



# TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

p.o.box 67 - darling heights - 4350

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

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**CLUB OFFICERS :**

President -  
Vice-P/Records -  
Secretary -  
Treasurer -

Michael Atzeni  
Rod Hobson  
Ann Shore  
Nicci Thompson

076 392761

076 303207  
076 343074

Editor -  
Librarian -  
Committee Member -

Ken McKeown  
Sharyn Frederiks  
Pat Cleary

076 303774  
076 331169  
076 303352

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

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**NEWSLETTER No. 232 - May 1995**

**EDITORIAL:**

Last Sunday, Wendy and I attended a Holiday and Travel Show at the new Brisbane Convention Centre. At the Bribie stand, we found a flyer advertising the 'Ferryman', a charter boat which operates the Pumicestone Passage Marine Park. As it was great weather, we decided to road test this charter and had a magnificent few hours. Trevor, the skipper, is an experienced birder and takes other clubs to the area. I think I could recommend this area for an excursion to visit our migratory friends when they return from the north.

The old saying, "You don't know what you've got till it's gone", certainly applies to photocopying facilities. For the past couple of years, we have been fortunate to have had the use of Graham Thompson's photocopier from his business, allowing us to produce the newsletter very cheaply. Many thanks to Graham and also to Nicci for help with the printing, collating and mailing of the newsletters during this time. Unless anyone in the club can recommend a cheaper alternative, future newsletters (3 pages, printed both sides) will be printed and collated by a commercial photocopying company for around 40 cents each.

Once again thanks to all the members who have shared their experiences with us through the newsletter. There has been a steady stream of articles lately and it's a pleasure knowing we have some stories remaining for future editions.

## OUTING REPORT - LOCKYER DISTRICT WETLANDS 30 APRIL

After negotiating breakfast without waking the inmates, it was with considerable joy that I fled from Alcatraz where Karen and I have served 6 months hard labour of a life sentence for having twins. (A little hyperbole here!) So bad was my birding withdrawal, that I had to stop *en route* near Grantham for a quick fix. Red-rumped parrots, Plum-headed Finches and Chestnut-breasted Mannikins did the trick (although a King Quail would have been ideal). There was a good turn up at Gatton Apex Lake, including well-known western birding identity, Dawn Allen, from Mitchell. We started the ball rolling with the likes of Hardhead, Australian Shoveler, a large flock of Plumed Whistling Ducks, Eurasian Coot and the usual regulars. A Brown Goshawk and Whistling Kite engaging in an airborne spat began a reasonable success story with the raptors.

John Harris, another on the run from paternal duties, joined me in my getaway car and we lead our merry troupe to Ropely Road Swamp, but not before a pair of Zebra Finches were accosted at the turnoff. As the driver of the leading car and half suspecting that's what the two small forms on the wire were, I reluctantly stopped and remained seated while John got out to confirm it. I had to have a little laugh to myself with the scenario unfolding in my rear view mirror. It looked like a Special Task Force operation with all these cars pulling up in quick succession, people leaping out brandishing double-barrelled binoculars and aiming them at the two hapless 'criminals' on the wire. The Zebs were either petrified or resigned to the fact that their life on the wing was over, for neither took flight. One has to wonder what was going on in their heads as well as in the heads of perplexed passing motorists, heads screwed wondering what the devil the commotion was all about on the quiet back road.

Jacana, Brown Quail (heard) and a few bush birds were added at Ropely Rd Swamp. Hoary-headed Grebe, rather unpredictable visitors to this region, were seen at a couple of sites including Lowe's Rd Swamp near Grantham. Karrasch's Lagoon yielded what I considered the bird of the day, namely, a Marsh Harrier. It was initially perched on a stump on the far side of the lagoon but then obligingly proceeded to fly right over us and then out of sight. I don't think I'd seen one since Hood's Lagoon had water! An Australian Hobby, a pair of Black-shouldered Kites and another Whistling Kite kept the raptor list moving. I couldn't find a Cotton Pigmy-Goose for John Harris. Then again, John never found me the Red Goshawk I've been after. Fair's fair.

Bill Gunn Dam (aka Dyer's Lagoon) near Laidley produced Marsh Tern, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Plum-headed Finches. The next port of call, a large shallow lagoon on the road to Blenheim, turned out to be bone dry. This portentous stop signalled the disbandment of the group. On the way back to Forest Hill, John and I added Brown Falcon and at Grantham I saw a couple of Magpie Geese and more Plum-heads which rounded off a rather enjoyable morning on the run. However, guilt got the better of me and I turned myself in (just in time for lunch), much to the relief of my family.

Michael Atzeni

## VISIT to the NEW ENGLAND NATIONAL PARK

After running the gauntlet of the resident scrub turkeys, our first task on arriving at our cabin at the New England N.P. was to start the fire. Not an easy task, as even the wood in the shed was damp, which explained the plaintive note in the visitor's book at the Point Lookout shelter shed. "I bought a trout at the Trout Farm to cook, and I can't get a fire to light in your rotten fireplace."

When we were confident that the heater didn't need our constant attention, we set out to see what birds we could discover before nightfall. There were New Holland Honeyeaters, Rose Robins, a Grey Shrike Thrush and Eastern Spinebills in the Banksias, while Crimson Rosellas, a King Parrot, and Lewin's Honeyeaters were seen in the Antarctic Beech Forest. We could hear a lyrebird, but could we see a lyrebird? No.

Next day a pea soup fog hung over the mountain till late morning. When it began to lift, we walked up to Point Lookout, seeing numerous Spinebills in the banksias, and a White's Thrush scratching around the perimeter of the picnic area. Three Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos flew screeching up out of the mist in the valley and across the escarpment. We could hear a lyrebird, but could we see a lyrebird? Not likely.

After lunch the rain poured down, but never mind, we had come to rest and what better than a good book in front of the fire; a thought reinforced by the sight of bushwalkers as they appeared thoroughly sodden and bedraggled from the track emerging near our cabin.

The sun greeted us next morning and the Spinebills were out in force in the banksias again, with Rose and Eastern Yellow Robins. At the picnic area a Flame Robin darted about the table tops, while the White's Thrush busied itself underneath, not at all concerned by our presence. At the lookout, a Peregrine Falcon patrolled the cliff face while Scarlet Honeyeaters and Striated Thornbills chattered in the surrounding bushes. Here we met a young man, cycling around Australia, who was interested in birds but didn't have a field guide because it was extra weight. We saw a Golden Whistler, New Holland and Lewin's Honeyeaters during an interesting conversation with him. And - we didn't even hear a lyrebird!

There is a diary in the cabin for visitor's jottings - mostly details of their experiences on walks, but every second entry seemed to report, "Saw the lyrebird", "The lyrebird was outside the cabin today", so before we departed for home, we decided to have one last look. We found White-browed Treecreeper and a Grey Shrike-thrush, and we could hear the lyrebird. Then, there it was, a male Superb Lyrebird, not in the undergrowth where we were looking, but on a branch about three metres from the ground. It did a little two-step, then descended from the branch to a clearing where it scratched around for about ten minutes before disappearing behind a log.

So there is another entry in the diary for 30 March which reads, "Saw the lyrebird today."

Fiona and Ken Wells.

### IN PRAISE of COBBLERS PEGS.

This April, the Beal's farm at Gowrie Junction must have more cobblers pegs than ever before, and what a bother they are to wade through when you are 'quartering' the hill paddocks looking for Lantana regrowth to spray.

Why then the praise?

It is because they have nourished hundreds of butterflies! At any given moment, when standing in the midst of the thickest patches of them, you can at least see twenty butterflies.

And not one species either. Most abundant are the two orange butterflies, the Lesser Wanderer and the Meadow Argus with its eight 'eyes'. The black-and-white Common Australian Crows are present in large numbers too, as are Blue Tigers, species I have not seen here until this year. All these species I have actually seen at cobblers peg flowers, presumably sipping nectar. In some areas, Caper Whites are the only butterflies present, while the tiny brilliant Common Grass Yellows seem to prefer to hover around the small Lantana plants I wish to spray! A bit of wand-waving on my part is needed to disperse these little gems before I let the spray loose. Each day I see one or two of the large strikingly marked Orchard Butterflies, and one day there was a majestic Wanderer purposefully flying by. Some areas of cobblers pegs have thousands, it seems, of tiny grey "butterflies", or are they moths? They appear to settle with their wings open, revealing a white patch across the hindwings.

And birds? Yes, there was one bird I saw feasting, not on butterflies, but on other smaller insects. It was a Restless Flycatcher, not often seen here, which flew many sorties from the top wire of fence, catching minute insects from the abundant grass-heads nearby.

Besides the 'reward' of sighting so many lovely butterflies to weigh against the half-hour needed each day to de-cobble my jeans, this morning I had my second sighting of a Boobook. Both times this bird flew only a short distance, from where it kept looking at me looking back at it until I departed the scene.

Gloria Glass

## OUT OF AFRICA.

A condition of our British Airways ticket was that we return by a different route from Europe or UK. Having travelled via Singapore to Rome enabled us to fly London - Harare - Sydney so 11 days in Zimbabwe became the bonus for me and also provided great excitement for Del, her sister Marlene and husband Ewan who travelled with us. Viewing elephants up to 4 metres tall and lions just metres away certainly gets the adrenalin circulating.

Our wilderness experience embraced 3 nights at Spurwing Island at Lake Kariba, 3 nights at Chokamella Lodge, and 3 nights at Victoria Falls town. Quick flights and airport transfers, pre-booked through A & K Tours (very reliable), gave us maximum time at each location but never enough for me.

My reference book, Sasol's "Birds of Southern Africa", states there are more than 900 species in Southern Africa which is defined as Africa south of a line between the Kunene and Zambezi Rivers as well as oceanic waters within 200 nautical miles of the coast.

Lake Kariba was formed by damming the Zambezi River and Spurwing and Fothergill became islands (small hills rising out of the lake). Mr. Fothergill organised a massive evacuation of the animals stranded on the island when the lake filled and it was named in his honour. At the time of our visit in July in the "dry" season the island was again part of the mainland. The resort is enclosed with an electric fence with the lake as one boundary. From our well-appointed, grass-thatched hut we could see Impala on a rise about 600 metres away and we could hardly wait until 3.30pm to set off on a game drive in an open 4WD with six on board plus our guide Greg who fortunately had a very good knowledge of the birds as well as the mammals.

Prior to our arrival in Zimbabwe I had tried to obtain a bird list for the area without success and the experience of being thrown into an extremely different environment with a surprising number of new species was a little frustrating but nevertheless very rewarding. The numbers feeding on the open grass lands and in the sparse forest was quite amazing. Being on a game drive I had to impose on my fellow passengers for Greg to stop periodically to view and identify birds encountered. Alas many birds had to be passed unidentified. Regarding the animals we were overawed by the size of the elephants towering over us at close range, impala were numerous; we saw many Cape Buffalo and Hippos at and in the water, Waterbuck, Bush Buck, Baboon, Duiker, Klipspringer and a magnificent pride of Lions making indecisive incursions into a herd of Cape Buffalo huddled together in a stand of Mopane forest for self-preservation.

Of the 365 odd bird species listed in the Zambezi Valley I only managed 58 positive identifications with the help of Greg. Some of the more spectacular birds were Lilac-breasted Roller (my first bird at Kariba), Kingfishers (Pied, Giant, Brown-hooded & Grey-hooded), Bee-eaters (Little & White-fronted), Hornbills (Grey, Red-billed & Ground), Storks (Saddlebill, Marabou & Yellow-billed), Finches (Blue Waxbill & Jameson's Firefinch). Many of the colourful birds like the Rollers, Kingfishers and Bee-eaters

have beautiful hues of blue as their dominant colour. Kittlitz's Sandplover and Blacksmith Plovers were in abundance and Crowned and White-crowned Plovers were also seen. Spurwing also provides trips in flat-bottomed boats to take you into the shallows along the lake where you can view animals grazing along the shores and gives the added benefit of waterbirds in the reeds, on shore lines and in the dead trees standing in the lake. The presence of many massive Hippos rising out of the water constantly had us wondering if one might unwittingly surface under our little boat!! a small consolation they were vegetarians.

The staff, both white and back, were most cooperative and went out of their way to make our stay enjoyable. Meals were sumptuous served with the minimum of fuss by friendly native staff seemingly dedicated to satisfy our needs. Although I saw a number of birds within the enclosure I dearly wished I could have explored outside at my leisure to more closely examine the birdlife and savour the moment of each new discovery.

Chokamella lodge in Hwange National Park and Victoria Falls were different habitats and could perhaps be another article in the future if of interest to members.

### Species seen.

White-breasted Cormorant	Grey Lourie
African Darter	White-browed Coucal
Grey Heron	Mozambique Nightjar
Great White Egret	Pied Kingfisher
Cattle Egret	Giant Kingfisher
Green-backed Heron	Brown-hooded Kingfisher
Hamerkop	Grey-hooded Kingfisher
Saddlebill	White-fronted Bee-eater
African Marabou	Little Bee-eater
Yellow-billed Stork	Lilac-breasted Roller
Sacred Ibis	African Grey Hornbill
Egyptian Goose	Red-billed Hornbill
Hooded Vulture	Ground Hornbill
Brown Snake Eagle	Flappet Lark
Bateleur	Chestnut-backed Finch Lark
African Fish Eagle	Wire-tailed Swallow
Crested Francolin	Lesser Striped Swallow
Swainson's Francolin	Tropical Boubou
Helmeted Guineafowl	Grey-headed Bush Shrike
Kittlitz's Sandplover	White Helmet Shrike
Crowned Plover	Red-billed Oxpecker
Blacksmith Plover	Yellow White-eye
White-crowned Plover	White-browed Sparrow Weaver
Greenshank	House Sparrow
Black-winged Stilt	Grey-headed Sparrow
Temminck's Courser	Large Golden Weaver
Red-winged Pratincole	Red-billed Quelea
Cape Turtle Dove	Jameson's Firefinch
Namaqua Dove	Blue Waxbill
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	

Laurie Atzeni

\*\*\*\* COMING EVENTS \*\*\*\*

May Outing

Location: Lake Broadwater  
Date: 28 May  
Leader: Michael Hirst 325 564  
Time: 8:30 a.m.

Lake Broadwater Environmental Park was reserved for its lake and the surrounding vegetation which typifies that found in the drier western Darling Downs. The lake is the only naturally occurring water body of its type on the Downs and covers approximately 350 hectares. It is an excellent birdwatching area. Travel to Dalby and proceed 20 km along the Moonie Highway. Turn left and proceed to the lake. Meet at the camping grounds (on the left side of the approach road). BYO everything.

Mid-June Outing

Location: Withcott  
Date: 11 June  
Leader: Pat Cleary 303 352  
Time: 7 am

We'll be concentrating on the region north of Withcott. There should be plenty to see including some Winter arrivals. Meet at the Withcott Pub car park. BYO everything.

June Outing

Location: Deongwar State Forest.  
Date: 25 June  
Leader: Judy Theiss

Judy is a teacher at the Amaroo Environmental School and knows the Deongwar area very well. More in the next newsletter.

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

**SURFACE  
MAIL**

P McConnell  
17 George St  
HELIDON Q 4344  
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