



TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

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MEMBERSHIP : Adults/Families \$18.00 Students \$10.00

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

Number 195 : APRIL 1992

EDITORIAL:

Isn't it amazing how the hearing of an old song or piece of music can sometimes unleash a flood of memories from past years and long-lost circumstances? For me, whenever I hear a large troupe of carolling Pied Currawongs, it takes me back to my early birdwatching days as a teenager when everything was exciting and new, my birdwatching life was filled with the promise of imminent discoveries and adventure, and I was the world's only bird-enthusiast! I clearly remember several cool, misty mornings whose blanketed silence provided an unforgettable background for the clear, ringing notes of a currawong-concert. Needless to say, I love to hear Pied Currawongs flocking together and singing. I know some people hate it, but I can never work out why.

As we move through Autumn towards Winter, we enter the time of year in which Pied Currawongs assemble into large, loose flocks and move to areas of human habitation seeking food. The warmer months have been spent in wooded areas where abundant food supplies have facilitated nesting. From now until Spring we can expect the relative abundance of Pied Currawongs to increase in Toowoomba. The Bird Observers Club of Australia (BOCA) is conducting a survey on the food of Pied Currawongs during the Autumn/Winter period, with particular reference to the effect of such introduced plants as Lantana, Privet, and Camphor Laurel on currawong numbers. For anyone wishing to participate in this survey, a small article explaining more details is included in this newsletter.

The club executive have decided that, to avoid possible confusion over future outing dates and to allow forward planning by members, the club's official monthly outing will be held on the last Sunday of each month, starting henceforth. The March outing, a joint campout with the QOS at Crows Nest Falls N.P., was highly successful (see Lesley's report this issue), and details of another joint campout on the May-day weekend are to be found on the back page. Make the most of the remaining warm weather! Cheers!

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB MARCH OUTING - joint campout with Q.O.S. at Crows Nest Falls National Park, 28-29 March 1991

The camp was marvellous. Thirty-six people enjoyed themselves either camping or for

the Sunday. Thirteen were visitors or Q.O.S (Queensland Ornithological Society) members. Seventy-two species of birds were seen or heard in the national park with others further afield.

However it wasn't the birds that were the highlight of the weekend but the night-spotting. Rod, Pat, and Don had brought their powerful lights and with a troop in tow they found us plenty of fauna to "ooh" and "aah" over; Brush-tailed Possums, Koalas, a Rufous Bettong (Rat-kangaroo), and a Sugar Glider. Tawny Frogmouths were very evident and we all got excited when a strange call alerted us to the possibility of a Masked Owl but it remained elusive.

Other points of interest were the Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies and Swamp Wallabies; three species of frog with the Brown Toadlet being my favourite as it was like a little beetle; five different skinks. Butterflies and moths intrigued us with at least nine butterflies identified and the Processionary Caterpillar (Bag-shelter Moth) following their leader doggedly all over the park. Lastly, even though it is Autumn, there were plenty of wildflowers around and the little ground orchids were particularly amazing. With the wonderful weather and sociable company, it was a great camp.

Lesley Beaton

" WHEN THE RED, RED ROBIN COMES BOB, BOB, BOBBING ALONG."

At the recent Q.O.S. conference held at the Queensland Museum which I had the good fortune to attend, Glen Ingram, Curator of Amphibians at that institution issued a plaintive call for " a return to good, old-fashioned natural history." Glen lamented the trend towards the cut and dried approach of the strict disciplines of scientific scholarship. He reproached then encouraged the growing body of amateur birdwatchers to make their observations available to the respective academic communities rather than have them sit gathering dust, unpublished, in private notebooks and diaries. At the recent Annual General Meeting of the Toowoomba Bird Club, the Hon. Minister for Environment and Heritage, Mr. Pat Comben, M.L.A. reflected these sentiments. As Records Officer to the above club I can but reiterate the statements of these august gentlemen. Too often I hear, upon the sighting of a rare or unusual species the frantic cry, " what! a, at....., I haven't got that on my local list ", as the wild-eyed hopeful disappears in a cloud of exhaust smoke and sprayed gravel. Yes, I'm guilty of this too. Local lists, state lists, yearly lists, Australian lists, 600 Club lists, international lists, yard lists, lists of birds seen whilst eating a pizza as a pillion passenger on a high speed motorcycle - there seems to be no end to lists. Birdwatchers have an infinite capacity for listing.

The point of this preamble, and to return to Glen Ingram's point, is, that whilst lists of whatever persuasion may give a deep, abiding personal satisfaction, they don't do much to further the cause of ornithology per se. What we observe from the breakfast table in our backyard may be more intrinsically valuable to " The Cause ", than Yellow Chats at No.2 Bore, " Dynevor Downs ". This point was brought home to me most forcefully yesterday afternoon, 29.10.91, with a call from Lorraine Wilson via Ann Shore from the Wilson's home at the end of Jones Road, Withcott. The gist of the call was that Red-capped Robins were still in residence at that place at this late date and had possibly raised a brood there. Exciting news in that this casual autumn - winter nomad should have returned to its warm weather, out back home and have commenced its family duties there. In his " Revised List of Queensland Birds ", G.M.Storr says of *Petroica goodenovii*, the Red-capped Robin, re. status , " Partial migrant, moving north

onwards. These results suggest that their migratory direction changes somewhere north of Brisbane, parallel to the eastern Australian coastline.

The northeasterly directions recorded in early autumn are supported by many observations in New South Wales. In contrast there seem to be only limited observations from Queensland north of Brisbane. We would be interested in any observations that members of the QOSI have made of this species in Queensland, in particular, occurrence in autumn and winter, movements and seasonal changes in abundance.

Ursula Munro and Hugh Ford
Department of Zoology
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351

Footnote: I am sure the above researchers would also welcome contributions from Toowoomba Bird Club Members.

Editor

SURVEY OF FOOD OF PIED CURRAWONGS -

B . O . C . A . Project
Autumn/Winter 1992

The B.O.C.A. is inviting assistance in finding out more about the food eaten by flocks of Pied Currawongs during their Autumn and Winter wanderings. Particularly because Pied Currawongs are recorded regularly taking nestlings and small birds in their varied diet, some people have expressed concern at seeing a build-up of Pied Currawong numbers locally during the Autumn and Winter. One biologist has estimated that there has been a population increase from three million birds in the mid 1960's to between five and six million today. Additionally, there has been an extension of their range in suburban areas of widely separated cities in eastern Australia.

Are currawongs to be considered "good" if they take nestling starlings and "bad" if they take nestling Grey Fantails? Has the increase of currawongs near Sydney resulted in an increase in Channel-billed Cuckoos, which parasitise them? Are Pied Currawongs now nesting frequently in the suburbs as well as in their traditional sites in nearby higher mountain ranges?

One suggestion is that the spread of introduced shrubs and trees (such as Lantana, Privet, and Camphor Laurel) which unlike most native plants produce fruit throughout the Winter, have assisted Pied Currawongs to survive in large numbers throughout the Winter. While a short-term survey will not provide all the answers, the B.O.C.A. hopes that it may shed some light on the matter and encourage birdwatchers to be more aware of how their local birds live.

Ellen McCulloch,
Promotion Officer
B.O.C.A.

If you would like to be a part of this survey, please write to Ellen and request some survey forms. The address of the Bird Observers Club of Australia is :

183 Springvale Road
NUNAWADING VIC 3131

Editor

HOBBY'N'CRAFT SPECTACULAR : Many thanks to Ann Shore who helped re-build the display at the showgrounds after considerable packing and unpacking of vehicles and special thanks to friends who are not club members but assisted in numerous ways, namely David Cleary, Janice Lyons, Lyn Lloyd and my husband John Wilson.

THEATRE NIGHT : This evening was a huge success! Not only was "Pygmalion" (presented by Actor's Studio) a magnificent production, but profit for this joint fund-raising venture amounted to \$440.15 (to be shared between the Withcott Progress Association Incorporated, the Withcott P & C Association, and the Toowoomba Bird Club Inc.).

Lorraine Wilson

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

April 1992 Outing :

Meringandan, 26 April 1992

Leader: Alan Davidson, (076) 967 288

Assembly Point: Meringandan turnoff (near Borneo Barracks, Cabarlah), New England Highway.

Time: 7.30 a.m.

May 1992 Outing :

Ingoldsby/Junction View, 31 May 1992

Leader: Rod Hobson, (074) 627 364

Assembly Point: Apex Lake, Gatton.

Time: 7.30 a.m.

Joint TBC/QOS Campout :

Aldershot Scout Camp, 10 km North of Maryborough, 1-4 May 1992.

Leader: Julian Bielewicz (07) 283 4921

Details: \$10 per site, all facilities avail.

Local naturalist, Hugh Peddie, in attendance.

Further enquiries, contact leader.

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