



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'

NEWSLETTER No. 244 - June 1996

EDITORIAL:

This month brings another mixed bag to interest most members. **Pat McConnell's** successful **Helidon Outing**, whilst **Sharyn Frederiks** reports on the **RAOU** campout at **Currawinya** in the far south-west of the state. **Koji Tagi** reports from the **Northern Territory** and for the **non-technologically-challenged** of us **President Michael** has some **Internet WEB** sites for us to access. He also has an **update on the Black-winged Petrel**.

Of particular interest is the recent sighting by **Rod and Betty Hobson** of a pair of **Brolga** flying over **Gowrie Junction**, west of **Toowoomba**. This is a new bird for the club's survey area. Further details will be in the next newsletter.

Thanks to all correspondents for their interesting stories in this newsletter but we could certainly use more.

OUTING REPORT - HELIDON AREA, 2 JUNE 1996

A May outing in June must have caught the birds napping for we managed to see over 100 species before they made their escape. The day started with the range shrouded in mist and the valley crisp and cool with a large flock of birders gathered at the **Helidon picnic area**. A quick scurry along the creek producing little of interest we soon decided to change tack and head towards the tried and true **Helidon Dip**.

The **Dip** is always a good place to bird at this time of year with members and visitors expecting to see some of the winter migrants. One of these the **Western Gerygone** displayed itself to most but the **Rose and Red-capped Robins** were nowhere to be seen. Though not a bird one of the other highlights of the **Dip** was the exquisite **Thick-tailed Gecko**.

After a quick cuppa under **Helidon's** famous **Jacarandas** we followed **Lawler's Road** to the edge of the club area hoping to see the elusive **Red-backed Button-quail**. None were seen but the stop did yield numbers of **Plum-headed Finch** and a lone **Little Eagle** in the distance. My leadership qualities then came to the fore as I was out-voted and the Club headed for **Peachey Swamp**. Here we saw thirteen **Freckled**

Duck and several Chestnut Teal as well as many other water birds. Some people were also lucky enough to see a pair of Pacific Baza.

With lunch time fast approaching we started to make our way back to the Helidon Picnic area where our environmentally conscious Club had left half its cars. The gods smiled on our car pooling efforts rewarding us with a pair of Red-backed Kingfishers. These not so common visitors topped off what was an excellent outing.

Pat McConnell

Species list: Australian Grebe, Australian Pelican, Darter, Great Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Pacific Heron, White-faced Heron, Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Little Egret, Intermediate Egret, Sacred Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Plumed Whistling-duck, Freckled Duck, Black Swan, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, Australian Shoveller, Hardhead, Maned Duck, Black-shouldered Kite, Pacific Baza, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Little Eagle, Brown Falcon, Australian Kestrel, Dusky Moorhen, Purple Swamphen, Eurasian Coot, Comb-crested Jacana, Masked Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Feral Pigeon, Spotted Turtledove, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeon, Galah, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Little Lorikeet, Australian King Parrot, Cockatiel, Pale-headed Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Pheasant Coucal, Laughing Kookaburra, Red-backed Kingfisher, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Richard's Pipit, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Jacky Winter, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Eastern Whipbird, Grey-crowned Babbler, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Golden-headed Cisticola, Superb Fairy-wren, Variegated Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Weebill, White-throated Gerygone, Western Gerygone, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Little Friarbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Fuscous Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, White-throated Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Scarlet Honeyeater, Mistletobird, Striated Pardalote, Silvereye, House Sparrow, Zebra Finch, Double-barred Finch, Plum-headed Finch, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Common Starling, Common Mynah, Olive-backed Oriole, Figbird, White-winged Chough, Australian Magpie-lark, Dusky Woodswallow, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow.

UPDATE ON THE BLACK-WINGED PETREL

Our Chronicle article on the wayward Black-winged Petrel reported in the May N/L prompted several calls and finally one from the person who found and submitted it to Toowoomba veterinarian, Bob Doneley. Mr Ross Ginder found the bird on his block of land at Cabarlah, north of Toowoomba on the 3/5/96, and took it to Bob because of a large growth on the foot, unaware of its identity and origin.

It was good to get the full story but, on the down side, it means we can't add this species to our local list because our survey area to the north ends at Mt Kynoch, which is well south of Cabarlah. So all you tickers better get out your rubbers.

Amongst the other calls were two records of live Wedge-tailed Shearwaters from Oakey - one flew into the window of the Oakey Pre-school much to the delight of the children and another was picked up in a blood drain at the abattoirs. The former made front page news in the Oakey Champion (15/5/96) and thanks to the teacher, Julianne Choice, for faxing us a copy of the article. The latter was taken to the Toowoomba RSPCA and then handed over to a Carbarlah resident who cared for it until it voluntarily took off in a southerly direction on the morning of the 8th May, coincidentally, the same day as one was found near Gatton and taken to Brisbane. My guess is that it was the same bird and by now has probably changed his tune to a guttural rendition of, "I've been everywhere (inland), man"!

I also had unconfirmed reports of seabirds at Pittsworth, Murphy's Creek and Laidley. It begs the question as to just how many seabirds strayed inland during the recent rough weather that were not reported or never found.

Michael Atzeni

A WESTERN R.A.O.U. CAMPOUT

Our trip to Hattah Lakes N.P. near Mildura in November 1993 inspired an enthusiasm for western birds, and in September 1995 Alex and I took part in the RAOU campout at Currawinya. The RAOU conduct an annual social campout at different locations throughout Australia. I first heard about Currawinya through Ken McKeown and after hearing about its avian fauna inhabitants it became high on my list of places to visit. It is situated in SW Qld, 168 km SW of Cunnamulla near Hungerford. Grey Mulga on red soils cover a great deal of the park interspersed with Erompohilia and Hopbush Scrubland on the sand plains and dune fields. I often ask myself the question as to why I have this fascination for birds of semi-arid habitats. I think it's because these superficially uninteresting habitats have just as many spectacular and interesting birds as you would find in the far more complex rainforest systems.

First I would like to praise the northern NSW Group of the RAOU for organising the campout. They had been surveying the park since 1992 and the campout was an opportunity to assist their on-going survey. I was amazed at the number (approx. 100) who attended - they came from all over Australia. To me the campout was well thought out - they had convoys of 4WDs going through the different habitats and areas of the park, many equipped with UHF radios by which interesting information was exchanged. At the end of each day most of us gathered at the Happy Hour where we met many fascinating people and where interesting birding experiences and knowledge were shared. The Ranger at the park presented a slide show one evening in the old woolshed. The remote place had me quite taken aback by the facilities available. They included the former shearer's quarters, flush toilets, hot showers (the donkey was the hot water carrier), running tap water and electricity!

We spent most of our time with Roy Sonnenburg and Ron Henderson from Q.O.S. in their 4WD bus and their company was most enjoyable. In fact, we were fortunate to even see Currawinya, as a substantial amount of rain had recently fallen. Roy had to often manoeuvre around water-logged claypans. I was surprised at the amount of birdlife seen from the bus window and while travelling people would call out what they were seeing and where. The species included Brolga, Common Bronzewing, Diamond Dove, parrots and cockatoos, including Little Corella, Pink Cockatoo, Red-winged Parrot, Australian Ringneck, Blue Bonnet, Mulga Parrot and Budgerigar. Parrots are certainly a speciality of the park and I thought what a nice change to see them along the road instead of Common Myna and Starling. Unfortunately, we sighted two Starlings at Lake Numalla.

There is so much to write about but I will only elaborate on the birds I was particularly keen to find. Bourke's Parrot was one and it proved very elusive. Ron found it the afternoon of the final day and I will never forget his elation, jumping up and down, yelling and pointing. Amazingly, the bird continued to sit quietly in the tree for all to see.

Four species of babbler occur here but Hall's was the one we wanted most. Every group of babblers we saw had us looking for the diagnostic dark brown belly of this species. Just as hopes were fading, a UHF radio report put us on to them. The Crested Bellbird is another Currawinya speciality and although we often heard it we only managed to sight it once.

Three others on my wish list were the Crimson Chat, Orange Chat and White-winged Fairy-wren. We saw all three in the samphire flats around the huge salt lake, Lake Wyara. I found them exceptionally beautiful and when they sit on top of the samphire their plumage glows brilliantly in the sunlight. Crimson Chat proved the most common and at Riley's Spring Bore we counted 60 plus.

A month before the campout we purchased a telescope which was put to good use. We saw the likes of Pratincole, Red-necked Avocet and Australian Shoveller at Whip Dam; Caspian Tern, Red-kneed Dotterel and Black-tailed Native-hen at Lake Yumberarra; and the rare Freckled Duck at Lake Wyara. Currawinya is recognised as an important inland refuge for the Freckled Duck.

The campout was a most enjoyable experience in all respects and one I'll never forget. I would recommend an RAOU campout to any birder.

Sharyn Frederiks

Species list: Emu, Freckled Duck, Black Swan, Australian Shoveller, Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck, Hardhead, Hoary-headed Grebe, Darter, Pied Cormorant, Australian pelican, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Spotted Harrier, Brown Goshawk, Little Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite, Brolga, Black-tailed Native Hen, Eurasian Coot, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Red-necked Avocet, Masked Lapwing, Black-fronted Dotterel, Red-kneed Dotterel, Australian Pratincole, Silver Gull, Caspian Tern, Whiskered Tern, Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeon, Diamond Dove, Galah, Little Corella, Pink Cockatoo, Cockatiel, Red-winged Parrot, Australian Ringneck, Blue Bonnet, Mulga Parrot, Budgerigar, Bourke's Parrot, Red-backed Kingfisher, Sacred Kingfisher, Rainbow Bee-eater, Brown Treecreeper, Variegated Fairy-wren, White-winged Fairy-wren, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill,, Southern Whiteface, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Yellow-throated Miner, Singing Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Crimson Chat, Orange Chat, Red-capped Robin, Grey-crowned Babbler, Hall's Babbler, White-browed Babbler, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Crested Bellbird, Rufous Whistler, Restless Flycatcher, Australian Magpie-lark, White-winged Triller, White-breasted Woodswallow, Masked Woodswallow, Black-faced Woodswallow, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, White-winged Chough, Apostlebird, Richard's Pipit, Zebra Finch, Tree Martin, Rufous Songlark, Common Starling.

NEW ORNITHOLOGICAL WEB SITES

BIRDNET, the Ornithological Information Source, presented by the Ornithological Council, is now up and running on the World Wide Web. It can be accessed at its permanent site at <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/>

In addition to information on the Ornithological Council, information on several of the major professional ornithological societies, government and non-government organisations involved with ornithology, and links to other sites of interest to ornithologists can be found through the site. BIRDNET is under constant development and will continue to expand to meet the needs of the ornithological community. Questions, comments and suggestions can be sent to Robert Hole, Jr. rbh2@ra.msstate.edu or rhole@interaktv.com

BIRDNET <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET>

The American Ornithologists' Union's home page can be accessed at this site
<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/AOU/>

The Association of Field Ornithologist's home page can be accessed at this site
<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/AFO/>

The Raptor Research Foundation home page can be accessed at
<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/RRF/>

GOOD BUY !!

Anyone interested in buying a copy of the latest Simpson and Day field guide at half price (\$15)? If so,

ring John Harris on 074 624676.

BIRDING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY (14-17 November 1995)

Whilst I found Cairns humid, Darwin was extremely hot. Mr Kei-suke Ueda (Kei) has lived in Darwin since March and is an ecologist researching the Red-backed Fairy-wren. He and his daughter picked me up at the Darwin Airport. According to Kei, the humidity is about 90% and the temperature is usually above 34 degrees. I found this heat very oppressive.

The next morning I joined Kei at Holmes Jungle Nature Park banding the Red-backed Fairy-wrens. I watched while he spread his nets. It is very difficult to forecast the weather in the Wet Season. Suddenly heavy rain began to fall so Kei went to check the nets as he didn't want any birds to die because of the cold. This time he caught two wrens and two Double-barred Finches. We immediately went home to warm the birds which recovered after an hour. I tried out my fairy-wren call on them and they responded to my mimicry.

In the afternoon, we went to Howard Springs. Kei explained that the springs was a good birding site, especially in the monsoon season. Several large fish were swimming in the spring. These were barramundi, a large fish eaten in Darwin. In Japan, large fish are considered poor tasting but here it is different.

Our next stop was Middle Arm where there were crocodile warning signs. Here we found some interesting species such as the Pacific Baza and the easily found Red-headed Honeyeater which lives only in the mangroves.

The next day saw us at Katherine where all the creeks and gullies were filled with water. Lowlands had become wetlands. We could see varied Lorikeets and Black-necked Storks and Kei promised to show me the Northern Rosella on the way to Grove Hill Homestead. After we turned off the Stuart Highway, we saw Masked and Black-faced Woodswallows, a Pallid Cuckoo, Varied Lorikeets and Pheasant Coucals. The homestead was in the savannah. Three distinctive parrots with pale yellow bodies and blue wings flew away as we arrived there. These were Northern Rosella and we also saw a pair of Hooded Parrot. The shining turquoise of the male was like a flying jewel. On the road a flock of Brown Quail came out and began to bath.

The reason to went to Katherine was to visit Chinaman Creek which is a birder's heaven. Apparently Hooded Parrot and Gouldian Finch go there to drink and bathe during the dry season. It was a shock to find the creek had now become a river. However we saw large numbers of Banded Honeyeater and Varied Lorikeet were feeding on the nectar of the surrounding trees. A long-necked bird flew away from the creek. It was my first sighting of a Black Bittern! I did not expect to see such a big bird.

Our next destination was the Waterfall Creek Nature park in order to see White-throated Grasswren, White-lined Honeyeater and Chestnut-quilled Rock-pigeon. The park is about 50 km east of the entrance gate on an unsealed road with plenty of creek and river crossings.

The waterfall at this time was powerful and big. We walked by it to climb to the top of the escarpment. Rock-pigeons were seen on the way. These well-camouflaged grouse-like birds can be found only on escarpment or rocky hills. Unfortunately we didn't encounter any grasswrens.

Our next stop was Nourlangie Rock. On our way to Cooida, we saw many Partridge Pigeons, believed to be very tasty. It is now listed as a vulnerable species as numbers have been decreasing. At the Nourlangie Rock we found nothing, however the magnificent landscape impressed me greatly.

Koji Tagi

COMING EVENTS

June Outing

Location: Girraween NP
Date: 30 June
Leader: Sharyn Frederiks 331 169
Time: 8:30 a.m.

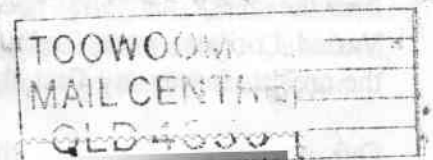
Always a great place to visit especially in winter. About 2 hours from Toowoomba. Drive through Warwick to Stanthorpe. A bitumen road leaves the highway 26 km south of Stanthorpe and winds 9 km up the Wyberba valley to the park. Meet at the ranger's office. Good luck with that damned elusive Lyrebird!!

July Outing

Location: Lockyer Wetlands
Date: 28 July
Leader: John Harris (074) 624 676
Time: 7:30 a.m.

Meet at Lake Apex. The tide's in and the birds are waiting.
BYO telescopes.

If undeliverable return to
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**SURFACE
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