

CLUB OFFICERS

President	Michael Atzeni	355587
Vice-Pres./Records	Rod Hobson	075 661379
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Editor	Barbara Weller	329821
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toowoomba bird club inc.

p.o. box 67 · darling heights · qld 4350

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

No 179 - December 1990

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On behalf of the Club Executive, I would like to wish all members a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year. Any articles on bird-watching over the holidays would be appreciated.

REFLECTIONS ON QUAIL, ESPECIALLY THE PAINTED BUTTON-QUAIL:

On Sunday morning, September 16, several members of the T.B.C. participated in a community based walk through Redwood Park. The walk commenced at 10.00 a.m. at the Bridge Street entrance to the park and culminated at Gatton Creek with a bar-b-que and several information stands of an environmental bias. Participants were later bused back to the start. Club members had been invited as guides and to answer any queries regarding the avian population of Redwood Park. Given the volume of participants and the commencement time, there was little else for us to do other than enjoy the walk. Despite the concomitant din of such a large assembly of such diverse persuasions, those of an avian bent were treated to a few surprises. Firstly were the appearances of Regent Bowerbirds, a lone Top-knot Pigeon and a male Painted Button-quail. These latter two birds proved very co-operative allowing clear views for a long time to a number of people.

During the inevitable post-mortem, the general consensus of opinion was that the Quail was the bird of the day - the rare aves of our perambulation. It was interesting to sight this attractive species in Redwood Park and I have been encouraged, as a consequence, to review my records of this bird in my home area.

Since arriving in Grantham in October last year, I have collaborated with Bill Jolly in establishing a monthly census of bird species contained within a grid encompassed by the co-ordinates 152°05" E to 152°20" E and 27°30" S to 27°40" S. The township of Grantham is practically central in this block. The Painted Button-quail, *Turnex varia*, has been recorded in this area on fifteen separate occasions spread out over seven months. On every occasion that I have sighted this species, it has presented itself either as a pair of adult birds or as a single adult. The only exception to this was my view of a mature male bird accompanied by a hatchling near Grantham on 10.9.90. Given this number of confirmed sight-

ings, therefore I do not consider this Quail to be locally uncommon. Quail species generally, seem to be well represented here. In using the term "Quail", I refer to both the True Quails, Phasianinae, and the Button-quails, Turnicidae.

With the above in mind, the Brown Quail appears the dominant local species, being recorded in every month. It is regularly encountered every month, and coveys of upward of a dozen birds can often be flushed from grassy roadside verges. It must be recognized that, as with any animal species of a secretive or retiring nature, such sightings may not represent respective species status. Still, the absolute preponderance of Brown Quail sightings and numbers generally would indicate it to be the dominant form. My records of other species locally are sparse compared to the two discussed types, viz. Stubble Quail, 7.2.90 and 6.9.90; a single road kill King Quail on 20.7.90 and the Red-chested Button-quail on 10.7.90 and 20.7.90. I believe that two other Quail sporadically irrupt in the area, these being the Red-backed and Little Button-quails. I have no records of these locally as yet.

My observations regarding the Painted Button-quail agree with those stated in the literature available, with one exception. The species is said to "run in spurts, head high," (Pizzey) which I agree to be the case. However, it is also stated that, when put to flight it usually flies far before dropping. This latter behaviour does not seem to me to be the case, as the majority of birds I have flushed have flown but a short distance before going to ground. The Quail is a powerful, direct flier with longish pointed wings. I have observed sustained flight only in very open areas when the bird has had to cover a considerable distance to attain cover. This Quail can often be seen dust bathing in the late afternoon along country tracks. On these occasions I have observed the bird to fly for a long distance parallel with the track before swerving off to cover. The majority of birds flushed within their preferred open forest habitat appear to only fly as far as is required to reach some scrubby sanctuary, usually short distances in this habitat type. Given a stealthy approach, a second view of these Quail is often possible under the above conditions. They do not appear to be a particularly shy species as is stated in some references. Local birds seem to congregate in pairs or singly, the female bird being marginally larger and a more striking bird. This is the case with Button-quail generally.

I have heard this species vocalization, a call Pizzey likens to a Bronzewing's "oom, oom, oom!" This is said to be uttered by the female only, the male being silent. I cannot comment either way on this matter but have observed a hatchling on 10.9.90 giving vent to a loud, continuous cheeping not unlike that of a domestic fowl chick but somewhat more melliflous. The male adult was in close contact with this youngster, who was clearly agitated, but refused to fly even when I closed to within five metres of the duo. Female Painted Button-quail are polyandrous, mating with several males in a breeding season. The male assumes complete responsibility for the incubation and rearing of the young, the female defending breeding territory from other hens. Given that the incubation period for this species is 14-15 days and in-as-much as I have observed a recent hatchling on 10.9.90, it would seem this species commences breeding locally in August.

Turnex Varia is a widespread species and I have personal records from such localities as diverse as the You Yangs Forest Park in Victoria to several S.E. Queensland populations. My greatest percentage of sightings, though, have been within five minutes drive of my home. This is an area of open Eucalypt forest growing on rocky, sandy soil. There is an understory of such species as Dogwood and Quinine Bush, coarse native grasses and some introduced pasture. This seem to be their preferred habitat. Unfortunately this local population may be under threat from land development, an all too common situation. Fortunately, however, this attractive Quail appears to be locally common wherever suitable, undisturbed habitat exists.

It can only be hoped that with a more enlightened approach to the management of our natural resources, this species will remain an integral part of our avifauna.

Rod Hobson

THE ART OF SURPRISING LYREBIRDS:

Have you ever tried to creep up on a calling lyre-bird with the aim of taking him by surprise and obtaining a good view? You know, the old technique of only moving whilst the bird is calling and freezing stock-still as soon as the bird is quiet. If you have tried this, what would you estimate your success rate to be? I estimate that mine would lie somewhere between zero and one percent, probably much closer to zero. It seems that in most parts of their range, both lyrebird species are very shy and observant, and generally know you are creeping up on them long before you think they know. Consequently, just as you think you're on the verge of obtaining a good view, the bird simply slips away through the undergrowth and starts calling a bit further on. I'm sure that this scenario is well known and has caused the pre-mature aging of many Australian bird-watchers. Lyrebird watching, however, need not be such a disappointing affair, and for the benefit of Toowoomba Bird Club newsletter readers, I am about to outline a brand new technique for obtaining fine views of lyrebirds in their wild and natural state. All you need is a pair of binoculars and a jogging outfit.

Yes, jogging gear! I will start my description of the technique by explaining that this method was discovered utterly by accident during a camping trip to Green Mountains, Lamington National Park. What follows is the background to the discovery. My companions and I had spent a most enjoyable day walking the Tooloona Creek Circuit, delighting in the myriad of waterfalls and the superb views along the Border Track. We had heard lyrebirds calling at various times during the day and had, on several occasions, attempted to creep up on them. In this pursuit we had obtained no success.

As we arrived back at our campsite, I happened to notice that my binoculars were not around my neck. After thoroughly searching my day-pack and questioning my companions, I remembered removing them from their usual position (around my neck) and placing them on a rock near a certain beautiful waterfall whilst a photograph was taken. I could not remember putting them back on! This conclusion resulted in the forceful removal of some hair from my scalp, several indecent profanities, and a vow to go and search for them in the morning, for it was at that time approaching dark.

Come morning, I decided to go for a jog along the track to fetch my binoculars, in order to save them. So, after lacing up my Adidas joggers and donning my T-shirt and shorts, I set off at a leisurely pace through the forest. I remember it was a most glorious morning. Not long after taking the Tooloona Creek turnoff, the grade of the track became decidedly down-hill, and, in contrast to my initial speed I soon found myself roaring along at an indecent pace. The scenery was whirring past, and I was probably dreaming a bit, because I remember being startled back to reality in a most abrupt fashion by a large brown bird on the track in front of me as I rounded a corner. I admit to getting quite a fright, but hasten to point out that the bird itself almost had an instant cardiac arrest. Its feathers stood up, its eyes bulged out and it let out a most surprised and most unglorified "SQWA-AAAAARK!!" as it flew up to a nearby perch about three metres above the ground. I was henceforth presented with an excellent view of a female Albert's Lyrebird. The poor thing had received such a fright that its natural instincts seemed to have deserted it, and it made no attempt to "slip" away in the usual fashion. Indeed it was left sitting on the same branch as I recommenced my jogging.

I remember thinking "what a coincidence!" and "... once in a lifetime sighting!!" when lo and behold exactly the same thing happened again about 500 metres down the track! SQWAA-ARK! Another very surprised, utterly bamboozled, and mentally wrecked female Albert's Lyrebird flew up to a low perch, this time on a liana vine. Once again I obtained a great view. I continued on, leaving the second bird to recuperate and re-assemble its shattered existence. Upon reaching my destination (Konumboola Falls) I was greatly relieved to find my binoculars sitting upon the very rock where I had laid them down, thankfully no worse for wear for their night in the creek-bed. As I sat and contemplated the morning's events, I became convinced that I had stumbled upon several monumental discoveries! Firstly, that Lyrebirds spend more time on walking tracks than we actually realise, but under normal circumstances silently slip away as "danger" approaches, and secondly that a startled lyrebird is a mere shattered shadow of its former secretive self.

Believe it or not, on my homeward run (after a very pleasant recuperation period at Konumboola Falls) I succeeded in yet again flushing a female Albert's Lyrebird from the track, despite the fact that it was uphill and I was travelling considerably slower. I figured from its location that victim number three was probably victim number one back for a second dose of fear and terror. I arrived back at camp very satisfied with having found my binoc-

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