

The Drongo

Number 168 November 2022



Enrico Roche

Lady
Musgrave

California

Ross Survey



FROM THE PRESIDENT

It would be well worthwhile checking your membership status. My own membership was 'down-graded' to 'Supporter' without any notification to me that this change had occurred. Apart from the fact that I need to be a Member to hold an office on the Branch Committee, it also meant that I would no longer receive the printed copy of Australian Birdlife. Birdlife Townsville is having difficulty accessing an updated membership list so each member would need to check for themselves, by contacting Birdlife Australia. Email: support@birdlife.org.au or Phone 03 93470757 (ext 4).

The Committee is faced with making some very difficult decision in the New Year. Unless more members and supporters step up and support surveys, meetings and educational programs, Birdlife Townsville will need to curtail a lot of these activities. We would ask that members register for all outings and meetings. If numbers are too low activities may be cancelled. It is really important to register for the monthly meeting for catering purposes, so our very valuable 'Afternoon Tea Team' have an idea of how much food to prepare.

There is a possibility that the Townsville City Council will introduce a fee for the use of the Soundshell as a venue for our meetings. Attendance at the monthly meeting has been declining so we will have to assess whether the meetings are sustainable with the possible raising costs. We have always had quality guest speakers but it may be difficult to attract them if the attendance numbers are so low.

October was a very busy month as usual. The Townsville City Council (TCC) again partnered with Birdlife to promote the Aussie Bird Count. Birdlife Townsville supported several TCC promotional activities. Displays to encourage participation were again set-up in the three city libraries using the bird specimens kindly loaned to us by the Museum of Tropical North Queensland. Information stands were held at three Shopping Centres the week prior to the count. These activities were managed by a very dedicated band volunteers. Unfortunately, all these chores fall to too few, with the result that we have already taken the decision that the Shopping Centre Stands will not happen next year.

The Tony Grice Annual Black-throated Finch Waterhole Survey was held as planned but again there was a struggle to get enough volunteers to man all the sites.

To join in the Christmas festivities, register by reply email to Wal's message with all the details.

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 January 31st. Please send articles as Word documents, photos as attachments.

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

LADY MUSGRAVE

Lady Musgrave Island-the second most southern of the string of coral cays that make up the Great Barrier Reef- is barely 20 hectares in size but all of the island and its surrounding waters is HEAVING with wildlife and, in particular, bird life.



It is because of this that Lady Musgrave Island (or 'Wallaginji' meaning 'beautiful reef' as it is known by the local Aboriginal groups) is included in the Capricornia Cays Important Bird Area. This is a far cry from when the island was heavily mined for phosphate (bird droppings) in the 1890s and then, as part of the Fairfax Island group, was used by the Royal Australian Airforce and Navy during WWII (and beyond) as a practice bombing target to the point where the Chief Inspector for Fisheries (EJ Coulter), in 1952, reported that the reef was "practically a marine desert". Today, it is a National Park and Conservation area.

Lady Musgrave Island is 58 kilometres from the small, coastal town of 1770 but, even before you hit the island, birds are in abundance. Waiting at the marina for departure time, I watched a Pied Cormorant swimming after its breakfast beneath the jetty. The waters surrounding the marina are in a 'Green Zone' so fish are plentiful and the waters clear.



Bridled Tern

In the same area, there were Brown Booby also diving for fish. The speed and power with which they hit the water, disappear for a split second before resurfacing with or without their target then take off which, in contrast, is a rather clumsy-looking splash and splay of feet and wings, was fascinating to watch.

Before reaching the open waters, the boat cruises past two or three sandbanks where large numbers of Pelicans, Cormorants (Pied, Little Pied), Terns (Crested, Bridled,

Little, Black-naped) and Lesser Plovers take in the morning sun.



Black Noddies nesting

Further out to sea, as well as the pelagic birds, you have the opportunity to see dugongs, turtles, rays and whales. During my trip, we were fortunate enough to have the rare Indo-Pacific Dolphin swim quite close to the boat.

It takes approximately 90 minutes to reach the mooring spot and, depending on the ocean, it can be a very pleasant trip...or not. However, it is well-worth putting up with a temporary bout of sea-sickness for once you arrive, any nausea is forgotten. The boat anchors in the deeper water and a glass-bottom punt ferries you the short distance to the island.

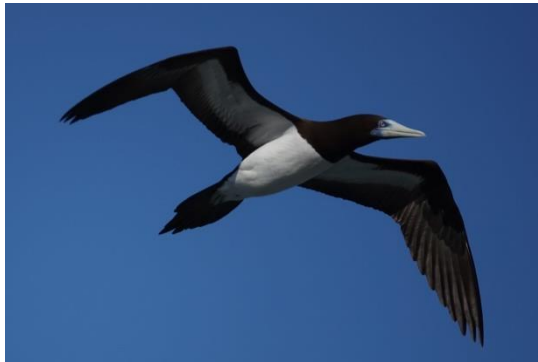


Black Noddy

Lady Musgrave is skirted by a relatively narrow beach made up of sand, bits of coral and some beach rock. Vegetation is dominated by Pisonia trees (*Pisonia grandis*) with a smattering of She-Oak and Pandanus trees.

Birdlife on this island is prolific. In nesting season, tens of thousands of Black Noddy nests fill the Pisonia trees. These nests are made of leaves which are held together with guano. While the female remains with the nest, the male Noddy goes off in search of the perfect leaf to give as an offering to his partner. Having found it, he takes it back to the waiting female, hoping that it meets with her approval. The female, if satisfied, takes the leaf and adds it to the nest. If not satisfied, she rejects it. Either way, the male is off again in search of the next perfect leaf. It is a most peculiar experience being so close to these birds, watching them pick among the nearby leaves on the ground and then fly off, all of them with a leaf in their beak and all of them indifferent to our presence.

The *Pisonia* tree produces a very sticky seed which can potentially spell disaster and ultimately death for both the adult and young Noddy should their feathers or down become entangled with these seeds. Carcasses of the unfortunate victims can be seen on the forest floor. However, centipedes and other island 'cleaners' make short work of returning them to the soil.



Brown Booby

Foraging beneath the *Pisonia* trees, Buff-banded Rails free-range like domestic chooks. There are no predators on the islands and, like all the other birds, they are indifferent to human presence so it is easy to just stand and watch them as they scratch among the dead leaves.

On the beachfront, a group of Bridled Tern was perched on a large bit of driftwood, each one busily preening while further down on the beach rocks several Crested Tern were enjoying the sea breeze. As the tide made its way in, a pair of Eastern Reef Egret (white morph) rushed around on the still-exposed tip of a nearby cay, gathering the final morsels of food before the water completely washed over it.

From December to May, the thousands of Black Noddy are joined by thousands of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters (Mutton Birds). These birds dig burrows in the sandy ground for nesting purposes...which is just as well as there is no room left in the trees. So numerous and extensive are these burrows that visitors to the island mustn't stray from the path as the burrows easily collapse under the weight of a person.



Buff-banded Rail

From September to March, migratory shorebirds such as Ruddy Turnstones, Grey and Wandering Tattlers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Pacific Golden Plovers and Lesser Sand

Plovers can be found searching for food on the surrounding flat reef at low tide.

Another all-year-round resident of Lady Musgrave Island is the Capricornia Silvereye- a species of Silvereye that is endemic to the more southern islands of the Great Barrier Reef. Unfortunately, I wasn't aware of this bird's existence until I was back on the boat talking to one of the crew who casually asked if I had seen the Capricornia Silvereye when I was ashore.

"THE WHAT?"

I was aghast that I hadn't known about it and missed seeing it! It was seriously tempting to swim to shore (only about 400m and I still had my wet suit on and fins) and go searching but the thought that they might leave me behind kept me onboard. There's only one thing for it....I'm going to have to return to this intriguing island.

Anne Lawrence

HOUSEBOUND

Having recently had my left knee replaced, I am temporarily confined to the house, unless a kind person is able to take me shopping or to any appointments I may have. I decided to do some backyard or rather Verandah counts, either from my front that has a chain or my side verandah that looks out on part of my back garden.

A great number of birds were feral as my neighbour puts out seeds for the locals, so large numbers of Rock doves, Indian Mynah and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. Even the Rainbow Lorikeets got the message and two appeared regularly.



Eastern Koel male

From the back verandah at lunchtime I had Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, an Eastern Koel, and one Torresian Pigeon. Brown Honeyeaters, Sparrows, White-breasted Woodswallows, and Peaceful Doves always frequent my area. At present I also have off and on a family of Curlews. I have only seen one chick but when my son was here he saw three at one stage !!!!!

I felt at least I had tried to do my bit for the count !!!!!

Barbara Reidy

BTF COUNT

The Tony Grice Annual Black-throated Finch Waterhole Count 20222022 was held on the weekend of 22 and 23 October.

Wal Threlfall and I were allocated Ford's Dam to do the count. On Saturday, as per the procedures, we arrived at the Dam prior to 6am to settle in our position and be ready to sit there until 9am, and hopefully count Black-throated Finches that come in to drink.

When we arrived the Dam was alive with activity. Unfortunately it wasn't birds of any sort that were causing the water to swirl and splash everywhere. The resident Cane Toads decided it was a good day to have a mass mating event. We estimated that there were over 200 toads in this rather small body of water.

The toads formed huge balls of bodies rolling and squirming along the banks and in the water. It went on for almost the entire period of the allocated count time. They were certainly very large and healthy looking toads. Once the excitement was over, the toads climbed to the top of the dam banks, some disappeared into large holes in the bank while others continued on over the bank. We were so engrossed in watching the show that I didn't think to take any photos. According to reports from the other waterholes this was a widespread event.



All this activity in the dam and close to the water kept the birds well away. We eventually got to see two Black-throated Finches drinking on the edge at the very last minute – 8.59am!

What a difference on Sunday! We only saw three toads. Two were floating upside down and one was bobbing on the surface and struggling to stay afloat. This last one soon succumbed. Obviously the efforts of the day before was too much for them.

There was more bird activity but did not include the target bird, Black-throated Finch. We had both packed away binoculars as it was just about 9am. At exactly 20 seconds to 9am, four Black-throated Finches came down to drink along with a few Double-barred Finches.

As we eventually headed back to the vehicle, Wal sighted Finches in a tree right above our heads – at least 8 Black-throated Finches preening themselves and each other! A very nice way to finish a couple of wearying days. Made up for those 4.30am starts!

Janet Robino

CALIFORNIA

A few weeks of summer in southern California – August, mid-September 2022

Within minutes of our arrival I could hear a buzzing outside – my first hummingbird! An Allen's Hummingbird feeding and protecting his feeder. Most of the yards around have at least one nectar feeder and a seed feeder of some sort. I spent quite a bit of time watching the resident Allen's Hummingbird. He was fabulous and happy to perch near me as long as I stayed still. The sound of the hummingbirds' flying and their call was a constant noise in the background of life. It was fabulous to watch and hear them defend their various patches. A very active bird through most of the day, no matter how hot. (We had some 40C + degree days and still those little birds defended their patches.)



Allen's Hummingbird Male

American Crows are numerous too, flying to and from their roosting areas early morning and late evening – dozens of them flying overhead. Occasionally there were a few in the backyard or in the adjacent green space. They call fairly consistently so are easy to locate.



American Crow

We visited the local library one afternoon and as we walked out I was told to look up – a Turkey Vulture was cruising overhead!

We had a day visit to the beach, Ventura Harbor. Brown Pelicans were numerous, flying overhead and perching along the seawalls. Western Gull was also prevalent

there, in various stages of adult hood. Like our Silver Gulls, they seem happy to be around humans, wandering amongst us beach goers and scavenging for scraps. House Sparrows were busily collecting scraps at our lunchtime café. That was the only time I saw them.



Western Gull

I managed to see a Red-tailed Hawk one afternoon while walking the neighbourhood tracks. Hunting there would be pretty good, the feeders bring in a lot of the small birds. Finches, Sparrows, Junco's, Doves are all regulars to the seed feeders.

One morning I was lucky enough to see a White-breasted Nuthatch, similar looking to our Sittellas in beak shape, size and under tail patterning. It was feeding down the palm trees, but also visited the seed feeder.



White-breasted Nuthatch

One evening my daughter-in-law heard the resident Great Horned Owl. Unfortunately it was quite a distance away so we didn't see it that night. About a week later we heard the owls again, this time much closer so with torch in hand we went out and managed to see a fleeting glimpse of the female as she took off from the tree above us. Then we made our way to the pine tree the male was calling from. We got a good look at him as he called and then flew down and over the top of our heads. It was fabulous.

On one early morning walk I came across a family of Acorn Woodpeckers, busily engaged in their morning activities which included feeding the kids that were still within the nesting hole. That was pretty cool. That same morning I came across a Cooper's Hawk perched on a light pole. I missed the close shot but got a faraway shot of it. Luckily the tail is very distinctive so I was able to identify it.

Birding was not the purpose of the trip but I managed some memorable bird sights anyway.

There are whole shops dedicated to birds – feeders of all types are available and of course the nectar and seeds to fill them. There were, of course, all sorts of bird paraphernalia as well. I had a great time in there.

Rabbits are easily seen, grazing in the early mornings and evenings in the parks and along the walkways. They just scamper off into the bushes as you approach. They don't seem to have the warrens that our Australian rabbits have. There are no free roaming dogs or cats – the wildlife would catch and eat them. Mountain Lions, Bob Cats and Coyotes are prevalent. My son has seen a couple of Coyotes while out walking in the early morning. A young Bob Cat was seen in a neighbour's yard (security camera footage) while we were visiting, not by us unfortunately.

The Eastern Fox Squirrels are encouraged as well. The one here is a female and only likes walnuts and pecans. The local male that visited infrequently liked that assortment of nuts too.



Lesser Goldfinch and Female House Finch

California is in severe drought at the moment, so domestic sprinkler watering is restricted to 10 minutes once a week. Of interest, there are no short or long flush options on the toilets.

We went along to Home Depot (our Bunnings) and checked out the plants for sale. I was horrified to see Lantana in all colours being sold by the pot. I also saw it used in group plantings on slopes, around the local walk ways. There is a large population of eucalypts here as well, used as street trees and park trees. It's lovely to see something from home growing so well. I saw callistemon growing as well, in the green spaces.

It was a good trip with lots of interesting things to see and learn about. As well as a great catch up with my family.

Annette Sibson



VERY PROTECTIVE PARENTS

Yesterday, while everyone was trying to put the bins out, we were entertained by a very determined display by our resident Bush Stone-Curlews.

They had to go into battle to protect their one and only chick when an intruder seemed to be set on getting at the chick. The parent birds made a growling type sound and the chick immediately flattened itself in the middle of my driveway and stayed then until the show was over.



The intruder made several attempts to by-pass the parents but they kept running interference, blocking its path each time. It eventually got a bit physical with one of the parents, chest-bumping it several times. The whole show lasted just over 12 minutes.



All the while the chick stayed frozen in its position. Once the parents were sure the intruder was definitely gone, they set up a chorus of those lovely high pitched wails. The chick responded instantly by jumping to its feet and joining the parents.

When I went out to put a bit more rubbish in the bin, I was challenged by the one of the parents.

Janet Robino

RECORD GODWIT FLIGHT

Exciting news: A New World Record Godwit Flight!!

Late yesterday a juvenile Godwit just 5 months old (tagged in Alaska) touched down in Ansons Bay in northeast Tasmania and already a local birder is heading that way to look for it but very heavy rain in the area may make travelling to the site difficult.



This Godwit with the great number 234684 departed from Alaska on 13 October and certainly looks to have flown non-stop to Tasmania. This will not be the first one to make this flight as Godwits are frequent summer visitors to Tasmania and we are sure this one was with a group but it is the first time a tagged bird has flown between Alaska and Tasmania. In the process it flew a minimum of 13,560km in 11 days 1 hour. The previous long-distance record of 13,050km set by the adult male 4BBRW in 2021 is blown out of the water by this young upstart.



Adrian Riegen 25.10.22

Courtesy Birds New Zealand

ROSS DAM

Ross Dam Wetlands/Townsville Sand and Gravel Surveys

21st August 2022 – WOW! What a difference a load of extra pairs of eyes and ears make.

We had twelve observers for the outing and with all those eyes and ears about we ended up identifying 70 species. It was another lovely morning for a stroll through the wetlands. Highlights for the morning were a Squatter Pigeon sitting on a fence, a pair of Diamond Doves on the road where we park the cars, three cuckoo and six raptor species.



Squatter Pigeon

While walking along the road to Townsville Sand and Gravel I noticed three members well ahead of the main group. This, in itself, didn't cause me any concern. However they were not birding!!! They all had their heads down and were chatting away. I had to severely chastise them about their inattentiveness to the task at hand. We also misplaced one of our party for a while. A quick phone call soon identified their location and all was fine. Provides a timely reminder to remain in contact with the main party, preferably by sight as communications are not always so conveniently accessible.



Black Kite

18th of September 2022 – Well, back to the usual numbers for the survey. Only the three of us braved the warmer morning to survey the wetlands. Can only assume that the smaller number of surveyors resulted in the

smaller number of species. Forty-eight species was the final count. The morning produced the usual species with the addition of the first Channel-billed Cuckoo for the season, at this site. We were serenaded for most of the morning by Pheasant Coucals and Eastern Koels with their incessant calling.



Pallid Cuckoo harassed by a Brown-backed Honeyeaters

One thing of note during the morning was the total lack of Kingfishers and Bee-eaters. However, there was no lack of Black Kites and one in particular gave us a little concern. It kept circling us as we walked down the road and it eventually perched high in a dead tree and watched us carefully. One of us must have looked a little sickly and it was hoping for an easy meal. I would say the highlight of the morning was watching two Brown-backed Honeyeaters harassing a Pallid Cuckoo. The honeyeaters were very determined to chase the cuckoo away and later investigation showed they had a nest, overhanging the water, in the same tree in which the cuckoo was perched. Their continuous harassment did finally pay off, with the cuckoo moving on.

We were almost back to the gate when a young Sea-Eagle graced us with a fly over. For once I was ready with my camera and snapped a few shots. You all missed another enjoyable stroll through the wetlands.



White-bellied Sea-Eagle

16th of October 2022 – A beautiful, still morning to wander around the wetlands. Six members walked up the road to the top of the dam wall in anticipation of some interesting sightings. The wetlands provided little in the way of

wetland birds. The level was very low, and the ponds were choked with vegetation.

As a consolation there were a few bush birds around with large numbers of Red-winged Parrots, several Galahs and the ubiquitous Rainbow Lorikeets flying through. The morning provided our first Dollarbirds for the season with a pair investigating a hollow in a Poplar Gum. We also spotted a Double-barred Finch (DB) nest down beside the road. There were quite a few DBs sighted with a couple of flocks numbering twenty or more. There were, however, no other finch species sighted.

The walk down to the creek was also lacking wetland birds. A juvenile Great Cormorant sat quietly enough for me to take a photo or two. One highlight though was the spotting of a Black-faced Monarch in the Melaleucas near the last waterhole. Alas, it was not inclined to show itself clearly for a photo op. The creek was almost barren of birds except for a couple of Pied Cormorants and a few Australasian Darters. Of note, once again, was the lack of Bee-eaters. Adding to the list of species that didn't show are Egrets and Herons. Not one was spotted, although there were Cattle Egrets sighted on the way to the dam.



Great Cormorant

The other similarity to last month was the lack of Kingfishers, although one Forest Kingfisher was sighted on our way out of the wetlands. We trudged back down the road to the cars with 54 species under our belts and were saying farewell when I spotted two Squatter Pigeons in the compound on the left. Fifty-five species for the morning. Another gentle amble over a three-hour period with everyone enjoying the morning.

Marl Horvath

The Ross River Dam Survey is conducted on the third Sunday every month. Mark Horvath is the leader. Contact him on 0409332633 if you wish to join in. 6.30 am in summer and 7.00 am in winter. Meet at the dam carpark.

The area at the end of the road is closed to the public so it is your only chance to explore these wetlands. It is usually very rewarding, yielding species that are a bit hard to spot in other areas such as Great and Pied Cormorants, Bustards, Squatter Pigeons and even a Black-throated Finch.

GOLD

I've been gifted some gold, in the form of old birding magazines. Gold to me. The earliest copy of The Emu I have come across at this point is from 1912. The Emu was/is the magazine of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU). This organisation merged with Bird Observation and Conservation Australia to form BirdLife Australia in 2012.

I have also gotten my hands on old copies of our club magazine The Drongo, thanks Janet. I have from November 1993 in print form.

When I can I will provide some snippets from the magazines for publication in The Drongo. There is certainly some interesting reading in all the magazines, the ones I've read so far anyway.

Snippet from The Emu Volume 64 Part 4 July 1965.

Extract from an article entitled 'Notes from North Queensland'.

...The bird, he reported, was 'a species of Goatsucker', known to the natives as 'Tako' and to the bushmen as the 'mallet-bird' from its monotonous note of tok-tok-tok, which it kept up nearly all night. This, no doubt, was the Large-tailed Nightjar, *Caprimulgus macrurus*, now known also as the 'axe-bird' and 'hammer-bird', so that, with mallet-bird added, it ranks as a complete 'carpenter-bird'!

Annette Sibson

PEREGRINE

It is not often that you come across a Peregrine Falcon so it is always a thrill. The last one I had seen was devouring a pigeon on a Douglas rooftop over a year ago.



A couple of weeks ago, on a very overcast afternoon, we went for a drive along the road to Pallarenda. Just as we approached the park at the end of the road, a raptor sitting on a light pole caught my eye. A quick circle around the park and there it was – a Peregrine Falcon. It was very busy, devouring a bird. It didn't pay any attention to us, clicking away on our cameras. Several White-breasted Woodswallows swooped it from time to time but it just kept on feasting.

When we looked at the photos on the computer, we could see it was a young Helmeted Friarbird that had become part of the food chain.

Annette Sutton

YOUR INVITATION



1992 -2022

Christmas and 30th Anniversary PARTY

DATE: SATURDAY 10 DECEMBER 2022

TIME: 6.00 PM for 6.30 PM

**VENUE: CARLYLE GARDENS RESTAURANT
49-61 BECK DRIVE NORTH, CONDON**

Restaurant Menu and Bar drinks at own expense

THE YEAR(S) IN REVIEW: by Members

CHRISTMAS TRIVIA: by Nina

PRIZES TO BE WON

RSVP: contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au

"COME ALONG AND HAVE SOME FUN"

***Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year***