



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

p.o.box 67 - darling heights - 4350

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

CLUB OFFICERS :

President -	Michael Atzeni	076 392761	Editor -	Ken McKeown	076 303774
Vice-P/Records -	Rod Hobson	074 627364	Librarian -	Sharyn Frederiks	076 331169
Secretary -	Ann Shore	076 303207	Committee Member -	Pat Cleary	076 303352
Treasurer -	Nicci Thompson	076 343074			

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

NEWSLETTER No. 230 - March 1995

EDITORIAL:

Two years ago I discovered around Thargomindah a small tree locally called Emu Bush *Eremophila glabra* which was reputedly drought resistant. Last year during the drought I planted a few to see how they would fare. I was excited last week to notice some of our resident Noisy Miners having a feed.

At the now green Table Top Estate, we are being besieged by flocks of Pied Currawongs which assemble into large, loose flocks and move into areas of human habitation seeking food. The warmer months have been spent in wooded areas where abundant food supplies have facilitated nesting. Thanks to former editor Don Gaydon, who also confesses to enjoying the ringing notes of a currawong concert and who wrote a piece (April 1992) regarding this phenomenon.

Don is also leading the March Wader Outing and would be interested in going to Stradbroke Island on the Saturday for birding and checking out how the island is recovering after the recent fires. Ring (07) 822 1684 immediately if you want to accompany Don on Saturday.

The editor would like to thank all contributors this year and for past editions but issue his monthly reminder that this is YOUR newsletter. We always need stories which a very small group of members somehow provide. I'd like to think the silent majority out there could contribute something each year.

This issue contains a Terry Pacey exclusive and he tells me he is not employed by the Gulgong Shire as promotions officer.

MID-MARCH OUTING to GLEN LOMOND PARK 12 March

Twelve TBO members found time to enjoy the ambience of Glen Lomond Park for a leisurely walk on Sunday. The recent showers had ensured the height of the grass had risen as had our hopes for some interesting birds.

The sky seemed to be perpetually full of Lorikeets, both Rainbow and Scaly-breasted, and the air resounded to the various calls of Wonga Pigeons, Common Koel, Pheasant Coucal, Brush and Fan-tailed Cuckoos, Eastern Whipbirds, Grey Shrike-thrush, Golden Whistler, White-throated Gerygone, Noisy and Little Friarbird, Brown and Scarlet Honeyeater, Spotted and Striated Pardalote, Spangled Drongo, Grey Butcherbird, Australian Magpie and Torresian Crow.

This park has much to offer. The interface between the steep, thick lantana and privet scrub on the south side of the track and the open eucalypt of the park ensured there was always something to pursue such as Brown, Yellow and Striated Thornbills as well as Variegated Fairy-wrens and White-browed Scrubwrens.

Near the Dorge Street end of the park we encountered Red-browed Firetails scampering through the privet and as we enjoyed the south-easterly view through a clearing, Figbirds and female Satinfinches made a belated appearance.

On the return journey, we were re-acquainted with Noisy Miner, Lewin's, Yellow-faced, and White-naped Honeyeaters and a very mobile Leaden Flycatcher.

Our final stop was a cool, dark gully complete with trickling stream in which we happened to discover two White-headed Pigeons and a magnificent male King Parrot. A fitting end to a good birding morning. Final total 42.

Ken McKeown

BIRD OBSERVING IN CENTRAL PARRAMATTA

My daughter lives in a unit in the middle of Parramatta. This is a plus or minus, depending upon how you feel about living in cities.

Parramatta has much going for it:

- * marvellous historical buildings
- * wonderful shops and eateries, many hidden in back streets
- * a river
- * and *ambience*

I feel it is a much better place to stay than in Central Sydney. It is only 30 minutes away from the city by train or 55 minutes by the Rivercat Ferry. The ferry is definitely the way to go and has possibilities for bird observers with mangroves and mudflats along the Parramatta River opening up onto the harbour before arriving at Circular Quay. There are numerous parks in Parramatta with Parramatta Park (site of Old Government House and resting place for Sulphur-crested Cockatoos) and Lake Parramatta (waterfowl) being suitable for bird observing.

I recently spent three days there in December 1994. The unit is in central Parramatta, close to the river. If you hang by your toenails over the edge of the 6th floor balcony and twist your body at unbelievable angles, you can see the river. The view is restricted to 90 degrees from East to North with a four lane main road directly in front of the unit. If you were to even pick up a pair of binoculars, you would probably be arrested as a "Peeping Tom". There are numerous trees around and an absolute "jungle" of grasses and unidentified bushes on the opposite side of the road, filling a gully (drain) which flows into the river. This was probably a pleasant creek in Macquarie's days but now

None of this sounds like a place to observe birds but it produced some surprises during the three days. Feral cats emerging from the drain after dark and cross the main road to find food scraps from the restaurants nearby. They stop, watch, cross part way, step nimbly between fast moving cars and survive. Not even a dark mark on the road to show they have misjudged. Most adaptable creatures.

I saw 19 species from the balcony including 15 species. It shows that you can observe birds anywhere. Please remember that all observations were made without any magnification and from a sixth floor balcony facing east which reduced the viewing time due to heat. Total time spent observing during the three days would be less than three hours.

There was another observation. It really needs confirmation so I can't legitimately claim it. While watching the Welcome Swallows and Fairy Martins hawk around the blocks of units and low over the highway, I noticed a swallow that seemed very white underneath. As it flew past at eye level I noted the rusty face, the white underneath, the black band across the chest....WHITE UNDERPARTS.....BLACK BAND.....

Oh yes, ye of little faith, a Barn Swallow in the middle of Parramatta. I have contacted the Records Officer of the Cumberland Bird Observers and he informed me that although no sightings have been previously reported from the middle of Parramatta, records have been confirmed from nearby. He quizzed me over the sighting (he of little faith) to eliminate a White-backed Swallow which had also been sighted nearby.

City bird observing can be very rewarding. All the swallows I have looked at over the years around Mt Perry, the Lockyer Valley and Darling Downs without success - but in the middle of Parramatta.....!!

Come on the rest of you. Let's start a competition and make it worthwhile. Who can produce the best observation from the middle of a city. Real cities like Sydney and Melbourne. Overseas sightings don't count unless they are of now extinct species. The winner can have a personally autographed copy of my next Parramatta bird sightings. That will surely encourage everyone to enter!!.

Keep those eyes peeled!!!

DAYS TO REMEMBER

Since moving to Gulgong in the middle of 1994, I haven't had much luck in observing many birds. The weather and ill health, both myself and my mother's, have conspired to restrict birding to the minimum. All that changed during the second week of January, 1994. A friend, Terry Robinson, came down from the Gold Coast for two days of intense birding.

Thursday 12 January 1995

Terry arrived after a ten hour drive and by four we were on our way. My favourite spot is a small forestry patch only ten km from home. It did not fail us with treecreepers, both White-throated and Brown, in abundance, Varied Sittella and magnificent Crested Shrike-tit being the highlight of an hour of gentle walking.

On our way home we visited a lagoon at the edge of town. An amazing sight confronted us. The water was covered with water birds and the reeds and grassy areas dotted with Spoonbill (both types), egrets, heron, ibis and Masked Lapwing. There were over 28 lapwing in one group; an amazing, noisy sight as they took flight on our arrival. Australasian Shovelers and Hoary-headed Grebe as well as the more common species were seen.

Buoyed by our success, we checked the local sewage treatment works nearby. More Shovelers, Hoary-headed Grebes, and several male Chestnut Teal in full breeding plumage concluded our afternoon's observations with one exception. Terry had never sighted a Blackbird, so we indulged in some civilised observing from the back patio with a drink in hand and watched the local residents perform in the our yard.

Friday 13 January, 1995

Early mornings are out for me at present so we sallied forth at seven a.m. for a more expansive outing. First stop, Munghorn Gap about forty minutes away. The picnic area proved the most rewarding. Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters and Eastern Spinebill filled the upper levels of the trees with Thornbills and Red-browed Firetails lower down. The Olive-backed Orioles thought they were Yellow Robins and seemed to follow us everywhere. When things went quiet, it was time to scan the skies and sure enough a raptor was seen nearby. On this occasion the bird was very obliging and ventured low and close at times. A Square-tailed Kite is always a welcome addition to a day's birding. It returned later to engage in a form of warfare with a Whistling Kite. Most interesting. Later a lone Satin Bowerbird made its appearance in a clump of Blackberries. Compared to the picnic area, the sandstone country further the Gap was disappointing so we moved on to greener pastures.

On a back road, not far from the Gap, we came upon a little treasure trove of bird life. On stopping, we discovered a White-browed Woodswallow feeding young. A pair of White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike also appeared to have young nearby. The next stop was the headwaters of the Goulburn River. Although it was now quite warm(damned hot to be precise), there were still plenty of birds around. The Clamorous Reed-warbler proved to be elusive but eventually presented itself for our approval. It then time to head home for a welcome rest.

Late in the afternoon about 10 km out of town we struck the jackpot. Stopping to check out a group of LBBs, I suddenly realised that in a mixed group were a number of Southern Whiteface, a new species for me. While observing these birds, I couldn't believe it! A Diamond Firetail, another new bird for both of us, appeared.

Further along the road were flocks of Woodswallows and Martins. There were Diamond Firetail everywhere. Suddenly there it was. A Hooded Robin, another new species for both of us. Within a short time we encountered another male and two females before calling it a day.

Saturday 14 January 1995

Another great day of birding. After another 7:00 a.m. start, we ventured to Mudgee only to find a lone Common Mynah sitting on power lines. These pests have previously been unknown in this area.

Our next stop was Lake Windamere east of Mudgee, about 35 minutes away. We started at the picnic area below the dam wall. Here cormorants along the creek bank were numerous as were Rufous Night Herons. We also spotted a lone Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater. On the lake itself we saw all four cormorants, all three grebes with a group of ten or more Great Crested Grebes, more Australasian Shovelers and a pair of Musk Duck (another new species for us both).

Leaving the lake, we went looking for Regent Honeyeaters - without much luck! We did however, find a most unusually named place. This was Dunn's Swamp in Wollemi National Park. The drive is magnificent and would probably provide great birding early in the day. The swamp is poorly named as it is more a lagoon or lake. There are bush camping facilities with toilet and recycling bins provided. This is a known haunt of the Regent Honeyeater and would probably be great birding if the trees were in bloom.

Later in the afternoon we returned to the area of the previous productive day. Once again we were not disappointed. Here we observed unusual behaviour of the Diamond Firetail. A male bird would take a long piece of grass and fly to the top of a dead tree. Here it would remain for a considerable time with much bowing and hopping interspersed with periods of inactivity. It would then suddenly descend to the ground where a female was visible and simply walk around still firmly holding the said stem of grass. One bird was observed exhibiting this behaviour for at least 30 minutes, repeating the process at least three times. Macdonald, in "**Birds of Australia**", briefly describes "...an elaborate courtship display.." but this would really be an understatement. Has anyone noticed this display in the past?

All the areas visited were within an hour or so from Gulgong and covered many types of vegetation at a range of elevations (300-800 metres above sea level). The longest walk would have been a kilometre over level walking tracks. In all, 118 species were sighted. Not a bad tally for about two days.

The highlight for me was undoubtedly the Musk Duck. Even my wife was pleased as she says that I won't have to drive off the road every time I pass a large water hole hoping to see this elusive species. Another win for road safety.

Terry Pacey.

NEW MEMBERS: John Harris, P.O. Box 419, Gatton. 4343.
Yvonne Duke, 14 Muir St, Toowoomba. 4350.

May the birds follow you!

VIDEOS: The TBO has recently acquired through kind donation two ABC Videos *Bird Suite* and *Wetlands*. If you would like to borrow these videos, please contact the TBO Librarian, Sharon Frederiks, 331 169.

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

March Outing

Location: Coastal wader outing, Brisbane
Date: 26 March
Leader: Don Gaydon (07) 822 1684
Time: 8:00 a.m.

Meet at Lytton Road opposite the Sewage Treatment Plant where you will meet the TBO's Brisbane operative Don Gaydon and his trusty telescope. This outing is a must for those of us not so hot on wader identification. The birds are in spectacular breeding plumage in readiness for their mammoth migration to breed in places such as Mongolia and Siberia. Don is still interested in visiting Straddie on Saturday if anyone is interested. BYO telescopes!

Mid-April Outing As this is Easter there will be no outing.

April Outing

Location: Lockyer Wetlands
Date: 30 April
Leader: Michael Atzeni 392 761
Time: 7:00 a.m.

As a small amount of moisture has fallen in the Valley, perhaps we might at last have the once popular Wetlands Outing. More in the next newsletter.

Mid-May Outing

Location: Helidon Environs
Date: 14 May

More in future newsletters.

If undeliverable return to
Toowoomba Bird Observers Inc
PO Box 67
DARLING HEIGHTS Q 4350

P. McConnell
17 George Street
HELIDON QLD 4344
C

