



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

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

No. 418
August 2012

Editorial

Mick Atzeni

Firstly, thanks to Kylie Grose for answering the call and helping pull this newsletter together. She has done a great job.

It's Spring and it's shaping up to be a great one! Some of the migrants are already back: **Channel-billed Cuckoo, Noisy Pitta, Leaden Flycatcher, Spangled Drongo, Rufous Songlark and White-browed and Masked Woodswallows** have been reported so far.

Spring's also the start of the TBO financial year. At the AGM in October we will be proposing a \$15 increase in subs this year to cover our own Public Liability insurance. It's unavoidable I'm afraid. Our previous cover was under BOCA's policy. It ended when BOCA and Birds Australia merged to become BirdLife Australia earlier this year.

We considered an invitation to become a BirdLife Australia branch or affiliate but there are some disincentives, including higher subscription fees. More about the fees in this newsletter.

Regarding the Challenge, we've already equalled the record (228 spp)! **Blue-billed Duck, Chestnut Teal, Yellow-throated Miner and Masked Woodswallow** are the latest. What will be the clincher?

Last month, I said a melanistic **Laughing Kookaburra** was seen at Laidley in 2009. Found this photo of it. Cheers!



Melanistic Laughing Kookaburra, Laidley, 2009
Photo: S. Goodwin.

2012 Challenge

Tally: 228 spp as of 13/9

This Issue

Raptor census: clarified results

Raptor census: perching behaviour

Azure Kingfishers & more
Bill Jolly

Adventures of the Black Falcon
Russell Jenkins

and more ...

COMING EVENTS

September Outing

Sat 29th

Venue: Mt Glorious

Leader: Mike McGoldrick

October Outing

Annual Species Census
Friday 26th-Mon 29th

Venue: Local survey area

Organiser: Mick Atzeni



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS

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MEMBERSHIP: Adult/family \$ TBA

Pensioner/student \$ TBA

Annual Raptor Census: Clarified Results

In last newsletter, **Black Falcon** appeared twice in the table. The final tallies haven't changed. Below is the revised table.

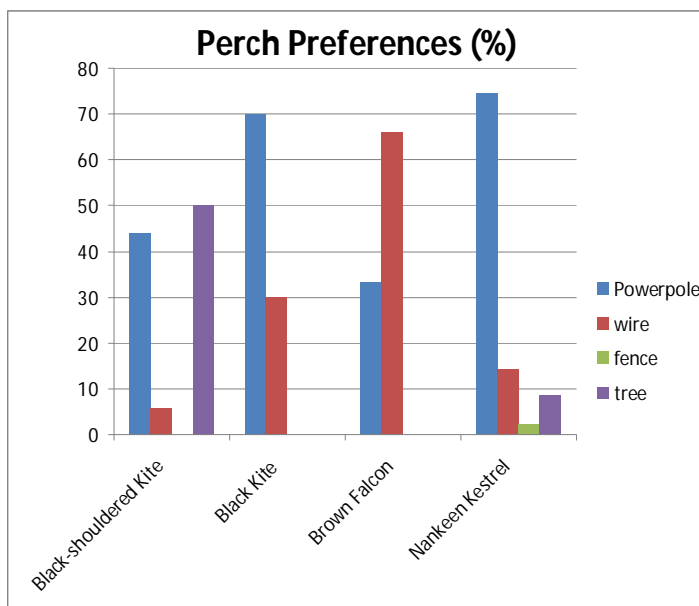
Table of Sightings for 23 – 24 June 2012

Species	N	S	E	W	Total
Osprey			1		1
Black-shouldered Kite	12	10	10	60	92
Square-tailed Kite			1		1
Black Kite			36	18	54
Whistling Kite			10	3	13
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	1		4		5
Spotted Harrier				1	1
Swamp Harrier			1	2	3
Brown Goshawk			1		1
Wedge-tailed Eagle	2		2		4
Little Eagle			1		1
Brown Falcon	2		7	7	16
Australian Hobby			1		1
Black Falcon			1	1	2
Peregrine Falcon	1				1
Nankeen Kestrel	13	18	25	120	176
Total number of raptors	31	28	101	212	372

Annual Raptor Census: Perch Preferences *Al Young & Mick Atzeni*

On the July raptor census, just for something different (or was it for the sheer rapture of it?), the western team also noted flight type and perch details. The perch data (western survey; Eastern Darling Downs area) is presented here graphically.

Because of the relatively low numbers of **Black Kites** and **Brown Falcons** observed, we can't read too much into their data. But power poles are tops for **kestrels**, whilst **Black-shouldered Kites** were observed on trees and power poles, roughly 50/50. Of course, what isn't known is the ratio of suitable "perch" trees to power poles.



Azure Kingfishers & more
By Bill Jolly

It's well and truly spring now! Nest-building, courtship and general showing off all over the place.

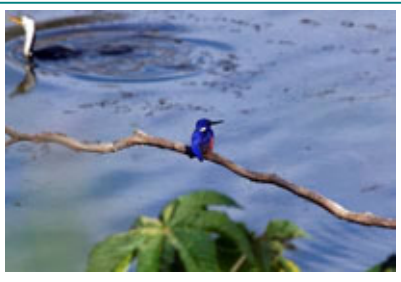
Part of the spring thing is that it's when the birds really look at their finest.

To the right is evidence of a splendid **Olive-backed Oriole** who visits the bird-bath every day.

Azure Kingfishers are regular, and I saw two zipping along together the other day - dare I call them a pair? Judging by the one in this photo, I'd say he's ready! First photo is from the house; then I made my way down for some closer shots.



Olive-backed Oriole
Photo: Bill Jolly



Azure Kingfisher

Photos: Bill Jolly

Adventures of the Black Falcon *By Russell Jenkins*

(Aka July Outing Report. It's gripping stuff so brace yourself! Can also be viewed on his blog at <http://russelljenkinsstoop.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/adventures-of-black-falcon.html> Ed.)

It was still dark but I awoke abruptly. It wasn't for sound or movement but for my mind. My eyes were wide open and I immediately anticipated the events of the coming day. It was a rare opportunity for me to go on an outing with the Toowoomba Bird Observers. Within moments I realised my face and feet were cold. (It was minus 1 Celsius outside). I tried in vain to snuggle and snooze, eventually getting up to make coffee. I grabbed the coffee and turned on the TV in time to watch James Bond arrive at Buckingham Palace. It was live. By the time Mr Bean was running along the seaside I was downing hot porridge laced with fruit and washed it down with another cup of coffee and a giant can of Red Bull. Mick picked me up at 7:07am.



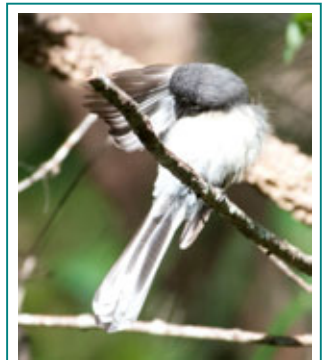
The crew at Highfields Falls
Photo: Russell Jenkins

We arrived at Highfields Falls at 7:30 sharp where we met friendly, bright-eyed bird watchers keenly gathering for the outing. It was pretty cold in the shadows but wherever we met the early sunlight, there was gentle warmth. Small shadows were already flittering high in the trees above us and the day had begun.

At first I was in awe of the size of the surrounding trees and bushes and was almost blinded by the contrasts of the light and shadows playing across the cold, damp, red clay path in front of us. I watched helplessly as names were called as

little figures darted from one bunch of leaves to another.

I've never been good at photographing (or even seeing) small passerines in the wild but now I am hopelessly out of practice. **White-naped Honeyeaters, Brown Thornbills, Eastern Yellow Robins, Australian Brush-turkey, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Pale-headed Rosellas, Australian King-Parrots, Torresian Crows** and **Grey Fantails** are just some on the top of my mind without referring to a list (At least several others). Hard to believe that sighting such a collection was regarded as a quiet morning.



Grey Fantail
Photo: Russell Jenkins



Grey Fantail
Photo: Russell Jenkins

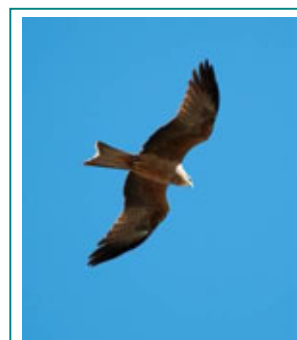
By late morning, we headed to a park at Highfields for refreshments where I found myself enjoying a nice cup of coffee provided solely by kindness. In the distance we found **Straw-necked Ibis**, and crows chasing some kind of raptor, and soon a **Brown Goshawk** passed by. **Pied Currawongs** were present as were **Galahs** and I got shots of a **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** announcing his whereabouts wherever he went. A **Brown Falcon** also stirred the alarms of **Noisy Miners**. A pair of **Wood Ducks** sat beside a pond and a **Little Pied Cormorant** soaked up the sun. High above us **Black Kites** floated back and forth.

After the refreshments, Mick offered to drive down around the Lockyer Valley in search of raptors. Kylie jumped in the back and we set forth with a couple of cars in tow. First Mick spied a distant **Wedge-tailed Eagle** as we went through Murphys Creek. Later, Kevin and Kay had selflessly stopped ahead of us and waved us on so I could get some shots of a **Brown Falcon** sitting on a power pole near Murphys Bridge. We needed to remain alert for every moment. Eventually the others left the three of us to continue our search. Not long after, Mick received a mysterious call by undercover agents, Rob & Jocelyn Wilson, reporting 'activity of interest' in the Grantham area. It seemed that a tractor working on a field had attracted numerous birds, including birds of prey. Sirens blazing and lights flashing we jumped into the transporter and were away. As we approached the Grantham area we found **Black Kites** lofting all about the place.



Sulphur-crested
Cockatoo
Photo: Russell Jenkins

In full patrol mode we cruised cautiously scanning for a field bloated with raptors and within seconds, we did. **Black Kites** and crows were sitting in a field with others alighting low and some high in the thermals. After getting to the end of the road alongside the "field of interest", Mick carefully performed a u-turn to double back. Suddenly two **Black Kites** were seen to be mobbing a dashing **Black Falcon** around trees ahead of us and Mick carefully landed the craft on the side of the highway. The three of us somersaulting into ready positions.



Black Kite
Photo: Russell
Jenkins



Black Falcon
Photo: Russell Jenkins

The **Black Falcon** is endemic species to Australia. It is a true spirit from Gondwana. The female is slightly heavier than a female peregrine and it is a dynamic aerialist. Although it is classified of "Least Concern" by Birdlife International it is thinly scattered over the outback. Although it's been decades since I read David Hollands' superlative book, "Eagles, Hawks, and Falcons of Australia", I recall Dr Hollands claiming it took him seven years of searching for Australian raptors before he finally encountered one.

As I landed to my feet I drew my camera from its holster. The falcon was hurrying our way, zigzagging around trees, power lines and poles. I tried to focus.

The Nikkor 80-400mm f5.6 VR lens is a very high quality lens made by Nikon in 2000. I bought mine in 2010. It was Nikon's first lens to boast VR (VR = Vibration Reduction which takes the shake out of handholding). In recent years, however, many have criticised Nikon for not updating the lens with AF-S, an in-built focussing motor. The lens relies on the in-camera focussing engine to focus. In the case of my Nikon D300, it can be ok but not completely accurate for moving subjects.

I focussed on a tree behind the oncoming missile and the camera refused to refocus. I shook it. The falcon funnelled around trees, poles and power lines and my lens found the lines but not the bird. I focussed on my left foot. Suddenly a great Gondwanian energy wave was upon us. My balding, eight year old R.M. Williams Gardener boots, (which were given to me freely by R.M. Williams outfitters when I went to get my old ones repaired in 2004) succumbed to the force sending me backwards. My camera flinging upwards out of my hands. I tried to save it, grappling it, I accidently grabbed it over the shutter button. I could hear the shutter

going, “bang, bang, bang” but when I got the camera back I looked upwards to see the falcon already high in the blue wilderness with its mate. The chance was gone.

Again we were alone. The trees reforming to stand tall, the power lines calming from their swing.



Black-shouldered Kites
Photo: Russell Jenkins

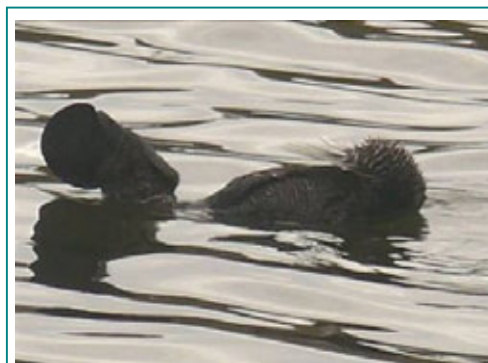
Raptors seen in the Lockyer Valley for the day were, **Black Falcon, Brown Falcon, Black Kite, Whistling Kite, Black-shouldered Kite, Wedge-tailed Eagle, White-bellied Sea-eagle, Australian Kestrel** and **Australian Hobby**. I'll go back over the list and count them properly later, but I think it adds up to eighteen species* (see below) in a couple of hours. For the day we have to include the **Brown Goshawk** up at Highfields too.

Days have drifted by like the continents. I have awakened to a breakfast of miso soup and rice. It is so very hot and humid. I decide to write for my blog and input a title, “We saw a Black Falcon”. Frustratingly, I am interrupted but the doorbell. I sign for a delivery ignoring the delivery man, close the door and pick-up and comfort a howling dog. She calms down and I nurse her and dream of events. I go back to my computer and read, “Your post has been published”. A gust of air flung the curtain out of the window behind me. I run to the window but see no-one.

** Some statements may be untrue in attempt to out-perform previous records of others ☺*

Male Musk Duck Puts on a Great Display *By Al Young & Mike McGoldrick*

On July 27 2012, while birding in the Loveday Cove area of Cooby Dam, we saw an amazing courtship/sexual display by a male **Musk Duck**. While walking along the shore we saw something moving about 10m from the shore and because the light was bad due to cloud cover it just appeared as a dark silhouette. Initially without the aid of binoculars it looked like some sort of weird model boat or extinct aquatic reptile motoring along. However, with the aid of binoculars it turned out to be a male Musk Duck displaying.



Musk Duck Photo: Al Young

The bill pouch was fully extended with the tail fanned-out and arched forward over its lower back. The neck was partially submerged and the head tilted upwards. While in this posture the feet were used to kick up a noisy splash of water that sounded just like a paddle slapping the water surface. While performing these manoeuvres the male emitted a shrill sharp whistle immediately after each kick-slap. This type of display is called a Whistle-kick and is one of three slightly different courtship display movements, each of which varies in intensity. The other two types of display are the Paddle-kick and the Plonk-kick (or rough red kick?). The Whistle-kick is considered to be the most intensive of the three displays.



This Whistle-kick display lasted for about 10 minutes and then the male swam across the inlet to the opposite shore and began to display again. While displaying a female Musk Duck was noticed swimming towards the male from an area near where the first display had occurred earlier. She passed to within several metres of the male but didn't slow down or even turn her head towards him. Oh well such is life! Maybe he should have tried the Plonk-kick display.



(Unfortunately due to poor light on the day the accompanying photos are not very good.)

References:

Biziura lobata Musk Duck. In *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds. Vol. 1B Australian Pelican to Ducks*, (ed) S. Marchant & P.J. Higgins, 1990. Oxford University Press.

Beware: "White-rumped" Harriers

By Bill Jolly



Immature Spotted Harrier

Photos: Bill Jolly

I had an interesting harrier here the other day which made two low passes along the middle of the creek and the margins.

My first impression, without binoculars, was of a dark un-spotted harrier, with a whitish rump, so Swamp Harrier kicked in straight away, and that was my mind set for a while. Striated under, colourful beneath, but none of the expected **Spotted Harrier** colours above.


Getting straight to the point, it proved to be an immature Spotted Harrier, but I'd already called it a Swamp Harrier, maybe a female, in my mind and it took a while to pick up that it wasn't.

You'll see that in some pics it shows a flecked rump, which looks surprisingly white as it goes away at a distance, but on close inspection of the other photos the spotted upper wing coverts are beginning to come through, likewise on the flanks; the face is a good rich chestnut, and the primaries are all dark beneath, not barred pale towards the tips.

These are not all things that one might pick up in the excitement of the few seconds of unfolding drama, when of course we're looking out for key field marks, hoping to get enough to be sure of an ID - particularly when the bird doesn't already neatly fit either of the regular adult options.

I guess the point of this note, is to say that I was left with the feeling that if I hadn't had the camera with me - and if it hadn't come so close - I might well have summed up what I was able to see with the naked eye and confidently called this passing bird a Swamp Harrier, mostly on the basis of its "white rump".

Photography Workshop



Are you interested in photography?

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FRIENDS OF LAKE APEX
Present



DIGITAL CAMERAS & BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY – A BEGINNER'S GUIDE *with Tom Oliver*

Convenor, BirdLife Southern Queensland Photography Branch

Date: Sunday 14th October 2012
Time: 9.30am to 11.00am
Venue: Lockyer Valley Cultural Centre,
Lake Apex
Cost: \$15 per head
(includes morning tea)

To book your place at this
workshop please contact:
Jocelyn Wilson
Phone: 07 5462 1230

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Why the Annual Subscription Increase?

By Mick Atzeni

Pending a favourable vote at the October AGM, annual subscriptions will increase by \$15 per membership this financial year making the new rates \$45 for family/individual and \$40 for pensioner/student. The \$15 increase is to cover our Public Liability insurance for outings, etc. The increase is based on our annual premium (~\$750) divided by a conservative membership estimate of 50. Historically, as a BOCA-affiliated club we were covered by BOCA's Public Liability insurance policy, which is why we became affiliated in the first place.

Some members may be interested to know the membership fees would be if TBO became a BirdLife branch or affiliate, in which case we'd be covered by BirdLife Australia's Public Liability insurance policy. **To become a branch**, the annual subscriptions are currently \$75 (Concession \$55), \$119 for a family and \$25 for a student. You'd receive our newsletter and BirdLife's publications. **To become an affiliate**, you'd pay the TBO subscription and would only receive our newsletter **BUT** three of the Executive must be BirdLife members too. The club will have to cover that expense (3x\$75 = \$225/yr) should no one be BirdLife members (default). In addition we'd have to pay BirdLife \$10/yr for each non-BirdLife member in the club for insurance. These two costs would have to be built into our annual subscription.

I hope this clarifies the current insurance scenarios and subscription implications for you.

Members' Bird Notes
By Pat McConnell

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES: 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.

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Rufous Songlark	1/9/12	"Tiddalac", Upper Lockyer	MA, KG
Blue-billed Duck (female)*	26/8/2012	Hood's dam, Helidon	MA
Banded Lapwing	23/8/2012	"Abberton" Helidon	BJ
Pink-eared Duck (2)	17/8/2012	near Granny May's Bridge, Iredale	MW
Australian Spotted Crake	17/8/2012	"Abberton" Helidon	BJ & MW
Wompoo Fruit-Dove	28/7/2012	Klein Rd, Highfields	GG
Red-winged Parrot (pair)	26/7/2012	near Lions Park, Hodgsonvale	PV
White-eared Monarch**	24/7/2012	Redwood Park	MW

* Second local record

** First winter record

MA, M. Atzeni; **GG**, G. Glass; **KG**, K. Grose; **BJ**, B. Jolly; **PV**, P. Vernon; **MW**, M. Wood.

If anyone wishes to submit bird notes they can do this directly to me at mccommel@usq.edu.au or via the Club's mailing address.

New Toowoomba Bird – Striated Heron (*Butorides striatus*)

Pat McConnell, TBO Records Officer

The following Rare/Unusual Bird Report was submitted by Bill Jolly. The bird was also photographed and the record was duly accepted by the Rarities Committee.

[For those unfamiliar with submitting such reports, Bill's report is an excellent example of the level of detail required for critical review, regardless of the observer's credentials. Ed.]

Other Observers Present: Eileen Jolly

Date of Observation: 26/05/2012

Location: Lockyer Creek at "Abberton", 27° 34' 21" S, 152° 08' 21" E

Habitat Description: Creek margins, native reeds, rushes and grasses in the shallows, banks covered with exotic grasses and weeds.

Sighting Conditions: 8.30am, clear weather, good visibility.

Optical Aids Used: Binoculars - Swarovski Swarovision EL 8.5x42; Telescope - Swarovski 20x-60x zoom

Distance/Height from Bird: 50 metres distant, maybe 10-15 metres above the bird.

Duration of Observation: Initially 15 minutes, several subsequent sightings that day and on succeeding days.

Number of Birds Observed: One

Description of Bird: Squat heron shape, smaller than local Nankeen Night-herons or Black Bitterns. Blue-grey above with darker blackish crown, face down to the eye, and nape. Underparts and face below the eye a pale chestnut wash, with a band of whitish feathers running longitudinally from throat to abdomen. Short dark streak on the face running back from beneath the eye. Dark upper mandible, yellow lower mandible. Yellowish patch in front of the eye. Legs yellow. Eyes yellow.

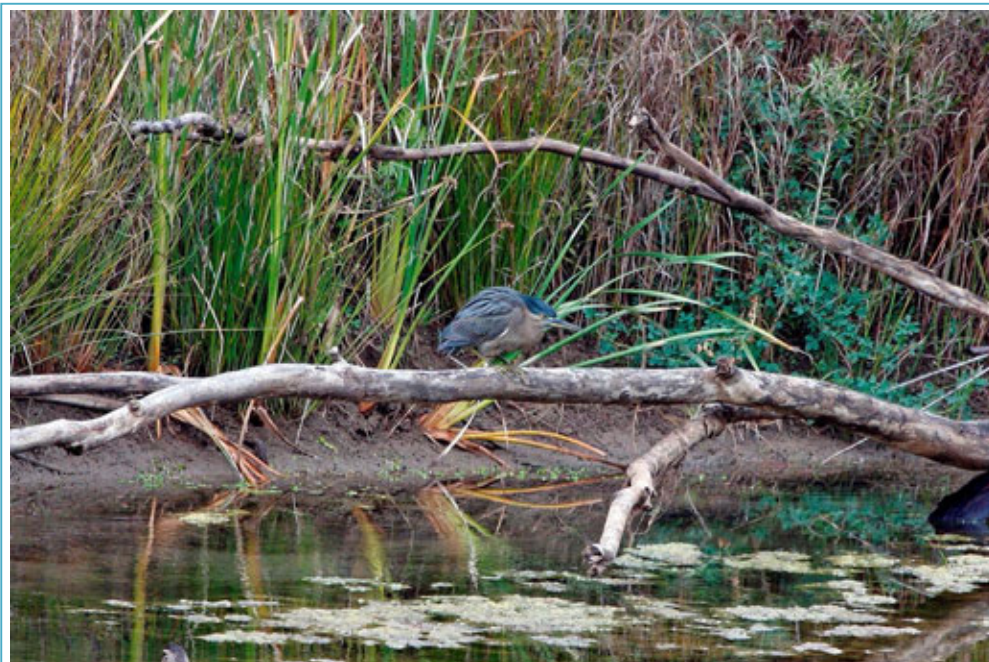
How was it distinguished from similar species?: Smaller than and different plumage and jizz to adult or imm Nankeen Night-herons or Black Bitterns, or other local herons. Larger than and significantly different plumage to Australian Little Bittern.

What is the extent of your familiarity with this and similar species?: Very familiar with this species and with all Australian herons.

What was the activity of the bird under observation?: Initially stalking prey in the shallows alongside the reeds lining the creek. Later seen to fly short distances, observed perched in shrubs overhanging the water, and seen to roost on the creek bank immediately adjacent to the water.

Reference material used: Instantly recognised as a Striated Heron, subsequently confirmed as an intermediate morph adult bird, as illustrated in the Eight Edition of Pizzey and Knight's Field Guide to the Birds of Australia.

Other comments: Saw the bird on numerous occasions over the course of four days, 26th - 29th May 2010.



Striated Heron, "Abberton", Helidon

Photo: Bill Jolly

COMING CLUB EVENTS

September Outing

Sat 29th September 2012

Venue: Mt Glorious

Time: 7:30 am

Meet: Minden-Lowood Rd turnoff, Minden. Travel in convoy to Red Cedar at the foot of Mt. Glorious where we will stop for morning tea (toilets available here). We will then proceed independently up the Northbrook Parkway to Maiala for our first birdwalk. If time permits we will have a second birdwalk at Boombana then on to Jolly's Lookout for lunch. Bring morning tea and lunch, drinking water, wear sunscreen and hat and good walking shoes and take insect repellent to repel scrub ticks. Please car pool at your own discretion to make the convoy as short as possible and to save on fuel costs.

Leader: Mike McGoldrick

Phone: 4635 7371 **Mob:** 0447 517 324

October Species Census

Fri 26th-Mon 29th October

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Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 20th September 2012

Please e-mail or post articles and photos to the Acting Editor.

If undeliverable return to
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Surface Mail