirrulla and then turned north east through the Gawler Ranges to Kingoonya and Glendambo on the Stuart Highway. Near Lake Hart we passed a small water filled lake and glimpsed birds. We had to do a U-turn with the van on the back and saw thousands of Pink-eared Ducks, as well as Black Swans, Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebes, Black-winged Stilts, Red-kneed and Black-fronted Dotterel, Grey Teal, Hardhead, Musk Duck, and Brown Song-lark – it was definitely worth our effort!

At Lake Hart near Woomera, a salt lake covered with water after a good wet winter for a change, we saw Singing Honeyeater, Brown Song-lark and two Bourke's Parrots. We left the Stuart Highway at Pimba and drove through Woomera, Roxby Downs to Marree at the southern end of the Birdsville Track seeing Zebra Finches, White-winged Fairy-wrens with others. Travelling up the Birdsville Track, we made an overnight stop at Mungerannie Roadhouse and camped at the edge of a waterhole, giving us good views of Australian Reed-Warbler, Blue Bonnet Parrot and flocks totalling approximately forty Brolgas.

Leaving Mungerannie, we continued north adding two new birds – the Gibber Bird and Cinnamon Quail-thrush. We crossed into Queensland just south east of Birdsville for our next overnight stop. Here on a bore drain we picked up a female Orange Chat and

Red-rumped Parrots. Continuing north to Boulia, we started to see big flocks of Budgies and more Brolgas, Cockatiels, and a couple of Australian Pratincoles. From Boulia we turned east to Winton – very dry everywhere. In one area we counted eighteen Wedge-tailed Eagles along with Black and Whistling Kites feeding on road kill. As a final treat we had two night's camping at Bladensburg NP south of Winton – still some water in the waterhole at the camping ground attracting Zebra Finches, Red-winged and Australian Ringneck Parrots, Grey-crowned Babblers, Spotted Bowerbird, Diamond Dove, large flocks of White Plumed Honeyeaters, Spinifex Pigeon and Budgies. Our last night on the road was spent at Pentland – still no water in the dam but plenty of bush birds to be seen nearby including White-throated Gerygone and Rufous Whistler. All in all quite a productive and trouble free trip.

Warren and Pat Charlton

EUBENANGEE

On a recent visit to family in Babinda, my sister and I snuck away for a little bit of birding. We went to Eubenangee Swamp National Park, just outside Mirriwinni on the Bramston Beach Road. According to National Parks *'One of the most important wetlands between Ingham and Cairns, Eubenangee Swamp is a birdwatchers' paradise. A walk to the swamp offers the opportunity to see over 190 bird species.'*

There is a short walk through a bit of forest and then up a grassy hill on well-maintained paths. Once at the top of the hill, there is the most marvellous view stretching over a large swamp area, cane fields all the way to Mount Battle Frere. From previous visits we were very aware of the resident crocodiles. As soon as we got there a croc about three metres in length slithered up onto the bank (a long way below thank goodness) to get warm in the early morning sun. He was soon joined by a slightly larger friend. And then, the biggest croc I've seen in the wild in Australia appeared. It was black in colour and absolutely 'gianormous'!

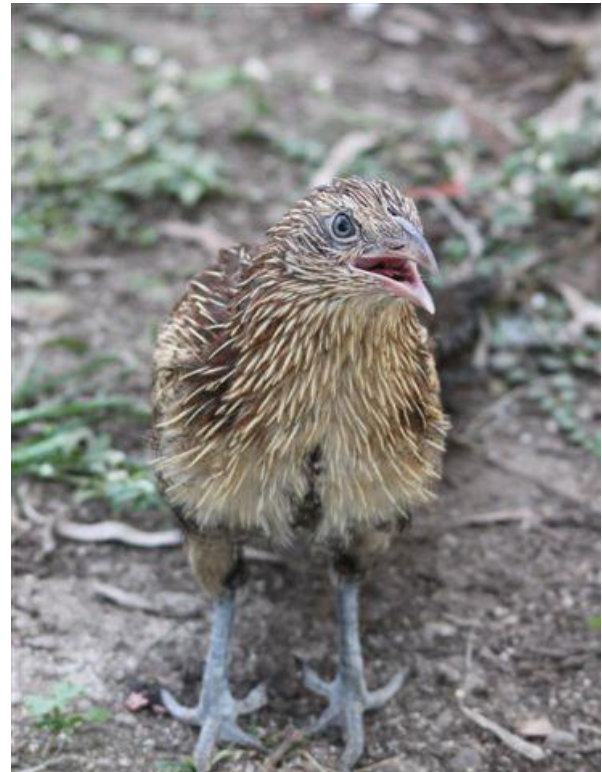


Great-billed Heron

While all this excitement was going on a Great-billed Heron flew in and sat in a paperbark about 10 metres away from the sunbathing crocs. We didn't see many other birds, but I figure a Great-billed Heron makes it a good birding day every time.

Janet Robino

COLIN -A REAL CHARACTER



Colin came to reside with us after a traumatic event in which his only sibling was killed by dogs after both young birds were prematurely released in the suburbs, having being reared in the city by a carer. He (or possibly she) is a bird of distinction, very well-dressed for a teenager, although his current clobber will change for the better as he matures, especially when enters his first breeding season.

His eyes are currently grey/blue, another sign of his immaturity, for these will eventually turn brown as he grows up and then reddish when he breeds. Colin has the most remarkably long eyelashes for a bird, I suspect as protection for his eyes as he runs through the low dense vegetation of the preferred habitat of his kind. His voice is yet to develop the melodious series of descending and ascending whoop-whoop-whoops by which he will eventually contact his peers and hopefully a mate. His current vocabulary is limited to a rather boring low-pitched drawn out creeeeeee sound which he mostly uses to indicate hunger and also less frequently as a greeting when he exhibits his limited social skills. He has no avian friends, is constantly shunned by the chooks and the neighbour's stately Chinese Geese, and Kookaburras frequently swoop at him whenever he ventures into the open.

The structure of Colin's feet (two toes forward and two toes back) is typical of the cuckoo family to which he belongs but he will not develop into a nest parasite like the other members of that group of

birds, Having said this, when fully grown he will have no qualms in raiding the nests of other birds, especially grass-nesting finches, to feast on their helpless young..

Although he can get airborne quite quickly, Colin rarely flies and is rather awkward when he opts for this mode of getting around. His preferred method of travel is a flat stretched-out, head down run by which he can cover good distances quite quickly. He is well camouflaged and his furtive movements are generally quite successful in ambushing me as I work around the yard. He slinks off to bed well before last light and is so secretive that I have yet to discover where he dosses down each evening. He is an early riser and likes to wake the household in an early morning run along the corrugated iron roof to remind us it is time for his breakfast

Some weeks ago while I was cleaning up one of my veggie beds, Colin thought this would be a good time to do a bit of bonding with me, his lord and master. He got between my legs and watched every movement particularly the process of uprooting weeds. He even picked up a small earthworm which he eventually discarded as not proper food for a bird. He was however very taken by the movements of a looper caterpillar which he stalked for several minutes and eventually ate. This was not his first kill I would imagine, and I was pleased that he was exhibiting the necessary skills and behaviour for survival when he eventually leaves home for the last time. We trained him to chase food by rolling small balls of minced meat along the ground near him so that he associated movement with food. He is very capable of catching a ball of mince when tossed to him now.



We take great pains not to humanise birds in our care and get our kicks from releasing our charges into the wild to live as nature intended. So why call this bird Colin? The answer is simple; It's much shorter and easier to say than that bl---y Pheasant Coucal. Also, it is easy to change to Colleen if he turns out to be a girl.

Norm Rains

INKERMAN

Four intrepid campers braved the beautiful conditions at Spotswood Park private campground on the banks of the Alma Creek wetlands, about 120 km SE of Townsville.

Enthusiastically, we all arrived Friday afternoon after work (for some) and, after setting up camps, scope out; we found there were plenty of Glossy Ibis and a solitary Buff-banded Rail feeding in the shallows and at the water's edge. Four Green Pygmy-geese lazed in the open water with the Pelicans. A low-level Marsh Harrier lifted everything as the sun was beginning to set behind Mount Inkerman: We decided then that it was time for our own little sundowners and bird call while the crackling cane fires billowed up out of the darkening evening.



White-browed Crake

Well after dinner (late), Len decided to take a stroll around the camp forest with spotlights and camera. He was rewarded with a pair of Barking Owls, seemingly just waiting to be photographed as they perched and growled softly to each other atop a couple of tall, dead trees just outside the entrance gates. Interestingly, they weren't making any barking calls.

Saturday sunrise we watched a White-browed Crake with an Australian Reed-Warbler working the edges of the reeds together in front of camp. After breakfast we consolidated vehicles into one and headed off on a trip to Wunjunga wetlands, beaches and township. As the Crow flies, Wunjunga is only six km from our campground, but all the fun was encountered along the thirty km drive to get there. This included a drive up to the summit of Mount Inkerman for fantastic 360° panoramas of the Burdekin Delta. There was a family of Australian Kestrels at home making full use of the communications structures at the summit carpark and picnic area.



Pacific Baza

As we drove slowly along Wunjunga Road, on the drying wetlands and grasslands there were many Red-necked Stint and Red-capped Plovers and Australian Pratincoles. A few Horsfield's Bushlarks and Australasian Pipits flitted away from us into the grasslands beside the gravel road. On reaching the beautiful Wunjunga Beach, in the shade of the She-Oaks we partook of morning tea in the close company of Fairy Gerygones, Dusky Honeyeaters and Varied Trillers. A walk along the beach let us get scope-close to 4 Pacific Golden Plovers in exquisite full breeding plumage amongst the numerous roosting Caspian and Gull-billed Terns. We also noticed an unusually high number of Bar-tailed Godwits, Whimbrels and Eastern Curlew that had either decided to over-Winter, or they had just returned, unusually early, from their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere. A pair of Brahminy Kites and a few Silver gulls disputed the pecking rights to a cleaned fish carcass that had washed up to the water-line. A Sacred Kingfisher, perched on a nearby dead drift-wood tree, was witnessing this dispute while waiting patiently for its next crabby snack to make a move.

There were many Brolgas and Bustards on the way back to the Bruce Highway and in one open field (which was really a dry wetland), we counted twenty-two Australian Pratincoles.

Arriving back at camp, we encountered two Pallid Cuckoos. One, a female (Dark Rufous Morph), was continually being fed hairy grubs by her male partner (light-grey Morph). This is a known courtship ritual with Pallid Cuckoos. Then after copulation, the female feeds the male. Sandra related it well, "*Bit like people really; the man takes the woman out for lovely meals before the wedding, then after the wedding she ends up doing all the cooking. Ha ha Ha @.*" We latently watched them during the course of the afternoon, as they seemed to hang close to our camp site. There were also Leaden Flycatchers and Grey Fantails close-by and present also were three Little Bronze-Cuckoos.

Sunday: - With permission, we drove and walked around the neighbouring property, where there is the

proposal to mine the sand dunes for beach replenishment in coastal Central Queensland. That country has been visibly "flogged" by overgrazing, which has allowed the plethora of woody weeds to advance at alarming rates. The sand dunes though were still in relatively good native vine forest vegetations. We saw many Bustards and Brown Falcons and many more Leaden Flycatchers and Grey Fantails. Two Australian Hobbies scooted through, no doubt interested in all the Double-barred Finches. On the banks of the tidal Groper Creek there was a Striated Heron and a Crested Tern on the close bank.

On our exit, we stopped to watch big flocks of Chestnut-breasted Mannikins feeding on the ground. With them were twenty-two Plum-headed Finches. So we took a photo or two while a Restless Flycatcher flew away from where we had parked the car.

Now back on Spotswood's property. On the north-eastern side of the wetlands we counted sixty-seven Cotton Pygmy-geese, twenty-eight Black Swans and two Black-necked Storks that were keeping company with a couple of Brolgas. There were also some Yellow-billed Spoonbills; a couple of Pied Cormorants perched to dry and a couple of Great Cormorants, unmistakable as they flew across us in the company of about twenty Little Black Cormorants.

After Lunch we drove to the Township of Groper Creek, where we had an exciting exploration in the



Pallid Cuckoo

town's adjoining Environmental Reserve. On entry we immediately picked up a Pacific Baza. There were many White-gaped Honeyeaters and Little Shrike-thrushes in the vegetation on the tidal creek-line, where we also watched an Azure Kingfisher working for tucker. We watched three Fairy Gerygones antagonising each other in the mangroves on the banks, where we also found two Sacred Kingfishers. Heading back on the bitumen, where about two kms from the township, we stopped to ID some finches on the barbed road-side fencing. More Chestnut-breasted and Crimson Finch. On the other side of the fence we picked up the Gould's (race *russatus*) Little Bronze Cuckoo, which had found a seemingly endless supply of food in the form of a procession of hairy grubs on a tree-trunk.

Night spotlighting produced two Barn Owls active from a couple of neighbouring cane field burns. There was also a couple of Brush-tailed Possums just outside the front entrance gates.

Of particular interest was this huge "moth" flying around inside the camper. It was bothering me as I continually shooed it away from me as I was trying to sleep. Next morning at breakfast I spotted it clinging in the folds of the top skirting curtain just above Len; so I asked him to get rid of it. As soon as he picked it off the curtain, its wings extended to reveal that it was not a moth at all, but was indeed a very small Micro-bat, with a body about the size of a twenty cent coin. Its wing-span was about 12-15cm. Its gaping mouth revealed tiny needle-like sharp teeth as it protested being man-handled. Len took it outside and carefully draped it on a branch of a small tree that had lots of foliage cover, a hide from the force of hungry Spangled Drongos, Pied Butcherbirds and other birds out there.

Monday Morning:- We walked and birded around the various wetland and forested habitats of the Spotswood's property, which produced Australian Reed-Warblers, many Grey Fantails, Leaden Flycatchers and Whiskered Terns, five Green Pygmy Geese, 170 Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, ten Crimson Finch, a few Rufous-throated Honeyeaters, one Spectacled Monarch, four Brahminy Kites, and a White-bellied Sea-Eagle sitting on its traditional nest.

124 Bird Species for the weekend



Plum-headed Finch

Addendum: - As we packed up for departure at about 3pm, our stow-away Micro-bat was still in the same place clinging to the same branch. Hopefully it found its parent colony that evening.

Story and Photographs

Chris and Len Ezzy

CAPTIVATED BY COOKTOWN

I had never been to Cooktown so while in the north decided I would go and was delighted to have Cec join me.



We set off from Cairns in her aptly named Ford Escape, bearing the sticker: Birder Frequently Stopping. This we did at Mossman to enjoy the recently established Yalada Centre, the walk to and from the Barron River with its suspension walkway, see Black Butcherbird and Yellow-breasted Boatbill and marvel at the regularity at which green Yalada buses took tourists to and from the River at 15 minute intervals.

At Cooktown we explored the Endeavour River and mangroves by boat with Mollo, spent a morning birding at Keatings Lagoon (Large-billed Gerygone and nest, Radjah Shelduck, Yellow Oriole, Wompoo Pigeon, Black Butcherbird, Green Pygmy Geese) and another at Poison Creek. Most evenings the tide was low and the hues of sunset made the river mouth a delightful place to be. We checked for waders and saw 4 Common Tern feeding as well as several Eastern Reef Egret fly into the mangroves to roost. Another evening Cec noticed Beach Stone-curlew on the northern shore. Going in search of a black bird which had flown past the verandah one morning, we saw two Collared Kingfisher only a few metres in front of us in the mangroves.

In Cooktown we were immersed in the history of the area, from the original inhabitants who met Cook and his Party to the many people who have lived and worked there for more than two hundred years. I joined a tour with Aboriginal elder Willie Gordon to walk through the land of his ancestors, sit under overhangs and have art explained which made very tangible his family's life and presence there. From across the valley a cacophony of calls from the Orange-footed Scrubfowl reminded us that they too inhabit this land.

Driving home we kept noting the birds we saw, including a Black-breasted Buzzard and a most unexpected Letter-winged Kite at Rifle Creek. You never know what you might find at a toilet stop!

Joan Wharton

CALENDAR

September 2014

6th - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am. Leaders - Mark Horvath
 9th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Anything Goes. 7.00pm.
 13th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker Greg Calvert - Birds of Bali and Borneo (To be confirmed).
 17th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 7.00am.
 21st - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 7.00am.
 28th - 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. Car pooling encouraged.

October 2014

4th - 6th - Saturday to Monday (LabourDay long weekend) - Mungalla Station Campout. Suitable camping and caravan sites are available on the property. BYO everything although basic showers and toilets are on site. Other accommodation is available at Ingham (14K away) and Forrest beach (4k away). More details closer to the date. Leader Ian Boyd.
 5th - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am. Leader Warren and Pat Charlton.
 7th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Honeeaters. 7.00pm.
 11th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00pm) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker - Martin Willis - Birds of Africa.
 15th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am.
 19th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am.
 26th - Sunday Outing - Townsville Town Common Out To Shelly Beach - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a departure at 6.30am sharp. Gate out to Shelly Beach will be locked after we enter so late comers will miss out. Bring morning tea - will be home by lunch time. Car pooling encouraged. Leader TBA.

QUEST

Chris Ezzy	319	15/11/2014
Len Ezzy	317	13/11/2014
Niel Bruce	292	19/10/2014
Ian Leach	286	13/10/2014
Marleen Acton	280	7/10/2014
Cecily Messer	279	6/10/2014
Ian Boyd	268	25/09/2014
Pat Charlton	266	23/09/2014
Joan Wharton	256	13/09/2014
Warren Charlton	273	30/09/2014
Annette Sutton	254	11/09/2014
Janet Cross	253	10/09/2014
Elna Kerswell	240	28/08/2014
Alf Acton	238	26/08/2014
Rosemary Payet	208	27/07/2014
Janet Robino	127	7/05/2014

Articles for the next Drongo are due by 5th October. Please try to send in a story – long or short. We can only print what you send.

Send to amsgreat@gmail.com

MEMBERS' PHOTOGRAPHS



Pallid Cuckoo female Rufous Morph Len & Chris Ezzy



Colin

Norm Rains



Micro Bat

Len & Chris Ezzy



Varied Oystercatcher

Graeme Cooksley



Barking Owl

Len & Chris Ezzy



Farewell Spit Lighthouse NZ Graeme Cooksley