

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

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

No. 170 - March 1990

From the Editor: The T.B.C. have organized a combined Easter Camp-out in the Mitchell area with Q.O.S. We will camp on private property so bring your own tent, bedding, cooking gear, cutlery, crockery etc. Refrigerator, water and washing facilities, eg shower are available. Our hostess will be Dawn Allen who is the country Vice-President of Q.O.S. for western Queensland. Dawn will guide us around her property to the best bird areas. A day trip to the St. George, area has also been suggested.

Directions: Drive west to Mitchell. Continue on past Mitchell on the Charleville Road for 10 km. The second main gate on the road is the entrance to Dawn's property -- 'BOORINGA DOWNS' sign is on the gate. Arrival can be from Thursday afternoon 12th April. Contact Jane White for more information on 30 6267.

Alternative Outings: Members wishing to go on a morning or day outing rather than to the camp-out at Mitchell over Easter are invited to join the Chinchilla Field Naturalists who will be making an Easter visit to Toowoomba from 14-17 April. They will camp in the Hodgson Vale area and will probably visit a private property on Sunday at Cawdor where there is an excellent bora ring, and, weather permitting, go to Goomburra on Easter Monday. Other venues in Toowoomba may also be visited. Further details from Ann Shore.

Please note that the Mitchell camp-out and local Easter outings will replace the usual 4th Sunday outing for April.

Interesting Snippets

I have written before of the delights of home birdwatching when quiet observation, or even the casual glance from house or garden, can lead to unexpected sightings and reveal those small quirks of behaviour, feeding habits, movement patterns, sounds or songs and so much more.

Last Spring it was a Scarlet Honeyeater that caught my attention: the intense patch of scarlet moving among the callistemon blossoms causing immediate excitement then + on several following days while on 13 February a Red-backed Fairy Wren suddenly appeared outside the garage - two more "firsts" for Shorelands!

However, our Withcott sightings pale into insignificance when compared with those of Bill Jolly from the home beside the Lockyer at Helidon. While visiting there on 25th February on a damp and overcast morning, the appearance of 4 or 5 Shining Bronze Cuckoos claimed our instant attention. They stayed around for some time, flying back and forth between eucalypts, wattles and the thickets bordering the creek, giving excellent views of their colouring and markings. In company with numbers of adult and young Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes and later an immature Brush Cuckoo, they were obviously feasting on the plague of caterpillars which had almost stripped every castor oil bush in the vicinity.

The previous day Bill had noted 5 or 6 Spangled Drongos similarly engaged, (two again early that same morning) and an Oriental Cuckoo on 3rd March. His species total for the day of my visit was 49 - not bad for one day's home birdwatching!

Ann Shore

FIELD OUTING REPORT 25/2/90.

A small gathering braved the ominous weather Toowoomba dished up to us on the morning of the outing. From Highfields we were escorted to Alan Davidson's property at Kleinton by Alan himself.. Birds, unfortunately, were not in abundance because of a persistent wind and intermittent rain but Alan's running commentary on the prolific ruins of the old Kleinton Pottery buildings on his property was both interesting and informative.

Grey-crowned babbler, White-winged choughs and a family of Wood ducks were of particular interest to our beginners. At morning tea we were all caught unawares when an unidentified raptor was seen to take a pigeon in the distance. Guess whose binoculars were in the car at the time!

We then travelled to Cooby Dam picnic area where the extra shelter from the wind was more conducive to bird activity. Wonderful views of an Azure kingfisher "frozen" on a low willow branch over the creek, curious Red-backed wrens and Superb blue wrens, Red-browed firetails and Double-barred finches ended the morning's birding in a blaze of glory - literally! A small taste of a wonderful past-time for our newcomers despite the adverse conditions.

Our sincere thanks to our host, Alan Davidson. It was a shame about the weather but Alan's property has the potential for attracting many species and we look forward to visiting it again under more favourable conditions.

Michael Atzeni.

NEW MEMBER

The club welcomes Pamela Stephenson, 2/72 WINE DRIVE, TOOWOOMBA Ph 34 3930. We hope your stay with us is long and happy with lots of interesting bird-watching.

BIRD TOUR BOCHURES

The Secretary is holding many brochures on Wildlife and/or bird tours which members are welcome to peruse. They include Philip Maher's Inland Bird Tours to all parts of inland Australia; Coate's Wildlife Tours who specialize in wildlife and birdlife and are offering tours to Western Australia, India, Nepal, China, Morocco, Turkey, Kashmir, Botswana, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, Kenya, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Bhutan, Zambia, New Zealand.

GIPSY POINT LODGE

The lodge is offering special bird-watching holidays with Graham Pizzey for two separate consecutive weeks commencing 24 March 1990. Peter Slater will be returning for two separate weeks of bird drawing and painting in October 1990. Further similar weeks are planned for the Spring of 1990 and beyond.

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For further particulars contact — MARG OR JOHN MULLIGAN, Gipsy Point, Vic. 3891. Phone (051) 58 8205



THE BEHAVIOUR OF BIRDS - PART 8 OF A SERIES

FLIGHT MAINTENANCE

A bird must keep its feathers in perfect condition. If the plumage is in disarray, insulation and waterproofing will be spoiled and flight will be less efficient. It will cost the bird more in terms of energy to keep warm and fly, and laboured flight may even cost the bird its life. Flight maintenance is a two way process comprising the everyday regime of cleaning, oiling and preening the feathers, and the renewal of the suit of feathers at the moult.

A feather is a complex structure, delicately pieced together, so that it must be treated with care. From the central shaft, or quill, there run two rows of barbs which are linked together by overlapping barbules. Maintenance consists of ensuring that the thousands of barbules stay hooked up, because the integrity of the feather is responsible for its unique flexibility and strength, as well as its waterproofing properties. Air trapped between the barbs increases the surface tension of the feather vane and causes water to pearl into droplets and run off (like the air held between the fibres in taut canvas). In waterbirds, the air trapped in the plumage also increases buoyancy.

Most birds bathe, even in cold weather, and starlings have been seen to break thin ice so they could immerse themselves. The typical bathing action gives the bird more of a shower bath than a soaking. Standing in shallow water, it bends down to immerse the belly and vigorously flicks its bill from side to side in the water. At the same time the wingtips are vigorously beaten so that sprays of water are thrown over the body. In heavy rain, drops of water run off the plumage leaving the bird dry, so, to make bathing effective, the bird ruffles its plumage to allow wetting, but it must not get soaked or it will be unable to escape if danger threatens.

Some birds bathe in the rain eg parrots stand with feathers ruffled and wings and tail spread. Some birds eg warblers bathe by flapping among rain or dew soaked foliage. The plunge bath is a feature of the most aerial of birds such as swallows, kingfishers and owls which dip into the water for an instant before continuing their flight.

by Barbara Weller

Adapted from "Bird Behaviour" by Robert Burton, Granada Publishing 1985.

FUTURE OUTINGS

T.B.C.

Sunday, 25th March - Jubilee Park. Meet at Bridge Street Quarry entrance at 7.30 am.
Leader Ann Shore Ph. 303207

Q.O.S.

Sunday, 8th April - Mt. Cordeaux, Cunningham's Gap.

Wednesday, 25th April - Bird Walk, Enoggera area, Brisbane.
(Anzac Day)

For more information contact the President - David Hiland 07 379 2344.

QUEENSLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS

Members are welcome to attend the monthly meetings of Q.O.S. which are held on first Thursday of the month, from 8.00 - 9.30 pm, followed by refreshments. The excursion is the Sunday following the meeting. The venue is the Queensland Museum in The Cultural Centre, South Brisbane. Entry is via The Dinosaur Garden in Grey Street. The doors open 7.30-7.50 pm. After 7.50 pm please use the wall phone to the right of the glass doors and dial six and ask to be let in. Please close these doors after you so they can be re-locked.

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