

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. 225 - October 1994

EDITORIAL:

The plethora of Red-tailed Black Cockatoo sightings has finally diminished only to be replaced by numerous reports of woodswallows and other much less frequently seen visitors. The highlight recently was to discover several Black Honeyeaters at Lockyer Creek after former member, Bill Jolly, sighted one at his home a kilometre along the same creek. Imagine our surprise when several members discovered Budgerigars sitting in the same tree as the woodswallows when we went to see these Black Honeyeaters. The Records Officer will be busy if this trend continues. The Black Honeyeaters are still present near Helidon and many members have now added this remarkable species to their list.

Up the range, Nicci Thompson was showing Michael Hutchison, the RAOU co-ordinator of the Murray-Darling Basin Waterbird Project, around Cooby Dam and sighted a lone Jabiru and Little Curlew. Incidentally, there are a great variety of waterbirds at Cooby presently as the surrounding areas dry out if you're interested.

Finally congratulations to our President, Michael Atzeni and wife Karen on the safe arrival of twins. Michael is adamant that this is the last of his junior bird-watching team.

OUTING to STOCKYARD and ROCKMOUNT 11 SEPTEMBER

Would the long-awaited thundery showers of Friday evening have had any effect on the birds around on Sunday morning, I wondered - or merely freshened the air, laid the dust and cheered up human spirits. But, sadly, 10mm of rain are neither here nor there in a drought and makes no difference to the scattered muddy waterholes where birds would still be found.

Meeting at the junction of Flagstone and Stockyard Creek Roads as the sun came over the hill to warm our chilly backs, the early chorus of birdsong and calls increased and activity gradually intensified in the dead lantana thickets and flowering eucalypts overhead. Brown Quail called from adjacent long grass. My expectations of this spot as a worthwhile venue - albeit now little more than stagnant pools

near and under the bridge were more than justified with increasing numbers of birds appearing, tempting us to stay put and watch many species for a couple of hours.

Finches were much in evidence:- numbers of Chestnut-breasted Mannikins with a few Zebras, Plum-heads and Firetails, coming down to drink, or sunning themselves in company a-top twigs and branches.

Sudden stirring in the tall, dead, roadside grass alerted one member to the presence of a Tawny Grassbird which obligingly came out to give us all good views. Overhead Rainbow Bee-eaters were cavorting around, showing off their brilliant colours to advantage in the bright sunlight. Numbers had increased considerably since my reconnoitre earlier in the week, with signs of nesting activity in the bare creekside banks.

Our next stop at the known haunt of the Black Bittern proved fruitless and so we pressed on up the narrowing and picturesque valley making our way quietly through a small herd of cattle grazing 'the long paddock' for what little stubble and herbage they could find.

During a short stop, Nicci Thompson spotted a bird of prey flying behind tall trees above a creekside cliff-face. Jack Lund traced them to a nest within our view. A second bird was seen but both flew off shortly, not to re-appear. However sightings were sufficient to identify them as Collared Sparrowhawks.

Members' paths diverged from then on - my visiting brother and myself, plus new member Janice Webster, continued uphill through Preston to the New England Highway to eat an early picnic at Lions Park. There we added a few more species to our morning's tally to be rounded-off with the sight of 9 Red-tailed Black Cockatoos as we drove through Toowoomba on our way home. A total of some 60 species.

Ann Shore

OUTING to CEDAR FLATS 23 SEPTEMBER

Because of the extremely dry conditions, Wendy and I completed a "recce" from Crows Nest Blackbutt the Sunday before the September Outing. Luckily we did, as the conditions were very poor over the entire route.

After conferring with President Michael, we thought a change of venue would be appropriate. We settled on Cedar Flats situated on the Northbrook Parkway between Wivenhoe Dam and Mt Glorious. However, because we had advertised the previous venue in the newsletter, I thought we should turn up at Crows Nest just in case some member decided to attend at the last moment and Murphy's Law was still intact.

Of course we needn't have worried and decided to journey down the Anduramba Road (at Rod's suggestion) in order to see the local Red Deer. No deer were sighted, but we did see some great prospective future outing sites. We hit the bitumen just north of Esk and headed around the northern end of Wivenhoe and then up the Northbrook Parkway to Red Cedar picnic ground arriving about 8:30am.

Unfortunately we were too late to see many bird species but Alex kept us informed regarding the expensive exotica flashing past on two wheels. This was bikers' heaven and some of the road-side shrines reminded us that some had reached an early final resting place.

We did have close encounters with Leaden Flycatchers, Azure Kingfisher, Red-browed Firetails and Crimson Rosellas at the adjacent White Cedars where we had morning tea.

Becoming desperate, we then decided to head for Northbrook Creek to increase our paltry tally. Because the road had become a super-bike test track and we were to chicken to turn around on the narrow road, we ended up driving all the way up the range to the lookout we had intended to visit in July. The views were superb and the weather much warmer.

All this driving had started the hunger pains so we headed to the Wivenhoe Spillway for lunch. Here we were greeted by the cheekiest pair of Pied Butcherbirds I've ever encountered. We also were afforded a great view of a pair of Kestrels using the strong breeze to advantage looking for their lunch. After it rains we must return to this great spot to improve on our tally of 43 birds.

Ken McKeown

WOODSWALLOW WALKABOUT

A small flock of White-browed Woodswallows with a few Masked Woodswallows in company with Rainbow Bee-eaters and two White-winged Trillers were seen in Gatton Forest. Yesterday and last night had strong to gale-force winds and one pauses to wonder if this could have any bearing on these nomadic birds?

John Hadley, 20/09/94.

Just before dusk my attention was caught by much bird noise high in the sky. The magical soaring flock was too high for species identification, but suddenly these birds landed on a dead stump on my creek bank. I ran for my binoculars and found a tree full of White-browed and Masked Woodswallows. The following morning they flew off over the horizon presumably on their migratory path. However I have seen them seven times since in flocks numbering from 30 to 100. They seem to be feeding on *Eucalyptus* sp. and *Grevillia robusta* blossom and have been observed at varying times of the day. As these were my first sightings of these birds I felt very fortunate to have had such good sightings.

Dana McCown, Iredale Road, 14-28 Sept.

ACTORS' STUDIO

The Actor's Studio will present "Halfway Up A Tree" by Peter Ustinov on 06 December. Starts at 8:00pm. This is a fundraiser for the TBO and is always good fun. Admission price is \$10 which includes wine, tea/coffee and nibbles. Contact Ann Shore 303 207 for tickets.

THE MAN FROM HONG KONG - MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

A friend from Brisbane contacted me several months ago to tell me her mad-keen bird-watching uncle from Hong Kong would be in Brisbane in early September and would like some information on what he could expect to see around this neck of the woods and in Brisbane, where he might find them, and who he can contact. A smart move as you will see later.

I went through my records and, as my September list for last year was fairly unspectacular, decided to post him a list of what I saw last October, mainly during the annual species count, plus information on the QOS, a list of sites around Brisbane and an offer to take him out locally. My October list was a good indication of what could be expected around Toowoomba and Helidon in a solid day's birding. Of course, some of the Spring/Summer migrants would not have returned by early September but it enabled our visitors, Gavin and Magdalena Cooper, to put their birding prospects into perspective and to set some realistic goals. On his arrival in Brisbane, Gavin faxed me the October list indicating species he hadn't seen that I'd seen last October plus a complete list of 'hopefuls' for the trip. He and his wife had already been birding around Sydney and Brisbane so had a reasonable trip list before their arrival in Toowoomba.

He set his target for the region at 40 new species in three and a half days. After a quick lunch Saturday, Sept 2, the whirlwind twitch was on! Nicci Thompson took Gavin and Magdalena to Cooby Dam where they picked up Musk Duck, Brown Falcon and Brown Songlark. Then down to Rod Hobson's place for a veritable feast of quail. In the one paddock they put up Brown and Stubble Quail and Red-chested and Little Button-Quail (with a little canine help)! Magpie Geese, Plumed Whistling Ducks and a flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos closed Day 1 with 15 newies.

Next day my father and I took over the reins. We first tried for Topknot and White-headed Pigeons along Herries and Hume St, respectively, as I'd seen them during the week in the Camphor Laurels on the way to work. No luck there but we were probably too early. Red-necked Avocet at the Helidon Spa was their first tick of the day. The list sprouted at the Helidon rest area where they added Bar-shouldered Dove, Australian Reed Warbler, Azure Kingfisher (one of Gavin's Top 10 to find and therefore qualified for a little bushland waltz between Gavin and Mag), Striped Honeyeater and Double-barred Finch. We all scored a bonus with an excellent look at a platypus in the creek.

On to the Helidon Dip for Brown-headed Honeyeater, Little Lorikeet, Plum-headed Finch, Peaceful Dove, Diamond Dove, Common Bronzewing and Weebill and a Koala, then across the road for Buff-rumped Thornbill, Leaden Flycatcher, Little Cuckoo-Shrike, and White-throated Gerygone. We looked in vain for Western Gerygone but they may have already departed the area. We returned to Withcott via the Stockyard, Flagstone Ck and Blanchview Rds picking up Black Bittern, White-backed Swallows and a pair of Pacific Bazas. The latter's beautiful plumage was clearly visible as they flew low over our heads and got the nod as the bird of the morning. After a beer and a feed at the Withcott Pub we wound up with a Shining Bronze Cuckoo before returning home by 2pm. At that stage we'd seen some 100 species of which 22 were new for Gavin and Mag.

Our visitors then took up again with Nicci and Rod and worked hard to add White-winged Chough and Blue-faced Honeyeater before calling it quits for the day. On our advice they headed for Warwick and Killarney the next day where Ken and Fiona Wells helped out with sites including their farm for Apostlebird and an unexpected bonus in Budgerigar. They ticked Rufous Fantail and Yellow-tailed black Cockatoo at Queen Mary Falls and, despite dipping on Albert's Lyrebird at the location where the TBO saw it a week earlier, Gavin and Mag headed back to Brisbane with 43 new species from their visit to our region.

With their mission accomplished and initiative rewarded, I put myself in Gavin's place and

wondered how many I would have seen in that period of time without anyone's local knowledge. I would suggest less than 20% of the new species seen. Gavin assured me the same applies for birding in Hong Kong. The message is loud and clear - to make the most of your birding holiday, determining who can help is an essential part of the preparation process.

The Coopers will gladly assist anyone travelling to Hong Kong to birdwatch. I have their address and phone number. They kindly donated a field guide to the birds of Hong Kong and southern China to the club. Thanks to Nicci, Rod, Ker, Fiona and Dad for helping out.

Michael Atzeni

BLUE BONNETS at GOWRIE JUNCTION

I arrived home on Saturday, 3rd September, to find Diana (Beal) expecting me to believe that she had seen two Blue-bonnets in the garden during the afternoon. She further expected me to believe that they were of the nominate race!

She said she saw the two birds in the *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*, perhaps twenty metres from the verandah. She had time to go inside and fetch her binoculars to look closely at the birds sitting side-by-side in the open, seven-metre tree among the red flowers. She said she looked at their colouration for a while, then went inside to consult the book, came out again and compared the birds in the tree with the illustrations in the book, coming to the conclusion that they were of the nominate race. On reading the text, she was amazed to see that the nominate race is reported not to come closer to our area than Charleville, and that should a Blue-bonnet stray closer to us than Condamine or Goondiwindi, it would be of the race *haematorrhous*. However, checking again these most cooperative birds, she is sure it was the nominate race birds she was looking at.

Gloria Glass

BIRD WEEK

Bird Week is being celebrated from 27 - 30 October and the theme this year is Honeyeaters. If you have any old calendars or photos of these wonderful birds please forward them to Ann Shore (ph. 303 207).

NEW MEMBER

A friendly TBO welcome to Junior Member, Matthew Redfern, 49a Bridge St, Toowoomba.

May the birds follow you.

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

October Outing
TBO Annual Species Survey

Location: Club's local survey area
Date: 29/30 October
Leader: Michael Atzeni 392 761

This is an important annual event. Small groups, each containing at least one experienced birdo, will cover the TBO study area. It is desirable that all eight sub-sectors are visited in the 24 hour period to obtain a clear picture of the species composition of the area at this time of year. The survey takes place between midday Saturday and midday Sunday. Members and visitors can participate for as long as they wish and such surveys are always enjoyable. Contact Michael for allocation to a group and further details. Sunday morning starters that have not contacted him can join in from 7:00 sharp at the Helidon Rest Area.

Mid-November Outing

Location: Atkinson/Bill Gunn Dams
Date: 13 November
Leader: Pat McConnell 976 141

Meet at Atkinson Dam at 7:15. Explore this haven for water birds and then journey to Bill Gunn Dam (Dyer's Lagoon) for an encore.

November Outing

Location: Stradbroke Island
Date: 26/27 November
Leader: Rod Hobson (074) 627 364

This outing will possibly consist of one day watching waders along the foreshores of coastal Brisbane, followed by the next day at Straddie looking at whales, dolphins, rays, turtles, and more waders and seabirds. A great weekend and DON'T FORGET THE SUNSCREEN. More in next newsletter.

If undeliverable return to
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SURFACE
MAIL

