

The Drongo

Number 169 February 2023



Mark Horvath

Cattana
Wetlands

Cane Toads

Blackall



FROM THE PRESIDENT

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

At the risk of sounding like a worn out record, I will start this report with an appeal for members to seriously consider nominating to become a member of the committee. The present committee members have been doing their bit to keep Birdlife Townsville alive and active for many years. There is an increasing risk of 'burn-out' and loss of some committee members. Without some change to this situation, there is a real risk to the future of Birdlife Townsville. This would not only be the end of some great birding outings for members but it would be a very sad day for the birds that we strive to protect. On behalf of all the present and long-serving committee members, I once again ask that each and every member consider what you can do to guarantee the long-term survival of Birdlife Townsville. Please.

Despite all the above, Covid 19 and rain (welcome but sometimes untimely), Birdlife Townsville has managed to maintain a very busy program of outings for members and visitors, and community awareness events as per the Activities page on the website.

The 'new' Birdlife Australia Website continues to be rather a trial to deal with. It is still very difficult to get up-to-date membership lists. Many members have had their status changed without being notified. If you are concerned about your membership status, I would encourage you to contact BirdLife Australia to see if this affects you.

As well as struggling with the Birdlife Australia website, Wal Threlfall has continued making sure the refreshed Birdlife Townsville website is working well. Check out all the tabs, there is everything you need to know about the club.

BirdLife Townsville's Facebook page is going from strength to strength. It shows that we have some really, really good bird photographers in our area. It is also proving to be an important tool in raising awareness of the club's activities. John Lowry is stepping down as moderator. Annette Sibson will now be joining Karen Doyle in this role.

Rain, even though very welcome in a very dry Townsville, caused cancellation of some activities already this year. Another reminder that it is important to keep an eye on the Activities page on the website to check for those last minute changes. Leaders have also found the system of registering for an outing very helpful in the 'very last minute' cancellations'. This means a message can be sent early in the morning to save every one venturing out in bad weather for an aborted outing.

While you are there have a look at the Photography Group page to see some great photos by local members.

I would like to extend a big thank you to:

- committee members
- members who volunteer to lead outings and surveys
- Editor of the Drongo –Annette Sutton
- Members who assist with Community Awareness events
- Members who provide a very welcome afternoon tea at our meetings
- Members who monitor our Facebook page
- Members who attend and assist with surveys and outings
- Mark Horvath who leads the Photography Group

Ray Sutton

It is their dedication that is keeping Birdlife Townsville alive and well.

A special thank you to Secretary Wal Threlfall who has the huge task of keeping us all informed, managing the Website, keeping the lines of communication working with Birdlife Australia and making my job so much easier.

Janet Robino

Newsletter Editor Annette Sutton amsgreat@gmail.com

Deadline for next Drongo is April 30th. Please send articles as Word documents, photos as attachments.
The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Birdlife Townsville.

CATTANA WETLANDS

So, you've travelled to Cairns, checked the tides, woken up early and taken yourself off for a stroll along The Esplanade.

With binoculars and camera in hand, you observe the Nordmann's Greenshank, the Asian Dowitcher and the Broad-billed Sandpiper along the way as well as the usual collection of shorebirds - Great Knots, Curlew Sandpipers, Godwits and Tattlers. It's been a great morning. Then, when the tide is too far out for good viewing, you wander over to the mangrove area and, fighting off the sandflies, you locate the Restless Flycatcher and the family of Mangrove Robins.



Common Greenshank

Where to go next? I would like to recommend that if you haven't been there yet (or even if you have but it's been a while) that you take the fifteen-minute drive north to visit Cattana Wetland, an 80.8 ha reserve near Smithfield.



Cattana Wetlands

Cattana Wetlands is on the traditional land of the Yirrganydji People who fished and hunted in the area. When settled by Europeans, it was previously used by the sugar cane industry and, at one stage, was quarried for sand. However, it has been revegetated and is now a reserve containing significant forests and has a large diversity of bird species and other wildlife.

Despite it being a bit too early in the afternoon for prime-time birding and having my visit cut short by the threat of a downpour, I still managed to see plenty of birds. Cattana Wetlands is an eBird Hotspot and 243 species of bird have been recorded in the reserve.

During my short time there I spotted quite a long list of birds of which the highlights were:

- A Black Bittern fishing on the edge of the island in the middle of Kingfisher Lake
- Several Orange-footed Scrubfowls scratching around on the lawns
- Black Butcherbirds calling from within the paperbark forest
- A Common Sandpiper foraging on the outer edge of Jabiru Lake
- A pair of Lovely Fairywren gleaning insects from the bark of small bush in Fairywren Corner



Black Bittern

As well as excellent birding, there are also excellent facilities including a modern, clean toilet block, well-maintained paths that are an easy walk, information boards (take a photo before you walk on so you can get back on track after chasing after that elusive bird), several viewing decks and bird hides and a raptor tower.

There are benches along the paths at regular intervals- a place to sit and take in the serenity. If, at the end of your walk, you want to stay for a self-catering morning tea or lunch, there's barbecue areas with facilities or, if you're like me and prefer to walk just that bit further so that someone else does the cooking, you can wander into the nearby coffee shop.



Lovely Fairy-wren

After the initial reclaiming of the land in 2009, the Cairns Council and the State Government later (2016) jointly funded the upgrading of the area to the wetlands reserve and the current facilities at a cost of \$3 million. The environment is maintained by a group of volunteers calling themselves the Cattana Wetlands Jabirus.

One can't help but wonder what an injection of that kind of money, motivation and effort might have the potential

to do for our own Town Common wetlands area. We can but dream.



Anne Lawrence

INTERESTING TRIP HOME

Recently Warren and I returned from a family visit in Canberra – our route would be determined by road closures due to flooding.

For bird watching the journey from Coonamble to Walgett on the Castlereagh Highway in north west NSW was exciting; the road was open to high clearance vehicles only as there was a lot of water up to 300mm deep across the road in many areas and we couldn't stop for very long as there was some traffic.



Cockatiel

We saw many birds including Black-tailed Native-Hen, hundreds of Pied Stilt and Whiskered Tern, also Glossy and Straw-necked Ibis, Little Black Cormorant, Australasian Grebe, White-faced and Pacific Heron, Black and Maned Duck, Grey Teal, Hardhead, Black and Black-shouldered and Whistling Kite, Little Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, White-winged Chough, Crested Pigeon, Emu, Galah, Fairy Martin, Kestrel, Welcome Swallow, Black Swan, Cockatiel, Pied Butcherbird, Budgerigar, Dusky Woodswallow, Hooded Robin and many others.

I can imagine travelling on this road at a different time would give a very different bird observation result as it is usually a dry country journey.

Pat Charlton

SURPRISE

Anne Lawrence and I headed out to White Mountains for the day on 25 January 2023. On the way we were a bit dismayed to see a Common Myna at Balfe's Creek. We were even more dismayed to see one at the Pentland Dam. Hopefully they are an anomaly and it isn't a sign of their spread out west.



The biggest surprise we got all day was at Sawpit Gully. We were having our lunch, sheltering amongst the trees almost on the edge of the Gully. We could hear an aircraft of some sort which didn't seem to be moving off. I stood up and stepped out from our sheltered spot and found myself face to face with the pilot of a helicopter. Not sure who got the biggest shock as I think I was a completely unexpected sight for the poor pilot. It turned out that it was a crew checking the power lines that stretch across the Gully.



We had been hoping for a bit of breeze to cool us down but we got a lot more than we had bargained on.

Janet Robino

WOODSTOCK 2023

I decided a trip to Woodstock to chase up some birds was a good idea, rain, hail or shine. I got lucky with the weather and only had a few sprinkles of rain during the trip. I admit I wasn't holding out much hope of seeing many birds, given the wet weather we had been having. I was certainly in for a surprise.



Squatter Pigeon

The trip there was uneventful, only a few raptors sighted. I pulled up at the first stop, just over the railway line on Gunnado Road. I could hear *Cisticola*'s but saw nothing. Not a Woodswallow, or Martin, or Finch, a tad disappointing I must say. I drove slowly up the road, still nothing. I pulled into the little dirt track down near the old Highway and I could hear some birds making a racket. They turned out to be two Channel-billed Cuckoos, waiting to be fed by an Australian Magpie; goodness they put up a lot of noise. That poor Magpie must have been exhausted. On that track there was a puddle with a lone Black-fronted Dotterel feeding along its edge.



Brolgas

I turned right onto the old highway and drove along slowly. There the birding took a turn for the best and I had a great morning along there. I won't bore you with exact sightings but they came thick and fast for a while. Some highlights were a large flock of Australian Magpies, personally I've never seen so many in a flock before. A

pair of Brolgas feeding beside the road made for some great photographs. A young Brolga was a very good photography subject too. A pair of Squatter Pigeons was lovely to see and photograph as well.



Red-backed Fairy-wren

I spent a good while on the old highway, stopping, walking, photographing and enjoying the numerous birds. Then I headed to Buck Road, nothing happening there. Then off to Wordsworth Park for a break. It had recently been mown so was lovely to see. I saw no frogs in the loo but a large gecko ran out of the toilet paper holder just to keep the wildlife sightings up.

I took a drive down Jones Road, just for a look and sighted a few more good birds. It is always lovely to see a Wedge-tailed Eagle sitting quietly in a tree.



Yellow-throated Miner

Just a heads up, there are a lot of big trucks working at the beginning of Jones Road. Pulling off and stopping on the road in that area is best avoided. The sides of the roads are very wet and have a good growth of long grass.

All up I counted 50 odd species of birds for the morning. It was fabulous and I thoroughly enjoyed my first trip to Woodstock for 2023.

Annette Sibson

CANE TOADS

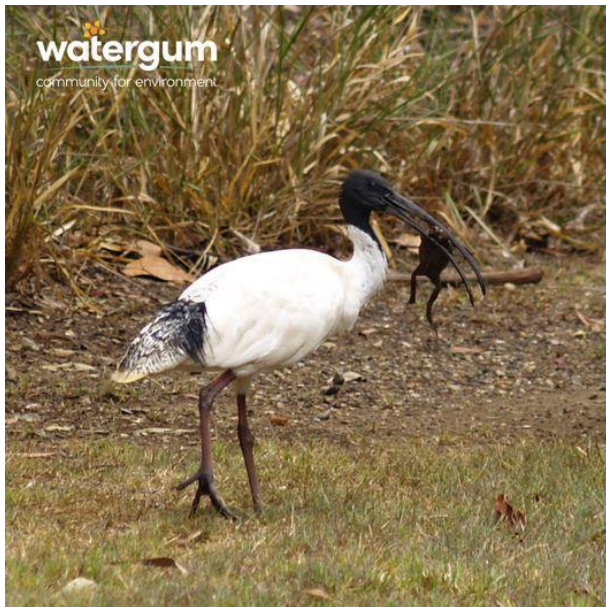
Are our native species learning how to deal with them?

Did you know that Ibis' have learned how to safely eat cane toads?

These underrated birds are a key player in the evolution of Australia's native species to coexist with and control the invasive cane toad.

When cane toads are threatened by predators, they excrete toxin from the paratoid glands on the back of their neck to poison their attacker and if they are stressed enough, they will empty the glands through this process.

Ibis have learned to use the cane toads' own defence strategy against them. Ibis will pick up cane toads and fling them about, causing them to become stressed and expel all their toxin. The birds then rinse the toads off in water, or wipe them in the wet grass to remove the poison, before swallowing them whole!



The 'stress and wash' method of eating cane toads has also recently been observed in Cattle egrets, Purple Swamphens and Moorhens.

We have already covered the Ibis and its ability to eat cane toads safely, but there are a variety of other species that have learned how to do this as well.

Top of the list is the Torresian Crow, which has an entirely different method of turning cane toads into food. These clever birds have learned to avoid the toads' toxin entirely, starting from the moment they pick them up.

To catch them, crows tend to pick up the toads by their brow or their legs, the least toxic parts of their bodies. They will then flip them onto their backs and reach down the toads' throat with their beak to pull out the contents of their stomach and feast on the insects within!

Crows will also eat the toads' tongues during this process, before moving onto their legs to consume the fleshy interior, all the while taking care to avoid the toxin filled paratoid glands.

There's even some suggestion that in some regions crows are also starting to target specific organs, strategically dissecting them from the body and consuming them, a method that is more commonly linked with Rakali, the Australian Water Rat.

As far as we know, it was crows who first developed this method of eating cane toads, however this same behaviour has also been observed in Kookaburras and some Birds of Prey species.



It's very encouraging to see so many native species learning how to coexist with cane toads. Please maintain your toad busting and tadpole trapping activities to keep numbers down until native species can control cane toad numbers by themselves in the years to come.

To see a full video of the 'flip and reach' method, Follow this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEpW4b8IOMw>

Watergum is a not-for-profit organisation and registered charity that helps the community engage in real, on-ground work to restore, maintain and protect the natural environment.

From the Australian Museum

Of the Australian animals that can safely kill and eat Cane Toads, some of the most interesting are snakes. The Keelback Snake (*Tropidonophis mairii*), a non-venomous species native to northern Australia, can eat Cane Toads without lethal effects, whereas many other snake species would be killed. The reason the Keelback can eat toads seems to be that its ancestors were some of the most recent snakes to arrive to Australia, having evolved in Asia. There are toads with similar toxins to those of the Cane Toad in Asia, and so the Keelback Snake has the evolutionary advantage of being 'pre-adapted' to life with toads.

Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) and Whistling Kites (*Haliastur spheurnus*) eat the tongues out of roadkill toads.



WARNING!

I was at my computer....umm....let's call it 'working'.....when my attention was grabbed by a loud ruckus being created by some Brown Honeyeaters out in the trees next to my back deck. Last time this happened, I found a Collared Sparrowhawk perched on my deck railing next to the water dish I leave out for the birds, so I grabbed my camera and went to investigate. At first glance, I couldn't see anything but the birds were really going off, flying in and out of the tree squawking angrily. Something was really upsetting them. On closer inspection, I found the source of their discontent. There was a large Carpet Python draped across several branches of the tree, just above their water dish and from the possum-sized bulge in its midriff, I'm guessing it had not long ago had lunch.



Up in the trees

It took two hours for the snake catcher, Jo, to coax the Carpet Python further along the row of trees and away from the house. Eventually it ran out of tall trees and came down low enough for Jo to catch it and wrestle it into the bag. I stood in the wings and cheered her on, giving an audible sigh of relief when she finally had it secured.



Jo estimated that it was 2.5m long.....personally, I thought it was much longer, 10-15m.....and weighed 6-7kg.

MORAL OF THE STORY: ALWAYS HEED THE CALLS OF THOSE LITTLE BROWN JOBS.

Anne Lawrence

BIRDING TO BLACKALL

On Sunday the 17th April, Beth and I set off for a quick trip out west to search for some of those special species which don't appear here on the coast.

While having lunch in Centenary Park in Charters Towers, we were entertained by a Pied Butcherbird and two Blue-faced Honeyeaters sharing the water from a dripping tap. Each waited patiently while another one was clutching the pipe and holding its beak under the drips. At the same time we were being serenaded by twenty or so Rainbow Lorikeets, feeding in the tree above us. They sat posing for a while, then some dropped to the ground to peck at specks of left-over biscuits.

We left them to it and headed to Pentland where we had booked in to the Caravan Park for the night. A late afternoon inspection of the dam wasn't disappointing, as there were Grey Teal, Wood Ducks, Black-fronted Dotterels, Black Ducks, Stilts, a White-faced Heron and a couple of Australasian Grebes enjoying the shallow water or standing along the far bank. Cumulus clouds and the afternoon sun presented us with a very pretty reflection on the dam and a couple of Bustards lurking in the long grass to the west of the water added to the pleasure.



Pentland Dam

The next morning, we stopped, of course, at the Quarry pits of the Burra Range where the Grevillea Decora was just coming into bloom. Only Brown Honeyeaters seemed to have got the message and there was a plethora of them, but one brave Singing Honeyeater also showed itself. The only other birds we managed to see were a Grey Butcherbird and a Striated Pardalote.

Continuing west, we stopped for smoko and a toilet visit at Torrens Creek and filled up with petrol. From there, it was south along the road to Aramac. There were more kilometres of bitumen since last year when we travelled that way in June. Lunch was partaken of at the only lunch stop along the way. One covered table and a toilet was the offering for comfort, and we were pleased that no one else occupied either. To add to the joy, the flies hadn't stopped by either, so lunch was enjoyed peacefully.

Onwards again to the Bowen Downs turn-off to Muttaborra and at first the rough and rocky state of the road worried us, but after a few kilometres, the road flattened out into two smooth black-soil tracks made by trucks. Quite effortless driving, except that we had to keep stopping to check out the birds which were flitting back and forth close to the sides of the road. I think we

checked each one of possibly a hundred birds, just in case one was different from the multitude of White-browed, Masked and Black-faced Wood Swallows.

Finally Muttaborra hove into view so we stopped at the Pub to book into our Motel. The Barman sent us off with instructions to phone the owner of said Motel, adding that her phone number was on the door. It wasn't! Fortunately, Beth had it on her phone. We rang and soon a lady appeared, directed us to a shed, and tried to accept our card. No internet came on after a 10 minute wait, so we paid by cash and moved in. Yes, quite comfortable and well set-up with crockery, cutlery and the usual toaster, jug, etc.

As it was reasonably early we drove around the fair city of Muttaborra to take in all the tourist sites. They have a number of barbed wire sculptures, a dam, a historic hospital and the wonderful, eye-catching new Muttaborra Information Centre. That treat we kept for the morning and headed to the Pub for a large beer and a delicious bush-pub meal.

Next morning, we walked across the road to the splendid Information Centre, which has the most marvellous walls



On the Road

made up of baseball sized rocks encased in cages and almost 6 metres high. The centre is open to the elements, a replica of the Muttaborrasaurus stood at one side in the morning sun and around the walls was a geological history as well as the history of that important discovery decades earlier. We were most impressed by the whole exhibition and advise you to visit it if you are birding in that area.

So it was on to Aramac and Barcaldine for lunch – not the tastiest pie I've ever bought from a bakery – then headed to Blackall. There is a sizable lagoon about 20 kms south, so we called there in case the Yellow-billed Spoonbill was visiting again as it was last year. No – a camper trailer was parked near that end of the lagoon, but in exchange, we found Yellow Thornbills and a busy Restless Flycatcher. At Blackall, we checked into our Motel, where Wendy and Roger, en route from Toowoomba to home, found us, as

planned. A pub-sized dinner was the next step before bed, after a very interesting and enjoyable day's driving.



Zebra Finches

We had to fill in time in Blackall before going out to stay with Roger's best mate on a sheep property 60 kms along the Isisford/Idalia Park road, so off to the Barcoo River to search for birds. That was a most rewarding morning, as in the knee-high grass and scrubby trees, we found several flocks of White-winged Fairy Wrens. Sadly, none was in colour, but the tails confirmed our naming. They had bred well after good rains about 3 or 4 weeks earlier. While chasing them, we saw seven Brown Quail scurrying between the clumps of grass and flocks of Zebra and Double-barred Finches. Across the road, were two Jacky Winters. A flock of Grey-crowned Babbler also made an appearance.



Spotted Bowerbird

Later, at the Sewerage works, we had just parked tentatively (wondering if we'd be caught trespassing there), when I looked up at two Swallows circling around overhead. Hoping they might be Fork-tailed Swifts or something equally pleasing, I managed to focus my binoculars on one for a while until I could study all its features. A strange bird – so a quick check in the book was needed to identity my "Lifer", which was a White-backed Swallow. Nothing else of interest was found on the sewerage ponds during our quick visit, so as Roger had said he'd seen a Spotted Bowerbird near the Hot Artesian Swimming pool, we drove around there and sure enough, one appeared and flapped around nearby for a while.

Further along the line of trees a Restless Flycatcher was happy to show off and pose for photos.

By then it was time to head for the property, which took us nearly 80 minutes to reach, as we had numerous birds to identify along the way, the best one being a Brown Songlark. That is downs country so lots of grass, a few shrubs and fewer scrubby trees. Our wonderful hosts greeted us and we were ushered to our bedrooms and shown through the beautifully restored old house. Rhonda fed us for the next day and a half, and a few bottles of beer and wine (which we had taken out), made their way onto the menu. The next day, we visited dams – 3 of them, all with abundant water from the rains 3 weeks earlier – and enjoyed the Red-winged Parrots (the common Parrot there), Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Butcherbirds, Budgies, Emus, Bustards, Cockatiels, Galahs, a Pallid Cuckoo, Singing Bushlark, Red-backed Kingfisher, Nankeen Night Herons, Brown Tree Creeper and a Common Bronzewing. Later, a flock of about 20 Grey-crowned Babbler in the trees in the house yard had me exclaiming in joy.

Next morning, we set off back to Blackall for smoko and I managed to overbalance backwards from the aluminium seat at the table, so that a slow-motion ½ somersault was performed, much to the alarm of all 4 of us. Fortunately, the brunt of the landing was taken on my derriere and it was not far to fall. The bruises came out later but I was tender for the next few days of sitting. Pity no one managed to video it. We called at Lara Wetlands on the way to Barcaldine. The Pink-eared Ducks, Black-tailed



Pink-eared Duck

Native-Hens, Red-kneed Dotterel and Tree Martins were there as usual, but we couldn't find the Tawny Frogmouths. On the road back to the Highway, we spotted a Hooded Robin and to cap it all off, at the Lagoon mentioned earlier, there was a flock of White-winged Choughs and a Rufous Whistler. Bingo!

Our next day took Beth and me from Barcaldine to Clermont. Along the last part of that drive and in the morning, with ripe millet crops adorning the roadsides, we enjoyed the hundreds of Cockatiels which in turn were enjoying the millet. Great to see so many had bred. Finally home the next day to unpack and revel in great memories of wonderful birding.

Elna Kerswell

SPECIAL TONGUES

I usually cringe when I hear people say that they're putting out birdseed 'to attract the local Rainbow Lorikeets to their yard' or see photos (usually on Facebook) of a bird feeder full of seed being eagerly attended by Rainbow Lorikeets. If the opportunity arises, I attempt to explain that while Rainbow Lorikeets out in the wild do eat some seed, they mostly forage on the flowers of shrubs or trees to harvest nectar and pollen as well as eating fruit and sometimes insects. Too much seed will permanently damage the bristles on the end of their tongue which they use for collecting the nectar.



The bristly tongue of a Rainbow Lorikeet.

Recently, I also posted this series of photos of a Rainbow Lorikeet's tongue (accompanied with a plea to put the seed away and grow native flowering trees instead) on the Australian Native Birds Facebook site and was astounded at the number of responses from people saying they didn't know this about the Rainbow Lorikeet. This was backed up by a wildlife carer saying that she often receives Rainbow Lorikeets into care with severely damaged bristles on their tongue.

Anne Lawrance

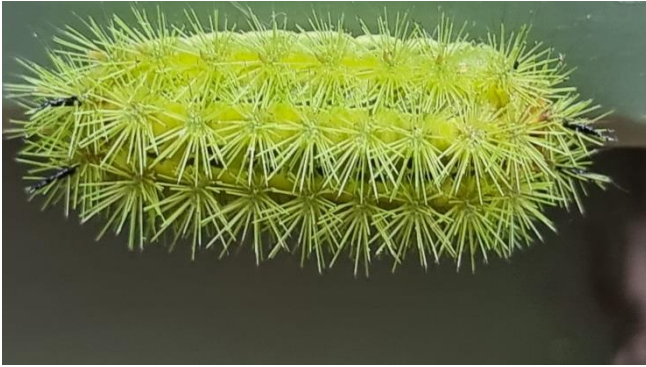
DANGER IN THE GARDEN

At the Jan meeting I spoke of a new and unwanted discovery in my garden. I had been tip pruning a lilly pillly type tree in my front garden when I was suddenly stung by something. This sudden burn/sting caused me to immediately drop the secateurs and rush upstairs. I ran my finger under the water – no help! Tried ice, no help either – then drenched it in vinegar – some relief...

The burning, sensation was to continue for 4 days!! According to the chemist I spoke with, it's a nerve toxin, not unlike a stinging tree. She could have offered cortisone cream...but not for me as I'd already put on the itchy-ese and apparently the cortisone cream over that would cause more pain.

During the four days I had tried all the various insect creams and took both Zertec each morning and Panadol each night. I found that by putting on some Itch-ese and then a small make up remover pad and a firm

bandage, so as to restrict movement, I could get some relief. The swelling also lasted four days .



Scopelodes species

Back to the culprit. I've been a gardener all my life and often took any caterpillars I found to school ... so this was something different. After the initial shock I returned to the tree and found what I believe was a Stinging Slug Caterpillar... Light green with spines all over its body. I managed to get it into a jar and it didn't seem to have the usual legs and claspers normally associated with caterpillars. Annette Sibson, after hearing my story, and checking out my photos, did some research. I'd thought it must be a Cup Moth of some sort. Annette's contacts thought it most likely to be one of the *Scopelodes* species, either *S. dinawa* or *S. intense*. Annette's contact thought the *S. dinawa* was most likely. I've never seen or felt one before.



Annette told me she had found one in December 2021 and a second one when she went looking on her Beach Cherry in January. Annette took a picture of hers and we could clearly see tiny legs at the front... both hers and mine seemed to pulsate to move, hence the 'slug' part of the name. Julia Hazel put both our pictures onto the "I naturalist" site and so far nothing new.

I kept the 'creature' in a container, and carefully, - with gloves on, fed it fresh leaves daily ..until it pupated. It's been over a month now and I'm still waiting as a photo of the moth will help with the identification.

Apparently its a native creature.. And just not that common.

Beth Snewin

THE SUMMER OF THE SUNBIRDS

In October 1994 a pair of Yellow-bellied Sunbirds became regular visitors to my 'outside area'. This is a covered area between the house and the carport. It is enclosed with wrought iron gates at the front. I spend as much time as possible there. It is a great place to have breakfast and fortify oneself for a day at the office. The Sunbirds spent at least a week casing the place. They tried every perch and sometimes just seemed to be playing around on the various windchimes, etc. One day I noticed a pile of debris beneath a string of bells – a metre of cord with five brass bells at regular intervals. Each day the pile of debris grew and I assumed that the pair were inexperienced birds practising nest-building. On about the eighth day of effort a nest finally started to take shape, hanging from the lowest bell. The pair soon settled down to incubating.

I was concerned that the nest was very low and might be a bit too tempting for the grandchildren who often visit. With the birds watching from about a metre away, I hooked the cord up to raise the nest out of little arms' reach. The female calmly returned to the nest as soon as I'd finished and continued as if nothing had happened.

My presence and frequent moving around near and under the nest did not disturb the birds at all. It was almost like I was the one being observed. About two weeks into the incubating, at about eight o'clock one evening, I was sitting in the lounge sewing on buttons. I heard a commotion followed by the frantic flapping of the female. She was beating herself against the flyscreen door. A neighbour's cat (of, course, there are several of them roaming free) had used my car as a springboard to launch itself at the nest. The body of the nest was torn from the support and lay on the ground. The one egg was still intact.

I still had the needle and thread in my hand and without thinking I picked up the nest and, standing on a chair, stitched the nest back together. I then caught the still frantic little mother-to-be and held her cupped in my hand until she settled – about an hour all up. When released she perched a couple of metres away from the nest. The male was nowhere to be seen.

In the morning I found the female back on the nest. What a sorry sight it was! My bright blue cobbling stitches were a far cry from the neat and intricate woven cobwebs, twigs and leaves of the original.

Over the next few days I shifted the position of the nest to move it away from any possible launching pads for more attacks. Luckily, there was a row of hooks about 30cm apart – so it was one hook per day until the nest was about a metre and a half from the front gates. Again, during all this interference, the birds watched and waited patiently and then returned to their job of incubating. Of course, my car had to adjust to a bit of outdoor living on the roadside.

I soon learnt that my stitches were not strong enough. On three occasions I needed to re-do my handiwork. The nest was now held up by a very colourful array of threads.

The egg eventually hatched. More problems! As the chick grew, the weight increase took a toll on the battered nest. The final solution was an onion bag. With a slit in the front, it made a strong, if somewhat odd, cocoon for the nest. The whole thing was certainly a sight for sore eyes by this stage but nothing seemed to disturb the birds. The big day arrived for the little one to leave the nest. As soon as I settled down for breakfast, the parent birds chirped and flew around me until I looked towards the nest. As soon as I was watching, the parents flew to the nest and seemed to encourage the chick to take flight. I like to think this big event was held up so that I could witness the first flight as my reward for being their protector.

Before I had a chance to remove the old nest, two more eggs were laid. Both duly hatched. I was again 'invited' to watch the home-leaving.



A lonely little Sunbird in an onion bag

The drama didn't end there. One chick flew straight to the ground. It was still on the ground an hour later when I had to leave for work. I know it had little chance of survival with all the cats about. I picked it up and returned it to the comparative safety of the nest. The female immediately fed it. All were still playing happy family that afternoon. The next morning the chick made a successful departure.

The sunbirds continue to visit but have not attempted to nest in this area again.

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PS. My apologies for the very poor photography. This was the days of printed photos and before digital cameras. I have learnt a lot more about taking a decent photo since then thanks to the Birdlife Townsville Photography Group.

PPS. And of course, the birds are now known as Olive-backed Sunbirds.

Janet Robino

AT THE CEMETERY

Birders tend to spend their time in interesting places like cemeteries and sewage ponds, finding entertainment that leave normal folk wondering.

The Belgian Gardens cemetery turns up some good birds from time to time, mostly in the Rowes Bay Lagoon to the side.



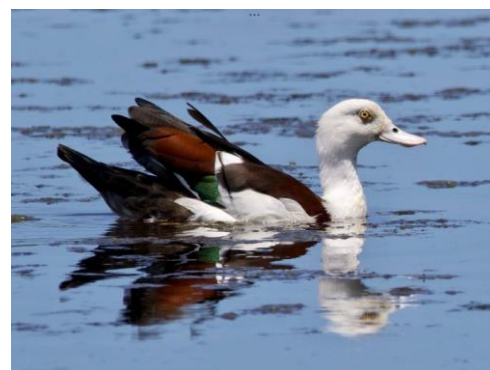
Pied Heron

Len Ezzy



Pied Heron

Enrico Roche



Radjah Shelduck

Brin Crowther

On the grassy side, you can find Australasian Pipits, Zebra Finches, Kooka burras, Cuckoo-shrikes and Bush Stone-curlews, to name a few. The rarer birds are usually in the lagoon.

So far this year we have had Pied Herons, Radjah Shelducks, Marsh Sandpipers and Black-necked Storks as well as the more often seen species. It is well worth a visit.

Annette Sutton

QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Anne Lawrance	220	8/08/2023
Janet Robino	226	14/08/2023
Ian Leach	150	30/05/2023
Pat Charlton	147	27/05/2023
Wendy Kaus	139	19/05/2023
Warren Charlton	135	15/05/2023
Beth Snewin	131	11/05/2023
Jill Staunton	130	10/05/2023
Mark Horvath	126	6/05/2023
Elna Kerswell	112	22/04/2023
Wal Threlfall	88	29/03/2023
Annette Sutton	81	22/03/2023
Brigid Glass	60	1/03/2023
Kathleen Vowles	52	21/02/2023
Julie Goldsbury	45	14/02/2023
Bill Hewitt	12	12/01/2023



Black-necked Stork

Annette Sutton



Australian Pelican

Annette Sutton

At the Cemetery



Zebra Finch

Enrico Roche



Blue-winged Kookaburra

Annette Sutton