



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

To encourage the observation and study of the birds of the Toowoomba area.

No. 384
June 2009

Editorial

By Mick Atzeni

There's a reason for holding our raptor census in Winter – it is the best time of year for them. If you're not convinced take a look at what has been reported on the forum this season including the Holy Grail – the **Red Goshawk**; a pair seen by Rod Hobson at Haigslea. A copy of Rod's account is included for the benefit of those who haven't been utilising the forum.

One of the less welcome native birds in gardens, because they drive other species from their territory, are Noisy Miners. But I for one am glad they're around both my workplace and home when I think about how many raptors I would have missed were it not for their ever reliable vigilance and alarm calling whenever a raptor flies over.

It's not just raptors either. Add to that snakes, goannas, roosting owls – even fog-disoriented **Wompoo Fruit-Doves** as I discovered on arriving at work earlier this month. It was a bleak morning and I almost didn't bother checking what the commotion was about in a nearby eucalypt, but curiosity got the better of me. Lucky I did! My first

Wompoo for the TBO local survey area and only the fifth club record. It was also thanks to the Noisy Miners that Rod, Plaxy and I picked up the Red Goshawk at Upper Lockyer last October. The message is clear: heed those Noisy Miners; you never know your luck.

Another species generating plenty of excitement – and photographs - are the breeding **Blue-billed Ducks** at Lake Galletly, UQ campus, Gatton – a very unusual event in Queensland.



Blue-billed Ducks, Gatton.
Photo: Kevin Williams

**2009
Challenge**
201 as of 24/6/09



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS

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COMING EVENTS

Raptor Survey

27-28 June

Organiser: Pat McConnell

Saturday, 25 July 2009.
Lockyer Valley Wetlands

29-30 August 2009

Camp over-night

**Lake Coolmunda/Durikai
SF**

(An affiliated member of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia)

P.O. Box 4730, Toowoomba East 4350

www.toowoombabirdobservers.org

MEMBERSHIP: Adults/Families \$22, Students \$11

(Subscriptions due 31 August)

Southern Toowoomba Escarpment Outing – 30 May 2009

By Rod Hobson

On the early Saturday morning of May 30th eighteen stalwarts of the Toowoomba Bird Observers gathered under a sky-full of scudding clouds at the northern entrance to Glen Lomond Park. The clouds and the birders were driven by a good ol' biting Toowoomba winter wind that really didn't presage a good day at all. But by midday, the clouds were gone, the wind had dispersed and we had 51 birds for our day's tally including some woodland gems such as Scarlet Honeyeater, Golden Whistler, Red-browed Finch and Rufous Fantail. As we waited at the entrance to the park we were regaled by a rabble of lorikeets in the surrounding gums that comprised Scaly-breasted, Rainbows and the locally uncommon Musk Lorikeet. A frenzied fly-over by a small troupe of Little Lorikeets later in the morning and we had recorded all the SEQ lorikeets for the day.



Little Eagle: Photo: Kevin Williams

During our unhurried walk through the parkland we managed good views of some of its less frequently recorded denizens such as head-down Varied Sittellas and Pickwickian Wongas, retiring whipbirds and a skulking Collared Sparrowhawk. The highlight of the day was the appearance of raptor high overhead about mid-morning. Fortunately Kevin Williams' itchy trigger finger managed several images, which later identified the wraith, as a Little Eagle albeit a rather unusually plumaged individual. The consensus of

opinion among raptorphiles that have since viewed the photos is that it represents a bird in transitional plumage from juvenile to adult. The advent of the digital photographic age has surely been a boon to birders. Thanks for the photos, Kevin.

It was a great morning despite the fact that every second bird we viewed was a Yellow-faced Honeyeater, which were abundant on the day. And there were some conspicuous absences such as Grey Fantail, Rufous Whistler and Double-barred Finch but then you can't have everything. I think that we were all pretty happy by the end of the day.

Species seen on the outing were: Spotted Dove, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Crested Pigeon, Wonga Pigeon, Tawny Frogmouth, Collared Sparrowhawk, Little Eagle, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Musk Lorikeet, Little Lorikeet, Australian King-Parrot, Pale-headed Rosella, Pheasant Coucal, Laughing Kookaburra, Satin Bowerbird, Superb Fairy-wren, White-browed Scrubwren, Brown Thornbill, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, Eastern Spinebill, Lewin's Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Red Wattlebird, Scarlet Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, White-throated Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Eastern Whipbird, Varied Sittella, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Australasian Figbird, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Rufous Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Torresian Crow, Magpie-lark, Eastern Yellow Robin, Silvereye, Mistletoebird and Red-browed Finch.

Red Goshawks at Haigslea

By Rod Hobson

(Source: TBO forum www.toowoombabirdobservers.org.au).

On Friday 12.06.09 I travelled down to the Queensland Museum from Toowoomba. It started out normally but by the end of the outward trip the morning had progressed into the exceptional. Things started quietly enough with my sighting of a Wedge-tailed Eagle over Helidon. About half an hour on I came upon a second Wedgie over the Gatton Refuse Tip and a road-kill Barn Owl nearby on the Gatton Bypass. Pretty good thus far; breaking the monotony of the drive. At 10.20am things changed radically. I was approaching Sprengers Produce at Haigslea when I saw two raptors circling over this establishment in wide, lazy circles; out over the Warrego Highway then back over the surrounding fields. The produce merchant's was the epicentre of their circling. The birds were only about ten metres above ground level and were flying on slightly bowed wings in a lazy glide interspersed with a few casual and shallow flaps to keep up the momentum.

These raptors were clearly visible through my 10 x 40 binoculars, in fact diagnostic features could be clearly seen with the naked eye, as they passed overhead; a mature male and female Red Goshawk. I watched the pair for about 5-8 minutes and they were still performing the same aerobatics when I departed for Brisbane. During this period a small flock of feral Rock Dove, resident at the produce agent's, were wheeling about in great consternation, as were a few Straw-necked Ibis. Occasionally one of the goshawks would depart from its circling to make a half-hearted chase of one of the pigeons but they were clearly not too interested in a pigeon meal. I believe that the circling may well have been a courtship display, as the goshawks seemed much more interested in each other than in the pigeons (or ibis). GPS for sighting is 56J - E 465082, N 6950099.

When I first recorded this species at Grantham in the Lockyer Valley in the early 1990's it was also of a pair of adult birds. On that occasion the female was perched in a dead tree and the male was circling her in the casual fashion that the birds were also employing last Friday. On both occasions I have been absolutely astounded by the size disparity, especially in bulk, between the female and male Red Goshawk. The female is a massive, powerful animal as compared to the much slighter male. I do not believe that this dimorphism is anywhere as near as pronounced in any other Australian bird-of-prey. It is not a feature that is made enough of in field guides but is mentioned in HANZAB. Surely there is prey-partitioning between the sexes of this bird?

And, as if the cake needed any icing, about 40 minutes later I had a good view of a pair of Australian Magpies harassing a white morph Grey Goshawk over Moggill Creek at Kenmore - needless to say I was a bit late for my appointment in Brissie. But what a morning.

Regards,
Rod Hobson

Satin Bowerbird sets up Residence

By Pat McConnell

For the past 10 years or so Kath and I have been planting numerous trees and shrubs in our yard hoping to attract as much wildlife as possible while also reducing the amount of lawn we have to mow. We have had some success and now record about 50 species of bird in the yard each month. Many of these are regular visitors and can be seen daily.

Over the last two years an immature Satin Bowerbird has been displaying to females as well as shifting various blue trinkets around our yard. Occasionally he has also tried to place small sticks in the form of a bower without much success. This year he has attained his full blue colour and we have regularly seen and heard him not far from the house. On Tuesday 5 May when I was doing some gardening I found a newly completed bower about 20m from the house and positioned at the base of a Daintree Pine that we had planted several years ago. The bower is



Satin Bowerbird's bower. Photo: Pat McConnell

not well hidden and can be seen from our back door if you look carefully through the other trees we have planted. After watching him for all this time it was very exciting to finally see him build a fair dinkum bower resplendent with blue tie wire, bottle tops, Pale-headed Rosella feathers and blue pegs as well as off-white leaves and cream flowers which he holds as he tries to impress the females. It is the Satin Bowerbirds that are also responsible for dropping yellow flowers in our birdbath.

Sunlight hits his bower first thing in the morning and this seems to be the time when he is most active. This suits us as we can enjoy the show as we have our breakfast. While watching him on 6 May we were also entertained by the arrival of two Eastern Spinebills (the first for the year) and seven Apostlebirds that have been absent for several months. It looks like all the planting we have done is paying dividends even if the resident possums do keep us awake at night.

Stop Press: On Sunday 17 May I went to have a quick look at the bower to see what blue objects had been collected only to find the bower in ruins. Maybe he decided that it was not such a good position after all or maybe the older male that also frequents the area didn't like the competition and destroyed the bower. In the past I have seen Satin Bowerbirds do this to the opposition.

Saturday 23 May – The bower has now been re-built in the same place. I guess this indicates that the bower was destroyed by a rival male rather than the owner relocating it.

Sunday 14 June – The bower has once again been destroyed.

Members' Bird Notes

By Pat McConnell

All sightings seen by, or reported to members of the Toowoomba Bird Observers. Accuracy not vouched for by the TBO. Please check with observer before citing.

Wompoo Fruit-Dove	03/06/2009	DPI Toowoomba	MA, JS, BL, EH
Red-tailed Blk-Cockatoo (5)	14/05/2009	Withcott	DC, PC
Barn Owl	03/05/2009	Highfields	PM
Barn Owl	17/06/2009	QPIF, Wilsonton	MA
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	16/05/2009	Murphy's Creek	MA
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	16/05/2009	15 Mile Road	MA
Red-capped Robin	14/05/2009	Gowrie Junction	GG
Red-capped Robin	- /03/2009	Withcott	LW
Spotted Quail-thrush	11/03/2009	Withcott	DC, PC
Spotted Quail-thrush	30/04/2009	Withcott	DC, PC
Spotted Quail-thrush	16/05/2009	Murphy's Creek	MA
Spangled Drongo (10)	20/04/2009	Withcott	LW

MA, M. Atzeni; **EH**, E. Houston; **DC**, D. Cleary; **PC**, P. Cleary; **GG**, G. Glass; **BL**, Barb Learmonth; **JS**, Joe Scanlan; **PM**, P. McConnell; **LW**, L. Wilson.

With the increased number of sectors and the associated Grid Guide the Species Checklist no longer has room to fit in any Members' Bird Notes. If anyone wishes to submit bird notes they can do this directly to me at mccannel@usq.edu.au or via the Club's mailing address.

Thanks
Pat McConnell

Brown-headed Honeyeaters: Plucky, little koala-pluckers.

By Mick Atzeni

Following on from last month's bird note about Brown-headed Honeyeaters allopreening, this one relates to their unusual habit of collecting hair and fibre directly off live animals, in this case from a Koala.

Around March this year, my father and I observed a Koala in a Spotted Gum along Thomas Rd, Upper Lockyer, across the road from "Tiddalac". At the same time, Brown-headed Honeyeaters were about in the surrounding trees. We noticed a couple fly to the same tree the koala was snoozing in and to our surprise they started flitting around and landing on it, one on the back the other around the crown. It soon registered they were actually tugging on the koala's fur. While the koala seemed nonchalant about the bird on its back – not that it could do much about it anyway - the bird tugging at its ear tuft was clearly a source of annoyance, and it was quite comical watching the Koala's delayed, slow motion, 'shoo-fly' reaction, each time. He was very easy pickings, pardon the pun! We would have observed this behaviour for 3-4 minutes I guess before it ceased.

It was only after I checked the field guides that I discovered koalas were a targeted species. I was aware horses were – members Pat and Dave Cleary have witnessed and photographed this behaviour at their Withcott property - and also humans, although the

only person I know of this happening to is my brother-in-law who was sitting quietly on his bush block at Postman's Ridge when one took a fancy to his beard.

Hard not to have a soft spot for Brown-headed Honeyeaters, with close encounters like these!

World Environment Day, Lake Annand, Sunday 31 May 2009

We met at Lake Annand at about 8:00 on a cool morning to set up. With the help of Gayle Lee, Steve Zell, Kay & Kev Williams and Mike McGoldrick, the tent was up in no time. Thanks to those people for their efforts.

Kay and I arranged the pictures on the display board, placed various bird references and field guides on the tables for anyone wanting to check out a bird they had seen, and had plenty of the club's popular tri-fold brochures, bird lists, etc. on hand for those interested in the club. We had quite a few people discussing the various birds they have at their place. Things wound up around 4PM. All in all, a worthwhile local exercise to let the public know who we are and what we do.

Olive Booth

On behalf of the Club, I wish to thank Olive and Gayle for their time and effort in making themselves available for the whole day. Also thanks to Kevin Williams, Steve Zell and Mike McGoldrick for setting up and dismantling the tent on the day.

Kay Williams.

Birder in Focus – Michael McGoldrick

By Kay Williams, the Roving Reporter

Hi Michael, how long have you been interested in birds?

Since I was a child, on the family farm at Tara, on the Western Downs.

How did you get started?

When I was given a copy of Neville Cayley's book "What Bird is That?" as a birthday gift.

When did you join TBO?

In 2004 after I moved from Dalby to live in Toowoomba.

How did you find out information about the club?

We already knew about the existence of TBO from my involvement with WPSQ in Dalby.



Mike McGoldrick:
Photo: Kevin Williams

Why did you join this club?

As a recreational pursuit and a relaxing pastime when not working.

Are you a lone birder in a family of non-birders?

Yes.

What are the reactions of friends and family with your birding activities?

Some think I am mad! My brother at the property at Tara, gets sick of me pestering him about any new birds seen on the property.

What is the best or worst thing about birding?

The excitement of sighting a new bird, ("a lifer") is one of the best aspects.

The worst thing is getting up early in the winter to catch the birds!

When or where would you like to go birding next?

A different venue from the regular club outings. Perhaps a remote unexplored area.

Where are some of your favourite birding spots?

1. Lockyer Valley wetlands/ the back roads around Helidon and Gatton.
2. Echo Valley South Park [Council bushland park at southern end of Ramsay St].
3. Highfields Falls until the recent lack of maintenance.

Michael when did you realise you were hooked on bird watching?

I started from an early age.

What is on top of places to go birding, Australia or Overseas somewhere?

Northern Territory and the Kimberly region of Western Australia.

Do you constantly write lists?

No, but I keep lists when the club goes on outings and on special excursions with my birding friends.

What is your favourite bird?

The Grey -crowned Babbler.

Describe one of your best birding experiences.

When I go out with my birding friends, because we seem to explore pretty remote areas where I see more "lifers".

What is on top of your birds to see list?

The birds of the Top End and the Wet Tropics.

Where is your favourite local birding area?

West Creek because of its easy access and the lovely native shrubs, Neilson Park is also very good.

Thankyou very much Michael for giving me your time.

Until next time, The Roving Reporter.

COMING EVENTS

27-28 June 2009

Raptor census

Contact: Pat McConnell (07) 4631 5573

To establish times and meeting places for the different areas contact the relevant person; either:

- Michael Atzeni (Saturday 27th - Lockyer Valley area, 0458 9489 55)
- Pat McConnell (Sunday 28th - area north of Toowoomba, 4631 5573 - work)
- Mike McGoldrick (area west of Toowoomba, 4635 7371)

Saturday, 25 July 2009.

Lockyer Valley Wetlands

Leader: John Hadley.

29-30 August 2009

Camp overnight

Lake Coolmunda/Durikai SF

Leader: Sandra Wilson.

Saturday, September 2009

Redwood Park

Leader: Al Young.

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Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 15th July, 2009

Please e-mail or snail-mail your articles to Plaxy Barratt or Nicci Thompson

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