



# TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

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**MEMBERSHIP: Adults/Families \$20 Students \$10**

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

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**NEWSLETTER No. 243 - May 1996**

## EDITORIAL:

OK you can all stop those rain dances!! I know I've written a few things about wetlands and the recent Ramsar Conference but this is ridiculous. I hope 750 mm is enough to satisfy most of you.

Many birders have large grins on their faces because of recent sightings but none bigger than Warwick member Ken Wells who visited the **Gingham Watercourse** north-west of **Moree** which featured on the ABC news. Ken reports he couldn't estimate numbers because of tall reeds but the RAOU Murray-Darling Basin Project co-ordinator Michael Hutchinson (Basin Bird Observer No.7) estimates at least **100 000** breeding pairs of Straw-necked Ibis alone. Not to be outdone **Fiona Wells** has written about all the **interesting visitors** she has seen from her kitchen window. As well Pat Cleary has an interesting **Blanchview and Lockyer Valley outing report**.

Many members were excited at the appearance of a **Black-winged Petrel** handed to local vet, Bob Doneley, in the wake of the recent cyclonic coastal weather. Reports of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters at Gatton and Oakey suggest some major disorientation resulted from the abnormal weather conditions.

Please note that the **MAY OUTING** has been **changed to Helidon** because of the closure of some escarpment parks because of track damage. It has also been postponed a week to **02 June**.

Keep the evening of **12 June** free to attend a presentation by **Zeiss representative, Mike Finkel**. Bring along your current binoculars if you have a problem with them you wish him to discuss.

## A BLACK-WINGED PETREL "BEACHED" IN TOOWOOMBA.

On Labour Day (**6/5/96**), good fortune smiled upon TBO when we accidentally stumbled upon our first record of a Black-winged Petrel. For a bird that spends its waking hours cruising over the ocean in search of seafood morsels and that roosts in burrows on sheer cliffs on remote Pacific islands, a detour to Toowoomba must have been one monumental letdown. Weis' Seafood Restaurant at the top of the Toowoomba range was about as close to a feed and a cliff face as he was going to get around here.

The lucky discovery came about when I rang Toowoomba veterinarian, Bob Doneley, for advice on young owls on behalf of another caller. The fact that I caught him at his surgery on a public holiday was quite fortuitous in itself. When I asked whether he currently had any birds in his care, I doubt I could have been more surprised. He answered quite casually, "A magpie, Crested Pigeon and a bird that I think's a petrel."

I cast the family aside and was there within half an hour, Slater field guide in hand. There in an incubator, alive and well was a small gadfly petrel. Apparently, local people found it in their yard on the Friday and took it to Bob. Unfortunately, they didn't leave their name or address and a request for them to contact me in an article in the local paper (The Chronicle, 20/3/96) has so far been unsuccessful.

Seabirds can be difficult to identify in the wild, but I wasn't expecting any ID problems with one in the hand. Yet I have to admit that an hour later I was still unsure of the identification. The bird looked most like the Black-winged Petrel but there were a couple of features not described or shown in the field guide that threw me. The bird had a fairly distinct white nape and very little dark smudging through the eye resulting in a prominent white face continuous with the thin white eyebrow. Pat McConnell and others came to the rescue with additional references, and we reached consensus that it was an immature Black-winged Petrel at a second viewing that afternoon.

Last we heard, the bird had been taken to Brisbane by the Department of Environment and was subsequently released in more familiar surrounds. Certainly, a real novelty bird for the local list and one that caused a lot of excitement on an otherwise pretty uneventful Labour Day.

Thanks to Bob Doneley for his co-operation - he was quite amused (and perplexed) by all the excitement - and we're looking forward to him notifying us of his next interesting casualty. Perhaps a Paradise Parrot, Bob?

Michael Atzeni

### BLANCHVIEW-LOCKYER VALLEY OUTING, 27 APRIL

The day before the outing, was fine and sunny, a typical Autumn day. The day of the outing, however, was to prove exactly the opposite, wet and overcast. Nine of us met at the designated area and proceeded to "Herron's" property on Silver Pinch Road.

This is a lovely area overlooking part of the Lockyer Valley. Mt Davidson is situated on this property and is covered mostly with dry rainforest species surrounded by grazing land.

The owners' dog accompanied us and had a wonderful time in the rain, bounding across, flushing out and chasing Brown Quail. At the base of Mt Davidson where the scrub begins, we saw several species-Varied Triller, Eastern Yellow Robin, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush and a female Regent Bowerbird.

As the rain continued, Ken suggested that we might like to continue birding around the waters of the Lockyer Valley as John Harris had seen Freckled Duck down there. The possibility of seeing this duck brightened the day considerably as the weather was certainly only good for ducks.

The property owners where this lovely lagoon was situated kindly invited us to come in and see the birds from a closer vantage point. Fortunately Alex had a scope which he kindly shared. Thanks Alex. Of course, all eyes were scanning for Freckled Duck, which were seen standing close to the water's edge on the far bank. We only saw three. This sighting well and truly made up for the inclement weather. As well, Pink-eared Duck were quite close and provided us with good views of their

distinctive plumage. An Australian Hobby and Kestrels wheeled overhead while around the edges of the lagoon were Eurasian Coot, Red-kneed Dotterel, Black-fronted Plover and around fifty Red-necked Avocet.

Most of us called it a day around lunchtime but several of us stopped at nearby Peachey Swamp and saw Darter, Cattle, Great and Intermediate Egrets, Glossy, Sacred and Straw-necked Ibis. To finish the day, Richard caught sight of a Comb-crested Jacana. That was indeed a good way to conclude and in all seventy-five species were seen.

Pat Cleary

## THE GWYDIR WETLANDS

I recently had the unique opportunity to visit a wetland on private property about 70 km north-west of Moree, N.S.W., on the Gingham Watercourse of the Gwydir River system. My son-in-law took me and a family friend. Getting there involved an hour's trip by utility to the edge of the wetland, and then a kilometre or so through rough, scrubby, damp terrain on a quadricycle, and finally about 500 metres wading up to waist deep through water couch to a low mound of land from which a slightly better view could be had. Common Bull Rush (Cumbungi), Channel Millet and Lignum dominate the landscape, the rushes up to 3 metres tall.

What we saw was a Straw-necked Ibis rookery covering many hectares. A count of them was beyond me because of the tall rushes, myriads of birds on every available roost, and countless ibis soaring and wheeling overhead, some on very high and in majestic echelons. The breeding season was almost over judging by the nests containing not chicks, but as yet flightless immatures. Nests were made by trampling the lignum and making a shallow depression in local plant nesting material assembled on top. There were anything up to eight to ten nests on a bush. No bush was free of nests. The sheer numbers of birds of a single species concentrated in one place was very impressive.

One puzzling thing was the almost complete absence of dead birds of any kind; there were also no mosquitoes or flies. The lack of insects probably lay in the fact that the water was flowing at about 1/4 metre per second.

Although Straw-necked Ibis was by far and away the dominant species, twenty-five other waterbird species were observed in the vicinity during the day. A smallish, dark unidentified raptor was observed in a dead tree on the edge of the rookery.

Leaving the mound after looking in wonder for quite a while, we struggled back to the quad with the object of visiting an egret rookery nearby. Unfortunately, this had to be abandoned when the game little quad went under water to the handle-bars after we lost our way in the maze of lanes among the overwhelming reeds. My admiration for this vehicle rose enormously when it didn't miss a beat during this outrage and our frantic efforts to pull it back from the deeper water. Absence of water couch should have made use of the quad possible here.

Although disappointed about the egret rookery, we needn't have worried; there was plenty to see as we wandered the foreshores of the wetland. Apart from more huge numbers of waterbirds, mainly ducks now, we observed a further twenty-seven species other than waterbirds, including Emus, a pair of Brolga, several Spotted Harriers and some Blue Bonnets. We also saw on the shores of the wetland, a quite handsome Lace Monitor and the fattest Red-Bellied Black Snake about 1.5 m long, both looking well fed and unconcerned about us.

We felt we'd had a remarkable day.

### Waterbirds

Hoary-headed Grebe  
Darter  
Pied Cormorant  
L. Pied Cormorant  
Great Cormorant  
L. Black Cormorant  
White-faced Heron  
Great Egret  
Little Egret  
Intermediate Egret  
Rufous Night Heron  
Glossy Ibis  
Sacred Ibis  
Straw-necked Ibis  
Clamorous Reed-warbler

Magpie Goose  
Black Swan  
Grey Teal  
Pink-eared Duck  
Maned Duck  
Dusky Moorhen  
Purple Swamphen  
Eurasian Coot  
Masked Lapwing  
Royal Spoonbill

### Others

White-winged Chough  
Spotted Harrier  
Black Kite  
Black-shouldered Kite  
Black Falcon  
Australian Kestrel  
Plum-headed Finch  
Diamond Dove  
Common Bronzewing  
Crested Pigeon  
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo  
White-plumed Honeyeater  
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater  
Australian Magpie-Lark  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
Noisy Miner  
Willy Wagtail  
Magpie  
Galah  
Blue Bonnet  
Apostlebird  
Brolga  
Yellow Thornbill  
Emu  
Grey Shrike-thrush

Ken Wells, Warwick

### FROM MY KITCHEN WINDOW

A friend of mine says she will never buy a dishwasher as she finds washing up is an invaluable time for talking to the child while drying the dishes. Our children have long left home, and our grandchildren never seem to stop talking, but we haven't a dishwasher. Apart from the fact I couldn't bear cutting up the kitchen to fit it in, I find there are interesting aspects to washing up.

Our kitchen window looks over paddocks, the Condamine River (more like a creek here), and surrounding flood plain to the Dividing Range 30 km away. The light and shadows on the mountains are ever changing, often they are shrouded in cloud, and sadly, sometimes in the smoke from bushfires.

Quite often foxes cross the paddocks in the early morning, and one day two came into our garden and carried out a thorough inspection before moving down the hill to the river. A surprise visitor was a Swamp Wallaby which crouched under a shrub. It stayed a few hours and moved on when my back was turned.

Our most rewarding visitors are birds. Some visits are brief. The King and Red-winged Parrots don't linger. A quick drink at the bird bath and they are off. The Rainbow Lorikeets and Eastern Rosellas stay to enjoy quite lengthy baths. Blue-faced Honeyeaters are also great bathers, gathering in groups and quite amicably taking turns unlike the Noisy Miners who squabble vigorously, and chase away the previous occupants. All give way to the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos who arrive squawking loudly.

One morning five Tawny Frogmouths were huddled together on a branch only a metre away. They stayed in the vicinity for a few days, and each morning I would try to find the tree in which they had settled for the day. This was Christmas 1994, and five more appeared about the same time in 1995.

Last spring a Crested Pigeon collected small twigs and made a nest in a Feijoa near the veranda. It sat there stoically and we hoped it wouldn't meet the same fate as the previous occupant who sat for two weeks on its pathetic bundle of sticks. We came home after a night away to find the nest and a few feathers and bones on the ground. Alas for the later inhabitant the scenario was repeated.

Our newest inhabitant is an Australian Kestrel. It sits on the paddock fence and has evidently declared this his territory. That is the place usually occupied by the Dollarbirds. Will they be back next

year? I'm always pleased when one or two swoop down and then sit and chat while I hang out the washing.

Recently about sixty Straw-necked Ibis descended on the paddock and prodded around with their long beaks. How did they know there was something worthwhile there? They hadn't been there for ages.

Then there are one-off sightings: an Oriental Cuckoo on the telephone line, a Channel-billed Cuckoo, two female Satin Bowerbirds, a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, a glimpse of a Golden Whistler pausing briefly, and the bright colour of a Red-capped Robin.

We have seen seventy-six bird species from the kitchen window, not always while washing up I must admit. Just think, I was told, if you had a dishwasher, you could spend that time sitting on the veranda watching what was going on. But would I?

Fiona Wells, Warwick

### DATE CLAIMER

The Murphy's Creek Theatre Night for Friday 14 June at 8 p.m. for the Actor's Studio production of "The Taming of the Shrew". Refreshments are included in the price of \$10. Ring Ann Shore 303 207 for info and tickets.

**MEMBERS' 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.

Black-winged Petrel (1)	03.05.96	Toowoomba (See article)	Various
Freckled Duck (3)	25.04.96	Seekamp Lagoon, Lower Tent Hill	JWH,NT
Freckled Duck (14)	21.05.96	Lockyer Waters	JH
Cotton Pygmy-Goose (6)	10.04.96	Gatton Apex Lake	JWH
Letter-winged Kite (4)	14.05.96	Bowenville	GG,NT
Square-tailed Kite	10.04.96	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	OB,JL
Square-tailed Kite	22.04.96	Peachey Swamp, Ropely	JH
Square-tailed Kite	22.04.96	Lockyer Waters	JH
Square-tailed Kite	22.04.96	Back Flagstone Ck Rd, Helidon	JH
Peregrine Falcon	10.04.96	Helidon	OB,JL
Black-tailed Godwit (25)	30.04.96	Lockyer Waters	JH
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (150)	30.04.96	Lockyer Waters	JH
Australian Pratincole (1)	30.04.96	Lockyer Waters	JH
Budgerigar (60)	05.96	Goondiwindi	JWH
Red-winged Parrot	06.04.96	Cecil Plains	A&SF
Squatter Pigeon	06.04.96	"Faltha", via Millmerran	NT
Red-backed Kingfisher	07.04.96	Cecil Plains & Aubigny	A&SF
Albert's Lyrebird	09.05.96	Carr's Lookout	K&FW
Diamond Firetail	06.04.96	Cecil Plains	A&SF

OB O Booth; A&SF A & S Frederiks; GG G Glass; JL J Lund;  
 JH J Hadley; JWH J Harris; NT N Thompson; K&FW K & F Wells;



M. Hurst  
Michael

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## COMING EVENTS

### Postponed May Outing:

**Location:** Helidon area  
**Date:** Sunday, 02 June  
**Leader:** Pat McConnell 976 141  
**Time:** 7:30 am

Because of bad track erosion, the TCC has closed some escarpment parks (including Redwood) for up to several weeks. Pat will now lead a **Helidon and environs outing**. **PLEASE NOTE THE NEW DATE**. Meet at the Helidon Rest Area. BYO everything.

### World Environment Day

**Location:** Lake Annand  
**Date:** 02 June

This year the theme is **I Can DO THAT**. Activities will include BBQ, workshops, stalls, speakers, music and children's happenings. TBO will be represented by Sharyn and Alex Frederiks, Olive Booth and Gloria Glass. Feel free to drop in and give them a breather.

### Zeiss Products Presentation

**Location:** USQ  
**Date:** Wednesday, 12 June  
**Time:** 7:00 pm sharp.

Mike Finkel, Zeiss' sales representative, Ophthalmic Division, will talk about the company and their products, particularly binoculars. There will be a range of optics on display and he will be happy to field any questions. Meet in the university car park on the SE corner (near the Arts Building) by 7.00 pm sharp. If you're late you will miss out getting into the C-Block venue as the doors must be locked. Pat McConnell will be letting us in.

### June Outing

**Location:** Girraween NP  
**Date:** Sunday, 30 June  
**Leader:** Sharyn Frederiks 331 169  
**Time:** 8:30 am.

A great NP with plenty of interesting birds, several of which are rarely if ever found around Toowoomba. Meet at the Ranger's Office. Those hardy types wishing to camp on the Saturday, please ring Sharyn and let her know your plans.

If undeliverable return to  
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**SURFACE  
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