

The Drongo

Number 163 August 2021



Mark Horvath

Out West

The Professor

Lucinda Survey



FROM THE PRESIDENT

BirdLife Townsville is getting back on track with surveys and outings. The weather is being much more cooperative, despite this winter being a lot warmer with overcast days.

The recent alert over possible transmission of the Covid 19 virus in our region is a timely reminder of why the committee has been so adamant that the Covid Plan needs to be adhered to. Again, I ask you all to be familiar with the Plan. BirdLife Townsville Covid19 Plan has been circulated to all members. If you need a copy, please send an email to contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au. In these uncertain times, it is recommended to check the website the evening before any activities in case of last minute cancellation.

[www: Birdlifetownsville.org.au/activities](http://www.birdlifetownsville.org.au/activities).

Kathleen Vowles has designed posters promoting BirdLife Townsville Activities to be displayed around the James Cook University Campus with the view to encourage membership. The posters are attractive and colourful. They were printed at no cost to BirdLife Townsville.

Townsville Dry Tropics Report Card 2020 was released in June. Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters is a collaboration between community groups, industry, science organisations and government. The partnership reports on waterway health with the goal of stimulating management actions. For more details on the report and the Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters, check out the Partnership's website drytropicshealthywaters.org.

Janet Robino

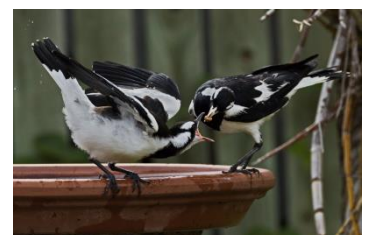
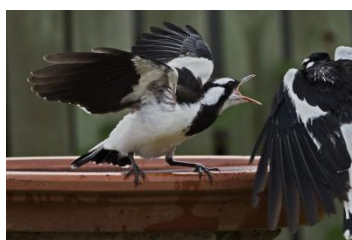
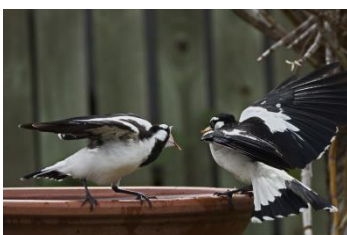
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Deadline for next Drongo is October 31st. Please send articles as Word documents, photos as attachments.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Birdlife Townsville.



DAINTREE

BIRDING ON THE DAINTREE –OR - HUNTING THE GREAT BILLED HERON

A few weeks ago, Elna and I took a trip with The Daintree Boatman. Murray Hunt is the owner operator and a fellow member of Birdlife. Elna and I were on The Birdlife Australia committee with Murray for a number of years when we were all younger!

Having done a Dawn cruise previously with Murray it was decided to go on the Dusk cruise this time.... Elna and I, two Dutch birders and a young couple wanting to see crocs made up the passenger list. The birders were very happy and hopefully the young couple from Melbourne learnt to enjoy birds - a bit cold for Crocs and none seen despite extra time searching in likely spots!

We left the boat ramp in Daintree Village at 4pm for our 2.5 hour trip. We saw lots of birds, the best being the Great-billed Heron. We saw the GBH 3 times - posing on the bank and later a different bird flying in front of us before landing where we could see it. The best views ever.



Great-billed Heron

Ray Sutton

Papuan Frogmouths, Shining Flycatchers, Azure Kingfishers, a family of Shelducks and some Dotterels, were the best of the many birds seen. Mark and Bronwyn reported they were lucky enough to see a Black Bittern as well.

SPECIAL Price Normally, \$65 for 2.5 hours of pleasure. If you contact Murray at boatman@daintreerivertours.com.au or 0417651929 and tell him you are a member of Birdlife Townsville, he will give you a 20% discount on the full price of \$65.

You can only get the discount if you book directly through Murray not online.

I enjoyed our trip so much I gave Wendy and Roger a cruise for their birthdays...hopefully the GBH will make his majestic appearance for them as well.

Beth Snewin

HOW TO ADD TO YOUR LIST

Do you need some particular species to add to your quest list? We have the answer.

Last Sunday 18th July, 6 of us braved the Ross Dam Levy Bank and wetlands count. A beautiful day.

This is what you missed: 4 Cotton Pygmy Geese, 4 Red Winged Parrots, Forest Kingfishers (only 23 this time), 2 Black Necked Storks, 1 Restless Flycatcher (what a sighting), 1 Swamp Harrier, 1 Pallid Cuckoo, 6 Leaden Flycatchers , 5 White Winged Trillers, 2 Olive Backed Orioles, 1 Dusky Moorhen, 1 Wedge Tailed Eagle, AND 6 Pacific Baza. Be honest , there must be at least one which you are missing!! Unless you are the map reading retiree at Mount Louisa.

Now cast you eyes over this amazing photo taken by Mark Horvath.



Pacific Baza

Mark Horvath

See you on the 15th August, 2021.

Cecily Messer

WATCH OUT

We have a bird bath. The Brown Honeyeaters particularly love it. They dive in and out, flying straight up into the orchids to preen, then another quick dive. Magpie-larks have a huge splash around but the bird most capable of emptying out the water is the Great Bowerbird. We get the odd White-throated and Blue-faced Honeyeater, as well as frequent visits from White-gapes. Peaceful Doves, Sparrows and Nutmeg Finches are the most common visitors. We've had Koels and Metallic Starlings (the latter after Cyclone Yasi). But sometimes there is an eerie silence and I think this fellow might be lurking.



Annette Sutton

A RECENT BIRDING TRIP OUT WEST

When winter arrives in the north and west, we look for an opportunity to drive out into the country west of the Great Dividing Range. We had made forward bookings in chosen towns, so on the 8th June, we headed west.

As Beth had been teaching on the Monday, we decided that we'd only go to Charters Towers for the first night, Tuesday, which would put us well on the way and make the next day's long drive via Torrens Creek to Barcaldine, a bit shorter. Our first stop was Pentland to check its interesting little dam with waders and ducks on it. Not much there, just Grey Teal, Wood Ducks, a couple of Stilts, Black Ducks and Black-fronted Dotterels and the resident Willy Wagtails dashing happily about.

Having inspected the dam, we then headed for the delightful Café/shop, Wookatook, to check out the local arts and crafts on sale and to buy a coffee. As the coffee was extremely hot, there was no seating inside, and a bitterly cold westerly wind was blowing, we decided to continue our journey until we reached our garden of wildflowers, which surround a quarry's disturbed surface soil, in the Burra Ranges. These plants – the red *Grevillea Decora*, a *Boronia*, various other coloured *Grevilleas* and some golden wattle – bloom in winter every year and we have visited the site many times. The coffee was still hot and was partaken of behind a wall of flowering bushes, while we enjoyed the songs of the multitude of Brown Honeyeaters.



Grevillea decora

However, a surprise awaited us. Suddenly dozens of birds erupted from some trees a bit further up the track, so off we went. Flocks of them kept appearing, settling for a few seconds, then off again in circles, so it took a few attempts to identify them. Ahh! White-browed Woodswallows with some Masked Woodswallows amongst them. Beauty! Always good to find a flock of them when out west. We reckoned there were about 200 darting about or feeding in the Decora on honey and insects.

We needed to top up with petrol before heading south, so pushed on to Torrens Creek, where the publican was the operator, so he didn't open up until 10.00a.m. We were later than that, so OK. Then south – on and on, sometimes in the middle of the road and sometimes along one side of the wide red stretch being graded and built up ready for its tarmac. A few birds crossed our path but not

always identifiable in the fleeting glimpses. Nearly 200 kms later, after meeting only 23 vehicles and being overtaken by two, a road-side toilet and covered seating area loomed into view. As the picnic table was occupied we parked in the warm sun, opened the two car doors on the opposite side to the westerly wind, and sat on our little stools to eat our sandwiches. Another 100 kms later, we arrived in the tiny town of Aramac, where there is a lush, grassy park and toilets beside their swimming pool. Aramac is the town of the "white bull". In 1870 a very valuable white bull had been stolen from Bowen Downs, a Station nearby, along with a large herd of other cattle. They had been stolen and driven by Harry Redford who was obviously a very competent drover. He almost made it to Adelaide, but along the way, the white bull was recognized by a station owner, so Harry was arrested and the cattle impounded.



One of the Aramac bulls

Most of the shops had a small "white bull" statue in front with a clever slogan written on it. Great idea. Aramac was abuzz with locals and caravaners parking behind the only Hotel, so they could view the first State of Origin match in Townsville, on the Pub's television. Seeing the Pub had an open verandah from rooms to toilet, I was a bit aghast that I'd be staggering along that cold and windy verandah in the middle of the night, when we would be staying there, 3 nights later. As Wendy had managed to find a different Motel, we rang the phone number she had given us and luckily managed to book in. What a relief.

From Aramac to Barcaldine was only 68 kms but it took us well over an hour as we stopped frequently to identify the dozens of striated, brown birds which were feeding busily beside the road and flying out as we passed. Grass birds – Songlarks and Pipits. Finally we checked into our Motel at 5.30pm and unpacked the multitude of gear we carry. We'll eat at their restaurant we thought. OH NO! State of Origin night, so some locals and visiting travellers wanted to eat at the restaurant to watch a large-screen T.V. No worries. Meals could be delivered to the room, so in the end we had a large and delicious home-cooked meal in the warmth and comfort of the room.

Next day, the Lara Wetlands called. It is only 41 km, which includes 13 kms of gravel road, south and west from Barcaldine, so makes an easy day visit. This delightful lagoon is on a private property, carefully developed and managed by the Station owners, with caravan and tent spaces for dozens of happy travellers. There is a nominal charge for campers and Day visitors, but well worth it. The whole perimeter of the Lagoon was decked with caravans or camper trailers, with the

occupants happily sitting on chairs in the sun watching the life on the lagoon. We enjoyed our morning coffee beside a tree which harboured 2 almost invisible Frogmouths, cleverly posed to evade inspection. White-plumed Honeyeaters and Yellow-throated Miners worked busily in the leaves, while White-browed and Brown Treecreepers worked the bark up and down in the trees and on the irrigated grass. Three Red-kneed Dotterels, Pink-eared Ducks, Grey Teal, Wood Ducks and Black-tailed Native-hens adorned the verges of the lagoon. One can almost be assured of finding those more elusive species enjoying that lagoon, so it is worth visiting. Pale-headed Rosella, and Redwing Parrot were also added to the list.

However, the best prize was the multitude of Cockatiels that were checking out, or occupying the hundreds of hollows in the old, drowned and very dead Eucalypts which were dotted throughout the lagoon. They constantly flew around in small flocks, calling loudly as they did their fly-pasts. Fun to just sit and watch. The drive back to Barcaldine was enhanced by the bush birds which sat on fences, so we saw Hooded Robin, Red-capped Robin, Jacky Winter, Rufous and Brown Song-larks, Pipit, White-winged Triller, a Common Bronzewing and Grey-crowned Babblers. What a delightful and rewarding day. To top it off, a Yellow-billed Spoonbill and two Brolgas were seen at a lagoon alongside the main road back to Barky.



Harry Redford and friend

Our next destination was to return to Aramac, where we were joined by Beth's sister, Wendy, and brother-in-law, so the next day we could "do" the sculpture trail east to Lake Dunn – a wonderful fresh water lake 68km east of Aramac, then south for 70kms and the third leg of 65 kms returning us to Aramac. This is great fun! The sculptures are mainly made of barbed wire, old vehicle and farming parts and anything the lady who makes them can lay her hands on. It takes a full day of stopping, inspecting, maybe photographing, and enjoying these larger than life-sized characters.

Birds, horsemen, bike and motorbike riders and animals are set up beside the road, so they can be seen very easily. We kept meeting the same people pulled up at each site as everyone admired and marvelled at the creative ingenuity of the lady who designs and shapes them. Lake Dunn was reached in time for a coffee and toilet stop as we searched the nearby wetland and perimeter trees for different birds. It is a large and impressive body of water in the dry outback and the Aramac locals enjoy a variety of water sports on its

copious waters. There had been considerable rain in its catchment area apparently, as some gum trees around the verges were standing in two feet of water. There was also a large swampy area nearby. For some reason, there were very few birds on the lake, on the swamp, or in the trees.



Black-necked Storks

After completing the sculpture circuit we drove back to Barcaldine to our Motel and a meal in their restaurant – not as busy, as there were no football match enthusiasts there. Off to Winton, via Ilfracombe and its dam (Variegated Fairy-wrens), Longreach Park for our lunch and the long featureless drive through dry country to Winton, where we checked into a 'tourist house' for 3 nights.

Next day we hit the road to Bladensburg National Park, finding White-winged Fairywren and a couple of Budgerigars beside an almost dry waterhole on the way. Bladensburg was also dry, but we saw Variegated Fairywren, dozens of the fascinating Spinifex Pigeons, Spotted Bowerbird, Diamond Dove, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Zebra and Plumheaded Finches, Squatter Pigeon, a Spotted Harrier, and had the excitement of seeing a Crested Bellbird.



Light Horseman

The Winton Sewerage Works was great, and that night we hit the jackpot. Being there in late afternoon we had the sun behind us, so were able to identify the Pink-eared

Ducks, Australasian Grebes, Hoary-headed Grebes, Baillon's Crakes and a Spotted Crake. These two fed close together for a considerable time, so we were able to study them closely. The next day we also found two Freckled Ducks and a Little Grass Bird. How good is that!

An interesting meeting happened the second night, when after some earlier emails and phone calls, we were joined at Tattersalls Hotel by one of my second cousins, who, with her husband, was on a caravan trip around Australia, having left from Australind (s.w. Western Australia) about a month earlier. From Tennant Creek on they were encountering battery problems in the Van and had to get to Gympie for a new battery being sent up from Melbourne. Coincidentally they just happened to be having one night in Winton while we were there. None of our family had ever met them before but it was a very happy evening and she and I caught up with some ancestral history of which she knew very little, but was keen to learn more from me. Winton was chockers with caravanners and the Pub restaurants were booked out.



Bucking Bronco

Eventually, it was time to head home, so we had a night in Hughenden and watched the sun set from Mt Walker, then on to the Burra Range quarry again for smoko and more bird-song amidst the flowering shrubs. The Woodswallows seemed to have migrated to the other side of the road, so were seen near the communication tower, but there were fewer of them. A late lunch in Charters Towers saw us home before sunset, after a most enjoyable few days of birding and enjoying interesting new sights.

The lady who does the sculptures says she sometimes uses two kilometres of barbed wire and one sculpture may take up to six months to put together. She gathers old bits and pieces of machinery from other properties. People donate things to her from all over the west and other farms. Old bicycles are one of her favourites. It can take fifteen minutes to find out all the things she has incorporated into the work of art, as you study each facet of it.

Elna Kerswell

FLAT CREEK STATION

SLATY DAM

I set myself up to sit by the dam, not really sure what I'd see. After five minutes I was thinking that this was going to be a quite boring. I only had dragonflies for company at that point.

A flock of Double-barred Finches arrived and drank and bathed, using the multiple branches of scrub that were growing opposite my hiding place. There were quite a few Double-bars coming and going. I couldn't tell if they were all the same flock or a new flock each time.

A couple of Brown Honeyeaters arrived and had a quick drink before flying off. The single Willie Wagtail spent a long time at the dam, coming over to my side a few times to hunt for insects. The dragonflies were busy fighting amongst themselves over the best hunting spots. They kept me entertained in the quiet times. Some Peaceful and Diamond Doves were waiting quietly for the 'right' time to come for a drink. They were all so nervous I'm not sure any got a proper drink.

Two noisy and bossy Yellow Honeyeaters came and called and bathed and drank before retreating to the thicker bush to preen. A male Leaden Flycatcher came to join in the bathing party, such a neat looking bird. A pair of Black-throated Finches (northern species) came for a quick drink. It's always a thrill to see them.



Double-barred Finch

I watched a Rufous Whistler (female?) quietly searching for bugs in and around the bushes. Then I spied a fully coloured up male Rufous Whistler walking along the water line, looking in the rocks for bugs too.

A Red-backed Kingfisher came to join in the fun, using the higher scrub as a viewing post. After a few sorties it jumped into the water and struggled to get up onto a low hanging branch. It was sopping wet. Suddenly a bigger brown bird arrived that sent the Red-backed Kingfisher screeching off as fast as its wet feathers could go. The little birds all dashed off and disappeared. The big brown bird was a young Collared Sparrowhawk. It looked confused that it hadn't been able to catch dinner. It even hopped into the dense shrub to check that no birds got left behind.

That was my cue to get up and stretch my legs; I'd been there well over an hour by that stage.

I thought that would be the end of the party, but after five or so minutes being back in my hidey hole the Double-barred Finches returned. My last visitors were a party of five bathing and drinking Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters.



Collared Sparrowhawk

It turned out to be a very entertaining morning after all.

Annette Sibson

WARNING

GOING TO CAPE CLEVELAND SALT FLATS? CARRY A BIG STICK!

I headed down to the salt flats a couple of weeks ago to see what species were making use of the late season water. I left early in the morning, so I could get there at dawn. I wasn't disappointed with my planning, as a Pelican was busy fishing at the first culvert. Large, Intermediate and Little Egrets put in an appearance, competing with the pelican for fishing rights. It made wonderful observation.



As the sun rose, painting the sky pink and gold, a look to the south over the pandanus revealed a large sheet of shallow water. It was holding a good range of species including Black Ducks, Grey Teal, Black Swan, White-

fronted Herons, Black-necked Storks, Glossy Ibis and Pied Stilts. Around the water's edge were numerous Black-fronted Dotterels doing their little skittish dashes, with a sighting of three Red-kneed Dotterels and a number of Australasian Pipits. A Whistling Kite surveyed its surrounds from the prominence of a boulder.

After taking a few images of the Pelican and his friends, I decided to walk along the eastern edge of the water toward the south where I thought I could get a better look at the swans. I used the tall reed beds for cover and was able to sneak out on a small isthmus to gain viewing distance of the 'edge' birds; alas, the swans stuck to the deeper water out in the middle, staying well out of reach. This is when my morning came unstuck, thanks to a particularly large feral pig.



The boar was approaching at steady speed, moving through the shallow water from the west. Given his haste and approach line, he would be in my vicinity in about thirty seconds. I decided to stay put, presenting the smallest silhouette possible, granting him right of way. I was mindful there were no trees if I needed to gain expedient height, and there were no objects at hand should I require to discourage the animal.



He arrived just south of my position, moving to where he blocked my return to the vehicle parked back by the road. He stayed there in the reeds for a couple of very long minutes, before wandering off into the scrub. I suspect Mr Sus Scrofa didn't see me with his little piggy eyes, but may have gained a sniff of the human visitor on the swirling light breeze.

I am going to return to the salt pans again for a better exploration of the southern stretches, as the habitat appears interesting and diverse. But next time, I'm going to carry a stout walking pole.

Peter Hughes

FROM THE DESERT TO THE SEA

I've always wanted to go to Birdsville but the idea of driving over a rough track through the desert always put me off. But this year we bit the bullet and off we went.

First stop, Hughenden. While we were having sundowners, a group of very friendly Rainbow Lorikeets called in. They sat on our arms and hands, trying to nibble our crackers. Quite a nice welcome to our western adventure.

We travelled with Alf and Marleen. Marleen is a very experienced bird watcher and I am just the apprentice. It was good to travel with someone else as we were going to some remote places. And Marleen knows where to find the birds.



Flock Bronzewing

Ray Sutton

Next was Winton. We stopped at the Broken windmill on the way. For some kilometres before the windmill, quite a lot of very dark birds flew over the road in small groups. They weren't Galahs. When we stopped we confirmed that they were Flock Bronzewings. Other most notable birds were Pink-eared Ducks, Diamond Dove and Rufous-throated Honeyeaters. On the road after left we saw a lot of Australian Pratincoles.

The drought has carried on for a long time around Winton and unfortunately, the bird life has suffered. Bladensburg National Park was very dry. We need a few good years of rain for things to recover properly. The sewerage works were closed so that was that.

We spent a day driving out to Lark Quarry, not for the dinosaur footprints (we've seen them before), but to find a pair of Grey Falcons that nest nearby and a Rufous-crowned Emu-Wren. The Grey Falcons were nowhere to be seen but we did find the tiny little wren, first time I've ever seen one. Tick. We did pick up one of my favourites, Spinifex Pigeons. Another exciting bird we found there was Hall's Babbler. We went cross country to Opalton, took a wrong turn as we had no real map, backtracked about fifteen kilometres and finally arrived there. What a remote place. Opal miners are in a class of their own.

We cut across on a minor road from Winton to Boulia. The road was very good and the scenery even better. The blue sky stretches from horizon to horizon through 360 degrees. In some places there were clusters of small pyramid shaped hills, their bottom halves decorated with spinifex and the tops dotted with small trees. It's a

wonder even that grew there, given the lack of rainfall. The landscape gave a hint of the desert to come. We spotted fifty Brolgas on the way.



Scenery near Boulia

Between Winton and Boulia lies the little settlement of Middleton. Mostly just a pub. Opposite the pub is an open air shelter with a picnic table and an old barbecue and a sign saying it is the Hilton Hotel. The roof of the shelter is covered in spinifex, apparently often used for temporary shelter roofs in this part of the country.

Boulia was a very pleasant little oasis. The 2016 census put the population at 301. The caravan park was pretty full with all the grey nomads making the best of travelling in Queensland, away from Covid 19. Even though there has been no virus out in those western places, they are very conscientious about all the rules and regulations. The Queensland QR app has made it very easy to register everywhere.

Boulia is famous for the Min Min Light and we visited the centre and did the tour. It was very impressive, with animated mannequins and the final room is awesome but I won't spoil it in case you go. We didn't go driving at night so we never did find the Min Min Light.

We were in our caravan and we woke up in the morning to find a cheeky pony had come under our annexe and eaten a bag of grapes I had foolishly left outside. He stayed for a bit then wandered off, only to be followed by a small kangaroo. Late in the afternoon a man rode by on a camel. Boulia holds camel races every year but we didn't see any camels except this one.

A road ran down the side of the caravan park, going nowhere, but it yielded some great birds. We found Budgerigars, Cockatiels, Masked and White-browed Woodswallows, Red-backed Kingfisher and an all time favourite, the Spinifex Pigeon. The Burke River is just beside the caravan park and about 2000 Little Corellas gather there. They cover the dead trees, making them look like Christmas trees. They cover the fallen logs in the creek, slaking their thirst. Then suddenly they all fly off in a white cloud and roost up in trees beside the Min Min Store, Boulia's supermarket. Those western stores are worth a visit. They sell everything. The park where the trees are houses animals that have been injured and also some Alpacas.

A visit to the Police Barrack's Waterhole yielded Two Black-breasted Buzzards. A couple of Cloncurry Ringnecks were spotted at the Caravan Park.

The Australian Hotel in Boulia is a good place for a meal. We had a Sunday special, roast lamb and vegetables and everything is freshly cooked. Delicious.



Next stop, Bedourie. Bedourie is famous among bush folk for its camp oven. It is made of steel, rather than cast iron so is lighter and won't break if dropped. I bought a miniature one at the Information Centre. The information centres in these little towns are always worth a visit.

One thing that astonished me was that the cattle we saw along the road from Boulia to Birdsville were Herefords. They are an English breed and I wouldn't have equated them with these harsh, outback conditions. Obviously the must do well and the ones we saw look in good condition.

The road from Boulia to Bedourie was very good. But things were about to change as we headed for Birdsville. Much to our surprise, we learned that the road to Birdsville was in very good condition and will be completely sealed by Christmas. We only had a few gravel sections and they were well graded. The bitumen road is only one car wide so you have to get off on the shoulders for approaching traffic. We pull over and stop if there is a road train monster coming. But the gravel shoulders are good so there was no problem.



Along the way you come to Cuttaburra Crossing on Eyre Creek. This is a permanent waterhole and we found nearly one hundred Pelicans and about fifty Wood Ducks amongst others.

The countryside turns into desert pretty much. Not sandy desert, but gravel. There are still a few bushes and scraggy trees. A hundred or so metres off the side of the road in the middle of this gravel desert sits a concrete picnic table and chairs. The gravel is smooth and shiny and glistens in the sun. It's like walking in a paved garden. Gibber country. Closer to Birdsville sand dunes begin to appear.

As you arrive in Birdsville you are greeted by a camel train cut out of corrugated iron and the town artesian bore. The water pours out of a pipe amongst clouds of steam. The water temperature is 98 degrees so it requires quite a bit of cooling.

Deep in the heart of wild and isolated country, Birdsville is situated between the eastern edge of the Simpson Desert, the vast gibber plains of Sturt's Stony Desert to the south and rich Channel Country to the north. The Birdsville Races are famous and attract about 7,000 visitors to the tiny outback town each year. The Birdsville pub is famous.

Thirty-five kilometres outside Birdsville is Big Red, a forty metre high sand dune, the first of 1,140 parallel dunes in the Simpson Desert. We took a tour in a small four wheel drive and watched the sunset from the top while enjoying a cold tippie and nibblies. I don't think we would like to drive our car to the top.



We took a drive out to see the Diamantina River which still had water in it. Nearby we visited the Burke and Will's tree, reputed to have had a blaze cut in it by those early explorers.

We retraced our steps through Bedourie and Boulia and saw four Banded Lapwings on the way. We had another delicious meal at the Boulia pub. Then it was up through Dajarra to Mt. Isa where we spent four days, mostly looking for birds along the lower reaches of Lake Moondarra. We found several very hard to find birds, including Pictorella Mannikins, Long-tailed Finch and the very striking Painted Finch.

On to Cloncurry where the caravan park was overrun by Varied Loriekeets, taking nectar from the flowering gums. There was a bit of excitement overnight as a shed full of the park's equipment burst into flame only about one hundred metres from our van. One motorhome had to be moved quickly then the local fires got it under control. It was a bit of a scare, being wakened by shouting and flames.

Next we went to Normanton for four days from where we made two day trips to Karumba. We were looking for a Pied Heron which were everywhere in Karumba last time we visited but not one did we find. Finally, we spotted one at the Town Dam in Normanton. It is one of my favourites. We went on a cruise on the Norman River in Karumba with the Ferryman and found two more birds we were looking for, a Red-headed Honeyeater and a White-breasted Whistler. Didn't see any crocs. We got a glimpse of the sea at the mouth of the Norman River. I lashed out and bought an Akubra at the Barramundi Discovery Centre.



The Gulflander is a vintage railmotor that Queensland Rail runs from Normanton to Croydon and back again. We went to Croydon so we could go on a sunset ride out to the Golden Gate mine, an old gold mine site. We had dinner provided by the Croydon Hotel and then went all the way back backwards as there is nowhere to turn the railmotor around. The driver drives from the rear and has a lookout man on the front, just in case the cattle have wandered onto the line.



Next stop was Mt. Surprise and the road there was the worst we went on. Much of it was single very narrow lane and there were about a dozen single lane bridges. And it's Highway One. Couldn't believe it. At least the narrow strip was bitumen. We had coffee in a charming shop in Mt. Garnet. Then it was on past Ravenshoe to Malanda where we spent the last three nights of our trip. Rainforest birds complemented our list.

We are so lucky in Queensland to have the variety of landscapes that we do. We went from desert to the sea and then lush rainforests. Get out and see it when you can.

Annette Sutton

MUSEUM MUSINGS

We are finally back at MTQ. This week Julia finished off a Tawny Frogmouth for the next box of bits, Mark worked on a Great Bowerbird while I did a Rainbow Bee-eater. A few of the increased numbers of visitors stopped at the Taxidermy window with one family from Lismore being very interested. The parents declared, "Learning about taxidermy has been the highlight of our holiday"! I even had to have my photo taken with them. The teenage daughter wasn't so keen....sure it was YUK and would be sooo smelly!!!

The latest offering in the museum is **Ancient Rome**. Its a nationally touring exhibition called Ancient Rome: The Empire that shaped the world. WOW those folk were masters of engineering. On display in the Great Gallery are scale models of many of their inventions. You can learn about the building of the aquaducts....and the way they kept the fall to 30 feet in 1000ft. The scale model of the ancient 'spirit level' is about 2meters long and apparently the real thing was over 9meters. Plum bobs were normally used but if the wind made that difficult, a channel chiseled into the wood, could be filled with water!

The crane, worked by 4 men (not volunteers I suspect) running in what looked like a hamster wheel, could lift 21 tons! By turning and running the other way the load could be lowered down.

Clocks...not just the sundial but also a version to work at night, carts, water lifters etc etc.. Well worth a visit.

In the old theatre, Ancient Rome's Colosseum comes to life.... You can learn about how the animals and men were brought up into the arena and how the bodies were removed. Did you know they could even fill the arena with water and stage SEA battles with real warships and weapons!

See the armour of the gladiators and lots of other bits...

Fascinating is the story of how the Romans built a bridge across the Rhine in a few weeks ...marched across, showed their might and the size of their army, marched back, dismantled the bridge with NO resistance! The 'conquered' peoples then paid taxes to Rome. Job Done!

One of the other galleries has more antiquities...and I haven't seen it yet.... that's for next time.

I'm in at the museum on Wednesday with Julia and Kerry, and Thursday with Mark. Jenny and Ian hold the fort on Tuesday. We are all happy to answer questions about what we are doing. Just tap on the window and we'll come on out .

Beth Snewin

Links

[Ancient Rome - The Empire that Shaped the World](#)

[Antiquities Revealed](#)

TOUGH LOVE

Parents Thrash Child at Palmetum in Front of Witnesses—Child Abuse or Tough Love?

Recently, while birding near Townsville's Palmetum, I and fellow birder Pete Johnston, witnessed an example of 'tough love' being administered by a mum and dad to one of their young offspring via a rather brutal 'beating'. After the event, which lasted for several minutes, we discussed what had transpired at some length and concluded the disciplining of the wayward offspring to be a good thing for its long term safety and wellbeing as well as that of its family. So are we two (bordering on) oldies out of touch in this modern day of pandering to offspring rather than keeping them under a tight rein and teaching them that there are consequences for bad behaviour and disobedience? I would have thought so, except we are talking about Australian Magpies in this instance rather than kids of a human kind. No doubt the parental correction of their child was indeed the right thing for the parents to do.

We were returning to the Palmetum from a walk down river along the Ross River pathway when just short of the Palmetum's 'Turtle Bridge' we noticed a group of seven Australian Magpies, four adults and three youngsters, feeding on the ground in a nearby open area. Anticipating an opportunity for a photo or two of this activity, we sidled over to get closer shots and were somewhat amazed that one of the immature offspring moved quite near to us, showing no fear at all. While this was happening, two adult magpies quickly move in.



Mum holds Junior down so Dad can punish him

The female (shadowy white nape marking) grasped one foot of the errant child in a powerful grip with one of her own feet, and laying on her side, flipped the youngster on its back, whereupon the male parent commenced to lay into its head and neck quite savagely with its robust sharp beak. The little one, unable to escape its predicament just had to cop it sweet while vocalizing its pain and suffering loudly throughout the ordeal. The male bird rested occasionally during the beating. However, the female did not loosen her grip, which in my mind encouraged the father to continue the beating. After what seemed to be several minutes the mother eventually released the youngster which continued to lay on its back, feet in the air in a submissive pose. Both male and female continued to berate their wayward offspring for another minute or so with sharp angry vocalizations and finally with soft but powerful meaningful warbles, designed, I feel, to intimidate the youngster.

The parents flew off without a backward glance after a few minutes, to continue feeding. The chastised youngster sat quietly for a while, still quite close to us, soothing his injured pride no doubt, which begs the question 'was the beating to educate the youngster to avoid close proximity to humans, or was it for a different reason?'



Junior has been suitably admonished

Whatever the reason, it was a remarkable experience for both Pete and I and one I certainly will take great pleasure in recounting many times in future years.

Norm Rains

GARDEN MIMIC

The other afternoon I was working out in the breezeway when I heard a Whistling Kite calling from a shrub in the front garden. As it was very unusual for a Kite to be in that sort of position, I had a closer look. There, singing his little heart out was a Great Bowerbird. Not a Whistling Kite in sight. While I watched, this mimic also made the calls of a couple of different Honeyeaters. He looked like he was enjoying his display as much as I was.



Late news from my garden: It appears that the Orange-footed Scrubfowl may have found itself a new home. I have not sighted it for at least five days, the garden paths have not been covered in mulch and leaf litter each morning and no plants have been displaced. I hope it is happy wherever it went to....happy enough that it doesn't want to come back again!

Janet Robino

1311

PACIFIC BLACK DUCK AT APLINS WEIR

During the Bush Gardens Survey on 14th July, we came across a Pacific Black Duck standing on the weir wall. We'd earlier met up with Tony who informed us the duck had been in the same spot for at least 24 hours. It looked a little dishevelled and was constantly preening. A few downy feathers were floating through the air around it. There appeared to be something green stuck on one leg. Of course, there was a lot of concern that it may have fishing line entangled around the leg and 'tethering' it to the wall somehow.

We observed this for a good 10 minutes while trying to come up with a plan of rescue. One plan was for some brave sole to crawl along the weir wall to grab the duck.....not the safest plan so it was quickly dismissed. Next plan was for someone who has a canoe (someone like Beth) but once again discarded because of safety concerns and the canoeist's reluctance.



As we were moving off and still pondering the dilemma, the duck stood tall, had a bit of a shake to get all feathers in the right place, held its head up high and sauntered along the weir wall, gave one backwards glance at the would-be rescuers and slid gracefully into the water and swam into the shelter of the grasses at the river edge.

PS. The Orange-footed Scrubfowl is still in residence at my place. It still hasn't learnt to distinguish the weeds from the wanted plants. I think I will just ignore the garden until it decides to decamp.

Janet Robino

A FUNKY LITTLE TAIL!

Early in May, Peter and I drove to Woodstock to see what we could see and discovered that there was a great deal to see in the way of bird activity. We turned into Gunnado Road and met Norm and Peter along the track who informed us that the birds were very active. They had counted about 27 species and had seen Black-throated Finches a few days before hand. We left them to it and continued down the road.

The morning was a delightful ramble along the back roads of Woodstock. The usual characters were up and about –

Magpies, Magpie-larks, Peaceful Doves, Crows/Ravens (I hesitate here – and probably always will after John Lowry's very informative presentation at the May meeting). As we rambled along, we listed Australasian Pipits, Tawny Grassbirds, Striated Pardalotes, Tree Martins by the dozen, Welcome Swallows in abundance, Red-backed Kingfishers, Forest Kingfishers, Squatter Pigeons, Red-backed Fairy-wrens, Blue-winged Kookaburras, Pale-headed Rosellas, Golden-headed Cisticolas, raptors like Nankeen Kestrels, Black Kites and Whistling Kites but – for us – the surprise was in discovering two Tawny Frogmouths sleeping in a mango tree at the rest area where we parked to have morning tea.



A few days later, we returned hoping to see the Frogmouths again but they'd shifted camp. What we did discover though was an odd Kingfisher. We had seen numerous Forest Kingfishers and half a dozen Red-backed Kingfishers but this fellow was different. Although there were no river systems or creeks close by, the area was very wet and pools of water were lying around everywhere. I wondered if the bird might be an Azure Kingfisher, maybe a young bird, simply because it didn't have a long tail and it had a bit of buff colour on its front. I'd glimpsed a white patch on the front of its head but couldn't see if there were two – the spotlights of the Forest Kingfisher. Puzzled, I uploaded it to FB on the Australian Bird Identification site and was informed that, 'It is definitely a Forest Kingfisher but I don't know what's going on with it's funky little tail!' Well, nor did we. Thank you also to John Lowry for confirming that the bird was a young Forest Kingfisher.

Jill Staunton

LUCINDA

This year's summer wader count was foiled by the weather and never took place.

The winter count was scheduled for Thursday 17th July. The twelve registrants all assembled at the nominated car park in overcast and misty weather and set off with much grumbling about the weather. Things seem to get worse as we closed in on Lucinda.

However, once we were all refreshed with our 'smoko', the weather cleared and was no impediment to our

counting. We started the count on a falling tide from close to high tide. We found very few migratory waders during our two hour survey, being one Whimbrel and two Eastern Curlews.



Whimbrels and Eastern Curlews Annette Sutton

However there were other birds to enjoy. The sighting of a Sooty Oystercatcher amongst a flock of eighteen Pied Oystercatchers was our first surprise. We also came across four pairs of Red-capped Plovers, each with recently fledged young. We were first alerted by an adult giving the classic "broken wing" distraction display in an area most unlikely to be used for nesting.



Red-capped Plover with Eggs Annette Sutton

Other sightings of note were Bar-shouldered Doves feeding amongst the Mangroves, along with Varied Honeyeaters and a lone Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo.

This site is used by many species of Seabirds and this time we had five species, including a small number of Lesser Crested Tern. Overhead amongst numerous swallows and martins we had a small flock of Australian Swiftlets.

The survey was enjoyable and we recorded forty-two species in our two hour walk. After lunch five of the group decided to check out Taylors Beach, ten kilometres south of Lucinda. Here we found quite a different group of migratory waders, being one hundred Great Knot, twenty Red Knot, twenty-five Bar-tailed Godwit, one Grey-tailed Tattler and seven Greater Sand-Plover. This rounded off a very successful day.

Ivor Preston

TOP BIRD WALKS

Queensland's Chief Scientist visits Townsville

During the recent World Science Festival Queensland event, the Museum of Tropical Queensland in Townsville engaged Professor Hugh Possingham, Queensland's Chief Scientist, to host two Bird Walks in Townsville.

The first was held in Anderson Gardens on the 7th May at 6.30 am on a very brisk Friday morning. The grass was wet with a heavy dew and the sun hadn't yet begun to blaze above the horizon but the birds were calling. We did the Covid check-in using our smart phones and the latest *Check in Qld* app then the professor introduced himself and we set off. He was clearly eager to explore the gardens and find the birds.



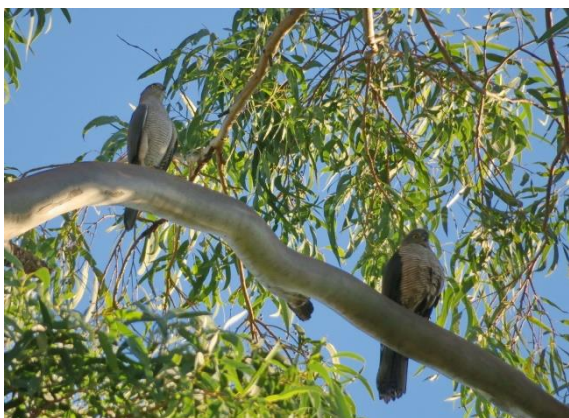
Professor Hugh Possingham and the Bird Walkers

It was obvious from the first moment of the Bird Walk that Professor Possingham was a dedicated bird observer. His attention was constantly and expertly divided. He would begin explaining a point then turn his head, look up into the sky, hold up his hand, stop speaking, tilt his head to the side to listen or turn about searching for a bird. And we all turned, looked, stopped and searched the sky with him.

What also became clear from the outset was that Professor Possingham has excellent hearing. Two minutes into our walk he propped and said, 'There are Rainbow Bee-eaters calling out there.' I knew he was right because we were in the section of the gardens where the Bee-eaters hung out but they weren't there and no one else could hear them, including me, and my hearing is pretty good despite the number of candles sitting on my birthday cake! It became fascinating to walk with the professor as he listened, chatted, scanned, gestured and identified quite invisible birds to us. We were good with the Magpie-larks, the Magpies, the Bush Stone-curlews, Magpie Geese, the Plumed Whistlers, the Spangled Drongos and the Egrets but the small birds remained heard (sometimes only by the professor) but largely unseen by the rest of us until they flew out of the towering eucalypts or burst out of the bamboo clumps. 'There's a Mistletoe bird up in that canopy. There's a Grey Fantail over there. I can hear a Varied Triller. And there's a White Throated Honeyeater somewhere there.' Fascinating!

Even more captivating, were the stories that accompanied each bird sighting. 'Magpie-larks, now, are nothing like Magpies and nothing like Larks. Why they have that name, I don't know.' We would then be informed about the genesis of the Magpie-lark. And so it went around the gardens - research, current data, future prognoses, connectivity or disparity between birds, geological, geographical, historical, anthropological information - until we thought the professor was a walking computer.

At one point he looked up, as though by instinct, and said, 'That's a Brown Goshawk flying over.' We all watched it fly overhead past the arching Raintrees and into one of the Blue Gums (*Eucalyptus Tereticornis*). As a group, we walked along the shaded road towards the stand of eucalypts. And that became the highlight of our Bird Walk in Anderson Gardens - the discovery of two Brown Goshawks, a male and female pair, and their nest high up in the canopy of the Blue Gum. Standing under the trees, looking up at the birds who were peering down at us, we learned a great deal about the Brown Goshawk - and were told the exam was tomorrow!



Brown Goshawks nesting in Anderson Gardens.

The following morning, also crisp and damp at 6.30 am, we met Professor Possingham at Aplin's Weir for our second Bird Walk. The first bird sighted was a Nankeen Night Heron standing hopefully at the bottom of the weir. It was joined by a number of Egrets - Great and Little - so we learned about the Egret family and how to distinguish its members. We then left the weir and began the walk along the Bush Garden bank. A few paces into this walk, the professor propped and said, 'I can hear a Mistletoe bird.' He seemed to be particularly fond of this little bird so we spent some time scanning the sky and canopy for it. Eventually, a male Mistletoe bird flew into a nearby tree and we were able to observe it as we learned about Mistletoe behaviour - both the bird's and the parasitic plant's.

Moving on six paces, we stopped before the riverbank where, in the tall melaleucas and eucalypts, a flurry of activity was occurring as the birds - the professor explained - competed for the available blossoms. Though many of them were after the nectar, they were not averse to snatching an insect as well. We spent some time observing Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes, White-gaped Honeyeaters, Spangled Drongos, Grey Fantails, Willie Wagtails, Brown Honeyeaters, et al and listening to a commentary that was both fascinating and informative.

When we reached the far end of the Bush Garden walk close to the pontoon, the professor listed a myriad of birds he could hear high in the canopy. He decided to try calling them down and showed us how to make a *pfst*, *pfst*, *pfst* sound by cupping his hands over his mouth - somehow! It did the trick! We watched, astonished, as the Brown Honeyeaters flew down onto the lower branches - then the Grey Fantails, White Throated Honeyeaters, the Leaden Flycatchers and others, the names of which I can't recall. They'd come to see who the invader was and were quite vocally assertive about telling the professor to vacate their patch.



Male Mistletoebird Aplin's Weir Walk

He, and we, took the hint and returned to the weir. Our Bird Walks with our Chief Scientist had been thoroughly enjoyable. Hugh Possingham began bird watching with his father at the age of ten. His love of birds is patently obvious and he communicates this with every story he shares. He has a great sense of humour but not everything he said was humorous. He told us that Australia is losing its bird numbers (not species) at a rate of 1% to 1.5% per year. He said it doesn't sound like a large figure but over 30 years of record keeping, the data shows that we have lost around 30% of our bird numbers - and that's a significant loss. Given that Professor Possingham is first and foremost a mathematician, his concern is understandable. He also said that he works with the data collected around Australia and uploaded onto sites such as eBird by volunteers like us, and others, who do regular bird surveys. He analyses the information and uses it to inform government policy. He emphasised the point that the work we do is vital and needs to continue.



A family of Pacific Black Ducks

Birdlife Townsville thanks the Museum of Tropical Queensland for arranging these Bird Walks. They were delightful and we would love to see Professor Possingham accompany us on other Bird Walk rambles around Townsville. Thank you for your time and company Professor Possingham.

Jill Staunton

PAST DRONGO

I chose the July 1995 Drongo to have a read of this month.

It was interesting to read the Club Calendar, a one page insert in the newsletter that covered July to October. Yep, four months on one small (A5) page. The Club Calendar these days is much busier with many more outings, and an extra meeting.

In August 1995 The Town Common was visited on the first Sunday of the month - as it still is today. The meeting was at 2.00pm on the second Saturday of the month - as it still is today. The only other outing was a trip to Paluma at the end of the month and everybody met up there.

One article I found was about a member who spent twelve hours on 14 February 1993 at the Townsville Town Common, in the Tower Hide (now known as Payets Tower) on Long Swamp. A long day was had with a number of interesting visitors, human, avian and reptilian being recorded. A good number of birds were seen along with the first record of Yellow Wagtails so that was a very exciting sighting.

On the nearly last page of this issue there is a list of 'Interesting and Unusual Sightings'. Some great birds were seen locally over a three month period (April to June 1995) Little Eagle x 2, Noisy Pitta, Barn Swallow, Black-breasted Buzzard, Little and Dusky Woodswallow, Spotted Nightjar and White-throated Nightjar among others.

I found the following quote too, and a poem.

Quote: The Stationmaster of Normanton. June 1995
"There's not much around at the moment, but the galahs are back in town" that possibly inspired the poem.

A Ballad of the Savannah.

The magpie geese are missing

The finches gone to ground.

Even cockatoos are nowhere to be found.

With sharpies still in Asia.

No waders to be seen

It's pretty sparse for 'birding' in the bush.

The only consolation as far as I can tell

The galahs are back in town.

The waterholes have dried up

The ground is cracked and bare

As cattle turned to carcase on the track.

El nino's come to stay they say

The rain's a myth.

Its pretty rough for people in the bush.

The only compensation as far as I can see

The galahs are back in town.

The wet was good this year I'm told

Now waterholes are full -

of spoonbills, herons, broilgas by the score.

Near the creek there're lovely wrens.

Fantails, whistlers too.

The times are good for 'birding' in the bush.

There's always inspiration as sunset shadows fall

The galahs are back in town.

Rosemary Payet

Townsville.



Annette Sibson

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

Just when I thought it was safe to start sorting out my garden to repair the 'alterations' done by the Orange-footed Scrubfowl, it's back! There had been no sign of the O-FS for just over three weeks so I thought it had moved off to find a permanent home somewhere else. I'm a little concerned my garden may be that permanent home!

Perhaps it is a female who found an attractive male who had made an impressive mound. If that is the case, she has obviously done what O-FS females do....laid an egg or two and left the rest to the male.



I decided that I may need to accept this bird as part of my family. I've decided to assume it is a girl and give her a name. So, Ollie it is - short for Olive the Orange-footed Scrubfowl. If I've made the wrong call and it is a boy, it will be Ollie - short for Oliver.

Janet Robino

JCU MARKET DAY

Spotted on the 28th of July at James Cook University (JCU), Birdlife Townsville. Mark and Kathleen, Committee Members of Birdlife Townsville, attended the JCU Market Day, generating interest for our feathered friends at the



university level.

From undergraduates, postgraduates, and lecturers, the interest was overwhelming. Hopefully, we shall see university students getting involved with citizen science by attending Birdlife's bird surveys and learning the wonders of nature.



Sparking the interest of birds in young adults can be so rewarding, as it builds a lifelong passion and gets young adults off their phones and outside in the world of song and flight.

Kathleen Vowles

MIMICRY

Currently, the best evidence that birds use [vocal mimicry to entice mates](#) comes from studies of satin bowerbirds, found in eastern Australia.

Satin bowerbirds attract females with an elaborate display involving a decorative bower and a performance that includes vocal mimicry. Females prefer to mate with males that can accurately mimic a large number of different species of bird. Perhaps female bowerbirds can assess the male's genetic quality through his prowess in vocal mimicry.

PETER HUGHES PHOTOGRAPHS



QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Len Ezzy	361	27/12/2021
Anne Lawrance	301	28/10/2021
Janet Robino	300	27/10/2021
Marleen Acton	298	25/10/2021
Annette Sibson	297	24/10/2021
Barbara Reidy	289	16/10/2021
Paul Thompson	288	15/10/2021
Mark Horvath	254	11/09/2021
Elna Kerswell	253	10/09/2021
Beth Snewin	250	7/09/2021
Ian Leach	239	27/08/2021
Warren Charlton	225	13/08/2021
Pat Charlton	225	13/08/2021
Wendy Kaus	217	5/08/2021
Wal Threlfall	216	4/08/2021
Paul Thompson	213	1/08/2021
Greg Calvert	206	25/07/2021
Rosemary Payet	205	24/07/2021
Annette Sutton	205	24/07/2021
Brigid Glass	203	22/07/2021
Jill Staunton	192	11/07/2021
Peter Staunton	192	11/07/2021
Kathleen Vowles	160	9/06/2021
Julie Goldsbury	134	14/05/2021
Trish Jordan	45	14/02/2021

These are the July figures unless you sent me a later update.

