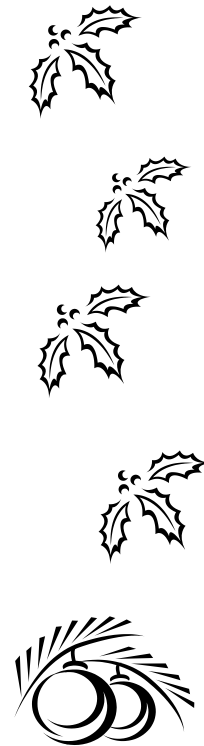
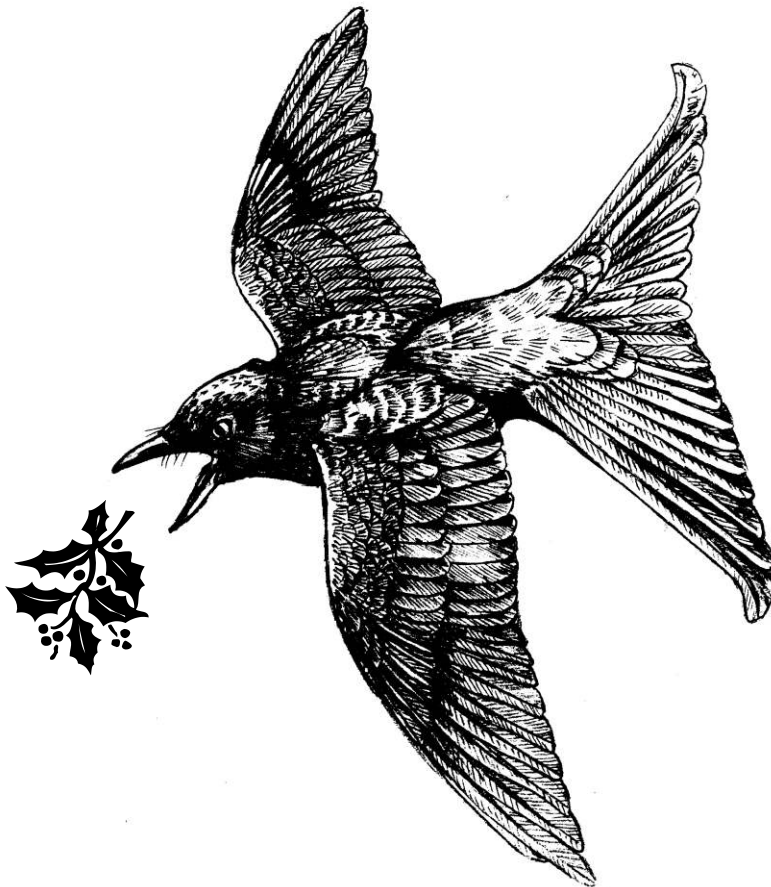


The Drongo

Number 130 December 2013



Fairy-wrens

O'Reilly's

Aussie Kiwi?



Merry
Christmas
&
Happy
New Year!

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino
Vice-President: Alf Acton
Secretary: Warren Charlton
Treasurer: Nina Doyle
Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton
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Committee Members: Pat Charlton, Malcolm Calvert, Lenore Calvert



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Email: contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au

HOLIDAYS 2013

Warren & I recently visited relatives in the southern states & took the opportunity to do some bird watching when the weather allowed.

Canberra – in the Botanical Gardens – Superb Fairy-wren, Red Wattlebird, Eastern & Crimson Rosella, Eastern Spinebill, White-browed Scrub-wren.

Chiltern (NE Victoria) – always a favourite spot & after 25 years of visits we eventually saw several Regent Honeyeaters high up in some flowering Iron Bark trees. There was great excitement as these were "Lifers". Here we also saw Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Grey-crowned Babblers, Yellow Rosellas, White-throated Treecreepers, Little Eagle, Scarlet & Eastern Yellow Robins

Warrnambool (SW Victoria). Here the weather was not good to us but we were delighted to have good views of Australian Gannet, Musk Duck, Australian Shelduck, White-backed Magpies, Singing Honeyeaters, Chestnut Teal & several pods of Southern Right Whales.



Australian Shelduck Annette Sutton

Adelaide – Little Friarbirds, Black-tailed Native-hens, Adelaide Rosellas, Chestnut Teal, Sooty Oystercatchers, Black-faced Cormorants, Musk Lorikeets, & more Southern right Whales at Victor Harbour.

From Adelaide, we left the relatives behind and moved on to Port Augusta where we visited the "must see" Arid Lands Botanical Gardens. We were greeted by millions of bush flies! Here we saw White-winged Fairy-wrens, White-crowned Babblers, White-plumed & Singing Honeyeaters, Mulga Parrots & large flocks of Budgerigars but no Chirruping Wedgebills this time.

South of Alice Springs, we detoured to **Rainbow Valley** which has spectacular scenery. There we found more Singing & Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, Black-eared Cuckoos & Pallid Cuckoos.

Alice Springs – Here we visited the Olive Pink Garden & another "Lifer" was found here – the

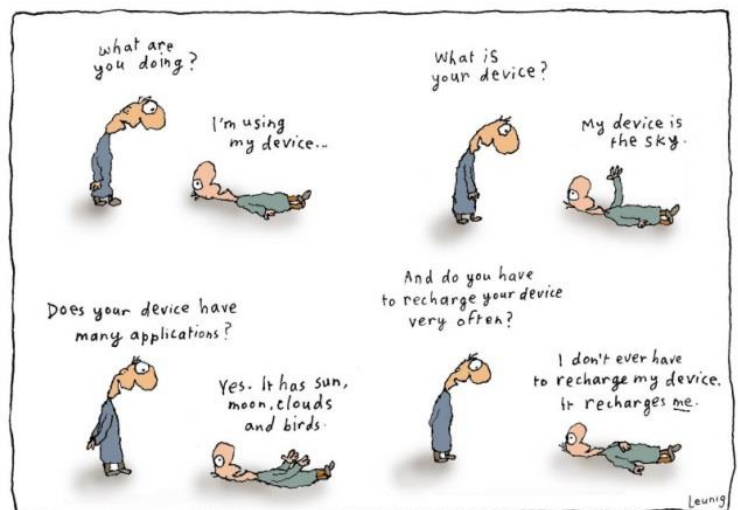
Western Bowerbird. Also seen here were Ring-necked Parrots (Pt Lincoln form), & Grey-crowned Babblers. In some of the gorges, we saw Grey-headed Honeyeaters, Firetail Finches & Zebra Finches. We also spent most of a day at the Alice Springs Desert Park. A number of birds indigenous to the area are on show in large walk-in aviaries. We saw a number of birds that were new to us but what was interesting to us was that a number of the same birds were on the outside of the aviaries. The sewerage works were not accessible due to work being done but normally birders are welcome.



White-plumed Honeyeaters Ray Sutton

Continuing our journey home with a stop at Mt Isa, we saw thousands of Pink-eared Ducks on Lake Moondarra and the sewerage works and Varied Lorikeets in the caravan park. A quick stop in Pentland – very little water was in the dam but two Red-kneed Dotterels and Pied Stilts were hanging in there. Next stop was Townsville and home.

Pat Charlton



"Image by Michael Leunig www.leunig.com.au"

Contributed by Cathie Black

O'REILLY'S

36th Annual Bird Week

Having visited O'Reilly's in 1964 and 1972 before my birdwatching days, I was keen to visit during Bird Week (Nov 3-10) in the hope of cooling off in the rainforest, doing the walks and seeing some new birds. I was not disappointed. We had fine weather, some cool nights and perfect days. In addition some of the much sought-after species were feeding only a few steps away from the entrance to the Guest House. One of these was Albert's Lyrebird - a male and a juvenile often scratched around in the leaf litter early in the morning. Sometimes it was a female and the juvenile.



Yellow-throated Scrubwren Rav Sutton

Besides these close-up views I also saw three Lyrebirds on the walk to Elebana Falls. Regent Bowerbirds - both male and female, Satin Bowerbirds and Catbirds also frequented the trees near the Guesthouse entrance. Noisy Pitta were harder to find but I did see a couple. Bassian and Russett-tailed Thrushes scratched through leaf litter along the main road in the early morning. On a walk towards Python Rock (which Cheryl Robertson told me was actually home to Rock Pythons) we saw male and female Paradise Riflebirds and Rose Robin.

While there were day trips to Southport, Beaudesert and Brisbane, I chose to stay on the mountain and do walks in the rainforest, farmland or Antarctic Beech Forest. On most rainforest walks we were greeted by White-browed and Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Whipbirds and Brown and Large-billed Gerygones. In the Garden a Brown Gerygone was making a nest while the lazy Large-billed Gerygones took over the hanging nests built by Yellow-throated Scrubwrens. Logrunners scuttled through the litter and Black and Spectacled Monarchs were building nests.

On the 14 km return walk along the Border Track (Border of Qld and NSW) which forms part of the walk from O'Reillys to Binnaburra, we were on the lookout for Rufous Scrub-bird and Olive Whistler. We had heard Rufous Scrub-birds performing long and loud imitations

along the Elabana Falls Track so knew what to listen for. Not having heard anything, Ian Gynther played the call and had a remarkable response. The bird crossed the track and surrounded him while he was hidden in the forest. Later it crossed the track again and we got a glimpse of what looked like a little mouse in a great hurry. To our delight one of the birders had captured it on her camera in video form so we were able to look at it ad infinitum, slow it down and try to see the bird. Further along we heard two more birds and stood watching for almost an hour. They were immediately in front of us but impossible to see in the undergrowth. At least now I know what to listen for!

The Olive Whistler was more elusive. While I was trying to identify small brown birds by myself I saw a bird that fitted the description of the Whistler fly quickly through some scrub. However I was told that its usual behaviour was more like the Golden Whistler which sits and watches from a branch. But what else could this bird have been?

Nightspotting turned up a South Boobook calling from a pine tree near the Guest House, a Marbled Frogmouth answered a call further out in the bush and a Sooty owl screeched in as well. One memorable experience was watching the Glossy Black-Cockatoos swoop in from the surrounding hills to drink in a creek along Duck Creek Road about 6pm each evening. Both evenings the flock numbered between 20 and 30. They sliced through the air in small groups, gathered and chatted in the trees and eventually came closer to the creek to drink undisturbed by our presence.



White-browed Scrubwren Rav Sutton

At first choosing what walks to do was confusing for the uninitiated like me because I didn't know the names of the walks or roads but after a couple of days and several outings along Duck Creek Rd (usually searching for the Spotted Quail-thrush which we didn't see) things became clearer. I delighted in the regrown rainforest, the birds, superb accommodation and the history and humour of the O'Reillys and their settlement on the Plateau.

Joan Wharton

PHEASANT COUCAL

A few weeks back, just before sunset, I noticed the Coucal quietly sneaking down our neighbours' side fence. I knew where he was headed (I am assuming it is 'he'), to the water in the front garden. Since then I have heard a couple of them calling on cloudy mornings, tucked away, I guess, in back yards in Hermit Park. Am wondering if they have been displaced from the development happening across the river at the old DPI Station, as new houses are encroaching and habitat lost. For some of our birds, life can be perilous.



Story and Photograph *Patricia Robinson*

RED-BACKED FAIRY-WRENS

Some researchers from Cornell University, USA, have been looking onto the mating behaviour of female Red-backed Fairy-wrens.

The researchers tested how female Fairy-wrens responded to two different types of males—a scarlet-backed form that occurs in north western Australia and a more flame-orange form in eastern Australia. The two forms were once geographically separated, but now occur together in north eastern Australia. The scarlet-backed form is steadily making inroads into the range of the orange-backed form, and the researchers wanted to learn why. The study took place in South-east Queensland.

"They had all the building blocks to get going on the classic speciation process," said Baldassarre, a Ph.D. student and lead author of the study. "But then they came back into contact too early, and they're still able to mate with each other. Interestingly, we found that happens only when they're deciding who to cheat with."

In the research area, the red-backed form had not yet appeared and only orange-backed males were present. The researchers took non-toxic red markers and marked a portion of the orange-backed birds red to mimic the arrival of this form. The females chose their mates equally from the red and the orange to build their nests with, but when it came to "cheating", they overwhelmingly chose scarlet-backed males to cheat with. DNA tests revealed that because of these dalliances, scarlet-backed males fathered more than double the number of young than orange-backed males. And that level of gene flow is more than enough to keep the two forms from continuing on the path to becoming different species, Baldassarre said.

Many birds cheat on their mates, but fairywrens display some of the highest rates of extrapair paternity in the bird world. A typical three-egg clutch has about a 75 percent chance of containing eggs from at least two different fathers. In some cases, a female's social mate fathers no eggs in his nest at all (though he may have young in other nests). Males even perform special displays for new females—carrying a bright-red flower petal in their bill—that they don't do for their social mates.

The researchers tested the preferences of females using nontoxic red markers to make some orange-backed males redder (as in the bird on the left).

The finding points to the growing understanding that female animals, by choosing their mates, can exert a strong force on the evolution of a species. And in Red-backed Fairywrens, that force is strongest in extrapair matings. "Some males will get 10 extrapair young and others will get zero, so the females' choices really matter there," Baldassarre said. "But they'll both probably have two within-pair young, so there's not as much at stake."



Red-backed Fairy-wren

Annette Sutton

All that infidelity gives a female fairywren a second opportunity to make a choice, Baldassarre said. "With a social mate, a female is getting a territory and a mate that's going to preen her and help feed the babies. When she chooses an extrapair mate, she's going to see that guy for two seconds, get some genes from him, and that's it. So she chooses different qualities."



Red-backed Fairy-wren female and chicks R.Sutton

The researchers chose southern Queensland as their study site to simulate the arrival of the scarlet-backed form in a new population as it spreads eastward. They have not yet been able to do the reverse experiment, looking at how orange-backed males might fare in a region dominated by the red-backed form.

But results so far suggest that in situations where two closely related species appear to be diverging, a second look might be warranted. Even when birds behave socially as if they are reproductively isolated, there might be more going on than meets the eye. "There's a lot of extrapair mating in birds," Baldassarre said, "and that might be a hidden avenue that could work against the speciation process."

The study was funded in part by the National Science Foundation, Sigma Xi, and Cornell Department of Neurobiology and Behavior.

This entry was posted in [Birds](#), [science](#) and tagged [Australia](#), [Birds](#), [evolution](#), [mate choice](#), [Red-backed Fairywren](#), [science](#).

Submitted by Ivor Preston

Edited by Annette Sutton

MASKED LAPWINGS

A friend alerted me to an incident about a Masked Lapwing reported on the Science Show on Radio National Sat 23/11/13.

In 2006 Kevin Thiele was on the Nullabor and had just dropped his children off at school. He was told that the Masked Lapwings had chicks on the school oval. He noticed the two Lapwings become alarmed and saw two Hobbies searching for the chicks. One Hobby flew down and attacked the Lapwing which flew off with a damaged leg but was still able to fly. The Hobby grappled with the Lapwing twice as they flew but eventually about 30 metres away the Lapwing changed course and landed at Kevin's feet - about one metre away. It remained there till the Hobbies retreated.

Discussion on the Science Show then revolved around whether this behaviour was learned, instinctive or uniquely purposeful as the Lapwing had made a conscious choice in an extraordinary circumstance. This time the person was seen as protection rather than a threat.

A new way to look at Masked Lapwings?

Joan Wharton



Masked Lapwing

Ray Sutton

LIMERICKS

"Now it's the end of the year
I will not shed a tear
Up at daybreak
A score to make
Let's give the birds a cheer"

"Now it's the end of the year
Let's have some Xmas cheer
The birds need a rest
While they mother the nest
Let's sleep in and drink some beer"

Thank God, I'm out of the Quest
I thought that I was the best
Now I sleep-in
Wake up with a grin
My blessings to all of the rest"

Nina and Ian

NUTMEG MANNIKIN

Lonchura punctulata

With a widespread natural distribution in many parts of south-eastern and southern Asia, the Nutmeg Mannikin does not occur naturally in Australia. It was first introduced into Australia in the 1920s and 1930s, and has since become established in eastern Queensland and New South Wales. They are occasionally recorded elsewhere in suburban Melbourne and Adelaide, but those birds are considered aviary escapees, and have not established feral populations. There is one report from Ashmore Reef, which may have been a bird that flew in from Indonesia.

The Nutmeg Mannikin is an introduced species. Popular as a caged bird, some escaped or were released into the wild in Sydney and Brisbane in the 1930s. It is a small plump finch with a dark brown face and throat, The upper body is chestnut brown and the underparts are white with dark brown scalloping, while the legs, feet and the large, deep bill are grey. Juveniles are paler above and buff-brown below. The Nutmeg Mannikin flicks its wings and sways its tail constantly. It is usually seen in small flocks. This species is also known as the Spice Finch. Nutmeg Mannikins are commonly found from North Queensland to Sydney along the east coast. They are native to South Asia, ranging from India to southern China and south-east into the Phillipines and Indochina. It lives in reeds, grasses and especially in the crops around farms. It is also often around disturbed areas and vacant blocks.

Although their usual diet is half ripe seeds, the Nutmeg Mannikin has become a scavenger around farms and garbage dumps and has been known to pick the flesh of road kill. Very few insects are eaten. They forage on the ground or hang from stems to eat seeds.



Nutmeg manikin

Annette Sutton

Nutmeg Mannikins are very social and more than one female may lay eggs in a nest. The nests are spherical and made of green grass and sometimes pieces of bark. The nests are usually built in the centre of shrubs and trees, but they have been known to use the eaves of buildings. Both parents construct the nest and share incubation and the care of young.

Article from Birdlife Australia website



KIWI AN AUSSIE?

BAD luck, New Zealanders: the kiwi may be descended from a flying Aussie. Two fossils about 16 to 19 million years old from the same genus as the kiwi found in Central Otago suggest it may have the same ancestor as the emu, a study has found. The fossils found are of a tiny bird about a third the size of a small kiwi which could possibly fly, suggesting it may have flown from Australia.



Paul Scofield of Canterbury Museum, who has studied them along with scientists from Te Papa Tongarewa, the national museum, and Flinders University in Adelaide, said this suggested an alternative to earlier theories based on the large size of kiwi eggs. That theory suggested the kiwi evolved from the giant moa, and while the "It suggests the opposite is, in fact, the case - that the kiwi has developed towards a larger size, a trend that is seen in many birds from the early Miocene," Dr Scofield said. The study backs earlier analysis of molecular data which had already shown the kiwi was more closely related to the emu than the moa.

"And if, as the DNA suggests, the kiwi is related to the emu, then both shared a common ancestor that could fly. It means they were little and had wings, and that they flew to New Zealand," Dr Scofield said.

The fact that New Zealand is now thought to have separated from East Gondwana later than originally believed - about 55 million years ago - makes it easier to imagine the bird making it across what would have been a much smaller Tasman Sea.

But Dr Scofield said researchers would need to find wing bones to prove the theory.

Reprinted from The Australian December 18 2013.

COASTAL BIRDS LUCINDA

On Sunday 24 November, Norm Rains, Wal Threlfall, Gil Crabtree, Ivor Preston and I travelled to Lucinda to give a presentation about the coastal birds and their environment in the Lucinda area.

Our aim was to outline to local residents the importance of Lucinda's coastal habitat in the welfare of migratory and resident shorebirds and to convince them to take action in the protection of the habitat.

The presentation concentrated on the need to keep motorised vehicles and free running dogs off the beach, especially during the migratory shorebird visiting season and the nesting season of the local shorebirds. After the presentation and a morning tea of fresh damper, jam and cream, the attendees were taken on a walk along the beach and through the coastal dunes where, using binoculars and spotting scopes supplied by the club, they were shown the local diverse birdlife.

Because of the state of the tide, not a lot of shorebirds were seen but there was enough to give the locals an idea of the birds and their habitat that needed protection. Of particular note on the walk was a small colony of nesting Little Terns on a high beach ridge within a few hundred metres of the township. The locals were unaware that they had an endangered species nesting on their door step..

After we had finished, the local progress association shouted us to a fish and chip lunch in Borello Park. Then, after lunch, we were taken on a newly created walkway through a melaleuca swamp virtually in the middle of the township; a walk worth seeking out if ever you visit Lucinda.

We left Lucinda that day satisfied that we had been successful in getting our message across and full of hope that the coastal bird population of the area now had some local guardians to care for them.

These photographs were taken at Lucinda by Ian and Jill Wilson while attending the recent BirdLife Photography forum.

Ian Boyd



QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Chris Ezzy	373	8/01/2014
Len Ezzy	371	6/01/2014
Niel Bruce	351	17/12/2013
Ian Leach	346	12/12/2013
Janet Robino	326	22/11/2013
Ian Boyd	305	1/11/2013
Marleen Acton	304	31/10/2013
Cecily Messer	301	28/10/2013
Rosemary Payet	300	27/10/2013
Greg Calvert	280	7/10/2013
Joan Wharton	279	6/10/2013
Lenore Calvert	278	5/10/2013
Malcolm Calvert	276	3/10/2013
Peter Valentine	264	21/09/2013
Annette Sutton	257	14/09/2013
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

Try this

<http://news.ninemsn.com.au/national/2013/12/14/07/13/surfing-swans-astonish-gold-coast-swimmers>

for the Surfing swans. Four swans came into Kirra Beach and began surfing the waves. They were caught on camera and made the Channel 9 news.



CALENDAR 2014

January 2014

1st - Wednesday - Paluma to start the year off. Meet adjacent to the RAAF Base Duckworth St gate for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. If for some reason the Paluma trip is not possible then the fall back will be Gunadoo Road/Woodstock. Leader Alf Acton

5th - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am. Leader TBA

7th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Bird on a wire. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

11th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker - TBA.

15th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am. Malcolm Calvert

19th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am. Leader Ian Boyd

27th - **Monday** - Outing - The Burdekin. 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. Leader John Stewart.

February 2014

2nd - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am. Leader TBA

4th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Water Birds. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

8th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and Annual General Meeting (2.00pm) Meeting Place TBA
John Young - The Search for the Night Parrot.

(Nominations for Committee positions to be forwarded to the Secretary by email, hand delivered or posted to PO Box 1168 Aitkenvale by 12 Jan 2013. Nomination form can be found here.)

12th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

16th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am. Leader Ian Boyd

23th - Sunday Outing - Cungulla 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. Leader Len Ezzy

March 2014

2nd - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am. Leader TBA

4th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Flying. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

8th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speakers Tony Grice.

12th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

16th - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am. Leader Ian Boyd

30th March - Sunday Outing - Paluma Meet adjacent to the RAAF Base Duckworth St gate for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. If for some reason the Paluma trip is not possible then the fall back will be Gunadoo Road/Woodstock. Leader TBA

