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

No. 201 - OCTOBER 1992

EDITORIAL:

Another Toowoomba Bird Club year has come to an end, symbolically concluding with our 1992 A.G.M. held at the C.W.A. Hall, Withcott on October 5. The meeting was successful despite low attendance, with thirteen "old" members and two brand-new recruits enjoying a varied evening including discussion of club business, election of the 1993 executive, and an informative talk and slide-show by Pat McConnell. In accordance with tradition, minutes will appear in the November newsletter.

We have received notification that the Q.O.S. (Queensland Ornithological Society) is administering a "hotline" for unusual bird sightings. If you desire more information, please contact the Records Officer. Ann is now taking orders for the beautiful R.A.O.U. (Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union) 1993 Calenders which we have available at reduced prices for members (\$14 versus \$15.95 rrp.). Judging by the quality of past R.A.O.U. calenders, these are really worth having and would make ideal Christmas gifts.

On the topic of R.A.O.U. projects, the Toowoomba Bird Club is footing a team in the "Queensland Twitch" (otherwise known as "The Great Bird Chase"), a birdwatching competition designed to raise money for research into two threatened Australian species: the Star Finch and the Regent Honeyeater. In a nominated 24-hour period, the teams must sight as many different bird species as possible, raising money through sponsorship per bird or direct donations. Our team, "The Unleaded Petrels", expects to sight 150-200 species on the weekend October 24-25. If you would like to offer sponsorship or make a small donation to this worthy cause, please contact Pat McConnell after hours on (076) 976 141. During the first competition (16-17 March 1991), our team finished first among the amateur teams and sixth overall with 174 species, so I'm sure we can expect another good showing this time. Glory to the T.B.C.! On the same weekend, we are holding our TBC Annual Bird Count, and encourage all members to be involved. See later article .

T.B.C. SEPTEMBER OUTING REPORT -Campout, Lake Broadwater, 26-27.09.92

Whether you judge a bird-watching outing by quantity or quality, the September outing was a success. One-hundred and two species for the weekend certainly showed the quantity. The Painted Honeyeater, alone, provided the

quality without the added attraction of only the second ever recorded sighting of an Osprey at Lake Broadwater (Well done Rod!) and the Inland and Chestnut-rumped Thornbills.

A few hardy souls started on the Friday night. Not our intrepid leader! A comfortable, warm bed is far superior when it is only forty-five minutes drive in an ordinary car or just over an hour in an antique four-wheel-drive. Friday night's spot-lighting produced a number of surprises..... the surprised Wedge-tailed Eagle and the equally surprised viewers. Saturday dawned clear but windy. The birding was interesting but not outstanding until the small honeyeater flying around the brigalow along the side of the main road was clearly sighted. Painted Honeyeaters always seem to cause some sort of interest and this group was no different. The amount of time and distance spent trying to obtain a good sight of this small, dainty bird is unbelievable and it is this sort of activity that convinces the non-birding community we are "slightly teched". But then, chasing a little white ball all over the country-side doesn't seem normal either.

By mid-morning on Saturday, we were joined by Malcolm and Marjorie Wilson from the Lake Broadwater Natural History Association. They provided us with valuable information about the best birding spots in the park and kept us up to date on the species seen in the park. After lunch they showed us the museum and then led us on a guided tour of the South-West Track and the surrounding area. This was thoroughly enjoyed by all and we thank the Wilsons for their time and effort. It was on the drive around the South-West Track that the antique four-wheel-drive proved its worth. I hope Lesley's photo of the mighty machine pulling a fallen tree off the track does justice to the driving skills of our leader.

Saturday night's spot-lighting produced some more quality sightings of Yellow-bellied Sheath-tail-bat, White-striped Mastiff-bat, a number of wallaby species, Brushtail Possum, Sugar Glider and Bynoes Gecko. Once again the intrepid leader was at home in the comfort of his own bed. (Shame, shame!!) Sunday morning brought more birders and everyone headed for the brigalow. Painted Honeyeaters can be tricky to find. Everyone found something of interest, even if the *Grantiella picta* remained out of sight. By lunchtime, goodbyes were being said, and the exodus commenced. Could the Rugby League Grand Final have had anything to do with the early departures?

So, what was seen? It is impossible to list one-hundred and two species, so, apart from those already mentioned, the highlights included : White-bellied Sea-eagle, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Greenshank, Red-necked Avocet, Gull-billed Tern, Australian King Parrot, White-winged Triller, Red-capped Robin, Western Gerygone, White-eared Honeyeater. Seven species were observed nesting - Crested Pigeon, Grey-crowned Babbler, Weebill, Yellow Thornbill, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Miner and Grey Butcherbird.

How did the intrepid leader feel about it all? He didn't say. He was heading home. It's not everyone who can lead a camp-out from his own bed.

Terry Pacey

On the mid-afternoon of 15.08.92, Queensland Ornithological Society members, R.Dowling, G.Long and G.Palmer were birdwatching around the Helidon livestock dip. I had joined them earlier in the day. Whilst at the dip, we observed a single Diamond Dove feeding in the company of Peaceful Dove, *G.striata*, Bar-shouldered Dove, *G.humeralis* and Common Bronzewing, *Phaps chalcoptera*. On the following morning TBC members L.Atzeni, P.McConnell and I returned to the area and sighted the bird. A single bird of the species was observed here on 13.09.92 by S.& A. Fredriks of the TBC. The QOS members reported the sighting in their newsletter, Vol.23, No.9, Oct.1992 in the "Members' Sightings" section with the annotation "unusual in the area".

It has been proposed that this species be added to the TBC checklist on the basis of the above sightings. After due deliberation as Records Officer, and consequent of a discussion at the TBC monthly executive meeting, 29.09.92, it has been decided that the Diamond Dove not be included on that list. It was felt that, as the bird is commonly kept as an aviary species, it was impossible to conclude that said bird was not an escapee. The Helidon livestock dip is closeby Helidon township which is known to house a large number of aviaries within its precincts. Over the last year such species as Mulga Parrot, Scarlet-chested Parrot, Little and Large-billed Corellas, Turquoise Parrot, Budgerigar, European Goldfinch, Ruddy Shelduck and Peach-faced Parakeet have been recorded in this area. This points to a high rate of escapism of captive birds in the Helidon, Withcott area and it is impossible to conclude that this Diamond Dove does not fall within that category. Accordingly, the proposal is rejected.

Records Officer

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB - ANNUAL BIRD COUNT, 24/25 OCT.'92.

It is proposed that our annual bird count this year commence at midday, October 24 and finish at "Shorelands", Withcott, at that time on the following day. Lunch and the collation of results to be attended to at that stage. The change of format, spreading the count over 2 x half-days, rather than a single day as has been the case previous, was decided for the following reasons :

1. To give participants more flexibility as to their allotment of time devoted to the event.
2. To allow for spot-lighting activities on the Saturday night without the prospect of a working day to follow as is the case on a Sunday.
3. To enable good birdwatching spots to be covered on more than one occasion during the census.
4. To encourage greater individual effort by families, and small groups thereby obtaining greater coverage for the count. This is very important.

The executive is trying to discourage this event as being regarded as another monthly outing. It is hoped that participants will "do their own thing" on these days. Any inquiries should be directed to the Records Officer or Secretary. Please remember that the count is confined to that area defined as our club study area. Good birding.

Records Officer

AFTER YOU, SIR....

As I was sitting in the middle of the creek one day, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, a sharp alarm-call from behind jolted me from my reveries and swung me around. I turned just in time to see a small passerine barrelling into the lantana, hotly pursued by a larger bird which entered the lantana with similar gusto. Their flight before entering the thick shrubbery had been horizontal, about one metre above the ground, through vine scrub with a thick canopy overhead. Upon crossing the creek, they had met the lantana. In the briefness of my first glimpse, I thought it was a whipbird chasing a thornbill; such was the readiness with which they both plunged into the spiny branches. It soon became clear that the little bird was now in its element; the snapping of twigs and awkward flapping sounds signalling the pursuer's pursuit nearing an unsuccessful conclusion. Within seconds of entering the lantana the vigorous but defeated courser, a diminutive Collared Sparrowhawk, made its ignominious exit, struggling out to the edge of the lantana before flying low over my head down along the creek. The no-doubt relieved coursee, a Large-billed Scrub-wren, was later observed attending to its usual feeding duties as if nothing had ever happened. All this took place close to the track crossing of Gatton Creek in Redwood Park. Just another little life-and-death story from the pages of everyday bush-bird existence.

Don Gaydon

POSSESSOR OF THE BOWER

On September 24 this year my explorations of Redwood Park were rewarded with the finding of a Regent Bowerbird's bower. The bower itself was almost impossible to see from the track and I only noticed it because of the antics of a male Regent Bowerbird. I heard a noise about three metres away and looked down to see the bird in question lunging at something that was obscured from my view. On changing position I saw a conflict between two male birds near a bower. The bird which I took to be the owner of the bower was facing the intruder with bill open. He was emitting soft, high-pitched squeaking noises while making lunges at his foe, sometimes with wings partly spread.

During the next couple of minutes the intruder made the odd lunge at the other bird but was neither vocal nor had bill open or wings spread. His display was nowhere near as impressive as his opponent. The intruder was soon shown off, with the victor in hot pursuit. At this stage I went in for a closer inspection of the bower and was only about one and a half metres away when the intruder returned and began to demolish it. I quickly left in case my presence was preventing the owner's return. On checking the bower about an hour and a half later it appeared slightly worse for wear but still basically intact.

The bower itself was somewhat smaller than that of the Satin Bowerbird and contained two faded blue plastic screw-top lids, one faded blue plastic pen-top, a broken white egg shell, some grey-green lichen and a bronze-coloured berry.

Pat McConnell

SOME FIELD NOTES FROM "THE VALLEY"

Two events of late have been of particular interest to me and so, perhaps, may they be to readers. From my diary:

" 03.10.92 : Birdwatching around Karrasch's Dam just before lunch today. Nothing much to note here. No sign of the pair of Freckled Ducks, Hoary-headed Grebe from yesterday. Saw a Peregrine Falcon, a female judging from the raptor's size, stoop on a Darter and put it to earth. Both birds disappeared into the long grasses in the paddock adjacent the dam. Watched for about ten minutes and neither animal reappeared. Appears that the falcon had a successful kill and was eating the darter on the ground, amidst the grasses and hidden from prying eyes. A powerful display.

" 04.10.92 : Morning spent around the backwaters of Lake Clarendon with Col Dollery. An excellent morning. Went "frogging" along the foreshore and recorded six species of amphibian viz. Cane Toad, Bleating Tree Frog, Striped Marsh Frog, Spotted Grass Frog and, of particular interest, two toadlets, the Smooth Toadlet, *Uperoleia laevigata* and the Dusky Toadlet, *U. fusca*. Also found a large Keelback, *Tropidonophis mairii*, about to slough and a Bombadier Beetle, *Pheropsophus verticalis*. Col collected B.B.. These ground beetles seem to favour damp habitats. Occasionally have found them around Hood's Dam.

Heard a commotion of bird call in waterside grove. Focused telescopes on area and observed agitated group of Australian Magpie-larks, Pale-headed Rosellas, Torresian Crows and Noisy Miners. Object of birds' ire revealed to be a pair of Channel-billed Cuckoos. Interested to note one cuckoo sitting astride a Magpie-lark's nest, its mate close to. Cuckoo observed to take an egg from the nest and, with a toss of the beak, swallow it whole. Like a well-larded bon vivant tossing back grapes. Channel-bills eventually driven off (by birds) but lingered in the area. Inspected nest from top of Col's four-wheel-drive and found it to be barren of contents. This practise of raiding of Magpie-larks of their eggs and nestlings specifically mentioned in *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*. A good morning."

R.Hobson
WOODLANDS
06.10.92

A GARDEN OF WILDLIFE

A Couple of years ago, my husband built a nest box for the Pale-headed Rosellas. Now, we had observed a Pale-headed Rosella with its head in the box, but there was never much activity at the site. Earlier this year we had occasion to get a very large Carpet Python removed from his favourite restaurant (here). Thanks Rod. This reptile really loved the Peaceful and Bar-shouldered Doves for entree followed by anything else that came too close to its position in its particular tree. After its removal, I suggested that David check the nest box for unwelcome visitors. He did and out flew a very upset and bewildered Owlet Nightjar. Both eyed one another in shock. However the little bird decided this human wasn't a threat and took up his position once again.

Pat Cleary

CALL FOR RECORDS - BLACK-BREASTED BUTTON-QUAIL.
(taken from QOSI Newsletter, Vol 23, No.9, October 1992)

The Fauna Conservation and Ecology Branch of the Queensland Forest Service is currently researching the historical and present distribution of the Black-breasted Button-quail, *Turnix melanogaster*, and would be greatly assisted by any records of sightings of this bird or its associated litter scrapes. The survey is an important initial step towards the formulation of an appropriate conservation program for this rare and interesting species.

This species may have suffered major retractions in range since the 1960's due at least in part to large scale land clearing. Accurate sighting records are required to assess this apparent shift in distribution. Records of bird sightings should include a description of what was observed, the date of sighting, person(s) involved in the sighting and very importantly a precise locality description including (if possible) grid co-ordinates. Other descriptions of the site vegetation, access and land tenure would be appreciated. The study is jointly-funded by the Queensland Forest Service and the National Rainforest Conservation Program. All information collected for this study will be published and available for public use. All inquiries and information should be directed to:

Zoology Section
Queensland Forest Service
80 Meiers Rd. Ph: 07 877 9794
INDOOROOPILLY Q 4086 Fax: 07 371 2217

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

1992 Annual Bird Count: Takes place of October Outing
Date: 24-25 October
Location: finishing at "Shorelands", Withcott
Contact: Records Officer or Secretary

November 1992 Outing: The Palms (via Cooyar)
Date: 29 November
Leader: Rod Hobson

THE TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER
Registered by Australia Post
Publication Number QBG3973

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