

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

POSTAL ADDRESS

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toowoomba bird club

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

No. 142 - OCTOBER 1987

DIRECTIONS

October is the time for our Annual General Meeting and the end of the TBC year. At this time it seems appropriate to take stock of the club -- to look at our directions.

The preparations for the B=A=T species count on October 25 have caused me to have a re-think on the club's bird counts. From 1976 through to 1982 we carried out an annual census of the bird population of our Local Study Area (LSA). On these counts we gained a sampling of the numbers of individual birds present. Each year we added to the information base and enabled valid comparisons to be made.

It was never suggested, or intended, that we were seeing every bird present in Toowoomba on that day. Obviously that would be quite impossible. However, we were counting at the same time each year (when the migrants had returned), and the results were perfectly valid.

In 1983 the club carried out a species count on one day and since then - nothing! Why? Our emphasis seems to have drifted to quarterly species surveys done by a few members at their leisure, with no organised effort to ensure full coverage of the LSA.

The QOS conducts an annual census for its own records in which several of our members participate. However TBC sees nothing of the results; nor would it benefit our records to do so, inasmuch as ~~the~~ the survey is not of our LSA. Naturally I'm in favour of co-operation with QOS (I take part in the census), but it is a great shame that our willing members are not harnessed into a team that would benefit our club records. I'm sure that the QOS folk regard their count as a sampling for that day. They accept that as a valid record - a perfectly valid record.

From 1977 to 1981 the RAOU conducted the Atlas of Australian Birds scheme. The result is now available as a large atlas which maps the distribution of all Australian species for that period. For their purposes RAOU divided the country into blocks of one degree of latitude and longitude. In some areas further sub-division into 10' blocks was used to simplify recording, but the Atlas maps show the species as present (or absent) in one degree blocks.

c/td.

DIRECTIONS c/td.

For the record, our LSA consists of two of the 10' blocks, adopted when we joined the scheme. That brings me to the second of what I feel are mis-directions.

Again in 1983, our LSA was divided into eight sectors simply by drawing arbitrary lines on the map. This, I think, was an error, in that the previous, simpler "uprange" and "downrange" blocks gave us all the accuracy we could possibly need. And all the accuracy the RAOU needed, too. I am yet to be convinced that eight sectors bestow any extra accuracy.

I venture to suggest that eight sectors are unnecessarily complex for members wishing to join the monthly checklist scheme. We also now have to maintain eight sets of records which must be waded through before information can be extracted. That is patently ridiculous. The sectors became so complex that in 1986 we had to produce a twenty page booklet to explain the divisions!

Hands up, all those who would submit a monthly checklist if all that was needed was to indicate "up" or "down" ?

The proper function of sectors is simply as a means of co-ordinating and directing an annual census. All of this comes down to two questions:

- a) The QOS finds value in an annual census -- why not TBC ?
- b) The RAOU found sufficient accuracy in 10' divisions-- why not TBC?

I am not suggesting that the changes were made with anything but the interest of the club in mind. I am, however, suggesting that the earlier directions were of much greater long term benefit to the club. We ought to get back on track.

Good Birding

Ron Hopkinson

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AUSTRALIAN BIRDS AND THE LAW

- * Nearly all Australian birds are protected, including eagles, Hawks and other birds of prey. In some districts certain species may be unprotected because they cause serious damage to crops. Specified game birds may be shot during limited seasons by licenced sporting shooters only.
- * It is illegal to make any collection or be in possession of live or dead birds, including bird skins, wings, skeletons or feathers unless a licence is first obtained.
- * It is illegal to collect any birds from the wild for aviaries, for food or for any other purpose without first obtaining a licence.
- * Birds' eggs are protected and egg collections are illegal unless a licence is obtained.
- * Falconry is illegal.
- * You may not put leg-bands on wild birds or otherwise handle or mark them unless you hold a permit.
- * Each Australian State has its own laws which protect birds, and heavy penalties can be imposed if these laws are broken. Details can be obtained from National Parks and Wildlife Service.
(From "The Bird Observer". Also published as a leaflet by BOC in English and eight other languages.)

Ron Hopkinson

SORTING THEM OUT - WHITE WATERBIRDS

It has been some considerable time since we had an episode in the "sorting them out" series, so it would not be out of place to have a look at some of the large white waterbirds which one is, hopefully, likely to see around the waterholes of the local study area.

There are other white, or pied, waterbirds of course, but our purpose here is to 'sort out' the species a Toowoomba birder might see in our district, leaving the others for a later date.

We will deal with seven birds: Sacred Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Little Egret and Intermediate Egret in the hope of clarifying any difficulties.

Sacred Ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopica*): Unmistakable; head and neck of naked black skin; large, black, decurved bill; in flight tips of primary feathers show black; band of scarlet, naked skin underwing.

Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*): another easy one because of the long black spatulate bill; in breeding plumage carries tuft of white plumes on the nape (nuchal plumes).

Yellow-billed Spoonbill (*Platalea flavipes*): generally similar in size and colouring to the Royal, but the spoon-shaped bill is yellow as are the legs; nuptial plumes on upper breast.

Cattle Egret (*Ardeola ibis*): a small, squat egret. Has the least elegant jizz of the egrets, with a hunched appearance at rest. Non-breeding bill is yellow and legs dark olive (blackish from a distance).

In breeding plumage the crown, upper breast and mantle develop plumes of dark buff to cinnamon colour; for a brief period prior to egg laying the bill, face and legs may become reddish.

Great Egret (*Egretta alba*): The largest of the four egrets here; with long legs and long neck it fishes in quite deep water, mostly by the 'stand and wait' method; usually alone.

The neck is long in relation to the body (about one and a half times); pronounced kink; non-breeding bill is yellow and legs, though variable, usually dark olive-grey.

In breeding plumage shows long nuptial plumes from mantle; bill turns black; legs black.

If you are close enough, the line of the gape extends beyond the eye and the forehead is low and flat.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*): a smaller egret with active feeding methods; walks briskly through the shallows and sometimes dashes after prey; the slender black bill remains so in or out of the breeding season, as do the legs. Breeding plumage consists of plumes on breast and back, plus two lanceolate plumes on the crown (occipital plumes). The Little is the only egret to show such plumes.

Intermediate Egret (*Egretta intermedia*): the difficult one; not always easy to separate from the great (larger) or little and cattle (smaller).

Out of the breeding season the great, intermediate and cattle all have yellow bills and legs that appear dark. However the intermediate has a shorter, thicker neck than the great, and the crown is more rounded; line of the gape does not extend beyond the eye, as does the great. During courtship the bill and upper legs take on an orange/

SORTING THEM OUT C/td.

reddish colour.

Size is not always a reliable criterion, unless several species are present for comparison. At distance a lone bird's size may be difficult to estimate. However size should separate great from little and cattle, leaving just a bit of practice required to sort out intermediate from the rest.

Ron Hopkinson

References: The Waterbirds of Australia. National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife. Angus and Robertson.

The Herons Handbook. Hancock, Kushlan, Gillmor, Hayman. published by Croom Helm.

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SIGHTINGS AT THE HABITAT

A couple of interesting sightings have been reported from the Waterbird Habitat, which augur well for its future.

We've had a report of an Australian Pelican there in August. The pelican is one bird which is so unmistakable that non-birders know what they are seeing, so this, coming as it does from outside the club, should be acceptable.

Lyn Rowan turned up a Buff-banded Rail on September 24. It was seen from the southern end of Aberdeen Street. These two reports underscore what was said in Newsletter #139 (July), that the park will build up a population of waterbirds in time.

Less interesting and hopefully short term was the presence of a domestic duck.

Ron Hopkinson

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FIELD DAY FOR OCTOBER

The field trip for this month will take the form of the species census for the Bird-A-Thon.

We hope you are planning to be in it.

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MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES

- Bush Thick-knee. 27.9.87. Carbarlah. AHS.
- Ground Cuckoo-shrike. 9.9.87. 'Ringmere', Withcott. AHS.
- Clamorous Reed Warbler. 23.9.87. Waterbird Habitat. REH.
- Large-billed Scrubwren. 27.9.87. Ravensbourne N.P. AHS.
- Paradise Riflebird. 27.9.87. Pair at Ravensbourne N.P. AHS.

REH: Ron Hopkinson. AHS: Ann Shore.

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:- Members \$10.00. Families \$12.00. Students \$5.00

ACTIVITIES:- Field day and meeting- fourth Sunday of the month.
Camping trips and film and slide evenings.

NEWSLETTER:- Published monthly, prior to field day. Contributions are invited and should reach the Editor by the end of the month.
