

The Drongo

Number 183 August 2026



Annette Sibson

New President
West
South
Malleefowl



FROM THE PRESIDENT

I'm honoured to take on the role of President of Birdlife Townsville, and wanted to share a bit about myself for anyone I haven't met yet.

I grew up in Townsville and always had an interest in birds, with my parents often referring me to a copy of that big Reader's Digest bird book. I started work as a nurse out west and then overseas before going back to university to complete an ecological PhD. Following university, I worked in a variety of government and research positions and currently focus on wetland rehabilitation with NQ Dry Tropics.

I have a beautiful Persian wife (Sara) and a very bright daughter (Shalil), and if I'm not spending time with family I like to exercise and create apps that automate environmental reporting workflows.

I hope that my work in the bird club can contribute to sustaining its positive culture and involvement in engaging projects. If you see me around, please don't hesitate to say hi.

Kyran Staunton



YOUR 2026 COMMITTEE

President: Kyran Staunton	Annette Sibson	Norm Rains
Secretary: Wal Threlfall	Claire Willard	Katherine Goodwin
Treasurer: Nina Doyle	Warren Charlton	Jodie Gausden

Newsletter Editor Annette Sibson annette.sibson@bigpond.com

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

OUT WEST

On Monday 20th July we set out for Winton.

First birding stop was the dam at Pentland. One of the first birds we saw was a Great-Crested Grebe so that made the detour worthwhile. There were also a couple of Australasian Grebe. On the cemetery side was a row of mixed waterbirds, drying off their feathers – Great, Little Black and Pied Cormorant and Australasian Darter. A few Australian Wood Duck and Pacific Black Duck sailed past and a Comb-crested Jacana scratched around on the leaves. By the time we headed home, a Black Swan had joined the gathering.

Didn't see much along the road to Winton. Black and Whistling Kite; Brown Falcon and Nankeen Kestrel were the most noteworthy. There are lots of crow nests in the electric pylons. Unfortunately, there was quite a bit of road kill which kept the birds busy.

We didn't pick a very good time to go to Winton as there weren't a lot of birds around. We just go arm chair birding and don't slog around in the scrub, so we might have seen more if we'd worked harder, but we like to enjoy ourselves and take it easy.

After nearly eighteen months, the roads to Engine Hole and Bough Shed Hole remain closed. That is a shame as we used to spend a lot of time at Engine Hole and various birds visited for a drink. The ranger did tell us of another track to get to the creek. We followed it down but the erosion on the top of the bank was very bad. We didn't get to the bend where we usually go and that is where the birds (and kangaroos) come in to drink.

The Budgerigar and the Cockatiel were noticeable by their absence. The rain out west has probably attracted a lot of birds because we didn't see any Australian Pelican or Emu either. Neither did we see White-browed or Masked Woodswallow.

We were going to go on a bird watching tour which ran for three hours but the operator cancelled it "to give her staff a day off" so that was that.



At a waterhole that we could access, we were treated to lots of White-plumed Honeyeater, bathing, drinking and flying around madly.

Some Zebra Finch settled in a dead bush and made various forays to the water's edge. A very low branch of a bush yielded a male Mistletoebird which was a nice addition to the list. Last year we had quite a lot of birds at this spot but not this time. On the way out we came across two Brolga and there were two adult Brolga and one chick outside the Outback Motel in town.



Just before we crossed Mystery Creek on the way to the homestead, in the dead tree that I'm sure everybody knows, we found a Jacky Winter. There was nothing around the homestead. A bit further down the road we came across a Nankeen Kestrel being pursued by a kite. The kestrel was dangling a one metre snake from its claws. It shook the kite off and landed in a bushy tree to eat its catch in peace.

Late in the afternoon at the Long Waterhole, on the fallen tree across the water from the high road, there were eleven White-necked Heron. That was a pretty spectacular sight. There was also an Australasian Darter, a Great Egret and two Hardhead swimming up and down.

The town itself was full of Galah. Every Galah for miles around comes and perches in Winton. One house near the cooling ponds is host to hundreds. They have a lovely baubinia tree in the garden and the Galah cover the top of it like Christmas decorations.



The power lines are weighed down with the pink and grey. Having a meal at Tattersall's means sitting under a canopy of noisy Galah with, thankfully, the shade cloth shielding you from their unwanted attentions. Apparently, some of the locals crack whips after dark to move them on from their houses so they can get some peace.

Just down the road a bit, at the showgrounds there are more Galah and a lot of Crested Pigeon. Not only that, but there were camels penned up there, waiting for the camel races which were happening on Saturday.



We drove out from Winton and stopped at Crawford's rest area on the way to Longreach. We were rewarded with the sight of 25 Cockatiel in a dead tree, a little way off. That was a bonus. Whilst it wasn't full of birds, it was a nice break and it is great to be out west.

Annette Sutton

LOOKING FOR JUNK PHOTOGRAPHS

Hannah Faraone and her team are looking for photographs of bowerbird species interacting with human litter in their bowers. The study is called The litter bird-en. They would love to hear from you if you have images or knowledge of a bowerbird using litter. Please contact them on ho.faraone@federation.edu.au or submit images to their website

(<https://biocollect.ala.org.au/acsa/project/index/43b52a65-7d07-42c1-9c0c-4b967cfce53c?&hub=acsa>).

The team thank you for your interest in their research.



ANOTHER DESTINATION ANOTHER BIRD (OR TWO)

At the beginning of May, Beth had to go to a Zonta conference in Bowen, so she decided we should continue the trip and head south to Toowoomba and then on to Girraween National Park. After the conference, we headed to Rockhampton, then through to Gayndah to avoid the coastal strip in southern Qld. Along the way, we managed side-trips into Wunjunga, the St Lawrence Wetlands and Ravensthorpe National Park. At each place we were able to record a couple of new species for the Quest list. Some of these were: White-browed Robin, Eastern Yellow Robin, Silvereye, Brown Gerygone, Emu, Grey Shrike-thrush, Superb Fairy-wren, Striated Pardalote, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Yellow Thornbill, Double-barred Finch, Noisy Miner and Grey Fantail.

Two nights in Toowoomba gave us the opportunity to catch up with her nephew Chris and his family, as well as being able to drive down to the Spring Creek Railway Station so we could hear and see the Bell Miner that provide birders with easy views of themselves. The other great find in Toowoomba was two Long-billed Corella, which seem to be permanent residents in the Peace Park in Highfields. As well, there were two Common Bronzewing resting under a scraggly bush.

So, it was on to Warwick, where Wendy and Roger met us, so we could all go to Girraween National Park. Driving along the Condamine River, we found Red-rumped Parrot and Musk Lorikeet. No Eastern Rosella this time though. Our digs at Ballandean were on a tomato farm (yes, not a vineyard) in a reconditioned farm cottage. It was cold! However, Roger kept the fire burning each evening, and the bedrooms and bathrooms were heated (to a certain degree). As it was still early, we drove on down to Girraween, parked, donned our warm gear and started to walk. Stop! There's a Superb Lyrebird scratching in the mulch which was heaped near young plants.



Beth Snewin



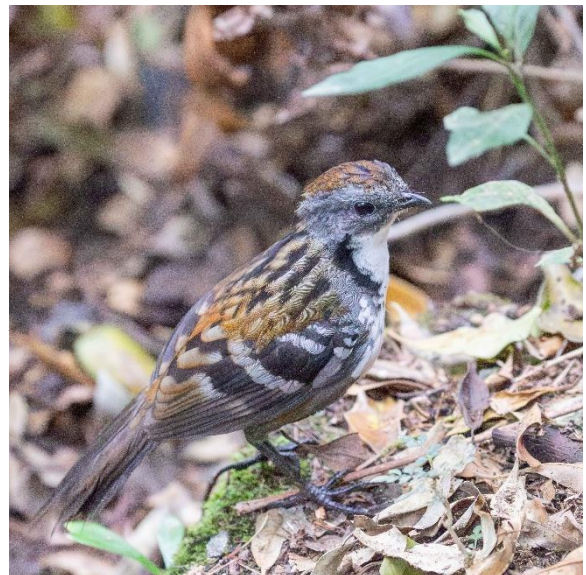
Many photos later, we continued along the short circuit to the creek. I was quite horrified to see how dry the whole park was, with young trees already dead and many of the more mature ones looking very sick. The rainfall here in summer had been almost negligible. Anywhere south of Toowoomba was dry, but the deciduous trees were in splendid colour, with their autumn leaves decorating each one. By the time we left, we had actually seen six Lyrebird, close up and personal, as they ignored our presence entirely. More photos. So back to our digs and the fire.

On our second visit to Girraween, we saw nary a lyrebird, but did find Red Wattlebird and Yellow-tailed Cockatoo. Diverting to the Wallangarra Sewerage Works after that, we only managed to find an Australian Shoveller. Another cold night, then back to Canungra where Wendy and Roger were holed up in his sister's house. From there it was easy to buzz up to O'Reilly's one day, in drizzling rain, to look successfully for the Yellow-throated and White-browed Scrub-wren, as well as having the pleasure of watching an Eastern Whipbird searching diligently and at length for insects under a nearby bush.

A Russet-tailed Thrush and an Australian Logrunner were also watched at length as they too worked in the mulch and a Brown Thornbill was found in the carpark trees.

Of course, there were the usual tourists feeding the Crimson Rosella and King Parrot, while Red-browed Finch enjoyed the fallen seeds. Sadly, no Wonga Pigeon came to delight us. As it was cold, wet and miserable, we bought pies and enjoyed them in the outside eating area, before heading back to Canungra.

The best find at Canungra were dozens of White-headed Pigeon feeding in fig trees in a park.



Australian Logrunner

Annette Sibson



Eastern Rosella

Annette Sibson

Surprise visitors next morning, close outside our bedroom windows, were two Eastern Rosella, many Variegated Fairy-wren and a female Satin Bower-bird flew onto a fence.

Along the dirt track back to Ballandean, we saw several Speckled Warbler, Jacky Winter and Yellow Thornbill. Near the river were Yellow-tufted Honeyeater and Beth and Wendy found White-winged Chough there the next morning.

Beth and I headed home via the same inland stretch after we drove up the Brisbane Valley to get to Gayndah, thence home via Rockhampton and Bowen. A Square-tailed Kite, Black-fronted Dotterel and Great Crested Grebe were the most interesting species seen along the way. Muller's Lagoon in Bowen gave us a mallard and Radjah Shelduck, while Wunjunga provided a Swamp Harrier, Australian Pipit and Horsfield's Bushlark as well as all the usual water birds, stork, stilt and Brolga. Thankfully, it was an interesting, happy and successful trip south, without any problems or accidents.

Elna Kerswell

MALLEEFOWL

There was much to learn, May to June this year, after my husband and I were able to properly identify mallee, and nearly getting lost amongst it. We were near the South Australia and Victoria border and were reminded of the rainforest, all looking alike. Yes, we were out of our environment for sure.

With Lew and Trish (below) and a guided tour of their Heritage area in the Paruna region, which is located in the Murray Mallee region of South Australia, 237km east of Adelaide, our education began. As expert Social Scientists in this field, they published the Malleefowl Conservation trifold leaflet which is available from Birdlife Townsville.



Naming conventions: Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata*
First Nations names: gnaw (naw, or ngowo); lowan (low, or loan, lawani); Nganamara.



Malleefowl are large ground dwelling birds somewhat larger than a domestic hen, so we were told. Listed as Vulnerable nationally under the EPBC Act 1999. They are one of just 22 bird species belonging to a family known as megapodes (meaning big feet). However, as a ground dwelling bird, Malleefowl will take flight to roost in trees overnight and to escape immediate danger.

Malleefowl are unique to the arid and semi-arid regions of southern Australia. They were once common across much of western, southern and central Australia. The birds prefer tall mallee eucalypt woodlands and low wattle scrub; unburnt, with relatively intact habitat, dense broom bush thickets with open ground and abundant leaf litter for mound building. Their range is now restricted to scattered pockets.



We found a footprint in the sand

Their food sources, as omnivorous, vary with seasonal conditions, droughts can mean low food availability. In general, they feed mostly on ants, seeds of wattle and senna plants as well as beetles, cockroaches, other invertebrates and lerp (sugary caps of sap-sucking leaf insects). They feed in stubble, eating spilt grain and weed seeds when other food is limited.



The Malleefowl lives on the ground and uses its large, powerful feet to build giant nest mounds and support a large body, measuring 50 - 60 cm long and weighing up

to 2.5 kg. It is well camouflaged, (some would say very elusive) with its upper body having intricately patterned bars that have fringes and streaks of grey, white, black and chestnut.

The underparts are creamy-white, with a black 'necklace' across the throat and upper breast. Its crest is flattened and the face is grey with a chestnut chin and a white line under each eye. The male is distinguished from the female by the larger dark grey patch on his wings, when birds are together, he is noticeably larger and more heavily built. The wings are short, broad and rounded at the tip.

Known to be quiet, shy, wary; rarely put to flight. They possess very keen hearing and eyesight, detecting danger well in advance but if threatened it will sneak away and rely on its amazing camouflage.

They prefer to run at a fast, lumbering pace if startled, which would have been cool to witness. Apparently, the best chance for sightings is near active mounds. They may be seen alone or in pairs, foraging quietly or crossing open areas, especially in the early morning or late afternoon, something we hope one day to witness.



Inactive mound; empty egg chamber

A single mound can contain over four tonnes of material and be over 1m high and 4 m across and may require an accumulation of over 20 years of debris - all moved by one industrious male who may tend it, dedicating between 9 and 11 months a year.

The surrounding leaf litter, soil, leaves and twigs are scraped together and then the process relies heavily on rain to help breakdown and decompose the material where he has buried wet litter inside the mound of sand. Later he captures the right amount of water for moisture requirements to regulate the temperature of the nest. The start of the nest preparation is between June and July, when the egg chamber is dug out regardless of the blazing heat.

He continuously checks by placing his head into the mound and it is thought that he probes with his beak or tongue into the soil, relying on the heat from the rotting litter, fermentation and the sun. The nest is complete as a dome shape mound that is ready for incubation.

The female lays up to 20 to 35 eggs per season (91x 60cm), usually in the South Australian region by August/September to late summer, with an egg laid every 4-8 days.



Excavated eggs

The egg is large and thin shelled, pale pink in colour and will change to dark beige during the incubation period. At dawn he digs down near the eggs, allowing enough heat to escape and refills the hole with cool sand or, alternatively, removing soil in the morning, spreading it out to warm in the sun, rebuilding layers as needed for correct incubation temperature overnight.

Newborn chicks have to find their way through a metre of soil unaided after 50-90 days and can fend for themselves away from the adult home range from the moment they hatch. Within one hour they are able to run swiftly and can fly within a day.



We found fox prints on the rim of one of the mounds.

The Malleefowl parents rarely get to see the result of their labour, because they abandon the nest and any remaining eggs when the critical temperature of the mound, about 33°C can no longer be maintained.

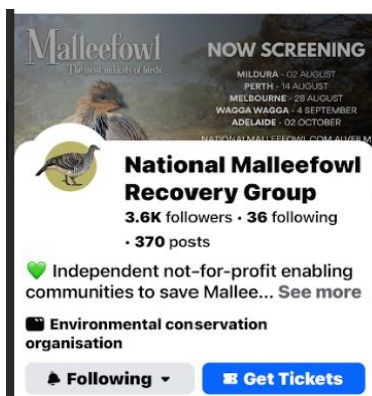
Some real threats exist, endangering this species: vast vegetation clearance has brought habitat loss and fragmentation limits their recovery. Grazing by livestock reduce food plants and feral animals' prey on chicks, eggs and adults. Fires and droughts are other threats to these birds.

Ron and Kath Goodwin

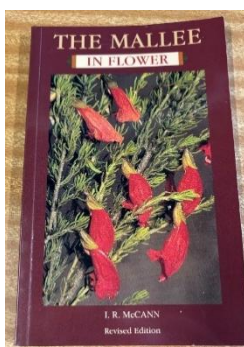
Other references for Malleefowl

Below is a link to the National Malleefowl Recovery Group film trailer.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1aZLnpwcuu/?mibextid=wwXifr>

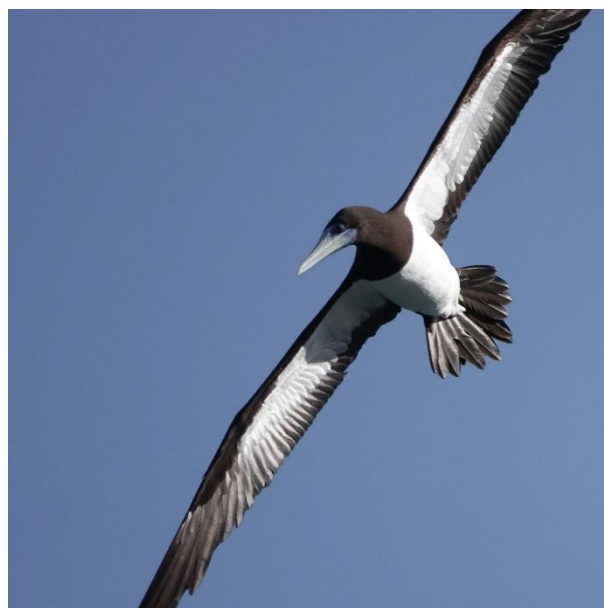


Books below available from Birdlife Townsville by request.



FUNNY BIRDING

On the way home from Toowoomba and Bell where we had been experiencing temperatures of -1.8°C, Anne and I spent a more comfortable night at Agnes Waters. In the morning before facing the long trip to Mackay, we had a quick search for birds on the waterfront. I was heading back to the car with the scope over my shoulder, when a little girl of about 3 years of age, walking with her mother and another young woman, asked "What's that thing?" I said, "It's a telescope so that we can see things that are a long way away". Her mother asked what we had been looking at. Of course, I said "boobies". Both women gave Anne and me a wide-eyed, amused quizzical glance. I immediately realised what the issue was, so explained that the big brown birds diving for fish were actually called Brown Boobies. With huge smiles and a big "Oh" they walked away giggling.



Janet Robino

LATHAM'S SNIPE COUNT

Dates for this season's snipe count are as follows –

September 26, November 21 and in 2027, January 23.

See our website activity calender for more details. Contact Annette Sibson if you'd like to be involved. annette.sibson@bigpond.com

If you see a Latham's Snipe at any time, please send in an ebird or Birddata report. Thank you.

THE THINGS YOU SEE AT BUNNINGS

Out looking for plants at Bunnings a month or so ago, I spied a female Sahul Sunbird feeding on some salvia. I watched, telling her that I'd choose a new plant from those she favoured.



Annette Sibson

While I waited and watched, along came the male, intent on mating he sang and fluffed his feathers sitting on a plant a short distance from her. I stayed still, marvelling at them so close to me, then suddenly he flashed a bright orange yellow pectoral tuft from his shoulders. The female wasn't overly impressed and continued to feed, ignoring him, so he did it again. I was impressed, not that he cared. I reached for my phone to record this behaviour but he was too fast.

The little feather he was flashing was only about 1cm long. He did it twice more before the female left and so did he.

I've never seen this display before and none of the birders I asked had either. I asked Mr Google and of course it had been recorded.

Courtship and Mating Behaviour

- Display: Males perform an active courtship dance, puffing up their iridescent blue-black chest feathers.
- Tufts: Males flash bright orange-yellow pectoral tufts from their shoulders during the display.
- Calls: Males sing and call loudly with an upward-pointing bill while moving from side to side near the female.

Just goes to show, there is always something new for us to observe and learn about birds, even while shopping in Bunnings.

Beth Snewin

11TH HINCHINBROOK BIRDLIFE ART AWARDS

Norm Rains was recently the guest speaker at these awards, with approximately 250 people in attendance. The awards are an annual event that celebrate the beauty of birds through art.

The exhibition is held at the TYTO Regional Gallery and attracts art works from artists of all levels from around Australia.

Not only did Norm speak at the event but he won the award for Digital Media with his fabulous photo of a female Satin Bowerbird, which was titled: Belle of the Bush.

The 11th Hinchinbrook Birdlife Art Awards are on display from 10am to 4pm until 29th August 2026.



POWERFUL OWL SEARCH

I have been on several searches for the Powerful Owl with Anne. I was taken to many places where the owl was definitely known to roost. It usually turned out to be just like Banjo Paterson said, "you should have been here last week." From his poem *'Last Week'*.

It was the same old story on our recent trip down south. We had finally decided to give up on the Powerful Owl this time, again!

While staying at Bell, at the foot of the Bunya Mountains we visited Wooroolin Wetlands. As we were leaving, we met a couple of very enthusiastic cyclists. Jennie and Tony were celebrating Jennie's birthday with a week at Wooroolin and cycling around the area, up to 50k's each day, Jennie's choice.

As we were chatting, our unsuccessful efforts looking for the owl got a mention. We had no idea that the cyclists were also very keen birders and members of the Toowoomba Bird Club, who just happened to know where the owl could be found. It got a bit complicated arranging to go on an outing with them. They were only going home on the Friday and we were leaving Bell on Sunday. It was a two hour drive there and back to where they live.

After a long thoughtful discussion, about three minutes, the decision was made to go for it on the Saturday. Jennie and Tony took us to a beautiful creek area which they survey and keep an eye on. It was full of birdlife. Highlights were Spotted Pardalote, Musk Lorikeet (lifer for Anne) and Powerful Owl (lifer for me).



As you can imagine, it was a pretty exciting moment for me. First, we found an adult sitting at almost the top of a 40–50 metres tall tree. Then a few minutes later, a pair of big, fluffy white juveniles were seen.



Jennie and Tony then invited us to their home for morning tea where we saw lots of Tony's amazing photos of birds. A really wonderful way to finish a great four weeks in the very chilly south of the state.

Janet Robino

EDITOR'S NOTE

Please send articles as Word documents and photos as attachments

As of the August 2026 issue of The Drongo, I will be using the BirdLife Avi List WLAB_v4.3(3) for bird names.

OF A FEATHER, exhibition Call for submissions

Birdlife Townsville is planning our own exhibition – Of A Feather – to be held at The Drill Hall Studio. The dates are 16 – 29 October, which will encompass Bird Week (19-25)

Entry to exhibit is \$10 per person. You can enter more than one art work if you like. Obviously, the subject is birds preferably local but at least Australian. Works can be offered for sale, subject to normal gallery commission.

All photographers, artists, creators in the club are invited. As well as artists from around the region. If you have a friend that is an artist, please forward the information I'll supply at the end of this article to them.

If you are entering photographs, please have your photos ready to hang. There are many ways to have photos printed these days, and frames are readily available.

The entry fee will help to cover the cost of hiring the exhibition space, advertising and opening night drinks and nibbles. There is some prizes up for grabs. The Drill Hall Studio is in Mitchell St, North Ward.

Below is a link to send to friends that might be interested. It is the entry form, the \$10 fee will need to be paid once this is filled in. (via a PayPal link)

<https://thedrillhallstudio.as.me/CallForSubmissionsOfaFeather>



H5N1 BIRD FLU INFORMATION

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/campaigns/birdflu>

Above is a link to the Australian Government information site for H5N1. It gives updates on where outbreaks are and what bird species are involved.

The information below is directly from the Birdlife Australia website.

What should I do if I suspect a wild bird may be infected with H5 bird flu?

- **AVOID** contact with sick or dead wildlife and their environment. Observe from a distance, and do not allow pets to touch or eat sick or dead wildlife.
- **RECORD** what you see, the location the animal was found, and take photos or video if this is possible without approaching the bird.
- **REPORT** any unusual illness or death in wild birds and other wildlife immediately via the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888**.

Details that will assist the response include:

- location (address and/or GPS coordinates if possible),
- date and time of the sighting (and when signs of disease were first noticed),
- the estimated number of sick or dead animals and other animals at the site,
- notes of any clinical signs that sick animals are showing, and
- contact details of any observers.

Learn the signs

Numerous dead birds in one location could be a sign that H5 bird flu has infected local populations and should be reported.

Individual dead birds should be reported if they are seabirds, waterbirds, shorebirds or birds of prey. In individual birds, warning signs and symptoms that should be reported include:

- a lack of coordination, tremors, swimming in circles
- twisted neck or other abnormal posture
- inability to stand or fly
- diarrhoea
- difficulty breathing, coughing or sneezing
- swelling around the head, neck and eyes
- cloudiness or change in colour of the eyes, and
- sudden death.

QUEST NUMBERS AS OF 8 AUGUST 2026

	Quest Number	Date
Marleen Acton	151	31/05/2026
Norm Rains	146	26/05/2026
Pat Charlton	217	5/08/2026
Warren Charlton	212	31/07/2026
Kyran & Shalil Staunton	193	12/07/2026
Wal Threlfall	222	10/08/2026
Jill and Peter Staunton	205	24/07/2026
Elna Kerswell	250	7/09/2026
Wendy Kaus	253	10/09/2026
Beth Snewin	246	3/09/2026
Annette Sibson	225	13/08/2026
Anne Lawrance	284	14/09/2026
Janet Robino	317	13/11/2026
Mitchell Heide	262	19/09/2026
Julie Goldsbury	68	9/03/2026
Mick Theobald	217	5/08/2026
Chris Corbett	228	16/08/2026
Peter Bates	150	30/05/2026