



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

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

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**NEWSLETTER No. 234 - July 1995**

## EDITORIAL:

If the swan population of Cooby Dam is an indicator, we could be in for moist conditions. Nicci Thompson and I counted 136 swans and seven nests during a Murray-Darling Project count recently. Lots of other species seem to be increasing there as well, so here's hoping. We also heard, then saw, four Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos in transit.

Thanks once again to all those who have contributed to the newsletter.

## OUTING REPORT - NORTHERN WITHCOTT, 18 JULY

This particular Sunday morning dawned overcast, windy and of course cool. Intrepid bird watchers, I've been told are not put off by bleak, cold winter days, but I must admit I found it very difficult to leave my comfy, warm bed to search for little birds in this weather.

To my surprise I found five enthusiastic "birdos" waiting for a leader. In all, nine of us set off for Rocky Creek on Jones Road, Withcott.

No sooner had we arrived than Richard spotted a male Regent Bowerbird in splendid plumage. What a beautiful sight! He was feeding on the fruit of a plant, which Michael Hirst has since informed me was commonly called Cockspur Thorn *Cudrania cochinchinensis*. This plant belongs to the mulberry and fig family. Information from *Flora of S.E. Queensland. Vol 1. DPI*. Thanks Michael.

Our appetites whetted, we proceeded on to see Eastern Yellow Robin, Golden and Rufous Whistlers, White-throated Treecreepers, Olive-backed Orioles, Figbirds and a Spangled Drongo. Michael Atzeni arrived later and reported seeing Red-backed Fairy-wren, Striped Honeyeater and Eastern Spinebill.

A Lewin's Honeyeater was seen breakfasting on the fruit of a prickly pear. Is this a usual food source or is food scarce because of the drought? A Fan-tailed Cuckoo provided us with a lovely view but unfortunately the noise of several trail-bikes destroyed the tranquillity for us and the birds. Back at our cars, we were afforded the sight of two Wedge-tailed Eagles and a Brown Falcon. We had now seen fifty-two species. It was decided to continue on to Rocky Creek on Gittens Road, Withcott.

On Jones Road, near Bells Road, I spotted an unfamiliar bird in a paddock. It was my first sighting of Ground Cuckoo-shrikes, and I must say, quite exciting. There were three of these birds were sitting with Magpie Larks. Richard set up his camera hopeful of taking some interesting shots of the birds preening. All present would agree with me, I'm sure, that this species was " the Bird of the Day".

As we pulled off the road at our next destination, a very disconcerted male Superb Fairy-wren flitted from one door mirror to another. He attacked his reflection repeatedly, perhaps challenging what he perceived to be a new-comer to his territory. He carried on with his antics for more than an half an hour, until we departed. We also saw Weebills and Striated Thornbills at close proximity.

It was now lunch-time and most people decided to call it a day. The promise of a sighting of a Rose Robin enticed Richard, David and I to continue on. After lunch at Amos Road, we engaged in some bush-bashing along our much over-grown track, but only saw Grey Fantails and Brown Thornbills.

After Richard departed, David and I continued on with our quest to find our first Rose Robin for the year. We decided to hike along Amos Road to Jubilee Park. Of course we saw the usual Eastern Yellow Robins, Golden Whistlers and friendly Grey Fantails, but no Rose Robins.

We ventured as far as the Crebra Track but as it was four o'clock, decided to turn for home. Then on the branch of a She-oak, our quarry materialised, a delightful male Rose Robin. That was to conclude what I would describe as a very satisfactory birding day. In all our total was sixty-eight species.

Pat Cleary.

### OUTING REPORT - FLAGSTONE CREEK, 16 JULY

Members of the Toowoomba Bird Observers who turned out for the outing to Flagstone Creek heaved a collective sigh of relief that the fierce westerly wind of the previous few days had eased. Before the sun reached the road junction where we met it was very chilly but by mid morning we were all shedding garments.

As there was still a little water near the creek floodways plenty of birds were around so we were quickly off to a good start. Small bush birds were seen low down including Double-barred Finches and Silvereyes with Striated Pardalotes calling; a lone Yellow-faced Honeyeater and a female Golden Whistler which, fluffed up in the cold, deluded us at first into thinking we had something strange. Larger birds such as the striking Australian King Parrot, Pied Currawongs, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos & Galahs were among others seen & heard higher up whilst Grey Fantails & Willie Wagtails fluttered and danced around wherever we went.

After a spell we moved on down to the creek to the Gorman's Gap turn-off where, with ample off-road parking space, we left the cars and walked in several directions. Our morning list soon started to grow with sightings of Pied Butcherbirds, Kookaburras, an Eastern Yellow Robin, Red-browed Firetails and Peaceful Doves plus a few Yellow-rumped Thornbills feeding on the ground with a large flock of Double-barred Finches.

Walking up the dirt road we spied Fairy-wrens, both Superb and Variegated, then saw much

activity centred on a number of large Prickly Pears. We identified Olive-backed Orioles, Noisy Miners, Lewin's Honeyeaters, a Golden Whistler and Pied Currawongs all feasting on the red fruit. Perhaps this should be regarded as the as the most interesting sighting of the morning. Returning along the road a little later a TBOI visitor spotted a Rose Robin, then seen briefly by others, while another sharp pair of eyes located a more distant disturber of the peace for agitated Pied Currawongs & Noisy Miners as a Brown Goshawk patrolling the higher country.

Following morning tea in the shade - by then quite necessary - the seven members and two visitors disbanded. Two keen parties continued on to check out the Lockyer Crossing on the Back Flagstone Creek Rd, adding a Brown Falcon, a Whistling Kite and others to the list. 55 species in all.

Ann Shore.

### LITTLE EAGLE ATTACKS BLACK-TAILED NATIVE-HEN

On 4 July 1994 I did a trip to Coongie Lake near Innamincka in South Australia. This whole area, like much of Queensland and New South Wales, was in the grip of drought. However, the lake itself provided an area of richness and was a sight for sore eyes.

Much of the lake's surrounds was covered by large clumps of lignum, a plant which in other areas is home to the Grey Grass-wren. No Grey Grass-wrens to be seen here, but the birdlife was amazing in its numbers and diversity. Small groups of Black-tailed Native-hen ran and flew awkwardly ahead of me as I made my way around the lake. I though, was not the only one interested in them. In a tree ahead of me were several Whistling Kites and a lone Little Eagle. They appeared to be showing no interest in the native-hens as they scurried around below. This could not have been further from the truth, for no sooner had the native-hens taken flight in front of me than one had been grabbed by the Little Eagle.

The speed of the eagle from a perched start was amazing. With the native-hen in its talons both birds crashed to the ground. A quick end for the native-hen seemed inevitable as it struggled in vain to escape. But as is often the case in nature the animal that catches the prey goes hungry. As the eagle was about to deliver its final blows three Australian Ravens arrived on the scene wanting a piece of the action. One actually grabbed the eagle by the wing and in the ensuing melee the native-hen escaped, and staggering made its way towards the safety of the water. To my amazement, within centimetres of freedom the native-hen was grabbed by a Dingo and devoured in front of my eyes within about 30 seconds.

I mentioned this to some of the locals back in Innamincka and apparently this Dingo is quite famous when it comes to catching birds on the water's edge. On one occasion it was seen to kill a pelican.

Pat McConnell.

### TRIP to TALWOOD

Recently we spent a weekend on a property near Talwood, west of Goondiwindi to celebrate a friend's 100th birthday. On the way, I saw my first Emu in the wild, near Toobeah. We also saw beautiful Red-winged Parrots and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters. That made three new species for me.

We also saw many other birds while travelling including many flocks of Cockatiels, Galahs, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Apostlebirds and White-winged Choughs. Fellow TBO members Jack and Marilyn Lund attended as well.

Olive Booth

## EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT CHECKLISTS BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK.

Some recent members have queried the purpose of the species checklist that may accompany their monthly newsletter. What's it for? Should *they* complete them? Is it worth it when they don't get out much? And what do "U" and "D" mean?

I will firstly give a brief history of the club's monthly recording system and then proceed to encourage participation in the scheme by anyone who has their favourite local patch, be it the backyard, the park down the road, the local creek or the bush block down the range.

Initially, the adopted survey area was that used for the original species list compiled by the club's founder, Bill Jolly. The area was defined as that within a 10 km radius of the main Toowoomba Post Office. With the advent of the Atlas of Australian Birds Scheme, the club became one of some 300 participants and was designated two 10 minute grids to survey for the Atlas. Roughly, the area extended from Gowrie Mountain in the west to halfway between Helidon and Grantham in the east, north to Mt Kynoch and south to Hodgson Vale and covered some 200 km<sup>2</sup>. The division between the two grids cut the range north-south at the bottom entrance to Redwood Park halfway down the range so the grids became affectionately known as Uprange and Downrange, hence the "U" and "D" columns on the checklist. The Atlas aimed to map the distribution and breeding distribution of birds in Australia from 1977 to 1981 and was published in 1984. We adopted the grids as our permanent survey area for monthly recordings.

In the days of "atlassing", there was rarely a weekend that I and several others were not out birding and the restriction of two areas over which to record became rather boring. Once you'd done well in Redwood Park, for instance, you had very little incentive to look elsewhere along the escarpment that month because you were unlikely to see anything new. Therefore, after the Atlas I proposed that both 10 minute grids be divided into quarters to give 8 sectors over which to record species. By doing so this encouraged visits to different areas and different habitats that would normally not have been surveyed. This proposal was duly adopted and has been in force ever since. The sectors were numbered 1 to 4 in the Uprange grid and 4 to 8 in the Downrange grid. You indicate the sector number(s) alongside each species seen so it's possible to have up to 8 numbers against a species depending on where you get to. The smaller sectors have helped refine distribution patterns and clearly shows several species are very localised.

Several members have diligently completed monthly checklists for as long as I can remember and I salute them. I, for one, have not been so consistent in recent times because of family obligations but I'm sure there are others amongst our ranks that can take over the reigns. Apart from the Atlas, the club's records have been drawn upon and reported in several shapes and forms, be they requests from conservation and government bodies, visitors, research scientists or other members. It has been the club's full intention to publish a booklet for many years - it's just a matter of someone with the time and commitment to get the ball rolling plus obtaining some outside funding for publishing. I'm all ears for ideas.

One of the biggest thrills and incentives in regularly recording is finding new species for your list be it your local or life list. Past and present members have had many memorable discoveries. Given the lack of significant water bodies and our inland location, our list of some 270+ species is extraordinary and boasts the likes of Red Goshawk, Red-necked Phalarope and Black Honeyeater. Who knows what may turn up next. And why shouldn't it be you that enjoys the experience by finding it?

I encourage everyone to participate if they can. It helps you fine tune your observation skills and is a cheap, enjoyable pastime. Those interested should contact Ann and she will provide you with a map showing the sector boundaries and some easy to remember reference points.

If you have any ideas on improving the monthly surveys or wish to survey a different area, the Executive would love to hear from you.

Michael Atzeni

**MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES:** All sightings as submitted by members of Toowoomba Bird Observers Inc. Accuracy not vouched for by TBO. Please check with observer before citing.

Cotton Pygmy-goose (3)	07.01.95	Lake Broadwater	N.T.
Gould's Petrel*	13.01.95	Dilli Village, F.I.	R.H.
Flesh-footed Shearwater*	09.01.95	Eurong area, F.I.	R.H.
Sooty Shearwater*	03.01.95	Eurong area, F.I.	R.H.
Short-tailed Shearwater*	05.01.95	Eurong area, F.I.	R.H.
White-tailed Tropicbird(4)*	14.02.95	Eastern Beach, F.I.	R.H.
Great Frigatebird**	12.02.95	Eastern Beach, F.I.	R.H.
Lesser Frigatebird**	12.02.95	Eastern Beach, F.I.	R.H.
Little Curlew	28.12.94	Cooby Dam	K.M. & N.T.
Wood Sandpiper (1)	07.01.95	Lake Broadwater	N.T.
Sanderling	11.02.95	Indian Head, F.I.	R.H.
Sanderling	12.02.95	Platypus Bay, F.I.	R.H.
Sooty Tern(20, all juvs)	14.02.95	Eastern Beach, F.I.	R.H.
Common Noddy	13.02.95	" Maheno ", F.I.	R.H.
Brush Bronzewing	29.01.95	Ungowa, F.I.	R.H.
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove	14.02.95	Central Stn., F.I.	R.H.
Powerful Owl	30.12.94	Redwood Park	M.A. & N.T.
Powerful Owl (imm.)	02.01.95	Redwood Park	P.M.
Masked Owl	07.02.95	Lake Boomingen, F.I.	R.H.
White-rumped Swiftlet***	11.02.95	Indian Head, F.I.	R.H.
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	29.12.94	Highfields Falls	N.T.
Ground Cuckoo-shrike (4)	05.01.95	Hood's Dam, Helidon	L.A.

\* Indicates beach-washed birds. All tropicbirds were juveniles, two being dead whilst other pair rehabilitated by QNPWS staff.

\*\* Large, combined flocks of these species sighted from Waddy Point to Sandy Cape brought inshore by storms. Forty-seven individuals sighted, 12.02.95. On morning of 13.02.95 a combined flock of both species numbering 89 individuals passed over Champagne Pools. Several birds as low as six metres above observer (R.H.)

\*\*\* A rare vagrant this far south.

F.I. = Fraser Island.

L.A., L.Atzeni; M.A., M.Atzeni; R.H., R.Hobson; P.M., P.McConnell; K.M., K.McKeown.; N.T., N.Thompson.

It is intended that Members' Bird Notes will appear in each newsletter again. Members may notice some name changes as we are using the names and order of names as set out in the RAOU Monograph No. 2. "The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories" by Les Christidis and Walter Boles. The RAOU will now be using this list so we will follow their example. It will involve minor changes to our list which will be highlighted in a later newsletter.

Pat McConnell, Acting Records Officer.

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

**July Outing:**                      **Location:**     Atkinson's Dam  
**Date:**                                 30 July  
**Leader:**                              John Hadley  
**Time:**                                  7:30 a.m.

Travel through Gatton and turn left into the Gatton-Esk Road. This road is about 200 m past the end of the Gatton By-Pass. Drive 20 km North and turn right. The Dam is about 14 km along this road. Meet at the picnic area. BYO everything.

**Mid-August Outing:**                **Location:**     Preston District  
**Date:**                                    13 August  
**Leader:**                                Michael Atzeni                      392 761  
**Time:**                                  7:00 a.m.

Meet at the Lion's Picnic Rest Area at the southern-end of Ruthven St on the way to Warwick.

**August Outing:**                      **Location:**     Goomburra  
**Date:**                                    27 August  
**Leader:**                                Ken McKeown                      303 774  
**Time:**                                  7:30 a.m.

This area features both rain forest and open eucalypt forest. Drive 13 km past Allora. Turn left and follow the signs. Take care on the gravel sections. Meet at the Notice Board.

**Mid-September Outing**            **Location:**     Helidon Hills  
**Date:**                                    17 September  
**Leader:**                                Michael Atzeni                      392 761  
**Time:**                                  7:00 a.m.

More in the next newsletter.

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