

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

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

NEWSLETTER No. 229 - February 1995

EDITORIAL:

Good things come to those who wait and haven't we waited. Incredible storm rains have at last put smiles on some farmers and definitely TBO members. Karrasch's Lagoon on the Old Toowoomba Rd via Gatton is worth the detour, Lake Apex has water once more, Wivenhoe is at 82% capacity and even Leslie is reported at 20%. As well many small farm dams are brimming.

Did someone mention Murphy's Law or deja vu? Do you remember February '94? If you can't, it was the first and last decent rain for the year. By the way I enjoyed the Toowoomba Chronicle's article (14.02.95) on Redwood Park featuring a natty President Michael. I won't comment on the other correspondent's portion of the story other than I've never had any trouble accessing Redwood, day or night!

Many thanks to Ken and Fiona Wells, Ann Shore and Vera Simon for their interesting stories. There's still plenty of room for more in future.

JANUARY OUTING to LESLIE DAM - 29 January

The Leslie Dam surrounds looked pleasantly green, thanks to some recent useful rain. Sadly however, the storage was down to 3% capacity at the time of the outing.

Members met initially at the main picnic area below the dam wall, and before inspecting the storage area, it was felt a short walk downstream along Sandy Creek could be rewarding; this proved to be the case. Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Galahs, Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, Red-rumped Parrots, and Eastern Rosellas were observed, along with Sacred Kingfisher, Cicadabird, Dollarbirds, Friarbirds - Little and Noisy, Blue-faced, Striped and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, White-throated Gerygone, Yellow Thornbills, and an Olive-backed Oriole, among others. A Brown Goshawk circling overhead enlivened the birds around us for several minutes. A cute and tidy mud nest, with th

Apostlebird owner actually in residence, was a happy discovery on an extended low branch by the creek.

Over a cup of tea at the picnic area, more Apostlebirds entertained us at very close quarters seeking handouts, and otherwise getting on the business of their lives.

On to the dam proper and the water habitat - the bird life was a little disappointing in numbers of both species and birds from previously, at least as far back as October 1994. Even so, apart from Black Swans and Pelicans, Whiskered Terns and Silver Gulls, the waterbirds included Red-capped Plovers, Royal Spoonbills, Black-winged Stilts, Dusky Moorhen and Little and Great Egrets.

Areas that have hitherto been mudbanks, ideal for waders, are now clothed in luxuriant green vegetation over a meter high. It is quite probable that many waterbirds, hearing of the good rains further west, have moved there to seek a better fortune.

A Brown Falcon and a couple of Whistling Kites patrolled nonchalantly overhead on the early air streams, and closer to earth Grey-crowned Babblers, Brown Songlarks, White-winged Choughs and Fairy Martins were seen within the proximity of the water.

After returning to the picnic area and the day being still young, the group set off for the banks of the Condamine River at Dwan's Lane near Pratten. While the bird life was not prolific, we had a most pleasant meander among some truly magnificent old river gums complete with interesting, often tiny wildflowers. Among the birds recorded here were White-plumed Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler, Little Lorikeet, White-throated Needletail and Fork-tailed Swift.

The river itself is presently a chain of murky waterholes and high steep banks with many fallen trees and brush plus other debris, longing for a flood. A water dragon showed off his swimming and diving prowess before assuming a motionless pose on a dead branch and practically becoming invisible.

Just away from the river among the river gums seemed an ideal place for lunch. Birders ate and chatted, and some gained valuable insights into the art of entering a car without a key. Presently, "tired but happy", they continued north via Pratten and Leyburn back to Toowoomba.

All in all an enjoyable outing, and a respectable final species tally of 78.

MID-JANUARY OUTING to RAVENSBOURNE NATIONAL PARK 15 January

The rainforest can be both a frustrating and a rewarding place for birdwatchers. Numerous tantalising calls can be heard in the canopy but it is often impossible to locate, let alone see the callers. Even when seen the birds may be mere silhouettes flitting about against a bright sky above; the dense canopy allowing only filtered light to percolate through to the ground with small clearings here and there where a forest giant has crashed to its doom.

At present, even in the National Park at Ravensbourne which being high, catches more showers than most of the surrounding area, the effects of wide-spread drought are very evident. The crisp and crunchy leaf litter underfoot is reminiscent of deciduous woods in autumn and the pathetically thin canopy allows light to flood in to replace the usual gloom. A changed scene certainly, and a sad one, but not without its compensations for birders as extra light leads to easier identification.

It was overcast and pleasantly cool as we set off down the track from the lower picnic ground: a mixed group of young and old, 10 members and 3 visitors. Still and mainly quiet until a small and colourful flock of Australian King Parrots flew into a low tree nearby. A portent of things to come? Maybe - shortly after came an excited call of "Catbird!" Yes a Green Catbird which we also heard its cat-like call.

A Cicadabird called further off, also White-browed Treecreepers and then the cries of "what-is-it, what-is-it" announced the presence of Brown Gerygones all around us. Next came a Spectacled Monarch with its bold patterning and rich colour followed by the darting movements and squeaky voice of a Rufous Fantail. Sharp eyes spotted where the Monarch had disappeared - to sit quietly on a beautiful little cup-shaped nest decorated with lichen and moss and half hidden under overhanging leaves. Throughout the morning we heard and saw Monarchs frequently, with perhaps a preponderance of the Black-faced variety, two of which were also seen sitting tight on their tiny nests.

Moving slowly down the Palm Gully Track, we soon had a rather special sighting - a Noisy Pitta - but it flew off too quickly for most of us. We waited quietly but although it called later, "walk-to work", tantalisingly close, it didn't show itself again. Our final certain "special" was a White's Thrush - a plump brown bird with beautiful brown scaly markings, often merely glimpsed as it scurried away or foraged busily amongst the ground litter. With patience we all had good views when it ran a few paces or flew onto a log, only to disappear again seconds later.

After this, morning tea became a priority. Then a short walk around the picnic area produced Red-browed Firetails near the road. As the temperature had risen considerably, we decided to call it a day. 38 confirmed species but with our special sightings more than making up for other unseen birds.

☺ Shore

THE SAGA OF THE SHAGS (Little black cormorants)

I would be the first one to admit that shags have never done that much for me. The quote, "sitting like a shag on a rock", is so appropriate as they are usually doing just that - sitting solitary on a rock in a somnambulistic state. They do little for the landscape, or the imagination.

But all this has changed ...

A recent trip to the Gold Coast found us stopping at the usual waterhole for lunch, the Currumbin Hotel. The time approximately 12 noon on a beautiful, shining day. The view from the Hotel, beautiful, as usual. On the Currumbin inlet, 80 black shags. I counted them. Fishing en-masse. The black flotilla was similar to a well organised military drill squad. With soldier-like precision they glided across the water, all eyes front, all heads held high. THEN THEY WERE GONE AS ONE! Not a splash. Not a rrry. No widening circles on the water. Not even a ripple disturbed the surface. Just gone! Two minutes later they all surfaced as ONE and continued their way upstream. Five minutes later they dived as ONE again, then resurfaced as ONE, still in their squad formation. This manoeuvre was often repeated as they sailed further and further up Currumbin Creek, finally disappearing from view.

Now this is my question. How? Who? Or what told each and every bird in that flotilla "Altogether now. One, Two, Three, ...DIVE"? There had to be communication. Someone in charge of such orderly conduct. And such precision with never a splash needs practice, surely!

Whilst having lunch 30 shags flew south and the rest flew north. No doubt they went back to their favourite rock and resumed their somnambulistic pose. Now how did they come to this decision? And who or what called the shag meeting in the first place? The mind boggles!

And so I've changed my opinions on shags. Who called them uninteresting? Not me any more.

Vera Simon

SPECIES : **GREY FALCON** *Falco hypoleucos*

DATE : 17 Aug. 1994

TIME : Approx. 12.50 pm est

LOCALITY : Over car park near Sir Leslie Wilson Building, University of Queensland, Gatton Campus.

OBSERVER : Rod Hobson, PO Box 416, Gatton Q 4343

OPTICS : Carton 20x60 telescope

CONDITIONS : Unseasonably warm and humid, no breeze. Build up of storm clouds to N/NE. Cloud cover approx 30%. Clear overhead. Visibility very good.

HABITAT : Open fields, cultivation. Scattered groups of *Eucalyptus* spp. University infrastructure. Central campus area well vegetated.

FIELD MARKS : Falconiform, size hard to judge as bird very high against clear blue sky. Very like Peregrine Falcon in shape, heavy chested. Pale underparts, lighter on chin, throat. Wings long, fairly broad, pointed wing tips, pale underneath with black tips (reminiscent of wing tip markings of Australian Kestrel), slightly bent at carpal joint, straight along trailing edge. Tail moderately long, appeared slightly rounded, hard to judge at height. Bird circled and able to get glimpse of smoky blue-grey upperparts, crown onto nape darker grey (juvenile?). White cheeks preceded by darker area (moustache?). Unable to distinguish colour of legs, soft parts, tail-bars.

COMMENTS : Alerted by alarm calls and panic flight of Galahs, Noisy Miners, Pied Butcherbirds, Australian Magpies and Feral Pigeons. These species extremely agitated by raptor's presence. Falcon soared, circled area for approx. six minutes then went into glide, raking wings further back than when soaring, disappeared towards Laidley area. Maintained height throughout.

Telephoned Greg Czechura (Queensland Museum) 1.30 pm. Discussed and quizzed. Greg agrees with identification. Much movement of Western species in Lockyer area of late; Diamond Dove (01/26.07.94), Western Gerygone (29.07.94), Black Kite(04.08.94), Little Button Quail(08/10.08.94), Black Falcon (09.08.94), Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (many records). Also big influx of Spotted Harriers, Little Eagles and Brown Falcons of late. Other eastern movement of western species into SE Queensland recently includes Budgerigar-Dalby, Goomeri (G. Czechura, C. Eddie pers. comm.), Blue Bonnet-Kleinton, Diamond Dove-Crows Nest (pers obs.). Grey Falcon previously recorded in Lockyer by Chris Corben (Date ?), Seven Mile Lagoon.

R.Hobson, 17.08.94

NEW TOOWOOMBA BIRD

: No.280

: **DIAMOND DOVE, *Geopelia cuneata***
Time/Date : 9.45 a.m./21.08.94
Place : Helidon Livestock Dip, Helidon, Q.
Observers : L. & M. Atzeni
Optics : Hartman 10x40 binoculars
Zeiss 8x30 binoculars
Weather Conditions : Fine. Visibility good.
Distance to Subject : 10-12 metres. Two birds on ground.
Comments : Implosion of this species into SE Queensland lately, most probably drought induced. Other SE Queensland sightings as under:

Jan./Feb.'94 (60+) Langlands T.P.
01.07.94 (1) Pechey Swamp J.H. et al
10.07.94 (3) Crows Nest R.H., L.McG., S.McG.
24.07.94 (1) Helidon Livestock Dip P.McC.
04.10.94 small flock Goomeri C.E.
* 09.10.94 (6) Tallegalla R.B., G.L.
* 15.10.94 (1) Haigslea G.L. et al
* 15.10.94 (call heard) Malabar G.L. et al
16.11.94 (2) Woodlands R.H.
Dec. 94 Lake Broadwater M.H. (C.E. pers. comm.)

This species has been in constant residence at the Helidon Livestock Dip since P.McC.'s initial sighting there, 24.07.94 to the present having been observed by numerous TBO members in the interim. Up to seven birds have been reported.

R.B., Richard Brown; C.E., Craig Eddie; M.H., Michael Hirst; J.H., John Hadley; R.H., Rod Hobson; G.L., Graham Leach; P. McC., Patrick McConnell; S.McG., Shane McGuire; L.McG., Lisa McGowan; T.P., Terry Pacey.

Field Marks : Conspicuous red eye-ring. Small white flecks on wings.
Similar Species : Peaceful Dove, *G. striata*, also common in the area. Field marks (see above) easily distinguish Diamond Dove from this species. Dissimilar call.

* Leach, G. (1994). Diamond Doves in QOSI Newsletter Vol. 25, No. 10, p.2, Nov 1994.

Records Officer, 09.12.94

*** COMING EVENTS ***

February Outing

Location: Crows Nest
Date: 26 February
Leader: Lesley Beaton 308 481
Time: 7:00 am

Meet at the Village Square in Crows Nest and follow Lesley to the property of Rodney Kerr of Greening Australia. Address is "Orion", Pierces Ck Rd. BYO everything.

Mid-March Outing

Location: Glen Lomond Park
Date: 12 March
Leader: Ken Mc Keown 303 774
Time: 7:00 am

Meet at the gate at the western end of Burraway Court which is the last street on right on Flagstone Ck Rd before you descend steeply.

March Outing

Location: Coastal wader outing, Brisbane
Date: 25/26 March
Leader: Don Gaydon, Thorneside

This annual outing is usually a Sunday jaunt but for anyone interested in making a weekend of it, Don is willing to work in a visit to Stradbroke Is. on the Saturday and can provide accommodation. Please let him know by 18 March so the ferry may be booked. More in next newsletter.

If undeliverable return to
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**SURFACE
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