

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB inc.

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toowoomba bird club inc.

MEMBERSHIP : Adults/Families \$18 Students \$10

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" To encourage the observation and study of the birds of the Toowoomba area "

No. 207 - APRIL 1993

EDITORIAL:

Well, what can be said of Toowoomba at the moment? Anyone know any good rain-dances? Severe rainfall deficiencies over the summer period have been experienced by a large chunk of Queensland, Toowoomba included, and thirty percent of Queensland is now drought declared, with over 8500 properties in dire straits. Many grain-growers face a third consecutive year with no income due to crop failure. Woolgrowers are in very difficult circumstances due to the combined impact of drought and wool prices.

The Jandowae area, our previously planned venue for the April outing, is presently like a dust-bowl and Terry says the birds are very quiet. For this reason, the April outing has been shifted to Cunningham's Gap in Main Range National Park where hopefully conditions will be more amenable to a bird-watchers' outing. See details on back page. Maybe we can expect to see some nomadic western birds moving through the Toowoomba area as dry conditions out-west force them coastwards. This is the usual trend, and has produced some fascinating records in the past including Freckled Duck, Black-chinned Honeyeater and various others. So, even in these waterless conditions, keep your eyes peeled.

Our club name change has not yet been confirmed by the Department of Consumer Affairs, so officially we are still the Toowoomba Bird Club. Hopefully, next newsletter will be under the new banner. Government works in mysterious and time-honoured fashion; each such submission requiring several weeks rest on each one of half-a-dozen clerks' desks before such an perplexing issue as our name change can be given the holy approval. Only after so esoteric and involved an affair can the title 'official' be rightly bestowed. We musn't forget this. Take heed, ye philistines!

By the way, if you do know any sure-fire rain-dances please contact Mr Ed Casey, Minister for Primary Industries, Brisbane, but don't tell him that I sent you, OK?

TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB MARCH OUTING, Coastal Brisbane, 28.03.93

The annual pilgrimage of our bush-bound birding brigade to the mangroves and foreshores of Moreton Bay was yet again a laid-back and enjoyable affair. It's on this annual outing that the nominated leader acquires that feeling of godliness as one reveals the identities of the myriad of perplexing brown and grey species to the wader-illiterate amongst the faithful followers. The

meeting spot at Lytton provided an excellent start as many waders began to arrive (earlier than anticipated) to roost at high tide. With field-guide open and telescope trained on examples of each species - Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew, Lesser Golden Plover, Red-capped Dotterel, Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Great Knot, Grey-tailed Tattler - in no time at all we had a healthy species list and the minds of our newcomers absolutely addled. Over the sewage-farm, tell-tale black underwings made identification of the White-winged Terns easy. Gull-billed, Caspian, Crested, and Little Terns were also seen during the outing. We left the mossies and roaring trucks of Lytton behind for a more leisurely time on the shady esplanade at Wynnum. Several of the above wader species plus Terek Sandpipers, Mongolian Dotterels, Red-necked Stints, and Ruddy Turnstones punctuated the patch of rocky foreshore spared by the high tide. A solitary Large-billed Plover allowed for comparison of this species and the similar Mongolian Plover.

Disbandon after lunch? No way, Jose! The hue and cry of the wader-hungry entourage left no choice but to drive on to Thorneside. There we added Mangrove Honeyeater and Mangrove Kingfisher before disbanding and cleverly avoiding the Broncos' traffic. A call at Helidon Spa to tick the resident Common Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper capped off one of those idyllic jaunts that only birdwatchers can carve out of an otherwise average Sunday. If you're sorry you missed this year, then reserve the same time next year. Thanks to Ann Shore for the use of her Subaru and to my complimentary passengers regarding my driving ability. I made sure I passed on this 'revelation' to my wife.

Michael Atzer

THIRSTY VISITORS

For those who watch and listen there are some compensations to be gleaned from this lengthy drought. The birds are definitely becoming bolder as they seek hitherto un-heeded sources of food and water. Recently (mid March) a Lewin's Honeyeater has been a daily visitor to the more wooded and secluded part of 'Shorelands' and once ventured to the birdbath below the house.

However, on 25 March a much more unusual visitor appeared. Noticing bird movement in a *Callistemon viminalis* I reached for my binoculars and was rewarded by identifying a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater preening. Only once before have I seen him here, on 2 November 1991, again in very dry conditions and also, briefly, bathing. This time he bathed at leisure. Dip, splash, preen, dip, splash, preen, repeated a number of times. Sometimes he flew to the shrubs between dips and sometimes he remained on the edge of the birdbath giving me excellent views before finally flying off. Maybe he's been again but I haven't had the good fortune to see him.

The Lewin's Honeyeater has certainly returned - several times - but prefers the smaller water trough hanging in the *Eucalyptus robusta* nearby where he gets good cover. From another stand hangs another container, the favoured haunt of the Double-barred Finches who arrive in a party and frolic about with abandon; nine getting in on the act one morning, leaving little water for late comers. Another day a smaller party was accompanied by a couple of cheeky House Sparrows and a Brown Honeyeater with Superb Fairy-wrens and a White-browed Scrub-wren waiting in the wings. Their eagerness for moisture is very real and tempts one to watch from the window at every opportunity lest one misses other thirsty newcomers. So much for life's mundane chores!

Ann Shore

THE GREAT NEW HOLLAND HONEYEATER CONSPIRACY

They know you're coming. They know you're a bird-watcher. The trap is set. Their timing is impeccable. Here comes the unsuspecting birdo. They start flying at the other end of the street and gather speed as they come from behind. The birdo hears them coming and in all innocence, turns to see the spectacle of half a dozen New Holland Honeyeaters tearing past. The victim turns back to find a large concrete telephone pole implanted in his face. They knew I was coming, they knew that pole was there, they flew by just at the right time. Fortunately, I managed to dodge the pole but if you are ever in the sea-side resort of Glenelg, near Adelaide in South Australia, be careful, you could be their next target!

David Hill

"THE PASTORALE" - FOR THREE PLAYERS

When we moved to the farm in February we decided that a dog was a necessary accoutrement to the rustic. Accordingly, a fox terrier pup was purchased and, after a deal of deliberation, the name "Digger" arrived at. The name proved prophetic, our lunar-landscaped yard now bearing its mute testimony. This 9kg. minuscule bundle of self-importance has now taken on himself the office of Lord and Protector of the house, yard and all lands within his canine ken. Any motile objects from skinks to semi-trailers are dispersed amidst a flying bundle of tan and white hair and outraged yelps. This over-zealous behaviour led to the incident, on the morning of 13.09.92, of which I would now relate.

It was a delightful morning as we sat on our back stairs soaking up the early spring sun, agrestic lotus-eaters, we two, man and dog. God was in His Heaven and all was well with the World. At that stage a Brown Hare had the temerity to intrude into our Elysium, profaning this garden of the Hesperides. "What a cheek, we'll see about this". Such thoughts, gestated in the recesses of the canine mind were transformed, straightway, into a flying ball of canine indignity. My next impressions were of a bolting hare, hell-bent on self-preservation, with a foxie in close pursuit, passing left to right across my field of view. As all this activity was transpiring, a Spotted Harrier appeared low over the brow of a nearby hill and the chase was joined. The hare led its merry way with the other two participants evenly spaced out behind, about five metres equidistant. The harrier flew approximately two metres above the grass-tops. This performance lasted a hundred metres or so when the hare apparently found the situation getting out of hand. This fleet-footed grass rocket then "put it up a cog" and left its adversaries with a swiftly diminishing view of hare feet and scut. The pursuers, dumbfounded by this rapid change of events, or, perhaps thinking their work well done, returned to their pre-hare idylls, the harrier off in a gentle arc to Pechey Swamp and Dig to his guard-post in the sun by the front steps. All over, another interloper vanquished, cast out into "the land of Nod", or the neighbour's, Old Mary's, place, as the case may be. All over, finis.

"Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."

Rod Hobson
WOODLANDS
25.09.92

PEE-WEE VERSUS DRUNK

Whilst walking in the Brisbane Botanical Gardens one Sunday in October, I was witness to an intriguing confrontation between a Magpie-lark and another of the garden's residents; an elderly, bleary-eyed drunkard. The bird was attempting to investigate some crumbs which had been dropped beneath a park bench. Nothing unusual about that; food is regularly spilt in the gardens and magpie-larks are frequent investigators of such scatterings. The problem for this particular avian, however, lay in the fact that atop the bench was the old indulger, sprawled-out and resting in seemingly contented fashion.

As I strolled past, I was hit by an odour like that of a rum-distillery and thanked my lucky stars I wasn't a smoker about to light-up a cigarette. I noted the bird strutting along the grass some two metres distant, eagerly eyeing the discarded foodstuffs beneath the make-shift bed. It wasn't a particularly memorable scene, and as I continued on, other things soon occupied my mind. All of a sudden, from behind came a loud, guttural roar, "Garn ! Get outafit ya mongrel !!" I turned to see the drunk, now striving to reach a sitting position, arms waving in an attempt to dissuade the magpie-lark from its endeavours. Startled, the bird quickly fluttered to a safe distance, and as I watched, it waited to see what the man would do. He proceeded to fall asleep at his newly-found upright station. Once again the bird embarked upon a bid to reach the edibles, walking gingerly towards the bench. Step by step, avian confidence soaring, Johnny Walker's man evidently dead-to-the-world. The pee-wee was almost within pecking distance of its goal.....

Suddenly, the old drunk burst afresh into glorious life, "Garn, ya stupid bloody mongrel !! Get outafit !!", arms, and also legs this time, flailing wildly. The magpie-lark once again retreated to a guarded chainage, but this time the old guy was really incensed. He seemed convinced that somehow, someday, this bird was trying to get the better of him, and he wasn't going to let it happen. As I rather rudely continued to watch, his unbelievably wrinkled face contorted into a grimace, his boosey eyes became full of determination, and all of a sudden he was on his feet. Incredulously, he then began to chase the raider, his gait wobbly, but his application admirable. Deciding after several steps that his chances of reaching the creature were markedly slimmer than his chances of falling in a heap on the ground, he stopped, fixed the fleeing magpie-lark with a vicious gaze, and began cursing it vehemently. The bird seemed unaffected by the abuse, and this appeared to anger the old pot-walloper even further. His dirty old trench-coat, hanging loosely in one hand, was then flung with intent to kill. Deftly avoiding the projectile, the pee-wee fluttered up and landed again.

Several kids on "roller-blades" had stopped and joined me in the audience. The drunk, apparently exhausted by his work, and quite possibly convinced that he'd taught the bird a thing or two, staggered back to his austere couch and lay down. I resumed walking, having reached the limit of my effrontery. I ended up concluding that unless the poor old magpie-lark made its approach bearing gifts of an alcoholic nature, it would have little joy with food at this particular park bench.

Don Gaydon

**** MORE ARTICLES, PLEASE ****

I again call upon TBC members to unsheathe their pens and share interesting sightings or snippets of bird behaviour through this newsletter. Small and/or large articles welcome.

WILD BUDGERIGAR FILM

The following letter was received from Mr Gary Steer, Sky Visuals, SYDNEY, and is produced in full below, dated 22 March 1993:

Toowoomba Bird Club,

I am producing a television documentary about Australia's wild Budgerigars.

The film is being co-produced with the ABC, BBC and National Geographic. Cinematographer for the project is Lindsay Cupper, of Mildura.

Some of the key scenes of the documentary require the filming of large flocks of Budgerigars, numbering thousands, in their natural habitat of inland Australia. However, due to the unpredictable nomadic lifestyle of Budgerigars, we are relying upon recent and accurate sightings by competent field observers in order to locate large flocks.

Should any of your members encounter large flocks of Budgerigars within the next few months, we would be extremely grateful for any information - such as how many birds, where last sighted, in which direction they were heading, and whether any breeding activity was occurring.

Observers can contact Mitchell Kelly or Gary Steer at Sky Visuals on (02) 356 2266, or Lindsay Cupper, Mildura, (050) 25 7248. It would also be of great assistance if you could extend this request to any ornithologically inclined acquaintances you may be speaking to.

Hoping you can help with this project.

Yours sincerely, Gary Steer, PRODUCER

Anyone who can be of help in this instance, please contact Sky Visuals directly.

'THRUSH CALL'

Who rang the bell in the morning ?
Whose hand tugged
The slim rope, slowly spilling a silver chime ?
Before the drowsy hills had softly shrugged
Mist from their shoulders, or mountains had rubbed the rime
Of snow from their violet eyes I heard the note
Drip as honey drips from a flower's throat.
Before the cattle came down to the creek to break
The ice into diamond splinters; before the sheep
Stumbled from under the trees to mellow and shake
The frozen grass with their breathing; I heard the steep
Blue grass of the sky reverberate, and the lost
Winds tinkle a thousand echoes in the frost.

Norma L. Davis

(from *Great Bird Stories of Australia and New Zealand*, edited by Jack Pollard.)

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

We shall be christening our new display board (bought with the state government grant which we have received) at the World Environment Day celebrations, Laurel Bank Hall and Park, on Saturday 5 June. Make sure you seek out the 'Toowoomba Bird Observers'.

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

April 1993 Outing:

Location: Cunningham's Gap

Assembly: Picnic area opposite service-station, 8.00 am

Date: 25 April

Leader: Rod Hobson (074) 627 364

Info: Due to perilously dry conditions in the Jandowae area at the moment, the previously advertised campout has been postponed. In its place will be a day outing to Cunningham's Gap, Main Range National Park. This area exhibits a wide variety of vegetation types including sub-tropical rainforest and open eucalypt, together with tremendous scenery and wildlife. The park is home to many birds not found in our area, like Green Catbirds, Paradise Riflebirds, Yellow-throated Scrub-wrens, Albert's Lyrebird etc., and is well known for Peregrine Falcons, several pairs nesting on the cliffs within the park. The assembly point is reached by driving from Toowoomba towards Warwick, and taking the Cunningham Highway turnoff to Brisbane/Ipswich just before Warwick. This highway then passes through Cunningham's Gap, the assembly point being at the first picnic ground, opposite the service-station. Approximate distance from Toowoomba is 130 km, so 1.5 hrs should give you plenty of time. Contact Rod for more details.

May 1993 Outing:

Location: Jubilee Park, Toowoomba

Date: 30 May

Leader: Ann Shore (076) 303 207

Info: This is certainly an outing which precludes distance as an excuse for not coming! Jubilee Park, on the Toowoomba range adjacent to Mt Lofty, has long been a favourite haunt of TBC members with open eucalypt forest containing a good variety of our local bush birds. Access is extremely easy, the assembly point for the outing being the end of Woolridge Street. Being so close to home, this outing will allow members to stay for as long or as short as they like. Plenty of experienced birders will be on hand to assist beginners, so make a note in your diary.

SURFACE MAIL

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