

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER



toowoomba bird  
club  
inc.

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Number 193 : FEBRUARY 1992

EDITORIAL :

As yet another piece of my sandwich goes to the brawling, bickering, squawking mob of seagulls, I can't help thinking that if Jonathon Livingston Seagull were living here at Wellington Point, he wouldn't be amongst this quarrelling crowd. He'd be out to sea, beyond sight of boat or shore; practising, experimenting and striving for perfection in flight, rejoicing in his ability to skim the waves or to slice through the air. Jonathon wouldn't get bogged down in the hustle and bustle of seagull life like these poor characters, his awareness of life's potential would be on another level.

I'm convinced there's a bit of J.L. Seagull in people who love to watch nature. They appreciate the myriad of life which they see all around them; on the mud-flats, in the mangroves, swamps and marshes. They recognise beauty where others see nothing, and they possess a magic door which they can open and suddenly be far away from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Don't you agree that its a great ol' hobby we share?

As summer rolls on, several Toowoomba Bird Club events draw near. The Hobby-n-Craft Spectacular will be held over the weekend 21-23 February 1992. Our club will have a good display there, stall No. 104 near the north-east corner of the pavilion. Be sure to drop in. The theatre evening presentation of George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" (organised by the Withcott P&C, the Withcott Progress Association and our own Toowoomba Bird Club) will be held on the 9 March, Toowoomba Repertory Theatre. The programme will start at 7.30 pm and tickets are only \$8 each including refreshments (wine, cheese and soft-drinks). This represents exceptional value and is raising money for our club, so treat yourself! Tickets available from Treasurer Nicki.

Keith Treshman has accepted the position of Toowoomba City Region Co-ordinator for Naturesearch 2001, the project introduced to our club by Queensland Environment Minister, Mr Pat Comben, during his presentation at our 1991 A.G.M.. Contained within is an article from Keith detailing some further information on the survey. Also, as a special supplement, this newsletter contains our club's 1991 species summary. (to follow)

Lastly, I would like to thank Michael Atzeni who has offered, at short notice, to lead the February coastal wader outing (joint with Q.O.S.) in my absence. Should be a great day, don't miss it. Cheers.

## TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB JANUARY OUTING - DWYER'S SCRUB.

It is a daunting prospect when one is required to produce a bird club outing report when you didn't see any birds, or not many anyway. Such is the case in question. Our January outing to Dwyer's Scrub will not go down in the club annals as one of our more productive with only thirty-two species recorded during a humid, oppressive morning. Fleeting glimpses of a male Regent Bowerbird and a not too co-operative Spectacled Monarch were the best sightings of the day.

The outing didn't get off to a great start when I couldn't quite find the entrance to the place. After much ado, amidst garbled excuses, this matter was eventually rectified. We were then confronted by an overgrown, congested, grassy track, sodden and muddy from overnight storms. More suitable as a S.A.S. training course than a bird outing venue. Nevertheless we plugged on, nicely sopping the wet grass and under a blackening sky. By 9 a.m. multitudes of cicadas had set up an uproarious din, millions of these little blighters of indeterminate parentage. Tree trunks and bushes were adrip with them.

Cicadas in full song can be very disconcerting to the most ardent of outdoor enthusiasts. The males of many species including the Double Drummer, *Thopha saccata*, produce a noise intensity of almost 120 decibels. This approaches the pain threshold of the human ear as members on the January outing can well testify. There were plenty of Double Drummers about on the day, also a plenitude of Cherrynoses, Razor Grinders, Black Princes, Black Squeakers, *Psaltoda claripennis*'s, \* Bladder Cicadas, Bark Cicadas and Wattle Cicadas - " the whole catastrophe ". Although birds find cicadas a desirable food, it is believed that the combined song of large aggregations of singing males repel predatory birds. Isolated singing males and flying females are quickly eaten. It seems that the ears of birds and their watchers are similarly, and painfully affected by the cicada's tumult, a racket from which only a female cicada derives any pleasure. There weren't many birds about, predatory or otherwise, on this day. Probably sitting in the trees with their primaries in their ears.

The cicadas carried the day and the outing ground to a halt about midday. Then we all went home. (those are my water-logged, mud-encrusted, grass seed-impregnated socks in the industrial bin at the Stockyard/Flagstone Roads intersection). Don, you gotta do better next month. But wait - isn't there a Mangrove Cicada ???

\* The Bladder Cicada, *Cystosoma saundersii*, is a common, large, green insect around Toowoomba where it finds the cities' Camphor Laurels much to its liking. It normally sings from dusk into nightfall. It is known, on rare occasions, to chorus on overcast, warm days when the ambient temperature reaches 15 degrees C+, as was apparently the case on the 26.01.92.

R.G. Hobson,  
GRANTHAM.  
27.01.92

## "OF AUSTRALIAN HOBBIES, FLYCATCHERS AND FINCHES."

Early November last year and the country was still belaboured by drought. It was the fourth day of the month and I was birdwatching along the sandstone escarpment of Sandy Creek near Grantham. The atmosphere was heavy, humid and cloying, under a brazen-burnished, old Spring sky. This afternoon, and for several days prior, the thunder clouds had rolled in, full bellied, pregnant with promise only to dissipate in a barren display of thunder and lightning sans rain.

About mid-afternoon I was in an area of Ironbark and Spotted Gum and the bush birds were there also - somewhere, happily abiding by the old refrain re. mad dogs and Englishmen. This afternoon, however, after the usual fruitless meteorological rumblings and grumbles, a welcome, short, sharp shower precipitated. Short - not long enough to be of any use to the parched land but fair enough to cool the air. Until this moment the bushland had been devoid of wildlife but after the rain a metamorphosis ensued in the tree tops with birds appearing as if by magic. An abundance of small passerines celebrated the rain ; Buff-rumped Thornbills, Striated Pardalotes, Fuscous and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Jacky Winters - all this merry company stealing the stage from the sun-worshipping cicadas.

Frantic scanning of the treetops exposed an abundance of birdlife but no species of particular note revealed themselves. At one stage, my attention was attracted to a male Leaden Flycatcher engaging in a curious display. The bird was plunging into a heavy, wet leaf mass, flapping his wings and fanning his tail therein before retiring to a nearby branch to preen vigorously. The whole process was then repeated. I watched these antics for about ten minutes at which stage we both tired of the entertainment. In a recent " Australasian Raptor Association News ", Vol.12, No.3, I had read of a similar process being engaged in by the Australian Hobby. The author, Stephen Debus, referred to the action as " foliage-bathing " and it was this same process which I was witness to in the Leaden Flycatcher. I had not seen this behaviour before and was not aware of such prior to reading the above article.

It is always satisfying to see these little actions which make up the life of birds, confirmed " in the flesh ". I well remember the Woodpecker Finch with the cactus spine probe on Santa Cruz in the Galapagos. Darwin and " the Beagle ", childhood images of tool-using birds indelibly stamped, resurrected in flesh and blood. Such are the pleasures that constitute the love of birdwatching - they beat " twitching " any day.

R.G.Hobson,  
GRANTHAM.  
02.02.92

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### "OVERSEAS TRIP 1991 - Part 3"

(Kenya, continued from January newsletter)

.....An early start next morning to continue north again up the valley with spectacular cliffs on the western side. Reaching Lake Baringo we left our vehicle at the jetty and crossed by boat to the little rocky island with it's small settlement of tents hidden unobtrusively under the low acacias. An abundance of birdlife everywhere. I spotted a Pied Kingfisher fishing off the rocks just below us; a pair of Madagascar Bee-eaters darting in and out from vantage points above while many small birds were busy in the bushes and on the ground; White-browed Sparrow Weavers, Yellow-vented Bulbuls and Spotted Morning Warblers. In the late afternoon we joined a few others in a guided bird-walk seeing a large Spotted Eagle Owl and a Dark Chanting Goshawk, both perched motionless overhead as we waited for a shower to clear. We noticed a huge structure in a low acacia nearby - the stick nest of the strange-looking Hammerkop - which flew shortly afterwards. Scrambling up the rocky paths behind the settlement the scrubby undergrowth and stunted trees were alive with birds. Weavers galore, doves, barbets, sunbirds, a Paradise Kingfisher, Blue-naped Mousebird and many others. Over the water we watched Gull-billed Terns, only recently added to the local list. Strange calls could be heard in the late evening and we dropped off to sleep to the sound of water lapping at the rocks below. A peaceful and relaxing place.

Next day back on the road for a cross-country drive to the Aberdare Mountain

Range where we spent a night at the Ark, the wooden lodge overlooking a natural salt lick and large swampy area to which one is taken safely by mini-bus through the forest and then via a cat-walk through trees for the final approach. Once installed and told to keep our voices low we observed a wealth of wildlife. From the viewing platform we watched a large herd of Buffalo pawing the mud for salt, Oxpeckers on their backs, while Egyptian Geese, Moorhens, Olive and Green Pigeons, Ring-necked and Turtle Doves were seen on the mud or in what little clear water remained. Away at the other end of the Ark, relays of birds arrived to feast when a large tray of chopped fruit was thrown onto a board by the catwalk while below Sealy Francolins and Mongooses shared what fell off. Gorgeous, iridescent Sunbirds and others flitted about at canopy level.

Returning to the Ark we found the Buffalo had moved away, their place being taken by a small herd of Elephants while three quiet sandy-coloured forms beyond showed lions awaiting their turn. It was fascinating to watch the drama as an old Buffalo tried to return to the salt lick. The Elephants gathered closely round a smaller one while the matriarch flapped her great ears and trumpeted her "keep-off" warning. The same occurred when one of the lions dared come too close. They had to wait till later when four came paddling down - two magnificent lions and two lionesses. In the night one more treat - two rhinos - a Crowned Hornbill seen from a window at dawn and a small troop of Colobus Monkeys in the trees as we left. An unforgettable night.

Nairobi National Park was hot and quiet for my final look around but did yield big herds of the larger antelopes and Wildebeest, plus Ostriches, a couple of Ruppell's Vultures - hideous but marvellous scavengers that they are - and a Long-crested Eagle. Altogether not a bad collection for a mere six-day visit.

Ann Shore

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## NATURESEARCH 2001

The population of South-East Queensland is expected to increase drastically in the next decade. So that local authorities might have better environmental data in forming decisions on development, the Department of Environment and Heritage has initiated Naturesearch 2001. Nineteen local government authorities from Noosa to the New South Wales border and west to Toowoomba are involved.

The project aims to use the resources of the department, co-operation from local government, and volunteers from the community. Geological data has already been inserted into the computer data base. Over the next two years information on the flora, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, freshwater fish, and invertebrates will be added. Characterising species of flora and invertebrates rather than a comprehensive list is sought.

I have volunteered to act as the co-ordinator of the Toowoomba City region. I am going to suggest to the Gatton Shire organiser that perhaps the Toowoomba region could be extended eastwards to the coverage area of the Toowoomba Bird Club. Any volunteers would suit themselves when they go observing. The information will be entered on sheets covering grids of 8km X 8km or 1.6 km X 1.6 km, and, if possible for rare or threatened species, 200m X 200m. Maps, information, and sheets are supplied. I will be calling a public meeting to explain this in more detail. At that I will gather a list of volunteers. However, if anyone wishes to they could write to me at 17 Butler Street, Toowoomba 4350 or telephone 35 2894 offering help. I would need name, address, telephone, any areas of expertise - birds only, or some of the other groups as well. Someone may wish to co-ordinate the entire bird survey. I would also

be seeking someone to go through the ten years of records kept by the club, and \*  
enter a proportion of the data.

A spin-off for the T.B.C. is that we can access the facilities of the computer. For the Toowoomba region the distribution of any bird could be printed. This could also show association with habitat, as well as many other interesting features.

Keith Treschman  
Madonna

352894

### "TOOWOOMBA-ITES LOOSE IN TASMANIA"

Under the misguided impression that Spring in Tasmania would be pleasantly warm, David Hill and I said goodbye to the last of Toowoomba's winter and set off upon our long-awaited trek to explore the Apple Isle. It was on a beautifully-clear but chilly morning that Devonport emerged from the sea-fog, quiet, but beginning to stretch and yawn as the locals prepared for another working day in Tasmania's central north.

There was something distinctly different, yet pleasantly comforting about Devonport. Was it the streets? Or the buildings? Initially we found it difficult to define, but eventually it dawned that every house in sight possessed heavy wooden window sills and supported a fully-functional chimney from which (without exception) drifted evidence of the fire which was no doubt keeping the interior sleepily snug. The houses were old but well kept and the cool greenery combined with the gently rolling hills and rocky coastline gave us the distinct feeling we were somewhere in England. A walk through pleasant parkland up to Mersey Bluff further re-enforced the impression with Blackbirds, Greenfinches and Goldfinches predominant. The quiet Devonport morning, however, also provided excellent views of some true locals; Crescent and New Holland Honeyeaters, Little Wattlebirds and the Tasmanian form of the Grey-breasted White-eye.

The male skylarks were heavily into their courting displays; one particular paddock (which dropped straight into the ocean) serving as a stage for four separately displaying males. Each one would rise slowly in a fluttering circular pattern, chirping and singing furiously until he was almost out of sight, at which point he would stop fluttering and begin to drop slowly, using his wings as a parachute, singing merrily all the while. Upon descending to a height of about eight metres, he'd become frustrated with his slow fall and, suddenly folding his wings tightly to his body, plummet like a stone, swooping to the ground in a level arc at the last moment. I don't know about the female Skylarks, but we certainly were impressed with the show. Right behind us on a rocky outcrop in the ocean, a flock of Black-faced Cormorants also looked on, but no doubt they'd seen it all before.

Over the next few days we explored the North West of Tasmania, delighting in the wild coasts and seas. My four-season, hurricane-proof tent was several times a victim of the famous 'Roaring Forties', those mighty winds of the high latitudes which thunder around the earth over nothing but flat ocean, interrupted only by the west coast of Tasmania, which they buffet in fierce and wild fashion. One of my old kayaking friends, now living at Devonport, had previously shown us a photo, taken at sea off the North-West coast, of a 5.5 metre sea-kayak completely and utterly in mid-air off the top of an ocean wave. He insisted it was taken on a calm day.

The coastline is ruggedly magnificent; sea-spray, giant kelp, abalone and sculptured rock-formations. Amidst such tempest and making their home happily among low clumps of shrubbery and grass-stalks were Striated Fieldwrens; chunky wren-like birds, covered in grey and white striations with fleshy pink legs and

distinct wren posture. Also making a somewhat unexpected appearance on one occasion was a wedge of six Black Swans, determinedly paddling in single file parallel with a section of the coast-line off Table Cape, some three-hundred metres out to sea. We could only wonder at their purpose. Sometimes we wished only for a kite, however as previously stated, the tent was obliging on several occasions.... (to be continued)

Don Gaydon

"AUSTRALIA'S FIRST BLACK-HEADED GULL"

The Broome Sewage Works, WA, provided the location for the first Australian record of the Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*), a Northern Hemisphere species found throughout much of Eurasia, wintering south to northern Africa. Attempting to appear inconspicuous amongst a dread of Silver Gulls, the single bird was observed and photographed on the 19 October 1991. Also of interest was a Fiordland Penguin (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*) a visitor from frigid waters, sighted at South Cape Bay, Tasmania on the 3 September 1991. (reference: "WINGSPAN", No. 4 December 1991)

\*\*\* COMING EVENTS \*\*\*

February 1992 Outing : Waqer Outing (Brisbane) 23th February 1992  
Assembly Point : Thorneside Picnic Area, Thorneside.  
9.00 a.m. (8.00 a.m. E.S.T.)  
Leader : Michael Atzeni

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

March 1992 Outing: Crow's Nest Falls Campout, 28-29 March 1992  
Leader: Lesley Beaton

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