



# TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

No. 438  
April '15

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

## Editorial

Sandy Robertson

Hi all,

This month we have a wonderful article by Pat McConnell sharing some of the birds and other creatures he encountered on a recent trip to Sri Lanka and an update on activities at *Abberton* with Bill Jolly.

There is also some more details regarding the proposed extended outing to Bribie Island in June. Make sure you let Esther know if you plan to attend.

Please note the following correction from the last newsletter. In the February edition I mentioned the life membership awarded to Neil McKilligan, Bernice and Don Seton, Malcolm and Marjorie Wilson and Gloria Glass. This honour was conferred Birds Queensland not Birdlife Australia as previously written. Apologies for the error.

Happy Reading  
Sandy Robertson



Yellow-tufted Honeyeater,  
Perseverance

Some of the birds I have managed to catch on camera during my travels out and about around the region.



Red-winged Parrot, Chinchilla



Azure Kingfisher, Goomburra

## 2015 Challenge

94 species as at 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015

For full challenge list, go to:

<http://toowoombabirdobservers.org.au>

## This Issue

[Proposed TBO outing to Bribie Island](#)

[Member travels – Pat McConnell, Sri Lanka](#)

[Members Bird Notes](#)

[Members Photos](#)

[Bits and Pieces](#)

[Coming events](#)

Date Claimers 2015

**Proposed outings calendar**

April 26<sup>th</sup> (Sun) Lockyer Valley – Lake Apex, Adare Rd

June 5-8 Bribie Island

June 27/28 (Sat/Sun) Raptors

July 25 (Sat) Stevenson Street

Aug TBA Saw Pit Gully

Sept 26<sup>th</sup> (Sat) Lockyer Wetlands

October 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

Oct 23-26<sup>th</sup> Census

Nov Christmas breakup TBA



TOOWOOMBA  
BIRD OBSERVERS

P.O. Box 4730, Toowoomba East 4350  
[www.toowoombabirdobservers.org](http://www.toowoombabirdobservers.org)

MEMBERSHIP: Adult/family \$45  
Pensioner/student \$40

# *TBO Extended Outing*

## **Bribie Island and other places Queen's Birthday Long Weekend, 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2015**

This is an invitation to TBO members and friends to swap a few cold winter days for a few warmer (but still winter) days down at the coast, and see lots of birds at the same time. The excursion will be based at Bribie Island which is a nice place to visit and also a great place for birds with 330+ species being recorded there during the past few decades. We could easily spend the whole time on Bribie Island but, depending on people's preferences and how far you are prepared to travel, there is the option of visiting the nearby seaside towns of Sandstone Point and Beachmere (both on Moreton Bay) or even going farther afield to Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve (a good rainforest site near Maleny in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland) and to Caloundra on the southern Sunshine Coast. Too much choice?

These places offer a variety of habitats and so a variety of birds including bush birds, rainforest birds and water birds but our main focus will be on coastal birds many of which you would seldom or never see in the Toowoomba region. Coastal habitats on offer include tidal mudflats, mangrove areas, sandy beaches, a river mouth and the open ocean so there will be ample opportunity for you to get your shoes and feet wet. Species that we have a good chance of seeing include: Striated Heron, Eastern Osprey, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Brahminy Kite, various overwintering and resident waders, several tern species, Collared Kingfisher, Mangrove Gerygone, Little Wattlebird and White-cheeked Honeyeater. Beach Stone-curlew is a possibility and winter is the best time to see Double-banded Plover and Lesser Crested Tern. A trip to Caloundra would give us the opportunity to see Eastern Reef Egret, Sooty Oystercatcher, Australasian Gannet and Hump-backed Whale (not a bird of course), even a few sea birds. As always with bird watching, there are no guarantees.

Bribie Island is a holiday island and offers a variety of accommodation but if you would prefer to stay together at a central place then Bongaree Caravan Park has been recommended to me by several birding friends who live on the island. You need to book your own accommodation.

### **Bongaree Caravan Park,**

Address: 25 Welsby Parade, Bongaree QLD 4507

Phone:(07) 3408 1054

<https://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/bongaree/>

Please note that the photos on the website give you the impression that the Bongaree Caravan Park is on the waterfront; in fact you have to cross the road to get to the waterfront.

There will be a full birding program from Friday afternoon, 5<sup>th</sup> June, until Monday morning, 8<sup>th</sup> June but participants would be welcome to come and go as you please – you might like to do some site seeing or even go swimming etc. while you are on beautiful Bribie Island. For more information or to register for the excursion, please contact me. If you would like to share transport and/or accommodation, then let me know and I will send your contact details on to other people who register for the excursion. In mid-May I will send out by e-mail more detailed information about the places we will visit, road directions, meeting times etc. to people who have registered for the excursion.

Esther Townsend (Brisbane)

E-mail: [plinth2@gmail.com](mailto:plinth2@gmail.com)

# Sri Lanka for New Year

## Article and Photos by Pat McConnell

Sri Lanka was not a place Kath and I had thought about visiting but when our friends from Adelaide invited us on a trip with them we jumped at the chance. We arrived in Negombo just north of the capital Colombo at 1.30am on 30 December and luckily it was just a short drive to our accommodation because we were both very tired having left Australia at 1.00pm the day before. Our accommodation was the Gateway Hotel that has 27 acres of grounds surrounding it. After a late breakfast we decided to explore the grounds of our accommodation and see what birds the area had to offer. After several hours of birding we had managed to see Indian Pond-heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Southern Coucal, Asian Koel, White-throated Kingfisher (our very first bird in Sri Lanka), Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Brown-headed Barbet, Black-rumped Flameback (a type of woodpecker), Red-vented Bulbul, Yellow-billed Babbler, Purple-rumped Sunbird, Loten's Sunbird and the beautiful Black-hooded Oriole. Add to this India Palm Squirrel and it was a spectacular start to our trip. A lovely little oasis surrounded by busy traffic. It quickly became obvious to us that Sri Lanka celebrate the New Year in style as marques and portable dance floors were being erected at the back of the accommodation. That night we were treated to a magnificent banquet, live music, and fireworks at midnight. What a spectacular way to start 2015.



**Indian Palm Squirrel**

I have always kept a record on what is the first bird I hear and what is the first bird I see at the start of every year. This year of course it was quite different to my usual backyard birds in Highfields. The first bird I heard for 2015 was Yellow-billed Babbler and the first bird I saw was House Crow. Kath's first bird was the spectacular Black-rumped Flameback. Early on New Year's day which was the first day of our organised bird tour we met up with our friends from Adelaide, who had not long arrived in the country, and our guide Lester and driver Herath who work for the Bird and Wildlife Team who organised our 15 day tour.

We were soon in our vehicle and heading for Kitulgala where we were to spend the next two days exploring the rainforest and areas nearby. The driving at first was terrifying until we realised that it was common place to pass vehicles when there was oncoming traffic – everyone just gets out of the way. Lester told us that all the drivers drive by intuition. To miss another vehicle by a centimetre seemed common place. To make the trip more exciting our seat belts had also been removed to “make it easier to get into and out of the vehicle” – hopefully not through the windscreen. Despite the large traffic volume it was also common place to stop in the middle of the road or on a bridge or corner if an unusual bird was seen. Our accommodation at Kitulgala was where the “Bridge on the River Kwai” was filmed and the guest house was full of photos from the 1957 movie.

The Kitulgala area produced many great bird species including Oriental Honey-buzzard, Crested Serpent-eagle, Black Eagle, Ceylon Junglefowl, Green Imperial-pigeon, Ceylon Hanging-parrot, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Green-billed Coucal, Brown Fish-owl, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Malabar Trogon, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Ceylon Grey Hornbill, Yellow-fronted Barbet, several woodpeckers, Gold-fronted Leafbird, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Toque Macaque, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and the magnificent Sri Lanka Giant Squirrel.

Our long trek into the rainforest to see the recently discovered Serendib Scops-owl was unsuccessful although we did manage to hear several of them calling.

Reptiles proved difficult to see on the trip but while at Kitulgala we were lucky enough to see and photograph several Green Forest Lizards and the massive Land Monitor.

Day three saw us heading for Ratnapura where our friends wanted to look at some gem stones. We arrived there just after lunch on Saturday only to find all the gem shops were shut. However to our surprise the security guard phoned up all the owners who came back and opened up their shops. We found the whole experience quite interesting especially when all the street traders also turned up and started pulling gems stones out of their pockets for us to have a look at. Ratnapura is a busy place and I was happy to leave it behind the following day to get back into the birding once again. A Rufous-bellied Eagle seen while we were driving did help the drive, and the numerous road side stalls made for an interesting trip.

On day four we headed up into the mid-highlands to a place called Sinharaja rainforest. This is a magnificent patch of rainforest (and a world heritage listed area). The rough ride in was made more tolerable by seeing some more Giant Squirrels and a group of Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys. The accommodation though very basic offered magnificent views and great birding. We spent two and a half days here exploring the rainforest and were rewarded with many birds including Crested Goshawk, Crested Hawk-eagle, Layard's Parakeet, Red-faced Malkoha (a large and beautiful cuckoo), Ceylon Frogmouth, Crested Treeswift, Ceylon Small Barbet, Indian Pygmy Woodpecker,

Orange Minivet, the elusive Ceylon Scaly Thrush, Ceylon Scimitar-babbler and the

Ceylon Blue Magpie – this beautiful bird joined us for breakfast each morning. Unfortunately spotlighting is not allowed in the area but luckily a lot of the mammals are diurnal and we managed to see Sri Lanka Flame-back Jungle Squirrel and Dusky-striped Jungle Squirrel. Despite the leeches this was a magnificent place to visit.

On day seven we drove to Udawalawa via Udawalawa Dam and Udawalawa National Park. The national park was a place we were looking forward to as it gave us our best chance to see Asian Elephant. It did not let us down with elephants easy to see at close quarters. Other things of interest were Spot-billed Pelican, Grey and Purple Herons, Painted Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Barred Buttonquail, Indian Stone-curler, Jacobin Cuckoo, Indian Little Nightjar, Lesser Pied Kingfisher,



**Ceylon Grey Hornbill**



**Indian Scops-owl (photo by Kath O'Donnell)**

Indian Roller, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Coppersmith Barbet, Indian Pitta, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, several munia (finches), Purple Sunbird, Ruddy Mongoose and Chital Deer.



**Green Forest Lizard**

From Udawalawa we drove to Tissamaharama better known as Tissa. Yala National Park near Tissa like Udawalawa National Park can only be accessed with a local guide and driver in a safari type vehicle which gave excellent views of the wildlife. Here we saw Painted Stork, Asian Openbill (a stork that feeds exclusively on snails), Grey-headed Fish-eagle, Common Redshank, Orange-breasted Green-pigeon, Indian Scops-owl, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Indian Hare, Eurasian Wild Boar, Sambur Deer and Mugger Crocodile. Mugger Crocodiles are large fresh water crocodiles that grow up to five metres in length but rarely attack

humans. Not only was the 8<sup>th</sup> of January another great days birding but it was also the Sri Lankan presidential elections. Elections in Sri Lanka can sometimes be violent but the days passed with little incident. We did see armed soldiers at all the polling booths, and I had read in a local newspaper that the soldiers had orders to “shoot in the head” anyone who interfered with polling booth boxes. This deterrent, along with alcohol not being served on the day probably helped to keep the peace. Apart from lots of fire crackers going off things were pretty quiet. The current president lost the election despite the fact that he had called it two years early because his astrologers advised him this would guarantee him a win. One astrologer said he would cut his throat if the president lost so I am not sure what he ended up doing.

Tissa was a very interesting area and besides visiting Yala National Park we went to Bundala National Park as well as some of the local tanks. Tank is a local name for a large man-made dam often used to water local crops especially rice. They are usually quite shallow and are home to numerous water birds.

Nuwara Eliya was our next destination and from here we visited Victoria Park and Horton Plains National Park. Victoria Park is a small park in the city that is a good place to see migrants. On our two visits we were lucky enough to see Common Hawk-Cuckoo, White-naped Flameback, Forest Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Pied Ground-thrush and the rare and difficult to see Kashmir Flycatcher. Horton Plains National Park was the highest place we visited on our trip. It rises to about 2,000m and has spectacular views of the surrounding countryside including the impressive Adam’s Peak with its temple on top. Here we saw Himalayan Buzzard, Grey Wagtail, Indian Blackbird, Dusky Blue Flycatcher, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, Southern Great Tit, the beautiful Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and Indian Brown Mongoose. This mongoose was the final one of four that can be seen in Sri Lanka.

After departing Nuwara Eliya we headed for Kandy where we visited the Botanic Gardens, Hantane Peak and the Temple of the Tooth Relic – a temple where one of Buddha’s teeth is said to be kept. Kandy is a busy place with lots of people. The temple was quite spectacular and the Botanic Gardens were impressive and we managed to see Black-crowned Night-heron, Black Eagle, Plum-headed Parakeet, Common Kingfisher (which wasn’t common at all), Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher, Small Minivet, Ceylon Whistling-thrush (which had eluded us on the first two attempts) and a very large Rat Snake in the Botanic Gardens.

On 13 January we headed off early to Sigiriya where we were to spend our next two days. The mountains at Sigiriya were spectacular as was the surrounding countryside and the wildlife. Here we managed to see Blue-faced Malkoha, another two Brown Fish-owls (a species that seems happy to hunt during the day), Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Ruddy Mongoose and the difficult to see Golden Palm-Civet.

Before we knew it our holiday was coming to an end and we headed back the 130km to our accommodation just north of Colombo. The drive back was a bit of a nightmare and it took us over six hours to travel the 130km due to road works and traffic. Not an enjoyable way to finish a fantastic trip but still it was another adventure in itself. Both Kath and I can certainly recommend Sri Lanka as a holiday destination and we were certainly well looked after by Lester and the Bird & Wildlife Team.

Pat McConnell



**Ceylon Whistling-thrush**

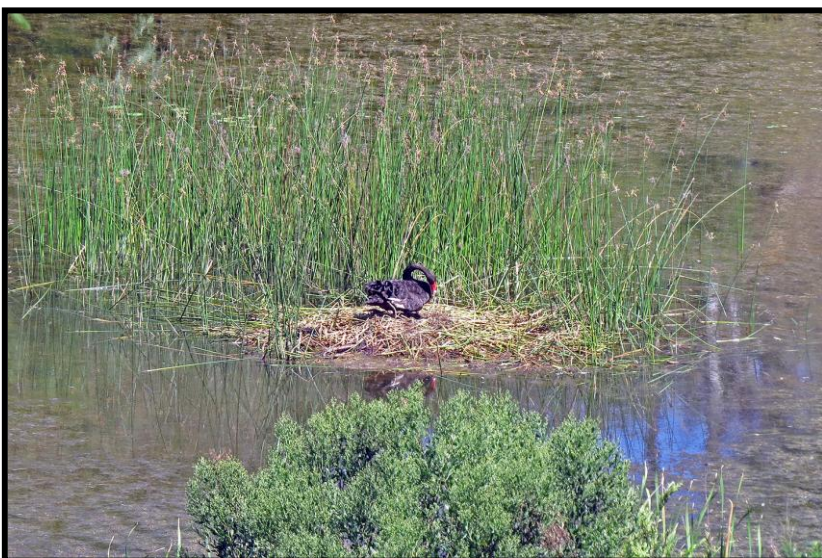
# Members' Photo Page

This month's member's photo page(s) includes stories and photos from Abberton with Bill Jolly and Rob and Jocelyn Wilson's recent travels in the Bundaberg region.

Just a catch up on some of our recent garden birds at Abberton.

At end of February, we noticed that a pair of Black Swans had begun to lay down the base of a nest in a patch of sedge right in front of the house. Five days later, half the sedge patch had gone, the nest was in place and the first egg laid!

We've been photographing them almost daily since and can vouch for at least 4 eggs in the nest, which has continued to be added to in width and height throughout. Full-time incubation was under way by 6<sup>th</sup> March, or just possibly a day or two earlier. Male and female are sharing incubation duties, though the fairly ritualised changeovers of the early days have become much more casual of late – allowing the below long-distance photo of the nest with eggs clearly on show.



The sodden Grey-crowned Babbler was photographed mid-ablution at the bird-bath outside my office window. Others pics from the verandahs.



**Grey-crowned babbler**

**Pheasant Coucal**



**Sacred Kingfisher**

**Spotted Harrier**

It's been a good week here with Speckled Warbler, Plum-headed Finch, Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, Azure Kingfisher and Ground Cuckoo-shrikes in addition to our regulars. I wish I could have photographed them all!





Last month I wrote the following to a birding friend

“Azure Kingfisher zipping up and down the creek a lot over the last few days. I shall erect a fallen branch as a tempting creek overhang from which he may fish in full view of the verandah.

I did the same thing about ten years ago and it snared an Azure on the first day!”

So, on the following day, I ‘planted’ some dead limbs in an appropriate location on the creekbank, and began the wait.....

Over the next week or so the new vantage point was utilised by Willie Wagtails, Red-backed Fairywrens, Tawny Grassbirds, a Spangled Drongo, Pheasant Coucal quite a lot of birds, but no Kingfishers.

Then a Sacred Kingfisher found it, and the new dead tree became, and remains, a regular outlook from which it daily surveys the creekside vegetation for prey.

But, though Azure Kingfishers continued to zip along the creek, it took another month or so, until yesterday afternoon – when Bingo! I stepped out on to the verandah to find an Azure Kingfisher doing exactly what I had hoped it would be doing exactly where I wanted it to be doing it!

A very rainy photo attached as a starter with the hope of much more to come.

Bill Jolly



Here are a few photo's from Rob's and Jocelyn Wilson's few days at the end of February in the Bargara/Burnett Heads/Bundaberg region, where they were privileged to watch 100+ tiny, perfect, Loggerhead Turtle hatchlings erupt from their sandy nest and scurry down over the sand dunes and beach to the ocean. Something they considered to be a magical and humbling experience. They also, managed some bird watching. At Burnett Heads, they were fortunate to speak with a local birder who pointed out two Asian Dowitcher, rare visitors to the area. It was thought that maybe they were blown in with the cyclone. Rob and Jocelyn are still trying to identify some of the other waders they observed in the mangroves in that area! Rob managed to photograph a very windswept Nankeen Night Heron on a rock wall near the Burnett Heads lighthouse. They recommend Baldwin Swamp in Bundaberg as a great place to walk and do some birdwatching. The area was apparently covered with flood water in 2013.



Clockwise from top

Burnett Heads 26th Feb, 2015

- **Asian Dowitcher**
- **Nankeen night Heron**

Badwin Swamp, 27th Feb

- **Female Rufous Whistler,**
- **Immature Spectacled Monarch, Baldwin Swamp**
- **Varied Triller, Baldwin Swamp**



# Members' Bird Notes

**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
Brown Goshawk	22/02/2015	Murphy's Creek	MA
Peregrine Falcon	28/03/2015	Highfields	PM, KO
White-headed Pigeon	22/02/2015	Prince Henry Drive	MA, PM, NM
Brown Cuckoo-Dove	22/02/2015	Prince Henry Drive	MA, PM, NM
Barn Owl	22/02/2015	Howmans Rd Lockyer	MA
Fork-tailed Swift (44)	26/03/2015	Highfields	PM
Rainbow Bee-eater *	20/03/2015	Highfields	PM, KO
White-throated Honeyeater	22/02/2015	Murphys Creek	MA

\* From 20 – 23 March 2015 I have noticed large flocks of Rainbow Bee-eaters passing over Highfields and Cambooya heading north.

**MA**, M. Atzeni; **PM**, P. McConnell; **NM**, N. McKilligan; **KO**, K. O'Donnell.

If anyone wishes to submit bird notes they can do this directly to me at [mcconnell@usq.edu.au](mailto:mcconnell@usq.edu.au) or via the Club's mailing address.

Thanks  
Pat McConnell

# Bits and Pieces



Many hands make light work  
We still require additional members to join the executive committee  
In particular someone to take on the role of treasurer.  
It is not a hugely demanding position, but one that needs to be filled. If you would like to help out, please come along to the next Executive Committee meeting which will be held Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015 at 7pm in the Dr Price Room, Little Street.

## TBO Online

Website and facebook:

[toowoombabirdobservers.org.au](http://toowoombabirdobservers.org.au)

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Toowoomba-Bird-Observers/175472075881350>

## Coming Events

### 26th April Lake Apex and Adare Road

Meet at Lake Apex at 7:00am in the bitumen car park next to the Playground and big Apex picnic/bbcue shelter. Mobile number is 0447621230 to advise if you are attending. Bring the usual gear; binoculars, camera, drinking water, sun protection, and morning tea of course, possibly a chair too.

For club outings, please advise the Outing Leader if you will be attending so that car pooling can be arranged where possible and Leaders can start the outing when all attendees have safely arrived, or advise everyone of any last minute cancellations due to inclement weather.

### October 2015 40th Anniversary celebration

We are still looking for volunteers to be involved in organizing an event to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the club. Please contact Sue of Olive if you would like to part of the group organizing this event.

## Committee Members

<b>President</b>	Olive Booth	4633 0553 <a href="mailto:o.booth@bigpond.com">o.booth@bigpond.com</a>
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**Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

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

**If undeliverable return to  
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PO Box 4730, Toowoomba East Q 4350**

**Surface Mail**