

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER



toowoomba bird club inc.

CLUB OFFICERS

President	Lesley Beaton	308481
Vice-P/Records	Rod Hobson	074 627364
Secretary	Ann Shore	303207
Treasurer	Nicki Thompson	343074
Editor	Don Gaydon	07 8221684
Librarian	Sharyn Frederiks	331169
Committee Member	Barbara Weller	329821

p.o. box 67 · darling heights · qld 4350

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

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

No. 199 - AUGUST 1992

EDITORIAL:

You know those expeditions you always talk about but never seem to get around to undertaking? Well, after a long time thinking about it Rod and I finally took part in a Wollongong Pelagic Trip. Together with the Flying Dutchman, Gijs Kurstjens, we joined another twenty or so sea-birders, including some pelagic-gurus, at the Wollongong Boat Harbour; our goal being albatrosses, petrels, prions and kin. An article by Rod about the trip will appear in the next newsletter, however I wish to make a brief comment on that which was a new experience for me; watching albatrosses.

While our little boat was slowly chugging along off the coast of Wollongong, tipping and rolling through the three metre swell, furiously burning diesel fuel and inducing queasiness amongst us "land-lubbers", albatrosses would glide in from the far horizon, circumnavigate the boat a few times, one wingtip skimming the surface of the sea; then casually follow the boat for a while, maybe dipping and turning with the slight tilt of a wing, judging upcurrents and gaining lift off the top of waves, before disappearing once more to the horizon; all without so much as condescending to flap a wing. Absolute simplicity of motion, an inspirational sight. If we were to rank the Australian birds in order of energy-efficient flight, Pheasant Coucals, Brush Turkeys and Jungle Fowls vigorously jostling for the bottom spot, the top end of the scale must surely be the unchallenged domain of the albatrosses.

Closer to home, as we enter the last month of Winter and prepare for another Spring, our much-esteemed visitors - the Freckled Ducks - appear to have left the Lockyer Valley, possibly returning to their lignum-swamp homes out-back. The last influx of Freckled Ducks was in 1982; a ten year gap. Maybe we won't see them again until the start of the next millennium; who knows? I remember when they were last here; I'd just joined the club and Freckled Ducks meant no more to me than Black Ducks or Grey Teal; they were all interesting and new. After waiting for ten years to see another Freckled Duck, however, the significance of this visit has not passed me by. So, as we bid adieu to one of the world's rarest and most endangered ducks, may we realise that it's been our privilege to view them in our own area. I wonder what unusual visitors we'll have during the coming Spring?

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB JULY OUTING - WITHCOTT AREA 26.7.92

To a keen bird-watcher the sighting of a male Red-capped Robin is quite

spectacular. It's a colour the mind carries with it till next time. Absolutely superb. We were fortunate to see this little bird at John and Lorraine Wilson's property on the club outing in July. Thanks to John and Lorraine for allowing us to view the robin.

Now, I had asked all the little bush birds around here to put on their best dress and be present. However they all saw us coming and took fright and flight. We had to roam far and wide to see fifty-six (56) species. Normally a smaller area for the majority of these birds is adequate. Pat McConnell sighted a Painted Button-quail and the Rose Robin showed himself to some.

After a walk along Amos Road some departed and others ventured out to Rocky Creek along Jones Road. However we did see two Rainbow Bee-eaters at the end of the day.

Pat Cleary

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"BARN OWL FOLLOW-UP"

In response to last month's article about a Barn Owl killed by a Laughing Kookaburra, I received a letter from Michael Hirst, Dalby WPSQ. He writes to say that he has witnessed similar episodes on several occasions. He quotes the most spectacular as being when a Barn Owl, "... made its escape over Oakey creek, only to be rammed in mid-air by the beak of a pursuing kookaburra, dropping stone-dead to the ground like a pheasant shot in a battue.". Mr Hirst's sightings come from the Bowenville area, west of Toowoomba. In the experience of Mr Hirst, the flushing of such birds is likely to end in disaster and he warns against deliberately setting roosting nocturnal birds to flight. Frequently, however, you may have no choice in the matter and the first indication of the bird's presence is it breaking from cover.

Pat McConnell has also re-counted an interesting Barn Owl story to me. Upon hearing a commotion outside early one morning, investigation revealed a Barn Owl undergoing severe persecution by a group of other birds; by this stage the poor owl was on its back in the gutter, wing damaged, talons bravely pointing upwards in a last-ditch attempt to ward off its attackers. This bird was rescued by Pat.

We are hereby presented with the delicate, vulnerable side of the Barn Owl; in some ways contrasting with their folk-image of vicious mouse-plundering hunters.

Editor

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"THE DAY I CLEANED-UP A BANDED LAND-RAIL...."

Let me start this tale by making it quite clear that I love birds; they are one of my greatest passions. I also love bicycles; to ride a "pushie" is another of my favourite pastimes. The third and somewhat crucial element in this story is that, rather unfortunately, I also have a love of speed; particularly on a push-bike. (I should point out that I'm totally reliant on the presence of steep, downward-sloping hills when it comes to satisfying the latter of these passions).

Anyway, to the story.... It was on a beautiful winter afternoon in the Redlands that the previously-described elements came together in unexpected fashion to produce what can only be described as a rather interesting and memorable episode. Let me introduce the players: Firstly, player 1: me, on my way home from work in the fading light. Secondly, Player 2: a Ricardo Viva 12-speed racing bike, the same being a tried

and trusted associate of player 1, and, last but not least player 3: one standard Banded Land-rail. Scene 1 : a swampy creek crossing on the bicycle-track between Wellington Point and Thorneside.

My day at work had been uninspirational and I was glad to be back on my bicycle, invigorated, enjoying the fresh air. In fact, I was feeling so well that I suddenly realised how essential it was I travel down the Rickert Road hill at extremely high speed. At this point in time, and indeed right up until micro-seconds before the entrance of player 3, players 1 and 2 were coasting along without a care in the world. The sunset was beautiful, the air was crisp, and a swampy creek crossing waited at the base of the hill. I contemplated braking as I neared the swampy crossing but, before my hands had tightened on the levers, player 3 made his/her dramatic entrance; rather unceremoniously barrelling into player 2 just below the handle-bars, entrance from stage right.

I was greatly startled and initially thought I'd hit a low-flying chook, albeit a swamp-chook. However, after bringing the bike to a halt and allowing the cloud of feathers to settle, I looked back to see a Banded Land-rail strutting about in remarkably dignified fashion at the side of the track. I was surprised on two counts. Firstly, I expected to turn around and find a dead or mortally-wounded chook, not an arrogantly-prancing, tail-bobbing rail of majestic bearing in seemingly excellent health. Secondly, and probably most surprisingly, the blighter wasn't heading for cover; he was heading towards me! Good heavens, I thought, he's after revenge! My life's not worth living, I've angered Super Rail! Just as I was considering making a run for it, he changed direction and started waltzing the other way, tail a-bobbing. It was then I realised that he didn't know where he was; a rail in ga-land.

I dismounted from my bike and stealthily approached, wondering whether I could grab such a poor disoriented fellow. I soon received my answer : No. Something clicked deep within the rail's brain and survival instincts directed him back into the reeds. I continued my ride home, glad but amazed our little altercation on "right-of-way" hadn't ended with any fatalities.

Don Gaydon

### "ON BIRDS, BOOKS AND BANK ACCOUNTS"

As I write the TBC is enjoying a period of prosperity, with a burgeoning membership which has been reflected in well-attended field-days and the phone running hot betwixt and between. As a result, several queries of late have reached me regarding the acquisition of field guides and reference books on ornithology. Why me? Perhaps my penchant for the three "B's" - birds, books and beers - has become general knowledge. Anyway, there is a prodigious amount of bird-orientated literature now available to the interested party. These run the gamut from the prestigious "Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds", HANZAB, to the more ubiquitous, popular field-guides observed in various states of decrepitude on any TBC jaunt, (you have to put those ticks in yourself).

Whilst any good bookshop will stock, or order in most titles, the following dealers cater for natural history bibliophiles especially. These dealers have the added advantage of employing staff who, themselves, have a love of all things natural. Unfortunately both are situated outside Toowoomba, nevertheless, they are well worth pursuing. They are:

Andrew Isles Bookshop,  
113-115 Greville Street,  
PRAHRAN VIC 3181  
phones: (03) 51 5750, (03) 529 6850  
fax : (03) 529 1256

and, closer to home:

Billabong Books,  
cnr Queen Street and North Quay,  
BRISBANE Q 4000  
phone: (07) 229 2801

Both offer mail-order service and Billabong Books also stock cards, posters and gifts, children's books and books on gardening, aboriginal studies, local history and Australian fiction. Andrew Isles Bookshop covers all zoological and botanical fields and has an impressive stock of second-hand and collectors' tomes. If you want to sell your house Andrew can offer you Mathews', "A supplement to the birds of Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands to which is added those birds of New Zealand not figured by Buller" across the board to the very adequate, everyman's field guides for those with caviare tastes but pie and peas budgets. Andrew will send a catalogue on request which includes republication information on forthcoming titles.

I can recommend both dealers, having used them personally many times, in fact am thinking of claiming Andrew Isles Books as a dependant on my forthcoming income tax return. In addition, the RAOU hold a varied selection of titles, including "HANZAB" and will send a catalogue of those available. Write:

Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union,  
21 Gladstone St.,  
MOONEE PONDS VIC 3039

If you are in Brissie, try the Queensland Museum's book and gift shop, just across the Anne Street Bridge from Billabong Books. As in any hobby or sport you can spend as much or as little, depending on the intensity to which you wish to pursue your interest. Birdwatching can be quite inexpensive and many birders get by adequately with a good pair of binoculars and one, or two field guides. On the other hand, "beware the monkey on your shoulder", or you'll end up with "Zeiss" binoculars - West German naturally, a telescope, cameras and lenses and a library larger than the Library of Congress. The elusive 600, the Holy Grail will send you questing, crisscrossing Australia like a scented-up quail-dog, with a fuel bill that would make Stormin' Norman blanch. Then Amazonia, Antarctica.....

Take my word, after one of my book-buying bacchanals the wallet looks like its got a hernia, bulging, fit to bust with credit card slips. Happy hunting.

Records Officer

### "BIRDER MIGRATIONS"

This winter, as in other years, it has been my pleasure to receive visitors from far afield; lured to Australia by glowing accounts, both personal and from tourist literature, of all this fascinating continent has to offer to anyone interested in the natural world.

In July they came from England, Spain, and Belgium, delighting in vastly different fauna, flora and scenery. Perhaps most satisfying to a member of the Toowoomba Bird Club was to welcome two avid young "twitchers" from Belgium for three intensive days spent scouring the neighbourhood for new scalps - their list on leaving Withcott stood close on two-hundred for some three weeks birding after arrival in Sydney. Following an excellent day in the Lockyer; at Helidon Spa, the Dip area and Lockyer Waters and a second along and below the range adding some forty-five new species, we were joined on their final day by Rod Hobson, kindly adding his expertise and knowledge of habitats on what was an appalling day weatherwise, but a most successful one for the young searchers achieving an enviable list of many of our best local birds - many thanks to Rod for his invaluable help.

Armed with binoculars, an all-weather telescope, keen eye-sight and a good understanding of their subject and with visits to Townsville, Cairns, Barrier Reef islands and Kakadu still to come, I wait eagerly for news of the rest of their trip. Such enthusiasm is wonderfully infectious!

Ann Shore

### "FEEDING BEHAVIOUR IN QUAIL"

Recently there have been numerous sightings of Painted Button-quail, *Turnix varia*, in or near our local study area. (Table Top Mountain, Withcott, Helidon and Gatton). Their presence in a particular area is, more often than not, first indicated by the sighting of platelets (small saucer-shaped depressions caused by the bird scratching in a circular motion). The bird itself is often shy and difficult to observe for any length of time.

In all the above-mentioned areas Painted Button-quail have been seen so it is very unlikely that the platelets had been caused by the Black-breasted Button-quail, *Turnix melanogaster*, which is also found locally and produces platelets when feeding. Although the Black-breasted Button-quail is rare and its nearest known populations are in the Ravensbourne area, platelets seen locally in suitable habitat should always be investigated further.

On 1 August 1992, I was watching a covey of nine Brown Quail, *Corturnix australis*, at close quarters near Helidon. Initially I was imitating their call and they were coming closer though I could not see them in the long grass. On many occasions I heard what sounded like the stomping of feet on the ground and thought this may be a territorial display in response to what they took to be another quail. I imitated this noise by lightly tapping my foot. After several minutes, the birds came quite close (1.5 - 4 metres) and I could determine how they were making the noise. It was achieved by the rapid movement of the bill up and down and sideways through the leaf litter while searching for food. This feeding technique was occasionally interrupted when a bird reached up to pull down a grass-seed. I watched them for 10-15 minutes and they never used their feet when feeding. Therefore no platelets. I saw the feet used in a scraping motion on only one occasion and that was when a bird was preparing a small mound of loose soil for a dust bath. Then, a few quiet calls to each other and they were gone.

Pat McConnell

Footnote: Mid-morning of 05 August 1992 Gijs Kurstjens and I had the rare experience of watching a pair of male Black-breasted Button-quail feeding in the forest litter in Ravensbourne National Park. We had long and clear views of this spectacle and were able to watch the process whereby the abovementioned platelets are formed. The bird hunches low to the ground when feeding, throwing the leaf litter out to each side with alternate scrapes of the feet. All the while the body is rotated until a full circle has been achieved. This action is interspersed with vigorous picking of unearthed foodstuffs. Both birds fed in very close proximity to each other and moved ahead to a new feeding spot in unison, unconcerned of the interlopers spying on their table.

Rod Hobson.

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### "PRATINCOLES NEAR JIMBOUR"

A flock of eleven (11) Australian Pratincoles, *Stiltia isabella*, was sighted in a ploughed paddock, Macalister turnoff, Jandowae-Dalby Road, by Rod Hobson and Gijs Kurstjens on the morning of 7 August 1992.



**\*\*\*\*\* NEW MEMBER \*\*\*\*\***

We welcome the following new member to the club :

Diana O'Connor  
44 Northam Ave  
BARDON Q 4065

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

**T.C.C. Environmental Walk:** Jubilee Park  
Date: 23 August 1992  
Assembly Point: East end of Woolridge St  
Time: 10 a.m.

Unlike previous years, the club is not participating officially in this event, however if members wish to attend, secretary Ann can provide further details.

August 1992 Outing: Prince Henry's Drive  
Date: 30 August 1992  
Leader: Ann Shore, Phone (076) 303207  
Assembly Point: Bridge Street  
Time: 7.30 a

September 1992 Outing : Lake Broadwater Camp-out  
Date: 26-27 September 1992  
Leader: Terry Pacey, Phone (076) 685582

A.G.M. : C.W.A. Hall, Withcott  
Date: 5 October 1992  
Time: 7.15 p.m. for 7.30 p.m. start

N.B. The previously advertised venue for the August outing has now been shifted to September. Also, please note a nomination form for executive positions is attached. Interested parties please forward to the Secretary prior to the A.G.M..

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Toowoomba Bird Club Inc.  
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P. McConnell  
17 George Street  
HELIDON QLD 4344  
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