

The Drongo

Number 135 October 2014



Bowra

BTF Count

Artemis



FROM THE PRESIDENT

The year is quickly drawing to a close. There are only two more club meetings for 2014 and both are really important. In November, our guest speaker will be Fiona Blandford, Branch Liaison Officer, BirdLife Australia. Fiona is going to do a presentation on one of her latest birding trips. She will attend the committee meeting with some answers regarding requirements for branches relating to BirdLife Australia's Insurance Policy.

The Christmas Party will be on 13 December at Suburban Bowls Club. Due to popular demand, we have 'encouraged' Nina to do her Christmas Trivia Quiz again. Numbers and payment will need to be complete 10 days prior. We would like to be able to get numbers confirmed at the November meeting so that arrangements can be made regarding payment.

The Education group has put in displays at the City and Aitkenvale libraries for the month of October to celebrate Bird Week. The birds in the displays are kindly supplied by the Museum of Tropical North Queensland. The group of volunteers who do the taxidermy have done a wonderful job in preparing the birds for exhibition. It would be valuable to get feedback from members on the displays. Please pop into one of the libraries and send your comments and suggestions to contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au.

Beth Snewin was interviewed by Paula Tapiolas on ABC local radio on 15 October. The part I was able to listen to was great, sounded like both Beth and Paula were having a fun time talking about Pied Imperial Pigeons and taxidermy. Well done, Beth. It was good publicity for BirdLife Townsville and the Museum.

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino
Vice-President:
Secretary: Warren Charlton
Treasurer: Nina Doyle
Newsletter Editor: Annette Sutton
Conservation Officer: Garrie Douglas
Education Officer: Norm Rains
Safety Officer: Janet Cross
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BOWRA TO BIRDSVILLE

Bowra – the premier birding location in Queensland! At least that is what we all felt after spending seven days there at the end of September this year.

Our band of five comprised of Ian Leach, Nina Doyle, Karen Emery, Lenore and myself. We had to drag Nina away from Tambo where we stayed one night on the way down. She had fallen in love with the teddy bears that are made there by local craftspeople.

Bird call for our first night was a scramble for chairs as the place had a lot of people staying. You certainly meet some interesting characters when birders get together and Bowra did not disappoint.



Bourke's Parrot

Hearing that nobody has been seeing the Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush, we vowed to change that next morning and headed for Stony Ridge to check out the never fail place where they always show up! Some fruitless hours later we had to admit to a temporary setback and decided to change to a different search area tomorrow. All was not lost as we put up six Bourke's Parrots as we were stumbling through the scrub on the far side of Stony Ridge. A Pallid Cuckoo plus Buff-rumped and Chestnut-rumped Thornbills were also seen in the same area. Splendid Fairy-wrens were seen with the males in full splendour. We finally located the Quail-thrush in Area 6, on top of the slope. Hall's Babbler and Red-capped Robins were in the same area.

We visited an area to the South of the main entrance road on one morning to look for the White-winged Fairy-wren. This seems to be a lesser visited area than other parts of the property and paid off when a male popped up in front of Karen. It stayed there for some time allowing plenty of photos.

Ian quickly spotted a couple of Blue Bonnets, then a juvenile sitting in a dense shrub. Variegated Fairy-wrens were also seen close by. A second visit a

couple of days later netted the elusive Crested Bellbird; most of the time it is heard but not seen.

The bore drain was popular with the birds. Budgerigars were all over the place; also Cockatiels. Ian spotted a Little Eagle perched in a tall tree adjacent to the bore drain. Good to see it close up as I have only seen them in flight previously. Magnificent bird.



Little Eagle

Bowra has a lot more water in the dams and billabongs this year compared to last year. This is good for the birds and other fauna but it does make birdwatching more difficult. We sat on the dam not far from the homestead one evening. Not many birds came in to drink whereas last year when there was little water around, the dam was a real hotspot.

The lagoon had its quota of birds as usual but only one Black-tailed Native Hen which was unusual. A Baillon's Crane had been seen before we arrived but was not to be found.

Major Mitchell's Cockatoos were being seen in Sawpit Gully; one only at the lagoon. White-winged Choughs were seen and heard frequently. Large numbers of emu's, 'roos, goats were seen plus a few feral pigs. Banded Lapwings were being seen along the Airport track but our attempts to find them were a failure. Travel to the extreme end of the Airport track produced plenty of Hooded Robins, Brown Treecreepers and a single Grey-fronted Honeyeater.

The Sandy Creek area is always good and both Black and a Painted Honeyeater were seen here. The mistletoe was about to flower; mid October it should all be in full flower. White-browed Woodswallows were everywhere and were breeding prolifically. The fledgling pictured had ventured out on its own much to the dismay of its parents – only a mother could love such an ugly little fella!

We booked for six nights at Bowra, extended to seven nights and there were still areas that we had not really explored – could have done with two or three more nights.



Fledgling White-browed Woodswallow

Leaving Bowra, we headed to Quilpie for the night, staying at the excellent caravan park.

As we had arrived early, we went birding to Baldy Hill later in the afternoon. The ground was bare, no water to be seen but there were lots of birds, including Crimson Chats, White-browed Treecreepers and Budgies. At the top of Baldy Hill, a superb view of the surrounding plains.

Next day, first stop Windorah, a thriving small town where Ergon has installed an experimental solar farm. The solar dishes are visible long before the town comes into sight.

On to Betoota for lunch. Now all that is there is the abandoned hotel, a picnic table and a toilet. Site of an annual race meeting on the weekend before the Birdsville Races. Even the main road has been realigned so that it bypasses Betoota.

The road progressively deteriorated the closer we got to Birdsville. It makes the notorious Gibb River Road in WA look like a super highway. Whoever is responsible for its maintenance should hang their heads in shame. Birdsville was buzzing when we arrived. A group of vehicles had just completed a West – East crossing of the Simpson Desert and space was limited. We had to camp in no-mans land, the bus area. Shade is non-existent but some trees are growing and it should improve with time. Temperature rose to 40°C both days we were there. The Birdsville Library and The Bakery provided good relief during the hottest part of the day; particularly The Bakery with its excellent pies, all homebaked. The famous Birdsville Hotel also had to be visited.

An early trip to Big Red looking for Emu-wrens was unsuccessful. The only birds seen were Little Corella's and Variegated Fairy-wrens. The wind was getting up by the time we departed the dune, with dust streaming in ribbons across the road, at ankle height; obscuring the road completely at times.

A search for the Inland Dotterel was also to no avail. The bore drain at Birdsville was productive with Crimson and Orange Chat, Wood Sandpiper, and Flock Bronzewing being seen. From Pelican Point in the lagoon, we observed Hoary-headed Grebes, Red-necked Avocets, Grey Teal and Whiskered Terns. Leaving Birdsville, we travelled to Boulia for the night. There is plenty of water at the Cuttaburra Crossing but elsewhere, it is extremely dry.

We had planned to spend some time at Bladensburg but as the daytime temperatures were getting so high and as it was unlikely that we would add to our birdlist, we decided to head for home.



Flock Bronzewing

An excellent trip with great travelling companions. No disasters apart from a couple of punctures due to bits of metal. The mechanic at Birdsville keeps souvenirs of tyre damage and proudly showed Ian and myself some examples of his collection.

Story and Photographs

Malcolm Calvert

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR

Everyone at the Karumba Caravan Park assured us that it never rained over Easter, but rain it did over the Easter that Birdlife Townsville was there.

An unusual sight to the Townsville visitors was many perched Whistling Kites, welcoming the rains with wings outstretched, enjoying a cleansing shower. Sure must beat the dust bath more often seen with Rainbow Bee-eaters in Townsville.

Story and Photograph

Ray Sutton



CAPE KIDNAPPERS

On the 11th November, 2013, I took the opportunity to visit the Gannet Colony at Cape Kidnappers, Hawke Bay, New Zealand.

It was some thirty-five years since my last visit. At that time we had taken a tour along the beach at low tide, on a tractor-trailer vehicle, (this tour is still available), and then climbed from the beach to the cliff tops and the colony. This time I took the alternative, the overland route, in the comfort of a 4WD Discovery.

Having stayed in Hastings, it was about a thirty-five minute drive to the Gannet Safari Overland Tours office at Te Awanga, to arrive just before 9.00 am. Adrian, my guide, arrived and became a personal guide, as I was the only one on the tour. There were frequent stops as birds appeared, or as views of ponds came by, and Adrian pointed out birds and things of interest.

The colony and the thirteen hectare reserve and Cape Kidnappers Station is sheltered from predators by a protective fence. This barrier fence is 10.4 km long, and cost \$400.00 per metre to build, (yes, \$4m). The electric gate alone cost \$40k to install (power required). It runs from coast to coast across the 8km peninsular.

The (3hr, 36km round trip), ride out was interesting, with Adrian providing a good commentary on the way. What is really noticeable, are some of the 1200 traps set around the area, to keep weasels, ferrets, and stoats under control. In the 2012 year, 8 noxious animals were caught, 7 from outside the barrier, and 1 inside the protected area.



There are actually four gannet colonies on the Cape, and the tour takes one right to the edge of the Plateau Colony. From the cliff edge, 100m above the beach, one can look down onto the other colonies. The gannets are amazing birds, just how they find their partners amongst the 20,000 other birds in the colony is a wonder. There was certainly a lot of activity with flying, landings, take-offs, nest building, incubating, and territorial challenges.

One has to have feeling of sympathy for the "singles" in the outer circle, longingly looking in for a suitable

mate. The crowded colony has the nests just out of reach of being able to peck one another, and woe-betide any hapless gannet that accidentally lands or wanders within strike range.

While viewing, one is served with a welcome morning tea. Of interest too, is the modern version of a lighthouse at the colony area. It is a small 4 m tall column, with a fully automated light, (116m above MSL).



Black-backed Gull with Gannet egg

One of the interesting features of this region is that the Pacific tectonic plate is subducting under the Indo Australia plate. This activity is evident in the visible tilting of the Cape Kidnappers strata, as viewed from the beach. This activity led to the 1931 Napier earthquake, and a considerable uplift in the Napier area.

The bird list for the tour is:

Australian Harrier, Australian Magpie, Blackbird, Brown Teal (Pateke) Duck, Common Pheasant, Gannet, Black-backed Gull, Mallard Duck, Myna, Paradise Shelduck, Pied Stilt, Quail, (Released) Red Partridge, Skylark, Sparrow, Starling, Tern, Welcome Swallow, Thrush, White Faced Heron, Yellowhammer

For images of the four Gannet Colonies check out:

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=four+gannet+colonies+Cape+Kidnappers&sa=N&biw=1181&bih=579&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&ei=Ii86VKixDs_n8AW6nILoDQ&ved=0CCQQAQ4Cg&dpr=0.9

Story and Photographs

Graeme Cooksley

Australasian Gannets are expert fishers. Birds soar 10 m or more above the surface of the water, herding fish into dense shoals, then fold their wings back and dive into the water to catch their prey. The fish are grasped with the aid of small backward-pointing serrations along the edges of the bill.

In Australia, the Australasian Gannet breeds in dense colonies on islands off Victoria and Tasmania. Breeding colonies are also found off the coast of New Zealand, mostly off the North Island. The young do not reach breeding maturity until about six or seven years old.

From Birdlife Australia

MISSION WITH A DIFFERENCE

Ian and I set off on a mission that was not associated with bird watching, though Ian was hoping to fit in some bird watching activities.

We joined Conservation Volunteers Australia in conjunction with Tangaroa Blue to travel to Old Mapoon Beach north of Weipa to undertake a five day debris beach clean-up. Northbound, we overnighted at Hann River and Archer River arriving at Janie Creek campsite on Sunday afternoon.

The following five days was 6am wakeup, on the beach picking up debris at 7am, return to campsite to sort and categorise debris from 11am to 3pm, then return to beach until 5pm. Return to campsite for more sorting until 6:30pm. Dinner then bed. I volunteered as camp cook. That meant I was relieved of the late afternoon sorting to prepare the evening meal for eight volunteers/workers. The only respite from the program was a trip to Old Mapoon township to meet a local representative and visit the local information centre. Old Mapoon township is well maintained, tidy, well planned and we enjoyed our visit.



Turtles mistake plastic bags for jellyfish

The debris upon arrival at the campsite was sorted – cigarette lighters, thongs, plastic bottles, glass bottles/aluminium cans, fishing line floats, five litre plastic containers and containers with foreign labels and plastic. Foreign labels included mainly personal items and drink bottles. The rest – fishing lines, nets, foam, lures and non-recyclables was bagged and taken to the dump as landfill – 12x4 trailer on a daily basis.

We did two 100m x 150m beach transits and the debris from each section was all individually categorised and data inputted. Whereas only foreign label items were data inputted from the general clean up together with numbers collected regarding lighters, thongs, plastic bottles etc. The plastic bottles will be recycled as clothing by an American company.

The rubbish is mainly from Asian countries, cargo ships and fishing boats. Unfortunately, the majority of Asian countries have no facilities to process rubbish, and as a result, the rubbish is disposed of by simply throwing it into the river systems. During the floods the rubbish is carried into the seas, then oceans and carried by the currents towards the northern coastline of Australia.

By cataloguing the debris, the process forms an information database. The database can be sourced by universities, government departments, communities for studies towards forming practical solutions in reducing ocean pollution and create source reduction plans.

We have learnt that plastic will never breakdown. Plastic will disintegrate into miniscule pieces which still can be consumed by the marine life. Amazing, upon trying to pick up a large plastic item, it shatters into pieces. Each piece was then painstakingly picked up.

During the five days, we were able to view frolicking dolphins just off the beach, assisted hatchling flatback turtles to reach the sea, and sighted a Lesser Frigatebird and there was a resident Marble Frogmouth at the campsite. Our fellow volunteers were more than interested in Ian's bird watching stories, and were always pointing out birds to Ian and asking Ian for identification.

As a summary the following debris was cleaned up off 7.5 km of beach with an average width 150m:

Weight: A mammoth 3 tons
Cigarette lighters: 1087
Plastic drink bottles: 6358
Drift net floats: Over 2500
Thongs: 5812

On our return trip, we overnighted at Musgrave, spent four hours at Cooktown and overnighted at the Lion's Den – highly recommended. The new Bloomfield River Bridge at Wujal Wujal has been officially opened to traffic.

Nina Doyle

Marine debris is harmful to marine life, most notably protected species of birds, sharks, turtles and marine mammals. Marine debris may cause injury or death from drowning, injury through entanglement, and internal injuries or starvation following ingestion.

Seabirds entangled in marine debris lose their ability to move quickly through the water, reducing their ability to catch prey and avoid predators. Constricted circulation can lead to asphyxiation and death.

Marine species commonly confuse plastic bags, rubber, balloons and confectionery wrappers for prey and swallow them. Turtles, in particular, mistake plastic bags for jellyfish, and seabirds eat polystyrene balls and plastic buoys thinking they are fish eggs. This debris can then cause blockages in the animal's digestive system.

World Wildlife Fund

A SENIOR MOMENT?

I was having a good day out with the bird club along Forestry Road with lots of species being identified. It is afternoon, up past the shed, when someone advises they can here some avian activity and I pull over. I hop out of the car and turn to pick up my Binos.... They're not in the centre console where they should be. I don't know how to describe the thoughts that went through my head but I knew exactly where they were.



I advise the rest of the party that I have misplaced my Binos and Warren kindly suggests that he could go back and retrieve them for me since I could describe where they would be, he being tail-end-Charlie and all. I um and ah a little and suggest that it may not be worth it. Why they all ask. Because I left them on the back wheel of my car and I have probably driven over them. Now is that funny or not? Warren, being very optimistic, suggests that I may be lucky and goes back to look for me.

The rest of us are dawdling up the track when Warren calls over the UHF with, "Do you want the good news or the bad news?" I presume he has found them and that they are toast. Not quite he says. "They have been driven over but they appear okay". I found that a little hard to swallow.

Anyway Warren arrives with my Binos and I have a look through them, using one of the group as a target. What do you know, there are two of them. We do a little farmie-fixing and eliminate the dual image problem but they still do not focus properly. Looks like I need a new pair.

Why do you think I would put the Binos on the wheel? I was divesting myself of all my paraphernalia before we moved on and was placing it in the back of the vehicle. All I had to do was place the Binos in the back of the vehicle with the rest of the gear. Significant personal research into the matter leads me to believe it is a result of what is known as mob mentality. Let me explain. In the bird club I mix with, what I would consider, an older crowd and many of those within have related their experiences of 'senior moments' to me. My association with club members and the imbibing of this collective amnesia has manifested itself at that precise moment resulting in a significant error in judgement. Is this a senior moment?

Mark Horvath

Maybe you are older than you think, Mark. (Ed) ☺

AUSSIE INNOVATIONS

When we think of all the inventions that people have come up with, we are indeed a lucky country. Where would we be without the Hills hoist, Victa lawnmower and the black box recorder? And then we have lots of others who make do with what they have to achieve an outcome. Ken Crombie (years ago) made a "new" clutch plate out of the bottom of a 44 gallon drum to get his truck mobile on the Birdsville Track.

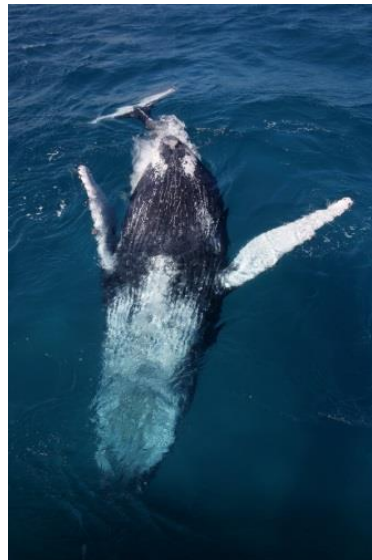
And we have our own bright spark – instead of carrying a great big plastic recovery track to enable the car to get going again on a rough track, there is a simpler way – put a pair of binoculars under the wheels! And they proved to be as strong as the plastic unit and still worked, but need some minor adjustment. The brand, like the perpetrator and re writer shall remain secret.

Anonymous

WHALES AND THINGS

In September Ray and I hitched up the caravan and headed south.

We spent the first night in Clairview but of course the Beach-stone Curlews were safe in hiding. Next stop Hervey Bay. We drove to Point Vernon where the Ospreys have been breeding for years on an artificial platform high up on a pole. In 2008 when we first saw them they had successfully raised two chicks. In 2010 we could only see one chick and only one again this year.



We hadn't gone to see the Harvey Bay Ospreys specifically, rather the Humpback Whales that have started making their journey back to the Antarctic with calves in tow. We weren't disappointed. We went out on two different boats and, though the weather was pretty foul the second day, we saw lots of whales of all sizes. On the first day we had an

adolescent pair come alongside. After close up viewing of us, the male retired about one hundred metres away. Not so the female. She swam under the boat. She swam around the boat. Then she turned on her back and just hung in the water for a while. Then she made many passes under the boat, lying on her back after each little trip. The male got sick of all this girlie showing off and smacked the water several times with his huge tail to tell her to get going. She replied by lying on her back and making more trips under the boat. He repeated his demonstration of impatience and again she ignored him. Eventually she tired of us and the pair moved off.

Later a big whale rose vertically out of the water, rearing up maybe four metres or so, not more than 10 metres from me. I froze. I knew I had a camera around my neck but I was paralysed with amazement and awe. No photo – just a wonderful memory. Then he slipped below the surface. We had a bit of breaching, flipper waving and tail slapping. Wonderful.

There were some bird highlights too. The harbour wall was roost to about twenty Pied Oystercatchers as well as Cormorants, Pelicans, Darters and Silver Gulls. Out in the whale area we had several Australasian Gannets fly by. We got the surprise of our lives to find a large flock of Cockatiels on the power lines outside a service station. The attendant said they had been in Hervey Bay for years. I had never seen them there before.



Pale-headed Rosella Chick

We cut across country and stayed at Yarraman at the foot of the Bunya Mountains for two nights. On the way up the range before Blackbutt we found the Bell Miners. They are so noisy but so hard to spot and even harder to photograph. At the caravan park in Yarraman, a pair of Pale-headed Rosellas had a single chick in the bottom of a hollowed out fence post. Just near to them was a bunch of rabbits, hiding out in a big wood pile. Our best find at the Bunyas was a Speckled Warbler down near the bottom. The Superb Fairy-wren turned up at his usual spot near the camping ground. Down further near the café we found plenty of Satin Bowerbirds and White-browed Scrubwrens.

Down to Brisbane next to see family and make the obligatory visit to O'Reilly's. Our son lives in

suburban Kenmore but he gets Lewin's Honeyeaters in his garden. O'Reilly's was fairly quiet but we did get some lovely photos of a Lewin's on a grevillea. There were lots of White-browed and Yellow-throated Scrubwrens scuttling through the leaf litter under the board walk like little mice. A Whipbird put in a brief appearance.



Lewin's Honeyeater on a Grevillea

Our next big stop was Bowra. We parked our van down near the big lagoon and had wonderful views. Nothing like eating your breakfast outside and having birds going every which way. A Restless Flycatcher performed all sorts of acrobatics all around us. Mrs. Black-winged Stilt sat on a nest on an island a little way out into the water. Mr. Stilt wandered up and down eating. Every now and then he would spot a third stilt, leave off his feeding and give it the rounds of the kitchen, and then resume feeding. A Black-tailed Native-hen wandered around the edges of the Lagoon. A couple of Brown Treecreepers were very friendly. The Spotted Bowerbird had his bower in the cottage garden.



Major Mitchell's Cockatoo

We found Mulga Parrots, Australian Ringnecks, Major Mitchell Cockatoos, Budgerigars and Cockatiels in the parrot family. We think some Bourke's Parrots flew over but otherwise we missed them. We managed to find the Crested Bellbird, the Southern Whiteface and Chestnut-crested Babbler as well as Variegated and Splendid Fairy-wrens. An Emu dad with two chicks was a highlight. We had four kinds of Woodswallow –

White-breasted, Black-faced, White-browed and Masked. I will leave the other species out.

On our way home we had to take a seventy kilometre dirt road detour to get to Charleville after a fuel tanker had blown up and demolished a bridge. The blast was felt thirty kilometres away in Charleville but no-one was killed.

North of Clermont we came across a paddock where some grain crop had previously been harvested. There were about 1500 to 2000 Brolgas pecking away in that paddock. It was like a grey carpet.

Just after that we came across a herd of cattle, grazing the "Long Paddock". We felt for the farmers.

Story and Photographs

Annette Sutton

CARNAGE ON THE ROAD.....ALMOST

It's a lovely Sunday morning and I've just picked Janet up on my way to the Palmetum to meet the rest of the motley crew gathering for the Forestry Road outing.

We've just crossed the Ross River Bridge and notice a couple of Masked Lapwings loitering in the middle of the road. I begin braking, expecting the birds to depart fairly quickly. However they tarry so I apply more pressure to the brake pedal. It then becomes clear as to why they are reluctant to depart. On the road are four little fluff balls, three near the left hand edge and one more towards the centre of the lane. I brake harder but I'm too close at this stage so I adjust my vector slightly in an attempt to avoid said puff balls. Luckily the parents depart with sufficient haste that I did not have to divide my attention between avoiding the chicks and the parents. The success of my manoeuvre will be unknown until we can go back and check.

We duck into the Palmetum and head back for a rescue mission, hopefully. Walking towards Masked



Masked Lapwing Chick

Rav Sutton

Lapwings with eggs or young is usually something I try and avoid but here I was doing exactly that with Janet. Next minute Janet is telling me to run decoy. Oh great, just what I've always wanted to do.

We are still some distance away when, with mum and dad trying desperately to fend them off, more cars pass over the chicks. Objective observation would indicate that not all drivers care one little bit if they hit or kill another species or for that matter even notice them. After seeing the behaviour of some of the individuals driving we were not very hopeful of effecting a successful rescue.

We are nearing the danger zone and mum and dad start their dive-bombing antics. Not the most relaxing time that day I can assure you. A short time, and no injuries, later we reach the chicks. Janet picks up the three near the edge of the road and I the last one near the middle of the road. With the chick in my hand I forgot about the marauding parents completely. I was engrossed to see that it appeared to be perfectly healthy and unharmed. Janet also indicates that the three she has appear okay. It seems tiny miracles can happen. More from good luck than any concern on the part of Homo erectus driving any of the cars I'm sure.

With the chicks safely placed well off the road the parents quickly settled down and we departed with a satisfied feeling.

Mark Horvath

SUNBIRDS

A friend of ours in Railway Estate has Sunbirds breeding just outside his back door. They are apparently quite happy with human beings and ignore them completely, going about their business even if a human is only a few feet away. Great for photography! We haven't seen the male about and there seems to be only one chick. It is a voracious eater and keeps Mum very busy. It is only the female who incubates the eggs – they usually lay one or two. They fledge at a very early age, between two and three weeks. A baby Budgie takes five to six weeks.

Annette Sutton



Female Sunbird feeding chick

Ray Sutton

ARTEMIS

Towards the end of August a group from Birdlife Townsville made the trek up into the Cape to visit Artemis Station.

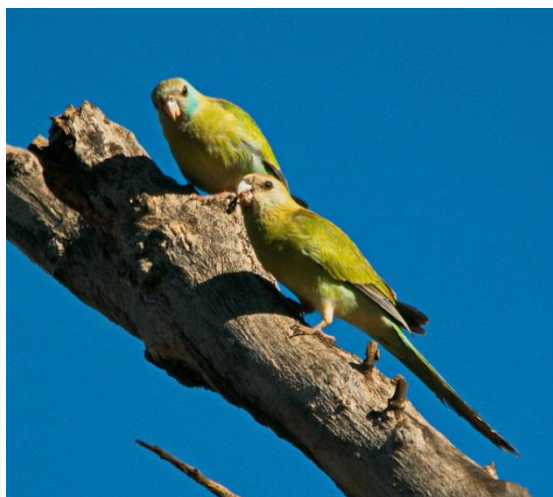
We spent the first night at Lakefield before setting off into the Cape proper. All was smooth until Laura but then the corrugations hit is. Our Tom Tom navigation device got so rattled on the windscreen that it pulled the pin and has been frozen ever since. We were greeted by the resident Hahn River Emu who haughtily looked us up and down. Further along we saw a Wedge-tailed Eagle in a tree by the road. Soon we arrived at Artemis and set up camp.

Next day we out and about around the dams and wetlands. A very friendly Striated Pardalote sat on a low branch, clutching nesting material in its beak. We picked up lots of the usual waterbirds. We were warned about a big lizard in one of the dams so we were quite wary around the water.

Next day we went to a spot along the highway where we at last found the Golden-shouldered Parrot, the main target bird for our trip. We stood for quite a while in the bush amongst tall termite mounds until they put in their appearance. There were adult birds and juveniles.

Later in the day we were entertained by a Magpie driving off a Wedge-tailed Eagle. Those big birds allow themselves to be chased so much. They don't seem to realise they could easily chase off those cheeky little bullies.

Some people went out spotlighting at night and found Southern Boobook, Barn Owl, Barking Owl and Tawny Frogmouth. It was hard work but worth the effort.



Young Golden-shouldered Parrots Annette Sutton

Next day saw us heading off to Lotus Bird Lodge and beyond. Our first searchings didn't find the Red Goshawk but did give us a view of a couple of Emus crossing the road in the dappled shade. We took the advice of a fellow bird observer and found the Red Goshawk nest. The female could be seen sitting but there was no sign of the male. Some people returned later and had great views of both male and

female. It is good to know the Red Goshawks are going well.

At Lotus Bird Lodge we were shown a couple of Papuan Frogmouths in a tree. Their camouflage is so perfect. Some Radjah Shelducks caused a bit of excitement out on the lagoon. Along the road somewhere we came across Bar-breasted Honeyeaters, another tick on the list for the year. We also found Banded Honeyeaters.

We came to a spot with an old windmill. The mosquitoes were very attentive. Some people spotted a Shining Bronze-cuckoo. Along the road we spotted a big flock of finches. Much to our delight they turned out to be Star Finches but they kept their distance. Further on we came to water and after we had been there for a while, Star Finches came in. These were a bit closer so we tried to photograph them.

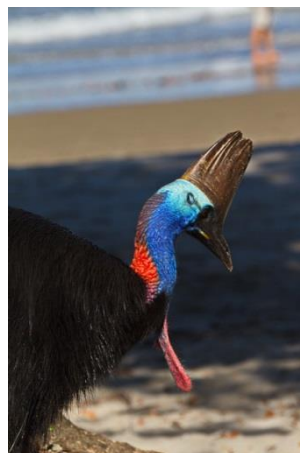


Star Finch

Ray Sutton

Time to go home and on the road back to Laura we found Australian Pratincoles. We stopped off at Atherton for the night and finished our trip with a nice Devonshire morning tea at the Nerada Tea Plantation, getting great views of the two Tree Kangaroos down by the gate.

Annette Sutton



The female Cassowary is patrolling the beach at Etty Bay whilst the locals think the male is up in the hills incubating eggs. Lets hope so.

ETTY BAY

BTF COUNT 2014

The Annual Black-throated Finch waterhole count was conducted on Saturday and Sunday 18-19 October. This was the 11 year of the count which attempts to quantify changes in the relative abundance of granivorous birds on the Townsville Coastal Plain. Each year volunteers are assigned to monitor the activity of birds using specific waterholes within areas judged to be Black-throated Finch habitat. Birds are counted as they drink at the monitored watering places so it is actually "drinking events" that are being counted rather than the number of birds – it is usually impossible to know whether a bird visits the watering place and drinks more than once. In addition to Black-throated Finches, the count records Double-barred, Zebra and Plum-headed Finches, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Peaceful Dove and Squatter Pigeon.

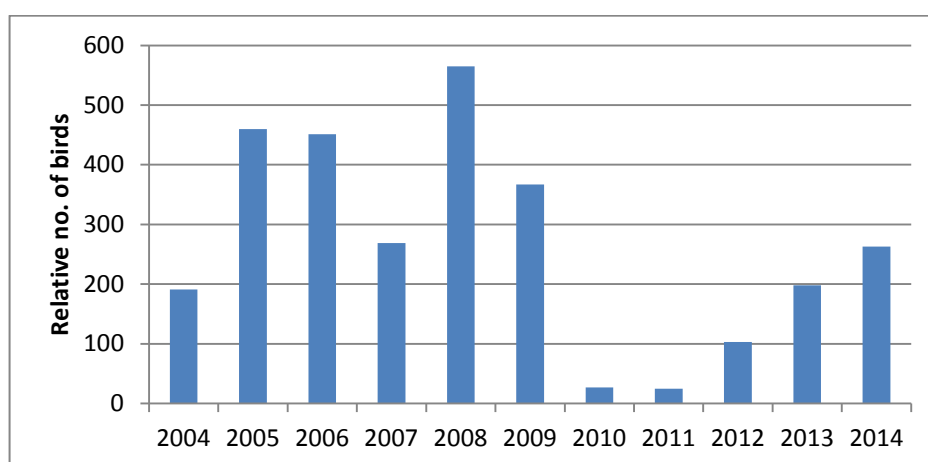
During this year's count, 35 volunteers monitored 18 specific locations. These included both farm dams and natural waterholes in creeks. Each was observed between 6am and 9am on the 18th and 19th of October, with "drinking events" of target species being recorded for each 15 minute interval.

This year, the target species (finches, Peaceful Doves, Squatter Pigeons) were observed at 17 out of the 18 watering places. The most frequently recorded of the target species was Double-barred Finch with a total of 628 "drinking events" across the two days and the 18 watering places. More than one-third of these were at one particular location. Peaceful Dove was the second most frequently recorded species with 508 "drinking events". There were far fewer for Chestnut-breasted Mannikin ($n = 5$) and none for Zebra (though there were incidental sightings of this species) or Plum-headed Finches ($n = 0$). Black-throated Finches were observed at only 4 of the 18 watering places. The total number of Black-throated Finch "drinking events" was 263. Volunteers also reported 110 other bird species that were observed during the count. A list is provided at the end of this article.

Overall, the news from this year's count is a mixed bag. The numbers of Black-throated Finch drinking events was up from the low numbers recorded between 2010 ($n = 27$) and 2013 ($n = 198$) but still considerably lower than recorded in most years prior to that. The relative numbers of Black-throated Finches recorded in each year of the waterhole count since 2014 are shown in the graph below. Perhaps of greatest concern is the fact that birds were seen at only a small proportion of sites and that some sites that in past years have been very reliable have had few birds since 2009.

There are at least three possible explanations for the changes in the apparent relative abundance of Black-throated Finches on the Townsville Coastal Plain. These relate to (i) detectability; (ii) seasonal conditions or (iii) habitat change. Detectability of the birds using the waterhole count method can change because recent rainfall may mean that birds do not need to come to regular watering places to drink because there are alternative sources scattered more generally across the landscape. Different seasonal conditions may mean that the resources that the birds need, especially grass seeds, vary in abundance and accessibility between years, leading to changes in breeding success and survival. Habitat deterioration, including loss of habitat due to changes in land-use, could lead to longer-term declines in finch populations. Continued monitoring of finch populations can help describe and explain population fluctuations and trends.

The Black-throated Finch Recovery Team would like to thank all those who helped with the 2014 waterhole count. We hope to see you again next year.



This figure records the number of "drinking events" by Black-throated Finches reported during each of the waterhole counts since 2004.

Tony Grice

CALENDAR

October 2014

26th - Sunday Outing - Townsville Town Common Out To Shelly Beach - Meet at the Town Common main gate for a departure at 6.30am sharp. Gate out to Shelly Beach will be locked after we enter so late comers will miss out. Bring morning tea - will be home by lunch time. Car pooling encouraged. Leader TBA.

November 2014

2nd - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am. Malcolm and Lenore Calvert.

4th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Big Birds (say from the Little Egret up). Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

8th - Saturday - Committee Meeting (12.00pm) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Sound Shell meeting room Thuringowa. Guest speaker TBA.

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

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

30th - Sunday Outing - Paluma through to Taravale - Meet adjacent to the RAAF Base Duckworth St gate for a departure at 6.30 sharp. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch. Car pooling encouraged. Leader TBA.

December 2014

7th - Sunday - Town Common - Meet at the main gate 6.30am. Leader Rosemary Payet.

9th - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Theme is Little Brown Jobs. Meeting place TBA 7.00pm.

13th - Saturday - Christmas Party details TBA.

17th - Wednesday - Bush Garden - Meet at end of Thompson St Mundingburra 6.30am.

21st - Sunday - Ross River Dam - Meet in the Dam car park 6.30am.

28th - No Sunday outing. There will be one on the 1st January to welcome in the new year and to start of your annual list.

QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Ian Leach	368	3/01/2015
Malcolm Calvert	341	7/12/2014
Lenore Calvert	337	3/12/2014
Chris Ezzy	356	22/12/2014
Len Ezzy	356	22/12/2014
Annette Sutton	298	25/10/2014
Niel Bruce	292	19/10/2014
Warren Charlton	283	10/10/2014
Marleen Acton	280	7/10/2014
Cecily Messer	279	6/10/2014
Pat Charlton	275	2/10/2014
Ian Boyd	268	25/09/2014
Joan Wharton	256	13/09/2014
Janet Cross	253	10/09/2014
Elna Kerswell	240	28/08/2014
Alf Acton	238	26/08/2014
Rosemary Payet	215	3/08/2014
Janet Robino	127	7/05/2014

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