

The Drongo

Number 136 December 2014

*Merry
Christmas*



Bird Week

Mallee

Regent
Honeyeater





FROM THE PRESIDENT

By the time you read this, 2014 will be all but over. On behalf of the committee, I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy 2015.

A timely reminder to all that BirdLife Townsville's AGM will be in February.....so it is time to consider standing for a position on the committee. It takes a fair bit of work to coordinate all our meetings, great guest speakers and birding outings. There is also the important work of surveys and community education. These are all the things that make our branch a very active and enjoyable club to be part of. Even though it seems a lot of work, it is made up of a lot of 'little' jobs which can be shared around to make the load a little lighter for each member of the committee. If you are interested in finding out what being on the committee might entail, just speak to one of the current committee members.

Warren Charlton will be standing down as Secretary at the AGM. He has done a sterling job of keeping track of our meetings as well as managing club communications. He is responsible for sending out the emails that keep us all informed of the club's activities and responding to the numerous email and phone enquiries. BirdLife Townsville owes Warren a big vote of thanks and hope he now enjoys the extra time he will have to just go out and have a great time travelling and birding.

We've come a long way this year. We are well on our way to having all our procedures in line with BirdLife Australia's requirements. From now on it should be a lot easier to just get on with what BirdLife Townsville is all about: lots of good birding outings; fun activities (Trivia Quiz, Birders' Breakfasts etc.); Entertaining guest speakers; and the serious stuff – surveys, community education etc. I think we all look very smart in our green club shirts and many members will soon be sporting our long-sleeved shirts on outings.

Once again, have a very Happy Christmas and lots of great birding in 2015.

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino
Vice-President:
Secretary: Warren Charlton
Treasurer: Nina Doyle
Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton
Conservation Officer: Garrie Douglas
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Regent Honeyeater Challenge

On 8th October 2014 we were visiting the Barraba Region to try and find the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater.

Barraba (population 1,150) is located about 85km NNW of Tamworth in the New England region in NSW. Described in the glossy tourist brochures as "The Bird Watchers Paradise", it is part of the Bundarra-Barraba Important Bird Area, which is important for the conservation of the Regent Honeyeater.



Regent Honeyeater

Len Ezzy

We based ourselves in the Barraba Caravan Park for four days so we could potentially bird most of the Bird Routes around Barraba. Our campervan site overlooked the beautiful Manilla River, providing some good relaxed birding: - Yellow-rumped Thornbills hopping around our feet, Eastern Rosellas and Red-rumped Parrots ground-feeding on grass and weed seeds and of course there was the continuously-calling Australian Reed Warbler to name just a few. Since our first visit to the Barraba Region some seven years ago, we could immediately and unfortunately notice the marked increase of Common Starlings, Common Blackbirds and now the Common Myna.

Early on that Wednesday morning we set out on the Nangahrah Bird Route No. 10
<http://www.tamworth.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/254/TRCBird%20RoutesBrochure.pdf.aspx> (There has been a brand new edition of this Bird Routes Brochure printed, but I can only find the previous

edition on the internet. All the routes have been renumbered and the Nangahrah Bird Route has become No. 21, which is located about 34km east of Barraba.) This is a renowned feeding and breeding area for the Regent Honeyeater. At "Ironbark Creek", about a kilometre before the "Mugga Ironbarks for Regent Honeyeaters" sign, we just had to stop to check out the busy bird activity. There were Speckled Warblers, Diamond Firetails, Restless Flycatchers, Common Bronzings, Musk and Little Lorikeets, Turquoise Parrots, Dusky Woodswallows, a Brown Goshawk, and many more. After a beautiful hour's birding here we decided we needed to travel on another kilometre to the well-renowned and signed flowering White Box and Mugga Ironbark Forest for a chance to see Regent Honeyeaters. We spent the next 3 hours walking randomly through the heavily flowering Mugga Ironbarks, whilst looking at every single one of those many hundreds of (very) Noisy Friarbirds, similar numbers of quieter Fuscous and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, a few Olive-backed Orioles and a couple of Mistletoebirds. Unfortunately, no Regent Honeyeaters. So, as our eyes continually scanned for any splashes of yellow through the forest, our hunt became just a long walk back to the car.

A little dejected, we decided to drive back down the hill to the shady Ironbark Creek for morning tea, with the hope of continuing where we had left off earlier in the morning with all that wonderful bird activity.



Musk Lorikeets

Len Ezzy

Len goes off photographing Musk Lorikeets feeding on tree-sap exuding from the low side of a trunk of a River Oak. These birds were actually biting into the bark, damaging the tree so that it would "bleed" sap to repair itself. They would then drink the sap. Much higher in the same tree Len was photographing a tail-less Restless Flycatcher sitting on a nest and a pair of Magpie-larks tending their own nest which housed three wide-gaped nestlings. I noticed a Willie-Wagtail sitting on a nest on a low limb on the other bank of Ironbark Creek.

As I started to walk back to the car to finish my cuppa in the shade, looking up in the riparian paperbark trees, I saw a honeyeater with a striking glossy-black head, red around its eyes, gold markings in the wings and black scallops on white breast. YES ! It was a Regent Honeyeater... finally after seven years, I had found my target bird... I called out to Len, who bolted over and started taking photographs of this list lifer. The bird flew to a She-Oak, landed on branch only a few metres from Len... and then it descended even closer to him as it scoured for food (insects and spiders, which it held in its beak). It then flew back to the same tree that was being used by the nesting Restless Flycatcher and Magpie-larks. Then I noticed that there was another Regent Honeyeater beside where the first had landed. WOW! Then another 2 Regent Honeyeaters tried to land in the same tree, but were unceremoniously shown the exit door before they could settle... What's happening here? After a couple of minutes, it became crystal clear. Two of our Regent Honeyeaters were the protective parents of a couple of freshly-hatched, naked chicks which were housed in a very high nest that had been built within the top compounds of a dead Mistletoe. This nest was in the same tree as the nesting Magpie-larks and Restless Flycatcher. The devoted Regent Honeyeater parents were chasing away absolutely any threats that ventured too close to their nest.



Regent Honeyeater with two chicks

Len Ezzy

We spent a good couple of hours just watching and photographing these marvellous birds, their behaviours and antics. "Hi Fives" all round at Ironbark Creek. What beautiful birds,... and with only an estimated 800 left in the wild, we feel very fortunate and especially privileged to have been able to find them, get so close to them, photograph them and witness this wonderful event.

Of course we reported our sightings to Birdlife Australia's TBN (Threatened Bird Network).

Chris and Len Ezzy

BIRDWEEK 2014

Once again our Branch celebrated Birdweek in proper fashion in 2014 by promoting native birds and their needs, locally in Townsville, on Magnetic Island and also in the Ingham area. We also promoted BirdLife

Australia's national initiative of the Aussie Backyard Bird Count held in the last week of October with many of our members dutifully sending in their lists of sightings to support this first ever national backyard bird count.



Flying Brolgas

Ray Sutton

The long established tradition of providing static displays in the City and Aitkenvale Libraries was again upheld by members of the Branch's Education Sub-committee and other committed members, led this year by Norm Rains. Thanks to the efforts of Beth Snewin and her team at the museum, including Cecily, Julia and Jenny, we had plenty of resources to put on two super displays for the public to enjoy and learn from. Judging by the feedback from both sites, the creative displays generated much interest from users of the libraries, both adult and children. Many thanks also to Janet R, Janet C, Beth, Rick, Ian B, Wal, Mark and Warren for teaming up to erect the displays on the first day of October and take them down again on the last day of the month. Your help was greatly appreciated. Of course our Branch must say a special thanks to the Museum of Tropical Queensland for allowing the use of museum specimens, and also to Beth who organised the whole deal from that end. Again, thanks to all involved. We have booked both libraries for the month of October again for the 2015 Birdweek season.

Birdweek was celebrated on Maggie Island this year when Chris Corbett organised a heap of material--- books, fact sheets, photographs, posters etc, for her display at the Magnetic Island community event in early October. Some of our members have expressed interest in being involved in this event next year and will travel to the Island to give Chris a hand with her display.

After much to-ing and fro-ing, we were able to organise visits to four outlying schools in the Ingham area to talk about birds and to promote Birdweek's Australian Backyard Bird Count. We (Wal and Norm) travelled to Ingham to make presentations to a combined Bambaroo and Mutarnee schools student body of about 20 kids assembled at Mutarnee, and then following lunch we made a visit to the 19 kids at the Trebonne State School. After the presentation we then travelled to Mt Fox to camp overnight at the Mt Fox Cricket Ground (great under-cover facilities there), where we counted 35 species in the following morning. We met with the 14 students from the Mount Fox State School first up in the morning and then drove back to Townsville via Paluma. It must be said that we were very well received and made welcome at all schools and they all said they would like us back again next year. Additionally, Forrest Beach, Helen's Hill and Toobanna schools all expressed interest in receiving a visit from BirdLife Townsville but were unable to take part this year because of other commitments. Perhaps next year's Education Committee can make it happen for these schools in the early part of the year. I think our branch could also look at visiting smaller schools in the Charters Towers and Burdekin regions to sow the seeds of interest in birds in the very fertile minds of the young ones at these places. Finally I must thank Ian Boyd for coming to our aid at short notice with a new more suitable power-point presentation for the school visits. You are a champion Ian!!!!!!.

Birdweek is an important event each year as it provides an opportunity for Branches like ours to promote birds and the need to conserve their habitats locally for the benefit of the birds and the other forms of life with which we share this region. It also provides a great opportunity for members of BirdLife Townsville to work together as a team for a common goal. Take a pat on the back please!!!!



Please enjoy a safe and joyful Christmas

Norm Rains Education Officer 2014

MOUNT MAUNGATAUTARI

In November 2013, I visited the Mount Maungatautari Sanctuary, located east of Hamilton and Cambridge, in New Zealand.

It is near where I had grown up as a boy, but the Sanctuary development is a new development since I left the area, the pest-control fence being completed in 2004.



I arrived mid-afternoon, and checked into the guest house, "Out in the Styx", and went up to the Sanctuary office to find my afternoon Tautari Wetland tour had not been recorded, and a tour guide was not available. They arranged for a replacement tour the next day, but it was going to delay my travel start the next day. Much of the wetlands area was drained for agricultural use, and this tour area is a recreation of the wetland habitat.

The Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari is the largest pest-proof project in the world, and covers 3,400 hectares in total. The area is divided into enclosures, with probably the main focus on the Southern Enclosure. This pest free enclosure is surrounded by an electric detection system, so if the security is breached, e.g. by a branch falling across the fence, then an alarm sounds, and inspection commences within thirty minutes. Day time and night time walks are available, guided or freelance.

After an excellent meal at OITS, in the company of two ladies doing environmental studies and the night guide, Phil, we headed back up to the Sanctuary to do the 2.5 hour night tour. Jenny, (one of the ladies), had been, in her youth, a Junior Naturalist, and had an amazing knowledge of flora, reeling off common and Latin names of all the plants as we wandered by. Even Phil was learning new information.

Bird life was minimal, the Tuis were lullabying themselves to sleep, and the Kiwis didn't show, and the Moreporks were heard, but not seen. The main night life fauna to be seen was a variety of wetas, snails (700 types in NZ), spiders (including a funnel-web, but mostly sheet-web spiders), stick insects, and numbers of koura (native crayfish) in the clear flowing stream.

The next morning I went on the 2.5 hr morning Forest Tour, with a good view of what had been in the dark the night before and able to catch up with some of the local birdlife. There is a tower to climb that takes you up into the canopy for a different perspective.

Immediately after the forest tour, I went on the Wetlands Tour, and again, some new birds, and a good look at the breeding Tuataras, (NZ lizard). Unfortunately, the Takahe were egg-sitting, and a view of this rare bird species was not possible.

An interesting visit, especially for those with a deeper interest in the flora.

Graeme Cooksley

http://www.sanctuarymountain.co.nz/plan_your_visit

TO THE RESCUE

I have been privileged enough to have a Great Bowerbird's bower in the garden for the last couple of years.

It is so entertaining to check the bower each day and watch the antics of the bird. He takes great care in placing and rearranging his decorations and is constantly working to ensure the girls just can't resist his treasures – and of course, him! He often leaves me little 'presents' on the mat at my front door – plastic green soldiers, silver clothes pegs and other items that he has in the bower.

Today I really worried it was all over! I heard a lot of scuffling and crashing about in the breezeway just outside my front door where he leaves the presents. It was pretty distressing to discover my bowerbird had got a red plastic ring caught around his head in such a way that his beak was held firmly down on his abdomen. He could not fly and was looking close to exhaustion as he struggled to rid himself of the restriction.

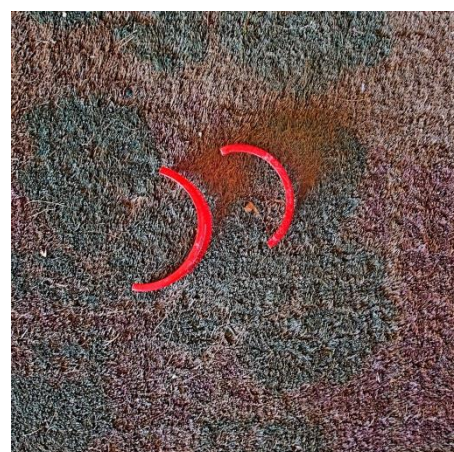


Despite almost knocking on the door to ask for help, he was definitely not keen on letting me get hold of

him. I finally steered him into the corner of the yard where I attempted to cover him with a towel so that he would settle down so I could try to free him from the ring. He was determined not to be captured, but in his last effort to wrench himself out of my clasp he somehow managed to pop the thing off his head. He took off like a shot and I thought that he may desert the bower because of all the distress.



I cut the offending ring in two so that it wouldn't cause this sort of problems for any other creature. I decided to throw the pieces into the garden to see what he would do – ignore it or maybe take it to the bower. He stayed away for at least two hours. Just when I started to think he may not come back I heard him at the bower again. Within another half hour he had retrieved one of the bits of the red ring and placed it close to the bower. Not sure if that means he appreciated my rendering it harmless or he just had a very short memory and didn't recognise it as being the thing that had caused all the trouble.



Anyway, he is happily tending the bower and I am very happy to see him alive and well. A good reminder to cut all those plastic rings from the drink bottles before throwing them in the bin.

Janet Robino

SPRING IN LITTLE DESERT

With a spring conference to attend in Adelaide (the one remaining Australian capital we had yet to visit) my wife suggested we both fly down and take a good look around.

We decided to spend a further two weeks, pre conference, travelling in the region. Christie's destination wish list favoured a wine and food agenda while mine reflected my passion for bird photography. My first choice and the focus of this article wasn't even in South Australia.



New Holland Honeyeater

I was interested in photographing some Mallee species and after a little on-line research, came across the Little Desert Lodge. Being in Victoria, it was a bit out of the way but the Conservation Volunteers Australia property looked very promising. The Lodge is not far from the town of Nhill and adjoins the Little Desert National Park. We arrived mid-afternoon after a pleasant drive past endless paddocks of bright yellow canola. A nearby Emu showed only fleeting interest in us.

Our en-suite room was clean and well appointed and close to a well equipped communal kitchen and lounge area. We were given a run-down on the many walking tracks close by and it wasn't long before I was heading for one with camera in hand.



Red Wattlebird

Some Mallee species were in flower and the bush was alive with frenetic bird and insect activity. Spring was in full swing here. Unfamiliar calls competed for my attention from every direction. Heaven. Confusion. Ah, bliss. It was late afternoon, cool and cloudy making the light very poor. I walked on regardless, neck craning, eyes straining, camera clicking.



Eastern Rosella

Most of the birds I encountered on that first afternoon were exotic to a North Queensland birder. Superb Fairywren, *White-winged Chough*, *Yellow-rumped Thornbill*, *Red-capped Robin* and *Red-rumped Parrot* were all present. The big thrill for me was adding two lifers in *Brown-headed* and *White-fronted Honeyeaters*, with reasonable photographs of each despite the failing light. I also noted *Jacky Winter*, *Eastern Rosella*, *New Holland* and *White-plumed Honeyeaters*.

There were still plenty of great birds left to find after my first outing, the surface had only been scratched. Out there somewhere were *Malleefowl*, *Shy Heathwren*, *Purple-gaped Honeyeater*, *Southern Scrub Robin* and *Gilbert's Whistler*. I resumed the hunt in the morning a little later than planned because it was very cold. Only one degree overnight and frost on the grass. We walked a loop track in the National Park, enjoying the warm sunshine and abundant wild flowers. It was good to be alive.



Tawny-crowned Honeyeater

Suddenly two birds shot across the track in front of us calling loudly and weaving expertly through the low, dense mallee. My heart rate rose. Will they land or just keep tearing through the bush? Ripper, they land further down, now I need to close the distance between them and me quickly and unobtrusively. The birds began to feed in a flowering grevillea but would not let me get very close. They were *White-eared Honeyeaters*; you beauty, another lifer. The thick

scrub and constantly active birds made getting a good shot difficult. I stalked and photographed the pair until I could no longer hold the heavy camera and lens steady. No great shots but still a nice record of this wonderful encounter.

Back in the Lodge grounds we chatted to a couple of German birders. Excitedly they implored us to visit a small bird hide at one corner of the property, insisting that the action there was non stop. After lunch we walked to the hide through mallee heath. The thick, low growth rang with the calls of cryptic skulkers. Frustratingly close by but remaining well hidden. The track entered head high scrub and New Holland Honeyeaters scolded us from thick cover as we passed. Curious White-browed Babblers dashed out of hiding to look us over before quickly disappearing again. At last the sandy path led us to the small wooden hide just big enough for two people.



Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater

Once inside I was surprised to see how close we were to a small artificial pond fed by a constantly dripping hose. Thoughtfully placed dead branches provided perches for visiting birds. It wasn't long before an avian procession began, New Holland Honeyeaters were numerous and the most frequent visitors. Tawny-crowned, Spiny-cheeked, Brown-headed, Yellow-faced, White-plumed and White-naped Honeyeaters all came in to bathe and drink. In the midst of all this another lifer furtively entered stage left before exiting in a blur. So that's why it's called a Shy Heathwren! Too fast for a photo.

We heard a Southern Scrub-robin close by but were unable to find it. Fortunately, I was able to get reasonable shots of this lifer later in the Flinders Ranges. On the way back a vociferous Gilbert's Whistler gave us the run around, showing itself only when breaking cover to fly some distance to a new hide-out. It repeated the manoeuvre several times before I conceded defeat.

I returned to this wonderful little hide for one more long session before leaving. A Bandicoot and a Shingleback lizard also took advantage of the tiny oasis. Red Wattlebird, Eastern Rosella and Crested Pigeon all obliged, posing for shots. Sadly not even a glimpse of a Purple-gaped Honeyeater or Malleefowl was to be had. They will be a good excuse to *return...* as if we need one.

Story and photographs

Michael Schmid

AAAAAAH!----NOVEMBER

At last November has arrived. This is my favourite time of year when the grass crackles under foot from lack of water, even at dawn before the sun has had a chance to do its work.

It is now the driest time of year and natural changes are happening everywhere around us, some of which commenced weeks, and even months ago in the life cycles of our local plants and other wildlife.

Take for instance my neighbour's Albizzia tree--- *Albizzia lebbek* , (*Indian siris*,) a mature specimen of some 30 odd years, about 25 m tall and with a much wider canopy, a large part of which overhangs our common boundary. As always at this time of year, brand new foliage is competing for space with the annual flowering , resulting in the whole of the under- canopy area being carpeted several inches deep with spent lime green blossoms. During the flowering, the tree has been alive with nectar eating birds, the most noticeable (and noisy) being the Rainbow Lorikeets, Blue-faced Honeyeaters and an assortment of Friarbirds. Two scrub turkeys camp each night in this tree, although distant from each other, keeping a heap of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos company . Recent visitors to this wonderful tree have been a pair of Eastern Koels, the all-black male calling and flaunting himself quite cheekily while his beautifully-patterned, multi-coloured brown female is always lurking deeper in the foliage, appearing only briefly to snatch a quick drink from the nearby bird bath.



Female Koel

Annette Sutton

It seems to me that the Koels have been less active this year in my district. There was an early onslaught on my pre-dawn sleeping time in late August but I haven't seen these birds for several weeks now. In previous years Koels have stayed locally for several months, driving the local Corvids and Magpies to distraction with their incessant calling at all hours and their nest raiding habits. Where in previous years squadrons of Blue-faced Honeyeaters have spent a good deal of time chasing off the males, unwittingly leaving nests unprotected against the females, this year these honeyeaters have had little

to do except feed in the flowering trees and squabble with their neighbours.

This time of the year is also when *Eucalyptus platyphyla* (Poplar Gum) and *Corymbia tessellaris* (Moreton Bay Ash) lose their outer layer of bark and produce their creamy white flowers. Poplar gums go one step further by shedding all of their leaves over a period of weeks and producing a brand new canopy shortly thereafter. Single specimens of both these species really stand out in areas of short grass because of the huge amount of discarded bark and leaves scattered at random around each tree.



Dollar Bird

Ray Sutton

This time of year is also when Dollar Birds that appeared from further north some weeks ago, are nesting in local tree hollows. For the first time ever I was "buzzed" by one of these birds this morning. He, (I assume the bird was a male on sentry duty), usually takes up station on a dead branch (courtesy of Yasi) at the very top of a bloodwood tree each day at dawn to complain about passing traffic, motor vehicles, wallabies, my chooks, resident birds and anything else that wanders even remotely close to his self-proclaimed kingdom. Today he went one step further by diving very close to my head and kak, kaking me in his harsh staccato voice. He made two passes too, the mongrel!!!!

One of my favourite sounds at this time of year, occurring at both at dawn and dusk, is the call of Pheasant Coucals communicating in their unique resonating cooping. Their call starts quite loudly, descends in volume and through five or six notes and then rises for a note or two to fade away at the end. Our resident Coucal "Colin", a rescued bird raised from a chick in the city, has been exercising his "freedom of the block" rights for quite some months now. He (I think he is a male) is in almost full breeding plumage now but without the red-brown eyes of the adults. His black head, neck and upper back feathers glisten in the sun, making him a very handsome bird indeed. He disappears frequently, staying away for up to a week at a time now. It is interesting that he always displays affection when he

does turn up with soft pipping noises and other soft "talking" noises and by nipping fingers and toes until he receives attention and a supplementary feed. It is difficult to restrain oneself from petting him when he is in this friendly mood, but restrain oneself I must do to ensure this bird eventually leaves home permanently to take his place in our local ecosystem as nature intended.

Cocky Apple trees, *Planchonia careya*, are another native species that go through a remarkable change around November. It is their time for flowering, and they do it with style. Flowers, consisting of many white stamens fused together in a red circle at the base, open around dusk each day, remain open for hours at night for pollination by insects and bats, and then drop to the ground around the tree, usually before first light. I always include a couple of these trees on my early morning walk and never tire of the sight of the stark white flowers against the brown of the soils and grasses. Cocky apples are remarkable tree in their own right. The leaves turn bright red in the middle of the year, and remain so for days before dropping. On occasions a whole tree will be covered in red leaves and from a distance this species can appear to be in flower rather than simply preparing to change clothes. Apparently the fruit is edible with many cultural uses. I have tried them but am not a fan I'm afraid. Also I have never spotted a cockatoo feeding on the fruit.



Cocky Apple Flower

In the ordinary course of events in coming weeks we can now look forward to increasing temperature and humidity in the build up to the wet season. When this finally happens there will be other remarkable changes in vegetation and wildlife communities for us to wonder at while we swelter and fight off droves of mossies, moths, beetles and flying ants each night. Until this happens we should be grateful to be able to bask in the November's wonderful weather and soak up the remarkable sights of our ever-changing environment.

Aaaaah, November!!!!!! Wouldn't miss it for quids.

Norm Rains



WHALES SEALS AND PENGUINS

Saturday 27th September 2014 we took an afternoon Whale-watching cruise from Narooma on the south coast of NSW, about 5 hours south of Sydney.



This was a "double-barrel" tour because our destination, Montague Island (Nature Reserve), is where Little Penguins come ashore to roost for the night as well as to breed when in season.

That's our boat: A Sea-Eagle 12.5m Steber craft licensed for thirty. We cast off Narooma Jetty at 4:00pm and even though Montague Island is only five nautical miles away, and only a twenty minute full-steam cruise, we took our time (about two hours) as we wallowed and drifted around in swelling seas with whales and other stunning creatures. Don't worry; we had chewed our Kwells half an hour earlier. It was obvious though that some of the other tourists had not. We enjoyed seeing Humpbacks and Southern Right Whales and there were large pods of Dolphins accompanying the Whales. We had a couple of extraordinarily close-up encounters with some Whales; a mother and calf swimming close to our boat, adrift. There was much breaching and fin-slapping happening all around us. Whenever we got under way again, the pods of Dolphins would swim right beside our boat and play in our bow-waves. Beautiful!



There were huge numbers of seabirds in the skies too. Crested Terns, Silver Gulls and some great

action with scores of Australian Gannets spear-diving for food. We have never been on a pelagic tour before so we relied on our experienced Skipper and our cruise guide to identify the other seabirds with which we were unfamiliar. So we inadvertently got a couple of lifers in Fluttering and Short-tailed Shearwaters.

As we eventually approached the shores of Montague Island, the Skipper manoeuvred the boat to within ten metres of a huge colony of Australian Fur Seals as they relaxed and yawned away on their rocky foreshores... These animals are big, in comparison to the much smaller New Zealand Fur Seals, their own colony just around the rocky point closer to the landing jetty. The smell of these colonies' guano was just awful.

We landed on the Island's loading jetty, where we were now under the strict direction of a NPWS guide who spoke to us about the history of Montague Island as well as the nature and conservation work that has and is still being done on the Island today. Early European Light Station workers totally cleared the island of trees and shrubby vegetation. The NPWS guide alerted us to the thousands of boisterous Silver Gulls that were nesting on the ground and under newly-planted shrubs as well as all over the island. Their eggs were lying around seemingly anywhere and everywhere. You have heard of the Swan Dive...? Well we now have experienced the continual Gull-dive with triple-twists.



Buff-banded Rail

It was then a long and Gull-hassled, steep walk up the 800 metre service track to the caretaker's residence and working Light House, where en route, we encountered four Brown Quail and a couple of Buff-banded Rails. We scaled the internal and upward tightening spiral staircase of the light house to exit onto the top-most viewing area. We had some terrific westward panoramas as the sun melted over the mainland ranges. Directly on the open ground below us was a huge colony of many hundreds of nesting Crested Terns. Two White-bellied Sea-Eagles patrolled the skies as they waited for the Shearwaters which all come ashore to roost in their own burrow in the ground.

As the twilight disappeared, we settled down at the barricaded Penguin viewing point. Under the artificial low-lighting we watched two Sooty Oystercatchers feeding in the washed-up kelp weed on the rocky shore below us. The Fluttering and Short-tailed Shearwaters were now arriving to find their night burrows. Fur Seals patrolled the waters out the front as they instinctively knew the Little Penguins would be coming home and could become a tasty snack. Then the Penguins did begin to arrive and they began to come ashore, tentatively and timidly at first, but then very clumsily they began to clamber up and over the rocks, as they headed towards their evening roosts. We counted 32 little Penguins in that short tourist time we were there.



Little Penguins

Our return trip in the dark back to the mainland Narooma Jetty was smooth; giving us all calm time to reflect on our wonderful lifetime experience on Montague Island...

Chris and Len Ezzy

My Big Year

2014 has been a very busy one as far as bird watching goes.

New Year's Day saw the club venture off to Paluma. The first stop at the Crystal Creek bridge was quite profitable with Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Pied Monarch and a Spectacled Monarch, amongst others. I managed to see the Spectacled Monarch but missed the other two.

There was great excitement with news of a flurry of birds at a waterhole near Brandon which was dubbed Duckworld. The farmer kindly gave us permission to enter his property and most members made the journey. There were Freckled Ducks, Pink-eared Ducks, Shovelers, Pied Heron and Red-necked Avocets as well as quite a few terns and bush birds. As most of these birds are quite unusual round Townsville it was hot news.

In the middle of January we found quite a few Black-throated Finches out at Woodstock. The club paid a

visit to Wongaloo and besides the water birds, we had great views of a male Koel. A few days later we saw a Barking Owl at the Palmetum and just two days after that a Tawny Frogmouth turned up in our yard. He sat patiently through a photo shoot.

In the first week in February we waited for the rain to ease a bit and we took off for Julatten. We didn't really avoid the rain but we had great views of the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher, a lifer for us. There were several pairs close to the camp and they didn't stop for a moment all day, ferrying food to their hungry broods. A trip up Mt. Lewis and a lot of patience was rewarded with a visit from some Blue-faced Parrot-Finches and a Musky Rat Kangaroo. We also found a Papuan Frogmoth in a branch over the creek. The rain persisted and we had to leave Julatten via Mossman but that was OK as we wanted to slip into Port Douglas on the way home.

Near the end of February the club went to Cungulla. And, yes, the Beach Stone-curlew revealed himself in all his splendour (actually two of them) until some people with dogs drove them away. I even got some half decent photos.

In early March we went to Jourama Falls and I managed to get the Pied Monarch this time after a lot of hunting around. We sat and had our morning tea as we watched a pair of Large-billed Gerygones build a hanging nest over the water. We also snared a Scarlet Honeyeater on this trip.

Cyclone Ita passed us by on the 13th April. Lots of Peaceful Doves came in on to our covered patio to gain shelter from the rain. They looked so bedraggled and miserable. Luckily, all we really got was some rain. After the rain we headed along Dingo Park Road out near Calcium and to our great astonishment, a pair of Painted Button-quail crossed the road in front of us.



Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher

Annette Sutton

Then it was off to Georgetown and Karumba for Easter. We had a great outing to Flat Creek and came across a very obliging flock of Squatter Pigeons. The two men who owned the station are breeding Gouldian Finches. All sorts of birds were found at Georgetown, including Pictorella Mannikins, Black-throated and Masked Fiches. Then it was on to Karumba. Pied Heron country. The boat trip was the highlight and we found the Mangrove versions of

quite a few birds. A Red-headed Honeyeater was another Lifer for us. Ray found the Star Finches but once again I dipped.



Beach Stone-curlew Annette Sutton

We continued on to the Atherton Tablelands to meet up with the Townsville Photography Club. We chartered the train which runs from Ravenshoe to Tumoulin. It was a great day on an old steam train. We also took in lots of tableland birds.

The club spent the long weekend in June at Pentland. The dam was dry and finding birds was hard work. One member found finding his car was even harder. We did get to see the White-eared Honeyeater so that was worthwhile. Quite a few Brown, Singing and Spiny-cheeked honeyeaters along with Thornbills and Variegated Wrens were spotted as well.

In August the club booked Pop Sullivan's boat for what might be our last trip on Lake Ross (otherwise known as Ross River Dam). We went for a long cruise to find the male Bustard exhibiting breeding behaviour. We found two different leks and though we didn't hear them booming, they certainly were displaying well. We found quite a few cormorants nesting, mostly Pied. Along a narrow creek we came upon an Azure Kingfisher, a real treat. The barbecue breakfast was a great success.

Towards the end of August it was time to head up to Artemis in the Cape. We found the Golden-shouldered Parrot, Banded and White-streaked Honeyeaters, Black-backed Butcherbirds, and of course the Red Goshawk. Out on a dam we came up with scores of Star Finches. There were so many even I managed to see them this time. A couple of Papuan Frogmouths tried to turn themselves into trees at Lotus Bird Lodge and a few Radjah Shelducks caused some interest. On the way home, we caught up with the Tree Kangaroos at the Nerada Tea Plantation.

In September we drove down to Harvey Bay to see the whales and then on to the Bunya Mountains, Brisbane and Bowra. You can read about this trip in the October Drongo (Whales and Things).

October saw a few club members camping at Mungalla Station near Ingham. There were Australian Pratincoles everywhere. Spotlighting at night was great fun and we managed to find some Grass Owls. We also spotted the eye shine of quite a few crocodiles in the swamps. The country was very dry and the waterholes had dried up quite a lot. We continued on to Etty Beach and found the female Cassowary walking along the beach, as predicted. The male was thought to be in the rain forest, incubating eggs.



White-bellied Sea-Eagle attacking a Pied Cormorants' Nest Ray Sutton

By 24th October I had garnered 298 birds for the Quest, the highest total I have ever reached. But I wanted to make it 300. So we went to Paluma to try to find the Golden and Tooth-billed Bowerbirds to make up the numbers. The Golden was no trouble, obligingly popping on and off his chosen bough. But the Tooth-billed decided to play hard to get. No way could I find him. Undeterred, we went back the next day and once again he wouldn't co-operate. He had moved across the road and was in tall timber up the side of a hill. I went off to see the Golden again and when I came back, the Tooth-billed was in his "proper" tree, singing his head off. Number 300. Funnily enough, the very next day I found a Tawny Grass Bird on the Common so I ended up with 301. So that is my big year. Never did get to see the Yellow-breasted Boatbill!

Annette Sutton



WHAT'S IN A NAME

The other day I was reading through a 1937 edition of Neville Cayley's 'What Bird is That' and a 1961 edition of 'An Australian Bird Book' by J.A. Leach and was amused by some of the names that certain species of birds were called in those early days. Names were not necessarily the proper species name but what they were known as in a particular locality. I wondered to myself what a bird list of an excursion in the Townsville region would have looked like in those days. For the hell of it I made one up and it looked something like this (species are in no particular order):

Early Name

Banana Bird
Devil Bird
Lesser Riflebird
Newton's Bowerbird
Maned Goose
Narrow-billed Cuckoo
Brown-tailed Flycatcher
White-shafted Fantail
Scissor Grinder
Long-tailed Jay
Blue Jay
Black Jay
Jardine Caterpillar Eater
Codling Moth Eater
Green Thrush
Yellow-breasted Wherrybill
Carinated Flycatcher
Thickhead
Delicate Owl
Crested Goatsucker
Tawny-shouldered Podargus
Cuckoo Owl
Winking Owl
Fern Owl
Wattled Talegallus
Dragon Bird
Spalding's Spinetail
Pugwall
Black-throated Cow-shrike
Pimlico
Sanguineous Honeyeater
Barley Bird
Swallow Plover
Dicaeum Swallow

Current Name

Lewin's Honeyeater
Yellow-throated Scrub-wren
Victoria's Riflebird
Golden Bowerbird
Australian Wood Duck
Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo
Jacky Winter
Grey Fantail
Restless Flycatcher
Ground Cuckoo-shrike
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
White-winged Chough
Cicadabird
Grey-crowned Babbler
Olive-backed Oriole
Yellow-breasted Boatbill
Black-faced Monarch
Golden Whistler
Barn Owl
Owlet Nightjar
Tawny Frogmouth
Southern Boobook
Barking Owl
White-throated Nightjar
Australian Brush Turkey
Noisy Pitta
Chowchilla
Magpie Lark
Pied Butcherbird
Noisy Friarbird
Scarlet Honeyeater
Chestnut-breasted Mannikin
Australian Pratincole
Mistletoe-bird



Owlet Nightjar

Ian Boyd



Mistletoebird

Ian Boyd

Take the Noisy Friarbird, its' assortment of names were:

Leatherhead, Monk-bird,
Four O'clock,

Pimlico and Poor Soldier.

Fancy calling an Owlet Nightjar a Crested Goatsucker or a Mistletoe-bird a Dicaeum Swallow! I don't know whether I'm showing my age, but in my childhood days in Victoria I knew some species by their odd names.

Ian Boyd

The White-breasted Woodswallow was a Dummy Martin around Townsville. Ed.

January

- 1st - Thursday - Outing. We will start off the new year with an outing to either Paluma or Gunnado Road depending on the weather. Meeting place and leader TBA.
- 4th - Sunday - Town Common Survey - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a 6.30am start. Visitors welcome. Leader Rosemary Payet.
- 6th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme for the night will be Two or More. A 7.00pm start at a venue TBA.
- 10th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. No guest speaker, members short presentations instead.
- 14th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra for a 6.30am start. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

18th - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet in the Dam car park for a 6.30am start. Leader Ian Boyd

26th - Monday - Australia Day Outing. Alligator Creek National Park. Meet in the National Park's carpark for a 6.30am start. Will be home by lunchtime so just bring morning tea. Leader Norm Rains.

28th - Wednesday - Survey - Bushland Beach Shorebird Survey. Leader Ian Leach. Meet at Rumbala Court Park, Bushland Beach for a .00am start. Will be home by lunchtime so morning tea only.

February

1st - Sunday - Town Common Survey - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a 6.30am start. Visitors welcome. Leader TBA.

10th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme for the night will be Ducks. A 7.00pm start at a venue TBA.

14th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and **Annual General Meeting** (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker TBA.

15th - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet in the Dam car park for a 6.30am start. Leader Ian Boyd

18th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra for a 6.30am start. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

22nd - Sunday - Outing - Lucinda Shorebirds. 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. Leader Ivor Preston.

QUEST 2014



Name	Quest Number	Date
Ian Leach	365	31/12/2014
Chris Ezzy	365	31/12/2014
Len Ezzy	365	31/12/2014
Malcolm Calvert	354	20/12/2014
Lenore Calvert	350	16/12/2014
Annette Sutton	301	28/10/2014
Niel Bruce	292	19/10/2014
Warren Charlton	283	10/10/2014
Marleen Acton	280	7/10/2014
Cecily Messer	279	6/10/2014
Pat Charlton	275	2/10/2014
Ian Boyd	268	25/09/2014
Joan Wharton	256	13/09/2014
Janet Cross	253	10/09/2014
Elna Kerswell	240	28/08/2014
Alf Acton	238	26/08/2014
Rosemary Payet	215	3/08/2014
Janet Robino	127	7/05/2014



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