



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

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

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

NEWSLETTER No. 222 - July 1994

EDITORIAL:

In the March Editorial, I mentioned Brush Turkeys and our small dam being full. Well, some things have changed. The dam is again bone dry but the turkeys are flourishing. In fact, four neighbouring households in our street, have been chosen to receive a daily raking and to heck with anything that gets in the way.

I suppose I started our plight by providing the raw materials for our new Camellia garden - mushroom compost 30 cm deep, lots of well-rotted manure, well-watered plants and topped with a generous amount of hay to stop evaporation. Pot plants are also a favourite and are emptied rapidly after being re-potted complete with a rock mulch.

If any club member wants a close view of a busy turkey you are welcome to our place anytime. This appears to be one species not dying out - but then again who knows what the future will bring.

What this edition will bring is great variety with an overseas report from Ann Shore, an interstate effort led by new cockroach, Terry Pacey, and a local myth laid to rest by Nicci Thompson plus of course TBO Outing information.

Many thanks to these TBO Members for their efforts. Could I please have additional articles for future newsletters? Early in the month would be appreciated and you can fax, write, type, telephone or send either size floppy disk in WP 5.1 format.

We often hear on the grapevine that so and so has visited an area and viewed some interesting species. The club would like to share your good fortune. Tell us about it. Thankyou.

TBO OUTING to Girraween National Park.

After six weeks overseas, one has to re-adjust to much - not least the countryside and the weather. The intensive greens of early summer in the U.K. following a very wet spring, replaced by the parched and pallid landscape of S.E. Queensland suffering long drought conditions exacerbated now by winter's icy blasts and frost. Again, cool and often cheerless days changed to the brilliance of a clear and sunlit world. Such was the transition I had made after arrival home three days previously. Changes brought home again as we drove to Girraween early on 26 June. Changes, yes, but to the onlooker each world has its own particular appeals and beauty. And what bird delights would this still and frosty morning yield?

All quiet in the National Park. Then a few unfamiliar calls had us reaching for binoculars to reveal three White-eared Honeyeaters. A beautiful bird with its strong markings and a new bird for me. An excellent start - but then silence. Slowly our small party assembled - eleven members including two intrepid campers. Still rugged up, we embarked on a short walk to a quiet creek which had been alive with birds the previous day. However, silence prevailed, apart from occasional twitterings aloft, the odd brief sighting of a Pardalote or Honeyeater and the sudden view of two Tawny Frogmouths side by side on a low branch. A beautiful day for walking but we hoped to view more birds.

Later, our luck improved with sightings of Red Wattlebirds and a Scarlet Robin, that special harbinger of winter. A much needed coffee-break came next on the agenda, then, leaving two less active members to enjoy the sun, we made tracks to the Granite Arch and Junction walks. Again the birds were elusive, but along the way a number of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters were seen - one of the day's hoped for highlights and another striking and distinctive bird. Then suddenly everyone stopped as the unmistakable voice of the Superb Lyrebird was heard. Despite Ken and Trent's careful searching, it remained unseen, although continuing to thrill us every now and then with its wonderful rich song and amazing mimicry.

En route for home some of us elected to travel via Storm King Dam in the hope of sighting Musk Duck. Water was low, as expected, but no sight of our quarry. Another quick detour was made to view Leslie Dam. There, the greatly reduced area of water storage was quite a shock - as it was only 5-6% capacity. A few more waterbirds to add to the list then home after a long but enjoyable day with some 67 species, added at all venues.

Ann Shore

CHANGING SPECIES.

I have changed! Some form of metamorphism has changed me from *Canetoadicus Jandowaeae* to *Cockroachicatus Gulgongcus*.

Why did this great change occur? Why not?! I have lived in many parts of Queensland and in the Solomon Islands so why not try New South Wales? (I know many of you are giving lots of reasons, but I'm not listening.) I must admit that I would not put those awful yellow number plates on my cars and pay extra for special plates but I still support the maroons in the State of Origin (some of us never learn), but for all intents and purposes I am now a New South Welshman.

Jandowae and Gulgong have a number of similarities. Both are about 300 kilometres from their capital cities. Both are very close to the Great Dividing Range and are at the western and eastern ranges of a large number of birds. This always means that the unexpected often happens. The other main similarity is the drought. Three years of drought declaration at Jandowae ended as we left at the end of April and the Gulgong area was declared a drought area just after we arrived. Is it us?

The differences are very visible. Hills, hills, hills, To move from the Darling Downs to the Central Tablelands of NSW means learning to walk again. Anyone can walk on the flat, but these hills need special skills (and different sized legs if you intend to walk across the slope).

The strong winds, cold weather (I have been forced to buy gloves just to hold my binoculars) and the short amount of daylight combined with all the little tasks that seem necessary when settling into a new home have all conspired to curtail my bird watching activities. But I am now starting to find areas close to town for those spare few minutes.

I have mentioned before the joys of bird observing from my own yard in Jandowae but this is different. The birds of the backyard seem, at first glance, to be nothing but Starlings and Sparrows (dozens of each). Closer viewing shows otherwise. Brown Honeyeater are absent. White-plumed Honeyeaters take their place. They seem to spend so much time chasing each other that I don't know when they feed. There is a pair of Blackbirds that have nested in our backyard for the last three years according to our neighbours. They are much nicer birds than other exotic species and seem to co-exist quite happily with the native birds. The Eastern Rosellas are much brighter than the Pale-headed variety. But the surprises.....a Crested Shrike-tit and a Grey Shrike-thrush in a suburban backyard only one block (downhill..) from the centre of town?

There are no corvids visible around the town and very few in the district at the moment. The number of Kookaburras never seem to amaze. The Pied Currawongs seem to sweep into the yard in great numbers, stay for an hour or so and then move on only to appear again in a few days and repeat the exercise. The Red-rumped Parrots are much more skittish. A tree full of Red Wattlebirds is even noisier than a tree full of Friarbirds.

The district shows signs of being extremely fruitful re bird observing. Fifteen minutes away are the headwaters of the Goulburn River part of the Hunter System. The Goulburn River N.P. is now known to be inhabited by Malleefowl. This is about the only place where these birds occur east of the Great Divide.

Five or ten minutes in the other direction is the Cudgegong River and the Murray-Darling System. Thirty minutes in another direction is Munghorn Gap. The flora here is both wet and dry sclerophyll forest areas in part of the Hawkesbury sandstone area. This area is noted for Superb Lyrebirds and Regent Honeyeaters.

Thirty minutes south east is Lake Windermere, a large man made lake on the Cudgegong River. Another thirty minutes south west is Lake Burrendong on the Macquarie River. This lake is three times larger than Sydney Harbour. Both these areas must be worth checking for the rarer water birds.

The Warrumbungles and the Pilliga Scrub are only one and a half hours away and are noted for their wildlife. The Macquarie Marshes are about two hours distant. The western plains are within half an hour. It sounds like a "twitcher's" paradise.

Well, this is my new home. Whether the bird watching lives up to expectations remains to be seen. I suppose those unimportant things like work, family and football will interfere.

If you are heading south, the detour through Gulgong is easy. Check your maps. The Mudgee-Gulgong district is one of the most historic in New South Wales. The wineries are worth a visit and the bird watching should prove interesting. The weather at this time of the year may be invigorating, but a *dram* of Mudgee White Port keeps all the chills out. Good Birding!!

Terry Pacey
Gulgong NSW

OF BANKSIA MEN, BUNYIPS AND BITTERNS

I, like many children raised in isolated country districts, gained my knowledge of the world beyond, by poring over a very limited supply of books and magazines. Having a mind that naturally categorises information, I was able to sort out the fruits of my reading satisfactorily, almost. The creatures that lived in children's books were often mythical - figments of imagination and in this category were filed Banksia Men, Bunyips, Gumnut Babies etc. The ones in the black and white **Walkabout** and the old tattered 1936 edition of Cayley's **What Bird is That?** were real and could be related to my own environment. Maybe the White-faced Heron fishing on the

sandy edge of a rocky water-hole wasn't the same as the Great-billed Heron in Cayley but it was a heron and somehow made all herons possible and so for most species with notable exception. Bitterns! They stood hunched in unbirdlike postures on their page in Casey, the text of which, indicated that some inhabited the south-western Downs, but despite dedicated searching they never materialized and so were included with the denizens of the mythical world. As I travelled and read more extensively and began to experience the wider world first hand no Bittern crossed my path and I concluded that some early ornithologist had hoaxed the birding world and the following generations of bird book authors had perpetrated the hoax.

However, three weeks ago, one usually down-to-earth birder rang to tell me that despite, or because of, my publicly expressed doubts on the existence of bitterns, he had seen a real one and gave me detailed and explicit instructions on how to find it. Despite my long standing scepticism, I hightailed it to the very spot and after an intensive search, concluded he too was in collusion with the field guides. There was, as you guessed, no Bittern - Black, Brown or Little - but that's not quite the end of the story, for during the course of a conversation with the Records Officer, I discovered that he too had seen the Bittern. It was definitely worth another try and so late afternoon saw the Editor and I heading east once more.

We found a very cryptic bird which flew into the branches of a small sapling and stood hunched in an unbirdlike posture on a branch giving us excellent views of its black upper body and the gold-brown streaks on throat and chest. As the local school bus roared by, the bird lifted clumsily and then with long slow wingbeats it floated across the open space to the other side of the road, its body, neck and legs in a straight line. In that light, gun metal apparition that dropped from view over a reedy bank.

Yes Don, it was a Black Bittern and soon perhaps I shall have a close encounter with Banksia Men or even a Bunyip, for as I watched it fly silently into the deepening dusk, it seemed to link the mythical world of childhood and its inhabitants to the real world of today.

Nicci Thompson

COUNTRY NOTES from the U.K. May/June 1994.

Burton Mill Pond and woodlands, West Sussex, under the protection of the Sussex Wildlife Trust, proved as rewarding a venue as on a previous visit. A special highlight on daily walks in June was to see the Great-crested Grebes' floating nursery, one parent carrying the two small stripey clutches pick-a-back, half hidden beneath its wing feathers. Every now and then the other parent would swim up to offer a little fish which dangled from its bill, first one baby then to the other. Eventually one grabbed and, after a struggle, managed to swallow it. The fish being as large lengthwise as the baby. Then that parent swam off to preen and later resume fishing while the other continued as nursemaid gently paddling and swimming to and fro in the breeze with only the clutch's head visible.

Elsewhere in the pond a Mute Swan foraged quietly for titbits for three fine cygnets. There were a number of Coots, four of whom had a fight as I watched, "standing on water" with wings held wide. A pair of Tufted Duck were usually about and scratchy song snatches of Reed Warblers came from tall reeds along the water's edge.

In the surrounding boggy heath and woodland much replanting has been carried out to revegetate areas devastated by the great storm of 1987. Numbers of oaks and some other broad-leaved species have been planted in waist-high heavy-duty plastic tubes ensuring straight stems and safe from attacks from the ever-present rabbits. Great twitterings of small birds came from oaks, birch, elder, holly, yew and bramble thickets; Great, Blue and Long-tailed Tits; Chiff-chaffs with their repetitive sing-song; the short song of Chaffinches; calls of Blackbirds and the occasional sharp "Tchich" and maybe a fleeting glimpse of a Great-spotted Woodpecker, that handsome black and white woodland drummer with a crimson patch on his head. Now and then agitated alarm calls as parents watched for enemies while feeding their ravenous young.

Upon the moors of N.E. England the plaintive cry of the Curlew could be heard; then songs of Skylarks, while Wheatears darted about their business. Forging a swift and boulder-strewn stream we stopped to watch Pied Wagtails as they flew from rock to rock, bobbing tails while Spotted Flycatchers flitted here and there as each sought its share of flying insects and Swallows circled and swooped from above. A calm and peaceful summer scene.

Ann Shore

RAOU CALENDARS

Once again the TBO will offer 10 RAOU Bird Calendars for sale at the AGM in October. Order now by phoning Ann Shore 303 207. They also make great presents.

Bird Sighting

On the 1 June at Peaches Lagoon off Ropely Road I had good views of a Diamond Dove in company with Peaceful Doves.

John Handley

RAPTORS

A photograph in the Sunday Sun caught my eye - Greg Czechura (Queensland representative for the Australasian Raptor Association) complete with an injured brown goshawk.

Greg stated that raptor numbers are starting to dwindle and species such as the Red Goshawk which require more than 200 square kilometres, as well as the White-bellied Sea Eagle and Grey Falcon are disappearing. To educate people with regard to the conservation of these birds, the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland with the Raptor Association is holding a "Rapt in Raptors" workshop at Bunyaville Environmental Education Centre next Sunday.

Peter Frater from the Raptor Restoration Rehabilitation Unit will be there with some specimens as will our own Rod Hobson (as a panellist in case you wondered).

If you are interested in attending ring the Wildlife Preservation Society (07) 221 0194. Time 8:45 to 12:45. Cost \$12.

{ Sat. 14th, Roberts 21st, 7.00 } 3

**** COMING EVENTS ****

Sat } 21st
Sunday } 22nd.

July Outing

Location: Mt Glorious
Date: 31 July
Leader: Ken McKeown (076) 303 774
Time: 7 a.m.

This park is one of four in the D'Aguiar Ranges. It offers scenic views of the coastal plain and has varied forest communities. Meet at the Maiala car parking area. As this park is 40 km north-west of Brisbane, it is preferable to approach from the west via Lowood. Turn **left** at the Esk - Fernvale Road, go 4 km and turn **right** and proceed 16 km to the Mt Glorious turn off. Turn **right** and enjoy the 15 km scenic drive up the hill to Mt Glorious. BYO everything. Don't forget to stop at Wivenhoe Lookout on the return journey. Great views. Map 14 A UBD Brisbane Refidex.

Mid-August Outing

Location: Crow's Nest area
Date: 14 August
Leader: Lesley Beaton (076) 308 481
Time: 7:30 a.m.

Meet Lesley at the village square for a Crow's Nest Mystery Tour.

August Outing

Location: Lake Coolmunda
Date: 28 August
Leader: Nicci Thompson
Time: 7:30 a.m.

More in next newsletter. Delete the gumboots.

Mid-September Outing

Location: Stockyard
Date: 14 September
Leader: Ann Shore

More in next newsletter.

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