

The Drongo

Number 180 November 2025



Len Ezzy

Rosemary
Payet

Winton

Melaleuca,
Tasmania



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Well, I've been president of the club for a couple of months now and the club is still a viable concern, thanks largely to the other members of the committee.

During that time, we have moved to a new monthly meeting venue at the North Queensland Wildlife Care building at 27A Aitken St, Aitkenvale. Access to the Soundshell was becoming problematic and with the fees increasing, it was decided to look for a more amenable venue. There are still a couple of settling in issues with the new venue but I'm sure we'll sort them out in short order.

The committee also cancelled some activities that we normally conduct during October. These included the Bird Week library and shopping centre displays. To make the library displays interesting to the public we relied on the taxidermy items from the museum, however with management of the museum coming under the control of the Queensland Museum access to the items became problematic. In the past the shopping centre displays were conducted to promote The Aussie Bird Count and our club however, with continued logistical issues and the amount of effort they required, the committee felt it was too much for very little return.

Lastly, we must accept the passing of Rosemary Payet, an Honorary Life Member of Birdlife Australia, and a stalwart of Birdlife Townsville. A significant proportion of Rosemary's contributions were before my time so I cannot expand upon the reasons for her inclusion. However for those unaware of the criteria to be acknowledged as an Honorary Life Member: An Honorary Life Member will be expected to have achieved the following:

- High status and recognition within the general community, or the organisation, or their own community/domain of expertise
- A contribution over a 'significant' period of time, as determined by the Board.

Mark Horvath



Little Woodswallow

Michelle Giuliani

YOUR 2025 COMMITTEE

President: Mark Horvath	Annette Sibson	Brigid Glass
Secretary: Wal Threlfall	Claire Willard	Mick Theobald
Treasurer: Nina Doyle	Warren Charlton	

Newsletter Editor Annette Sibson annette.sibson@bigpond.com

Deadline for next Drongo is January 30 2026. Please send articles as Word documents, photos as attachments.
The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Birdlife Townsville.

ROSEMARY PAYET

25/11/1926 – 9/9/2025

Rosemary was a founding member of the Townsville Region Bird Observers Club (TRBOC) in 1992 - a branch of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia (BOCA). TRBOC became Birdlife Townsville when Birds Australia and BOCA merged into Birdlife Australia, 2011.

Rosemary lived and of course, observed birds in several countries throughout her life. Rosemary and her husband Jock were very active club members, both having served on the committee over many years. Rosemary and Jock both served terms as President of the branch. Many members will be familiar with the Payets Tower on the Town Common which was named to honour the contribution both Rosemary and Jock made to conservation efforts and knowledge of the birds that use the Common.

Rosemary's background in science and teaching and love of all things in nature was evident in all her engagements with members, visitors and community members. She was generous in sharing her knowledge and enthusiasm in a friendly and relaxed manner. Rosemary promoted the enjoyment of bird watching as a way of encouraging participation in conservation activities. For both Rosemary and Jock, morning tea, lunch and 'sundowners' were a necessary part of all birding trips.



Rosemary was nominated for Honorary Life Membership of BOCA for distinguished service to the Bird Observers Club of Australia and to ornithology, especially in the Townsville region, which was granted in 2002.



The Citation below outlines Rosemary's contribution to knowledge and community awareness of conservation of birds and their habitat.

'Rosemary Payet has had many years of birding experience in countries including England, Kenya, Seychelles and Papua New Guinea. She has been a member of BOCA and the Townsville Region Bird Observers Club since 1992. She was a Committee Member from 1993 to 1996, Publicity Officer from 1996 to 1997 and is currently President of the Branch as well as its Environmental Officer. With her husband Jock, she has been involved in all aspects of Club activities, acting as Leader on Outings, organising guest speakers, presenting talks and arranging community displays. She has also contributed to the Branch newsletter "The Drongo".'

Rosemary was overall Coordinator of a CoastalCare project in which the Townsville Branch was involved from 1997 to 1999. Migratory Waders were the primary focus of the project, which involved surveying and monitoring sites in the RAMSAR listed Cape Bowling Green Bay area and other sites around Townsville. She organised surveys, collated data and submitted reports throughout the project, she and Jock presented the project at a North Queensland CoastCare Conference in 1999. A future CoastCare project will focus on endangered species such as Little Tern and Beach Stone-curlew and will also monitor impacts of urban development on sensitive coastal environments. Rosemary's experience and expertise in environmental issues has been a major strength in the Townsville Branch. She is involved in a project aiming to reduce bird strikes by aircraft at Townsville Airport. She is also a volunteer with the Townsville Town Common Conservation Park, an active member of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and a volunteer guide at the Townsville Aquarium, where she assists the Education Officer with advice on seabirds.'

The efforts to reduce bird strikes at Townsville Airport led to the development of a Management Plan which has since been adopted by airports throughout Australia and some overseas airports.

As well as leaving a huge birding and conservation legacy, Rosemary left a loved and loving family and many friends. Appropriately, Rosemary's Memorial

Service was held under the trees beside the lagoon at the Palmetum. I'm sure Rosemary would have heartily approved of several birds making their presence known during the morning.

Janet Robino



Annette Sibson

PAYETS TOWER

This observation tower is so named in recognition of the many years of dedicated volunteer work on the Townsville Town Common by Rosemary Payet and her late husband, Jock Payet.

With particular reference to the Town Common's birds and their habitats, the Payet's were always willing to escort and advise visitors and locals alike, passing on their extensive knowledge of natural history and historical aspects of the Town Common. The Payet's passionate relationship with the Town Common has mentored new understandings and appreciations of the profound importance of conservation, monitoring, promotional and advisory values with many. Their energy and enthusiasm has been instrumental in creating an environmental awareness among the general public that has had a positive influence on the protection and promotion of the Townsville Town Common that will confidently ensure its preservation into the future.

Article from The Drongo August 2013

SO MANY MAGPIE GEESSE

My 4 year old great grandson wanted me to take him 'looking for birds'. As I was a bit limited in mobility at the time, I figured a drive through the Town Common would do the trick. The water was well below capacity so bird variety was limited. However, the sight of hundreds of Magpie Geese making the most of the last bit of wetland satisfied my keen little birdwatcher. He did a very accurate count, got to 20 the jumped straight to 'so many, just so many'.

Janet Robino

TOWN COMMON SURVEY UPDATES

Townsville Town Common Survey – 7 September 2025

Fun facts: 10 birders identified 64 species in 2.5 hours. Recently, I was observing quietly at Melaleuca (Town Common) when a fellow birder jumps out of their car and asks 'seen anything extraordinary'? Like the 7th September when the wetland was teeming with life - my response was, and had to be, 'it's all extraordinary'. Water levels were dropping with many smaller water holes dry or close to it, but there was still room for many thousands of Magpie Geese. If a Latham's Snipe is extraordinary then we saw the extraordinary, just 1 (there was 3-5 the week before). The raptors didn't disappoint, the Peregrine spotted in August was absent but we did see an Australian Hobby. Eagle eyed Pat Charlton plucked one from nowhere when a Lovely Fairy Wren crossed her path, that was extraordinary!

A great group of people shared some special moments that day. A flock of 30 or so Red-tailed Black Cockatoos made all smile as did the cacophony of noise coming from teeming wetlands, how extraordinary.

Townsville Town Common Survey – 5 October 2025

Fun facts: 4 birders identified 58 species in 2 hours. Cheek by jowl were the Magpie Geese with just enough room for four score of Pacific Black Duck, a few Grey Teal, a pair of Green Pygmy Geese, Great, Intermediate, Little, and Cattle Egret took what little spare space there was left over. Brolga numbers were up with 15 counted.

Three Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and a Black-fronted Dotterel at Freshwater Hide were newcomers and a big welcome back to the first Dollarbird for the season. Australian Gull-billed, Caspian, and Whiskered Terns were showing off their aerobatics and wading the banks were good numbers of Royal Spoonbill, estimated at 125. Magpie Geese were estimated at 3000, probably conservative by some order.

With increasing temperatures and days since rain getting longer, some birds, definitely perching birds, were lower in numbers or absent compared to previous months.

Mick Theobald



Magpie Geese

Janet Robino

MY BIRDING ADVENTURES IN WINTON 2025

This year has been a remarkable one for my birding experiences, with not just one, but three trips to Winton. Although each visit was brief, I was able to get a wonderful glimpse of what the western region has to offer for bird enthusiasts.

First Trip: Easter in Winton

The first trip took place over Easter, during which I spent the entire two days immersed in birdwatching around Winton and its nearby regions. The journey to and from Winton, which should have taken about six hours, was extended into a full day each way due to numerous stops for birding along the route. This trip was particularly memorable as it was my first opportunity to use my new Tamron 150-600 lens, which made a significant difference in my photography. Throughout this visit, I encountered a diverse and abundant variety of birds, leading to many new species for my life list. One of the highlights was driving out to Lark Quarry, making frequent stops to observe Black-shouldered Kite, a flock of Budgerigar, and various wood-swallow. In Winton, I was excited to find Purple-backed Fairywren.



We also visited Bradenburg National Park; however, the lack of a 4WD vehicle limited our ability to explore beyond the main roads, as many side roads and tracks were still badly affected by water and flood damage from the recent wet season.

Other notable stops included the Pelican Hole and Long Waterhole, both of which hosted a wonderful variety of birds. However, the abundance of water also brought along an onslaught of mosquitoes and sandflies, which were particularly challenging during the trip.

Second Trip: A Rainy Getaway in May

The second visit to Winton was a spontaneous trip in late May, accompanying a friend who was heading out that way. This time, I had only one day to spend in Winton during the three-day trip, and unfortunately, it rained throughout the day. Once again, without a 4WD, birding was mostly done along the roadside during the journey. A memorable sighting on the way was a large mob of Emu near Hughenden.

During my single day in Winton, I visited the council cooling ponds, where I observed Red-backed Kingfisher, Plum-headed Finch, another Black-shouldered Kite, White-winged Triller, Rufous Songlark, a lone Brolga, and more. Galah were present in abundance, with hundreds seen everywhere.



Third Trip: October Long Weekend

My third trip took place over the October long weekend, with the goal of spotting the Opalton Grasswren and the Rufous-crowned Emu-wren. I was successful in seeing the Rufous-crowned Emu-wren, though I was unable to capture any good photographs, and I narrowly missed getting a proper view of the Opalton Grasswren, just glimpsing it briefly before it disappeared into the spinifex grass.



Despite missing out on a clear sighting of the Opalton Grasswren, I was able to add a few more lifers to my list on this trip. Notably, I finally saw the Spinifex Pigeon, which had eluded me on previous visits, as well as Little Woodswallow, Bourke's Parrot, and the Splendid Fairy-wren.

Now I can't wait to explore more of outback Queensland and the bird life – next winter/spring.

Michelle Giuliani

A DAY VISIT TO MELALEUCA, TASMANIA

On 15th December 2024, I took a light plane trip to Melaleuca hoping to observe Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) in their breeding grounds.

Melaleuca is a very small remote settlement located in Southwest National Park, Tasmania, also a Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. It is a popular destination for bushwalkers, boat-based visitors, and birdwatchers. There are no road connections to Melaleuca and visitors must use one of three ways to get there. Light plane, which will take approximately 50 minutes from Cambridge Aerodrome (Hobart). A couple of days of voyage through the Southern Ocean or a week-long 85 km hike through South Coast tract starting from Cockle Creek, Tasmania.

Melaleuca was originally established for tin mining by Deny King, a well-known miner, bushman, naturalist and artist. He was there from 1936 until his death in 1991.

Facilities at Melaleuca include a gravel airstrip, toilets, two walkers huts, a small campsite, the Deny King Heritage Museum, Needwonnee Walk and a bird hide. Melaleuca and its surroundings are the only known breeding ground for the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*). The birds breed during the summer months and migrate to the coast of south-east mainland Australia for the winter. The migration route includes the west coast of Tasmania and King Island (Park and Wildlife Services Tasmania).



Male Orange-bellied Parrot near feeding station

I spent almost seven hours around Melaleuca mainly looking for OBP and enjoyed the perfect summer day in North West Tasmania. I managed to observe 12 OBP mostly males, which may be indicative of females incubating eggs.

The Orange-bellied Parrot is just bigger than a Budgerigar, with males and females varying slightly in appearance. The male is a bright grass-green on the

head, back and most of the wings, fading to a yellowish-green on throat and breast, to bright yellow to the vent and under the tail. The belly has a bright orange patch, and there is a deep blue band between the eyes, bordered above by a faint blue line. The male also has bright blue on the bend of the wings. The female is duller, with less blue and has a smaller orange belly patch. Both male and females have a greyish-black bill, a dark-brown eye and greyish-brown legs (Australian Museum).



Group of OBP not far from a feeding station

The OBP is listed as 'Critically Endangered' under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, and is also listed as a threatened species in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. Between 2000 and 2008 it was estimated that around 50 Orange-bellied Parrots remained in the wild. However thanks to significant contribution from teams and volunteers involved in OBP recovery programs, wild population of OBP seems to be slightly improving. Tasmanian OBP recovery team census have confirmed 92 birds returned from migration in December 2024 breaking last year's record of 82 birds (Various reports by Orange-bellied Parrot National Recovery Team and Tasmanian Program).

I was able to witness amazing work towards OBP conservation by staff and volunteers attached to Tasmania Park and Wildlife Services. Two of volunteers also helped me to locate OBP roosting sites which were away from the main attractions.



Green Rosella at a feeding station

All of my OBP observations were near or at feeding stations indicating supplementary feeding has a positive impact on the OBP population. Unfortunately a few of the supplementary feeding stations were occupied by Green Rosella (near Deny King Heritage Museum). I was told by one of the staff that OBP's did not like the rosella's presence and avoided those feeding stations. To support this claim, I did not see any OBP during my seven-hour observation at this feeding station.

A number of artificial nesting boxes were noted, they are attached to eucalyptus trees and timber poles around Melaleuca and have been put up by the OBP recovery team. I observed large number of boxes were occupied by Tree Martin which eventually prevent nesting access to OBP. I hope the recovery teams come up with a solution to deter the Tree Martin from using the nesting boxes.



Tree Martin nesting in artificial nesting box

I believe hard work from the OBP recovery team and volunteers has paid off. I hope they will continue their effort and eventually prevent extinction of this beautiful grass parrot.

Indunil Thilakaratne

BROLGAS GALORE

On the last day of a 10-day trip 'out west' we were heading home via the Belyando Crossing. It was a fairly non-eventful day up until we spotted some Brolgas sharing a dam with some cattle. We counted 300 plus....and then more and more arrived. We estimated there were more than 550 altogether.

Unfortunately, not much further down the road we collided with a kangaroo. Outcome was not great for the poor old kangaroo and did some serious damage to the front end of the vehicle.

Janet Robino



Brolga at Belyando

Janet Robino

GOLDEN BOWERBIRD

Gavin and I were lucky enough to see Golden Bowerbird (male and female) at Paluma recently (out towards the dam at the 'usual' spot that many members would be familiar with). The male had a large round growth on its left leg but seemed to be behaving normally (foraging, preening), although birds are renowned for masking any symptoms until they are severe. Have others noticed this growth before? Something to look out for next time you are up there.

Claire Willard and Gavin Colthart (photographer)



BRUSH CUCKOO AND BLACK-CHINNED HONEYEATER

This very young Brush Cuckoo just popped into my line of vision while I was looking for owls. There was no time to change my position or camera settings to get better lighting. I just pointed the camera and hoped for the best.

We actually saw the Black-chinned Honeyeater feeding it but it wasn't until I got photos on the computer that I could see that I had managed to get a shot of it. The photo would certainly never win any awards, but I was pretty excited to actually get it at all.



Janet Robino

Quest as at November 8 2025

Marlene Acton	155	4/06/2025
Warren Charlton	235	23/08/2025
Wal Threlfall	182	1/07/2025
Annette Sibson	231	19/08/2025
Jill Staunton	186	5/07/2025
Norm Rains	115	25/04/2025
Colton Tinkey	62	3/03/2025
Janet Robino	320	16/11/2025
Wendy Kaus	240	28/08/2025
Elna Kerswell	236	24/08/2025
Beth Snewin	228	16/08/2025
Pat Charlton	237	25/08/2025
Julie Goldsbury	75	16/03/2025
Anne Lawrance	294	21/10/2025
Mick Theobold	256	13/09/2025
Brigid Glass	137	17/05/2025
Chris Corbett	209	28/07/2025
Kathleen Vowles	60	1/03/2025
Claire Willard	321	17/11/2025
Melissa Baker	156	5/06/2025
Geoffrey Morice	126	6/05/2025