

The Drongo

Number 182 May 2026



Mark Horvath

Out West

Firsts

Visitors

Dawn Chorus

THE WESTERN RUN

Over Easter, in spite of concerns about the weather, fuel supplies and prices, and accessibility to one of our destinations, we departed on a family trip in Big Red (Kyran's Prado) to the west. Admittedly, I was the one with the concerns but I was persuaded that a short, five day trip to visit my sister on her property north west of Julia Creek, and my niece on a property north west of Richmond would be fine. The strongest inducement, after that of catching up with my sister and niece, was the potential to see some new (previously unsighted) birds.



We left Charters Towers (Mum's) early on Easter Sunday morning with the intention of driving to Julia Creek that day and taking the time to do some birding along the way. Shortly before reaching Pentland, Peter spotted a Black-shouldered Kite, one of our favourite birds, and we spent time watching four of them in the trees along the roadside. At the Pentland dam we saw Great Crested Grebe, Cotton Pygmy-geese and a Black Swan, that Shalil loved seeing, amongst an array of other waterbirds. Between the Towers and Pentland, we counted 36 species.



One of the facets of this trip I've always enjoyed is watching the changing vegetation along the way. From the Towers to Hughenden, the eucalypt woodland forests travelled with us. Along the roadside, especially nearing Pentland, the verges thickened with slender grevillea, acacia, melaleuca and a range of small shrubs providing a habitat for a variety of birds, especially honeyeaters. The lovely red Grevillia decora was in bloom and the acacias were just beginning to flower. On the Pentland to Richmond run, Sara spotted the first new bird when a Letter-winged Kite flew overhead,

clearly identified by its underneath wing pattern. That was an exciting moment. The stately Wedge-tailed Eagle made an appearance as well as a lone Olive-backed Oriole sitting on a powerline in Prairie. By the time we arrived in Richmond to top up our fuel (which was in good supply) we'd ticked off 43 species – mostly from the car windows. We lunched at the lake there then continued on to Julia Creek. No different species were added to our list until, after our arrival in Julia Creek, we exited the highway onto the Old Normanton Road on our way to Lara Downs. As this country has been flooded twice so far this year, courtesy largely of the Flinders River, there was still water lying in the paddocks. Fortunately for us, the next 90 kilometres were bitumen. Along the way, we were very excited to come across a wet area that was quickly drying out but still retained enough broad puddles to attract birdlife. We counted 12 Glossy Ibis and 15 White-necked Heron. They didn't worry too much about us when we stopped on the roadside and clambered out to look at them, as they were frenetically feeding on small fish that had been trapped in the receding puddles as the area dried out. It was pretty amazing to watch the glossies sweeping the water like spoonbills.



Even more exciting was the discovery of our second new bird as we turned onto the station road. The downs country we'd been travelling through since Hughenden, was thickly covered with Mitchell and Flinders grasses, some gidyea stands, prickly acacia and a plant none of us (except Kyran) recognised that seemed to have colonised the entire area. I wondered if it was yet another invasive species but my sister and nephew later confirmed Kyran's suggestion that it was *Sesbania cannabina*, a native yellow pea plant that only appeared now and then, most often after a heavy wet season. As a legume, it puts nitrogen into the soil and livestock can eat it. That's all to the good but their concern was that when it dries off it becomes a serious fire hazard. Back to the point, after driving through country virtually lacking tall trees, we came upon a stand of lofty flowering eucalypts, we had to stop and look at them as they were full of birds. Kyran identified the birds as lorikeet but they weren't familiar to any of us. After finally taking a reasonably useful photo and consulting our small CSIRO field guides, we agreed that they had

to be Varied Lorikeet – a brand new bird to all of us. They were absolutely beautiful and making the most of the eucalypt blossom while it was available to them. From there, it was a short trip to the station and a welcome cup of tea.



We were accommodated in the station quarters, self-sufficient in every respect, much to Shaili's joy. She was quick to pick her own room and stow her gear and was fascinated by the big rocks on all the toilet lids. She asked me why aunty had put them there. I explained about the frogs and, to her delight, she found a big green tree frog in her shower.

The following morning, a walk around the homestead added a Pictorella Mannikin and a Variegated Fairy-wren to the new bird list. They were in the company of Zebra Finch, White-winged Triller, Budgerigar and a host of other birds.



Clouds of Little Corella roost around the homestead and are preyed upon by Black Kite – and possibly the Brown Falcon which hang around the cattle yards. My sister has seen the kites attack the corellas, break their wings and leave them stranded in the trees for a few days then return to kill and eat them. All up, we listed 24 bird species around the homestead.

On Tuesday, we backtracked to Richmond then turned off onto the Croydon road. One hundred and six kilometres later, many of them along a rough dirt road, at times badly scoured by the floods, we arrived at the Woolgar River. This river had flooded twice this year coming within 50 metres of my niece's homestead. It was still flowing to a depth below knee height but much of the causeway had been washed away. Kyran had to park on the riverbank where we could unload our gear.



We then carried it across the river to where my niece and her children waited with a couple of quads. We loaded the quads and walked the 500 metres along a sandy track to the homestead. Again, we were accommodated in well stocked quarters.

This country, unlike the open downs of Lara, was heavily timbered with eucalypt, gidyea, lancewood and bauhinia. There were plenty of nesting hollows in the eucalypts for cockatoos and parrots, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, Pale-headed Rosella, Rainbow Lorikeet, Red-winged Parrot, Galah and Cockatiel.



In exploring the area around the homestead, we encountered three new birds – a Grey Butcherbird, a Grey Falcon and, on a spotlighting ramble to the river one night, a Southern Boobook Owl. Around the homestead, we logged 28 species of birds. It was a great trip. The weather behaved. We managed to get across the Woolgar. Fuel supply wasn't an issue however; the roads were very quiet. There were no caravans at all. Triples loaded with fuel were heading west; others loaded with cattle were heading east. Most importantly, we spotted seven new species and saw dozens of other lovely birds.

Jill Staunton

CHASING BIRDS FOR THE QUEST OUT IN THE WEST

Fuel shortage? What fuel shortage. At least that's what we hoped. With some doubts still in our minds, Wendy, Roger, Sandra, Beth and I set off in our search for those wonderful western species of Queensland birds. The first stop was Pentland, the dam that remains faithful for us in our quest to find new birds for the year. The high point was to see a Black Swan sitting in the middle of the reeds, obviously on a nest. Ten days later, there were two cygnets beside her. Lovely to see. Great Crested Grebe, too, were nesting – three that we could see, but none had hatched when we returned 10 days later. The coot, Australasian Grebe, Grey Teal, Cotton Pygmy-geese, jacana, Red-winged Parrot and Noisy Friarbird were also new for my list. A great start indeed.



Red-winged Parrot Ian Boyd

We ate at the Pentland Hotel where we had enjoyed meals last year, but the fare was far from the same and we realised it was a different cook. I might add that when we returned, there were entirely new people running it. Managers, they told us, as it is up for sale. That time, the new lady cooked our meal which was absolutely delightful. I ordered the same, bangers and mash but this time there was a heap of other vegetables all cooked to my taste.

So off we went next day to the Burras. Zip! Brown Honeyeater only. The *Grevillea decora* was just starting to flower, but no joy! Torrens Creek for morning tea, had a surprise for us, though.



Across the road, Roger spotted two enormous Emus, NO, they were Ostrich, right up against the fence, so of course we had to photograph this very rare species. Nothing exciting in Hughenden so after having lunch and topping up with fuel, we headed for Winton. The road wasn't as cut up as I thought it might be and we saw Red-backed Kingfisher, Tawny Grassbird, Wedge-tailed Eagle, and White-winged Triller as well as others along that stretch.



Wedge-tailed Eagle Ian Boyd

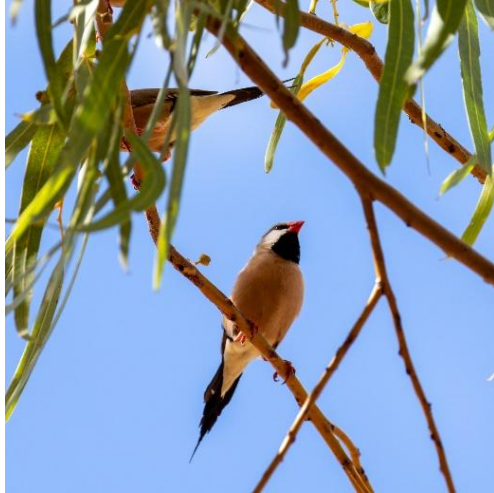
Bladensburg was open, hurrah, and the roads had been graded, so no worries about bogging, except that Engine Hole and the Bough Shed were both closed and the tracks certainly looked uninspiring. We managed to see Cockatiel, Budgerigar, Emu, a few Spinifex Pigeon, female White-winged Fairy-wren, Diamond Dove, a Black-fronted Dotterel, Tawny Grassbird, a Rufous Songlark, a Restless Flycatcher, Rufous Fantail, Zebra Finch, Black-faced, Masked and White-browed Woodswallow and then two Pratincole. Surprise! But even better, when driving back along that road there was a tiny chick floating about beside one of them. That was the icing on the cake.



Australian Pratincole Annette Sibson

The Age of Dinosaurs rewarded us with Hall's and Grey-crowned Babbler, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush and Yellow-rumped Thornbill. It was great to see that the area between reception and the laboratory were looking healthy again, after so many dry years. That's a lovely patch of woodland there and always worth checking out. Little Woodswallow were also seen there. The Mary Kathleen Park in Cloncurry provided more babbler, Spotted Bowerbird and Olive-backed Oriole, while at the Cloncurry Dam area we found Varied Lorikeet feeding in a flowering gum and a juvenile Eastern Koel hiding in a dense bush.

Though we could not see the spillway, Lake Moondarra at Mt Isa was full and flowing over. We searched diligently for different honeyeater, finding rufous-throated, ringing and grey-fronted only. However, our persistence paid off and both Long-tailed and Painted Finch were seen quite close up. Beautiful.



Long-tailed Finch Annette Sibson

Then a special treat. In a park near the Leichhardt River were lots of ghost gums with hollows. Varied Lorikeet, Budgerigar and Australian (Cloncurry) Ringneck were nesting. We had very good views and enjoyed watching them for some time. Returning to Townsville, a Yellow-billed Spoonbill was spotted near Julia Creek and a White-bellied Sea-Eagle sat for a while in a gum tree at Homestead where we enjoyed our last smoko.

A happy and successful trip indeed.

Elna Kerswell

GREBE EXPERIENCES

First of all, I apologise for the poor quality of the photos, but I really wanted to share with you what were some pretty special experiences for me.

I saw a fluffed up Australasian Grebe at St Lawrence Wetlands.



First of all, one little head appeared out of the fluff.

When the other adult approached with food, there were two little grebes with wide open mouths, and then there were three!



At Lawton Lakes, Brisbane, there were a few Great Crested Grebe just resting on the water.



Then two woke up and started that amazing mating dance.



Janet Robino

FLEETING VISITS

In April I had a fleeting visit from a Spectacled Monarch. I was pretty excited as this was the first time I could remember one in my garden. This was the first April migrant I have seen in the garden for several years. It certainly didn't hang around, here just long enough for me to be sure that it definitely was a Spectacled Monarch.



The very next morning I heard an unusual call, rushed out the door just in time to get one really good look at a Rufous Fantail before it took off. I used to get regular April visits from the Rufous Fantail. It used to hang around for a few days, but not this time. Here one minute, gone the next.

The very next day I had an 'almost visit' from a Restless Flycatcher. I heard its very distinctive call and rushed out into the garden just to see a blur heading off. As Annette Sibson and I 'shared' this little bird's visits over the years I rang her immediately. As expected, Annette heard the call not long after. (Annette lives a few hundred metres away across a grassy bush area.) Neither of us got a good look at him.



In the early hours next morning there was a Barking Owl persistently calling in the bush area. I felt it was prudent not to try finding it with a spotlight with all my neighbours sound asleep.

LONGER TERM VISITORS

In January a pair of Olive-backed Sunbirds built a nest in my carport, as usual in a very inconvenient spot. I

had to duck under the nest every time I needed to access the car. Despite all the disruption, they managed to successfully rear two chicks. Before I left for a four week trip, I relocated the nest to a more convenient position for me. Wasn't sure how the birds would respond. On my return, the female was sitting on the nest. Again, two lovely little chicks emerged.

(Attached photographs are from previous sightings.)

Janet Robino

A KEEPER, FINALLY

The wet seems to be over, and if not, it certainly should be by the end of April. Having said this, while there has been a slackening off of rain in recent days, there has also been a lack of consistently good light for photography. At least this seems to be the case at most of my favourite haunts. I shouldn't really complain about the lack of good photography conditions though, given that I managed to get reasonable shots of one bird I have been chasing for years, and the shots are good enough to be keepers. Whoo hoo!

This bird was spotted in a table-drain, on the roadside on the way to Wallaman Falls, a few kilometres before the climb up the range. At first the bird appeared to be a darter. Its sharp-billed long neck was extended well above the surrounding grass, plus there were light coloured markings on the head and neck similar to those of a male darter.

After overshooting the bird's position by 100 metres or so, a quick u-turn and return to the area of the sighting, revealed the characteristic yellow and creamy white stripes from under the bottom mandible, which confirmed its identification as a Black Bittern. Talk about excitement and shaky hands! Got some closeup shots of the bird's head and neck, but unfortunately the lower part of the bird including legs remained partially hidden by the tallish grasses. The old adage 'Beggars cannot be choosers' certainly came to mind.

One does not often receive the gift of a close encounter with the very shy Black Bittern. I am truly thankful that after 20 years of birding, my name has finally floated to the top of the waiting list.



Norm Rains

A NEW BIRDING SPOT

I found myself stuck for a birding spot recently while spending a few days in Ingham. I had intended to spend a lot of time at Tyto, but there are currently 3 saltwater crocodiles enjoying Tyto wetlands, so I left them to it.

Broadwater Park is closed, Jourama is partially closed and I'd already visited Wallaman Falls.

I looked around on ebird and saw a little spot way up at the very end of Abergowrie Road, beside the Herbert River. This spot, Yamanie section, is a pick-up point for walkers on the Wet Tropics Great Walk, and is brilliant. It is part of the Girringun National Park.



The drive out was about 45 minutes, the road is bitumen for the most part, just the last is dirt, but was in good condition when I drove it.

Wow, what a fabulous birding spot. At the end of the dirt road and past the farm house you come to a fenced and gated area that you can drive into. There are a couple of flat areas for tents, if you desire, but you do need a camping permit. There are no facilities there. But it was lovely and quiet and the birds were happily calling and feeding and flying about.



In dry times and with a four-wheel drive you could cross the little creek and drive along the road beside the Herbert River. I chose to walk along the road for a bit, only stopping because there was water right across the road. It was well worth the walk as I saw a good number of great birds while there. Northern Fantail, Pied Monarch, Little Shrike-thrush and Grey Whistler being the best.

Out in the parking area was a fig tree in full fruit, just small figs. I sat my chair beside the car and spent a very pleasant hour birding.

Silvereye, Barred Cuckoo-shrike, Varied Triller and Dusky Myzomela were among some that I saw enjoying the figs. Australian Swiftlet were flying above my head for a good part of that time as well.



The drive back along the dirt road was slow due to birds perched along the fences and on the posts. It was a very pleasant and safe spot for birding.

Annette Sibson

11th Hinchinbrook Birdlife Art Awards

Entries are now being sought for this annual exhibition. The close of entries is 15 June, the date of the exhibition is 31 July to 29 August.

Art works exhibited in the TYTO Regional Gallery.

For entry forms and full details, please visit:

gallery.hinchinbrook.qld.gov.au/art-awards

DATE CLAIMER 2026

Dates 12 – 30 October, encompassing Bird Week (19-25). We are planning our own exhibition at The Drill Hall Studio, in Mitchell Street, North Ward.

All photographers, artists, creators in the club are invited. There will be a small cost for each entry that you exhibit. You will need to get your selected photos printed out and made to look exhibition ready. Obviously the subject is birds, preferably local but at least Australian. Your best photos, something that you might like to see hanging on your wall or displayed on a table. Framed up and ready to hang. Printed as you would like, there are lots of options these days for printing. The entry fee will cover the cost of hiring the exhibition space, advertising, and opening night drinks and nibbles. There will also be a few prizes.

DUCKLINGS SPOTTED

Seven Spotted Whistling-Ducklings and 1 or 2 upset adults, seen on Badu Island in March. I startled them as I came around a corner of the track, they were in a flooded ditch.



Claire Willard

LISTENING TO THE DAWN CHORUS IN SWEDEN

Every May in Sweden, there is a tradition called Gökotta, where people get up predawn to hear the first birds sing. This listening time is sometimes accompanied by a picnic.

There is also a radio broadcast by Swedish Public Radio that starts around 3am and goes for eight hours, it features the dawn bird song from multiple locations. The radio broadcast also features commentary by bird

experts. The show aligns with the spring migration and peak breeding season, highlighting the intense early morning sounds.

The radio event is extremely popular, with approximately half a million listeners, reflecting a deep cultural connection to nature in Sweden. The phenomenon is celebrated as a way to reduce stress and reconnect with nature.

Some of the birds you might hear calling are, Common Cuckoo, Willow Warbler, Song Thrush, Common Blackbird, Redwing, Brambling, and many others.



Common Cuckoo Cuculus canorus

Gökotta directly translates to "cuckoo dawn" in English and is part of old folklore, according to which the cuckoo was bestowed with mystic powers and able to make predictions about the future. The Gökotta is a celebration of new beginnings, reflecting the endless possibilities each new day holds. It's a practice that encourages optimism and appreciation for the small wonders of life, and offers a moment of peace and reflection in a frenzied world.

Events modelled on the Swedish tradition are now moving around the globe, one location is Sussex in the UK. Birdlife International has a Dawn Chorus Day, celebrated on the first Sunday of May each year.

IAN BOYD'S PHOTOGRAPHS

The editor has been given permission by Robyn Boyd, (Ian Boyd's wife) to reproduce Ian's photos in articles for The Drongo.

All photographs of Ian's will be acknowledged by the editor.

Ian Boyd was a past member, who sadly lost a battle with cancer. His photographs are sitting in the cloud, doing nothing. He was a wonderful photographer and his specialty was owls.

Quest Numbers as at 9 May 2026

Name	Quest Number	Date
Marleen Acton	142	22/05/2026
Norm Rains	130	10/05/2026
Pat Charlton	190	9/07/2026
Warren Charlton	177	26/06/2026
Kyran Staunton	185	4/07/2026
Wal Threlfall	192	11/07/2026
Jill and Peter Staunton	196	15/07/2026
Elna Kerswell	180	29/06/2026
Wendy Kaus	215	3/08/2026
Beth Snewin	201	20/07/2026
Annette Sibson	212	31/07/2026
Anne Lawrance	257	14/09/2026
Janet Robino	259	16/09/2026
Mitchell Heide	216	4/08/2026
Julie Goldsbury	66	7/03/2026
Mick Theobald	207	26/07/2026
Chris Corbett	182	1/07/2026
Peter Bates	131	11/05/2026

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Deadline for next Drongo is July 31 2026. Please send articles as Word documents, photos as attachments.
The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Birdlife Townsville.

YOUR 2026 COMMITTEE

President: Mark Horvath	Annette Sibson	Norm Rains
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Treasurer: Nina Doyle	Warren Charlton	Kyran Staunton