



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. 247 - September 1996

EDITORIAL:

It's that time of the year again. Two weeks ago we were wakened by our first raucous Channel-billed Cuckoo clock. The Sacred Kingfishers are also back and Pat McConnell saw a Black-faced Monarch in Glen Lomond Park recently. Redwood Park should be hotting up so make the effort and get down there. It's a wonderful time of the birding year. Also keep your eyes peeled in suburbia for the likes of Rufous Fantail and Leaden and Satin Flycatcher. They just might pass through your yard during their annual pilgrimage down eastern Australia.

What an interesting and mixed bag of articles we have this month. Two outing reports by John Harris and Michael Hirst, Gloria Glass submits a Sundown sojourn and Nicci Thompson tells us about the northern infusion of Blackbirds and her Murray-Darling Project happenings. Many thanks to all correspondents but we could always use more stories.

Pat McConnell has kindly offered to take over the records and collate the monthly members' bird notes following John's move to Brisbane. Please inform Pat of your interesting sightings and don't be bashful.

OUTING REPORT - LOCKYER WETLANDS, 28 JULY 1996

Following some good publicity in the Lockyer Valley Star regarding the presence of Freckled Duck, I awoke early to what seemed to be our fate - "wet" land tour. After a couple of concerned phone calls from hydrophobes and my insistence that the day would proceed, we all met at Lake Apex. This day was one of an international flavour with visitors from England and Japan. Past and prospective members also appeared.

With members spread around Lake Apex, some interesting sightings of Pacific Baza, Royal Spoonbill, Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Duck, Pink-eared Duck, Red-kneed Dotterel and Australasian Shoveler were made.

From there, we moved through Gatton to Karrasch's Lagoon where we added Red-rumped Parrot, Comb-crested Jacana, Intermediate Egret, Swamp Harrier, Pacific Heron and an elusive Musk Duck to list the more notable species. So far 56 species and only two stops. I couldn't have planned it better! We then proceeded around the corner to Lowes Rd to the swamp. At first glance, I thought my luck had deserted me. Thankfully I was mistaken. To add to our list were Darters, Swampheens, a Whistling Kite dining on a fresh catch, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Golden-headed Cisticola and as one of our visitors put it "two Greylags to describe two domestic geese-a pity it wasn't England".

Next stop was Peachey Swamp on Old Ropely Road, where I had last seen Freckled Duck, three weeks earlier. To the disappointment of all, none of this rarity were to be found and to my surprise, no Plumed Whistlers either. After much scanning of scopes failed to turn up either species, most people headed for home.

A small party continued on to Gatton College, where we were greeted by 300-400 Magpie Geese grazing in the paddocks adjacent to Lake Calletly. This is where I left the group. Some of the remainder headed to Jahnke's Lagoon to look for the Blue-billed Duck which had been sighted earlier in the day by other birdos.

All in all a fine sunny outing with 70 species recorded and a couple of new members to boot.

John Harris, Beenleigh.

OUTING REPORT - FELTON AREA, 25 AUGUST 1996

Twelve members and visitors were blessed with a mild sunny day when we visited the Felton area. Kestrels were very numerous, together with a few Black-shouldered Kites, as we drove from the rendezvous on the New England Highway to Harry and Merryl Green's farm near Felton. Conspicuous by their absence were the Brown Falcons, which only a month earlier had been very plentiful. Apparently the local mouse plague had declined.

Absent also were the finches, Double-bar and Zebra, that frequented the small feedlot at the farm and had been present the day before! As we searched for them, we noticed a pair of Red-rumped Parrots inspecting nesting holes in a dead tree in the yards. I hope that they will not be evicted by the mynas which are in swarms round the yards. We then drove to the foot of a stony hill on the farm, timbered with mountain coolibah, bloodwood, bow, and some ironbark, with an understorey of wilga, canthium etc.

Our first really interesting bird was a Tawny Frogmouth, spotted by new member Clare Gover. Its mate was on a nest in an adjoining tree. Striped Honeyeaters were frequently heard but none were seen.

Whilst passing from one block to another, two of the group managed to spot a Red-backed Fairy-wren. The second block was steeper, and crowned by scrub. Here we saw a Pacific Baza. We circled round the hill above the cultivation, and had a distant glance at a neighbour's dam, where the only waterbirds visible were a pair of Pacific B. Ducks.

After a short spell, we worked our way back to the first block, where the frogmouth and baza were seen again. As we descended to the cars, a Pheasant Coucal was seen to fly up to a tree, where it promptly made itself invisible!

Having lunched at the vehicles, we set off to return by another route via Mt Kent. Along a leafy lane we saw a pair of Speckled Warblers and an immature Golden Whistler. We then stopped above a large farm dam on Woodlands, the property owned by John and Shona Rice, who had kindly given us permission to enter their land. After a spy with telescopes, some of us walked down to the dam where we saw over 50 ducks, Grey Teal, Wood and Black Ducks, a lone Hardhead, also Australasian Grebes, a Coot, Masked Lapwings and a Black-fronted Dotterel.

Our numbers were now depleted, but the last carload was rewarded by the sight of a magnificent pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles soaring above the slopes of Mt Kent. Forty-nine species were seen and the lack of honeyeaters was surprising. Our sincere thanks to the Greens and the Rices for allowing us on to their properties.

Michael Hirst

SUNDOWN NATIONAL PARK, June 1996

Sundown has long been one of my favourite places. Being out of the way, it is never crowded, and other campers mostly seem to be nature lovers or, at least, quiet potterers-around. There are shower places, but you need to heat and carry your own water. It's all designed to keep the park primitive.

And it's working! The kangaroos are quite visible and tame, allowing observation from ten paces usually. And, so far, they don't seem to have been beguiled by those misguided feeders of bread.

What about the birds, you ask? We had a list of what we wanted to see, birds we don't have at home. High on the list were Turquoise Parrots and Diamond Firetails for their exquisite qualities; next were Brown Treecreepers and Southern Whitefaces for their charm. In the third category were the 'whatever else' variety. Of these the 'best' were Painted Button-quail, which I'd never seen before. Others that disported themselves for our delection were Crested Shrike-tits, Eastern and Crimson rosellas, a pair of Red-winged Parrots, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes, Dusky Woodswallows, Hooded Robins (others in the park saw rose robins) and White-plumed Honeyeaters along with their Spiny-cheeked, Striped, Yellow-faced and Scarlet cousins, together with charming Jacky Winters and very Restless Flycatchers.

The 'ordinary' birds were there too, like Superb Fairy-wrens, Rufous Whistlers, Grey Shrike-thrushes and Spotted Pardalotes, but the ones that won the prize for the 'fixed in the memory' scene were the Willy Wagtails doing their Ox-pecker impersonation on the ears of kangaroos.

As we were packing up to leave, who should arrive to oversee operations but a Red-capped Robin. All in all, a very satisfactory few days, bird-wise. And P.S. - we didn't see the whitefaces, which Ranger Peter said hadn't been about much lately.

Gloria Glass

P.S. We visited Sundown again for a weekend at the end of August. Most of the above applied in August as well as in June. Except that the Diamond Firetails won the 'fixed in the memory prize' this time. At least half a dozen flew ahead of us up a grassy slope and, with the sun behind us, the flash of crimson was a delight. The colour is not just on their rumps but half-way up their backs as well. We had to consciously stop ourselves from pursuing them further to see this wonderful sight.

FOUR AND TWENTY BLACKBIRDS BAKED IN A PIE...

Well, there weren't exactly twenty four Blackbirds and they weren't in a pie. In actual fact there were only two Blackbirds and my observation of them was so brief that it precluded any chance of their ending in a pie.

On a quite cold, Monday afternoon - 8th July - I was walking along Prosser Street which is a little south of St Andrews Hospital when I heard an unfamiliar bird call. It was, however, a call I felt I should have known. You know how it is. You know you know the call but can't put a name to it. Even though I couldn't place it I was equally certain it wasn't one of the local birds. After a few minutes of listening and peering up side driveways in a decidedly suspicious manner, I assumed it to have been an aviary bird. There are many backyard aviaries in the area.

Zippping up my anorak I resumed my walk, but had only gone about ten paces when a very black bird flew across the footpath and crossed the street, alighting in a thick green tree in the front yard of the house opposite me. A black bird with a long tail and a bright orange bill!! I dashed across the road. As I peered into the dense foliage a second bird came from behind me and joined the first. Immediately, they both flew with characteristic undulating flight and landed with tails cocked high in the bare branches of a tree at the side of the house. I had heard that call before - in New Zealand and the southern states of Australia. I was staring in astonishment at a pair of adult male European Blackbirds. They paused briefly before resuming their flight south. It was only then that I realised I had been standing

beside a truck loaded with untreated sheep skins, which would normally have made me feel quite nauseous. It's amazing what a good adrenaline rush can accomplish.

I couldn't locate them again when I reached the other side of the block. Other club members and I searched diligently for them the following day with no success but two facts are interesting. Pat McConnel observed one male Blackbird at Cooby Dam in 1991 and *The Atlas of Australian Birds* (p 360) states, "The Blackbird's range is still expanding in Australia specially north along the main watercourses of the Murray-Darling Region." Cooby Dam and then Toowoomba are at the northern end of the Murray-Darling system. Are these elusive males the harbingers of an invasion of Toowoomba by yet another exotic bird species?

REFERENCES

Blakers M, Davies S.J.J., & Reilly P.N. (1984). *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, Melbourne University Press.

Nicci Thompson

TWO SPECIAL WETLANDS

Since early in 1994 a number of TBO Members have been surveying wetlands as part of the RAOU Murray-Darling Basin Waterbird Project. The period has spanned the end of one of the most extensive droughts ever experienced in South-eastern Queensland and the incredible deluge early in May this year. Two sites that I am involved in surveying are Cooby Reservoir to the north of Toowoomba and Lake Broadwater, south-west of Dalby. Most often Ken McKeown and I survey Cooby every second month. It is also surveyed by a group who travel from Brisbane. At Lake Broadwater Malcolm Wilson surveys the Inlet section while I survey the Overflow section.

Already some very interesting data is available from the project and it confirms what many of us have known for a long time. Cooby Reservoir and Lake Broadwater are very special wetlands.

Cooby Reservoir is quite old, having been constructed in the late 1930's and early 1940's. It has had time to settle into its surrounds and mellow. Additionally, a far-sighted decision was made to place buoy-lines across the creek inlets, thus deterring fisher folk from entering. This has created areas where birds and fish can retreat to feed and breed.

Lake Broadwater is a visually lovely fresh-water lake, ringed by River Red Gum. In the centre of the lake is an extensive patch of *Polygonum* which provides shelter for the waterfowl, particularly when the water-skiing fraternity are on the lake. During the survey it actually dried up to a tiny puddle in the centre. Painted Snipe, Wood Sandpipers and Cotton Pygmy-Geese are three of the less common species noted on the Lake.

When Ken and I began counting at Cooby in 1994, the water level was low and over the next 18 months we saw it fall even further, exposing huge mud flats at the northern end and inviting the growth of extensive stands of *Polygonum* some of which attained heights of two metres or more, making counting at times very arduous. The rewards were good though including such species as Little Curlew, Jabiru and Painted Snipe. Last winter flocks of up to 28 Musk Ducks and over a thousand Hardheads and Grey Teal were present.

In the December 1994 issue of *Wingspan* (p 10), Dr Michael Hutchison wrote, "The wetland on which the most species have occurred during counts is Cooby Creek Dam near Toowoomba." Again in the September 1995 issue of *Wingspan* (p 11) in an article titled *The richest five in the Basin* Dr Hutchison has this to say, "In first place: Cooby Creek Dam near Toowoomba, Queensland, with a grand total of 53 species. The dam is probably favoured in the drought as a refuge. Close behind in second place is Lake Broadwater, near Dalby, Queensland, with 49 species." In the same article, he predicted that as the drought broke and birds moved into revitalised wetlands this would change and he was correct.

In the *Basin Bird Observer No.7 April 1996*, Dr Hutchison writes of the importance of shorebird sites in the Basin. He includes both Palaearctic migratory and Australian resident shorebirds and lists the sites with the highest number of wader species. The first three are:-

Fivebough Swamp, Leeton, NSW	18 species
Lake Broadwater, Dalby, Qld	14 species
Cooby Creek Reservoir, Toowoomba	13 species

At no time has the survey been a competition to record the most species at a given site. However, it has emphasised that these two special wetlands, virtually on our doorstep are very important ecologically and a birdwatcher's paradise. You don't have to travel long distances to view quality wetlands. They are right here along with quite a few others. Perhaps I can persuade all those other Basin counters (there are at least four of you out there) to share their sites with us?

REFERENCES

Hutchison, M (1994). 'Drought in the Murray-Darling Basin', in *December 1994 Wingspan*, Royal Australian Ornithologists Union.
Hutchison, M (1995). 'The richest five in the Basin', in *September 1995 Wingspan*, Royal Australian Ornithologists Union.
Hutchison, M; *Basin Bird Observer No 7, April 1996 (News from the Murray-Darling Basin Waterbird Project)*, Royal Australian Ornithologists Union.

Nicci Thompson

A.G.M. - MONDAY, 14 OCTOBER

The A.G.M. will be held in the Withcott C.W.A. Hall (opposite the pub), 7:00 for a 7:30 pm start. This year our guest speaker is well-known author and President of BOCA, Ken Simpson.

As there was no opposition to the club's proposed affiliation with BOCA, the TBO Executive decided to go ahead with the merger. President moved that "The club become a BOCA affiliated Group. The TBOI offers to pay the annual BOCA membership for the club's President to be the designated leader of the group"

Members please provide nibbles/savouries and drinks.

Should you wish to nominate someone as an office bearer, please complete and forward the nomination to Ann Shore by Friday, 11 October.

**TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS INC
NOMINATION FORM FOR EXECUTIVE POSITIONS 1996-97
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD MONDAY 14 OCTOBER 1996**

POSITION:
NOMINEE:
NOMINATED BY:
SECONDED BY:
ACCEPTANCE (Signature of Nominee):
DATE:1996

COMING EVENTS

September Outing

Location: Highfields/Cooby Areas
Date: Sunday, 29 September
Leader: Nicci Thompson (076) 343 074
Time: 7:30 a.m.

Info: Swift parrots were seen in the area during winter. Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters appear to be resident at Highfields Falls. Head north from Toowoomba and take the James Byrne Centre turnoff. **This is not the usual way to Highfields Falls.** Meet Nicci along this road. BYO everything. Later the group will visit Cooby Dam. Read Nicci's article in this newsletter if you need further persuading.

October Outing

Location: Annual Species Count
Date: 26-27 October
Leader: Michael Atzeni (076) 392 761
Time: All weekend

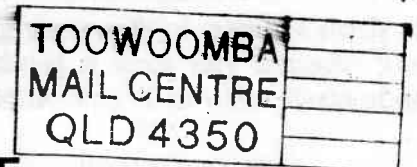
Info: This is an important event. Small groups, each containing at least one experienced birder, will cover the TBO study area. If you wish to participate, contact Michael for allocation to a group. Preliminary groups will be organised at the AGM. Let me know in advance if you'd like to cover a specific area for the survey.

November Outing

Location: Mulgowie/Thornton area
Date: Sunday, 24 November
Time: 7:00 a.m.

Info: More in next newsletter.

If undeliverable return to
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