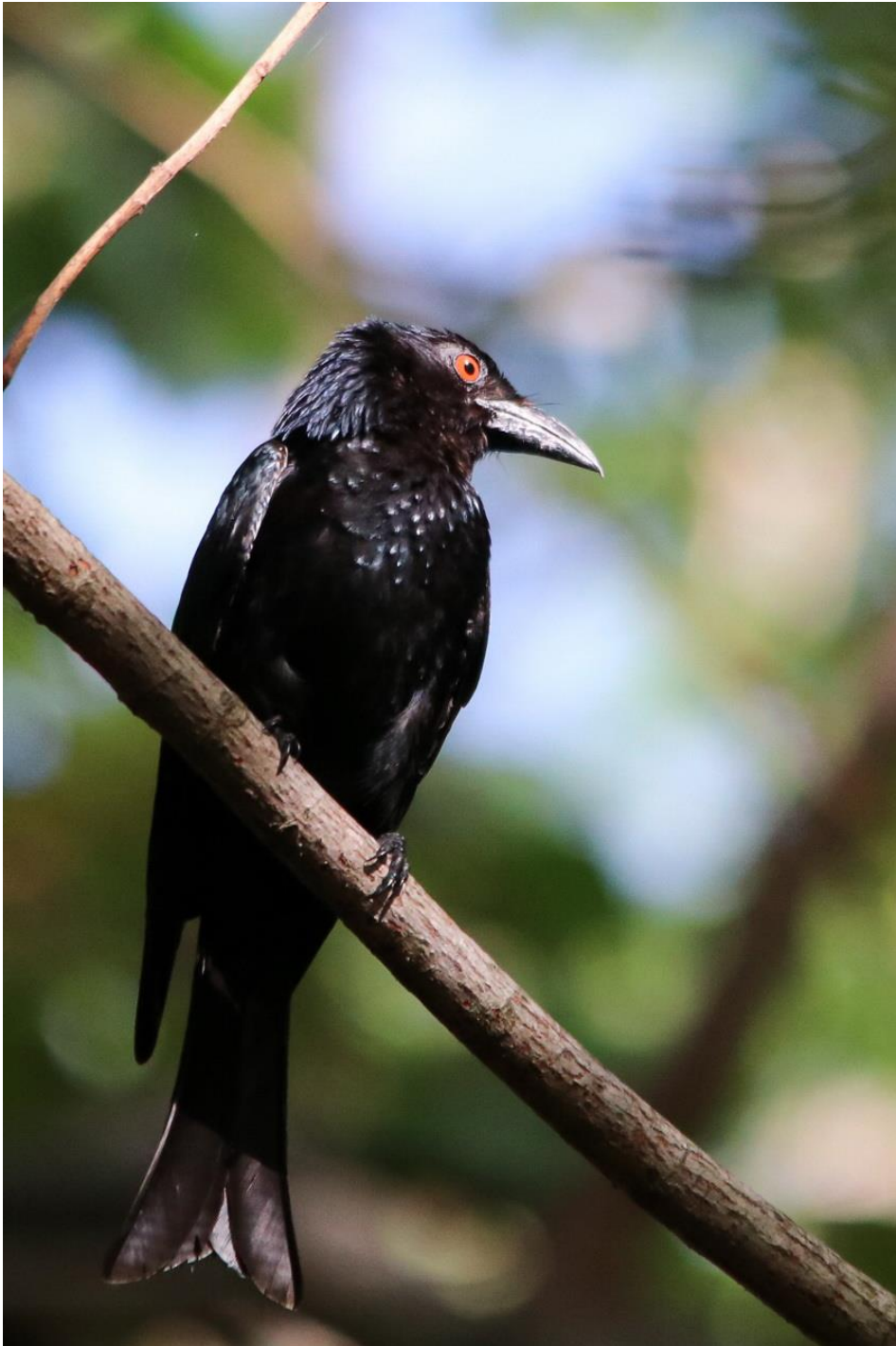


The Drongo

Number 161 February 2021



Annette Sibson

Bowen

Burdekin

Alligator Creek

FROM THE PRESIDENT

BirdLife Townsville's 2020 year started out as usual following the February Annual General Meeting. Little did we know then that the Covid-19 pandemic would change the world so drastically. Outings and meetings were cancelled to comply with Government Guidelines. The Committee was still very busy during the 'lock-down' period with meetings being held electronically.

A Covid-19 Plan had to be developed so that activities and meetings could be held in safety as soon as possible. It is vital that members make themselves familiar with the plan which has been circulated via email to all members and adhere to it at all times. I'd like to give everyone a friendly reminder that it is necessary to register for meetings and outings.

The following is a recent alert from the Occupational Health and Safety Committee of BirdLife Australia.

'BirdLife has a duty under Occupational Health & Safety legislation to provide and maintain, so far as reasonably practicable, an environment that is safe and without risk to health.

Everyone has a role to play - by taking reasonable care of their own health and safety and, importantly, taking reasonable care for the health and safety of others.

It is imperative that we continue to do the right thing, so If you are organising or planning bird outings, events, monitoring, surveys or fieldwork please ensure you: Follow the [Branch Outing Guidelines/Fieldwork Policy and Procedure](#).

- *Comply with State/Territory guidelines and follow advice around social distancing, number of people gathering, good hygiene practices.*
- *Use sign-ups when organising events, to ensure that you know who is attending, and so you stay within your State/Territory maximum group size.*
- *Ensure excellent record keeping details to facilitate contact tracing – consider downloading the COVIDSafe app.*
- *Encourage any participants or staff who feel unwell to return home and follow any State/Territory medical and testing advice.*
- *Complete a risk assessment for any activities/events/surveys/monitoring/fieldwork.*
- *Note any different rules that may apply to visiting vulnerable communities.'*

A sub-committee group of Julie Goldsbury, Annette Sibson and Mark Horvath kept working away on the development of the 6 pull-up banners for use during community activities and school programs. The proofs are at the printers as I write, so the banners will hopefully be ready very soon. The banners are funded by a grant we received from BirdLife Australia ABEF.

Julie Goldsbury has been very busy in the grants department. She is now working on a submission to the Townsville City Council for funding to assist in the costs of storage and IT training.

The committee was alerted to the plight of the birds in Deb Carter's care in May by Beth Snewin. Fight for Flight suffered severe reduction in financial support as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and of course, the birds being rehabilitated still require feeding. BirdLife Townsville made a \$500 donation to Fight for Flight for the care, maintenance and general wellbeing of the Birds of Prey in Deb's care.

A local casualty of Covid-19 was the closure of the Townsville Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) office. BirdLife Townsville had a very close working relationship with CVA. They had also allowed us storage space in their building at the Old Quarantine Station. In July all our equipment was transferred to a unit at National Storage in Kirwan. This, of course, is a financial burden on the club. We are working with the Townsville City Council to find permanent storage and in the meantime we are hoping to get some relief via grant money.

BirdLife Townsville's volunteer hours were markedly reduced as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. Despite having to withdraw from our Schools program and cancellation of several surveys we still managed more than half of the average hours per year.

The Photography Group was able to resume meetings in August as per Townsville City Council allowing limited access to the meeting venue. The Photography Group page on the website is well worth a visit. Click on the month to see some of the photos shown at that meeting. The Members' pages have some of each member's favourite shots.

We were able to hold a club meeting again in November with Deb Carter and Poseidon the Osprey as the guest speakers. Fortunately, we also managed to have our Christmas Party in December. Wal presented a PowerPoint re-cap of the BirdLife Townsville Year and of course, Nina Doyle once again entertained and confounded us all with her Christmas Quiz. Mark Horvath surprised us all (particularly Wal and Norm) with some short film clips of 'hiccoughs' on the Wongaloo surveys. The reaction of the group was very positive with lots of demands for re-plays.

BirdLife Townsville's library displays in October were again very well received. Library staff once again reported huge interest by their visitors. The 'Information Photographs' have proved very popular. Three of the four sets are complete and Mark Horvath is now working on the Woodlands Birds set.

Secretary Wal Threlfall, in amongst the myriad of jobs he does for the club, has found the time to continue updating the website. It is shaping up to be pretty marvellous and easy to navigate. If you haven't done so already, it will be worth spending a bit of time getting familiar with it. Remember to check regularly for changes to the activities page. In these uncertain times, last minute changes are often necessary. Nina Doyle is still making sure our finances are kept in good order and regular reports submitted to BirdLife Australia as required.

We received a request from the Cluden Race Course for assistance in deterring the Magpie Geese from creating divots on the track. Of course, as soon as we started assessing the situation and hopefully come up with a plan of action, the Magpie Geese decided to move to pastures greener. Wal and Greg Calvert will pick up where they left off when the birds return.

Again, a big thank you to everyone who makes a big effort so that we can all enjoy club activities including: Annette Sutton for keeping us all informed with the Drongo; Activity leaders; the education group; and of course the afternoon tea team.

Peter and Jill Staunton will be leaving the committee this year for family reasons. They will be very much missed. Sadly, so far no one has nominated to step up and fill the empty places. The club is facing some serious risks of not being able to continue in its current, vibrant form. The present committee is made up of long-serving members who cannot stay on the committee for ever. All clubs benefit from fresh ideas and the energy that new people bring. If we all want to continue enjoying the club activities and the knowledge that the club contributes so much to the future of birds, more members will need to join the committee so that all the hard work of the many previous committee members is not wasted.

Birdlife Townsville got off to an uncertain start in 2021. We had to cancel several outings at the last minute. The good news is that those cancellations were because of rain. After a very dry 2020, it is good to see all the creeks and wetlands full.

Janet Robino

COVID-19 PLAN

For ALL ACTIVITIES (MONTHLY MEETINGS, PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP MEETINGS, SURVEYS and OUTINGS) commencing as from TUESDAY 4 AUGUST 2020 - All details on the Club website including contact details of the Leaders

IF YOU ARE UNWELL or HAVE ANY COVID-19 LIKE SYMPTONS YOU MUST GET TESTED and SELF ISOLATE AT HOME UNTIL YOU RECEIVE YOUR TEST RESULTS

1. **All ACTIVITIES will be organised on the basis of a maximum of 30 Members/Participants only, ensuring the correct physical distancing requirements (1.5m) and two (2) persons per vehicle are followed. In accordance with TCC and QLD Govt. guidelines.**
2. **Members/Participants who wish to attend an ACTIVITY must RSVP the Leader at least 48 hours prior to the activity. ACTIVITIES will be organised on a "FIRST COME" basis --- Members/Participants who DON'T RSVP will not be able to participate.**
3. **The Leader to advise those Members/Participants who RSVP, who will be able to attend the ACTIVITY.**
4. **The Leader to ensure all Members/Participants sign and record their contact details in the "Sign on Book". This is to provide trace contact details if required. Further if required (Meetings only) the Leader is to complete the TCC Covid-19 Community Checklist. The Secretary will then provide these details to the TCC.**
5. **The Leader is to ensure these guidelines of a maximum of 30 Members/Participants, physical distancing requirements (1.5m) and two (2) persons per vehicle only are followed.**
6. **The Leader is to ensure all equipment (tables/chairs/light switches/etc) touched by Members/Participants must be wiped down (sanitised) prior to and at the conclusion of the Meeting.**
7. **The Leaders Safety Bag will be supplied with hand sanitiser and sanitising wipes which will be dispensed by the Leader as and when required.**
8. **All Members/Participants must have their own binoculars/telescopes etc as there will be no sharing of equipment.**
9. **Those Members/Participants who breach the above guidelines will be directed to leave.**

President: Janet Robino 17/07/2020

BIRDING IN THE RAIN

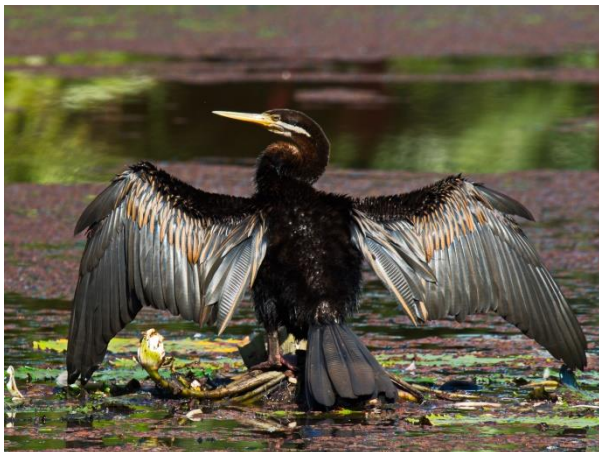
What an interesting start to the year. Nine rain measurements in 9 days and the ground at saturation point in the whole district. Did that deter Townsville birders? No way! It just made it more exciting as we found unusual species in unusual places. Everyone was out and about and sightings came in from many places around the City's outskirts.



Brahminy Kite

Ray Sutton

For example, while scanning the sky for Brahminy Kites and Sea Eagles, I saw my first ever Great Frigate Bird. It soared effortlessly and impressively not far above our car as it searched for prey; or was it just exploring? For at least ten minutes we watched in awe, trying desperately to determine just which Frigate bird it was. A phone call to Ivor and much question-answer, description-providing information took place while watching the bird floating above us. As suddenly as it had appeared, it disappeared before any other eager



Australasian Darter

Annette Sutton

eyes were able to catch a sight of it. Sorry folks.

Having exhausted our searching in that area in Townsville, we decided that coffee called, so found the first little coffee shop along Mitchell Street. That was another surprise. Not for the Café Latte Set, but basic and interesting and not a dog in sight. An old roaster and a new stainless steel one sat along one wall and a chatty group greeted us with, "Is that a Subaru

Forester?" Beth took one lady out to inspect it while I ordered the coffee which was 'just right' for our tastes. A Coffee Shop that I will visit again when in that area. We finally noted the Covid sign-in Code picture so did the right thing before heading off to Benwell Road. Tide was almost full, so nothing there except the songs of the Varied Honeyeaters. As we had already seen that little gem behind Seagulls, we didn't search long and soon headed home for a late lunch.

Next trip? Friday the 8th was wet all day, constant drizzle bordering on rain. But relief came at 5pm with a complete clearing of the skies, so off we went along Allambie Road turning left, then right, into Bohle Road in Gumlow. Many years ago that was all rutted gravel and dust but not now. Oh, no. New bitumen roads head between large flat Turf Farms towards the Pinnacles. Every paddock was awash and the Ducks had spread the word. Ducks - (both species of Whistlers) and Hardheads, Geese, Jacanas, Great Cormorants, a Darter, Little Egrets fishing happily in the run-off from overfilled dams, Ibis digging furiously, Finches fluttering, various Swallows hawking, Cisticolas chirruping, and of course the mandatory Black-Cockatoos by the dozens. Beth spotted a lone Squatter Pigeon and many Crested Pigeons sat fluffing themselves on the lines. What a delightful hour to end a rather wet and miserable day.



Plumed Whistling-Duck

Annette Sutton

Who wouldn't be a bird fanatic in North Queensland in 2021. No lock-down, rain-soaked earth and the dam filling.

Elna Kerswell



BURDEKIN BIG DAY BIRDING

Wednesday 3rd February 2021. 5:30 a.m. start from Townsville. First birding stop; Lochinvar Station, which is on the east side of the Bruce Highway between Giru and Brandon, near Collinson Lagoon. We found a few little lagoons visible from the roads, including the eastern extensions of Collinson, where we spotted one pair of Cotton Pygmy-Geese and a few Comb-crested Jacanas. After an 8 km drive on some very rough tracks (public roads and railway corridor) transecting the property, we found we were looking at the backwaters of another huge expanse of water that is known as "DuckWorld, Brandon". The ground off the tracks was too wet, boggy, and overgrown to leave the track, even on foot, so we hightailed it out of there after recording 34 species for the hour. Most prolific was about 200 Magpie Geese, other waterbids, and an amazing 25 Australasian Pipits and 7 Bushlarks.



Cotton Pygmy-Goose

Off to Brandon now. LOCKED GATE WARNING - As is our custom, we had organised prior permission from the owners (the Burkes) to have a look in on part their property, "DuckWorld", to drive in along Toll Road for a scope around. However, when we arrived at the familiar Toll Road closed gate, we found it chained and padlocked. We called the Burkes to see what the problem was. We were told there are new owners of that adjoining unfenced property that Toll Road continues through. Apparently, some of their cattle had escaped through that gate by way of "some visitors" leaving the gate open, either as they entered, or departed the property. Well, the gate's definitely shut now. So, we climbed over the fence beside the gate and hoofed it in, hauling water, binoculars, telescope, and camera gear, along the rest of Toll Road so we could get a look over all points and bays. The water was too deep in there for any exciting avian visitors (like Avocets or Native Hens), but we did have 350 Hardhead, 150 Little Black Cormorants, 50 Pelican and just a small array of expected waterbirds... Not a single migratory shorebird was seen. There were many more Bushlarks and Pipits, a few Crimson Finch, and a heap of Tree Martins. In the end, I can safely say, "Changed birding access to Duckworld makes it less worth the time and effort." And, to top it all off, we got rained on while about 2km from the car.

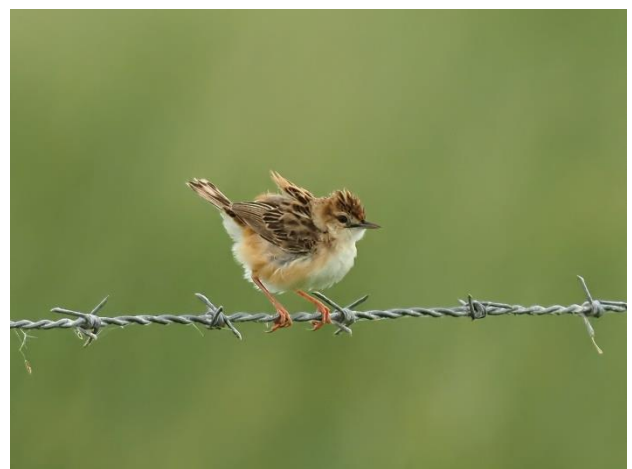
From there, we decided to nip down past Home Hill and Inkerman to Beachmount Road, Wunjunga Wetlands

and search for the Little Ringed Plover. This is a rare migratory shorebird that has been returning there this time of year for the previous couple of years and mixing with the resident Red-capped Plovers. It has not been seen so far this year, probably because the wetland landscape there is now too dry to entice such-like migratory shorebirds to feed there.



Crimson Finch

But we did see 17 Black-necked Storks, and one of them had scored the biggest fish and was carrying it away from all competitors to try and swallow it. Still there were some of the expected wetland species seen along the slow birding drive from the Bruce Highway to the Beach. 43 species. No outstanding species or numbers, with the exception of the 17 Storks, one Australian Bustard, 37 Common Greenshanks, Pied Stilts, a few Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, and 160 Pacific Black Ducks in 2 hours and 11 kms. After a late lunch on the beach, we set our meandering sights towards home as storms rolled through the region. We ploughed through an extreme rainstorm around Home Hill. In the Locality of Giru, we veered off for a look along Hodel Road (inundated in a few places), Horseshoe lagoon, and Morris Creek Road down to the boat ramp. The dirt road to the boat ramp was cut-up-sloshy as they must have had a decent storm too, probably only an hour earlier.



Zitting Cisticola

There was hardly a bird to be seen from the Horseshoe Lagoon bird hide. However, over the railway crossing, further along Morris Creek Road, the rain seemed to

have enlivened many of the coastal grassland birds and mangrove birds. A couple of Zitting Cisticolas were preening on the top barbed-wire of the roadside fence, (posing for photographs) after bathing in the wet grasses. At least a score of Golden-headed Cisticolas were up on the fence wires proclaiming the weather, 14 Australasian Bushlarks, amongst scores of Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, about 65 Peaceful Doves, 14 Crested Pigeons, and lots of Willie Wagtails graced our slippery drive to the boat ramp, where we had an afternoon tea break. A handful of vocal Mangrove Honeyeaters grabbed our attention as they were having some sort of territorial dispute. On the drive back to the Highway, a Whistling Kite perched on the railway track at the Stop-Sign crossing. We stopped and watched a flock of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos feeding roadside near one of the farmhouses. Back on the Bruce Highway again we were reunited with the roadworks.

Big Day. Up at 5 a.m., lots of driving, including many hours slow-driving birding, lots of heavy-haulage walking, as well as bird photography at every available opportunity. Back home safely in Townsville by 5 p.m. 83 bird species for the day including 7 new species added to my 2021 Bird Quest.

Wouldn't like to try a day like that on a weekend.

Len and Chris Ezzy

LOCATION LOCATION

What were they thinking?

Sometimes I have to scratch my head in wonder as to what actually goes on in an Olive-backed Sunbird's mind when deciding where to construct their nest. They often surprise me by building in the most unlikely of places. I've seen nests hanging off clotheslines between the towels and the undies; dangling from electrical cords that have been slung over beams; attached to rope that droops over outdoor picnic tables with the little heads of chicks regularly popping out to see if the next feed is on



its way, squawking loudly regardless of the humans sitting below; hanging from the ceiling framework over the paint section in Bunnings with the adults flitting to and from the garden section with food, even going so far as learning how to activate the sensors on the doors so they can come and go at will. I've even seen a photo of a nest hanging off a curtain rod in a person's living room! What factors do they take into consideration.....the view? Re-sale value? Certainly not the presence of humans. What constitutes good real estate in a Sunbird's mind? Are they being very brave in showing us such callous disregard or are they just a bit dim? Perhaps they're simply taking advantage of the shelter we provide.

My latest surprise was when I was doing a day of casual work at Belgian Gardens State School. It was my first time at that school and as I headed towards the office to sign in, I was impressed by the thriving native gardens dotted around the place. The office is located at the front of the school in one of those high set, older style, wooden buildings. I went up the stairs and the first thing I noticed was a smallish Syzygium of some description eking out an existence in a pot placed right beside the door and swaying from one of the tendril-thin branches, no more than 60cm off the ground, was an Olive-backed Sunbird's nest. Of all the available greenery, they had chosen possibly the busiest part of the school to build their nest and raise their young. When I entered the office, I asked the admin assistant if the nest was being used at all, thinking perhaps the birds had built it during the school holidays and then, realising the error they had made, moved house, but the woman assured me that it was currently being used and that the parents had been at the nest earlier that morning making adjustments. All I could do was scratch my head and wonder.

(AAI usually avoid taking closeup photos of nests but in this case, I don't think the birds were too panicked by the fact that yet another person was walking past and looking at them.)

Anne Lawrence

SURPRISED

Things are usually pretty quiet around our garden. Our bird bath is visited by Peaceful and Spotted Doves, Magpie Larks, Sparrows, Nutmeg Finches and the occasional Mynah Bird. We have had on odd occasions Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Koels, White-throated Honeyeaters, and, after Cyclone Yasi, Metallic Starlings. Lots of others fly over, rarely stopping.

The other day there was a deathly quiet and not a bird could be seen. I looked up, only to see a raptor flying over. No wonder they all took off. It settled in a palm tree a couple of yards down and through my telephoto lens I could make out the shape of a Pacific Baza. Haven't seen them around here before.



Collared Sparrowhawk

Ray Sutton

A few weeks before that, everything took off in a cloud and a Collared Sparrowhawk came and perched on the outdoor table. He surveyed the scene for a while, no doubt regretting his failure to catch something, and off he flew.

You never know what is around.

Annette Sutton

Some Spring and Summer Visitors

As I have expressed on earlier occasions, I am captivated each year by the changing weather of the spring/summer period in this part of Australia and the changes that occur to our local birdlife in terms of species diversity and population numbers. Many native and exotic plants produce fruit at this time of year after flowering some weeks earlier, nicely filling the food gap for the larger migrant frugivores like Eastern Koels and Channel-Billed Cuckoos that grace us with their presence.

Smaller honeyeaters like the Dusky feast on the sweet nutritious droplets oozing from the over-ripe fruit of the Sandpaper Figs while a host of other species also feed on figs at this time of year, including friarbirds, cuckoo-shrikes and of course the Australasian Figbirds and Great Bowerbirds, all of which are breeding residents of our region. Some eight years ago I planted a Weeping Fig remote from my house and water bore, in a spot where its invasive roots are unlikely to cause problems with water and drainage systems. My plan was to encourage a range of larger fruit eaters to visit, especially the Topknot Pigeon which I have often seen feeding in Weeping Figs locally. Although the tree fruited massively for the first time this summer, most did not actually ripen and I have yet to receive a visit from this large, spectacular fruit-eater. One can only hope!



Channel-billed Cuckoos

Not surprisingly for this time of year, both the Eastern Koels and Channel-billed Cuckoos, together with other cuckoo species, have been in the country since last August, much to the annoyance of the birds whose nests they parasitise. One pair of Koels has been using my place as their annual command post for a number of years. They turned up again last springtime to spend most of their daylight hours, scheming and planning or just relaxing in either my mulberry trees or in one particular Sandpaper Fig tree which is partially covered by the robust pink/mauve flowering *Argyrea* Vine (Elephant Ear Vine, Woodrose). This vegetation combination provides shelter from the elements as well as a refuge from the harassments of their target species in between their daily nest-raiding forays. The male bird

is reasonably easy to photograph but the female with her cryptic plumage and behaviour is another matter entirely as she seems to disappear easily into most vegetation types.

Early in last October my attention was drawn to a noisy bunch of birds (including several small and large honeyeaters, and at least three Drongos) mobbing an unwelcome interloper in one of my mulberry trees. Thinking it may have been a snake, or better still an owl or frogmouth, I gathered my camera gear and went to investigate, only to get a glimpse of a female Koel sitting quietly in the thick foliage. I am rueing the day I put off pruning the tangled internal growth of the mulberry tree because it was simply not possible to focus and get a shot away at the female bird this year. Curses for my procrastination!!!



Eastern Koel Female

Other entertaining visitors, a pair of Dollar Birds, arrived in mid-October. My attention was drawn to their presence by very loud and angry 'kek-keking' issuing from the Poplar Gum tree in which there had been a breeding hollow used by Dollarbirds for many years. Unfortunately, a good quarter of this tree was diseased and termite-ridden and this part noisily crashed to the ground one day around noon last March, (which sent my dogs into a barking frenzy and caused the cat to streak away from his daytime sleeping spot about twenty metres distant). Also unfortunately, the large branch that fell carried a number of mature hollows, one of which was used annually by the pair of Dollar Birds and another by a pair of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. There was also a termite nest on a branch in this collapsed portion of the tree, which had been used in earlier years by Forest Kingfishers as a nesting site, until, after raising a clutch of three young to the point of fledging one year, Blue-winged Kookaburras harvested them, one at a time, as they emerged from their safe refuge in order to feed their own young. Nature may appear cruel sometimes. Anyhow, the Dollarbirds spent the next few days hovering erratically in the air very near to where the opening to their hollow had been, complaining all the while about the loss of their home and venting their displeasure on all and sundry in the bird world that dared to venture near the site of destruction. I was even 'kek' 'kek' raucously a couple of times while erecting a new greenhouse close by. Eventually the birds accepted the situation and opted to take up residence in another hollow that existed in the remaining still-standing part of the tree. After the male

Dollar bird advised his partner that he still loved her and wished to raise a couple of kids with her, in the usual fashion, I observed them taking some nesting material into the hollow and I guessed that starting their family had commenced. I had witnessed the hovering behaviour around a previously-used nest site that no longer existed only once before when some years ago a pair of Australasian Figbirds returned and hovered in almost the exact location of their nest of a year before in the outer foliage of a diseased and termite-ridden bloodwood tree. I had put off taking this tree out because several other pairs were also nesting in it at the time but removed it after that breeding season because it was a danger to my family, especially my kids who spent a lot of time with their pet goats when penned up nearby. I was struck by the similarity of behaviour of the Dollarbirds this current summer and find it not hard to believe that some birds have navigating systems accurate to within a few millimeters. And why not--- many other birds, e.g. pigeons and I suspect Koels, as well as aquatic species such as sea turtles and salmon obviously have similar 'equipment'.



Dollar Bird

This new Dollarbird home was also under surveillance by a pair of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos which also lost their nesting hollow when the tree partially collapsed. On one occasion the two cockies were poking their heads into the opening of the newly occupied hollow when a very angry Dollarbird erupted noisily from its new home and with the help of its partner which had been observing the proceedings from a tree some 80 metres distant, successfully drove the new home-seekers off. A nice bit of entertainment for me but unfortunately no worthwhile photographs captured. The Dollarbirds successfully raised a single chick and the family have now moved on.

Also among the spring/summer visitors was pair of Channel-billed Cuckoos which I first noticed early one morning in August while I was feeding my chooks. On this occasion my attention was drawn to a flock of eight of these birds because of their raucous contact calls as they casually winged their way overhead, criss-crossing a number of neighbouring properties, including mine, as if searching for something. They kept this up for a while on that occasion then seemed to lose interest and moved on. I surmised that these birds had travelled together, perhaps part of an even larger group, and were on their way to their individual breeding territories.

Over the next few days I noticed a similar sized flock of Channel-bills on a few occasions, I am assuming the same one, which gradually reduced in numbers (by twos) until only two birds remained. These birds

apparently chose my area as their territory for breeding that season as I observed them almost daily in the tops the tallest gum trees, feeding on large grasshoppers, and on occasions, copulating. I must say at this point that I would only guess that the same birds return to the same territory each year to breed, but I would surmise that this is likely because I have never seen these birds involved in any sort of scrapping with others of their kind over territory. Only once in the more than 40 years I have lived in my district have I witnessed young channel-bills with their adoptive parents and that was when a pair of Torresian Crows were feeding their single charge in a tree near the local Caltex servo about 5 years ago. I have observed them being fed by Magpies as well but not here in my district.



Eastern Koel Male

I have learnt over time to always take a camera with me when I work or walk on my property and on one occasion a few weeks ago this lesson paid off handsomely when I witnessed and photographed a remarkable sequence of activity of a pair of Channel-bills in a tall gum tree in my yard. The male bird, the larger of the pair, had captured a good-sized grasshopper which he showed to his mate who promptly made a grab for it but was only successful in securing a small portion of the unfortunate creature. There was a bit of toing-and-froing for a few seconds after which the female promptly positioned herself in the avian equivalent of the missionary position whereupon the male mounted with the remains of the grasshopper in his beak. Following a steamy few seconds the male reached over the head of the female and transferred the prized morsel to her beak, after which the heat went out of the moment and the birds separated but remained close together on the branch. Some fairly 'ordinary' photos of the event are attached.

At the time of writing (late January 2021) I still hear the occasional calls of Koels and Channel-billed Cuckoos, and less frequently now, I notice a couple of Dollarbirds and their immature offspring on the powerlines that run up my street. These are indicators that the frenzy of breeding and feeding is waning and within a couple of weeks these visitors will retreat to their northerly winter lodgings in Indonesia and PNG.

I will certainly miss them and I for one am looking forward eagerly to their return next spring.

Norm Rains

ROSS RIVER DAM SURVEY

15 NOVEMBER

We met up at the car park near Ross River Dam in the cool of the early morning. First bird of the day was a family of Barking Owls, mum, dad and the two kids, found by Mark. A wonderful way to start the day.

We headed off, picking up some good birds on the way to the first stop. Bustards were striding around, Little Corella were wandering about on the road and practising their gymnastics on the barbed wire, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo flew over and a Black Kite was looking for breakfast.



Barking Owl

Annette Sibson

The walk along the embankment was slow due to the numerous birds in the trees and waterholes. All three Friarbird species were seen, busy fighting and feeding in the flowering paperbarks, along with Yellow and Brown Honeyeater. In the waterholes were waterbirds aplenty, Royal Spoonbills, and Glossy, White and Straw-necked Ibis. Great Egret seemed to be mostly sitting up in the trees, Cattle Egret were feeding along the edge of the water. A group of Cotton Pygmy-Geese were busy chasing each other around, eventually settling down very close to where we were standing for great views through the binoculars.



Little Corellas

Annette

On heading back to the gate, a lone Black-necked Stork flew over. Through the gate and down into the restricted area there were Double-barred Finch and Red-backed Fairywren flitting about in the chonky apple trees by the road. Blue-winged Kookaburra were

around by the half dozen, sitting about in the dead trees and calling periodically.

Back by the river and we found an immature White-bellied Sea-eagle, an adult and an immature Black-necked Stork and a lone Great Crested Grebe (my first for the year).



Brown honeyeater

Annette Sibson

We headed back slowly. Cecily called that she had found a Brown Honeyeater caught up in spider web, I went back to see if I could help. Together we went out and found the little guy stuck firm by a wing and his tail, flapping about trying to free himself. We found a stick and managed to get him down and into Cecily's hand, where we pulled gently at the spider web still covering his wing and tail feathers. He sat quietly while we tried to help then flew off to a nearby tree. Probably spent a lot of time preening to remove what web was left. Sticky stuff! It was great to know that we'd helped him out.

On getting back to the cars we had a Pacific Baza fly by, a great way to end the morning.

Annette Sibson

Cecily Messer, Marleen Acton, Mark and Bron Horvath

BOWEN SURPRISE

Every Christmas I travel to Bowen to celebrate the holiday with my wife's family. I often joke about Bowen, saying such things as if I only had a week to live, I'd spend it in Bowen – because it would seem so much longer. But the sleepy seaside town has lots of well-kept secrets, such as some of the most beautiful little bays and beaches in North Queensland.

On my hit list today was Muller's Lagoon, a 13-hectare artificial lake with a larger 23.57-hectare park right in the middle of Bowen. This morning was pretty typical, with lots of people walking their dogs, which is usually the kiss of death to anyone looking for water birds and waders. Fortunately though, whoever designed the lake had the good sense to include several well vegetated islands that afford a sanctuary for the birds, even with the most irresponsible dog owners. I think every artificial lake should have an island as a mandatory feature for this reason. I shouldn't complain too much about them though. I was walking beside the lagoon

back on 1st Jan 2007 when an unrestrained dog ran into a patch of bulrushes in front of my and flushed out a Painted Snipe – a lifer for me and the first time the species had been recorded in Bowen.

You never really know what you're going to get at Muller's Lagoon, and 150 bird species have been recorded there. Being a pretty dry location, I've regularly seen Galahs, Crested Pigeons, Cockatiels and Yellow-throated Miners, while being very close to the coast, numerous terns, gulls and waders are seasonally common. Freshwater Crocodiles have been reported, but no salties yet I believe.



Muller's Lagoon

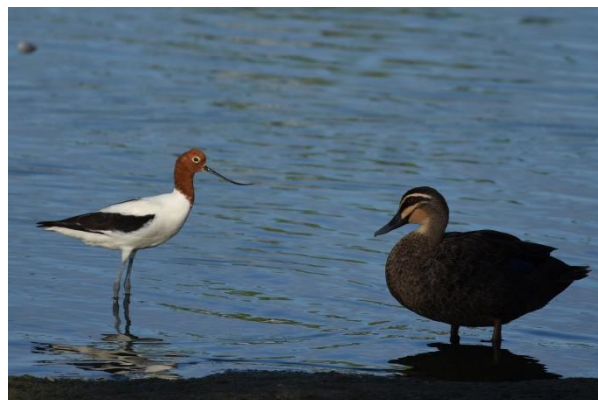
My visit on Christmas Eve started as it usually does, with an abnormally large number of Purple Swamphens and Dusky Moorhens. I could hardly hear myself think for the Rainbow Lorikeets in the flowering Moreton Bay Ash trees and Figbirds adorned nearly every branch of the numerous fig trees. The Plumed-Whistling Ducks were lined up along the shore, while a lone Royal Spoonbill waded through the water. The water was green and in desperate need of a good flush, which I believe it received soon after my visit.



Marsh and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers

The sun was in my eyes, so I decided to do a wide loop so that I'd have the sun to my back. There were multiple Radjah Shelducks along the shore here, which I'm always happy to see as they're usually so hard to get in Townsville. Feeding alongside were Black-fronted Dotterells, Marsh Sandpipers and even a lone Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Black-winged Stilts were in abundance. Out on the island in the middle were numerous Pied Cormorants, White Ibis, Whistling-Ducks, Pacific Black Ducks, Grey Teal and Silver Gulls. Overhead, a Caspian Tern was doing laps of the lagoon. A pair of Black Swans came in to land on the water and as I had my camera trained on them, something white

and orange flashed across my view. I'd heard legends of Red Necked Avocets at Bowen, but after more than 20 years of visits, I'd never seen one and dismissed the story as a furphy. But here they were - a pair of them!



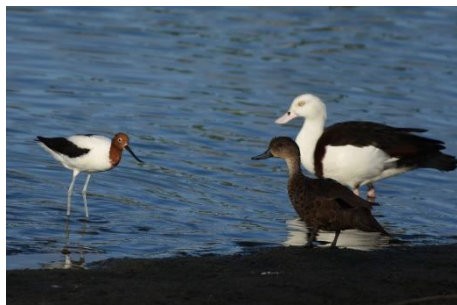
Red-necked Avocet

Very skittish I found, which I assume was due to the constant stream of dog walkers. They certainly knew I was there, but within a very short while they resumed their feeding and they were glorious in that morning light. They'd made my morning, and turned an otherwise nice morning birding into a great morning birding. I totally encourage anyone passing through Bowen to take the time to see what Muller's Lagoon has in store for you.

Greg Calvert

RED-NECKED AVOCET

Many species of shorebirds feed by probing the moist mud or sand, or pecking at its surface, but the Red-necked Avocet is different. Avocets have long and slender bills that are elegantly and unusually upcurved, and which are used to forage in the water of shallow wetlands. By sweeping the bill back and forth through the water in a scything motion, tiny aquatic invertebrates are caught with each sweep of the bill. The avocet apparently locates these insects and crustaceans by using its sense of touch.



Greg Calvert

The Red-necked Avocet is found throughout mainland Australia, but breeds mainly in the south-western interior. Out of breeding season, it visits most of the rest of Australia, but is only an accidental visitor to Tasmania or the Cape York Peninsula

Courtesy Birdlife Australia

SLEEPING BEAUTIES

(A Bex and a little lie down)

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are usually hard to approach. This standard wariness wasn't the case when I chanced upon a happy little crackle adjacent to Old Common Road, Belgian Gardens, in late October 2020.

I really hadn't expected to observe any finds in the freshly burnt country, but there they were, feeding on the ground about eighty metres on the western side of the roadway. The group were mostly females, some feeding, some wobbling along as if drunk, and others even asleep on the ground under a hot morning sun! What obliging subjects to photograph.

It turns out, the birds were feasting on the caramelized flesh and burnt seeds of Chinese Apple fruit (*Ziziphus mauritiana*) – their behavior being explained by the properties of the plant. Research informs that the fruit contains a hard, oval or oblate, rough central stone that contains two elliptic seeds. In India, these seeds are used as a medicine, a sedative to halt nausea, vomiting and other pains. In Ethiopia, the fruits are used to stupefy fish.

These birds were taking full advantage of their bounty, having a wonderful old time.

Peter Hughes



Wobbling Along



Getting to central seeds



A little lie down

HANDSOME SPOONBILL

Raymond caused many a female heart to flutter this summer with his long, gorgeous, fly-away locks.

Anne Lawrence



QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Anne Lawrance	203	22/07/2021
Janet Robino	198	17/07/2021
Warren Charlton	191	10/07/2021
Barbara Reidy	190	9/07/2021
Len Ezzy	186	5/07/2021
Annette Sibson	163	12/06/2021
Pat Charlton	147	27/05/2021
Wal Threlfall	143	23/05/2021
Rosemary Payet	137	17/05/2021
Warren Charlton	136	16/05/2021
Marleen Acton	136	16/05/2021
Mark Horvath	135	15/05/2021
Ian Leach	125	5/05/2021
Elna Kerswell	115	25/04/2021
Beth Snewin	112	22/04/2021
Jill Staunton	106	16/04/2021
Peter Staunton	106	16/04/2021
Wendy Kaus	105	15/04/2021
Paul Thompson	74	15/03/2021
Annette Sutton	73	14/03/2021
Julie Goldsbury	66	7/03/2021



A few more photos from Len and Chris's Burdekin trip

