



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

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

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

NEWSLETTER No. 209 - JUNE 1993

EDITORIAL:

As you've probably noticed from the header on this news-sheet, it's now official; we're the Toowoomba Bird Observers. Our new name clearly projects what we are - a group of people interested in observing wild birds in their natural environments; a society of field bird-observers.

I'm sure no-one denies feeling a twinge of sentiment as we bid farewell to 'Toowoomba Bird Club', the name of our group since inauguration in 1975. Our entire history as a club has been conducted under that banner and, for many, fond memories shall always surface at its mention. Along with the old name, however, we leave behind the unfortunate public confusion over our purpose as a club and clearly define ourselves as bird-watchers, not bird-keepers. This is a move from which we will surely benefit.

The Black-shouldered Kite has been the symbol of our club since the beginning, and, as one of our most recognisable and beautiful birds, a fitting species to have as our emblem. The logo which you see in the upper-left of this news-sheet was drawn especially for our club by the late Betty Temple-Watts, one of Australia's most respected wildlife artists, at the request of Bill Jolly around 1978-79. To mark this historic name-change, and as a tribute to Mrs Temple-Watts, future newsletters will feature her beautiful hawk. Here's to a prosperous future for the TBO! Cheers!

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS MAY OUTING - Jubilee Park, 30 May

With the range shrouded in misty drizzle at dusk on Saturday evening I feared the next morning's outing along the Toowoomba escarpment might be one of those 'rained-off' occasions when, although all set to don the mantle of leader and having dutifully reconnoitered the area some days before under pleasant sunny skies with birds everywhere, the actual day would be a let-down. Now, much as I longed for good soaking rains, I thought no, please not on Sunday morning!

However my Jeremiah-like worries came to nothing, as even though gloomy and cool we managed a quite creditable list of 48 species and members turned up a-plenty, some from far and wide. To come up from Warwick and in from Jandowae, Dalby and the Lockyer says something for Toowoomba birding! Pottering along the walking tracks edging the Range, the birds were certainly scarce in some parts and then all around us in others, but were probably less in evidence

generally due to the lack of sunshine. The bird of the morning had to be the Grey Goshawk, whose appearance, lazily circling along the escarpment, caused a flurry of excitement among birds and bird-watchers alike, startling both into instant activity. The latter striving for good views while the former set up a great clamour high above. Next in interest was the beautiful Eastern Spinebill, new to some and a pleasure to all. Then nearby we were intrigued by seemingly strange-looking birds among a flock of female and immature Satin and Regent Bowerbirds. Alerted to an orange beak and striping on the breast and another with black head and white underparts we had even the experts puzzled. Some 20 pairs of binoculars were trained on the spot but the elusive birds kept us guessing. Maybe an immature Regent Bowerbird for one? If not? And the other.....?

After a 3-4 hour walk up hill and down dale everyone was ready for a break by the time we had completed our circuit and returned to the cars. Most then went their separate ways, some heading home and those with picnics fore-gathering in Webb Park to check lists and compare notes. Yes, no worries, it had been a good morning with enjoyable company.

Ann Shore

THE RED-BELLIED PITTA

In early January this year I spent six days at Pajinka Wilderness Lodge at the tip of Cape York. To get to Pajinka in the wet involves flying to Bamaga and then travelling the remaining twenty kilometres or so to the lodge by four-wheel-drive. Once at the lodge it is only about half a kilometre to the tip and most guests waste no time in heading off to the northern-most part of Australia's mainland. I did not break with tradition.

I guess by this stage most people are asking, "Why go north in the wet season?". It is wet and humid and the mosquitoes are bad but the birding is great. At this time of the year the migrants are back and one can expect to get most of them. There are eighteen species of bird restricted to the tip of Australia and all but four can be seen near Pajinka. The Eclectus and Red-cheeked Parrots along with the Green-backed Honeyeater are found further south while the Black-winged Monarch only passes through on migration in the months of about October and March. One misconception I would like to correct though, is that the tip is hot at this time of the year. In fact the temperatures are about five degrees lower on average than Cairns and although storms are frequent, the water quickly runs away and rarely ruins a day's birdwatching.

On speaking to friends before going I found that most, on their trips to Cape York had not seen the Red-bellied Pitta. This then became my most desired bird. However, finding it proved to be a nightmare. The first three days of searching, though turning up other species, failed to produce any sign of the pitta. On the fourth day my luck changed when I met Gordon and Erina Beruldsen. Not only was their knowledge of the birds of the area great but their friendliness, and willingness to share this information much appreciated. I had assumed that the habits of the Red-bellied Pitta were similar to those of the Noisy Pitta, but once Gordon had pointed out their call and told me they spent much of their time high in the canopy they became easier to see. After this bit of advice, I managed to see six of these magnificent birds, five of them perched in trees. One as high as thirty metres. Thanks to the help of Gordon and Erina I managed to see several other species I may well have missed. Of these, the most difficult to see were the Yellow-billed Kingfisher and the Yellow-legged Flycatcher. As Gordon proved to me many times, familiarity with the calls is the key to success when visiting a new area for a short time.

While at the tip, a trip to the Jardine River is a must. Besides the magnificent scenery one can hope to see White-streaked Honeyeaters and the Climbing Pitcher Plant, *Nipenthes mirabilis*. The Jardine itself is well worth the drive and one may also be lucky enough to see a Salt-water Crocodile. In all I managed to see all of the endemics except for Olive's Button-quail. The last

ing the Fawn-breasted Bowerbird which, despite my getting lost, I managed to see two hours before departure. Other animals of interest were the White-tailed Rat and the Northern Death Adder, both of which were fairly common. The staff and facilities at Pajinka Wilderness Lodge are excellent and I can recommend a trip north in the wet to anyone. Also if my friends say, "Can you show me a Pitta Pat ?", I can point them in the right direction.

Pat McConnell

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY REPORT

World Environment Day was celebrated with huge enthusiasm at Laurel Bank Park, headquarters of the Toowoomba Region Environment Committee (TREC), with contributions from many local organisations and schools, etc..

Our club paraded its new display board, purchased with the State Government grant we received last year. This is a great addition to our display resources and much improves our ability to show posters and photographs etc. safely without the fear of losing them to the first gust of wind, not to mention the ease of putting-up and taking-down using velcro instead of blue-tac! Our display at the big marquee drew alot of people and created a deal of interest due in no small way to the cases of birds which, together with extra posters, we borrowed from the Queensland Museum's Education Loan Department. We also had a small competition to guess the names of bird silhouettes which attracted 23 entries, mostly from among the many children present.

My very grateful thanks go to Pat and David Cleary and to Sharyn and Alex Frederiks for all the time and help they gave to the preparations, setting-up and carrying of material etc., contributing to a very successful and enjoyable day for the Toowoomba Bird Observers.

Ann Shore

DISCOVERY OF THE LYREBIRD

The following extract is taken from *Great Bird Stories of Australia and New Zealand*, edited by Jack Pollard. This particular piece was written by H.M. Whittell.

In January 1798, some Irish political prisoners, misled by a rumour that there was a colony of white settlers some three or four hundred miles to the south of Sydney, discussed among themselves the possibility of getting away to the supposed settlement. Governor John Hunter, having obtained information of their intentions, sent a magistrate to endeavour to dissuade them from attempting the journey. Seven of the prisoners were dealt with harshly, but the rest remained undeterred and Hunter decided to send four of them, accompanied by three men upon whom he could rely, and four soldiers to make a search of the country where the settlement was supposed to exist.

The party left Parramatta on January 14 1798, and on February 9 they returned much exhausted. They had travelled about 140 miles in a south-westerly direction from Parramatta, and they brought back with them a bird, the now well-known Superb Lyrebird (*Menura novae-hollandiae* Latham, 1801), the locality being the vicinity of the Nepean River. Amongst the Banks Papers in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, is the journal kept by one of the men on his expedition; it had been sent to Banks by Governor John Hunter. The diarist (who has been identified as a youth named

Barracks) recorded that on January 24 he "saw two pheasants which we could not get a shot at", and on the following day he "saw a great many emews". It was on the 26th that the first specimen of the Lyrebird was obtained, the diarist recording: "Here I shot a bird about the size of a pheasant, but the tail of it very much resembles a peacock, with two large long feathers, which are white, orange, and lead colour, and black at the ends; its body betwixt a brown and green; brown under his neck and black upon his head; black legs and very long claws".

What an exciting time this must have been for anyone interested in natural history. Hitherto unknown species and families just waiting to be observed and discovered; the naturalist never knowing what weird and wonderful creature he may next happen upon. A bit like walking down Wickham Street, Fortitude Valley, on a Saturday night, I suppose. - Editor.

POOR KOOKABURRA

Just before leaving the patch of bush I call home and heading down the highway which leads to civilisation, I paused for a last scan of the trees above me. Only a crow. But with the binoculars I noticed the subject of the crow's attention. The crow was harassing a kookaburra which held in its beak a limp prey, probably a Peaceful Dove. The crow was intermittently pulling at the kookaburra's wing. When the kookaburra shifted branches, the crow followed and persisted pulling at the wing. The balance in what appeared to be pretty much a standoff shifted with the arrival of a second crow. The kookaburra flew off, leaving his dinner to the bully-boys. "Poor kookaburra", I thought as I drove off. Poor kookaburra? I wonder when I will feel sorry for a kookaburra again.

Dana McCown

OBSERVATIONS ON PREY CAPTURE AND FEEDING TECHNIQUES: BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE, *Elanus Notatus*.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, September 22, '92 I was birdwatching along the banks of Blackfellow Creek, Junction View, SE Qld. My attention was drawn, initially, to begging calls of juvenile bird/s emanating from a hidden position on the opposite bank. Upon a closer investigation the perpetrators of the calls were revealed to be a pair of juvenile Black-shouldered Kites, *Elanus notatus*. The birds were developed to the stage of being volant but still displayed the tan areas on the upper body and head, indicative of the juvenile of the species. Both birds were perched in an exposed position atop a Casuarina and were occasionally being mobbed by Noisy Miners, *Manorina melanocephala*. The attention of the miners did not seem to inconvenience the raptors to any degree.

At one stage, whilst I was watching these youngsters, they became very agitated, raising their wings and calling in a more strenuous manner. The object of their consternation became apparent as an adult of the species, obviously a parent bird, appeared, flying towards them. On focusing on the adult, I observed it to be carrying a small rodent in its talons, most likely a House Mouse, *Mus musculus*, judging by its size. As the adult approached to approx. 12 metres of the juveniles, these latter birds sallied out to meet it. Upon closing on the parent, amid shrill calling, one of the juvenile birds rolled up and under the adult and the food item was transferred into its talons. The juvenile then returned to its original perch to eat its meal. The adult flew off to take up station in a dead eucalypt nearby. I remained in the area for approx. two hours, during which time the young kites kept up a constant barrage of begging calls.

Just prior to leaving the area, about 5.00pm, I noticed the mature kite in a hover over knee-high grass, in a paddock behind the Junction View State School. The bird maintained its position for approx. four minutes but dropped, in stages, from an original height of about 10 metres to approx. 3 metres from the ground. It then dropped into the grass to shortly emerge with a large skink to talon. During the maintained hovering the bird adopted several attitudes, the most common being with its head lowered to about a 30 degree angle, scanning the ground. Occasionally it would raise its head and forebody to approx. 40 degrees above the horizontal. At one stage a pair of Galahs, *Cacatua roseicapilla*, passed above the hovering bird and the kite turned its head side-on to observe their flight, still maintaining its height and position. During the hovering process, the both legs were held extended but, on occasions, one or the other, or both of the legs were raised temporarily.

The parent bird returned towards the youngsters with the captured skink and, for a second time, I was witness to an aerial exchange of food between adult and juvenile. As I left the adult was again perched in the dead eucalypt and a cacophony of begging calls continued from the creekside Casuarina.

R.G.Hobson,
WOODLANDS
24.09.92

Reprinted from *Australian Raptor Association News*, Vol 13 #4, pp 75-76, December 1992.

THE MOPOKE

I heard the hautbois of the solitude,
And followed after that elusive sound,
Which, uttered from the shy bird's feathery hood,
Haunted all places, yet in none was found.
For now on air it seemed,
And now on tree,
Muting and fluting over me.

How many a moonlit night - a girl - a child -
I sought to trace that strange and wandering note,
Now running here, now there, till, half beguiled,
My will upon its movement seemed to float!
Mopoke! Mopoke! it cried;
The chequered darkness held the call.

It is a lovely thing to hear a bird -
And hear it through the shadowy places of
The night! - to seek a wing that goes unheard,
And trace its flight through spaces far above!
Ah, follows still my heart,
And half afraid,
The mopoke's note within the shade.

Mary Gilmore

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

MORE ARTICLES, PLEASE

Well, I know the weather's getting cold and you may not be out birding quite as much as during other times of the year but, hey, that only gives you more time inside to write articles for the TBO newsletter! Feel free to dredge up past experiences of the ornithological kind, and/or interesting snippets you may have heard or read. Details of recent adventures or observations gratefully received. Long or short.

Editor

**** COMING EVENTS ****

June 1993 Outing:

Location: Coal Creek, Ipswich

Assembly Point: Outside Haigslea Hotel, Warrego Highway, Haigslea

Time: 7.30 am

Date: 27 June

Leader: Rod Hobson (074) 627 364

Info: The Coal Creek area abuts the Ipswich Botanical Gardens on the Bremer River. The vegetation consists primarily of dry vine-scrub and parkland, and it is by all reports a most interesting place to visit. Resident Powerful Owls should be enough to incite the interest of most birders. The Haigslea Pub is situated on the main Warrego Highway at Haigslea, a kilometre or so east of Marburg. Approximate travelling time from Toowoomba to Haigslea Pub is 45 minutes. Contact Rod for more details.

July 1993 Outing:

Location: Spicer's Gap

Date: 25 July

Leader: Pat McConnell (076) 976 141

Info: Spicer's Gap, on the main range just south of Cunningham's Gap, is an area of Open Eucalypt forest and sub-tropical rainforest. It is an area known for several very unusual bird species including the Eastern Bristlebird. This outing is an optional camp-out, with the main outing day being Sunday 25. Spotlighting for those inclined to camp.

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