

The Drongo

Number 141 February 2016



Janet Robino

New Zealand

Northern
Territory

St. Lawrence

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2016

The monthly club meetings throughout the year were well attended. Apart from providing a venue for members to catch up and discuss stuff – not just always about birds – the quality of the presentations by guest speakers and members are entertaining as well as instructive. Thank you to everyone who takes the time to present at the meetings. We all appreciate the time and effort that goes into preparing and presenting these sessions. I, for one, love Members' Presentation days! We now have some brilliant photographers in the club and we appreciate their sharing their favourite snaps and holiday experiences with us all.

Sadly for the club, Gloria and Rick are moving down to Tasmania to escape the heat. At this time of year it is easy to understand why. They have both been very active members of the club and have been supportive of many of the club's education programs over the years. We have all enjoyed the wonderful afternoon teas they have provided at the monthly meetings. So I would like to take this opportunity to thank Gloria and Rick and wish them all the best in this big move. Beth and Wendy have very kindly taken on the role of afternoon tea providers. They have big shoes to fill but the couple of practice runs last year when they filled in when Gloria and Rick were in New Zealand proved that they are up to the task.

Once again in May I braved the Melbourne weather to attend the Branch Delegates Forum. It is always worthwhile having someone represent the club at these meetings. It gives us a chance to 'give feedback' on some of the difficulties we have encountered over the preceding year in dealing with National Office and to also contribute to discussions on the direction BirdLife Australia is taking.

Wal has done a marvellous job of keeping everything in order for the committee and making sure all members are kept up to date with all the club news. This is no small task as BirdLife Townsville is such a busy group with many outings for all to enjoy, and working with several Government and non-Government agencies. Warren has been a reliable back up for him.

The website continues to be very popular with members and the general community. Thanks to Ian Boyd for on-going management and development. If you have difficulty in opening 'Activities', click on the Refresh Icon to update the page.

The Owl Boxes Project in cooperation with NQ Dry Tropics is progressing a bit slowly due to several issues, but it is progressing non-the-less. A few of the boxes are in situ and being watched to assess the best height and position to place the boxes to encourage the owls to move in.

Norm has organized several school and community education programs. He and Wal have been sharing the Conservation Officer's role as Garrie has had family responsibilities keeping him down south. Janet Cross has worked hard to get all the safety stuff set up and maintain the equipment needed. Nina has done a sterling job of keeping our finances well organised as usual.

Our busy schedule of surveys continues with many members taking part and even taking the responsibility of coordinating some surveys. It is exciting to see so many members making good use of eBird: recording lists, planning holidays and keeping up with all the latest news on sightings.

A very important event in 2015 was the Nestling Exhibition at the Museum of Tropical North Queensland. The volunteer taxidermists, most of whom are BirdLife members, have developed a fantastic display. If you have not had the opportunity to see it yet, you still have till March to get in there. It would be a real shame to miss it. Earlier in the year, BirdLife Townsville donated a display case which will be only used to show bird specimens.

Beth Snewin has done several radio interviews on ABC local throughout the year. The great news is that this will now be a regular event. Beth will be interviewed by Paula Tapiolas at 1030 every second Tuesday. Beth's interviews are always entertaining and informative so be sure to tune in.

Thank you to the outgoing committee and the many non-committee members who worked hard over the year to keep BirdLife Townsville such a successful group to belong to.

Janet Robino, President

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino

Secretary: Wal Threlfall

Treasurer: Nina Doyle

Conservation Officer: Garrie Douglas

Education Officer: Norm Rains

Safety Officer: Janet Cross

Committee : Warren Charlton

Newsletter Editor Annette Sutton amsgreat@gmail.com

BIRDING IN THE TOP END

We had a couple of days in Darwin before our Kimberley Cruise in September so went birding in Kakadu with Luke and Sarah, two young bird guides. They were very knowledgeable so we saw a lot of hoped-for birds in a short time.



Rainbow Pitta

On the Marakai Track we saw Masked Finches and flushed out Brown Quails. At Nourlangie Rock we had a fabulous sighting of the vibrant Rainbow Pitta, practically under our feet. He stayed around for ages, fossicking in the leaf litter and varying his position in a fifteen foot radius. Then he got sick of all the attention and wandered off. In the gloom of late afternoon, the White-lined Honeyeater turned up at a soak, as predicted, under an overhanging cliff. On the outskirts of Jabiru we came across some Partridge Pigeons.

Somewhere near Jabiru, Luke showed us a Red Goshawk's nest that he's been monitoring, with parent on the nest. We were admiring it when a white fluffy chick poked its head up. Suddenly, about five Northern Rosellas flew close by the nest. Another Goshawk (previously hidden) charged out from a nearby tree and tried to catch one of them. It was a fast and dramatic chase over our heads with some skilful manoeuvring but the Goshawk lost and the Rosellas flew away. This thrilling unexpected encounter was so satisfying - a case of being in the right place at the right time. We also saw Silver-backed Butcherbirds in this area. We were lucky to encounter buffalo, brumbies and pigs on our travels.

At Copperfield Dam near Pine Creek I got my 500th bird, and what a bird! The Gouldian Finch - which was very exciting as it was the bird I most wanted to see up there. Admittedly, they weren't very close but we saw the striking colours of the male. In Pine Creek the female Hooded Parrots were having fun under the sprinklers with the males nearby in the trees. At

Adelaide River we saw the Arafura Fantail and Yellow Fly Robin.

Obviously we only scratched the surface of Kakadu in our two days and will have to go back to explore in-depth.

John and I went to Buffalo Creek (just outside Darwin) early the next morning and saw Red-headed Honeyeaters and the Green-backed Gerygone but missed the Chestnut Rail.

We also went to the Sewage Farm. Everyone kept saying 'be croc aware when you go there', so much so that I was on hyper-alert. There's not much space between the mangroves and the perimeter fence and no-where to run. We managed to see lots of good birds but it's a huge place and without a telescope it was sometimes a case of 'is it? could be, too hard to tell'. Dotterels, Pied Herons, Mangrove Golden Whistler, Large-billed Gerygone and Yellow White-eye were not a bad haul but I was pleased to leave. And we flushed some Red-backed Quail on the way in.

That afternoon we went on the Outback Floatplane Adventure to the Finniss River. It wasn't particularly to see birds - just a fun thing to do involving a floatplane, a boat cruise along the lagoon (where the croc Sweetheart was found), a helicopter and an airboat. However, we managed to see Kingfishers, Shining Flycatchers, Night Herons, Pacific Heron, Great Egret and of course, lots of crocs, big ones, which were very close to the airboat. It was a fascinating area - it had a primeval feel about it and the airboat could negotiate the narrowest, trunk-laden & vegetated little creeks.

At one stage John had a small fish on his outstretched hand and a Forest Kingfisher swooped down and picked it up with a nip in the process.



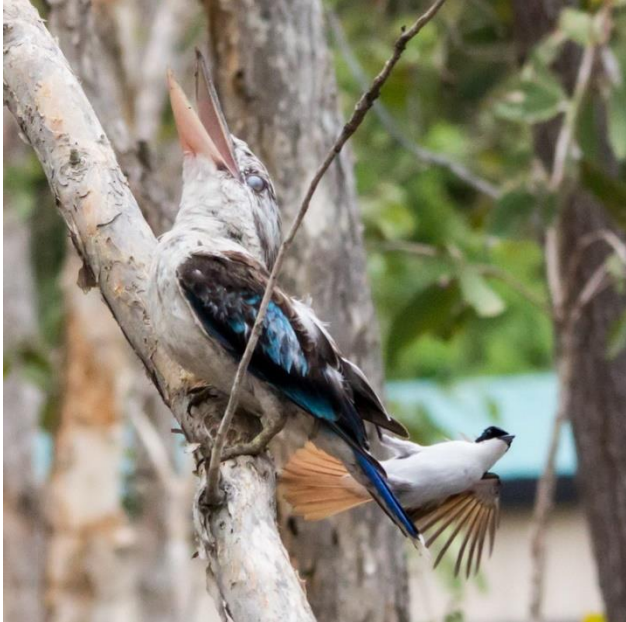
Partridge Pigeon

In a park near our hotel in the heart of Darwin we also saw the Red-collared Lorikeets. We bumped into a couple of English birdwatchers on their second trip here. Amazing how a pair of binoculars around your neck gives you instant friends. They had some knowledge, but were way-off with some identifications - such an adventurous elderly couple. Made me think we've got years of birding left in us yet.

Chris Stewart

SHINING FLYCATCHERS

I've been chasing a nice photo of the elusive and shy (according to my bird book) Shining Flycatcher.



Attack

I had had a few fleeting glimpses of both the male and female and one memorable day had a male feeding just a few feet from me, far too close for a photo with my long lens so I just watched and enjoyed the experience.

Over the Christmas break I had heard them calling and saw the male feeding in the ti trees (*melaleuca viridiflora*) behind our beach hut. With the drought we are having their regular mangrove creek has dried up. It's one that is only connected to the sea irregularly and is now closed off due to a build up of sand at the mouth.

I dashed out with my camera and was lucky enough to see both male and female sitting together in a tree. I got some shots and then left them to it.

Later in the day I went for a wander with the camera and could hear the call of the Shining Flycatcher again, but much more frequently and louder. I discovered the pair harassing two Blue-winged Kookaburras. We had had a nice shower of rain overnight that had brought out the flying ants and then the frogs and consequently the kookaburras were having a feast of frogs.

I got to sit on the ground and observe and photograph these two birds, busily seeing off enemy. It was fantastic. Both birds were calling and attacking with their feet, putting on a very good show. I did notice that the female appeared to be the one doing most of the actual physical attacking. One kookaburra got the message very quickly and left, the other was somewhat slower, which was great for me.

During this attacking time I observed the male picking off bits of paper bark and waving them around and

then chucking them on the ground. I'm not sure if this was a display of strength for the kookaburra or something for the female flycatcher to observe.

It was an amazing experience that left me with some great shots. I can't believe my luck in being there at the right time.

This happened at Toomulla beach, in Clement state forest land that our block backs onto.

Annette Sibson

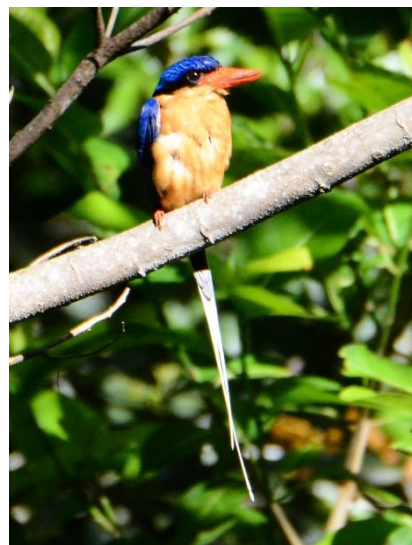
IN SEARCH OF THE BBPK

As we had failed to see the Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher along the road to Paluma (you can't miss it; it's there all the time – comments from the ones who had seen it); Lenore and myself followed Angela Wards instructions upon where to find the elusive bird.

This was to walk up the track which starts at Ellen Cl., Bayview Heights, a suburb of Cairns; following the track to the lookout and down the other side if necessary.

We started out on the track early morning on Jan 30 2016 after a good shower of rain during the night. The rainforest was still dripping with water; it was hot and the humidity was bordering the totally liquid stage. Didn't take long before we were dripping with sweat.

The climb would make a mountain goat think twice about tackling it. Very steep. Keeping an eye out for the BBPK, we finally made it to the lookout. We could hear different birds calling from all around but not close to the track. Taking our time to descend, finally we gave it up as wild bird chase and went back for breakfast.



Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher

The previous day, Nina and Ian had seen the BBPK at this location and, judging by the calls that we heard, there is a fair population of them in the area that we climbed.

We met up with Nina and Ian and went to the Daintree Village where we then met up with Nina's brother, Vince and his wife Liz.

A cruise on the Daintree with Sauce and a walk through the Mossman Gorge took up the rest of the day. The following day we had planned a trip up Mt. Lewis but when we arrived were cheerfully informed by the work gang at the bottom of the mount, that the track was closed for at least a week while they cleared fallen trees, fixed other hazards and repaired the track.

Regrouping, we decided to go to Kingfisher Park and walk along the bordering road. The Park is closed for two months, reopens in April.

As we turned the corner to go down to the creek, a juvenile BBPK flew up and perched close by.

Further down the road, we found an adult BBPK which sat there obligingly for photos.

We all agreed that this was the way birding should be; not clambering through hot and sweaty jungle, risking life and limb!

Malcolm Calvert

BIRDS IN THE GARDEN

Robyn and I have recently returned from a holiday in the top western corner of the south island of New Zealand.



Tui

We stayed with our daughter-in-law's father, Graham, on his dairy farm in Pu Pu Valley on the outskirts of Takaka in a picturesque area called Golden Bay. The house is situated on a forested hill that overlooks the farm which takes in a large portion of the valley. Around the home is one of the best rambling gardens I have seen for a long time. I would class it as a cottage garden only on a much larger scale. It is in that garden that I spent many hours with my camera.

There was plant photography aplenty but it was the birds that took most of my attention.

Due to the quite likable temperature (not too hot not too cold with the odd rain showers) the birds were active throughout most of the day. It was the Tui and the Bellbird that first caught my attention as they were taking advantage of the two nectar laden plants in the garden; the New Zealand Flax and the Pohutukawa which has a flower not unlike a callistemon.



Bellbird

Another bird that was a regular visitor was the New Zealand Pigeon, quite a large bird that fed mainly on the fresh leafy shoots on various trees. They were usually in pairs and flew in and out of the gardens at all times of the day.

Of course there was the Tomtit. Akin to our Robins, they flitted around the garden in search of food. Generally in company with the Tomtit was the Grey Fantail. The colour of these birds was variable from light grey with lots of white in the tail to all over brown which I first thought was another species.

Always skulking around the garden was the Weka (Bush-hen). There was a family of two adults with their two immature off-spring. They quietly moved around the garden in search of food. We were warned that if we left an exterior door open for too long they would more likely enter the house looking for food. Much to Graham's annoyance they are adept at getting under the netting that protected the strawberry plants and any other succulent food that took their fancy.

Another ground dwelling bird was the Californian Quail, an introduced species, but what a beautiful bird. It could be seen in any part of the garden and would general pop up when least expected.

Another bird that was the cause of protective netting over the plants was the Silver-eye. These little birds, in numbers, could devour a good size fig in no time. They were very common and spent a lot of their time deep inside the Manuka trees that were abundant on the hills around the house. The reason for this was I think because of the New Zealand Falcon and the

Swamp Harrier that patrolled the area on a regular basis.



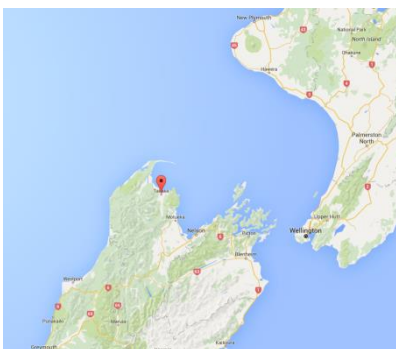
Weka

The New Zealand Falcon proved to be a hard bird to photograph. On most occasions that someone saw it I was either out touring around or otherwise occupied. It was only on the morning that we left to return to Australia that the Falcon presented itself for me to photograph. To start with it was the female, preening herself in misty rain on top of a power pole near the house. Not worrying too much about getting the camera wet, I was able to get close enough for some photos. And, I think in sympathy too me for waiting so long for an opportunity for some photos, the male bird joined her and I got both of them together. A nice farewell present.

One bird that I chased around the garden but could not find let alone get a photo of was the Long-tailed Cuckoo. Quite a large bird of around 40cm and looking something similar to a female Common Koel, it should have been easy to find. Not only do these birds lay their eggs in other birds' nests, eggs and young nestlings form part of its diet. The call of this Cuckoo is quite loud and you would think easily lead you to the bird. Not so. I spent ages trying to track them down which, by its call, seemed to be only a couple of metres away. Ventriloquist I think. Blowed if I could locate one.

All in all we had a great time and visited lots of places and I saw plenty of other birds but it was the time I spent in the garden on that hill in PU PU Valley that was one of the highlights of the trip for me.

Ian Boyd



California Quail



New Zealand Falcon



New Zealand Pigeon

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Since my unexpected return to SA, I have been renovating my trashed house, which is only a couple of kilometres from the samphire coast, which is the stretch of coastline of St Vincent Gulf extending from Adelaide to Pt. Wakefield, and renowned for its migratory seabirds. It attracts researchers and birdgroups from all over Australia.

The lignum grasslands and the surrounding scrub supports, amongst others, the Slender-billed Thornbill, Elegant and Rock Parrots and plenty of honeyeaters.

In my few excursions to date, I have seen some nice birds, which, although not uncommon here, may be of some interest. Photos are in order Ruddy Turnstone, Red-necked stints, Common Greenshank, Grey Plover, Pacific Gull, and Fairy tern.

Roger Mortlock



BEACH STONE-CURLEWS

The Beach Stone-curlew is no longer the phantom bird for me. Well, not at the moment anyway. Benwell Road is, for the time being, home to at least three of these wonderful birds. And we saw them four days in a row.



We went down to Benwell Road at the end of February at low tide. One Beach Stone-curlew was patrolling up and down on the mud. As soon as we drew up by the side of the road (about one hundred metres before the stop sign) he took off into the mangroves and we thought we had scared him. We waited a bit and left. At least we had scored.

The next day we went back and he was standing in the mud, just looking about. We pulled up again and he totally ignored us. After some time he lunged into the mud and pulled out a crab. He gripped the crab by one of the nippers, holding it well out so the second nipper couldn't get him. He crossed the little stream and then proceeded to bash the crab on the mud until all of its legs and nippers fell off. Then he ran off into the mangroves where we could see him stabbing at the carapace and extracting the meat.



When he was finished he wandered back down on to the mud and stared into space again. After a while he repeated the performance. Another Beach Stone-curlew strolled up and watched for a bit and then flew off.



Next day there were two there when we arrived. One caught a crab and ate it and then caught another and, after smashing off the legs, he went up into the mangroves, followed by the other one. He then presented the legless carcass to the second bird who proceeded to stab it with its bill but it seemed to take a very long time to get into the crab so I am assuming this one was a juvenile. Its feathers looked smoother than the other bird but I couldn't see any other differences.

Shortly after the two birds returned to the mud, a third arrived. So now we seemed to have the complete family. Only two of them caught crabs but on the third day I think the juvenile caught its own.

While we were waiting for crabbing to happen, there was a passing parade. All up, over the four days we had two Bar-tailed Godwits, half a dozen Black-winged Stilts, a pair of Sharpies, a Common Sandpiper, A Great and a Little Egret, a Royal Spoonbill, a White Ibis or two, a Gull-billed Tern and a Masked Lapwing and, of course, Silver Gulls. Both Egrets were feeding on Mudskippers which seem to be enormous over at Benwell Road.



Then we drove down to Samphire Drive and found five Pacific Golden Plovers. A week or so later, about two hours after the peak of the king tide, we counted twenty-two Pacific Golden Plovers taking refuge from the water. The Beach Stone-curlews were resting up on the flat behind Ross Haven Marine with a bunch of Royal Spoonbills.

You can find it all around here. Beach Stone-curlews, no trouble.

Annette Sutton

Photos Annette and Ray Sutton

CARPET SNAKE

Late in January my husband and I were up at our beach hut in Toomulla. He had just gone to get the papers and I was starting to cook breakfast.



There was a knock on the door and a neighbour was there saying he had a snake swallowing a rainbow lorikeet in his yard, was I interested? Well, of course I was. I grabbed the camera, and followed him after the quickest lens change you've ever seen. Breakfast could wait.

Well really the photos tell the story. It was fantastic to watch the small snake manage eventually to swallow all of the bird. The snake was in the best spot possible for clear views and photos of the whole process. Luckily, there were plenty of people around to keep any predators away as he was very vulnerable during the whole process.

We ended up having morning tea at the friends hut then when the snake had finished and was in the recovery process I went home and had breakfast! I was there for two hours and we estimated that the snake had already spent an hour on the process. No wonder the poor thing looked so exhausted when it was finally finished.

We went back later in the day to see the snake. He was still in the tree but higher up and in amongst the branches so a clear shot wasn't possible. That was a

shame as it would have shown just how small the snake was. The next morning the snake was gone, no doubt sleeping somewhere safe, feeling very satisfied with himself.



Annette Sibson

YORKSHIRE

Thought you might like a few photos of British Birds I've sighted on my travels around Yorkshire. Not sighted the Redshank and Purple Sandpiper before but never tire from seeing the Robin red breast.

Brin Crowther



Purple Sandpiper



Redshank



Robin

BUSH BUILDING

Janet and I set off early for a trip north to Tyto Nature Reserve. Unfortunately, the Lagoons are lower now than they have been since the Reserve first started. This is on reliable information from a well known local birder, Tony. There were very few birds to be seen in or around the Lagoons from the viewing point, but we did see several White-browed Crakes.



Brown-backed Honeyeater nest Janet Robino

We walked round to the bird hide on the other side of the Lagoon and had a wonderful surprise----watching four different species either sitting in, or building nests. Close to the hide we watched two very busy Brown-backed Honeyeaters building in a low bunch of foliage, then spotted a White-breasted Woodswallow, almost hidden in the fork of a tree, flying back and forth with twigs. Janet then walked round in front of the hide to get photos of the Honeyeaters nest building, and spotted the Willie Wagtail sitting in his little cup on the end of a branch. We noticed that Crimson Finches were in and around the hide all the time and then found their nest in a top corner of the hide. We had to leave so that they could attend to business !!!



Crimson Finch nest Janet Robino

After all this activity we thought our trip was well worth while, but something better even was waiting at Jourama when we got there. As we crossed the second water crossing we saw movement and parked the vehicle and walked back to the edge of the water, and as we did a male Shining Flycatcher flew upstream from a rock, closely followed by the female. Standing, keeping an eye open for their return, we spotted the nest up above us and the male was "in-situ". After this they took it in turns to sit on this beautifully built little cup. Neither of us knew where these birds normally built, or had seen their nest before. In other words what a great morning!!!

Barbara Reidy

ST LAWRENCE WETLANDS

Len and I travel regularly to and from his family town, Bundaberg and back home to Townsville. We usually make it a comfortable two-day trip with an overnight stop about half way.



For whatever reason, we had never driven the six kilometres east off the Bruce Highway at 177km north of Rockhampton, 155km south of Mackay, to check out St. Lawrence, the town and surrounds. It is the headquarters of the Isaac Regional Council. (<http://www.isaac.qld.gov.au/st-lawrence>) Central to the renowned St. Lawrence Wetlands, which are listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia, we found it a little gem of a coastal, tidal-estuarine town on the banks of the expansive St. Lawrence Creek.

There is no formal accommodation in St Lawrence i.e. hotels, motels or caravan parks. There is, however, the Recreation Grounds on the outskirts of town, which provide year round camping facilities and amenities for travellers. We were towing our campervan so that suited us perfectly, thank you. Fees apply but are by way of personal donations essentially to cover rubbish removal, general maintenance, the cleaning of the amenities, hot showers and toilets etc.



Latham's Snipe

Our last holiday itinerary (August-September 2015) included a couple of nights at St. Lawrence, where

we'd planned to be for our wedding anniversary. This all sounded good on paper... In reality, it turned out to be a far better experience for us than we could have expected.

First afternoon we were there. Len won the final raffle of the tourist season, a beautiful seafood, mud-crab and beer tray. We struggled to fit it all in our tiny campervan fridge. The contents of that tray wouldn't be in there for very long anyway. Thread-fin Salmon fillets for that night's dinner.

Early next morning we walked the 2km self-guided walk to the elevated Wetland Viewing Shelter (and beyond). As usual, Len carried our scope so we could get better and clearer views of the birdlife. The wetlands were alive as we stood in awe of the multitudes of birds in front of us: about 130 Radjah Shelducks snoozed around the shores and there would have been more than 250 Cotton Pygmy-geese along with about 150 Eurasian Coots casually scattered over this primary wetland. The waders are returning. Lots of Sharp-tailed and Marsh Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, half a dozen Latham's Snipe fed in the shallows and grassed shores. Many waterbirds species present; Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills, Black Swans, Ducks, Australasian Grebes, Cormorants, Herons, Pelicans, Egrets, Swampheens and Moorhens etc. There was even a Bustard which came in for a drink.



Australian Painted Snipe

Len was intent on scoping around the far edges, hoping to pick-up Crakes or Yellow Chats. He didn't find any; but he did call me to the eyepiece, exclaiming, "Look what I've got here!" ☺ It was an Australian Painted Snipe (adult male) dozing in the shadows of a stand of reeds about 100 metres away. It began preening, then snoozing on and off; then started feeding along the shore, staying in view for about 35 minutes, before moving further away from us. It eventually took flight to the south over some reed-beds and out of view. Great to watch.

Here is a link to Eremaea Ebird list for the St Lawrence Wetland Hot Spot.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/australia/hotspot/L1253964>

To top the morning off, we spotted a Little Grassbird in the reeds on the walk back to camp.

We celebrated our morning's birding excitement with delicious fresh bread and mud-crab sandwiches for lunch. What a wonderful wedding anniversary. Great wetlands; beautiful food; good clean camping with hot showers that were never going to wash the smiles off our faces. ☺



Chris and Len Ezzy

WORLD RECORD BIG DAY TWITCH

Most of you probably wouldn't give a oobook's hoot about the following story, but some of you might find it of interest, so here goes. Recently, a new world record was set in Ecuador for a 24-hour birding twitch-a-thon, and my good mate Mitch Lysinger was one of the four-man twitching team (a fifth person was the official monitor/chronicler for the team). Dušan Brinkhuizen, one of Ecuador's top twitchers and, like Mitch, also a professional birding guide, planned, coordinated and led the troops with military precision in their record-breaking attempt. In October 2015, the team assembled at Cabañas San Isidro in the cloud-forest zone on the eastern Andean slope at 2000m elevation – the Cabañas are run by Mitch's wife, Carmen, and are among the top birding lodges in Ecuador.

Just after midnight, on 8 October the team set out for the Amazonian lowlands, birding along the way, and recording some useful night birds as well as a few day-birds. Still more or less in the lowlands, they drove southwards towards Tena in the eastern foothills (where I was based the last few months of my Ecuadorian assignment, till mid-August). Among the best birds in this nocturnal segment were, could you guess, Nocturnal Curassow, two owls and an assortment of other species including a Blue-fronted Lancebill hummingbird sitting on her nest! Buckley's Forest-Falcon in the lowlands at dawn, among many other birds. The team then back-tracked along the main Tena-Quito highway to San Isidro, adding species at a rapid rate, and on up-slope past another top birding lodge, Guango (owned and run by Carmen's older sister, Irene) at 2500m, towards the Papallacta Pass over the eastern cordillera of the Andes. At the pass they entered the paramo at over 4000m, and then drove down into the inter-Andean valley in the Quito area at around 3000m. By this

stage, late afternoon, they had surpassed the old 24-hour world record of 354 species, set by a team of Louisiana State University researchers with their Peruvian counterparts in Peru many years earlier (before that, at one stage the world record belonged to Kenya teams with another good friend, Don Turner a participant in one of the early world-record Kenya twitchathons).

At around 6:30pm, the relentless assault on the record took a surreal turn: the team boarded a commercial flight to the Santa Elena peninsula on the south-western coast of Ecuador. Here the team logged on in the dark, finally ending up at the famous Ecuasal lagoons (owned and operated in part as a bird reserve by Ecuador's national salt company – I had spent two bird-full days there in 2014 with the local resident coastal bird expert, Ben Haase, who has monitored bird populations there over more than 20 years). The team logged an astonishing additional 40 species at the lagoons, in the DARK! The last two species recorded were Chilean Flamingo and Snowy Plover. The exhausted team then dragged themselves to their local hotel just before midnight, for a quick beer to celebrate before crashing.

So, you ask, what is the new record? A mind-boggling 425 species in 24 hours, fortunately good weather throughout!! Superb effort, guys, glad I wasn't with you! This provisional total is "unofficial" and an official account with results of the twitch not yet published, though a preliminary short report appeared recently in the Field Guides, Inc. (Texas) online newsletter since Mitch is one of their guides – some of the above information also came from Mitch directly.

And now I must urgently head for a lie-down and nap – just writing this account has completely exhausted me!

[illegible]

Post-Script: Since I wrote the above, it has come to my attention that official results have now been published, under the rules for Big Day twitches of the American Birding Association (ABA) with the full bird list coming in at 431 species, seen and/or heard and unequivocally identified. The report (with list) may be accessed at "Research Gate" via the following link: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283498360>

FYI CORVID COMPARISON



Found this Corvid
comparison chart on the
internet and thought it may
be of interest to some of the
members.

<http://birdsqueensland.org.au/downloads/crows.pdf>

Michael McMaster

A NORTHERN TRIP

In my other article, I dealt with the trials and tribulations of looking for the Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher. We did a few other things in between not finding and then finding the elusive bird.

On the way to Cairns, we stopped at Tully and found Metallic Starlings in residence in the big tree near the Gumboot. These were seen wherever we went in the days following.

In company with Ian and Nina, we checked out the Cairns esplanade. Very few birds – Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits; Grey-tailed Tattler and Eastern Curlew. The Mangrove Robin was quickly found, as well as the Varied Honeyeater.

On to the Cattana Wetlands; trees have grown considerably since our last visit. Plenty of water in the lakes; again few birds – a solitary Jacana on each of the lakes. Wandering Whistling Ducks and Orange-footed Scrubfowl were also seen. Overall, very disappointing with the lack of birds.



Double-eyed Fig-Parrot

Moving on – in the first parking area in the Ellis Beach area, two bullets whistled past. These were resolved into Double-eyed Fig-Parrots by a sharp eyed Nina who spotted them inspecting a cavity in a high up dead tree branch. Much jubilation (by the humans). A few other birds seen in the area, including a juvenile Black Butcherbird, were Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Torresian Imperial-Pigeon.

Staying in Daintree Village for the night, we met up with Nina's brother and his wife, Vince and Liz, aspiring birdwatchers. We were all booked with Sauce Worcester for a cruise on the river. As he had only a four seater boat available due to his usual boat being fitted with a new outboard motor, we split the group into two lots with three people doing the afternoon cruise and the balance on the early morning cruise next day. In the final analysis, there was little difference between the number and species seen on the cruises. The Daintree River still has plenty of water in it despite the lack of rain.

The Great-billed Heron, Papuan Frogmouth, Black Bittern, Shining Flycatchers, Channel-billed Cuckoos were all seen. A very relaxing cruise, excellent weather, not too hot. We always enjoy our outings with Sauce.

Before we left, Sauce remarked that Beach Stone-curlews were usually to be seen at Newell Beach. Calling in there, the first bird seen was a Beach Stone-curlew.



Great-billed Heron

Thinking ourselves very fortunate, we took a casual look around. Out of the mangroves along the Mossman River, stepped a Great-billed Heron. On the Daintree cruise, all we could see of the Great-billed Heron was a very long neck poking out of thick foliage. This one, at Mossman R., was right out in the open and not far away so it was an excellent sighting. Much rejoicing, again.

A quick walk around the area and heading for the cars when Nina spotted a Collared Kingfisher. This was nearly too much for us to handle – our cup runneth over!

Mossman Gorge was the next stop; taking the shuttle bus up to the top. Quite a number of birds to be seen with Ian finding White-browed Scrubwrens. Also seen were Pale- yellow Robins, Black Butcherbird, Sacred Kingfisher, and Black-faced Monarch.

Next day, Monday 1 Feb. 16, we all set out for Mt. Lewis but were thwarted due to road maintenance works which were about to start. A week they said to complete. I would allow a bit longer!



Beach Stone-curlew

After finding the BBPK at Kingfisher Park, we headed up Eulamo Rd. at Julatten. Some distance along, on Black Mountain Rd., a check of some dense trees revealed a Wompoo Pigeon. Further on at the edge of the Mowbray State Forest, we found a Superb Fruit-Dove as well as Black-faced Monarchs. So we were pretty happy with our fill-in areas taking the place of Mt. Lewis.

Calling in to Abattoir Swamp, the new walkway is finally under construction; about 25% complete.

Talking to the workers on the job who were having a well earned rest, it will be some time before it is ready for use.



Shining Flycatcher

Next stop Hastie Swamp. Again, few birds. A Nankeen Night-Heron, a couple of Grey Teal and a solitary Purple Swamphen were the main birds of interest. Water level is medium.

The Lake Eacham Caravan Park next morning had a few Grevilleas flowering and Scarlet Honeyeaters were working these over. Plenty of domestic ducks and hens; I was hoping that a stray bolt of lightning might strike a particular rooster.

Lake Eacham circuit was good. Took us three hours to get around and could have easily spent longer. Wompoo Pigeons, Black-faced and Pied Monarchs, Great Cormorant, Atherton Scrubwren, and Brown Cuckoo-Dove were among the more notable birds seen.

On the way home now, down the Palmerston Hwy., heavy rain, much lightning. The rain had stopped by the time we reached the Bruce Hwy. so we headed to Etty Bay.

On our way in, past long term roadworks and heading up the first hill, Nina spotted a Cassowary strolling along in the paddock to our left; an adult bird. Lucky sighting as it soon disappeared into the trees.



Cassowary

At Etty Bay, the resident Cassowary was wandering about; two Cassowaries in the one day was a major event in our lives.

Overall, an excellent trip

Malcolm Calvert

HITS AND MISSES

In September last year we went on a dream cruise from Darwin to Broome. As we had already seen Broome in our pre-birdwatching days you can guess what the priority was when we disembarked.

We only had a couple of days before flying out, so we contacted a local birder to help us find as many birds as possible in a short time. The first 'not-going-to-plan' incident – he wanted a 4.30am start! So we dragged ourselves out of bed only to discover a pea-soup thick fog blanketing Broome. George was confident it would lift soon – 2 hours later we were still groping around. First stop was Taylors Lagoon. We managed to discern Yellow Chats, Little Ringed Plovers, and Long-toed Stints in the gloom but without George's guidance we wouldn't have achieved it. The Chats didn't have their full-blown yellow plumage but just a smudge was good enough for me.

At the next waterhole we were lucky to see the Ruff (he with the funny shaped head) and many more species. Our visit to Lake Eden produced Swinehoe's Snipe. We also saw a Wedgie and a Sea-Eagle feeding on the same fresh carcass which was unusual. We had good views of the Oriental Plover when we traversed cross-country out on the Roebuck Plains.



Oriental Plover

John Stewart

The next 'miss' was a very close encounter with a semi in the middle of Roebuck Plains. George had never ever seen a vehicle out there and it was a chance in a million that our paths crossed, almost literally. And I thought crocs and snakes were the biggest dangers!

It was a race to get to Roebuck Bay for the waders before the tide went out so that we could get the best views of the birds. Talk about a potpourri of birds! So many different species I lost count. On the one stone outcrop there would be six different species huddled together. There were thousands of waders on the shoreline and when they took flight it was magnificent – undulating synchronised masses putting on a

balletic performance. I could have watched them forever. John and George did more of the serious stuff of identifying the birds.

Seeing the Great Knot in full breeding plumage was good. It was exhausting work racing along the shoreline cliffs to get to better vantage spots, especially lugging telescopes in the 38 degree heat.

We bumped into some birders who had just seen some Redshanks but by the time we got down onto the beach they had disappeared, never to be seen again. So close!



We went to the nearby mangroves to see the Mangrove Fantail and he practically performed for us. The Dusky Gerygone was there too and we had a great viewing of the White-breasted Whistler while wending our way through the mangroves. We didn't hang around too long there for the obvious reasons but then we had trouble extricating the vehicle from the sand. I had visions of a long hot walk back but eventually we got out.

We only saw the one group of birders in that whole area (Broome Bird Observatory) but the Broome Sewerage Farm was another story. We went three times and every time bumped into birders. One time there was a crazy lady standing on top of her car with the biggest camera lens I have ever seen though she seemed an amateur birder. We were after Barn Swallows (which we also saw at Gantheaume Point) and of course the Semipalmated Plover, a vagrant which has been visiting the sewerage farm for the last six years. However, we 'missed' and heard it arrived the day after we left. So Broome turned out to be a visit of hits and misses.

Chris Stewart

SMART PARROT

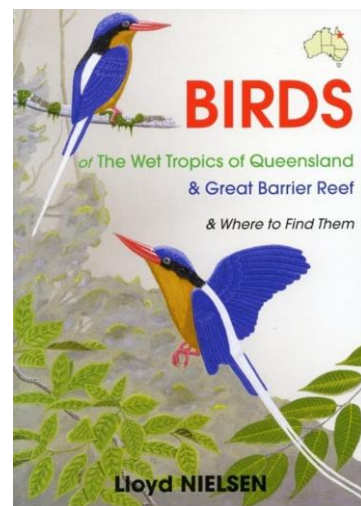
Scientists studied a parrot for 30 years and found he had the intelligence of a five-year-old human. He had a vocabulary of 150 words and could ask for a banana. If he was offered a nut instead, he would stare in silence, ask for the banana again, or take the nut and throw it at the researcher.

WHITE ZEBRA FINCH

I picked Barbara up from her home in Kirwan to take her to the airport. It was lucky I was a bit early, which meant we had time to stop and admire a little group of Zebra Finches hopping between the fence and lawn in one of Barbara's neighbours' yard. One was begging for food so we assumed it was a very young one. We had nothing else to go on as it was completely white with pink legs and beak. Of course, I had no camera with me at the time. It would have made a pretty impressive picture, sitting on the fence wire beside its parent bird which was in full breeding colours.



Zebra Finch <http://www.singing-wings-aviary.com>
Janet Robino



Lloyd Nielsen has released the update of his book, "Birds of the Wet Tropics of Queensland and Great Barrier Reef and Where to Find Them". The book costs \$45.00 and can be purchased at the Mary Who bookshop or is available by ordering through

<http://www.birdingaustralia.com.au/> or PO Box 55, Mt. Molloy, Qld. 4871

Add on \$12.00 for postage.

Look for a review in the next Drongo.

CALENDAR

February

1st Sunday every month - Town Common Survey - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a 6.30am in March and April and 7.00 am in May start. Visitors welcome.

3rd Sunday each month Ross River Dam Survey Meet in the Dam car park for a 6.30am start.

17th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra for a 6.30am start. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

18th - Thursday - Lucinda Shorebirds Outing - Meet 6.00 am at the Readings Cinema car park, Thuringowa Central. Bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Leader: Ivor Preston

20th - Saturday - Museum of Tropical Queensland World Science Festival -- Children's Program meet 9.00 am at MTQ -- bring morning tea and lunch -- Birdlife Townsville Education Committee activity - Leader: Norm Rains

25th - Thursday - Reef Guardians Schools -- Networking Meeting -- meet 4.00 pm St. Pats School 45 The Strand, Townsville -Birdlife Education Committee activity - Leader: Norm Rains

28th - Sunday - Burdekin Outing with John Stewart -- Meet 6.30 am at the Annandale Central Shopping Centre, Coles under cover car park, Annandale. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Leader : Wal Threlfall

March

3rd - Thursday - Wongaloo Survey -- Leader: Ian Boyd - Meet for 6.30 departure from the Coles car park at the Annandale Shopping Centre, University Drive Annandale. Bring morning tea. Car pooling encouraged. This survey depends on the weather and ground conditions.

8th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme: "Bathing/Drinking" A 7.00pm start at a venue TBA.

12th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker: Rolf Jensen -- "Birds of Ecuador"

13th - Sunday - Bushland Beach Shorebirds Survey - meet 6.30 am Rumbala Court Park, Bushland Beach - bring morning tea - Leader: John Lowry

16th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra for a 6.30am start. Leader Malcolm Calvert.

25th - 28th - Friday to Monday - Easter Campout "Cardwell / Blenco Falls / Hinchinbrook Island " -- Leader: Warren Charlton - More info closer to the date.

April

5th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme: "Night Birds/Terns". A 7.00pm start at a venue TBA.

7th - Thursday - Wongaloo Survey -- Leader: Ian Boyd - Meet for 6.30 departure from the Coles car park at the Annandale Shopping Centre, University Drive Annandale. Bring morning tea. Car pooling encouraged. This survey depends on the weather and ground conditions.

9th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker TBA.

13th - Wednesday - Bush Garden Survey - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra for a 6.30am start. Leader: Malcolm Calvert.

24th - Sunday - Outing - Mingela / Clare Loop. Meet at the Annandale Shopping Centre, University Drive, Annandale for a departure at 6.30am sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Leader: TBA

30th April to 2nd May - Saturday to Monday - May Day long weekend campout to Tully Leader: Janet Cross -- More details closer to the date.

May

5th - Thursday - Wongaloo Survey -- Leader: Ian Boyd - Meet for 6.30 departure from the Coles car park at the Annandale Shopping Centre, University Drive Annandale. Bring morning tea. Car pooling encouraged.

10th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme : "Shorebirds" other than Terns. A 7.00pm start at a venue TBA.

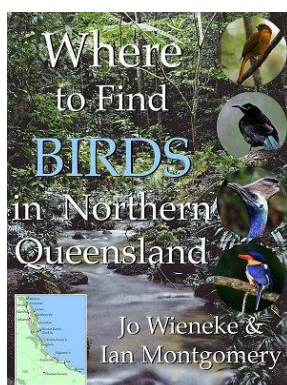
14th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker: Christina Buelow -- "Birds and Mangrove Connectivity"

QUEST

Niel Bruce	267	23/09/2016
Janet Robino	200	18/07/2016
Chris Ezzy	183	01/07/2016
Len Ezzy	179	27/06/2016
Rosemary Payet	170	18/06/2016
Malcolm Calvert	168	16/06/2016
Lenore Calvert	162	10/06/2016
Ian Leach	132	11/05/2016
Janet Cross	118	27/04/2016

NQ Bird App

Ian Montgomery and Jo Wieneke have produced an app. *Finding Birds in Northern Queensland* is an electronic guide to the spectacular wildlife of this unique area. Go to [iTunes](#); [Google Play](#) [Kobo Books](#)



Tomtit New Zealand Ian Boyd



Darter St. Lawrence Len Ezzy



Restless Flycatcher Malcolm Calvert

Articles for the next Drongo are due in by 30th April, 2016. amsgreat@gmail.com