



# TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

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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	<del>076 303761</del>	Librarian -	Sharyn Frederiks	076 331169
Secretary -	Ann Shore	076 303207	Committee Member -	Pat Cleary	076 303352
Treasurer -	<del>Nicci Thompson</del>	<del>076 303070</del>			

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

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**NEWSLETTER No. 235 - August 1995**

**EDITORIAL:**

It's strange sometimes how previously conceived ideas form a mindset and cloud our thinking. There I was overlooking a large farm dam south of Woodenbong on my way to Coff's Harbour to retrieve my wife from a conference when I thought I saw a Feral Pigeon dive down to the water's surface and either drink or gather food on the wing. As I reached my scope for a better view, a flock of five birds landed at the edge of the dam and waded into the water and sat cooling their heels so as to speak for at least 15 minutes although the weather at about 11 a.m. was not remotely hot. Later I saw this behaviour repeated several times. If anyone has seen similar behaviour or has an explanation, please let me know.

It could be getting drier than we think further west, as I saw a large flock of Budgerigars sitting in a tree near the Clifton turnoff on the Warwick road. Diamond Doves have been recently reported from Gowrie Junction (Gloria Glass) and from the showgrounds at Glenvale (Nicci Thompson, 21/8/95). The Red-tailed Black Cockatoos have reappeared in reasonable numbers too.

This newsletter as usual has something for everyone. Several outings reports, Ann's African assignation without one mention of the Rugby World Cup thankyou very much, Michael's proposal for additional survey areas and members' bird notes compiled by Pat McConnell in Rod's absence.

Thankyou one and all for your efforts, **BUT** the time has come said the Editor for all good TBO members to once again come good with articles. Perhaps your experiences regarding aberrant bird behaviour could be a good place to start.

It's probably a payback for not mentioning the rugby, but our stalwart secretary Ann Shore is incapacitated for eight weeks after coming off second best with a speed bump on the Atkinsons' Dam

outing. I'm sure all members wish her well and a speedy recovery.

We're minus a Treasurer following Nicci's recent resignation. Thanks Nicci for your long service and a job well done. If anyone is interested in taking over, please contact Ann.

### OUTING REPORT - ATKINSONS DAM 30 JULY

Sixteen members met at Atkinson's Dam to a clear, fine, hand-tingling light frost, later to become ideal weather conditions for bird watching. A walk along the dam wall afforded views on both sides, with minimal disturbance of our quarry.

Flights of Straw-necked Ibis were very noticeable flying in a north-south direction. Also prominent were mixed flocks of Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills in which the Yellow-billed were predominant. Down at the water's edge, we were surprised to see a Marsh Sandpiper but then saw several others further along the way. We weren't sure whether they were early arrivals or overwintering birds. Ducks in small groups on the open water were mainly Hardhead with a few Pacific Black, Maned and Grey Teal.

From the dam wall, we saw several raptors including Australian Kestrel, Brown Falcon, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite, Whistling Kite and one Swamp Harrier. We then were lucky to witness seven Glossy Ibis take off from the water-side vegetation, wheeling into the sun which turned the colour of their upper wings into that of burnished copper. The song of the Little Grassbird often floated up to those of us on the wall. Caspian Tern and Silver Gull were constantly flying over the open water when I thought I heard claims that someone was attacked by a Crested Pigeon! The victim was the President and the failed assassin was possibly attracted to the sun reflecting off the tripod of his telescope. It was remarkably tame and after some coaxing elected to perch on Jack Lund's hand.

Off the wall, we walked back beside the water sorting out Masked Lapwing chicks, Red-capped Plovers, Black-fronted Plovers and Red-kneed Dotterel. From the thicker vegetation, a loud chorus of Reed Warblers was constantly heard and one Latham's Snipe was seen to rise and fly off quickly.

After a refreshment break, we proceeded to Balaam Hill west of the dam. On the way, we saw a solitary Banded Plover but not much more of interest.

I wish to thank all who attended and a special thanks to those who travelled from Warwick. In all we saw 61 species.

John Hadley

### OUTING REPORT - PRESTON, 13 AUGUST

The August outing was small on observers and big on observed. Our party of 5 including two visitors had a brilliant time, particularly at one small patch on the corner of Meynink's and Walkers Springs Roads, Preston. There were finches galore feeding in a clearing - Plum-heads, Zebras, Double-bars, Red-browed Firetails. Alert Jacky Winters and a Fan-tailed Cuckoo kept vigil over the same clearing from their chosen vantage points. With such a variety of finches about, we scanned carefully for Diamond Firetails. I had seen this species drinking at a nearby trough some 10 years ago. Alas, none materialised but a group of Eastern Grey Kangaroos *Macropus giganteus* drinking at the trough solemnly surveyed us, perhaps understanding our disappointment, before loping back into the adjoining scrub. I find it quite disturbing that Diamond Firetail sightings in our region over the last decade are on a par with Red Goshawk sightings. What has caused their decline?

Dusky Woodswallows jockeyed for position along a dilapidated fenceline while delicate Rose

Robins, Varied Sittellas, Variegated Wrens, Grey Fantails, Yellow-faced and Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Rufous and Golden Whistlers kept us entertained in the adjacent woodland. At the junction of Boundary Road and Walkers Springs Rd we picked up a group of Painted Button-Quail. A reconnoitre the previous day suggested it wasn't worth spending too much time anywhere else around Preston so at the mention of the Helidon Dip by our visitors, we bee-lined to Helidon before it got too late. We were rewarded with a rare treat in this area, the Turquoise Parrot, gracing us with its presence. Two birds were seen but later that day, Pat McConnell saw three birds in the same area. The Western Gerygone, a regular winter visitor (May-August) to the acacia scrub adjoining the dip, is often hard to locate but, as though on cue, one obligingly put in an appearance, hovering briefly to display the diagnostic white tail band and all the while piping his sleepy cadences.

Fuscous Honeyeaters, Rainbow Bee-eaters and *more* Plum-headed Finches (real feast or famine stuff, aren't they!!) topped off one of those more memorable mornings. Seventy-five species all up.

Michael Atzeni

### MORE SNIPPETS FROM AFRICA

A busy highway winding around endless hills, partly built-up and partly wooded with many acacias and eucalypts lining the road was my introduction to South Africa as I was driven inland from the port city of Durban. Gradually the country opened out as we left the urban scene but always the road continued in great sweeping curves, up, down and around with distant higher hills on the skyline. Few birds were visible as we travelled but I remained hopeful of better things to come.

Heavy smog hung over the valley of Pietermaritzburg as the tall chimneys of the brickworks belched forth their cargoes of pollution. We did not linger, swinging away north-westward and climbing steadily towards the cleaner world of the Drakensburg Mts. The rolling grasslands, already golden brown from early winter frosts and once all given over to dairying, now showed the changes to the landscape brought about by the ever-increasing number of pine plantations for wood chipping. They seemed quite alien in that setting. Here and there in valleys and watercourses one saw a few pockets of indigenous forest, a small reminder of how the land had looked prior to the arrival of Europeans some one hundred years ago. My destination, a cottage on a farm almost two hour's drive from Durban, where I was to stay with friends unseen for over thirty years, was a different world again. Much cooler and fresher and, oh hurrah, birdlife everywhere.

Frequently replenished bird tables outside the cottage drew a host of small birds; the golden yellow-browns of Masked Weavers - by the dozen, Black-eyed Bulbuls, a few Speckled Mousebirds and both Red-winged and Glossy Starlings. Others would come in spring and summer I was told. One morning, a Kingfisher did arrive but was off before I could identify it.

Three Hadada Ibis regularly quartered the mown Kikuyu Grass around the house and were welcomed as soil aerators as they prodded the ground in their search for tasty invertebrates, while a Fiscal Shrike appeared occasionally and the constant murmur of doves came from overhead. Fork-tailed Drongos came to pick off comatose wild bees, unwise enough to stagger out of their hive in a hole on the outside of the house on chilly mornings and a little flock of Helmeted Guinea-fowl might be seen wandering through the grass and cowyards. The little body of a dead Horus Swift was found on the grass one morning with no apparent reason for its demise.

A dam, used only for irrigating the already rich green dairy pastures as few crops were planted, produced a few Yellow-billed Duck while a couple of Three-banded Plovers searched diligently along its muddy edges. A Cape Wagtail or two were seen briefly, swallows darted overhead and a flock of finches was feasting on seeding grasses. A morning visit to a nearby estate in more open country, now mostly planted with young pines, revealed sights of several raptors. One, the Long-crested Eagle, circling

majestically above us was easy to identify, others alas impossible. We disturbed some 6 to 8 Black-headed Herons which flapped off in leisurely fashion from a swampy area and from the adjoining dam saw numbers of Red-knobbed Coot, Common Moorhen, Dabchick (Little Grebe) and other unidentified duck species. Then as we crossed drier parts of the swamp we saw two stately Crested Cranes and a Stonechat singing its heart out from a tall grass stem. Later, on a day trip further north I recorded White-faced Duck and Blacksmith Plover. Interestingly I learnt that Natal, although looking considerably greener than Queensland, was experiencing prolonged droughty times, these being related to the effects of El Nino.

My total sighting for six days was a mere twenty-six species, but more serious birding would, I know, have turned up many more. Perhaps, one day.....

Ann Shore

**THANKYOU:** The TBO would like to thank Richard Thomas, a Brisbane member who has presented us with a beautiful book entitled *"BIRDS OF LORD HOWE ISLAND PAST AND PRESENT"* written by Ian Hutton. Thankyou Richard.

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

Great Crested Grebe	18/03/95	Cooby Dam	M.T. & N.T.
Spotted Harrier	02/04/95	Southbrook	G.T. & N.T.
Swamp Harrier	30/03/95	L. Broadwater	N.T.
Little Eagle	14/04/95	Helidon	P.McC
Red-tailed Blk Cockatoo	--/03/95	Withcott	P.C.
" " " " (26)	03/04/95	Baillie Henderson	N.T.
" " " " (5)	14/04/95	Helidon	P.McC
Red-winged Parrot	18/04/95	Helidon	P.McC
Oriental Cuckoo	16/03/95	Redwood Park Tmba.	J.H. & P.McC
Brush Cuckoo *	17/04/95	Withcott	P.C.,A.S.,A.W
Fan-tailed Cuckoo *	17/04/95	Withcott	P.C.,A.S.,A.W
Shining Bronze-cuckoo	17/04/95	Withcott	P.C.,A.S.,A.W
White-eared Monarch	23/04/95	Redwood Park Tmba.	P.McC
Barred Cuckoo-shrike	16/03/95	Redwood Park Tmba.	P.McC
Ground Cuckoo-shrike	21/04/95	USQ. Toowoomba	P.McC
Black-faced Woodswallow	30/03/95	Bowenville	N.T.
Plum-headed Finch	19/04/95	Cooby Dam	K.McK & N.T.

\* All feeding in close proximity on large grubs found on the ground or under bark of large fruiting White Cedar.

P.C., P.Cleary; J.H., J.Harris; K.McK., K.McKeown; P.McC., P.McConnell; A.S., A. Shore; G.T., G.Thompson; M.T., M.Thompson; N.T., N.Thompson, A.W. A.Warburton.

Pat McConnell, Acting Records Officer

**NEW MEMBER:** Welcome to former member, Lonnie Hogan, 39 Fourth Avenue, Toowoomba.

## MORE ON MONTHLY SURVEYS

Firstly, an erratum and a couple of omissions from my article last month. The downrange grid numbers should have read 5 (not 4) to 8 and I failed to mention our efforts in the past were to cover the whole 8 sectors thoroughly in the middle month (January, April, July and October) of each season under a system known as Seasonal Species Surveys. The purpose was to obtain at least one good snap shot of the seasonal species composition and distribution within the area every year. As you know many birds are only seasonal visitors. The other omission was the fact that every October we endeavour to find as many species in a 24 hour period within the club boundaries during the annual species count. Originally, this use to be a bird census but because of the lack of a rigorous scientific methodology and the difficult of replicating the effort year to year it was agreed that such censuses had little if any scientific value, the census was replaced by the species survey.

Over the past couple of years it has become apparent that the monitoring activities of the club may need review to encourage greater participation. This brings me to a new and probably long overdue recommendation for the future, namely to add additional survey areas over which to record on a monthly or seasonal basis. My key reasons for suggesting this move are that for many years we have had keen and experienced observers living outside the club's present survey area and/or regularly surveying other areas e.g the Lockyer Wetlands, Highfields, Ravensbourne National Park. For the main these sightings, and dare I say just the more interesting sightings become diary jottings that will never be made public or, even worse, become "time-less" fond memories!

Keeping records is both interesting and important. With escalating fragmentation, degradation and destruction of habitats, we can all appreciate the importance of detailed, documented information on our wildlife as ammunition for conservation discussions. Add to this the enjoyment and incentive of recording in "virgin" country, the chance to contribute your historical records and to find new species for these new survey areas, and the satisfaction from knowing your records can be put to good use and won't just be accompanying you to your grave and I hope I've sold at least a few of you on the idea.

Now here's the crunch! We want you to suggest where these new survey areas should be. By completing the following nomination form, tell us the area you would like to survey and an indication of how frequently e.g. monthly or seasonally, you could survey the area. If available, we also want you to submit your historical records for the nominated area. At this stage, we are not concerned with how scant your past records are, nor the size of the area. The executive will consider all submissions. For the benefit of TBOI's members, it is desirable that the nominated area has sufficient appeal so as to attract consistent coverage through the collective efforts of members. This avoids the onus falling on any one person, invariably a recipe for good work down the drain should that person stop recording for whatever reason. If you are interested, please complete and return the slip below.

Michael Atzeni

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Description of survey area and bounds (e.g grid references, roads, or mud map):

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Type of Habitat(s):

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Frequency of survey possible by you:

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Records or Species list available?:

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

**August Outing:**

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

**Info:** This area features both rain forest and open eucalypt forest. Drive 3 km (not 13 as in last newsletter) past Allora. Turn left and follow the signs. Take care on the gravel sections. Meet at the Notice Board. Watch out for those Budgies! BYO everything.

**Mid-September Outing**

**Location:** Helidon Hills  
**Date:** 17 September  
**Leader:** Michael Atzeni  
**Time:** 7:00 a.m.

**Info:** Meet at the Helidon Rest Area on the Warrego Highway. BYO everything.

**Annual General Meeting**

**Location:** Withcott  
**Date:** 9 October  
**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Info:** Our guest speaker will be Greg Czechura from the Queensland Museum. Greg will talk about raptor identification and will make particular mention of the Red Goshawk which he has been researching. It will be well worth your effort to attend. More details next month.

If undeliverable return to  
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