



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. 231 - April 1995

EDITORIAL:

Many thanks to all the members who have written stories for this newsletter. It certainly helps when we have excess and can plan the next newsletter in advance. Having said this please don't rest on your laurels as we all want to hear what you've been doing.

This month's outing is to the Lockyer Valley and I feel it could be a beauty. This week I visited Karrasch's Lagoon near Gatton and found a pair of Jabiru many waterbird, a Peregrine Falcon and a pair of Black-shouldered Kite It could be a good idea to attend and see the "wetlands" before they dry out again. Also read Adele Warburton's letter home to an English friend regarding our area.

As well, this newsletter has items from four distinct areas. Dana tells us about the beautiful Paluma Ranges west of Townsville, Michael Hirst recalls his journeys to the Bollon district, Sharon Frederiks enthuses about Girraween and Don Gaydon files his wader outing report .

OUTING REPORT - COASTAL BRISBANE. 26 March

By the time the Toowoomba folk arrived at 8am, John Harris and I had already observed some beautiful birds at Lytton. A short walk along the roadside adjacent to the sewage-treatment plant had yielded a small but obliging flock of Plum-headed Finches, a male Chestnut Teal resplendent in the morning sunlight, and a pair of Ospreys in addition to a bevy of Golden-headed Cisticolas and Tawny Grassbirds.

It was a great start to the day, and as we shuffled back towards the wader roost, we were passed by the car from the mountains which contained Ken McKeown, Ann Shore, Nicci Thompson and Michael

Hirst. Richard Thomas and his wife Belle followed shortly afterwards and the team was complete. The Lytton roost was dominated by godwits, curlews and Whimbrels; the big-boys of the wader world. Numerous godwits, both Black-tailed and Bar-tailed species, had moulted into their breeding plumage and were resplendent in shades of russet, brown, and cream. Ample opportunity was available to compare the two species, both in breeding and eclipse plumage.

As we gazed upon the loafing group, the birds suddenly became agitated and then pandemonium broke loose as a cruel grey form sliced through the panicking waders on sharply-pointed wings. The Peregrine rose again, its efforts to put the birds to flight largely unsuccessful, and circled high above as the birds and birds trembled below. We watched with bated breath on anticipation of a kill. Apparently Peregrine Falcons always take their prey on the wing and although these waders were extremely jumpy, the vast majority remained on the ground. The discouraged hunter embarked upon an aborted dive before departing westward.

The next stop for us, Wynnum esplanade, was very rewarding with excellent views of many smaller wader species at close range. There were Ruddy Turnstones, magnificent in their sharply-contrasting breeding colours, Greenshanks, Terek Sandpipers, Mongolian Dotterels, and Grey-tailed Tattlers displaying the delicate breast-barring which indicates their imminent migration. As I gazed across the mudflats, my heart skipped a beat on several occasions as visions of Curlew Sandpipers, Great Knots and Red-necked Stints in their subtle breeding-hues came into focus.

And then we spied the greatest of migrators, the Lesser Golden Plover, the king of travellers. The three birds before us looked in fine health and so they would need to be. Soon they would embark northward to the furthest reaches of land in the Arctic Circle to breed, flying at speeds of up to 100 km/hr, two wingbeats per second, for hours on end. Some of these plovers are believed to conduct flights of up to 8000 km non-stop over open ocean. That's over three days unremitting flight, night and day! By the time they arrive in the Arctic Circle they will have halved their body-weight and will rely heavily on the hatching of millions of insects on the tundra, an abundance which has always awaited them there. Courtship, mating, incubation, and rearing of young will be compressed into the three short months of the Arctic summer, before they head back on the same monumental journey to arrive on our shores once again. In similar fashion, they will rely heavily on the availability of suitable feeding areas when they arrive.

The lifestyle of all the migratory waders follows the same, though less extreme, pattern. Aren't they incredible! Some of these birds are little larger than sparrows. I couldn't help thinking, as reams of joggers and walkers passed us by on the esplanade and wondered why we were so intent on watching the little brown birds on the mud, that if more people were aware of the remarkable little travellers who share their bay, conservation of the habitat required for their continued survival would come as a matter of course.

After visiting the Manly marina and then Wellington Point for lunch, we called the outing to a conclusion as heavy rain clouds brought their watery cargo in from the sea. Goodbye again to the migratory waders, until next summer.

Don Gaydon, Thornside

NORTH QUEENSLAND REVISITED

An eight-day Creative Textile trip to North Queensland was full of happy reunions, interesting exhibitions, great food, but the best of all - wonderful birding. My hostess had arranged a weekend respite in the rainforest of Mt Spec, partly to escape the oppressive heat and humidity of Townsville and partly to visit Len Cook, the award winning potter, whose studio and home are adjacent to the Paluma Range National Park.

Luckily, cricket featured on the telly that weekend and so I was free to roam with my binoculars. I found the best spot to be right outside Len's entrance, where the road cuts the forest allowing light and space for observation. Unfortunately, my trekking in the rainforest was not as profitable, due to overcast skies and poor visibility. A few of the more interesting sightings were Tooth-billed Catbird, Spotted Catbird, Bower's Shrike-thrush, Chowchilla, Grey-headed Robin and Spectacled Monarch.

In the open parkland in the village were beautiful Macleay's Honeyeater, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Dusky Honeyeater and White-breasted Woodswallows to name a few. Alas, I found the Victoria's Riflebird to be elusive despite its explosive call. The Ivy Cottage Tearooms are supposed to be a sure place to see this bird. However, having changed ownership in the last year and opening less frequently and feeding the birds less, this is changing. Nevertheless, I highly recommend this area as being better than O'Reilly's as it does not have the hordes of tourists or even a corner store. The road up the mountain is similar, but the temperature contrasts markedly with that of Townsville.

Back in the city and suburbia, I was able to snatch moments to glimpse the stunning Sunbirds flitting through the garden, hovering under the eaves inspecting spider webs. Yellow-spotted and Brown-backed Honeyeaters were also very plentiful. A quick trip to the Town Common Environmental Park gave the opportunity to view Broilgas, in spite of a sign warning of crocodiles. Black and Whistling Kites were ever-present, however, few birds were evident on the day. Usually this spot is rich in birdlife.

The Palmetum, along the Ross River, having Australia's largest collection of palms and a rainforest section is a great place to go birding. Nature Search recently launched its new Townsville project there. The restaurant there retails a booklet, "Birds of the Palmetum".

I read in the local paper that Jo Wieneke's Book, "Where to Find Birds in North east Queensland", Edition Two, was being launched at the Mary Ryan Book Store before I left. So one hour before I boarded Ansett 131 to return home, I was presented with this very useful book, just a trifle late to be used this trip, but now of course I'll be planning the next trip North - but at a cooler time of the year.

Dana McCown. Iredale.

BIRDS ROUND BOLLON

Towards the end of January this year, I had the opportunity to visit the family property of my son-in-law, Eucumbene, on Mungallala Creek north of Bollon. While there, I carried out two Murray-Darling Waterbird Surveys, one on the creek and one on the large dam near the homestead. I also did what other bird watching I could.

On a previous visit (March '89) I recorded an Eastern Shrike-tit. It was very dry at the time, the creek being just a chain of waterholes but following a local storm, a side gully contained a pool of muddy but fresh water. Many honeyeaters were bathing there, avoiding the stagnant pools. The shrike-tit came in to drink and I had a good view of it as it perched on a twig in the water. I realized it was out of its usual range, so next day I searched for it and discovered it in a Belah on top of the bank. This time I checked that there was no confusion with a Crested Bellbird. Though out of its range on the Atlas, it was East of a line drawn north-south through the most westerly sightings. (I submitted a report to the RAOU.)

Another sighting just west of other Atlas' records was that of a Painted Button-Quail on Wallum Creek at the Northern end of the Bollon town reserve. I had a very good view of it as it ran along in the undergrowth a few metres from me.

The January trip followed reasonable rain in the area from October on, enough to keep things

going. Mungallala Creek was flowing and all dams were full or nearly so. The main dam contained about six hectares (fifteen acres) of water, divided in two by a bank of spoil. This area is timbered by Red River Gum, Poplar Box and Wilga, though where it was crossed by a rocky bar, tea tree predominates. The dominant vegetation away from the creek is mulga, with box and sandalwood.

As I completed the survey, I found the waterfowl population changed daily as the abundance and wide dispersal of water allowed much movement of species. Thus I had to add supplementary lists as the days passed. I counted eighteen species on the dam, but only six on the creek. The most numerous birds on the dam were 60 Straw-necked Ibis, 44 Grey Teal and 25 Black-winged Stilts. Others of interest were 16 Pink-eared Duck, 6 Plumed Whistling Duck and a dozen White-eyes. The most numerous ducks on the creek were 24 Wood Duck and 12 Black Duck. They were in small parties of 2 - 4.

On the property I saw 88 species over 5 days of intermittent birding. Some of the more interesting were Black Falcon, Mallee Ringneck, Mulga Parrot and four species of thornbill, (Broad-tailed, Chestnut-rumped, Yellow-rumped and Yellow). Three woodswallows (Masked, White-browed and Black-faced) were very numerous on a cleared area with scattered dead trees above the dam. In fact this was one of the most prolific places for birds, full of song, with both Rufous and Brown Songlarks and White-winged Trillers in good voice.

I also saw quail, either Brown or Stubble, but was not sure of their identity. A notable absentee was the Major Mitchell Cockatoo, which I had seen on previous occasions.

The manager told me that "big mobs" of Black-tailed Native-hens had appeared. They stayed about a fortnight. Perhaps they were part of the same general group that turned up at Lake Broadwater, also in October, after some rain.

Anyhow it was wonderful to see even a temporary break in the season after so many years of drought and struggle for man, bird and beast, and I thoroughly enjoyed the trip.

Michael Hirst.

GIRRAWEEEN

Girraween National Park is one of our favourite birding places and we have had many memorable visits there. In the summer of 1992, we did most of our birding around the camping grounds and along the Junction track which is a walk along the northern bank of Bald Rock Creek. We chose this route because the ranger had informed us that the Turquoise Parrot had been seen at the end of this particular track. Alex and I combed the track and adjacent heath unsuccessfully for three mornings. Later we decided to split up and Alex searched the lower section of the hill and I would do the upper portion. Luckily Alex saw two birds flying but unfortunately I missed them on this occasion. Later we both saw them at the Warrumbungles National Park near Coonabarabran a year later, but that is another story.

Even though I missed the Turquoise Parrot this was compensated by our seeing along the same track the elusive Chestnut-rumped Hylacola briskly bounding along an outcrop of granite, the appealing Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters were common, the intriguing Crested Shrike-tit with its noisy foraging habit of stripping bark off branches and the Dusky Woodswallows sitting crammed together.

It's marvellous what birds you will find near camping grounds. Here we found New Holland and White-eared Honeyeaters and the Red Wattlebirds which were new bird for us at the time.

Sharon Frederiks.

LETTER TO ENGLAND

This is a letter to a friend in England - a very reluctant air traveller - to encourage her to make the journey to Australia.

Dear Hilary

As there had been rain in the previous weekend, my friend Ann decided that the lagoons and dams in the Helidon and Gatton areas might yield some interesting birds. Knowing that an early start is "the done thing" I was at the bottom of the range by 7:00 a.m. and we set off for Karrasch's Lagoon. We stood on the roadside and had a good view of the shallow water. Standing in the shade of a large gum tree, we realized that even though it was only 1 April, we were quite chilly in the early morning air. However, there were plenty of birds feeding among the water-lilies and polygonums.

With the aid of a telescope, we had good views of Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills feeding in the same area. I was very interested to see the crest of rather ragged plumes on the Royal showing that it was in breeding plumage. The area was obviously a favourite haunt of Black-winged Stilts and their long, bright, pink legs were a wonderful patch of colour in the early morning light. We were disappointed when we could not find any Jacanas on the lagoon as we had seen several a few weeks earlier bobbing their heads and flicking their tails as they walked across the lilly leaves on their long toes. We also saw Egrets, Straw-necked Ibis and a White-faced Heron as well as Black Swans before we decided to continue to the Bill Gunn Dam.

The day had now become much warmer and there was very little shade when we parked at the picnic area. The water level was very low but, in the distance, we could see a number of birds on a sandy spit. We walked through some long grass to the edge of the water and soon became convinced that venomous snakes were hidden there. We set up the telescope and found that there was a large number of waders feeding near the grasses at the edge of the water. After much discussion we decided that they were Sharp-tailed Sandpipers but, as we watched, they disappeared into the grass. We also saw Marsh sandpipers, Black Swans, Australasian Grebe, Little Pied Cormorant, Egret, Grey Teal and Australasian Shoveler. We returned to the car and disturbed two Masked Lapwing standing quietly on the grass and as we drove away, an Australian Kestrel was hovering over the road.

Has this whetted your appetite?

Regards Adele.

Adele Warburton

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.

NEW MEMBERS: Mrs Patricia Charlton
23 Wirra Wirra St
Toowoomba 4350

Tagi Koji
49 Hickey St
Gatton 4343

May the birds follow you.

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

April Outing

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

Some patchy rain has fallen in the Valley, and perhaps we might at last find some birds. Meet at Gatton Lake Apex. BYO everything.

Mid-April Outing

Location: Helidon Environs
Date: 14 May
Leader: Laurie Atzeni
Time: 7:30 a.m.

Meet at the Helidon Dip. Enter Helidon and cross the railway line turn left into Arthur St. Follow this to William St and carry on to Air Force Rd. Follow this road west until you come to a right angle corner. You will see the dip on your right. Please do not drive vehicles through the gate.

May Outing

Location: Lake Broadwater
Date: 28 May
Leader: Michael Hirst
Time: 8:30 a.m.

Meet at the camping grounds (on the left side of the approach road). BYO everything.

Mid-June Outing

Location: Withcott

June Outing

Location: Deongwar State Forest.

If undeliverable return to
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