



TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

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"TO ENCOURAGE THE OBSERVATION AND STUDY OF THE BIRDS OF THE TOOWOOMBA AREA"

No. 150 - June 1988

Sundown National Park

Most of the birds mentioned below I have seen many times before, but as I had not been into this area for many years, most of the birds seen had not found their way onto my lists for a long time. The fact that a trip like this, with nothing new to be seen, can bring about so much enjoyment is a tribute to the hobby of birding.

Sundown National park lies south of Stanthorpe on the Queensland/New South Wales border. The park has an area of 6680 hectares and is bisected by the Severn River. I had the good fortune to visit this area for a weekend in early May.

The road into the park was a bit bumpy due to recent rain but the slower driving certainly helped the birding. Brown Treecreepers and White-plumed Honeyeaters were commonly seen, and while stopped at the Ranger's office obtaining a bird list, Southern Whiteface and Diamond Firetail were also added to my list. The bird list for the park is about one hundred and fifty.

We quickly set up camp, with Wedge-tailed Eagles soaring overhead, and didn't waste any time getting into the birding. The park is lucky to have a fine river flowing through it which provides a permanent source of water for the local wildlife. There are not many marked tracks in the park but there are plenty of creeks and gullies to follow. Even quick walks were rewarding, and just following the creek for a few hundred yards produced Common Bronzewing, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Spiny-checked Honeyeater and Dusky Woodswallow.

While preparing tea that evening we were lucky enough to have a Turquoise Parrot fly over our camp, and Variegated Wrens come in for a close look at the goings on.

The following morning saw us leaving the river to explore neighbouring woodland. Despite a few Scrub Ticks, this walk proved quite rewarding. Nearly the whole time we were on this walk, Wedge-tailed Eagles could be seen circling overhead. Brown Treecreepers and Diamond Firetails were quite common and we were fortunate in that they were both very tame. The Diamond Firetail has to be one of the most beautiful of Australia's finches. It wasn't long after this that we got good looks at several small flocks of

Turquoise Parrots. Hooded Robins, Spiny-checked Honeyeaters and White-plumed Honeyeaters were also seen.

A fine weekend of birding was topped of by what was certainly the best bird of the weekend. As we were leaving the park we stopped to get some water from the ranger and it was here we spotted a Purple-crowned Pigeon feeding in a Peppercorn Tree. It was very tame and afforded excellent views for several minutes before it headed off down the creek.

In all, fifty birds were seen in the park over the weekend excluding a Little Eagle which we saw sitting by the road on the drive home.

Behaviour of Magpies

May I add an observation to those of Diana Beal (Newsletter No. 149) on the roosting behaviour of Magpies. John and I have often remarked on the evening 'flight to roost' of these birds.

Sundown seems to act as a pre-arranged time signal, for quite suddenly the sky will be full of Magpies heading purposefully toward the Range. Last year there were upwards of twenty, the most I remember; this year around a dozen. Always at the same time, be it clear or cloudy, and always heading in the same direction, though we never see them alight at the roost as they are lost to sight among the tall trees at the foot of the Range.

Diana noticed that they had used the same roost for several months, but as they seem to be obviously great creatures of habit, maybe they use the same one for years? And will the dozen, even two dozen or more, also cram themselves into a very small space for the night; all daytime enmities temporarily forgotten when safety in numbers takes priority?

Ann Shore

May Outing - Pittsworth Area 22/5/88

Three cars found their way through the fog to Pittsworth High School to be joined by Bruce and Di Muirhead who led the group to two very interesting water habitats. One car, having missed a turn-off, wasn't so lucky and spent the day looking in vain for the rest of the group.

After observing an aboriginal Bora-ring from the road near Mount Rolleston, the first stop was a sizeable dam on Jim Martell's property at Felton South. A large flock of Little Corellas (200) was an obvious highlight - a real treat to see these western birds so close to Toowoomba. A total of thirty-one species was recorded at this spot alone, the most notable being White-eyed Ducks, a pair of Darters, and in the bush across the road, Mistletoebirds, Double-barred Finches and Grey-crowned Babblers.

The road into David Hogarth's Lagoon was bumpy and rough, showing the effects of the recent heavy rains. In fact, there was evidence everywhere of the 'big wet' of April - roads pitted and damaged, bridges under repair and debris in the fences lining the roads. None of this seemed to have any effect on the roadside birdlife which included Brown Falcons, Zebra Finches, Black-shouldered Kites and numerous Kestrels.

Hogarth's Lagoon was alive with water birds, quite different from the bitterly cold day when the Bird Club visited there several years ago. Black Swans, estimated to be 150+ in number, were the most prolific, and good views of their nests were obtained from the back of Bruce's truck which he drove slowly along the edge of the lagoon. Among the species observed were two Pelicans, Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Grey Teal, Black Duck, Sacred Ibis and Little Pied Cormorants.

A perfect day of bird watching ended with a picnic lunch at Di and Bruce's property, 'Rosensath'. Many thanks are extended to them for organising such a worthwhile outing.

A total of fifty-five species were seen during the day.

Members Present: Lesley Beaton, Marilyn Jacobs, Angela Kilmartin, Di and Bruce Muirhead, Norma Thomas, Jane White and visitor, Matthew Williams.

Marilyn Jacobs

Back Yard Antics

Since our household has been leaving birdseed in the backyard, and feeding the local Magpies and Butcherbirds, the Hawks have also become more common. The Crested Pigeons often scatter as an Australian Hobby flies overhead.

Several days ago we had a different visitor. A Collared Sparrowhawk called in, and to the annoyance of the other birds, decided to stay for several hours. The Crested Pigeons were soon nowhere to be seen but the Butcherbirds did not let the Sparrowhawk leave their sight. The Sparrowhawk seemed intent on making a meal of one of them. But the Butcherbirds didn't seem too concerned, although they were careful not to fly into any wide open spaces. For about two hours the Sparrowhawk chased the Butcherbirds, and the Butcherbirds chased the Sparrowhawk, with Crows and Currawongs sometimes making the battle a bit one-sided.

There were four Butcherbirds in all. But no more than two at a time were occupied with the hawk. Watching the other two going about their normal business was an entertainment in itself. It was while watching one of these that I received a pleasant surprise. As I was leaning over the verandah, one landed in a small tree in front of me, hopped along a side branch and plucked a dead mouse from one of the thorns and flew away to eat it.

In the meantime the sun was setting and it was looking as though the Sparrowhawk would go hungry. I never did see if he got a feed that night.

If the Sparrowhawk had hunted in this apparent haphazard manner for a short time, I would have thought he wasn't really serious. But when he kept it up for several hours I was convinced he was serious otherwise it was a great waste of energy.

This Sparrowhawk is quite tame and has since been seen on several occasions in our back yard.

Complimentary Copy

Century Hutchinson Australia Pty Ltd had kindly supplied the Club with a complimentary copy of John Bransbury's book "Where to Find Birds in Australia". Members wishing to read the book could contact our Librarian - Nancy Belcher. Any member wishing to buy the book at a reduced price could contact Pat McConnell.

Cape York Bird Weeks

The Cape York Wilderness Lodge are offering two weeks birding on the Cape. One week in January and one in April. Anyone wishing to go would have to book early. Last years trips were booked out four months ahead. Lesley and Peggie Beaton highly recommend them. For more information contact Lesley.

June Outing

Lockyer area. Leader - Ann Shore.

The meeting place is at Apex Lake, Gatton, on Sunday 26 June at the amenities block at 7.45 am to leave at 8.00 am sharp. Visitors are most welcome.

The QOS has reminded the Club that our members are most welcome on any of their outings. Those interested contact Ann Shore.

July Outing

This outing is to Flagstone Creek. Leader - Angela Kilmartin.

Members' Bird Notes

Emu (4)	29/4/88	Gympie-Tin Can Bay Road	AS, JS
Forest Kingfisher	30/4/88	Mary River, Tiaro	AS, JS
Musk Duck	2/5/88	Cooby Dam	GG

AS - Ann Shore; JS - John Shore; GG - Gloria Glass

It is with regret that the Club accepts the resignation of Ray and Audrey Viljoen, effective as of 22/5/88. Ray and Audrey are moving to Buderim. They have been very supportive of the Club and will be missed very much. The Club wishes them a peaceful and enjoyable retirement.