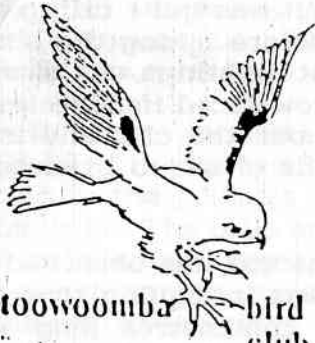


TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER



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

NO. 198 - JULY 1992

EDITORIAL:

There's an aboriginal legend concerning a group of young men who were participating in an initiation ceremony on the Mitchell grass plains when suddenly they became threatened by a fire. The legend tells how their long, braided hair caught alight and, after drifting through the smoky air, they eventually turned into cycads; their spiky hair becoming spiny fronds. For a long time, anthropologists were bemused by this story because there were no palms or cycads on the Mitchell grass plains. Recently, however, climatic and fossil data has indicated that ten thousand years ago the area was much wetter and covered in palms and cycads. Could it really be that such legends have been passed from generation to generation, unwritten, over periods of time exceeding ten thousand years? If so, it is difficult not to be moved by their antiquity; they may well represent some of the most ancient human memories.

Woven into many aboriginal legends and ceremonies is a fundamental awareness of the need to sustain the environment which provides them succour; a deep conservation ethic. For example, the Red Kangaroo renewal ceremonies from Central Australia were performed at various totemic areas where hunting and everyday visitation was strictly forbidden. During the ceremonies, rocks, trees, and sacred hollows were struck and every grain dislodged arose as a kangaroo next time it rained. The fascinating thing is that scientists have discovered these totemic areas actually coincide with the most fertile breeding grounds for Red Kangaroos. Through their ceremonies and laws the people were, in reality, preserving and managing their own conservation zones. The performance of the ceremonies was much more than the perpetuation of some primitive fairy-tale; it was a real affirmation of the importance which the performers placed on the health of their environment; a demonstration of their care.

So now, when old aboriginals show their concern that the old ceremonies are no longer performed, we should listen because to them it means no-one cares, and maybe they're right. We can proclaim World Heritage Areas; it's great to hear that Fraser Island has been accepted, however a pity that the rest of the Great Sandy Region was not included.

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB JUNE OUTING - QUEEN MARY FALLS 28.6.92

The highlight of the day was a bird we didn't actually see! But more anon. The visit to Queen Mary Falls took place on a glorious day - bright sunshine, no wind, and

just a suggestion of an early chill in the air. Only the day before it was quite different. Fifty-five species were noted for the day. In the picnic area, before taking the short walk to the falls, nine club members and one visitor had excellent sightings of Crimson Rosellas, King Parrots, Eastern Rosellas, Superb Blue Wrens, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, and Red Wattlebirds. On the way to the falls Lesley pointed out the characteristic hovering and fluttering of the Striated Thornbill at the outer ends of shrub branches. The falls provided attractive views from both viewing platforms.

On the return walk to the picnic area a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo was observed in just the right light to show-off its striking iridescence; and it was intriguing to see a busy Red-browed Firetail break off a grass stalk about sixty centimetres long and successfully fly with it. Back at the picnic area the kiosk staff drew our attention to a Satin Bowerbird's bower on the edge of the caravan park. It was in excellent condition and contained numerous blue objects of several kinds, but blue drinking-straws were easily the most common. From the falls lookout we proceeded east along the Boonah road to Carr's Lookout. A lovely sight was a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles playing in the air currents, and Eastern Whipbirds performed their remarkable calls in a small patch of rainforest.

Carr's Lookout provides a magnificent view of Wilson's Peak and the surrounding mountains of the Great Dividing Range to the east, and of the head of the Condamine River immediately below to the north. The river flows west through the Condamine Gorge, some of the northern cliffs of which are visible from the vicinity of the lookout. Not far below the lookout the road leaves the cleared Kikuyu grassland and descends steeply through thick rainforest scrub to the Condamine River and The Head village, now barely discernible, but the sight of a sawmill in days gone by. From the edge of the grassland which is right beside the Qld-NSW border, we wandered down into the scrub and soon heard Eastern Whipbirds again, and saw Satin Bowerbirds and Topknot Pigeons on the wing. The rushing sound of "topknots" in flight is quite impressive. We later had a good view of a single bird feeding in the canopy. Then as we drank our morning tea in the warm sun on the grass at the edge of the scrub, yellow robins came closer to check us over.

It was while we were idly enjoying the robins, the view, the tea, and the discussion, that Lesley suddenly galvanised into action and headed very smartly into the bush. She was hot on the trail of an Albert's Lyrebird whose mimicking calls we all heard quite distinctly. In spite of careful stalking for most of the rest of the morning, alas, no lyrebird did we actually see. This was definitely not for the want of trying, especially on the part of Lesley and Nicki, who both readily negotiated the interstate border rabbit netting fence to follow yet another of several soundings. Lesley swore she saw "movement". Even so, we all felt we had been close to a thrilling experience.

After that Rhonda cooked lunch for Roger and Koji in proper style while the rest of us contented ourselves with our sandwiches. It was very pleasant in the sun relaxing in the deep, soft grass, and no-one seemed in a hurry to leave.

Ken and Fiona Wells

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"THE RED GOSHAWK, *Erythrotriochis radiatus*, IN THE LOCKYER VALLEY, S.E.QLD."

Historical records reveal that the Red Goshawk has been known to occur in the Lockyer area since E.A.R. Lord's record of a breeding pair at Murphy's Creek in September, 1949 ("The Emu", Vol. 52, 1952., Vol.56., 1956.). Murphy's Creek lies on the north-western perimeter of the Lockyer Valley. I cannot find any earlier references to the bird locally but would be glad to hear of same should such be known. Intervening records to date are scarce although I believe Greg Czechura has recorded the species at

Rockmount which lies on the southern edge of this area. A record of a single bird from nearby Toowoomba, 10.04.77 (" Toowoomba Bird Club News-sheet No.16 ") is now regarded as erroneous.

My first encounter with this raptor in this area occurred on the afternoon of 30.05.90. I had been birdwatching and was returning home to Grantham when I was alerted to the possible presence of a bird of prey by the characteristic clamour of bird alarm calls. The calls emanated from the vicinity of a farm dam which was obscured from view by roadside vegetation. As I was on foot I was able to cautiously approach through this vegetation to investigate. To my great delight I was confronted with a pair of Red Goshawks under siege by a rabble of Noisy Miners, *Manorina melanocephala* and Pied Butcherbirds, *Cracticus nigrogularis*. The female was perched atop a dead tree protruding from the waters of the small dam and the male was circling the surrounds in a leisurely manner. Neither bird seemed at all inconvenienced by the attentions of their tormentors. I watched the spectacle for about fifteen minutes after which I headed home as nightfall was imminent.

The following morning, together with two fellow birdwatchers, I returned to the dam and we were fortunate in sighting the goshawks in flight about the area. After some time they departed to the south-west and we were able to follow their progress until they perched on alternate fence posts in a water meadow. We were then able to get clear, protracted looks at both birds, positively identifying the species - an exciting event. The birds then decamped westward into the heavily timbered foothills of the Great Divide. The male bird put in a brief appearance over the water meadow that same afternoon, 15.00 - 15.15hrs., but this was the last to be seen of these birds until 22.06.90 despite intensive searching in the interim. On that date I was birding around \*Karrasch's Dam, a farm dam to the east of where the above events occurred, about two kilometres off. I noticed a high flying raptor approach and was able to identify it as a male Red Goshawk which I was sure to be the same bird as that sighted 29/30.05.90. On all three occasions the bird was seen to have a secondary feather/s missing, creating a distinct hiatus in the wing. I watched the bird circle the dam at height for approximately five minutes, 1305-1310hrs, before he departed, again to the west towards the ranges. I was to encounter the birds on three more occasions that Winter i.e. a female, 29.06.90; a male, 22.07.90; a male, 08.08.90. I believe these separate sightings to be of the one pair of birds although I do not have positive evidence that such is the case. In all instances the birds were observed around water: over the abovementioned water meadow; along Lockyer Ck. near Iredale and over Grantham Abattoir livestock dams respectively. In every event, also, the bird/s were flying from/towards the heavily timbered foothills of the ranges, their preferred habitat. I now believe that these raptors live in the ranges and make forays out into the adjoining, well-watered agricultural lands to hunt waterfowl which are abundant about the area. It is noticeable that the above records were all late Autumn, Winter sightings? Perhaps suitable prey becomes scarce in the ranges in Winter forcing the birds into foraging more open country.

My next encounter with the species, my only " out of Winter " record was 18.10-18.18hrs, 03.02.91 when I was again birding at the already mentioned water meadow and again alerted to the raptor's presence by agitated birds, in this instance Masked Lapwings, *Vanellus miles* and Torresian Crows, *Corvus orru*. These birds were harrying an area of *Juncus* from which they eventually flushed a female Red Goshawk. As the goshawk took to wing I noticed that she had a Grey Teal, *Anas gracilis* to talon. Again the raptor disappeared towards the wooded country but not before the strenuous harassing of the Masked Lapwings managed to put her to ground briefly. I have another three Winter records of these birds for this year, all in timbered country however, as the present drought has accounted for much of the surface water hereabouts. On 12.05.91 both birds were sighted over Helidon township; 30.07.91 - a single bird was sighted flying to the west, high over " Boxmore ", Grantham and on the 27.06.91 a female bird was sighted on this same property.

This last record is of particular interest. I was birdwatching on that property,

along the sandstone escarpment of Sandy Creek in a heavily forested area. The dominant trees here are Spotted Gum, Eucalyptus maculata. I was on foot and failed to notice a raptor in the dappled light, on the ground ahead, until I flushed the bird. I was initially unable to make a specific identification but saw it to be a B.O.P. clutching prey. The bird made laboured progress over the ground, never able to gain much height as the prey seemed of considerable bulk. The raptor flew about 100 metres before alighting on a sandstone knoll. I was able to work around and slightly above the bird for clear views of a female Red Goshawk. I was intrigued, upon examination, to see her with the remains of a Brown Hare, Lepus capensis gripped in her massive talons. She made some hesitant picks at her meal but was clearly uncomfortable in her situation and soon made off, still carrying the hare, to be lost amongst the trees. I was intrigued by this record as the Red Goshawk is predominantly a bird eater. The Brown Hare is very common locally.

These, then, are my complete records of this magnificent raptor from the Lockyer Valley. Sincerely hope them to be of interest.

R.G.Hobson,  
GRANTHAM.  
12.11.91

(Reprinted from "Australasian Raptor Association News", Vol.13, No.1, May 1992.)

The Australasian Raptor Association was formed to cater for those people whose particular interests centred on birds of prey. The aim of the association is "to promote the study, conservation and management of diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey in the Australasian Region.". Annual subs. are A\$12 for regional members and A\$20 for extra-regional members, due Jan 01 annually. Interested parties should write: The Secretary, Mark Holdsworth, PO Box 33, HUONVILLE TAS 7109, or contact the Queensland Co-ordinator, Greg Czechura, Queensland Museum, PO Box 300, SOUTH BRISBANE Q 4101. Well recommended for BOP fanatics.

\* Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on your point of view, and taking into view recent "armchair philosophising" appearing in another publication, potential goshawkers are advised that Karrasch's Dam and "Boxmore" are private properties and access is restricted. Hard to focus your bins with a Blue Cattle Dog, Canis obstreperous, hanging off your bum.

Records Officer

#### "A STORY ABOUT A BARN OWL"

The Barn Owl; a creature of unquestionable beauty and grace, yet many individuals will meet their end in highly undignified fashion: through starvation. Such is the nature of owl life in Australia. I know, however, of one particular Barn Owl (may he/she rest in peace) who met a slightly different and may I say unusual and noteworthy end. For the sake of posterity, his/her story is now recounted; albeit a decade old.

It was a lovely mid-spring morning when a young fellow, mad-keen on nature yet several years short of obtaining his driver's licence, chose to ride his bicycle from Toowoomba down to the Flagstone Creek Wier in the quest of birds. Near the wier he spent considerable time watching the movements of Golden-headed Cisticolas in the hope of finding a nest. He knew they were nesting. Adult birds were continually dropping down into the long grass with beak-fulls of food and surfacing without. He particularly wanted to find one of their "tailor-bird" nests about which he had read. The only problem was that every time he launched into a searching foray amongst the grass, confident of having finally established the nest location through the age-old processes of

observation and deduction, he found only grass. Grass, grass, and more unencumbered grass. About an hour of such activity saw his enthusiasm start to wane and, disappointed but not forlorn, he decided to try his luck on the other side of the creek.

He was now on a high bank, looking down over the creek to a group of eucalypts opposite. He could hear Brown Honeyeaters chirruping from a grove of callistemon further upstream on his side. Maybe they're nesting there! He decided to go and investigate. Suddenly, amidst a flurry of leaves and flapping wings, a large bird broke from its cover in a small, thickly-foliaged tree beside him and flew across the creek towards the eucalypts, eventually perching in an exposed position some twenty feet above the ground. Galvanised into action, the boy reached into his bag and pulled out a copy of "WHAT BIRD IS THAT" by Neville Cayley (I warned you this was an old story!). It was a beautiful Barn Owl, the first he had ever seen.

The owl's arrival in the eucalypt was soon followed by the arrival of every Noisy Miner, Pied Butcherbird and Magpie-lark within coo-ee. Within seconds pandemonium reigned, and the poor owl ducked and weaved on its perch to avoid the beaks of swooping birds. Several Laughing Kookaburras had also joined the welcoming committee, and the lad watched as the onslaught continued. Without warning, one of the kookaburras dived and dealt the owl a glancing blow to the skull with its mighty beak. The owl, knocked terribly off balance, plummeted down into the lantana below, wings agape in an awkward fall.

With slow incredulity, the boy lowered his binoculars. Did that kookaburra really just knock the owl off its perch?! No, the owl has grown tired of such vicious harassment and decided to seek refuge in the lantana below. Surely that is what has happened, he thought. He continued his observation, wishing his conclusion true, but the tumult died away and the lantana revealed no movement. He was soon on the other bank, underneath the eucalypts, peering into the lantana. The ghostly white shape of the owl, wings spread in an ungainly posture, was clearly visible through the leaves. Making his way cautiously through the spiny branches, the lad reached a position from which he could deliver a 'hey you' prod to the apparition. After a moment's contemplation and soul-searching, the prod was gingerly delivered..... No response. A second somewhat bolder prod followed..... Similarly, no response. Struth.....!

As he sat on the grass by the creek eating his sandwiches, the beautiful (but stone-dead) Barn Owl lay at his feet. Initially, when he'd pulled it from the lantana, he thought it may only be unconscious. He really hadn't known where to find the pulse of an owl, and the prospect of performing mouth-to-beak resuscitation had seemed ridiculous. So, laying the still warm owl in the shade on the grass, he had waited for some evidence of recuperation to occur. It hadn't. The bird was finished. No obvious wounds attested to its unusual death, and the lad began to wonder whether it had seen the kookaburra coming and, micro-seconds before impact, died of a heart-attack.

The push-bike ride back to Toowoomba was a nervous one for the boy, having never before faced the remote prospect that a bird of prey may suddenly come to life in his knap-sack. The journey was completed without incident however, save the rousing he received from his mother about bringing home dead animals. He felt somehow responsible for the death of the bird, yet at the same time realised he had witnessed something he may never see again and maybe no-one had ever seen before. It may sound corny, but in this case the kookaburra really did have the last laugh....

Don Gaydon

NEWS FROM OVERSEAS

Maintaining the raptor theme of this newsletter, "Last year was a good year for the Californian Condor. Eleven pairs of the birds, in the Los Angeles Zoo and the San Diego Animal Park, laid a total of 22 eggs, 13 of which hatched successfully. Early this year the condor population stood at 52 (50 in captivity and 2 released into the wild), a big increase since 1987 when the last free-flying condor was caught. DNA fingerprinting has indicated that these birds have come from three different ancestral groups, an important factor to take into account when re-introducing birds into the wild."

Also from "Oryx", January 1992, courtesy of "Wingspan", June 1992, " In France Griffon Vultures have been successfully re-introduced into the wild in the Causses region. Between 1981 and 1987, 69 birds were released, first breeding successfully in 1982. Last year the 19 chicks which hatched brought the number of vultures in the area to over 100."

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

July 1992 Outing:

Withcott Area  
Date: 26 July 1992  
Leader: Pat Cleary, Phone (076) 303352  
Assembly Point: Withcott Hotel parking area  
Time: 7.30 a.m.

August 1992 Outing :

Lake Broadwater Camp-out  
Date: 29-30 August 1992  
Leader: Terry Pacey, Phone (076) 685582

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