

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

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'To encourage the observations and study of the birds of the Toowoomba area'

NEWSLETTER No. 216 - JANUARY 1994

EDITORIAL:

I was going to wish all TBO members a Happy New Year but this seems a little trite considering the devastation down south. I'm sure most of us have friends or relatives in the areas affected.

I'm sure you all enjoyed the various avian adventures in the December Issue and this month all TBO articles vie for the Editor's 1994 Award. If that doesn't get you moving - could I please have some articles for future newsletters ?

This month we are inundated with Drongos. A pair sitting on a fairly fragile nest in a Gum Tree are keeping a wary eye out for crows with good reason. Combined with an extended family of Kookaburras, Whipbirds, Crows, Fig birds, various Wrens, Channel-bills, Dollarbirds, flocks of speeding Lorikeets, Galahs plus the odd Willie Wagtail and Magpie this small patch of bush is certainly colourful and very noisy.

This issue has reports from the far North and South, bird and book lists and details of the next outing.

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS OUTING. Lockyer Wetlands Outing - 12 December 93

A string of nine cars meandered through the Lockyer Valley visiting likely waterbird habitats. The good recent rain had made little impact on water levels around the region but had apparently instigated some movement as all the Red-necked Avocets (bar one) had left the Helidon Spa and the lagoon behind Gatton Apex Lake was devoid of birds. When I couldn't turn up a Rufous Night Heron on the creek in Gatton I was beginning to despair. However, things picked up dramatically at Karrasch's Lagoon: Comb-crested Jacanas and Whiskered Terns by the score; at least a dozen Cotton Pygmy-Geese (the most I've seen at one location); a solitary Glossy Ibis and Little Egret; Brown Songlarks in the paddocks; and White-breasted Woodswallows overhead to name a few.

An "insider" informed us that Magpie Geese (presumably from the lagoon at Morex Meats, via Grantham) had taken up residence at the university at Lawes and for several of us (including me) the existence of the lagoon was a revelation. Thanks Nola! Amidst the plethora of Magpie Geese there were Pink-eared and Plumed Whistling-Duck and Sharp-tailed and Marsh Sandpipers. A Little Grassbird artfully eluded most of us as it darted between reed clumps around a smaller neighbouring lagoon, the only clue to its general whereabouts being its distinctive high-pitched call. A pair of Whistling Kites rolled in with a pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles, the latter high in the sky.

At Bill Gunn Dam, our final port of call, we added Hardhead and Chestnut Teal (a single male) to our list and a further two Sea-Eagles were seen perched in a dead tree on the far side of the dam. By then, it had warmed up considerably, lunches had been consumed and everyone was happy to call it a day (and a year!).

Michael Atzeni.

Tips on birding in the Mt Isa region, September 1993.

"If you want, you can go". Surely the sweetest words a husband can hear from his wife, at least when it means permission to join the lads on a 12-day birding trip, just like the good old days!

In my case, I'd had a 10-year abstinence from such pleasures during which time I suffered frequent bouts of withdrawal, especially after hearing about anyone's trip!?! I had opted to pursue the roles of boyfriend, husband and father. Needless to say, this unexpected permission was grasped with open arms.

Anyway, enough of my good fortune! This article aims to report on our trip and aid birders heading to the Mt Isa region, particularly for the first time, with regards species, locations and time allocation. In retrospect we could have seen the species we saw within a much shorter timeframe and then devoted the time saved to more challenging pursuits such as Carpentarian Grasswrens, Night Parrots and Spectacled Hare-Wallabies (*Lagorchestes conspicillatus*) or travelled to Burketown or Normanton looking for mangrove-dwelling species.

In the Mt Isa-Cloncurry region, there is a lot of similar country and little variation in species diversity. From our experience, a number of our unplanned stops, although good for a stretch and a break from driving, were unnecessary as we picked up the species seen in these areas at other locations that were much richer in birdlife. Based on our September trip, the following sites are worthwhile priorities before looking in other areas. The suggested time required is given in brackets.

Lake Moondarra (a day) - starting at the main picnic area, drive along the road that skirts the lake and meets up again with the main road into the lake. Our main reason for going was for waders but they were conspicuous only by their inexplicable absence. However, in the surrounding spinifex, Spinifex Pigeons were common and Painted Firetails were abundant although generally difficult to view. We also saw a pair of Spinifexbirds. Silver-crowned friarbirds were common in the flowering Callistemons in the picnic area. Great-crested Grebes, Green Pygmy-Geese, and many other waterbird species were on the lake. The Black-footed Rock Wallabies (*Petrogale lateralis purpureicollis*) were quite common (but easily overlooked) in the rocky cliffs above the main picnic area and Freshwater Crocodiles were seen in a backwater of the lake.

Clem Walton Waterhole (Lake Corella on our maps) (a day) is also good for a variety of waterbirds. It's quite easy to miss the turn-off which is about 60km from Cloncurry on the way to Mt Isa. The road eventually forks. Take the right branch to get to the dam. The left branch leads to the creek below the dam wall. Unfortunately, the creek is now choked with Salvinia. Before its appearance, the creek had been an excellent spot for seeing crakes.

While only a sum total of two migratory waders was seen, they were both notable. A well-marked Wood Sandpiper and a very tired Oriental Dotterel, the latter presumably recuperating from a recent arduous migration. In fact, it was so knackered that it allowed us to approach within 3 metres. It was still in the

same spot when Al returned with his camera some 20 minutes later and obligingly posed for a whole roll of film.

Butchers Creek area, west of Cloncurry (a morning) - Grey-fronted and Rufous-throated Honeyeaters, Black-tailed Treecreeper and Varied Lorikeet. Possibly, Dusky grasswren which were seen in hilly country 1.7 km further down the road (see last month's newsletter)

Lawn Hill National Park (2 days) - Northern Rosella, Red-collared Lorikeet, Spotted Nightjar (on the road at night), Lilac-crowned Fairy-Wren, Northern Fantail, White-browed Robin (buff-sided race), Sandstone Shrike-Thrush, White-gaped Honeyeater, Black-chinned Honeyeater (Golden-backed form which is possibly a distinct species), Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Crimson Finch, Long-tailed Finch and Great Bowerbird. Apart from the Shrike-Thrush which we saw at several of the lookouts, all these species were seen in the camping area (particularly, near the taps and sprinklers) and around the Ranger's residence, especially at the bird-bath. We had good views of Lilac-crowned Fairy-wrens in the late afternoon from the boardwalk near the Ranger's residence. Northern Rosellas were only seen early in the morning near the bird-bath. Long-tailed finches were fairly shy and uncommon but we obtained good views of birds drinking briefly at puddles around the taps in the camping area throughout the day.

The park is a gem and well worth the effort in getting there. Conventional cars can enter via the route from Cloncurry, Burke and Wills and Gregory Downs. Take extra fuel as a precaution as petrol is not available at all hours. Don't forget to book a site in advance as there is a daily limit placed on the number of campers.

Allison Bridges (2 hrs in the morning), just north of McKinlay - Diamond Dove, Black Honeyeater (a pair - the only sighting all trip), Rufous-throated Honeyeater.

Kynuna - A single Flock Pigeon was seen flying on dusk near the pub.

Bustards were regularly seen particularly on the outskirts of towns. While birds of prey were common we didn't see any of the rarer species. Spotted Harrier was about the best.

Hope this helps in planning your trip to this area.

Michael Atzeni.

TBO LIBRARIAN Sharon Frederiks has the following books which members may borrow.

A Field Guide to Aust Birds	P. Slater
1st Bush Birds	H. Frauca
Aust Parrots and Cockatoos	N.W. Cayley
Aust Waterfowl	Fisheries & Wildlife of Victoria
Birds of Brisbane and Environs	D. Vernon
Birds of Victoria	Reid, Shaw & Wheeler
Birds for Beginners	J.D. Macdonald
Bird Wonders of Aust	A.H. Chisholm
Bushwalks in the Toowoomba Area	N. McKilligan
Foliage Birds-	G.M Adam
The Atlas of Aust Birds	Blakers, Davies & Reilly
The National Photographic Wildlife	Crane, Olsen and Olsen
Birds of Prey & Ground Birds	
Readers Digest Book of Aust Birds	Readers Digest
What Bird is That ?	N.W. Cayley
Where to find Birds in West Australia	N. Marr

BIRDING DOWN SOUTH at HATTAH

In November 1993, Alex and I travelled south to spend one week at the Hattah Lakes National Park. This Victorian park is situated near Mildura with the Murray River forming its eastern boundary. At this time, the Murray was well and truly flooded and filled several periodically dry lakes as well as roads in the park.

The vegetation of Hattah consists mainly of Mallee which is interspersed with either Red Gums which line the water courses or Cypress-pine / Bullock Woodlands.

Whilst at Hattah, we were fortunate to observe several species whose distribution was mostly restricted to the Mallee habitat. Three such birds are the Regent Parrot, Shy Hylacola and the Chestnut Quail-Thrush.

We stumbled across the Shy Hylacola quite unexpectedly thanks to a Jacky Winter we thought was a female Hooded Robin. As we searched for the male Robin, we spotted a family of Chestnut-rumped Heathwrens. Similarly, we came across the secretive Chestnut Quail-Thrush when we were looking for the Malleefowl. It exploded from the ground with a whirring of wings and landed a few metres away from us. I was most intrigued to see it trying to camouflage itself by walking under the shade of a shrub and crouching perfectly motionless.

The discovery of these endemic Mallee species was one of the many highlights of birding at Hattah.

Another species we hoped to view in the Mallee was the Red-capped Robin. We certainly weren't disappointed seeing a pair of Red-caps, unperturbed by our presence, taking turns feeding their hungry offspring.

Another reason for choosing Hattah as a holiday birding destination was the chance to see new parrots. Luckily, we saw four species. Our first sighting of the Regent Parrot occurred when we were driving through Mallee. Its characteristic call became familiar as we caught glimpses of them flying swiftly overhead and sitting quietly in trees.

I think the Pink Cockatoo is a lovely bird to see in flight as it reveals its soft underparts and wings. We saw our first one sitting on a branch feeding on Cypress Pine seeds.

Mallee Ringnecks and Yellow Rosella were quite common in Hattah. Alex and I camped under River Red Gums beside Lake Mournpoul and every evening we watched them drink from the lake's edge.

We also found three smaller species. The Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Southern Whiteface and the Splendid Wren are all beautiful in their own way.

Two species of the Babbler family were also discovered in Hattah - the White-browed and Chestnut-crowned. These birds are very entertaining to watch as they carry on in their family - orientated lives. Often we would also have families of Choughs and Apostlebirds drop in for a campsite handout.

As our holiday came to an end, we were fortunate to meet Alec and Sharon Hawtins from the Sunraysia Bird Observers Club who kindly invited us for a day of birding with them. Their good local knowledge was useful in finding birds we really wanted to observe. We found White-fronted Chat, Orange Chat, White-winged Wren, Hooded Robin and the Blue Bonnet. The Chats and Wren were found on top of low-lying saltbush near a dried-up salt lake.

One of the highlights of our day with Alec and Sharon occurred when Alec was tapping on a tree trunk and out flew an Owlet Nightjar which landed on a nearby branch for close viewing without binoculars. It had a delightful little face with large black eyes, cat-like whiskers and a small beak.

Later, Alec heard a Gilbert's Whistler, and played a tape of the bird. It was quite interesting watching the Whistler flying from tree to tree trying to locate another Whistler.

Alex and I were very thankful for the Hawtins' birding advice and we hope to return the favour one day.

Because we enjoyed Hattah so much, we are already planning our next birding holiday. It will be somewhere out in the dry country - Currawinya sounds interesting.

To me there is something attractive about birding in semi-arid country.

Sharyn Frederiks

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES: All sightings as submitted by members of Toowoomba Bird Observers Inc. Accuracy not vouched for by TBO. Please check with observer before citing.

Pacific Baza	Rocky Ck., Withcott	17.11.93	P.C., A.S.
Peregrine Falcon*	Murphy's Ck. area	12.09.93	D.G., R.H.
Grey Falcon	Currawinya N.P.	19.09.93	R.H.
Spotless Crake	Soda Springs	17.10.93	C.D. et al
Caspian Tern (1)	Karrasch's Dam	23.10.93	P.McC.
Ruff**	Woodgate	30.10.93	R.H. et al
Yel.-tail.Bl.Cockatoo	Sylvan Ct., T'wmba	20.11.93	M.J.
Musk Lorikeet	Hood's Dam, Helidon	24.10.93	L.A.
Regent Parrot	Hattah N.P., V.	05.12.93	R.H.
Powerful Owl***	Redwood Park	01.10.93	D.G.
Wh.-th. Nightjar	Helidon	23.10.93	R-M.R. et al
Dollarbird****	Withcott	19.11.93	A.S.
Wh.-winged Triller	Memory St., T'wmba	18.10.93	L.A.
Satin Flycatcher	Memory St., T'wmba	17.10.93	L.A.
Chestnut Quail-thrush	Hattah N.P., V.	08.12.93	R.H.
Striated Grasswren	Hattah N.P., V.	07.12.93	R.H.
Shy Hylacola	Hattah N.P., V.	05.12.93	R.H.
Bl.-chin. Honeyeater	Helidon Livestock Dip	24.10.93	P.McC. et al
Wh.-front. Honeyeater	Hattah N.P., V.	08.12.93	R.H.
Orange Chat	Lake Mungo N.P., NSW.	08.12.93	R.H.
Plum-headed Finch*****	Charleville	23.12.93	C.D.
Little Crow	Lake Namulla	27.09.93	R.H.

L.A., L.Atzeni; M.A., M.Atzeni; P.C., P.Cleary; C.D., C.Dollery;
D.G., D.Gaydon; R.H., R.Hobson; M.J., M.Jacobs; P.McC., P.McConnell;
R-M.R., R-M.Roberts; A.S., A.Shore

* Pair of breeding birds observed with three eggs in eyrie on sandstone ledge. Magnificent raptors.

** Member of QOS Twitch team 'Wild Hunt' with Greg and Robin Czechura, Darryl Kirkup and Michael Strong. Other birds of note recorded at Woodgate included Wandering Tattler, Common Noddy, Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Australian Gannet, Brown Booby, Pied Oystercatcher and Beach Thick-knee. Also Red-tailed Black Cockatoo near Childers. Total number of species recorded for weekend = 221. What was the 'Unleaded Petrel' tally again?

*** An adult and racoon-faced juvenile sighted by Don, a great breeding record.

**** Ann reports a flock of approximately 10 of the species "rolling and swooping over 'Shorelands' just before dusk on a setting evening. "

***** A small charm of half-dozen finches feeding on seeding grasses in Dept. of Environment and Heritage grounds, Charleville - a good western record. More to come, Col? Liven up the Members Bird Notes with some Princess and Night Parrot sightings. Maybe a Plains-wanderer.

- Records Officer.

**** COMING EVENTS ****

January 1994 Outing :

Location: Lake Maroon via Boonah
Date: 30/01/94
Leader: Ken McKeown (076) 303 774

Info: This month's outing will be held in conjunction with the Fassifern Field Nats who have considerable local knowledge. Meet at the Boonah State School at 0700. Go past two large silos. Cnr Park St and Yeates Av. BYO everything. Yeates Av joins onto Rathdowney Rd. You can travel via Rosewood or Walloon to Amberley and down the Peak Crossing Road to Boonah OR travel through Cunningham's Gap and turn right after Aratula. About 2 hours either way .

February Outing :

Location: Brisbane Forest Pk
Date: 27/02/94
Leader: Michael Atzeni

Info: More in the next newsletter as this area recently experienced bushfires.

***** NOTICE *****

Please remember that **SUBSCRIPTIONS** are due on 01 November at the rates shown on the front page.

If your address label bears a **RED STICKER**, this will be the last newsletter you will receive until your subscription is current.

You can all relax now. The Calendars have been found.

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