

The Drongo

Number 166 May 2022



Mark Horvath

Ross Dam
Mundy Creek
Drongos



FROM THE PRESIDENT

As you can see from the comments below, BirdLife Townsville has a good reputation with the BirdLife Australia community.

'From Paul Sullivan CEO Birdlife Australia:

Thank you for taking the time to prepare and submit BirdLife Townsville's 2022 Action Plan. I'm pleased to inform you we have agreed to your contribution request of \$2,620. We are lucky to have you as part of our BirdLife family, and in particular note your work aligning to our strategic priorities in conservation through a varied survey program, including, in particular, surveys within the Paluma KBA, and of local shorebirds. We want to thank you for your ongoing time, passion, and effort, and are excited to work with BirdLife Townsville to continue protecting our local birds in 2022.'

The Committee is concerned that BirdLife Townsville will not be able to sustain the activities above and our community awareness programs unless more members get involved. Regardless of the level of experience, everyone has something to offer. Recording the sightings, taking photos to confirm identification, even helping with carrying scopes and just keeping the leader company. The more pairs of eyes out there looking the more chance of seeing all the birds in the area. It is also a great chance for learning more about identifying those tricky birds, especially the shorebirds. Our community awareness programs are particularly important in our conservation efforts. Please consider putting your hand up for some of these important activities. No-one will be expected to take on more responsibility than they are comfortable with. The most important reason to volunteer is that all these activities are great fun. There are still two vacancies on the Committee. Please consider joining the committee. New ideas and input can only be a good thing for the club.

A recent survey has shown that all respondents read and enjoy the Drongo. The most consistent comment was that there could be more articles by BirdLife Townsville members.

For example: *'Encourage more members to send in articles, which we are doing already I know. Without more input from members there's no other way to improve it as it's already a great read and the editor is doing a fantastic job.'*

An 'article' can be as small as a few sentences. If it is interesting to you then there is a very good chance it is interesting to all members.

The changes to BirdLife Australia Website has had an impact on membership classification. All members received an email from Wal Threlfall explaining these changes and what each member needs to do to ensure continuing membership. Please check your membership status. BirdLife Townsville's website has also undergone some changes. Have a look as there is a lot more information. While you are there have a look at the Photography Group page to see some great photos by local members.

BirdLife Townsville's Facebook page is proving to be very popular. Karen Doyle is now joining John Lowry as moderator. Check it out and give it a 'like'.

Unfortunately, Covid 19 and unseasonable wet weather has caused many cancellations. Make sure to check website – Activities Page – the night before any activity just in case!

Janet Robino

YOUR COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino	Annette Sibson	Julia Goldsbury
Secretary: Wal Threlfall	Mark Horvath	
Treasurer: Nina Doyle	Brigid Glass	

Newsletter Editor Annette Sutton amsgreat@gmail.com

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

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

ROSS DAM WETLANDS

20/03/2022 – Three members set out on the morning walk along the dam wall above the Ross Dam wetlands. Halfway up the road to the wall, we were thrilled to see a Restless Flycatcher as it glided into a nearby tree. Unfortunately, it disappeared in the foliage and couldn't be found again. This is going to be a good morning!



Black-necked Stork Mark Horvath

The water level was quite low and clogged with various aquatic plants. Consequently, there was little bird activity, if you don't count the Cormorants and Kingfishers, of which there were quite a number. Although there was little wetland bird activity, we were treated to spectacular displays from flocks of Red-winged Parrots. A couple of Black-necked Storks also made an appearance, and the female was kind enough to do a fly past for us. Beautiful!



White-bellied Sea-Eagle Mark Horvath

Down along the road to Central Creek was also quiet, maybe because of the two White-bellied Sea-Eagles scanning the ponds from their vantage point, in a dead tree, not far from the road. The only species that didn't seem to care were the Oriental Dollarbirds, as there were several of them about. The walk to the river was probably not worth it on the day as, other than seven Intermediate Egrets, the creek was empty. The bright spots on the walk were one solitary Double-barred Finch perched in a bush atop one of the gravel mounds, a lonely Golden-headed Cisticola and a Pacific Baza.

It might have been a quiet with only 43 species identified but it was a most enjoyable morning stroll as usual.

17/04/2022 – Once again only three members set out on the morning walk around the Ross Dam wetlands and down to Central Creek.

Initially it was sunny, but some dark clouds quickly rolled in from the east making for a grey old morning. Without rain, the wetlands were even worse than they were last month.

Still identified the usual, Egrets, Cormorants, Darters, Kingfishers, and a Jacana with a youngster in tow, from the dam embankment. Even though the wetlands were drying there was one lonely Pelican paddling around. There were a few birds flying over but identification was difficult in the poor light, so some went uncounted, although it wasn't difficult to identify the three Pied Currawong that flew past. The Red-winged Parrots were also in attendance but not in the numbers like last month.

The walk down to Central Creek came up with a couple of nice birds, the best being a Cotton Pygmy-goose. Central Creek was once again almost barren, barring a couple of Caspian Terns cruising back and forth. It was only on leaving the creek that we spotted the two White-bellied Sea-Eagles sitting low in a dead tree on the other side.



Caspian Tern Mark Horvath

The trip back to the cars provided some more species that we hadn't seen earlier. Some were a flock of eleven Double-barred Finches, a Leaden Flycatcher, and a Pardalote.

All in all, it was another nice morning out with fifty-five species identified.

Mark Horvath

DRONGO BEHAVIOUR

As I lookout my kitchen window the Drongo is back. His loud and varied calls greet me when I check out my garden in the early mornings. When his 'friend' is nearby they have long conversations. I often observe his "impressing" behaviours....and was surprised when one of our fellow birders said she had never seen their leaf picking behaviours and so came to visit and observe.



Leafy Stage

Beth Snewin

I was wondering if other birders had also seen this behaviour. I imaging it is done to create a stage on which to impress his chosen partner with his chattering and tail flicking. The ground under my tree is scattered with fresh leaves and at times the partner also clears a stage in a nearby tree - to allow for unobstructed viewing I suppose. The second stage is smaller.

I've not seen this behaviour recorded but many must have seen it. My mother and I, 60 years ago, watched the local bird busily picking leaves off our peach tree. "Why?" I asked, and my mother's learned answer " I've no idea! He doesn't eat them or do anything with them... that's probably why he's called a Silly Drongo!"



Viewing tree

Beth Snewin

Birdlife.org states....

Description

The Spangled Drongo has glossy black plumage, with iridescent blue-green spots

(spangles), a long forked tail and blood red eyes. Sexes are similar, but the female is slightly smaller. Occasional white spotting can be seen on the upper wings of both sexes. Young birds are more sooty black without the spangles and the eye is brown. The Spangled Drongo is noisy and conspicuous, usually active, and frequently aggressive to other species.

Feeding

The Spangled Drongo is usually seen perched on an open branch or telegraph wire, where it awaits a passing insect. Once seen, its prey is pursued in an acrobatic display, and is caught in the Drongo's slightly hooked bill. The Spangled Drongo then returns to its perch to eat its victim. The prey is guided into the bill with the assistance of sensitive, long, wire-like bristles bordering the bill (rectal bristles). Insects are also taken from foliage and from under bark; fruit and nectar also form part of its diet.

Breeding

Spangled Drongos normally have only one clutch per season. Both adults participate in building the nest, which is a simple, shallow cup of twigs, vine tendrils and grasses, held together with spider web. It is placed in a horizontal fork of tree, normally toward outer edges and up to 10 m – 20 m above the ground. Both sexes incubate the eggs and care for the young. Spangled Drongos actively defend the nest against intruders.

All very interesting but no mention of my Drongo's behaviour.

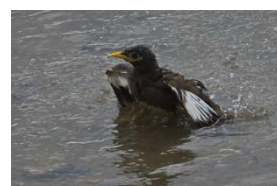
Beth Snewin

COMMON MYNAS AT WOODSTOCK

On Saturday 2 April 2022, Barbara Reidy, Anne Lawrance and myself headed off to Woodstock despite the very heavy rain falling in Townsville. As we expected, the rain was short-lived and we had no problems.

At the Dam along Buck Road (the Crocodile Dam) we were a bit taken aback when at least 40 Common Myna flew in for a morning drink. I don't recall even seeing one Common Myna in the area before. By the time we thought to capture this sighting on the camera the Mynas disappeared as fast as they had appeared.

Janet Robino



LATHAM'S SNIPE PROJECT

There is a group of passionate ornithologists working hard at learning more about the Latham's Snipe migration, breeding and life. Recently Townsville Birdlife members have begun to participate in the surveys that are run during the year. I have included the next three dates at the bottom of this article.



Latham's Snipe

Annette Sibson

I have also included a link to the Latham's Snipe project at the bottom of this article. There is some fabulous information and photographs in there, well worth a read.

Yes, most of the work is down south, in Victoria and around Canberra where the majority of the snipe arrive to over winter. We get Latham's Snipe here, out at the Town Common and in various waterways during the wet season. The snipe start to arrive in August, September and leave again April, May.

Recently five snipe were satellite tagged so some fantastic information has been recorded on where the birds have been and for how long. An exciting event was being able to track one particular bird from Tamworth all the way back to southern Japan. This is the first ever complete and documented migration of a satellite-tagged Latham's Snipe.



Well camouflaged

Annette Sibson

I've been lucky enough to see Latham's Snipe out at the Town Common on two occasions, once in August 2018 when three snipe took off in front of me, and again in October 2018. I've included two photographs, one of which shows

how the snipes plumage works so well to keep it camouflaged.

Dates for the next 3 Snipe surveys – September 24 and November 26 in 2022. January 14 in 2023.

<https://lathamssnipeproject.wordpress.com/2022/01/13/satellite-tracking-update-and-national-surveys-results-january-2022/>

Annette Sibson

MUNDY CREEK

In April, quite a few photographs began appearing on the Birdlife Townsville Facebook page of birds from Mundy Creek in Garbutt. The most interesting was the Little Kingfisher. Although there are quite a few of them about, they are not the easiest birds to see. For a short while, you could almost rely on seeing one



Little Kingfisher

Annette Sutton

at Mundy Creek.

There are plenty of other birds there too. Turn off Bundock Street to the airport, go past the houses and across the culvert and you're there. Firstly there is a waterhole among trees at the end of the culvert and then there is the lagoon with plenty of parking. The first day we went there in the middle of April, a young Little Kingfisher came and perched right in front of us, only about five metres away. After he left a Welcome Swallow did the same. We haven't seen the Little kingfisher since then.

There have been quite a few unusual birds posted from there on the Facebook page. It's worth a look. Sightings include Collared Sparrowhawk, White-eared Monarch, Horsfield's Bushlark, Shining and Restless Flycatchers, Rufous-throated Honeyeater, and White-browed Crake. There are many more species as well.

Annette Sutton

BUSH GARDEN

We met up at the carpark and got organized, all busy chatting and catching up.

Off we went to the open area to check out the large trees there. Wendy told us she had seen a Rufous Fantail in the area a few days previous, and had asked him to hang around so we could see him. Low and behold, the Rufous Fantail was spotted by all, even though it was staying at the very top of the tallest trees.



It's in the green tree Annette Sibson

A cuckoo species was sighted and due to the lines on its chest and body area was not immediately identified. Photographs were taken to be studied later on. A number of male Leaden Flycatchers were busy chasing each other, with a lovely coloured up female also in the mix. A Black-chinned Honeyeater was heard and then found feeding in amongst the flowering mistletoe. We moved onto the path and headed in to the gardens proper. Lots of White-gaped Honeyeaters were seen and heard.



Magpie Geese were sitting quietly in amongst the water weeds, making for some nice calm photographs. On the concrete float we spied a Striated Heron, busily using the platform as a great hunting spot. There was also a Pacific Black Duck family, with very small ducklings, making us all ooh and ahh over their cuteness.

Up at the walkway across the river we spent a fair bit of time enjoying the view and the antics of the Welcome Swallows. Another Pacific Black Duck family showed up, its ducklings were somewhat bigger.

On the path on the way back to the cars another two Black-chinned Honeyeaters were heard and spotted. A lovely way to finish up a pleasant stroll in the early morning.

Annette Sibson

LOTS AND LOTS

Fifteen....yes, fifteen.... Pacific Bazas!!! All swirling around at the same time in the same bit of sky! Breathtaking.

This was the sight that had us all gasping in astonishment down at the Town Common on Sunday.



There were eight of us doing the usual once-a-month survey down at the Town Common. We'd parked the vehicles to the side of the road in preparation to go down the side track for a look when one of us pointed out two Pacific Bazas flying overhead and landing in a tree. By the time we had all parked and looked up there were more Bazas and they just kept coming. We counted them off....2,3,4,5.....15! They were all circling overhead as a group. Spectacular!



Gradually, as a 'flock' they all moved on out across the Common. I wonder how many other people took the time to look up and see this rare sight. You would expect to see birds such as ducks, geese, ibises and egrets in a large flock like this but not Pacific Bazas. Most unusual.

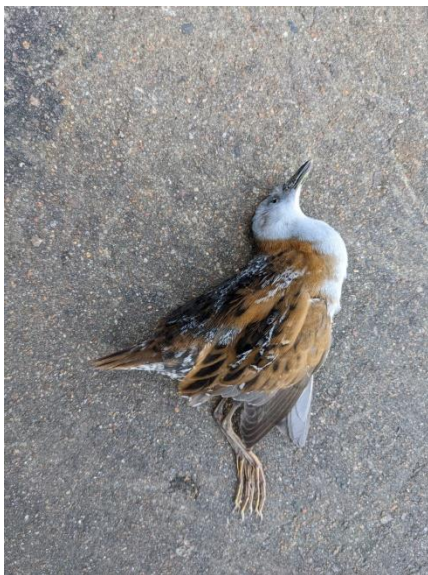
As a footnote to this event, I was out at Ross Dam the following day and in Ross Park there were another five Pacific Bazas. All up, for the weekend, I saw twenty Pacific Bazas!

Story and pictures Anne Lawrance

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

All information and photographs by courtesy of Community Members, Birdlife Townsville Members and Ebird

Baillon's Crake: Australia's smallest Crake was found on Thursday 7 April 2022 in Toll Street, Mount St. John, Townsville. Unfortunately, the Crake was dead and may have been struck by a car or truck. The bird was retrieved and given to the Museum of Tropical North Queensland in the hope that the very skilful taxidermists may be able to use the Crake for display purposes.



Baillon's Crake

This is the second sighting (although in unfortunate circumstances) of a Baillon's Crake in the Townsville area since 2013. The first sighting reported on Ebird was by Jon and Alison Elliott on Sunday 18 August 2013 near the Freshwater Bird Hide at the Townsville Town Common Conservation Park.

"Observed from Freshwater Hide in pond immediately in front of the hide. We were observing a White-browed Crake at the time so had a good size comparison (the Baillon's being smaller). We had good views and could identify it well by its small size, barred under tail, black and white flecking in light brown (almost rufous) wings and absence of red mark at base of bill. We understand this may be the first sighting of Baillon's Crake at the Common which is why we are reporting it somewhat retrospectively. Site Townsville Town Common Conservation Park. Observer: Jon & Alison Elliott."

Pictorella Mannikin: Sighted by Jill and Peter Staunton at the Townsville Town Common Conservation Park on Thursday 5 May 2022.

"The bird was sighted in the morning with a flock of Plum-headed Finches."

Birdlife Member Tony Ashton advised "This is a rare sighting, first ever for the Town Common Conservation Park, first ever sighting for Townsville City (disregarding claim of one being sighted on The Strand in 2011). Most wider area sightings date from 2007 to 2008 at Woodstock and further west."



Pictorella Mannikin Jill and Peter Staunton

Emu, Weebill and Hoary-headed Grebe: On Friday 6 May 2022, 18 Members of Birdlife Townsville were on the annual Mingela/Clare Loop Outing with stops at Mingela Dam, Kirk River Bridge, Ravenswood Show Grounds (for the very important morning tea break), White Blow, Ravenswood Deco Quarry and then to Claredale Pastures Café, Clare (lunch break, also important) and then home to Townsville via Reed Beds Road. An all-day outing but successful in the number and species of birds sighted e.g.: Australian Bustard, Grey Butcherbird, Rufous Whistler, Grey-crowned Babbler, Squatter Pigeon, Yellow-throated Miner, Emu, Weebill, Nankeen Night-Heron (juvenile).

While we were stopped at the Ravenswood Deco Quarry to observe the largest Australian bird, the Emu and we were also lucky enough to also observe Australia's smallest, the Weebill.



Hoary-headed Grebe Anne Lawrence

However, there was one lone bird we sighted in the water filled pit and called as an Australasian Grebe (juvenile), but later, thanks to our photographer Anne Lawrence, we were able to identify the bird as a juvenile Hoary-headed Grebe.

Wal Threlfall

NICE SURPRISE

Barbara Reidy, Anne Lawrance and I headed off for Julatten via Mossman Gorge.

We'd stayed overnight in Babinda so had enough time to make a quick detour to the Cairns Esplanade. The tide was not the best for wader watching. We did find a group of fifteen waders up towards the mangrove end. Amongst this group of Bar-tailed Godwits, Great Knots and Red Knots was 'something a bit different'.

The mystery bird was not very co-operative at first, hiding his legs in the water and having a snooze with his head tucked very snugly into his back. Finally he had a little stretch, stepped a little forward into shallow water, looked straight at us and lifted one yellow leg to clearly show partially webbed toes.



Nordmann's Greenshank

Yes! The Nordmann's Greenshank. We hadn't expected to find anything exciting so were all very pleased with ourselves for deciding to check out the Esplanade despite the high tide.

Story and Pictures Janet Robino

5th January, 2021 by Greg Roberts, Sunshine Coast, Australia

The avian New Year started with a bang when Cairns birder Adrian Walsh photographed a Nordmann's (Spotted) Greenshank on the Cairns Esplanade. This is a rarity worldwide with as few as 1000 birds surviving. It had previously been known in Australia from a handful of sightings in northern Western Australia. The last two sightings from that part of the world were made at Roebuck Bay by Adrian Boyle in late November-early December last year: the Cairns bird is the first record for eastern Australia and incredibly, the third for the nation in five weeks

UNDER ATTACK

Recently I went up north with Janet and Anne, with a visit to the Cairns esplanade.

We were lucky enough to see the Nordmann's Greenshank, and it was obliging enough for Janet to photograph it with one leg out of the water so that the slight webbing was observed between the toes.

We then travelled to Babinda and stayed with one of Janet's sisters. We could not leave without a visit to the town bakery, where amongst other goodies we bought some cream buns, which have a great reputation !!!!!



Southern Cassowary Janet Robino

Our next stop was at Ettu Bay for morning tea. Whilst the others were getting organised, taking photos, with a Cassowary on the way, I sat down and started on my cream bun.

Next minute I had one very hungry Cassowary who wanted to share with me. I got quite a fright, much to the others amusement, jumping up and putting it behind my back. That didn't work so I had to hide behind the car, one very determined bird !!!!! We later saw another Cassowary at the Bay, and another adult with a chick on the road on the way out. We thought four in one day excellent.

We headed home after a rather eventful morning.

Barbara Reidy



MORNING WALK

Thank goodness I roused myself to get up and go for an early morning walk, having had the 'day off' yesterday because of the long-awaited rain. In Fitzroy Street, I stopped to watch a Pale-headed Rosella swaying in the breeze, on the top of a newly-opening palm frond. The homeowner appeared on his balcony wanting to know why I was so interested in his garden. So we had a lovely chat about the Rosella and other birds that visit his yard.



Black-shouldered Kite

Ray Sutton

When I was almost home again I heard a racket overhead. Looking up, I could see a pair of something chasing a pair of Torresian Crows. I thought I could identify the attackers, but really couldn't believe I was right as I had never seen them this close to home. Fortunately, the attackers returned as I reached home, and my binoculars. I was able to confirm that it was a pair of Black-shouldered Kites. I'm pretty sure the Crows are nesting in 'the paddock' behind my house. Maybe it was a battle over one of the few remaining suitable nesting sites. It appears the Crows won; the Kites took off and have not returned all day.

Janet Robino

ST LAWRENCE WETLANDS

We called in to the St Lawrence Wetlands earlier this year. We were on the way home from a trip to Hervey Bay and decided it was time to check out this town and its wetland.

Wow, what a fabulous little spot with a very well maintained wetland. It was really impressive, neatly mowed walking tracks, easy to open and close gates and a great viewing platform.

St Lawrence is approximately 550 km south of Townsville, a bit far for a day trip, but you can stay at Mackay or Bowen. Or camp at St Lawrence of course.

These wetlands are part of the greater Broadsound Wetland which are listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia.



While researching for this article I came across adverts for the St Lawrence Wetlands Weekend, 24-26 June 2022, with guests Costa Georgiadis and Matt Golinski. Sounds like a fun weekend. Just in case anybody is looking for an activity.

Annette Sibson

STARTING YOUNG

My 16 month old great-grandson has shown an interest in birds since he was very young. Being a little Tasmanian, he spends a lot of time indoors. He was getting a little frustrated by not being able to see the birds he could hear as he was too short to see over the window ledge. His parents came up with a very clever solution – his very own 'Birdwatching Tower'.



Now, when he hears birds outside, he can climb into his tower and watch till his heart's content. He now seems to be able to link the bird call to the right bird. Initially, he started 'quacking' at ducks. Next step was 'quacking' at all birds. Now he imitates the Little Wattlebird, Spotted Dove and Forest Raven.

Janet Robino