



TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

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

No. 171 - April 1990

FROM THE EDITOR: The exciting news this month is that a new bird has been sighted in our coverage area and added to our area checklist bringing the total number of species for our study area to 261. Congratulations go to Michael Atzeni and Pat M^CConnell for their sighting of a male Blue-billed Duck at Hood's Lagoon on Sunday 1st April. See Pat's report later in the newsletter.

Our first winter Bird-a-thon will be held on Sunday 27 th May. This is in response to the success of the summer bird-a-thon and requests by members. It will take the form of a non-sponsored fun day to survey as many species as possible in our coverage area. The winter migrants should have returned so come along and see how many you can tick.

REPORT ON LAST MONTH'S OUTING - PRINCE HENRY DRIVE, TOOWOOMBA.

Following a spell of fine and bright autumn weather, it was rather disappointing that Toowoomba's first and much needed wet day should be that planned by our members to explore the walks in Jubilee Park; which after a reconnitre the previous week, looked to hold promise of good birding. However ten intrepid members and one small grandson braved the gloomy morning although opting instead for a walk along the roadway above Redwood Park instead of slippery, steep and muddy tracks edging the range. Poor light made identification tricky but a Brown Cuckoo-dove flashed past as we started out and small scrub birds such as Brown Thornbills, White-browed Scrubwrens, Spotted Pardalotes and numbers of Lewin's Honeyeaters were much in evidence. A pair of Whipbirds called and chased each other back and forth in the top of the lantana to the delight of the watchers and a Currawong was caught making a meal of a young Bandicoot. Some of the party saw a Regent Bowerbird while for others there was an Eastern Yellow Robin. Now and again the mist cleared and we had glimpses through the trees of the valley below. A short morning with minor pleasures and pleasant company.

Ann Shore

SOME BIRDING SPOTS DOWN SOUTH. In January this year I did a month's birding mainly in southern South Australia and Victoria. Outlined below are some of the better areas visited.

Mirrool Creek - 66 km. east of Hay. I stumbled across this spot by accident, at first attracted by small flocks of Glossy Ibis overhead. On closer inspection the swampy area turned out to be a real gem. The little birds I saw dashing between the reeds turned out to be Australian Crakes. Sitting quietly on the edge turned out to be rewarding with twelve of them wandering back and forth with little concern for me. Also seen here were Nankeen Night Herons, Baillon's Crake, Black-tailed Native-hen and White-fronted Chat.

Hattah Lakes - These lakes are well worth a visit but preferably not in the middle of summer. I hadn't planned a stop here but the weather was quite mild so I put in a day hoping to see the elusive Red-lored Whistler. Once again it didn't materialize but those species of interest that I did see here were Pink Cockatoo, Regent Parrot, Mallee Emu-wren and White-fronted Honeyeater. When in the triodia areas the Emu-wrens are easily attracted by making squeaking noises while the White-fronted Honeyeaters which were new for me were very noisy and obvious.

Adelaide Salt Fields - The salt fields are extensive stretching from Middle Beach to Cavan and consist of 284 square kilometres of birding magic. Some of this area doesn't have public access so be careful where you go. The day spent here was one of the highlights of the trip providing me with three new species: these being Cox's Sandpiper (there is still some debate as to whether this is a genuine species or a hybrid) and the Wood Sandpiper as well as the Elegant Parrot which was seen in several small flocks. Many thousands of waders frequent this area and I was astounded at the numbers. Local birders however, informed me that numbers were down because of the inland wet to about a quarter of their usual numbers. Don't miss this area.

The Coorong - The Coorong represents 100 square kilometres of well managed birding habitat with National Parks and local people who are very friendly encouraging people to enjoy the area. A survey in 1982 counted 214,000 waders consisting of 27 species. Pelicans and Mountain Shelduck abound with others of interest being Mallee Fowl, Hooded Dotterel, Elegant Parrot and Rufous Bristlebird.

Eildon - This area and the nearby Rubicorn State Forest offers spectacular scenery, good birding and mammal viewing. Common Wombats were seen sunning themselves beside the road. Pilot Birds at close quarters made this area worth a visit as did the promise of seeing Leadbetter's Possum while spotlighting. The Leadbetter's Possum was the highlight of the trip.

Pat M^CConnell

BIRDS, BIRDS EVERYWHERE.

On Thursday 29th March I made a quick visit to Hood's Lagoon and was surprised by the amount of birdlife. A quick count was in order and revealed the following figures:

Grey Teal - 372; Pacific Black Duck - 297; Hardhead - 159; Maned Duck - 89; Australasian Shoveler - 7; Grass Whistling-duck - 2; Feral Duck - 1; Cattle Egret - 86; Plumed Egret - 1; Straw-necked Ibis - 25; Masked Lapwing - 21; Little Pied Cormorant - 2; Darter - 2; Eurasian Coot - 26; Pied Stilt - 1; Red-kneed Dotterel - 2; and Black-fronted dotterel - 1.

The above was only a rough estimate and would have been an under-estimate.

Pat M^CConnell

FUTURE OUTINGS:

TOGWOOMPA BIRD CLUB.

Sunday, 27th May - Bird-a-thon. Meet at the Helidon Picnic Ground at 7.00 a.m.

Sunday, 24th June - Atkinson's Dam.

Sunday, 22nd July - Murphy's Creek and Helidon.

Sunday, 26th August - Blanchview and Silver Pinch Road.

QUEENSLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY:

Wednesday, 25th April - Wednesday Morning Bird Walk - Enoggera area.

Friday, 5th to Sunday 7th May - Labour Day Weekend Outing - Imbil area.

Friday, 9th to Sunday 11th June - Queen's Birthday Weekend Outing - Broadwater National Pk.

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

THE BEHAVIOUR OF BIRDS - PART NINE OF A SERIES.

PREENING. After bathing, the bird returns to a safe place to preen. Wetting the feathers before preening helps to spread the preen oil. Most birds have a preen gland at the base of the tail whose contents are smeared over the plumage. The function of the oil is not known for certain. It was once believed to act as a lacquer that helped to increase the surface tension of water and hence the waterproofing of the feathers: but ducks treated with a solvent to remove the oil still remained waterproof. Neither is there any support for the notion that preen oil contains a substance which is converted to vitamin D when under the influence of sunlight. The oil, does seem to help the feathers from becoming brittle and it has anti-bacterial and fungicidal properties.

Several actions involving sensitive movements of the bill are used in preening. The most thorough movements are gentle nibblings of each feather as it is drawn between the tips of the beak. This cleans and rearranges the barbs and barbules. Sometimes the bird digs vigorously at one spot to clear away dust or remove a parasite; at other times it draws the feathers rapidly through the bill. Stroking movements help to smooth the feathers and to dry them. Finally the bird "shivers" its body feathers and beats its wings to settle everything in place.

As well as being a frequent visitor to the bird bath, the house sparrow also indulges in dust-bathing, particularly in fine weather. Some birds of open, dry country dust-bathe but never bathe in water. The bird scrapes with its feet and shuffles its wings so that its ruffled plumage becomes filled with dust. The value of dusting is not clear and neither is that of sunbathing. At its simplest, the bird sits with its feathers ruffled and wings drooping. At higher intensities, it leans away from the sun with the nearer wing drooping and half spread, or it lies flat with both wings spread. Pigeons raise the wing nearest the sun over their back.

Some birds probably sunbathe to warm their bodies in the morning but some birds sunbathe even though the air is quite warm. They pant at the same time so they are presumably too hot already and appear to be in a trance and lose their wariness. A possible function for sunbathing in large birds is to assist in feather maintenance. When birds such as Vultures, Storks and Pelicans soar for extended periods their long flight feathers become bent. These birds sunbathe whereas large birds that flap - Herons, Swans and Cranes - and those that have short wing feathers, such as the Albatrosses, do not. It has been found that a twisted Vulture feather straightens out in four to five minutes when exposed to the sun, but takes two to three hours in the shade.

Perhaps sunbathing for some birds, as for humans, is more than a functional pursuit and is positively enjoyable. The same may be said for "anting". This is an odd performance in which a bird picks up ants, one at a time, and applies them to the underside of the wings, as if oiling the feathers. Then the ants are dropped or eaten and the performance is repeated. Some species, notably members of the Crow family, squat over the ants, often with wings spread as if sunbathing, and let them swarm over the plumage. The usual explanation is that Formic Acid from the ants may kill or dislodge lice from the feathers, or other secretions may act like preen oil in preserving the feather structure.

by Barbara Weller

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

BIRD CALLS TAPE.

Some members have enquired as to where they may purchase such tapes.

"Bird Calls of Eastern Australia", by Len Gillard, 1987 is available from Peter Gillard, P.O. Box 214, Kirwan. 4817. Cost approximately \$12.

PELAGIC TRIP.

A sea-bird watching trip has been planned for Saturday, 14th July for members of T.B.C. The boat will depart from the Manly Boat Harbour (Brisbane) at 4.30 a.m. and return at 5.00 p.m. (approximately). Price will be \$62.00 per person and as there is limited seats it will be on a first in basis. July is the best time of the year to see many of the ocean birds. Reserve your seat by calling Michael Atzeni on 355587 by 7th May.

BIRD CLUB CARRY BAGS.

Would any members be interested in making some of these for selling by the club to members? The club will supply the materials and Lesley will do the silk-screening on them. Phone Ann or Lesley if you can assist.

MEMBERS BIRD NOTES.

Superb Fairy-wren (2)	20/1/90	Raff & Bridge Sts.	Joe Deuble
Banded Lapwing	2 -8/1/90	Waterbird Habitat	Keith Treschman
Wedge-tailed Eagle (3)	/1/90	Gilmour Court	F & N Belcher
Aust'n King Parrot	19/11/89	Mackenzie St. (North)	Barbara Weller
Topknot Pigeon	21/11/89	Redwood Park	" "
White-headed Pigeon	1/11/89	Toowoomba Cemetry	Keith Treschman
Plumed Whistling Duck (50)	10/11/89	Waterhole 1 km. before Lockyer Valley Abattoir	" "
Australian Hobby	15/11/89	Flagstone Creek	" "
White-headed Pigeon	16/11/89	Mary St;(North)	" "
Musk Lorikeet	1/19/89	Rangeview Rd; Blue Mountain Estate	Lesley Beaton
Musk Lorikeet	2/10/89	Glenvale State School	" "

(The first time Musk Lorikeets have been sighted in either of these locations in five years of observations.)

NEW TOOWOOMBA BIRD. *****

Blue-billed duck(*Oxyura australis*). Bird No. 261. Sighted at Hood's Lagoon on 1/4/90 by Pat M^CConnell and Michael Atzeni. Also seen on the same day by Rod Hobson, Lesley Beaton and Ann Shore. A male bird seen in full colour and smaller than nearby Hardheads. Blue bill; black head and chestnut-brown back. The single bird sat low in the water and often dived. The tail was often held erect and sometimes spread to show individual feathers. The Blue-billed Duck is not a rare duck but sightings in Queensland are few and far between as is evidenced by Atlas records with birds only being seen in five localities in Queensland during "The Atlas of Australian Birds" five year survey. The sighting of this bird also breaks a seventeen month long drought since the club's last new bird which was the Chestnut Teal seen on 5/11/88. This is the longest period of time the club has gone without seeing a new bird.

Pat M^CConnell.



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