

The Drongo

Number 127 June 2013



Surveys Artemis Costa Rica



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Warren Charlton attended the Branch Representatives meeting with BirdLife National Office in May and came back with some positive feedback. It is early days, but at least a start has been made on simplifying the reporting requirements of branches and the financial arrangements with National Office. The Committee will continue to work with National Office and the other branches to resolve these issues.

Ian, Nina, Elna and I attended the Cardwell Bioblitz 15-16 June. Terrain NRM organised the BioBlitz as part of their Habitat incentives program. It was also their 10 year anniversary. Surveys on flora and fauna were conducted over a 24 hour period. We surveyed two sites on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. Ian and I went on the spotlight walk to try to find the Mahogany Glider. We didn't see one but cameras picked up one in one of the areas we had surveyed.

Annette is still in need of more support in making the Drongo the classy production that it is. Please send any little tit-bits or photos you think other members might find interesting. Remember, if you think it interesting then there is a good chance others will as well. And if there is one thing to be said about our club, it is that our members find anything about birds interesting.

Thanks to Len Ezzy for stepping up to the plate for the sake of the White-bellied Sea-Eagles of Bunnings fame. He has been liaising with Amy Proud, the Ecologist who is doing the Environmental Impact Statement relating to further development around the nesting and feeding site behind Bunnings. Len, with the input of George Baker (yes, he still manages to find time in his travelling schedule to support the club) has supplied the required data to Amy with some valuable suggestions on how the future of the birds can be best assured.

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino
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ANZAC DAY

Before the sun had risen, we were on our way from Townsville up to Wallaman Falls.



Red-backed Kingfisher

Len Ezzy

We stopped just past Venables Crossing over the Stone River where we were surrounded by sugar-cane fields, some with mature cane but it was the fallow fields that held our attention. It had rained a couple of days earlier so there was plenty of roadside water. Brolgas and Crimson Finch were everywhere. A Black-shouldered Kite stood sentry on the very top of a roadside acacia. A couple of Glossy Ibis picked in the pooled table-drains, above which the powerlines sported four Red-backed Kingfishers, ignoring us as they preened.

Suddenly the smaller birds lifted and scattered. A Spotted Harrier glided through. A Buff-banded Rail sped across the road from the fallow fields as it made for the security of the stands of cane. Things settled down a bit after the Harrier departed. The Black-shouldered Kite had not budged: probably too full of finch to take flight. Hundreds of Chestnut-breasted Mannikins returned to feed on the seeding roadside grasses. White-necked and White-faced Herons patrolled the table-drain pools; Black-faced and White-breasted Woodswallows hawked overhead while Yellow Orioles called in the distance.

We had morning tea at the Wallaman Falls campground. Wonderful: We were the only people there then. While dunking ANZAC Biscuits, we watched Spotted Pardalotes and Scarlet Honeyeaters flitting about in the trees around us as Little Shrike-thrush and at least one Wompoo Fruit-Dove called nearby. Down on the Stone River Circuit Walk near the foot-bridge we experienced a stunning wave of great birds. Three Yellow-breasted Boatbills played follow-the-leader for fifteen minutes (still I missed out on a decent photo), three White-throated Treecreepers clamber-fed on the tree-trunks. A Bower's Shrike-thrush came in close for an inspection. Australian Swiftlets flew high above the River. We had great views of a couple of Fairy Gerygones. Spectacled and Pied Monarchs were also present at that foot-bridge, where thirty minutes disappeared into awe.

At the Wallaman Falls Lookout the falls were absolutely "Thunder-pumping". Amazingly there was hardly a spare carpark, but there was not a soul to be seen. By

talking to a young Dutch guy who had emerged from that walk while we were taking the obligatory photos of the falls, we found out all the cars belonged to those in a bush-walking group and they were all down the bottom of the walk at the base of the falls. He also commented that the track down to the base of the falls was extremely dangerous and very slippery with the thick water spray.

Next destination – Broadwater State Forest Park. From our drives up and down the range from Wallaman Falls we can happily report that the World Heritage Wet Tropics rainforest is slowly regenerating after TC Yasi devastation. We saw no Cassowaries though. Down on the lowlands again on the Lannercost Extension Road about 4.0km NE from Venables Crossing Road intersection survey, we stopped on a low-level single-lane bridge across an unnamed creek. From our front seats, we had good, long looks up and down that creek and had exquisite views of a female Shining Flycatcher feeding just above the water and as she took perch on the waterside vantage-points... A Nankeen Night-Heron flushed from right beside us on this bridge.

On to Broadwater for a late lunch in a site in the Group camping area on the left of the campground entrance road. We couldn't find this site's legendary Large-tailed Nightjar, but we did watch at least 60 Australian Swiftlets doing their acrobatic feeding overhead.

The Rainforest Circuit is now open again. The new temporary entrance now departs from the second-last of the Group camp sites near where we had our lunch. So we did that walk. It is still a bit clambersome with a few downed trees across the path to climb over and there was a lot of Wait-A-While Lawyer Vine, where we had to be very cautious. Contractors rebuilding the Giant Fig Tree Boardwalk were working there while we did the walk. The old Yasi-damaged boardwalk has been completely ripped up and removed. The new concrete foundation footings are set and ready to take the new boardwalk. Lots of construction noise though and Oh So many mozzies. Best birds on the circuit walk: - a pair of Orange-footed Scrubfowl, a Grey Whistler who wouldn't shut up, a Superb and two Wompoo Fruit-Doves, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Dusky Honeyeater and Pied Currawong.



Spotted Pardalote

Len Ezzy

We birded the Scenic Route home. Masters Road at Toobanna, a few kilometres south of Ingham had plenty

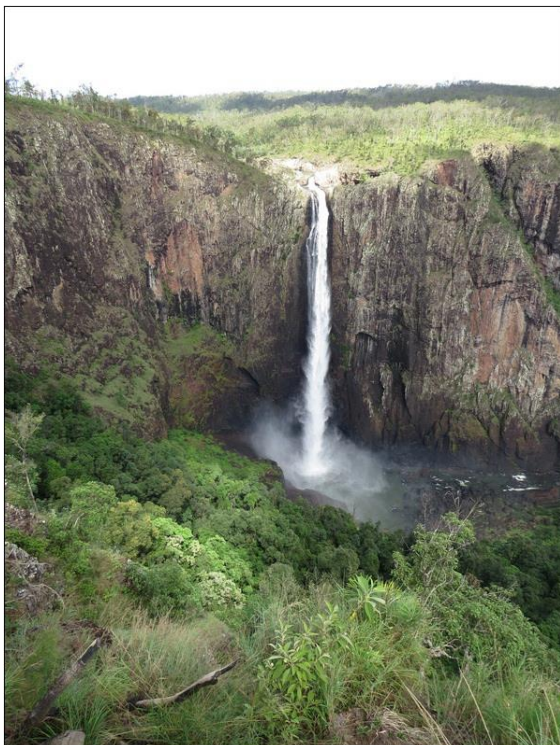


Yellow-breasted Boatbill

Len Ezzy

of Plumed Whistling-Ducks and Magpie Geese on all the roadside wetlands, Purple Swamphens, Royal Spoonbills, Coot and Yellow Orioles and heaps of Crimson Finch.

We also stopped at Barralgie Road on the left bank of Crystal Creek just past the North Coast Railway underpass for a quick afternoon tea. What a great break from the busy Bruce Highway. Again there were lots of Crimson Finch. We called in three Lovely Fairy-wrens which we watched for a good fifteen minutes as our tea cooled. We then packed up the cups and leftover ANZAC biscuits and headed home.



Wallaman Falls

Len Ezzy

ANZAC Day 2013... A day to remember;... in more ways than one.

Len and Chris Ezzy

WHY BIRDING?

The cool air had not yet lifted as I enjoyed the tranquility in the early morning hours of the Caletas-Ario National Wildlife Refuge of Costa Rica.

The forest was alive with its usual blend of cicadas rattling, monkeys howling, and birds singing. The end of the dry season was near, and most of the foliage of this tropical deciduous habitat was absent, enhancing the visibility of my avian friends. I stood for minutes, relaxed by nature, poised to pursue and identify. Hummingbirds zoomed like wind-up toys around me, gulping nectar and hovering from flower to flower. A male Long-tailed Manakin glided like a stingray through the understory, flashing indigo and scarlet as he crossed through the trickling sunlight. A Trogon barked overhead as tanagers bounced in the leaves of the canopy. I was deciphering the whine of a flycatcher when the shadow of a bird crossed my view and landed on a stick right next to me. I turned to see the bird perched, and was instantly transported to the past on the other side of the Earth.

I was looking at the stunning Rainbow Bee-eater. With its black eye-lines, golden and turquoise plumage, and elongated black bill, the creature caused my mind to swirl with confusion and nostalgia. Before I could rationally analyze the sighting of a Rainbow Bee-eater in Costa Rica, I was on the lookout tower on Magnetic Island, cruising down Gunnado Road, and strolling through the Townsville Town Common. The birds, faces, guidebooks, and everything rushed through my mind all at once. Lorikeets, Honeyeaters, Bowerbirds all flew through my head, and James Cook University and my friends from St. Paul's College followed. I thought of the nights at the Uni Club, my field trip to Paluma, my SCUBA certification diving the Yongala. There was the Townsville Region Bird Observer's Club and all the other birders I met all over Australia. My semester abroad in Australia in the latter half of 2010 was the happiest time of my life. I smiled as I gazed at the...Bee-eater? Memories are powerful in their ability to alter emotions. But how could one small bird dig up such powerful memories?

I have been a naturalist since I was born, and as a child I explored the woods behind my grandparent's house in my home state of Wisconsin in the USA. I have always caught frogs, insects, and any other critters I could find, but I became a birder when I took an ornithology class in high school, and birding is now my favorite hobby. Although I cannot explain why exactly I love the sight of a bird, my passion for birding is associated with my love of nature. An obvious benefit of birding is that it helps birders develop commitment to the natural world. It was less obvious to me that the hobby of birding is an elegant way to bring people together from different walks of life. I did not realize this social benefit until taking a semester abroad at James Cook University.

I had many unforgettable experiences with birders that I met in Australia. Thanks to Janet Robino, I joined the Townsville Region Bird Observer's Club (TRBOC) and met local birders by going on the club's weekly excursions. The member of the TRBOC whom I developed the closest friendship with was Norm Rains, a local from Townsville. I will never forget him asking me, "So mate, what do you think about a camping trip into the Outback? We'll be sure to see some beautiful birds." A week later we met in a café and plotted our three-day trip into the Outback. We agreed to take my friend Pascal, who was also an American studying abroad at James Cook University and who was interested in filming wildlife.



Rainbow Bee-eater

Ray Sutton

When mid-semester recess came, the three of us set off on our expedition into the Outback. We traveled hundreds of kilometers on desert dirt roads in Norm's SUV, stopping along the way to view scenic panoramas, kangaroos, and our main objective: the birds. Our ride flew by much faster than any of the three of us expected. Norm, Pascal, and I spent endless hours chatting about various topics: birds, film, American Football, Rugby, the music we listened to, his time in Vietnam, the war in Iraq, his high school years, our high school years, and the list went on. In those three days we shared much more than amazing landscapes and beautiful birds. Norm taught me a great deal about Australia and I taught him about America.

Norm and I were from two different cultures and two different generations. We differed in many ways. But the major thing that we had in common was that we were both birders. If either Norm or I had not been a

birder, we never would have met. We can thank the hobby of birding for building a memory that we will never forget.

My Outback adventure with Norm Rains was one of the most interesting experiences of my life. Even so, I had many other memorable experiences with other birders in other places throughout Australia. The website birdingpal.org made it easy to find local birders to take me birding for a day. Each of the birding partners that I met through birdingpal.com had a unique character and something special to offer. In Darwin, Mike Jarvis happened to be a master snake catcher, and he gave me tips on catching snakes. In Adelaide, Roly Smith insisted that he pick me up from my hotel at 3:30AM to see as many species as we could in one day. On the Sunshine Coast, Don Penny and I never even went birding because of the rain. Instead, he showed me a slideshow of his trip to Tanzania. It was spectacular!

During my time in Australia, I not only learned that the birding sub-culture can connect people in amazing ways, but also started to comprehend the special camaraderie that birders share. Being a birder is similar to being part of a secret society or a specific alumni network. While others may look at us with confused faces when we awake at early hours and grab our binoculars, we know what it's all about. Not only do we understand each other, but also we enjoy spending time together. Every birder I met in Australia was genuinely happy to meet me and spend time with me. If not for birding, I never would have met any of those people.

Birding connects birders, of course, but can birders spread their passion to people who would perceive birding as being weird? I am discovering the answer to this question as I currently work as an instructor at CIRENAS. CIRENAS is an environmental education organization located on the Nicoya Peninsula of Costa Rica, and hosts English-speaking students from all over the world. I lead excursions through the Caletas-Ario National Wildlife Refuge, and teach students about the local natural history and environmental issues. On our hikes, kayaking adventures, and surfing excursions, I am quick to point out the species of birds we see. Almost every teenager is either perplexed or chuckles when I reveal my passion, but after a few days, he or she seriously understands. Even some of the most materialistic makeup-ridden girls and dumbest jock boys have gained some respect for birding. A few who were previously "too cool" for birding have left CIRENAS completely fascinated by birds. I believe that many people in our world are disconnected from nature. Our world needs more people to connect with nature, especially in the younger generation. My time at CIRENAS has given me hope that the younger generation can learn to love nature and become interested in hobbies like birding.

The largely unnoticed feathered creatures that fly above our heads are responsible for many things. They are responsible for controlling mosquito populations and dispersing seeds. They are responsible for indigenous ceremonies and the subject of horror films. They are responsible for millions of dollars spent every year in birding tourism and the migration of twitchers around the world. They are responsible for my friends in the TRBOC, and the enthusiasm that teenagers gain when



Turquoise-browed Motmot

Eddie Williams

coming to CIRENAS. We should thank the birds for all of these, but the truth is, deep down, birding is not about the birds. It is about humans connecting with each other and teaching each other how to love nature.

I came out of my daydream, arriving back in the tropical forest in Costa Rica, and was able to identify the individual perched beside me: a Turquoise-browed Motmot who had lost his tail. Without the tail, the Turquoise-browed Motmot had momentarily fooled me for a Rainbow Bee-eater. Turquoise-browed Motmots often wag their racket-shaped tails back-and-forth like a pendulum. This striking behavior may be a way to distract predators or attract mates. That morning, the motmot did not enchant me with a beautiful tail, but I still had to thank it for everything else.

Note: CIRENAS is a non-profit organization open to groups from all over the world. For more information, the website is: www.cirenas.org.

Eddie Williams

Superb fairy-wrens sing tunes to their eggs that contain unique notes, which act as familial passwords. Embryonic chicks are able to learn these notes and incorporate them into their begging calls after they hatch.

A CLAYTON'S BIRDING TRIP

Last month John and I went camping with friends at Paluma Dam.

The focus of the trip was camping, followed by food, then relaxation, and lastly, birding. Our friends are not birdwatchers and do not even have binoculars. But how could you go to Paluma and not birdwatch? So we decided that it could be an opportunity to show our friends why we are passionate about birds. They soon realised that our binoculars are just extensions of our bodies – everywhere we go, our binocs go too.

We went for a walk along the track the other side of the dam and were confronted by a gaggle of noisy Chowchillas cavorting through the rainforest. Excitement from John and me, interest from male friend, and a fascination, not with the birds but with the name of the bird, from female friend. She also commented that birdwatchers get to have lots of breaks on their walks. As I didn't want to over-do the 'bird thing', female friend and I forged on ahead, chatting, while John and male friend were fortunate in seeing five Riflebirds (3 males) high in the trees, flying in and out across the track, group-feeding, poking under the bark of the trees.

Paluma is a beautiful camping spot and, being mid-week, we practically had it all to ourselves. In the afternoons, the mist rolled in over the lake, creeping up over the camp and enveloping the trees and tents and dripping moisture all night. We could almost imagine we were in Ireland again. It afforded lots of moody photos. One morning we found a potentially interesting walking track, rough and unmarked, up behind the riflebird gully campsite which we traversed for a while and later found out (from the guy from Hidden Valley) that it is a 12km track around the lake but easy to get lost on.

Because of our friends, this was the first camping/birding trip whereby we had time to leisurely cook our meals over the fire, producing dinners such as roast lamb and baked vegies, pizzas and scones for morning tea.

When we could not go out to the birds, the birds came to us. The Grey-headed Robin was a constant companion at our campsite and, as we relaxed in our camp chairs observing him, he was checking us out, perching himself on the esky lid. Overhead, the Crimson Rosellas were making their presence known with a variety of striking calls and male friend's interest was piqued. He eventually caught sight of not one, but four and was pleased with himself – though this might have had more to do with the bet he and John had about who could find them first.

At night we heard the eerie 'falling bomb' call of the sooty owls very close to our tents, and even though we (and our friends) searched diligently, we failed to sight them. During the day we saw lots of little Treecreepers – female friend was impressed with the big sound such a small bird could produce.

Early on one of the mornings I was woken from a cosy sleep by John's insistent call, "Chris, Chris, come quick. You've got to see this!" I scrambled out of the tent and

followed him to the clearing at the entrance to the group camping site. He had just experienced a magical moment of being surrounded by five active whipbirds, feeding and frolicking, with one only a few metres away on the ground, and more of them in the bush behind. They were not perturbed by John's presence and he could observe and marvel at his pleasure. By the time I got there they had dispersed and even though I got up very early the next morning the experience was not to be replicated.



Grey-headed Robin

Chris Stewart

However, the rich array of birdlife and birdcalls in this spot kept me engaged and satisfied and we were rewarded with spectacular sightings of Riflebirds, Large-billed Scrubwrens, vibrant Golden Whistlers, and a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo. At one stage I sensed movement on the log behind me and at first thought, "It'll be just another robin. They're everywhere" and almost dismissed it. Then I turned to see the vivid yellow throat of the Scrubwren and watched him prance along two logs then disappear. We managed some good birding before our friends even emerged from their tent, though they admitted to hearing the dawn chorus which was hard to ignore. The birds put on a beautiful performance (reminiscent of Iron Range) that would tempt any sleepy-headed birder out of their warm cocoons.

Besides our visiting Grey-headed Robin and ubiquitous Scrub Turkeys (female friend was not impressed with their antics and determination to eat all our supplies) we also had a visit by a melomy. This cute little mouse-like rodent evoked plenty of interest. Then I stumbled across a leaf-tailed gecko trying to look inconspicuous on the ramp to the toilets.

We didn't end up converting our friends but they did learn a lot about birds and birdwatchers while we learnt a lot about camp oven cooking. We also learnt it's not always about the birds, but just having fun with friends.

Chris Stewart

The Grey-headed Robin is endemic to Queensland. It ranges from Cardwell to the Bloomfield River.

HAPPY SIGHTINGS

Having only seen Black Butcherbirds on two occasions – Daintree and Cluden – I have been delighted to come upon two unsuspecting birds recently.

The first was at Cape Tribulation in the small mangrove walk from the shop to the sea and secondly at Cocoa Creek. The first bird was a large rufous one and only later did I realise what it was. At Cocoa Creek I was again puzzled and when I consulted a guide, found again it was an immature rufous bird. Both were not calling and very shy. I just happened upon the first and it flew off, not to be seen again but the second was seen moving in a small flowering melaleuca and Cheryl helpfully photographed it for id. Happy sightings.

Earlier in the year Rosemary and I often came upon Swifts as we were driving to a birding destination or returning home. The last few weeks have given us some special surprises as well. A Grey Goshawk was flushed up by a car in front of us from the road, just after Little Crystal Creek. We saw it fly into the roadside tree so stopped immediately to look. There it was before our eyes. An excellent view before it flew off down the road and into the bush.

Another unexpected sighting occurred driving home from Ingham. Rosemary and I had really stopped birding but just kept an eye out (as birders do) in case anything unexpected appeared in the sky. As we drove, a raptor accompanied us on the passenger side for some metres so we were able to get a good look at it. My first response was : " It's a Buzzard" as I've often seen these birds in the Centre. Rosemary's response was to check the guide. Bingo! Another unexpected sighting!

Joan Wharton



Black Butcherbird

Cheryl Robertson

Owls turn their heads almost 360° (a complete circle) but they cannot move their eyes.

PENTLAND AND WHITE MOUNTAINS

After the fires



Pentland Dam

Janet Robino

Barbara Reidy, Ian Leach and I headed out to Pentland in May in search of the Freckled Ducks everyone else seemed to be seeing. We were pretty shocked by the state of the country. There were some great birds on Pentland Dam such as the Freckled Ducks, Pink-eared Ducks, Red-kneed Dotterels, Royal Spoonbills, a few Coots and the usual waterfowl. Unfortunately, the poor old things were all trying to fit into a very small puddle of water.

At White Mountains National Park, we were surprised at seeing quite a few White-eared Honeyeaters at Bungaree Creek. When we got to the Gravel Pits they seemed to be everywhere. We saw at least six in a small area of the pits, and some again near the Telecom Tower. There weren't really great numbers of any other birds in the whole Park.



Sawpit Gully

Janet Robino

We headed off to Sawpit Gully. It didn't take us long to realise why there were so many White-eared Honeyeaters in the Gravel Pits and near the Tower. Huge areas of the Park have been burnt, and very badly burnt! It was distressing to see the devastation. Standing at

the edge of Sawpit Gully, where we normally see the White-eared Honeyeaters, all we could see was brown and black with a very small smattering of green regrowth on a few trees which had somehow managed to survive the intense fire. I think the pictures say it all!

Janet Robino

HOME SCHOOLING EMAIL

Thanks so much to the Birdlife presenters for delivering a well prepared talk on Townsville's birds and their habitat for the Townsville Homeschool Group at Dan Gleeson Gardens on the 1st May. We had about 25 children come along and it was great to see them asking so many questions. We had some unexpected rain but it was lovely for the mums to be able to sit back and listen to the talk in in the gazebo with the cloud cover bringing out all the colours of the garden around us. Our presenter Janet's blue hat was outdone by the blue of a passing Ulysses butterfly and the bright blue of a Forest Kingfisher. The kids especially liked being able to look through the scopes. From the questions being asked we realised that quite a few of the kids were interested in caring for injured birds and the homeschool group is now looking at finding out more about wildlife care. Thanks for sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm with our kids!

"Very informative. I was amazed how much Hugo knew about birds." Amanda, mum.

"Birdlife borrowed stuffed birds from the taxidermy room and showed us different beaks for different uses. We spotted a Forest Kingfisher fly into a tree and most people got a look at it before it flew away. After that we had a look at the bats through a scope and binoculars. While we were looking at them the rain started coming down again. My favourite part was the Forest Kingfisher." Philip, 9.

"I liked holding the wings and also seeing the kingfisher." Penny, 8.

"I liked holding the stuffed birds" Lil, 6.

Julia Haig



Forest Kingfisher

Philip

BOUNTIFUL BIRD BEACON

A little over a year ago I was fortunate to be able to purchase a large potted Grass Tree at a garage sale for only \$50.

From pot top to leaf tip, the plant stood 140 cm tall and sported an impressive two metre flower spike. Unfortunately, the flower spike snapped off on the trip home, oh well; this addition to my collection was still a bargain.



There were already ten smaller Xanthorrhoea specimens in the back garden when I brought my new acquisition home to be planted. It soon became the focal point of our evolving garden, even more so lately since it has thrown a long awaited, new flower spike. I love this iconic Australian species for its form and texture in the garden and its ability to connect one, in a sense, with the bush. To me however, the most endearing quality of my precious Xanthorrhoeas, is the range of birds and insects they attract when in flower.

The ten established plants flowered last year from September to November, so it was a surprise to see a flower spike emerging on the new plant only a few weeks ago. The flowers are now fully developed and are a beacon to local nectar feeding fauna. From a

comfortable position on the deck we are able to watch and enjoy the, sometimes frenetic, activity around the tightly clustered cream flowers.

Blue-faced Honeyeaters jealously chase smaller birds away when they attempt to sip their share of nectar. Brown Honeyeaters try to get in and out before the nectar Nazis can react, often feeding on the wing. A White-gaped Honeyeater waits in the cover of a nearby Lillipilli and darts in opportunistically for a feed but never stays for long. Yellow Honeyeaters arrive in small groups to take advantage of the bounty, safety in numbers. Once as I watched, a Helmeted Friarbird swooped on to the flower spike from its perch in the Cadagi gum. A quick drink then it was gone, leaving the spear wobbling in its wake.

I've managed to photograph some of these birds on their recent visits. Among them, and not normally associated with taking nectar, was a Great Bowerbird feeding from the flowers. All this in the middle of Currajong! What a treat for the birds, my wife and I.

Story and Photographs

Michael Schmid

AN INTERESTING SIGHTING INDEED

While we were walking back to our caravan park at midday, a Barn Owl, pursued by a number of Blue-faced Honeyeaters, flew out from a large tree by the road. The owl had nowhere to go so headed for the nearest dark hole – the wheel arch of a Nissan Patrol. He sat quietly for a few moments while the honeyeaters dispersed and then moved into the roof section of the nearby toilet block. We were so lucky to catch this – it happened so quickly.

George and Teresa Baker



By day the Barn Owl roosts in hollow logs, caves or dense trees, and is usually seen alone or in pairs. The preferred habitat is open, often arid (dry) country, such as farms, heath and lightly wooded forest.

PRECIOUS PEN

The scene is the Birdlife Townsville's last outing for the survey of the Cleveland Bay Wastewater Purification Plant (CBWPP), adjoining Mangroves and foreshores of the Southbank Conservation Reserve.

This bird survey was organised and led by Ian Leach. The club hadn't been permitted in here for last 9 months during the construction of the new Southern Port Access Road so many birders were eager to return to the previously monthly club Shorebirds 2020 survey event.

Four of us (Greg, Len, Tony and Niel), in that order, walked along the main 220metres long x 1.5 metre diameter water release pipeline easterly above the exposed mudflats to the end outlet vent. No overtaking was possible while on the pipeline, so, in order we walked, observed and counted: Greg was our leader/scout and photographer; I was the telescope handler, Tony was our designated recording scribe and Niel was our primary spotter. The team was working well for this survey area... until such time as when Tony dropped the scribe pen into the gurgling, bubbling release water pool at the end of the pipeline. The pen floated nib-down with the top bobbing like a fishing-line float. Tony's mission then became clear as he shed his birding gear for the rest of the team to hold while he sat on the pipe, removed his shoes and socks and then slid gracefully off the pipe into the black mud below. It was then a slushy romp to the edge of the water pool, when, like a Striated Heron's strike, Tony reached out and plucked the pen out of the bubbling water, shook out the water and popped it back into his shirt pocket. Rushing back to the pipe, he heaved himself out of the mud, rescaled to the topside of the pipe... and now with grey-black muddy legs, stood tall with the pen held high in the air and exclaimed, "Never ever give up!"

Len Ezzy

Quote from our photographer, Greg: -

"In the meantime, here's a shot of the intrepid Dr Grice in pursuit of what we assumed must have been a very expensive pen with great sentimental value - not the \$1.20 BIC biro it turned out to be."



OWLS

I bought myself an external flash for my camera, and as my family say to me, I have the camera as an "attachment" to my arm, and I have it with me when I know I will be coming home after dark.

Over the past 2 months coming home, I have been lucky enough to capture the following birds, Tawny Frogmouth on a fenceline that was obliging enough just to fly from post to post allowing me a couple of half decent pictures, The Barking Owl was also on the fence. This was a nice surprise as any other pictures I have got they have always been way up high in the trees and therefore not clear. The Barn Owl was the best thrill as he was just sitting on the post as I drove through the front gate. He also stayed around long enough for a few photos. The picture of the two frogmouths was in a tree in our yard, their hiding place given away just on dusk by the Yellow Honeyeaters. Lastly was the Southern Boobook in a Box tree again in our yard, its hiding place was again given away by the Honeyeaters.

The owls are lovely birds and I am lucky to have them so close. My next aim is to find their nesting spots, here somewhere I am sure as there are a lot of hollow logs about. I did find the Frogmouth nesting spot but not until the birds had fledged. As I write I can hear the Barking Owls down somewhere in the creek, a shame its a bit to cold to go walking outside !!

Story and Photographs

Sue Rutherford



Barn Owl



Barking Owl



Southern Boobook



Tawny Frogmouth

BIRDING IN KARUMBA

We arrived in Karumba with plans to stay a few days but ended up staying for two weeks.

It is a great place for birding; there are good camping facilities, friendly people and the winter weather is good. There are three caravan parks in Karumba and during the winter months they are full of fishermen, but they still made room for a couple of birding poms.

Our birding experiences started on the road into Karumba from Normanton. The road crosses a huge open savannah with a number of large man-made waterholes. There were Australian Pratincoles feeding all along the road, Spotted Harrier hunting in the paddocks and hundreds of ducks and waterbirds in and around the lagoons. We could not stop on the highway while towing the van but made several return trips to the area once based at Karumba.



Red-headed Honeyeater

George Baker

A 'must-do' for all birders at Karumba is a Ferryman boat trip with Glen and Allison on the Norman River. Make sure you book the birdwatchers trip rather than the sunset trip for the tourists. Glen makes great use of taped recordings to attract the birds and they certainly respond. They have vast experience of the area and can provide close up views of several of the local endemics, such as the Red-headed Honeyeater and the White-breasted Whistler.

Our most productive area was the track that runs past the Karumba Point airstrip out to the open woodland and mangrove area along the coast. The locals use this area to fish from the beach but the far section of the track is usually quiet. We recorded White-breasted Whistler, Broad-billed Flycatcher, Mangrove Gerygone and Mangrove Grey Fantail in these mangroves.

Another good spot for us were the waterholes each side of the road junction from the main highway out to Karumba Point. The local refuse dump is located here. Many of the other waterholes had dried out but those close to this junction were the last ones standing. So early morning the place was alive with birds coming into drink. Star finches have been recorded here; we were not that lucky but recorded a good number of other birds

including the Red-browed Pardalote and the Rufous-banded Honeyeater – a lifer for us.

The local council has just completed a pedestrian/cycle path that runs from the esplanade at Karumba out to Karumba Point. The path follows the Norman River past mangroves, open woodland and across salt flats, so you can expect to find a whole range of birds in the different habitats along the way. We walked there and back one morning and it took 2 hours (birders pace).

In addition to these main areas we found many other 'hot spots' in the area; lagoons full of ducks and waterbirds, flowering trees with woodswallows and honeyeaters and of course shorebirds along the banks of the Norman River. So all in all we had a very enjoyable two weeks in Karumba and recorded a good number of great birds – our records are on Eremaea.

George and Teresa Baker

CONSERVATION COLUMN

Today was the second phone link up between Conservation officers of Birdlife Australia branches.

It was quite depressing. Queensland shares many whole of landscape conservation issues with all the other states and the list of issues with direct impacts on birdlife is worrying.

In Victoria the direct threats to birds by shooters has produced severe impacts on many individual birds and remains a major concern. There is a hint that duck-shooting is back on the agenda in NSW despite statements by the Government to the contrary. Recent additions to the "pest management" regulations means that Pink-eared Ducks have been added to the list of species farmers can legally kill (on the spurious grounds that they may eat rice crops). This evidence that the Government has no interest in science or facts when it is delivering on party commitments shows how low we have sunk in the political arena.

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/animals/duck-season-puts-ofarrell-in-crosshairs-20130621-2onxa.html>

Of course at the Queensland level there is very widespread concern about reduction in protection on the habitat set aside for wildlife, including birds. There is an attempt to get the Eungella Honeyeater listed as endangered because the Queensland Government has re-opened Crediton State Forest for logging, thereby threatening the winter habitat of this species. Our friends in BLNQ have concerns about the survival of regional species not even listed as threatened, including Buff-breasted Button-quail, Fawn-breasted Bowerbird and Carpentarian Grass-wren, as well as the deliberate poisoning of cranes on the tableland.

Likewise the general decision that some National Parks may now be grazed brings the possibility of potential damage to habitat. Concerns about Coal Seam Gas proposals, coastal development and mining remain.

The establishment of the Protect the Bush Alliance is recognition that these issues have got too big for one

branch to tackle and this Queensland wide group gives opportunities for members to contribute to the battle against environmental destruction in Queensland.

<http://ptba.org.au/>

Of course it is not just people interested in birds who are concerned about this Queensland Government's actions. A very large number of scientists have expressed grave



Pink-eared Duck

Ray Sutton

concerns and called for changes.

<http://concernedqldscientists.wordpress.com/>

To many people the signs are there for a devastating return to unsustainable and destructive ways, completely disconnected to the modern world. This feels a lot like "deja vu" for those who recall the 60s and 70s in Queensland.

Unfortunately the conservation gains achieved since the 1970s now appear under serious threat and it will become important for citizens to reclaim the moral high ground. Perhaps to paraphrase JFK from an earlier era, "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for our birds".

Peter Valentine

BURDEKIN TRIP

The annual trip to the Burdekin was a great success once again. John and Christine Stewart showed off their backyard in great style.

Probably the main bird for the outing is the Yellow White-eye. We pulled up near a mangrove area and walked in. Every-one gathered in a bunch. We were entertained by a Dusky Honeyeater and a couple of Sunbirds but, after a while, out came the Yellow White-eyes. Not one but four. Well done. Every-one had good sightings of them as they perched in the trees and flew in and out.

We saw plenty of water birds on our travels, including Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels, Black Swans, Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Ducks, Red-capped Plovers, Australasian Grebes and Grey Teals. Terns were represented by Caspian, Gull-billed, Whiskered and White-winged Black. Sharpies and a Common Greenshank were spotted, feeding in the mud.

We had lunch in a park in Brandon with an all singing, all dancing toilet. It was a bit surreal, having "All the world needs now is love, sweet love" blasted at top volume whilst you answered nature's call.

The road to the Barattas, Jerona Road, was a good choice. There we saw many of the waterbirds and the Mangrove Honeyeaters welcomed us with full song. A Hobby put on a nice flying display. After the outing was over we continued along Jerona Road to the village and were rewarded by three Hobbies giving a great aerial display. On the way back to the highway, eight Budgerigars flew over us and a couple of Brolgas flew in.

We came home via Reed Beds Road just for luck and found a Wedge-tailed Eagle who had been feeding on a dead wallaby.

The tally for the day was around the hundred mark so if you live a long way away and you happen to be reading this little narrative, make sure you put Townsville on your list of places you must visit for some of the best birding in Oz.

Annette Sutton



Yellow Whiteeye

Ian Boyd



Red-kneed Dotteril

Ian Boyd

BOWLING GREEN BAY

Survey of Waterbirds and Shorebirds 2011-2012

The original Ramsar listing for the Bowling Green Bay Ramsar Site (BGBRS) was based on a number of criteria, including the presence of 20,000 waterbirds, mainly Magpie Geese and Brolga and the presence of greater than one percent of the flyway population of the Black-tailed Godwit. A subsequent Ecological Character Assessment of the Ramsar status was unable to confirm these criteria due to a lack of data for the site. In 2011, Peter Driscoll and the Australian Wader Study Group (AWSG) were contracted to complete a twelve month assessment of the distribution and abundance of shorebirds and waterbirds in the BGBRS and adjacent wetlands. BirdLife Townsville supported this work and provided copies of previous bird surveys for inclusion into the assessment.

AWSG issued the draft report for this work late in 2012 and while it is currently being reviewed by the Queensland Wetlands Program and the Department of Environment (SEWPaC), I am able to provide a brief summary of the report's findings.

Waterbirds:

- The report identified 4 important wetland groupings within the Bowling Green Bay region. These have been identified as Alva, Coleville (Brandon), South East (Cromarty) and South (Barratta and Jerona). These wetlands form a continuous and complex arrangement directly linked to the BGBRS.
- The report recommends the entire system be maintained and any changes in habitat or habitat use be monitored. The particular importance of Coleville and Cromarty wetlands is recognised.
- 60,000 waterbirds were recorded in the August 2011 surveys. However, this number dropped to 20,000 waterbirds during the three subsequent surveys. 90% of these birds were recorded in the Bowling Green Bay wetlands outside of the designated Ramsar site boundaries.
- The most numerous waterbirds recorded were the Magpie Goose and the Pacific Black Duck, each with 25% of the totals counted. Low numbers of Brolga were recorded. No nesting data for Little Terns was recorded.
- 4 species of waterbird, the Cotton Pygmy-goose, Great Egret, Black Duck and Royal Spoonbill were recorded in internationally significant numbers plus another six species were recorded in nationally significant numbers. The presence of these ten species of waterbirds in such numbers confirms the national and international status of the Bowling Green Bay wetlands for waterbirds.

Shorebirds:

- The report has identified nineteen high tide shorebird roosts in the BGBRS. Many of

these have been monitored since the mid 1990s. The majority of shorebirds were recorded within the BGBRS boundaries.

- Three species of migratory shorebirds, the Great Knot, Red-necked Stint and Black-tailed Godwit have been recorded in internationally significant numbers. However only the Great Knot numbers are considered as being consistently high.
- Thirteen species of migratory shorebirds and two resident shorebirds are recorded in nationally significant numbers. The presence of the fifteen species of shorebirds in such numbers confirms the national and international status of Bowling Green Bay for shorebirds.



Recommendations for future surveys.

While the arrangements for future monitoring and survey works are yet to be finalised by the Queensland Wetlands Program and SEWPaC, the report includes the following recommendations:

- Regular shorebird counts and habitat monitoring of high tide roosts on spring tides between October and December. Particular note to be made of Great Knot numbers.
- Regular waterbird counts and habitat monitoring at the Carrick, Jerona, Cromarty and Horseshoe Wetlands between July and September.

GB Comment.

BirdLife Townsville's records for shorebird surveys from the mid 1990s to 2012 were of great benefit to the authors of this report and enabled them to provide a comprehensive and long term assessment of the value of Bowling Green Bay. The report's findings and future recommendations provide every encouragement for BirdLife's shorebirds survey work to be expanded to cover the waterbirds on the important wetlands in the region.

George Baker

Photos Ray and Annette Sutton

ARTEMIS CAMPOUT - CAPE YORK PENINSULA

Golden-shouldered Parrots – EPBC Endangered

Wednesday 22nd May 2013: - Having travelled only 200km from Lakeland, we arrived mid-day on our first day at Artemis Station. After a quick camp set-up, we were treated to an afternoon personalised tour with Sue Shephard as she led our small convoy of just a few packed cars to all the Golden-shouldered termite-mound nest sites that she was currently monitoring. Sue walked to quite a few sites, and using her LED light probe, would look in each nest-hole and say things like, "They're gone: must have fledged yesterday...☺" More often though Sue would whisper things like, "Come and have a look in this nest...☺"... There would be either 4 or so eggs, a few nestling chicks with no feathers yet (very pretty), some with a few quills and feathers or, fully-feathered nestlings ready to fledge. In one case a nestling took its first flight from the safety of the nest as we watched. It landed in a nearby tree and immediately both parent birds appeared from nowhere and flew to the same limb and landed on either side of the fledgling. Mum and Dad to the rescue. At one termite-mound nest site, Sue asked us to keep our hand over the entrance hole as we peered into the mound; this was so that they all would not fledge before everyone had a chance to have a look in. Oh! And of course there were the ever-present adult birds resting in nearby trees while keeping close watch on their family homes.

Tom and Sue Shephard's tireless and dedicated and mostly unpaid work for the conservation of the Golden-shouldered Parrots, the management and preservation of suitable habitats on their property, affords these birds a much better chance of survival and recovery.

Chris and Len Ezzy

P.S. - The night spotlighting of Owls, Frogmouths and Nightjars along Dixie Road was a hoot too.



Tawny Frogmouth

Ian Boyd



Red Goshawk Ian Boyd



*White-streaked Honeyeater
Malcom Calvert*



*Golden-shouldered Parrot
Ian Boyd*



Inspecting Joan Wharton



*Lemon-bellied Flycatcher
Len Ezzy*



*Golden-shouldered Parrot
Malcolm Calvert*



Termite Mound

Annette Sutton



Masked Finch

Ian Boyd



Spotted Nightjar

Len Ezzy



Looking

Len Ezzy



Diamond Dove

Len Ezzy



Banded Honeyeater

Malcolm Calvert



Spear Gate

Annette Sutton

CALENDAR

July 2013

29th June to 1st July - Townsville Show Long Weekend. - Campout at Pentland.

7th - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am

10th - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Wetland Birds. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

13th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00pm) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker Ian Boyd - "A Bird Watchers Year".

17th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 7.00am.

21st - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 7.00am.

28th - Sunday Outing - Ross River Dam Cruise with Pop Sullivan (Cost \$30.00 per head). Meet at the Ross River Dam car park 6.15am ready to move off at 6.30am sharp. Following the cruise there will be a free birders breakfast for members (for non-members the cost will be \$5.00).

August 2013

4th - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 7.00am.

7th - Wednesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Club Outings - The members and the birds. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

10th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00pm) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest Speaker - Chris Stewart.

BUDGIES, BUDGIES, BUDGIES

This has been the year of the Budgie for Townsville. The last few good years out west must have seen a build up of numbers and now, with this year's dry, they are coming to the coast.

John Maddy saw them near Ingham and Joan Wharton reported a hundred or so feeding in a flowering melaleuca in the Townsville Hospital grounds. The first I saw were in Townsville, flying over the Nathan Street bridge in April. I couldn't believe it and I put it down to my seeing things. Then later on we have seen them in Bamford Lane, Dalrymple Road, around the Ross River Dam, at Woodstock, the AIMS Road, Reed Beds Road and the road from Mingela to Clare and at Mingela. They even flew over my son's house in Kirwan a few days ago. There must have been a couple of thousand by Ross River Dam and they performed a beautiful ballet in the sky.

Annette Sutton



INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

Birds	Date	Place	Observer
White Backed Magpie	26 April	20 k north of Fletchers Creek	Mark Horvath
Spectacled Monarch	17 May	McLaren Court, Kirwan	Mark Horvath
50+ Budgies	22 May	Bruce Highway near Helen's Hill School	John Maddy
1 Golden Pheasant (Escapee)	25 May	Alligator Creek Camp Grounds	Norm Rains
Barn Owl	29 May	Downs Street, Gulliver	Joan Wharton (nephew)
12 Currawongs	2 June	Castle Hill, at top	Julia Hazel
100 White-breasted Woodswallows	1 June	University	Warren & Pat Charlton
17 White-browed Woodswallows	1 June	University	Warren & Pat Charlton
3 Common Terns	1 June	Three Mile Creek	Cheryl Robertson & Joan Wharton
8 Bush Stone-curlews	1 June	Woolcock St, behind Showgrounds	Angela Ward
6 Eurasian Coots	1 June	Below Gleeson's Weir	Malcolm & Lenore Calvert
21 Pink-eared Ducks	1 June	Thuringowa Dump	Beth Snewin
17 White-browed Woodswallows	1 June	Hervey Range Road, 3km before base of range	Annette & Ray Sutton
Little Woodswallows	1 June	Forestry Rd, Bluewater, dirt road	Cecily Messer & Rosemary Payet
Emerald Dove	1 June	Forestry Rd, Bluewater, in creek nearest locked gate	Cecily Messer & Rosemary Payet
2 Beach Stone-curlews	1 June	Townsville Breakwater, flying from reclaimed area north.	Cecily Messer & Ian Leach
6 Wedge Tailed Shearwaters	1 June	Townsville Breakwater	Cecily Messer & Ian Leach
Nankeen Night-Heron	4 June	Aplin's Weir	Tony Grice
Black-necked Stork	5 June	Water drain near Hyde Park shopping Centre on Woolcock Street	Jenny Sebba
Square-tailed Kite	11 June	Museum Tropical Queensland	Niel Bruce
Red-backed Button-quail	13 June	Toonpan, near the junction of Gunadoo Rd and Old Flinders Hwy.	Russell McGregor
Barn Owl	8/9/10 June	Mungalla	Townsville Birdlife weekend camp
Spotted Nightjar	8/9/10 June	Mungalla	Townsville Birdlife weekend camp
6 Freckled Duck	8/9/10 June	Mungalla	Townsville Birdlife weekend camp

Please send Interesting Sightings to Cecily Messer cecilymesser@westnet.com.au

QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Chris Ezzy	337	3/12/2013
Len Ezzy	335	1/12/2013
Janet Robino	310	6/11/2013
Niel Bruce	304	31/10/2013
Ian Boyd	287	14/10/2013
Rosemary Payet	284	11/10/2013
Marleen Acton	283	10/10/2013
Joan Wharton	271	28/09/2013
Greg Calvert	260	17/09/2013
Peter Valentine	255	12/09/2013
Cecily Messer	248	5/09/2013
Ian Leach	247	4/09/2013
Elna Kerswell	235	23/08/2013
Alf Acton	233	21/08/2013
Beth Snewin	232	20/08/2013
Lenore Calvert	223	11/08/2013
Wendy Kaus	221	9/08/2013
Annette Sutton	220	8/08/2013
Malcolm Calvert	219	7/08/2013
Pat Charlton	204	23/07/2013
Mark Horvath	199	18/07/2013
Warren Charlton	197	16/07/2013
Alex Canton	182	1/07/2013

ON THE DAINTREE



Joan Wharton



Papuan Frogmouths

Ray Sutton



Great-billed Heron

Ray Sutton