

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

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

No 181 - February 1991

FROM THE EDITOR:

Another new species has been added to the Toowoomba coverage area this month with the sighting of a single Diamond Firetail (Finch) in the Helidon area by Lesley Beaton and Marilyn Jacobs. It was feeding with a flock of thornbills. Later on in the same day a pair of Diamond Firetails was sighted by Pat McConnell and Rod Hobson in the same area. This bird has had unconfirmed sightings in the area in the past ie only seen by one member so we thought we would eventually "bag-it". Well done to those involved and a good start to 1991.

The male Ruddy Shelduck reported in the October newsletter has been seen again in the coverage area. At present checks are being made to ascertain if it is an aviary escapee or a rare vagrant.

I have been saddened this month to hear and see plight of the wildlife, particularly the birds who are suffering as a result of the war in the Middle East. I would hope and pray that the oil slicks can be contained and don't continue to occur. It is not only the birds that will be affected but the entire marine ecosystem including the producer plants, the mammals, fish, crustaceans and smaller microscopic organisms.

A big thank-you to all those members who were involved in the Hobby'n'craft in any way for their help. Thanks once again to Lorraine Wilson and Pat Cleary for planning and organizing this worthwhile endeavour.

JANUARY OUTING REPORT - COOBY DAM (27.1.91)

Unfortunately the very wet weather deterred a number of members from coming to the January outing. The four brave (stupid) people who did go had a good morning birdwatching.

As the main gates didn't open until 8.00 a.m. we firstly went down to the sailing club to look for waders in the shallows. Not many birds were about, although a Pied Cormorant was perched on the far bank.

After going to the picnic ground below the dam wall, we found the bush birds to be very active in the murky weather. Looking onto the spillway, we had splendid views of two Azure Kingfishers on the edge of a pool below. These birds were evident all along the creek in the newer picnic grounds.

There were no flowers about that we could see and so we saw very few honeyeaters.

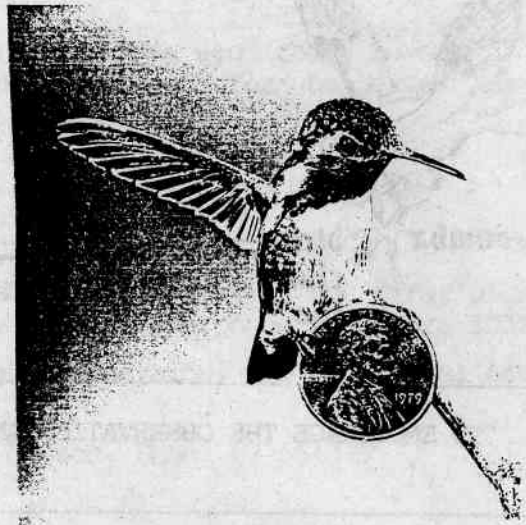
Don and Barbara decided to be very energetic and follow the track along the dam edge, so Ann and I turned back for morning tea. We were lucky because as we crossed the creek there was a flurry of bird activity which included the bird of the outing - a little Bronze Cuckoo. This was a new bird Ann and one I'd only seen rarely; so we were very excited. At about 10.30 a.m. the rain set in - two bedraggled bushwalkers returned and the outing was concluded.

57 species were sighted in all.

Lesley Beaton

THE WORLD'S SMALLEST BIRD:

Endemic to Cuba, the bee hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*) tips the scales at about two grams, less than the weight of a penny. Called the "bee" hummingbird due to the characteristic buzzing sound, it can be mistaken for an insect. At an estimated 80 beats per second, the bee hummer's wings move so rapidly that the naked eye cannot detect them. Measuring a bit more than two inches from bill to tail, only the male of the species ranks as the smallest of birds, since the female about a quarter of an inch longer, is about the same size as the vervain hummingbird of Jamaica and the island of Hispaniola.



Male *Mellisuga helenae* - life size

Hummingbirds are typically loners, bonding with the opposite sex for only the few seconds it takes to mate. Many are fiercely territorial engaging in spectacular aerial battles against other hummingbirds.

The females' nest is no bigger than a doll's teacup and is loosely woven of cobwebs and flecks of bark and embellished with lichens. The soft lining of silky plant down will hold two eggs smaller than coffee beans. Breeding takes place in May and June.



Female's nest lashed to a branch with spider webs.

The hummingbird has the highest metabolic rate per unit of body weight in the avian world and requires proportionately large amounts of food. Though tiny spiders, flies and other insects supplement the diet of the bee hummer, it obtains much of its nourishment from red trumpet shaped flowers like the coral plant whose blossoms produce copious quantities of nectar. Such plants have evolved to depend on hummingbirds rather than insects as pollinators.

Once relatively widespread across Cuba, the bee hummingbird is now thought to be a threatened species. Despite Cuba's conservation efforts, the diminutive bird is seen only rarely in its dwindling habitat. Just what the future holds for the tiniest of all flying jewels remains an unanswered question.

Adapted from "Hummingbirds of the Caribbean" by Robert and Esther Tyrell.

FEED THE BIRDS: RECIPE FOR NECTAR FEEDING BIRDS

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 slice bread
- 1 dessertspoon raw sugar
- 1-2 tablespoons high protein baby cereal
- 1 tablespoon milk
- hot water

METHOD:

1. sprinkle sliced bread with raw sugar
2. cover with hot water
3. mash bread to a pulp
4. stir in remaining ingredients
5. add extra water, if necessary, to make a very sloppy, runny mixture

- * baby cereal provides iron & protein
- * milk provides calcium
- * sugar provides glucose

CAUTION:

DON'T USE HONEY

BIRDS' PORRIDGE:

This is a complete food suitable for all types of native birds and particularly valuable in the winter months. To make it use dripping, honey, brose meal (dried pea flour) and instant oats, in approximately equal quantities by measure. Melt the dripping, stir in the honey, then beat in the brose meal and instant oats until a thick paste is formed- do not boil. This food will keep indefinitely and does not spoil in very hot weather as does nectar. Small plastic or glass pots wired to shrubs form satisfactory containers; if placed on a bird table, the containers must be held firmly in position to withstand the bird's vigorous pecking.

The best way to encourage birds to your garden is to -

- * plant native trees and shrubs
- * install a bird bath
- * get rid of the cat
- * avoid the use of poisons in your garden

JANDOWAE BIRD NOTES: Jnauary 1991

At the beginning of January 1991, my family and I moved to Jandowae 50 km north-west of Alby. This presented a new challenge in bird watching as the countryside differs greatly from my previous birding area around Gatton.

So far my bird watching forays have been short - mainly around looking for suitable areas. I am concentrating on an area within 25 km radius from Jandowae township. within this area is a large range of habitat, so here's hoping.

My success rate so far has been encouraging - 84 species for the month of January with 42 of these seen in my own yard. Rod Hobson has copies of both lists if anyone is interested.

The monthly awards for January are:-

THE BIRD(S) OF THE MONTH:

I don't know who received the greater shock: the Baillon's Crake or myself. Flushing it from between your legs is not recommended. Flocks (50+) of Plum-headed Finches were out on the grasslands at the town dam. This area is now covered in water so they have moved on.

THE NOISE OF THE MONTH:

Not the crows!! A flock of 120+ Sulphur-crested Cockatoos flying slowly over the town on the last two days of the month. Unbelievable noise!!

THE FRIENDLIEST BIRD OF THE MONTH:

A Southern Boobook uses the clothesline as a perch most nights to look for insects attracted by the security light. It allows me to approach within a metre or so and does not fly if I remain still and talk quietly. My wife is questioning the attention the owl is receiving.

THE SURPRISE OF THE MONTH:

Jandowae creek flooded without rain in the town. Even the "old" townspeople were surprised. This means that the dam is full and there are large waterholes at my back fence.

So much for January. If anyone is coming out this way, telephone me on (076) 685582 or call at the Jandowae Hospital.

Terry Pacey

CHECKLISTS FOR ANNUAL SUMMARY:

If you have an outstanding checklists for 1990 could you please send these to our Record Officer - Rod Hobson as soon as possible so he can collate them before he leaves for Nepal. Rod's address is 11 Robert Street, Grantham, 4347

FUTURE OUTINGS:

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB:

- Sunday, 24 February Ravensbourne National Park via Hampton. Meet at the first picnic ground at 7.30 a.m. For more information phone Ann Shore 303207.
- Sunday, 24 March Wader's outing - Brisbane southern bayside. Leader Michael Atzeni phone 07 3969379
- Sunday, 28 April Gatton Forestry - Leader Rod Hobson. Phone 07 661379
- Sunday, 26 May Jandowae area.
- Sunday, 23 June Flagstone Creek/Stockyard areas. Leader Rod Hobson.

THE RESCUE OF A BROWN CUCKOO-DOVE:

In December of last year I witnessed a Brown Cuckoo-dove being attacked by Butcherbirds, Currawongs and Kookaburras in my garden which borders on Redwood Park. It was thought that the Cuckoo-dove had flown into a tennis court net and although it had no visible signs of injury was obviously in a weakened state to be attacked by the other birds. As it couldn't fly, I contacted National Parks and Wildlife Service for advice on how to care for it. They issued me with a permit to keep it for six weeks and advised me to feed it red or black coloured fruit. These are apparently the only colours seen by Cuckoo-doves and hence their preferred colour in choice of fruit. I tried every type of domestic fruit possible but the Cuckoo-dove showed no interest at all. In desperation I tried some Inkweed. At last success!! The Cuckoo-dove loved it and fed on the Inkweed for the next nineteen days slowly regaining its strength. The time had come to release our avian boarder back into the wild again. The first two attempts were unsuccessful. He had seemed to have forgotten how to fly. The next attempt was successful and he flew off into the direction of Redwood Park nineteen days after we first rescued him.

as told by a club member to Barbara Weller

THE TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER
Registered by Australia Post
Publication Number QBG3973

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