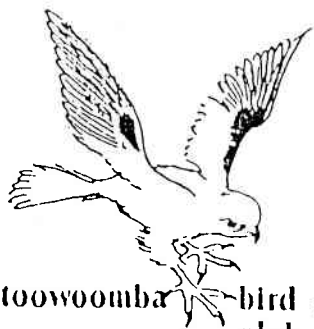


TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER



toowoomba bird
club
inc.

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NO. 192 - JANUARY 1992

EDITORIAL: It's January, the weather's fine and warm, and I'm sitting on the back verandah of my new home, enjoying a cold drink and savouring the cool breeze which is drifting past. The only matter which seems faintly disconcerting to me at this point in time is that I am also involved in a rather vicious staring-match with a large, white, (and may I say) ugly duck, the intensity of which is beginning to get out of hand. Somehow I get the distinct feeling that this bird knows I am writing the editorial for the TBC newsletter and is wondering whether the next-door-neighbour's pet muscovy rates a mention!

Or is **he** craving some of my orange-juice? Maybe he just doesn't like the look of me. That would be pardonable; I don't like the look of him. The point, however, is that I really don't know what he's thinking and regardless of what I may think he's thinking, he's most probably thinking something totally different. Birds' actions are rarely the result of 'human-like' logic, rather they are programmed by instinct and conditioning, and aimed primarily at ensuring the bird's survival. Exactly how this fits in with the previously-described duck I don't know, but I must admit I'm beginning to wonder.

How often do you see a Galah employ its talent for chopping and changing direction, to suddenly swerve in front of your car; or observe a Magpie-lark vigorously attacking a rear-view mirror. Such antics regularly provoke the 'poor dumb creature' comment but in reality have survival value for the birds in question, and are hardly stupid. Surely there's much more satisfaction in observing the behaviour of birds than there is in just being a bird-spotter.

Yet another two new species have been added to our area check-list since last newsletter, the White-eared Monarch our last for 1991, and the Red-backed Button-quail our first for 1992. Details are contained within this news-letter. Local bird identity, Noel Baker, had previously recorded the White-eared Monarch in Redwood Park and I can clearly remember the occasion, some ten years ago, when he described the location of his sighting to myself and Michael Atzeni (then Records Officer), "...on the creek near where a large 'swing-like' liana hangs..". Of particular interest is that Pat McConnell "re-discovered" this species at precisely the same location as previously described by Noel. How about that! There must be some biological link between this little area and this species; a coincidence is too much to swallow.

This month we continue our monitoring of Dwyer's Scrub for the Q.N.P.W.S. through our club outing. This land (in the Stockyard area) has been purchased for gazetting by the National Parks, and following their request our club is compiling a list of birds. Another reminder that subscriptions are due, and a red mark on the front of your news-sheet indicates this will be your final copy pending payment.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Rod Hobson, Nicki Thompson, and Barbara Wilson in the preparation and distribution of each TBC newsletter, even though they are no doubt happy to donate their time anonymously. The prosperity of a club like ours rides on such member participation.

NEW TOOWOOMBA BIRD : No.272
: WHITE-EARED MONARCH, *Monarcha leucotis*.

Time / Date : 5.10 p.m.(E.S.T.) / 30.12.91
Place : Gatton Creek, Redwood Park via Toowoomba, Q.
Observers : L. Beaton, R. Hobson, P. McConnell.

Optics : " Bausch & Lomb " 7 x 24 binoculars.
: " Zeiss " 10 x 40B binoculars.
: " Zeiss " 8 x 30 binoculars.

Weather Conditions : Hot & humid, little to no breeze, 30% cloud cover. Visibility good.

Distance to Subject : 10 - 15 mtrs.
Comments : Observed by P. McConnell in same area, approx. 8.00 a.m.(E.S.T.), 27.12.91. Confirmed by abovementioned observers as stated. Small black and white bird flitting about canopy in flycatcher fashion. A confiding species.

Field Marks : A typical flycatcher of a bold, simple plumage pattern. Superficially similar to a miniature Australian Magpie-lark. " black above, with bold white marks round eyes, on sides of head and wing; rump white, outer tail-feathers broadly tipped white. " - Graham Pizzey on the diagnostic features of this species. All these features clearly noted on Redwood bird.

Similar Species : Superficially similar to the Frilled considered Monarch, *Arses telescopthalmus* and the Pied Monarch, *A. kaupii*. Both these species, however, confined to far northern Qld.

R.G. Hobson,
GRANTHAM.
02.01.92

NEW TOOWOOMBA BIRD : No.273
: RED-BACKED BUTTON-QUAIL, *Turnix maculosa*.

Time / Date : 8.10a.m.(E.S.T.) / 03.01.92.
Place : Ditchman's Rd. (west) via Helidon.
Observers : E. & R.Hobson.
Optics : N.A.
Weather Conditions : Hot & humid, 100% overcast, no breeze.
Distance to Subject : Bird in hand.
Comments : Road kill, Ditchman's Rd. via Helidon. Surrounding area - verges of long, rank grasses and weeds. Wet, grassy gully and cultivation closeby. Specimen badly mutilated but retaining sufficient detail to allow for positive identification. Covey of four of this species observed in this area, 5.00p.m.(E.S.T.), 22.08.91 - R.H. Heard calling from reed, water couch wetland north of Grantham, 27.01.91 - R.H. Heard calling from water meadow near Grantham,

7.15p.m. (E.S.T.), 09.01.92 - E. & R.H.

Field Marks : A small bird. Yellow legs, feet. Three toes. Slender, sharp beak, - lower mandible yellow, upper mandible horn to yellow at base (diagnostic). Small, pale area at base of bill underside. Dark forehead and crown, brown flecking on forehead. Upper chest, sides of neck rufous. Black flecks on neck sides. Belly whitish. Wing coverts ochre yellow with black flecking. Quantity and richness of colour of upper chest, neck sides would indicate a hen bird. All flesh to the bone missing from nape, back, rump, vent and most of belly. Viscera missing. Body depleted of flesh etc. by the ant, *Iridomyrmex purpureus*.

Similar species considered : KING QUAIL, *Coturnix chinensis*. (female). This species has four toes.
 BUFF-BREASTED BUTTON-QUAIL, *Turnix olivei*. This species confined to Cape York.
 LITTLE BUTTON-QUAIL, *Turnix velox*. Heavy grey-blue bill, no flecking to side of neck.
 RED-CHEST. BUTTON-QUAIL, *Turnix pyrrhorrhox*. Heavy grey-blue bill, no flecking to side of neck, lacks flecking on wing coverts.

NOTE : due to the nature of death and subsequent scavenging, the rich red area from the back of the neck of the bird in question was missing therefore this field mark is not considered in comparisons.

R.G. Hobson,
 GRANTHAM.
 09.01.92.

"OVERSEAS TRIP 1991 - Part 2"

Following a month in England I spent six days in Kenya as guest of my step-daughter, Rosemary, then working in Nairobi. Knowing my birdwatching interests, she arranged a four day trip up-country to take in some of the highlights. Not that one needed to go far afield in that fascinating land as my appetite had already been whetted by roadside glimpses on leaving the airport. Even a town garden was alive with movement. A large Jacaranda the perch for Laughing and Ring-necked Doves and smaller birds hard to verify, also the gay yellow and black Weavers (several varieties), a Robin Chat, an Indigo Bird and a Black-headed Paradise Flycatcher - just for a start. At the bird-bath and on the ground were numerous Seedeaters and Firefinches, while Yellow-vented Bulbuls and the curious Speckled Mousebirds (regarded locally as a pest) hopped about among the shrubs and a Variable Sunbird vaunted its iridescent colours on a wire above. Overhead the Black Kites patrolled constantly and at dusk the Hadada Ibis called loudly as he flew to roost.

On the road next morning and out to the north-west through intensively cultivated and undulating land carrying crops of maize and bananas, then tea and coffee. People walking by the roadsides everywhere; the national mode of travel! More open, arid and dusty country with thorn-trees and thin scrub then down into the great Rift Valley, stopping for a break at Lake Naivasha. Lovebirds squawking in the wide, shady trees in the well-kept hotel grounds; perky Superb Starlings; numerous small birds in the brushes and scores of waterbirds in the shallows of the swampy lake; ibis, cormorants and storks among them. A Fish-Eagle flapped leisurely by and Wire-tailed Swallows were nest-building in the hide just over our heads.

Continuing northward and edging the escarpment we came later to the larger Lake Nakuru, one side fringed in pink. This told its own story. We were in luck for it

represented the astonishing sight of a million-plus pink flamingos in close assembly - pink due to a pigment in the blue-green algae on which they feed. Mostly Lesser Flamingos but a few of their Greater relations towering above them.

On the hillside behind the town we were made welcome at the home of a Swedish scientist, who, after a meal and relaxation, drove us down to the national park surrounding the lake. Out on the mudflats and within a 'stone's-throw' of the flamingos, the scene took on a dramatic effect with the pink birds slowly moving along as they sifted the shallow water against a backdrop of purple storm-clouds and showers over the hills beyond. Here and there in the foreground Yellow-billed and the ugly Marabou Storks, Pelicans, Black-winged Stilts and a few small waders. Hard to leave but dusk was falling as we drove on around the lake with views of baboons, giraffe, impala, waterbuck, buffalo and a startled Warthog. Regaled by uninhibited and hilarious dancing from our host's African family, plus good food and drink, our first day ended.to be continued.

Ann Shore

Sounds like a pretty monotonous, boring old time you had, Ann! Watch for the continuation of Ann's safari next newsletter.

Editor

"SNIPPETS FROM GOWRIE JUNCTION"

The Willy Wagtails are nesting a metre from my bedroom window. They have been sitting for more than a week now, and in a little over a week's time, judging from past observations, they will hatch. Two metres further on, in a Silky Oak tree, a pair of Magpies have raised two out of the three chicks they hatched. The female did all the sitting, while the male spent most of his time looking after an obviously more comely female a hundred metres further down the valley. "Our" female magpie began sitting about the 22nd August, and the chicks hatched about the 12th September, 21 days later. One chick was found dead below the nest on 6th October. The first of the two surviving chicks flew on 13th October and the other on the 17th, about 5 weeks after hatching. We now have three juveniles about the garden and cattle-yards - perhaps including one of the "valley" young.

Just this morning we discovered the location of the Yellow-rumped Thornbill's nest in the thick foliage of one of the horizontal branches of a big Pencil Pine two metres from the kitchen door. The parents have been observed for some time gathering food around the lawn and shrubs by the house and flying from tree to tree - admittedly in the direction of the Pencil Pine - but just where was the large nest hidden in our drought-affected trees? Ten White-faced Herons' are spending their days gleaning in the irrigated lucerne paddocks. Ten!! For a 'solitary' species! Twenty-five Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos fly most days along the ridge that links Gowrie Junction to Kingsthorpe, and have done so for the past month.

Finally, one hot afternoon, an extremely colourful bird was seen near our bird-bath. A second bird was spotted. "Quickly, the glasses!" A pair of Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves!! A new bird for me! My 354th Australian bird.

Gloria Glass

* - An interesting observation. From "HANDBOOK OF AUSTRALIAN, NEW ZEALAND & ANTARCTIC BIRDS" Vol 1. Part B. pp. 990-91; "... generally solitary when feeding in terrestrial and aquatic habitats, but occasionally flocks of up to 60 birds observed in Australia (Lowe 1983) and 20+ birds in New Zealand (Lo 1982); feeding flocks of 10-15

observed often in lower Williams R. Valley, N.S.W.,.....".

A flock of 15-20 birds of this species were in residence around Karrasch's Dam, Placid Hills from 17-24th May 1991. R.G.H.

Records Officer

"LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST - IN A PEPPERINA."

On the morning of Oct.8, '91 I had just returned home from Hood's Dam to Grantham. On alighting from the car my attention was drawn to a rumpus in an venerable pepperina growing along our back fence line. As I was encumbered with the usual paraphernalia which wader watching requires; telescope, binoculars and folding chair, I was ideally provided to home in on the little drama being enacted 'midst the berry-set arbour. What I was to witness over the ensuing ten minutes was to be an example of unbridled, and eventually unrequited avian passion. As I sat, the " Compleat Voyeur ", the principal actors presented themselves in the livery of a pair of Channel-billed Cuckoos; the leading man, a dastardly cad with dubious intentions; the leading lady, a picture of outraged innocence. A third, minor, and somewhat reluctant part was being played by a locust, it being capably and literally supported by the male cuckoo - firmly clamped betwixt upper and lower mandible.

The two stars faced each other and, on close scrutiny, the female bird could be discerned to be the finer, her casqued bill not as dominant as that of the male. Under such circumstances it is easy to see why this species was known as the Hornbill to the Old Timers. The male, that coarse fellow, twice tried to " have his way " and twice was toppled adroitly from his unwilling victim. The locust could but kick an occasional, protesting leg which in locust semaphore could probably be interpreted as " hold out, Ma'am, hold out ". All the while this drama unfurled both birds uttered a low grumbling through partially open bills, the male being the more vociferous. Black Bart constantly presented the locust to the distressed damsel whilst never actually leaving her take possession of the dainty, distraught morsel. It seems as if, even in the feathery world that there is no such thing as a free meal.

The first act came to an abrupt end when a third participant, a fig tree paladin, called from off-stage, unseen in the neighbour's yard. The leading lady immediately exited, stage right, followed in haste by the male lead and support. The second act, the menage a trois, now played out in the verdant depths of a mango tree, was hidden from prying eyes and the eventual outcome can only be left to lurid speculation. As for the locust, from a purely chauvinistic point of view I can only hope that the chitinous chappie's death was not in vain. I can well relate and remember those nights, now long passed, when I sat over the bottle of wine at the midnight hour, alone and deeply pondering.

R.G.Hobson,
GRANTHAM.
23.12.91.

***** CULTURAL FEAST *****

Another reminder that our own Toowoomba Bird Club, together with the Withcott P&C and the Withcott Progress Association, is presenting a night at the Repertory Theatre for a performance of George Bernard Shaw's classic, "Pygmalion". The show will be performed by the Young Actors Guild and in addition to raising money for our club, the night represents exceptional value at (probably) \$8 per ticket. If you (or someone you know) are interested, please contact the treasurer, Nicki.

"CAN'T SEE THE BIRDS FOR THE TREES"

Being sent overseas for work training gives one certain opportunities. I was sent to Aberdeen in Scotland with two other Australians to my employer company's head office/training-centre for "official" training. I took advantage of the opportunity. I bought a bird book and set off for park-lands, lakes in search of anything which had wings and feathers. What I found were obstacles : eg Cricketers still batting away in the ten o'clock twilight, nine companions with absolutely no interest in birds, a whole new "wad" of birds which did their best, as birds will do, to disappear whenever binoculars appeared, and worst of all the wonderfully leafy Scottish trees. Several times I found myself standing under a bird-infested tree and seeing nothing but green leafy-bits! Consequently the majority of birds I saw were on the water and in the city. But hey! Better than none at all!

David Hill

"Little Globetrotter"

A Curlew Sandpiper, banded at Werribee, Victoria, in January 1988, has been recovered in Russia. This is the longest ever recorded movement of a bird banded in Australia. A Russian ornithologist, Dr Pavel Tomkovich, caught the bird at its nest on the Taimyr Peninsula, northern Siberia, on 24 June 1991. The bird was recovered at 76 degrees North, 98 degrees East, almost 13 100 kms from the original banding site and well inside the Arctic Circle. This information comes from the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Schemes (ABBBS) in Canberra.

- adapted from "Wingspan", No. 3 September 1991.

***** COMING EVENTS *****

January Outing : Dwyer's Scrub 26th January 1992
Assembly Point : Junction Flagstone Creek/Stockyard Roads
7.00 a.m. (6.00 a.m. E.S.T.)
Leader : Rod Hobson

February Outing : Wader Outing (Brisbane) 23 February 1992
Assembly Point : Thorneside esplanade picnic area
9.00 a.m. (8.00 a.m. E.S.T.)
Joint outing with Q.O.S.

Hobby'n'Craft Spectacular 21-23 Feb 1992 Volunteers required, contact Ann

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