

The Drongo

Number 173 February 2024



Enrico Roche

AGM

Western
Australia

Bat's Wing
Tree



FROM THE PRESIDENT

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024

Once again, I start this report with a plea to each and every member and supporter to consider what they can do to ensure the survival of Birdlife Townsville. Many members on the current Committee have been there for many, many years and are at risk of burn out. The same applies to our volunteers who participate in our education and community awareness programs, and organize and lead our outings and surveys.

At the risk of sounding repetitive and like a very broken record, I would remind everyone to check their membership status by contacting Birdlife Australia. Email: support@birdlife.org.au or Phone 03 93470757 (ext 4). There is still the ongoing issue with Birdlife Townsville getting current membership information from National Office. In fact, we are experiencing difficulty getting any responses to emails and phone calls to National Office. If you are not receiving emails from Birdlife Townsville but wish to do so, please send an email to contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au so you can be added to our contact list.

I am writing this as we await the arrival of Cyclone Kirrily. All Birdlife Townsville activities will be cancelled until the emergency is well and truly over. A good time to remind everyone to check the Activity Page on the website. Of course, in the event that there is power or internet issues that make it impossible for Wal to update the website, it is expected that good old common sense will be used. If there is any severe weather warnings or flooding in our local area, it can be assumed that all our activities will be cancelled.

Please remember to register for outings and meetings. Last minute cancellations may be necessary. If registered, you can be notified by text or email. It is important for meetings for catering purposes.

'The Quest' was well supported in 2023. The winner will be announced at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). As this is our only fund-raising activity for our Branch, we need as many members as possible to participate. For more information on how the Quest works, check out the Birdlife Townsville website.

The Photography Group is still well attended. All members are welcome to come along and enjoy looking at some great photos of birds, even if you are not into taking photos yourself.

The Townsville City Council (TCC) has introduced a fee for the use of the Soundshell as a venue for our meetings. Fortunately, we were granted a waiver of the fees. This is good news, but just one more job for the committee as the application for the waiver has to be submitted every 6 months. Attendance at the monthly meeting has been declining so we will have to assess whether the meetings are sustainable. We have always had quality guest speakers but it may be difficult to attract them if the attendance numbers are so low. We have also been successful in getting a grant from TCC to cover the cost of our storage room at Senior Citizens.

In February Wal Threlfall and I attended a workshop on the Yellow Crazy Ant which are fairly widespread in some Townsville Suburbs. Birdlife Townsville members are encouraged to join the 'Invasive Species Council Bug Hunt' project. Download the iNaturalist app and use it to report any sightings. In March a small group of members went on a field trip to have a practical lesson. For more information check the Townsville City Council website or www.invasives.org.au.

Also in February, several members made a day trip down to Mt Alma at Inkermann to conduct a survey for NQ Dry Tropics. We were then treated to a pretty amazing morning tea at the Inkermann Hotel. We also managed to do a talk at the Museum of Tropical Queensland.

In March Annette Sibson and I attended both Junior Grammar Schools as part of our School Education Program. Several members attended the Paluma KBA survey in April.

In May Birdlife Townsville organized the showing of the film 'Flyways' at the Warrina Cinema. The Cinema staff were very happy with the numbers who attended - around 100. This was planned to support the visit to Townsville of Milly Formby who was flying around Australia in her home-built Ultralight Aircraft to promote the plight of Migratory Shorebirds. Milly also visited Wongaloo with Norm Rains.

At the August meeting, I had the honour of presenting Annette Sutton with a Birdlife Australia Distinguished Service Award. As well as being the editor of the Drongo for many years, Annette has been involved in our School Education and Community Awareness Programs and has served as a Committee Member.

August also saw several Birdlife Townsville members take part in the Paluma Range citizen science project which consisted of two parts - a Southern Cassowary Survey and a survey as part of 'Birds with Altitude project'. There were 42 participants from various areas of Queensland and New South Wales.

In September we attended St Benedicts for the Eco Warriors day (for kids from several schools in the Townsville Diocese), and then two days later for the St Benedicts Ecofest. These days are a bit exhausting but also exciting when the kids show so much enthusiasm for learning all about birds.

October was the usual busy, busy month. During Bird Week several members attended the Port Authority Revegetation Area Tree Planting and helped the staff with their Aussie Bird Count (ABC). There was a talk at U3A about the Black-throated Finch. Displays promoting the ABC were installed at the three City Libraries. Wal Threlfall and I participated in a panel discussion on Feathers and Flowers organized by the Townsville City Council (TCC). It was a great experience. Twenty-one people had registered but on the day just over forty attended. I also took part in the Library Kids Storytelling session. All this was to support the TCC who has partnered with Birdlife Australia to promote the ABC.

Then of course, many members took part in the Tony Grice Memorial Black-throated Finch Waterhole Survey.

Apart from all this, Birdlife Townsville has managed to maintain a very busy program of outings for members and visitors as per the Activities page on the website, so we can all still enjoy our local birds.

At the eleventh hour, the plans for the Christmas Party were thrown into disarray with the sudden closure of our booked venue. Thanks to Wal Threlfall's persistence, those who had registered to attend the Christmas Party were able to enjoy a lunchtime get-together at the re-vamped Sun Hotel.

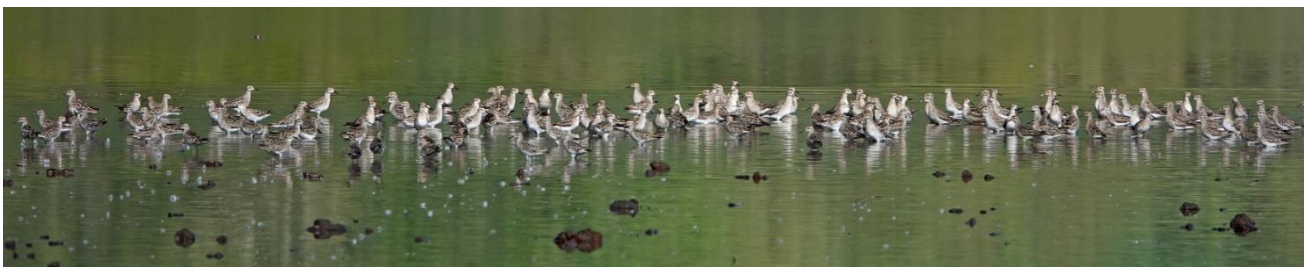
I would like to extend a big thank you to:

- 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

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

A special thank you to Secretary Wal Threlfall who keeps us all on track.

Janet Robino



Sharp-tailed Sandpipers by Janet Robino

YOUR 2024 COMMITTEE

President: Janet Robino	Annette Sibson	Brigid Glass
Secretary: Wal Threlfall	Mark Horvath	Claire Willard
Treasurer: Nina Doyle	Warren Charlton	Mike Grigg

Newsletter Editor Annette Sibson annette.sibson@bigpond.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.

WEST AUSTRALIAN TRIP

In September, Beth, Wendy and Roger persuaded me to accompany them to W.A. to look for birds, wildflowers and all the other wonderful attractions to be found in the south west corner of that State. Our date of arrival coincided with the school holidays, which made finding suitable accommodation a bit tricky, but we had wisely booked most nights way back in July. It did mean that there were many families haunting the main tourist areas, but we didn't really see any keen birders anywhere, which was a bit strange, as in spring, all the trees were in full bloom and gardens in parks, along the streets and in private gardens were a picture of colour - particularly the bright red Callistemon that were more vivid and had larger blooms than any I've seen in Queensland. These, of course, featured various Honeyeaters, especially the New Holland, Singing, the Red Wattlebird and Brown Honeyeaters. Beth and I spent our first day at the Perth Zoo, while Wendy and Roger went on a birding tour that later proved useful in leading us to a couple of great birding places.



New Holland Honeyeater by Ray Sutton

On the way south to Albany, we managed to see Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos, Mistletoebirds, an Inland Thornbill, some Emus, Black-fronted Dotterels, Ravens, Striated Pardalote, Wood Ducks and the usual Willy Wagtails. White-backed Magpies and Magpie Larks were plentiful, while the Twenty-eight Ringneck Parrots were feeding along the roadside verges. On a small dam, there were Grey Teal, Australasian Grebes and Australasian Shovelers, which later appeared in profusion on some wetlands. Our most exciting find was in Cranbrook's little roadside park where we stopped for our afternoon cuppa. The flowering gums were alive with parrots. Rainbow Lorikeets and Ringnecks attracted our attention, then Wendy spied a Purple-crowned Lorikeet. There was a small flock of them feeding noisily as they flitted about. To say the least, we were delighted and continued looking, exclaiming and admiring them all. What sort of luck was that? A lifer - and a beautiful one at that.

After a good night's sleep in our comfortable accommodation in Albany, we drove east to Cheyne's Beach, in hopeful search for a Noisy Scrub-bird. No - we didn't find any of those, but on a walk up the sand-dune

near the caravan park, with stunning banksias and grevilleas in full flower bordering the narrow track, there were others of interest. In the next hour we saw - Common Bronzewing, White-winged Triller, White-breasted Robin, Silvereye, Fairy Martin, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Grey Fantail, New Holland Honeyeater, Whistling Kite, Osprey and then - Red-capped Parrots. Another lifer. In the afternoon, we inspected the Amity, a ship which took the first settlers to that area, then drove up Mt Clarence where we paid homage to our Anzacs and Padre White, who instigated the idea of remembering the diggers on the 25th April, with a dawn service. Padre White is buried in the Herberton Cemetery and there is a wonderful gallery also in that cemetery, showing the historic highlights of World War 1. A visit there would be of great interest to you all.

The next morning we headed to Steppings Lagoon in search of Musk Ducks and Blue-billed Ducks as well as the little bush birds which live in the Melaleucas surrounding the walking track. There were so many enormous bull-rushes that it was difficult to see the water, but in one small back-water, a Blue-billed Duck and a Chestnut Teal gave us easy views. Far out in the lake was a Musk Duck, swans, coots and pelicans. A Sea-Eagle flew overhead, plus a Whistling Kite. In the trees bordering the muddy walk, an Inland Thornbill, Grey Fantails and New Holland Honeyeaters were the only bush birds seen, so we abandoned the search (my knees told me it was time to turn back) and headed to a beach for our morning tea. After exploring the town, we headed for Whale World to rekindle our knowledge of the local whaling industry which ended in the 1980s. From there, it was on through Denmark for a food shop before searching for our Airbnb accommodation in a huge house in the bush. Flowering plants and birds were abundant in the surrounding gardens, but best of all were the Western Rosellas which were feeding busily on the lawn. A Flame Robin, Western Golden Whistler, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and New Hollands also graced the area. Dragging ourselves away from that little paradise, we headed to the Valley of the Giants (Tingle country) to enjoy once again those spectacular trees, one of which I had reversed my car into its huge hollow, in January, 1972, on our first visit to Western Australia. At that time, there were still 340 MILES of bull-dust and pot holes to negotiate. Hundreds of tourists, mostly families, wandered happily along the wooden board-walks taking photos and enjoying the magnificence of nature.



Striated Pardalote by Annette Sutton

The next day, we boarded Gary's tour of the Walpole Inlet for his entertaining and knowledgeable history of the Inlet. His own family had been part of that story for eight generations. Laughter and orange tea cake with thermos-hot coffee at a little jetty (in a shower of rain) on the opposite side of the Inlet, were the order of the day. If you ever go to Walpole, do take Gary's tour. It is a most enjoyable experience indeed. I'll also mention the seventeen Fairy Terns, Crested and Caspian Terns, Great Cormorants and Pied Oyster Catchers on a nearby sandbank, with a Sea Eagle near its nest.

That night and next day, three storms made their presence felt and at one stage we had small hail stones gracing our windscreen as we headed to Pemberton. Manjimup with its huge Karris (the climbing trees were closed for the day because of the strong winds, so we weren't allowed to climb either of them – woe. In six visits, I've successfully avoided that "pleasure".) Did I mention that it was cold, wet and windy? Often we huddled for warmth, when having our wayside coffees in parks, but the sheer beauty of the whole area makes the shivering worthwhile. At our accommodation, Red-winged Fairy-wrens were flitting about in the garden just outside our kitchen window. Easy sighting indeed. Next day, we drove to the west coast to look for Rock Parrots. At our first port of call, Hamelin Bay, after searching along the edges of the sand dunes near the beach without success, Roger and I headed back to the car park with Beth not far behind. Suddenly she yelled and pointed. About 6 metres from us, were seven Rock Parrots sitting at the top of a small tree. Shortly, five of them flew to the ground at the edge of the car park to feed on the herbage that was flowering there. We sneaked closer and they totally ignored our presence. One sat guard at the top of the tree the whole time. Wendy eventually arrived after Beth yelled and gestured furiously for some time, so it was a great thrill for us all. On the way out to Cape Leeuwin lighthouse, we scored with a Sooty Oystercatcher, two Ruddy Turnstones, one Red-capped Plover, and another Rock Parrot.



Baudin's Black-Cockatoo (male & female) by John Anderson

Next day, at the Margaret River Berry Farm, after enjoying their delicious pancakes with berry sauce and ice-cream, we were able to see numerous Splendid Fairy-wrens and then a Red-eared Firetail, which seemed to be alone, while a Gilbert's Honeyeater fed in the nearby flowering gum trees. The chocolate shop there is also a great attraction.

Later, at one of the beaches, a White-browed Scrubwren made a couple of brief appearances. As well as birds from various coastal lookouts, we were also pleased to see Hump-backed Whales migrating south, well out to sea. While meandering up the coast from Augusta to Busselton, we managed to have several sightings of Baudin's and Carnaby's Cockatoos. Very tricky identifications necessary but they were close up and ground feeding sometimes. Quite a number of Emus were also sighted in the lush paddocks as we drove from place to place. Square-tailed Kites gave us a couple of fly-pasts and Wood Ducks were plentiful.



Baudin's Black-Cockatoo (male & female) by John Anderson

I can recommend Bibra Lake, close to Fremantle, as an excellent water-bird viewing place. We stood for hours watching the antics of Musk Ducks uttering a loud "plonk" and swiping their tails up, Blue-billed Ducks, Australian Shelducks and the wonderful spectacle of forty-two Hoary-headed Grebes sailing majestically past. Beth and I visited the Lake again the next day while Wendy and Roger did the Rottnest Island tour. There were five pairs of Striated Pardalotes nesting in the hollows of one gum tree, all twit-twitting loudly as they flitted about among the branches. Almost equal to that Lake is Herdsman Lake in the north of Perth. It also boasts a wonderful walkway through a melaleuca swamp where two families of Pink-eared Ducks were herding a number of chicks and two Hoary-headed Grebes were nesting right beside the boardwalk. Those two Lakes are a MUST if you go birding in Western Australia.

The housing developments along the coast to the north of Perth, with so much clearing of the trees and shrubs, is quite horrifying. The clearing of huge swathes of land for the homes and shops, the extension of the high-speed railway line and a freeway, left us gasping. Apparently it is becoming the "go-to" home for the FIFO miners in the north. Money talks.

Our three wonderful weeks of enjoying the delightful sights of south west Western Australia - and chasing those very different bird species from our North Queensland ones, finally came to an end as we headed for the Perth airport to wait for our flight to Cairns. By the end, we had seen at least 112 species and were well satisfied with the adventure and fun of the chase - successful birding indeed

Elna Kerswell

BAT'S WING CORAL TREE

For me, a very special bird-attracting plant

Around ten years ago, I planted a heap of native trees on my block after removing a small mango orchard established way back in 1977 when I first moved to Alligator Creek. Among the different species I selected for my re-veg project were a couple of Bat's-wing Coral Trees, an Australian native species of the *Fabaceae* family that does well in our area and which survives well locally in the dry months when initially well established. This plant's scientific name *erythrina vespertilio* is derived from Greek *erythros*, 'red', (coral?) referring to the colour of the flowers, and Latin *vespertina*, 'a bat', referring to the unique 'bat-in-flight' shape of the leaves.

This species is classed as a small tree, 6-10 m high with an open somewhat straggly form. The attractive cream-coloured corky trunk is deeply furrowed and thorny, as are the older branches. My trees usually commence flowering in mid to late September and continue through till early November, the heaviest coverage occurring around mid-October.



I regard this tree as a 'special tree' because, in spite of its thorniness, it has highly desirable features that suit my main interests - Australian native plants, birdwatching and bird photography. For me, the main attributes of this plant are:

- It is an Australian native species which does well in a wide range of local soils and sites, however it does best if not crowded by other plants and not subject to continually wet feet.
- It is not a 'weedy' species in that rarely are there any self-sown seedlings after a flowering season, in spite of the tree producing viable seeds.
- Being an open form deciduous type, which produces showy red flowers in long terminal racemes, the plant is an ideal species to attract a range of birds and insects, both of which feed on pollen and nectar, and in some cases, the birds feasting on insects as well.

The bird species that visited my Bat's Wing Coral trees in 2023 included Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet,

Horn-billed Friarbird, Little Friarbird, Noisy Friarbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, White-throated Honeyeater, Yellow Honeyeater, Dusky Honeyeater, Lewin's Honeyeater, Olive-backed Sunbird, Spangled Drongo, Varied Triller and Grey Fantail. On some days during the heaviest flowering period, I managed to capture images of five or six of these visitors.



Obviously, this is not a tree for a small garden space, especially for families with active children. As I have neither of these restrictions I intend to 'dot' a few more of these 'special' trees in safe spaces on the block in the next year or so.

Norm Rains

WONGALOO

Six intrepid souls braved the heatwave conditions on 5th January to do the Wongaloo Survey. We all expected mosquitoes to be an issue in the Rainforest area, but did not really expect to be swarmed by them. It was certainly the worst I've seen them. Unfortunately, every single mosquito seemed to follow us the whole way!

The water level was well below capacity and as we expected, it was a very hot morning. A lot of the usual birds we see there were not around and those present were not in the usual big numbers.

However, there were roughly eight hundred Grey Teal. But, best of all was the flock of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, some of them feeding within a few metres of us and completely ignoring our presence. We estimated the number at four hundred. I have never seen that many 'Sharpies' in one spot. It more than made up for the discomfort of the heat...and the mosquitoes!

Janet Robino



Grey Teal

CHRISTMAS TRIP

Just before Christmas we set off for Brisbane to spend the festive season with our son and his family. We stayed in a nice little flat in Pullenvale, which is quite rural.

On the way down we called in at Armstrong Beach, just south of Sarina. There is a mangrove creek and the house on the corner always has a few Wandering Whistling-Ducks and Radjah Shelducks and sure enough, they were there. We dipped on the Mangrove Honeyeater but, while I was talking to the residents, Ray spotted an Orange-footed Scrubfowl scurrying across to the mound, a huge construction on the edge of the bush. The men at the house said it had originally belonged to a Brush Turkey.

We stayed on the Boyne River and enjoyed the evening breezes watching a few Noisy Miners, some Pale-headed Rosellas and an Osprey on a high roost, enjoying the late afternoon sun. The bonus was the next morning when a bunch of Grey-crowned Babblers came to say good-bye.

We didn't notice a lot of birds on the way. Even Magpie-larks were in short supply.



We know where Bell Miners hang out near Pullenvale so we went looking for them and after our last visit, five or six years ago, they were in almost the same spot. Looking for them is the key. They were deafening but we could not spot them in all the foliage so we gave up. Next day we went back and one hopped out onto an open branch for a few seconds and I managed to get a photo. We could see them flying in and out but never again in the open.

Summer storms were moving in and we were afraid that we might get stuck in a hailstone attack. We drove up to Mt. Glorious and about four kilometres from the top, a big storm broke. We pulled up into a farm driveway and I was afraid of being parked under trees but we didn't have much choice. The wind was very strong. Next thing, crack, crack, crack – hail hitting the car. Luckily we must have been on the edge of the storm as we only got about two dozen hits and they were no bigger than marbles. When we finally got to the café at the top, we discovered that they had been hammered by hail. All we found was one very bedraggled Lewin's Honeyeater.

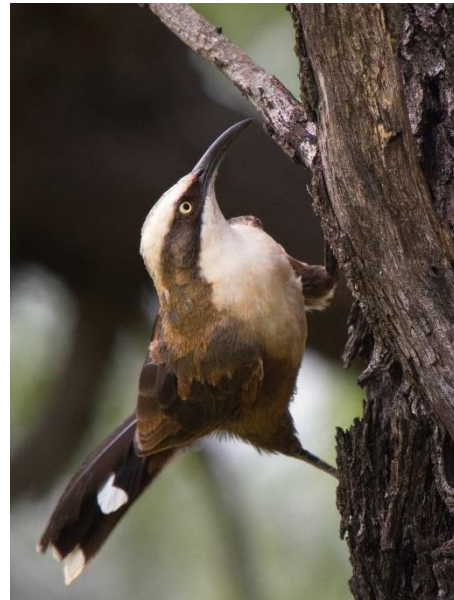
The best sighting was a White-headed Pigeon. We saw two in separate spots in Fig Tree Pocket. The King

Parrots, which always visit our son's house, refused to play ball but of course, they turned up the day after we left.



We always like to spend a day in the Bunya Mountains but, for whatever reason, we couldn't find much more than crows and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. An almighty storm broke just as we were leaving so we retreated to the café and had a coffee. No hail this time but horizontal rain in waves. As we left we spotted, very briefly, a couple of female Satin Bowerbirds and a few Pied Currawongs. On the way down, we had to negotiate trees that had fallen across the road. Our reward was a Wonga Pigeon.

Hood's Lagoon in Clermont was the highlight of the trip home. A lone Grey-crowned Babbler showed up along with various waterbirds and a heap of Little Corellas.



The most notable thing about our trip was how few birds we saw in comparison to other years. Who knows?

Annette Sutton

CAREFULLY AND SLOWLY

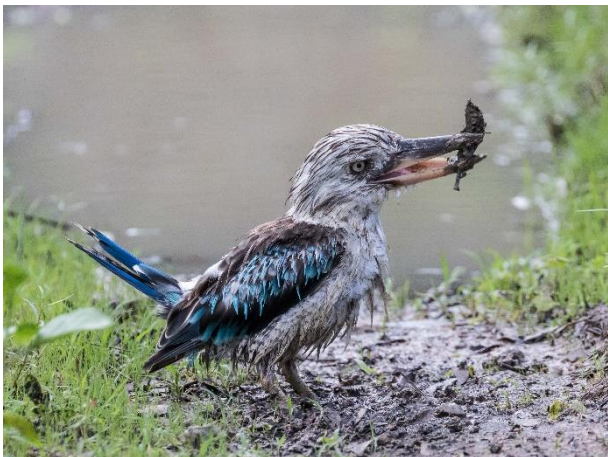
Birding with an injury (knee/hip) is no fun, but I'm determined to do what I can. Over the Christmas/New year break I spent some time up at Toomulla. Thankfully the area out behind our hut is relatively flat ground so I'm able to wander about there freely.

Not long after we arrived, I wandered out just past our back gate to see if there was any water lying around and if there was any bird activity. I was lucky enough to spot a couple of Blue-winged Kookaburras, one of which was busy preening and looked as though it had been bathing.

I went back and got my camera, hoping to get a few close ups. Well, what I got was fabulous. There was a young female Kookaburra that proceeded to have a bath while I busily pumped the shutter. It was great to see how she threw herself into the water time and again. (The water was a muddy puddle in an old wheel track.)



All up there were three kookaburras in the group, two males and a young female, judging by the feathering and eye colour of the birds. One male was quite active and kept dropping to the ground from his perch and attacking the mud around the puddle, bring up bits of mud, leaves etc. I guess there was something there that he just couldn't get to. It was interesting behaviour to watch and yes, photograph. This particular male was very muddy around his belly feathers.



The other male had bathed earlier and was busy preening not too far away. I noticed that he had his back towards the sun and drooped his wings to facilitate drying.

I ended up sitting on the ground and spending quite a bit of time with the three birds. As long as I was quiet, they seemed quite happy to have me there. I got some great close ups of the young female, she came quite close to check me out.

Out of interest, I had spotted what looked like a rocket frog in another puddle of water on the same track, it was lucky the kookaburras didn't spot it.

It was a great session and I got some fabulous shots, I ended up leaving them to it and headed back inside to the cool.

Annette Sibson

BROWN GOSHAWK

This Brown Goshawk was enjoying a spot of sun-bathing in the back yard. It then very indelicately 'hacked up' a pellet.

Janet Robino



TWO SPECIES AT ANDERSON GARDENS

I always enjoy my trips to Anderson Gardens, one of Townsville's popular suburban green spaces and home to a large range of vegetation. Both Australian native dry-tropics species as well as plants imported from other similar nearby global regions in this climate belt. The diverse plant life, which includes a range of well-developed tall trees, smaller trees and shrubs, extensive lawns and water plants in two artificial ponds. These with other wetland species found in the natural stormwater drainage line along the northern border of the park, provide a variety of habitats for the 132 species of birds that have been recorded here since 2009. The complete list is available on the [eremaea ebird internet site](#).

This is an amazing number, given that the park shares its borders with suburban housing, schools and recreation areas, and during daylight hours a range of dog-walkers, picnickers and motor vehicles.

While I have not seen all the recorded species at Anderson Park, I am able to claim approximately 125 birds, sighted at this great birding spot. It is certainly not my intention to talk about all of them in this article, but rather to highlight two of the more secretive ones that I have photographed here in the last few months. These are the Nankeen Night-Heron and the Striated Heron.



The Nankeen Night-Heron. In late September 2023, I first noticed an immature bird as it took refuge in a *Leichhardt* tree in the drainage line on the north boundary of the park, about one hundred metres from the gate. It had obviously been disturbed from a nearby location, as at the time it was being hotly pursued by a rather raucous Laughing Kookaburra. I parked in the first car-park on the left and wandered down, camera in hand, to where the bird had disappeared into the tree. After a few moments the bird showed itself, rather nervously, however I did manage a couple of shots before it flew off much further down the drainage line with a couple of Magpie Larks in hot pursuit. I didn't bother to follow.

A few weeks later, in the first week of November, I managed a few shots of another immature specimen in the trees on the southern side of the park near the Wellington Street entrance. Possibly the same bird. Nearly a month after that encounter I managed a shot of an adult bird in that same location. Since that time, I

have visited the park on quite a few occasions but have never been lucky enough to find the bird/s again.



The Striated Heron. I have seen an immature Striated Heron on several occasions in the park, on the mound at the northern end of the largest pond near the filtration system, and on occasions, an adult bird as well. The birds have always been skittish and I have never really been able to capture a 'keeper image' of one until recently. I had a remarkable encounter with an adult male at the southern end of the smallest of the two ponds just a few weeks ago, on 29 December 2023. The bird was hunting along the concrete coaming of the pond and was so absorbed in this activity that it completely ignored my presence. I managed to capture over one hundred images of the bird in different poses, over a period of several minutes and was very happy with the results. The only thing wrong was the actual site which was 'unnatural' because of the constructed concrete coaming.

I went back a few days later, on the 2 January 2024 but there was no sign of the bird at that spot. Why would there be? I asked myself --- silly me! I then wandered over to the larger pond where an adult Striated Heron was in hunting mode on the edge of the Lotus patch. The bird was clinging to a leaf-stalk, which was swaying in the wind, but I managed to get a few shots away of the bird's activity in a natural setting. I smiled smugly about those shots at the time.



I shall continue my visits to Anderson Gardens into the future. It is an excellent birding spot and a nice place to sit in the shade on a hot day watching the world go by.

Norm Rains

SWEARING PARROTS

Five parrots at a wildlife park in Lincolnshire have been removed from public display after they started swearing at visitors.

The African grey parrots were adopted by the Lincolnshire Wildlife Park in Friskney in August 2020 and placed in quarantine together.

However, after being moved into the main outdoor aviaries the birds started ruffling a few feathers with their somewhat choice language.

They have now been moved into different colonies away from delicate ears.

The African grey parrots were adopted by the Lincolnshire Wildlife Park in Friskney in August and placed in quarantine together

Jess Newton said it was very entertaining working with the birds when they first arrived.

However, she said it was hoped they would "kick the habit" when they were put outside.

Sadly, this did not quite go to plan, park chief executive Steve Nichols said.

The parrots "swear to trigger reaction or a response" so if people look shocked or laugh, it just encourages them to do it more, he said.

"With the five, one would swear and another would laugh and that would carry on," he said.

Park officials said people laughing when they swore had encouraged them to do it more

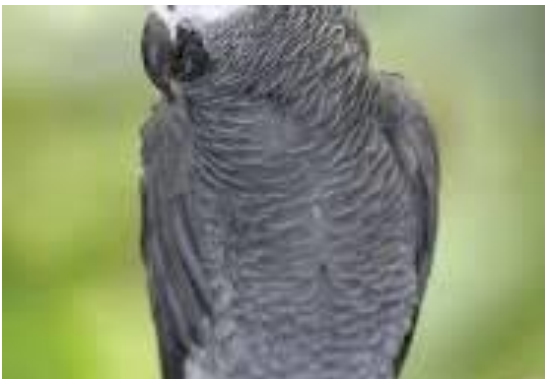
"Some visitors found it funny but with kids visiting at weekends, we decided to move them.

"I'm hoping they learn different words within colonies - but if they teach the others bad language and I end up with 250 swearing birds, I don't know what we'll do," he added.

The birds are not the first at the park to cause a stir.

The park is also home to Chico, who became an internet sensation with his rendition of Beyonce's 'If I Were a Boy' Chico went viral on social media with his version of Beyonce's 'If I Were a Boy'. He now has his own Instagram page.

BBC News



PALM COCKATOO

Australian National University researchers find 'master sculptor' in drumming Palm Cockatoo

ABC Far North By Kristy Sexton-McGrath

A rare and spectacular cockatoo known as the Ringo Starr of the bird world also has its own sense of creative style, new research has found.

Key points:

- The Palm Cockatoo is extremely rare and is the only bird in the world that uses a tool musically
- A new study has been examining the drumstick-like tools the birds fashion from wood and seed pods
- Research finds the birds methodically design and decorate drumsticks

The Palm Cockatoo is only found at the top of Cape York in Far North Queensland and drums on trees by fashioning its own musical instruments from wood and seed pods in a bid to attract potential mates or mark its territory.

A study led by the Australian National University has shown another side to the parrots, finding that each bird methodically designs and decorates its musical tools according to individual taste.

"We already knew that they have highly personalised rhythms when they drum, allowing other birds to recognise who is drumming from a long way away," lead author Professor Robert Heinsohn said.

He said researchers examined the birds' discarded tools to find that, while some males preferred seed pods to drum with, others preferred long sticks, and some had a preference for short and fat sticks.



"Each of the 13 male palm cockatoos had its own strong preference for tool type and for the shape and design of the drumsticks," Professor Heinsohn said.

"It was this individuality that blew us away.

"It was as if they all had their own idea of what made the best drumstick."

Professor Heinsohn said female birds also took an interest in the types of tools used by the males.

"The females watch every move, while the males demonstrate their immense bill strength while they snip through up to 3 centimetres of hardwood," he said.

He said the birds did not tend to copy each other's designs but rather taught their craft to their sons.

A sad plight

With fewer than 2,000 believed to be living in the wild due to habitat destruction and poor reproductive rates, researchers have long raised concerns about the future of the distinctive black bird with the bright red cheeks.

Its Queensland conservation status was upgraded from vulnerable to endangered in late 2021.

They live in a number of colonies on both sides of Cape York, about 10 hours' drive north of Cairns, and prefer to nest in trees that are hundreds of years old.

The largest flock is found in the Iron Range National Park near the Indigenous community of Lockhart River.

Christina Zdenek from the University of Queensland has been studying Palm Cockatoos in Cape York for more than a decade and helped to make the case to have the listing upgraded by the Queensland government in order to help protect the bird.

Dr Zdenek said the birds have the lowest breeding success rate of any parrot in the world.



I could hear no sound while this dancing was happening. Which was interesting. I didn't see the birds mate at any stage while I was there with my camera.

I sat and watched them while taking photographs for more than 10 minutes. It was close to 6.30 when I left them to it. I continued to watch from the verandah until they were buzzed by a pair of Blue-winged Kookaburras. That put an end to the display.

Annette Sibson

MORE FROM TOOMULLA

Late one afternoon, while sitting enjoying the backyard view from the verandah of our hut, I was intrigued to see (twice) a Bush Stone-curlew jumping around, wings out, no sound. It would then disappear behind our shed. I grabbed my camera and made my way quietly out to the back fence.

I sighted two Bush Stone-curlews, one of which would occasionally jump around, wings out and sort of dance around the other curlew. I was intrigued to say the least.



I've never seen such a display before. I'm assuming it was a male displaying to a female, as it appeared that only one bird was doing the displaying. The other bird stood around looking bored, at one point it squatted then sat while the other bird jumped and displayed around it. The displaying bird even picked up leaves to toss around and show.

BOWING OUT

After having had the privilege of being your Drongo editor for more years than I can remember, I am very happy to be telling you that I am handing on the baton to another Annette, Annette Sibson.

I took over from Marleen Acton in the days when the Drongo was put out as a black and white paper edition. Marleen was editor for a long time. The only illustrations we could use were clip art as it was in black and white. After Birdlife Australia was formed, the Drongo became an electronic newsletter which enabled us to publish photographs from our contributors.

Annette has previous experience with editing newsletters, she is an avid birdwatcher and a good photographer. She also serves on the Birdlife Townsville committee. The Drongo is in capable hands.

Thank you to all of you who have written articles for the Drongo over the years. Keep up the good work. Annette needs all the content you can provide.

I am often surprised by someone outside the club telling me they read the Drongo. It helps spread our conservation message and is very useful in letting everyone know where birds might be found.

Signing off for the last time,

Annette Sutton

Interim project report Nov, 2023

Assessment of distribution and abundance of the Southern Cassowary (Casuarius casuarius) and threats at the southern extent of their global distribution to identify habitat management and protection priorities.

BACKGROUND

There is a paucity of knowledge about the southern cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius*) at the southern extent of the species' global distribution. The Paluma Range contains 22,050 hectares of potential cassowary habitat, much of which is accessible only by foot. Few formal cassowary studies have included this area but the most recent (Westcott et al 2014) stated 'While there was an overall decrease in the rate of sign (footprints, dung, feathers, vocalizations & sightings) encountered throughout the two Wet Tropics population census conducted by Crome & Moore 1988 and then Westcott et al. 2014, this decrease was most noticeable in the southern extent of their range in the Herbert catchment and Paluma range'. To adequately protect the State and Federally listed endangered southern cassowary in uncertain times of climate change, population dynamics and threats should be understood and the species conserved across its entire geographical distribution. This project aims to determine cassowary distribution, abundance, habitat composition, condition and relevant threats in an area mapped as essential cassowary habitat at the southern extent of its global distribution. It addresses 11 actions from the Cassowary Recovery Plan (2007) that have not been assessed or undertaken in this region.

PROJECT PROGRESS TO DATE

- This project began in mid-2023 operating under a Qld Government CSA grant of \$25,000 and \$15,000 donation from Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens,
- It has raised the profile of the cassowary in this region by engaging with Nywaigi Traditional Owners, local community members, naturalists, bushwalkers, birdwatchers, scientists, NQ Dry Tropics NRM agency and the local branch of Queensland Parks and Wildlife to exchange information on historical sightings and collaborate on the project.
- Baseline cassowary sign and fleshy fruit surveys were conducted for cassowaries while deploying 27 camera traps with fake fruit lures across a ~54km north-south extent of the Paluma Range at high, mid and low altitude sites. No signs of cassowary were detected and the paucity of data on the subset of cameras serviced in August 23 it was deemed necessary to extend the deployment period from 3 to 12 months.

With low abundance and diversity of fruit in high altitudes during the middle of the year and an increase in mid to low altitudes to low altitudes, it is hypothesized that cassowaries in the Paluma Range may be migrating altitudinally through habitats with differing fruit phenology over different seasons.

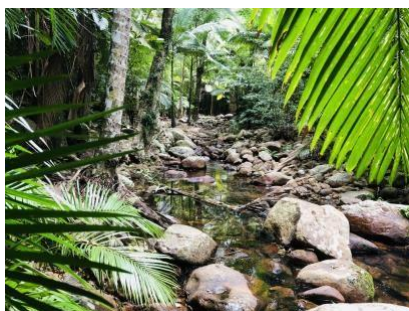


Fig 1. Mid-altitude cassowary habitat fruits



Fig 2. Lead researcher in mid-altitude gallery forest



Fig 3. Identifying fleshy

- The launch of the cassowary citizen science program was opened by Nywaigi Traditional Owners attended by 50 people in August 2023 who surveyed 80km of transects on high altitude sites over one weekend. During this launch the lead researcher's team found two small scats consisting of 100% small blue fruit (Fig 24). Two teams also confirmed hearing low frequency cassowary vocalizations. All participants thoroughly enjoyed the survey and requested another citizen science survey in 2024.



Fig 4. Welcome by Nywaigi Traditional Owners. Fig 5. Citizen scientists planning survey routes. Fig 6. Briefing teams before survey start.

- The event attracted media attention from the ABC who aired the story as an [online news](#) item then played 5 times on [ABC Radio National's A Big Country](#).
- Project partner NQ Dry Tropics NRM developed a citizen science QR code reporting tool designed to be user friendly and transferable to Birddata and WildNet. The QR code was successfully trialed at the launch and small metal plaque signs were installed across the area. Numerous sightings data have been registered on the Citizen Science QR code reporting tool.



Fig 7. Training Townsville Hike & Explore. Fig 8. Citizen Science QR code reporting tool. Fig 9. Teams servicing camera trap station.

- One cassowary scat (Fig 11) and an adult cassowary (Fig 12) were detected in Nov 2023 surveys.



Fig 10. Small scat containing 100% blue fruit Fig 11. Small scat containing fig and Unid seed. Fig 12. Cassowary at high altitude.

- Numerous cassowary sign and sightings have been reported through the Citizen science QR code reporting tool (Fig 13-15).



Fig 13. Scat found in early Aug 2023.



Fig 14. Sub-adult cassowary in pineapple farm



Fig 15. Scat found in Oct 2017.

CONCLUSION

It has been previously extrapolated that cassowaries in the Paluma Range exist in low densities, as few as 16 adults (Westcott et al. 2014). This study hypothesizes that cassowaries in the Paluma Range may also be; 1. a disjunct sub-population, 2. have low recruitment, 3. subsist in an area of low fruit abundance and therefore 4. utilize larger home ranges, 5. undertake altitudinal migration, 6. experience resource bottlenecks due to habitat fragmentation beyond the boundaries of the National Park and 7. due to the aforementioned factors, be at risk of an extinction vortex. Further work is required to fill knowledge gaps and test these hypothesis.

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