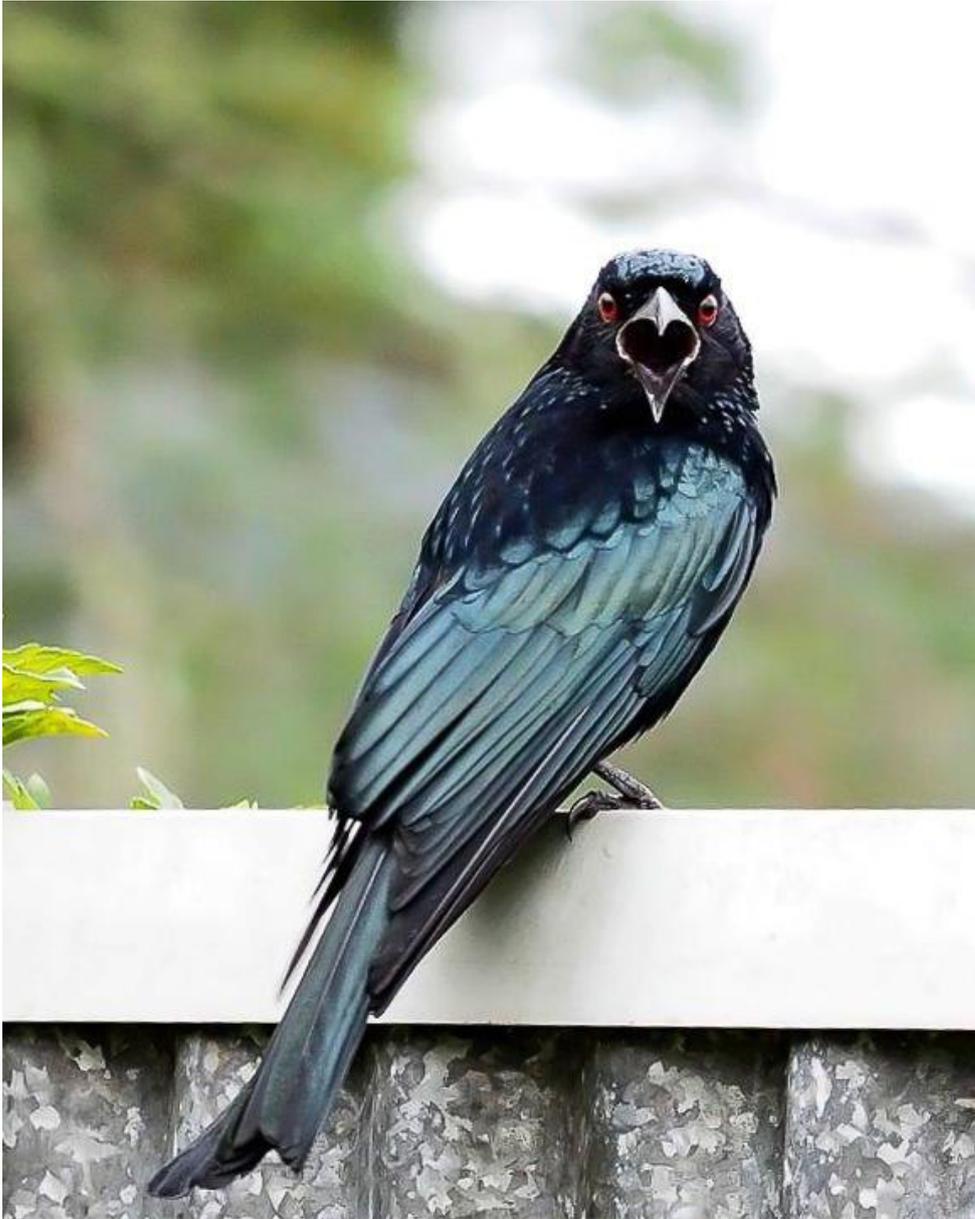


The Drongo

Number 181 February 2026



Norm Rains

Up North

Little Tern

In The Wet



FROM THE PRESIDENT

During the year Birdlife Townsville saw some changes, not the least of which was the resignation of the long-term president. This necessitated the selection of an interim president, until one is formally elected at the annual general meeting, in February 2026. Not only did we lose them as the president, but they also resigned from the committee leaving us a member down. In addition, we lost another committee member at the end of the year. These resignations not only caused a reshuffle of committee member responsibilities but also necessitated finding people to take over the Leader positions for the outings that they lead.

The inability of the club to obtain the use of the taxidermy exhibits from the Townsville Museum, the difficulty in finding enough volunteers, and the limited return on effort, saw the committee cancel both the library and shopping centre displays for Bird Week in October 2025. The ability to obtain volunteers appears to be a result of there being a reduction in the number of active members. This contrasts significantly with the number of persons registered on the club's Facebook page. At the time of writing the number was in excess of 1700. The committee is trying to come up with strategies that may assist in getting some of these people to become active members of the club. This task is also complicated by Birdlife Australia head office not providing member details, thus limiting the club's ability to engage the members.

A significant change that occurred during 2025 was the move from the Bicentennial Building in Thuringowa to the North Queensland Wildlife Carer's venue in Aitkenvale. Although the monthly rent is higher, the facility is an improvement with no access or acoustic issues, as previously experienced with the Bicentennial Building. The higher costs are also offset by the cessation of storing our equipment at the Senior Citizens centre, as it is now stored at a private residence at nil cost. The club is in a good financial position and hopefully with continued requests by various agencies, where remuneration is forthcoming, it will remain so.

Overall, it has been an interesting year with some struggles and successes. Here's hoping that the club experiences more positive growth in the coming year.

Mark Horvath

YOUR 2026 COMMITTEE

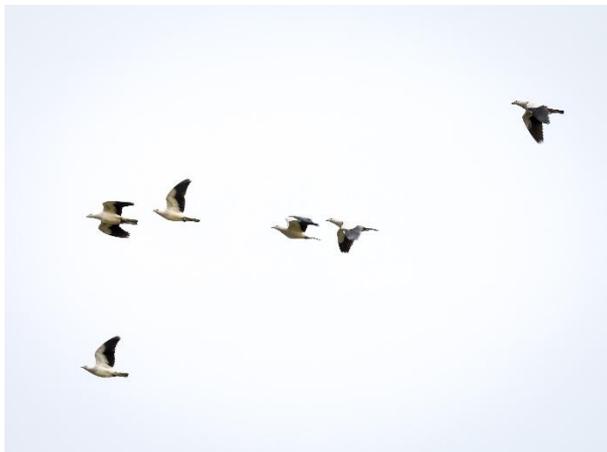
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Secretary:	Wal Threlfall	Claire Willard	Kathy Goodwin
Treasurer:	Nina Doyle	Warren Charlton	Norm Rains

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

JANUARY BIRDING IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

On the 7th of January, Beth drove my sister, Irene, and myself up to Mossman to attend our eldest sister's 90th birthday party on the 9th. There were few and far birds to be seen as we journeyed north, and we didn't have time to go to any special places where some might hang out, as we wanted to book in to our Newel Beach Cabin well before 5pm. We did manage to see some Plumed Whistling-Duck, a Brown-backed Honeyeater and a couple of Comb-crested Jacana at the Tyto Tourist Lagoon as we enjoyed our smoko. It rained off and on after Ingham, so lunch was in the Mourilyan Sugar Shed Cafe. Along the way, there were egret, Magpie Geese, White-breasted Woodswallow and Spotted Dove aplenty. Common Myna won though. Torresian Imperial-Pigeon also scored well at Newel, where they obviously nest in the coconut trees each year.



Torresian Imperial-Pigeon

Annette Sibson

The next day, the news of a pending cyclone possibly coming in to the coast in the far north, and with heavy, sustained rain for most of the day, had us shopping for non-perishable food in case we were without power and hemmed in by flooded creeks and rivers. The restaurant (beside a fast flowing creek) owners who were opening specially to host us the next day, phoned our sister early to say they thought we wouldn't be able to get there, so would we like to cancel. Yes! Good idea, so they looked for a suitable venue in Port Douglas and the Barrier Reef Tavern turned out to be the perfect place for a family party. The 9th dawned bright and clear after all the panic, so it was a very relaxed family of the elderly sisters and brother, a cousin and son, the son and daughters, various grandchildren and some rowdy, energetic great-grandchildren who gathered there to enjoy a delightful party. There was a good variety of fine food and flowing drinks, hugs all round and photography aplenty. Oh, birds? Yes, we did search – especially for the Orange-footed Scrubfowl which are generally found along the roadsides in Port Douglas. Nothing! But all was not lost, back at Newel after seeing a couple of Crested Tern at the Mossman Heads, we drove about 600 metres along the street from our cabin to check out

Radjah Shelduck. The word was that someone there fed them every afternoon. Joy.



There they were, wandering about on the lawn on the near side, perched on the guttering of their shed, and scattered around the other side and back of the house wherever one looked. We estimated 100 at least, knowing that some were out of our sight, too. It was a wonderful experience indeed. It wasn't surprising to find more of them at the fish farm on the way to Daintree the next day, along with a few Pied Stilt. Wonga Beach then supplied us with the missing scrubfowl.



Orange-footed Scrubfowl

Annette Sibson

On the 11th we headed home via the Atherton Tableland, but again, birds were scarce. Only a Brown Honeyeater at Abattoir Swamp, no Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher at Kingfisher Park, barely a bird at Hastie's Swamp (and NO Magpie Geese) and no Cassowary at Etty Bay in spite of spending some time there waiting and watching. We stayed in the Beachcomber Motel that night and had a leisurely drive home on the Monday morning. Masters Road gave us Crimson Finch and Wandering Whistling-Duck. Very few Magpie Geese – we decided they were all here in the Townsville area.

We have decided that a further trip to Mossman and places north must be taken when the weather clears.

Elna Kerswell

GREY GOSHAWK VERSUS METALLIC STARLINGS

On a trip to Jourama Falls, on a very cloudy day, following days of rain the birds were few and far between. To our delight, a Grey Goshawk flew in and perched just above our heads, just as the clouds cleared a little and the sun struggled to show itself. It was exciting enough to see a Grey Goshawk, but what happened next was even more exciting.



There were some Metallic Starling nests that had fallen to the ground. We had a conversation about why the nests had fallen as they are usually fairly secure. The answer presented itself as we watched.



The goshawk made a very concerted effort to rip open a nest in the colony above. All the while the starlings swooped and attacked from every angle. Eventually the goshawk gave up and flew off with empty claw and beak. This particular nest survived, for the time being, unlike the ones littering the ground.

Janet Robino

LATHAM'S SNIPE UPDATE

An excellent catching season over spring saw 43 birds fitted with GPS tags. Data is being received on a semi regular basis from about two thirds of these birds. The data is showing greater movements than has been seen previously.

There has been a number of leg-flag re-sightings from Canberra this year, with all birds being tagged at Jerrabomberra wetlands. One bird was first captured in January 2020 and re-sighted in December 2025, making it more than 6 years old.

There was an exciting occurrence of a Japanese flagged bird being sighted on the NSW central coast over spring. This is only the second time this has happened.

On a local to Townsville note, there were no snipe seen for the January count, but a big thank you to all that regularly put their hands up to visit the particular sites.



Len Ezzy

FIRST CONFIRMED NESTING AT ROSS RIVER FOR SEVERAL YEARS

The Eastern Australian breeding subspecies of the Little Tern was listed as nationally Vulnerable in early 2025, and Birdlife has been overseeing monitoring of the small and scattered nesting sites in North Queensland since 2022.

Ross River sandbar was once home to a large nesting colony, but after it was wiped out in a storm surge several years ago, it was thought to be either lost or hanging in there depending on who I asked. In early December a short expedition on a Parks and Wildlife service boat was organised and we found one nest, the first confirmed nesting since the storm surge. This nest was at the eastern end of the sandbar, out of sight of vantage points from Ron Mclean Drive and only reachable by boat. John Lowry also found several nests at Bushland Beach, a site where they have not nested for at least 17 years, showing that while Little Terns return to many of their nesting sites, they will opportunistically nest in suitable habitats.

The Ingham area from Lucinda to Palm Creek (just south of Forrest Beach) was the most successful area in North Queensland, with at least 17 fledglings. The photo from Palm Beach was taken in early December and shows what to look out for once the young birds are old enough to fly. These terns with their scalloped feather patterns on the upper back and short orange-brown bills are around 20 days old, at which point they have left the nesting area and joined their parents and often many other adult Little Terns, some of which we strongly suspect are visitors from eastern Asia of a different subspecies.

Birdlife is currently discussing another Little Tern monitoring season with funding agencies to return to the sites where nesting occurred this season, gauge breeding success, and use fencing and signage if necessary.



Three Little Tern fledglings among breeding adults (yellow bills) and non-breeding adults (black bills) at Palm Creek, Forrest Beach, December 2025.



The first confirmed Little Tern nest at Ross River for several years. North Queensland's Little Terns appear to nest among woody debris more readily than populations further south.

Simon Kennedy

SURVEYS AT THE TOWN COMMON

Bird surveys on the Townsville Town Common have been done on the 1st Sunday of each month, except when cancelled due to fire or flooding, since BOCA (Bird Observers Club of Australia) commenced a bird watching group in 1992. Prior to that The Field Naturalist Group did some surveys. Various members have led the surveys but in particular I remember Rosemary and Jock Payet leading the group for a number of years. The Town Common is a popular site for visiting birdwatchers, due to the diversity of birds found in the bush and on the water. There are three bird hides and two viewing points as well as walking tracks to enable watchers to see as many birds as possible.

There is great excitement when rare birds are found e.g. recent sightings of Yellow Wagtail, Little Curlew, Spotted Whistling Ducks and Latham's Snipe.

On the most recent survey, there were eight participants with 41 species recorded including Green Pygmy Geese, Royal Spoonbills, Olive-backed Oriole, Little Shrike-thrush, Sea and Wedge-tailed Eagles as well as the usual birds.

Details of the starting time can be found on our BirdLife Townsville website of

<https://birdlifetownsville.org.au>

Pat Charlton

A LITTLE HERON FISHING

Little Herons are renowned opportunistic predators that feed on a variety of aquatic prey. Their diet typically includes small fish, invertebrates like crustaceans, crabs, molluscs, and aquatic insects. Up until recently referred to as Striated Herons, they are great tactical hunters.

Back on 30th November 2025, Chris and I found this Little Heron at the lotus ponds at Anderson Botanic Gardens, Townsville. The bird seemed totally transfixed in hunting mode, crouching stealthily, slowly creeping around on top of the lotus lilies that cover (sometimes choking) the ponds.



We watched it hunt unsuccessfully for about 10 minutes, when suddenly it changed its tactics. It about-turned and headed back to the western bank near the pandanus stands, where it gleaned a terrestrial 'bug' and brought it back in its bill to where it had originally been hunting; on the edge-line of the encroaching lotus lilies and the ever-receding clearwater.



The heron held the bug securely in its bill over the water until it spotted potential prey below. Then it dropped the bug onto the surface, using that as bait to lure its prey up from the depths and to within striking range. All the while without compromising the stability of its hunting/fishing platform, the lotus lily pad.



It took just a couple of seconds and the catch was made. Another few seconds and it was down the hatch. A nice little silvery rainbowfish (I think). Not the biggest of meals for this Little Heron, but a lot more substantial than the bait bug it used to catch it.



Len and Chris Ezzy

BAR-TAILED GODWIT FACTS

These birds have a huge bill that can be between 73 and 122mm. The species holds the longest nonstop migration record of 13,560 km in 11 days, Alaska to Tasmania. They only weigh 190 – 400g, getting up to 600g pre migration.

From Broome Bird Observatory



Annette Sutton

IN THE WET

Prolonged rainy conditions in early January this year, prevented me being out and about chasing opportunities to photograph birds. Rather than risk the dreaded malady Cabin Fever I decided to head down around the Giru area to see what birds may be braving the inclement weather, after all, they do have to eat and are therefore also likely to be out and about satisfying their hunger.

My first call was the Cape Cleveland Road wetlands (A.I.M.S. Road), where I spotted a solitary Little Black Cormorant, hunched miserably on a rock, not far from the highway. I fired off a few shots, all of which I later deleted because of the poor quality of the images. There were no other birds at the site, not even a Masked Lapwing.



I decided to go further afield and ended up at the road leading to the Giru Pony Club, where I managed a couple of keeper shots of five distant Brolga in a paddock, two of which were calling raucously, beak-raised to a leaden sky.

The area around the pony club gates produced only a single Crimson Finch, which popped up on a barbed wire fence only to disappear just as quickly into the Guinea Grass. The only other feather was a single Pheasant Coucal which managed to position itself behind a bunch of leaves high up in a eucalypt tree. No shot there.



I then took off for Link Road, hoping I would be able to travel to Woodstock and managed a shot of a Pied Butcherbird hunting on the ground. These birds are much harder to find now and I wonder why.



Further along Link Road, for a few short minutes I managed shots of Tree and Fairy Martin, a Golden-headed Cisticola and two Willie Wagtail, all perched on a barbed wire fence a few hundred metres from the highway.



I was pleased to bank some keeper shots at this location but sadly missed a Chestnut-breasted Mannikin which appeared very briefly on the bottom wire of the fence. Spurred on by this minor success, I decided to continue to Woodstock only to have my plans thwarted by a Road Closed because of flooding sign, just before the dip into Iron Bark Creek.

There was nothing for me to do but to accept the reality of the situation and head back home. I thought I would have another go at the martin and other birds I had photographed a few minutes earlier, but they too had other plans that did not include me and my camera.

Norm Rains

SUNBIRDS GET CREATIVE

Our Olive-backed Sunbirds love to build in safe and sometimes awkward places. Janet Robino had a pair that built so close to her car that she had to wriggle carefully out of the driver's seat in order not to disturb the nest. The pair persisted and safely raised two young. Not only was the positioning questionable but the birds built onto a windchime with clear glass baubles.



Janet Robino

Another Townsville resident had a pair that built onto a windchime that had a large stone hanging at the bottom of the string, the birds incorporated the stone into their nest.



Ross Horner

WESTERN GROUND PARROT

It was announced in early January 2026 that a chick of the endangered Western Ground parrot had been hatched and left the nest at Perth Zoo.

After 11 years of tireless monitoring, research and dedicated care, this moment marks an incredible step forward for the critically endangered species.

Super mum – Kangal incubated the egg entirely on her own, showing perfect nesting behaviour.

Super dad – Golambiddee stepped up too, providing extra care and support throughout.

With fewer than 150 Western Ground Parrots left in the wild, all surviving in remote southern WA, this hatchling represents new hope for a species on the brink of extinction.



The expert bird keepers will keep watching the chick's progress via CCTV and can't wait to see its first tiny 'test flights' around the aviary. Every small milestone helps us learn more about this cryptic, elusive bird – knowledge that strengthens conservation efforts and brings us closer to protecting and eventually rebuilding the Western Ground Parrot population.

At the last update that I saw the chick had undertaken short flights within its aviary.

There is a short video of the chick and parents on the web page of the Perth Zoo. Link is below.

<https://perthzoo.wa.gov.au/article/first-western-ground-parrot-chick-successfully-hatches-and-leaves-the-nest-at-perth-zoo>

MALLEE EMU-WREN

For the very first time, 17 captive-bred Mallee Emu-wren have been released back into the wild in South Australia's mallee. Each bird weighed between 4 and 6 grams and were released into high-quality spinifex habitat. On release the birds showed natural behaviors, including calling to each other and displaying predator avoidance strategies.

Bred at Monarto Safari Park and released in early February 2026, the project is a collaboration between four major groups within South Australia.

A QUICK TRIP TO WUNJUNGA

On Friday 13th February I thought that I would take a quick look at the Wunjunga wetlands and adjacent beach, ignoring the warnings about impending rain events in the area. I was agreeably surprised at the number and diversity of species present, but having said this, many others usually found here at this time of year were not sighted.

After leaving the Bruce Highway a few minutes after passing Mt Inkerman, the road to the Wunjunga Township is in very good condition, mainly dirt, free of potholes and corrugations, with some sealed sections further along. The first of the clay pans encountered was bereft of birds and completely dry, however further along the birding improved, especially where water was present on both sides of the road near the culverts.



Shallow water was flowing across the road at three of the concrete inverts and there were concentrations of egret and stilt at these spots. I would say that there has been no recent rain in that locality, as the roadside vegetation and the swamps all looked like they needed a 'freshen up' that only rain can provide.



Species sighted on the wetland section include, Magpie Goose, Brolga, Royal Spoonbill, Grey Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Australasian Pipit, Pied Stilt, Great, Plumed and Little Egret, Black-necked Stork, Australian White Ibis, Masked Lapwing, Black Swan, Black Kite. And on the beach, (sadly only one of each), Eurasian Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew and Silver Gull.



Birds often seen in this location that were not present on this occasion included, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorant, Straw-necked Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Australian Magpie, Magpie Lark, Australian Raven, Australian Bustard, Pied Butcherbird, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Whistling Kite, Forest Kingfisher, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove to mention a few.



I had a great day out at this excellent birding site. It's only a little over an hour's trip from my home, and with only one other vehicle on the road across the wetlands, I had the place to myself.

Norm Rains

Quest as at February 14 2026

Marlene Acton	71	12/03/2026
Norm Rains	98	8/04/2026
Pat Charlton	174	23/06/2026
Warren Charlton	161	10/06/2026
Kyran Staunton	98	8/04/2026
Wal Threlfall	125	5/05/2026
Jill Staunton	148	28/05/2026
Elna Kerswell	110	20/04/2026
Wendy Kaus	150	30/05/2026
Beth Snewin	127	7/05/2026
Annette Sibson	131	11/05/2026
Anne Lawrance	?	
Janet Robino	169	18/06/2026
Mitchell Heide	195	14/07/2026
Julie Goldsbury	48	17/02/2026
Mick Theobald	121	1/05/2026
Chris Corbett	122	2/05/2026



Wunjunga storm from the road by Norm Rains