



# TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

(An Affiliated Group of the Bird Observers Club of Australia)

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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. 253 - March 1997**

## EDITORIAL:

As I sit finishing this newsletter I am being serenaded by a Whipbird in nearby lantana. They have been absent for several dry years and I suspect his presence has something to do with the lantana shooting up spectacularly. About a week ago, I called it close up to the house by doing my best rendition of the first part of his call. It obliged with an answering crack every time, even when I had only just started to make a sound.

This newsletter contains something for everyone. The **Franklinvale Outing** report by Michael Hirst whom I trust is enjoying North Queensland and grandchildren, Malcolm Wilson's story on the **colonisation the Darling Downs by Common Mynas**, our third **Murray-Darling Project** story, this time by Ken Wells and a tempting tale regarding the **Peach Tree NP via Jimna** by Wes and Norma Sturdee, who have recently joined the club. John Harris also chips in with the **report on the recent wader outing**.

Many thanks to all contributors but could we please have more articles?

## OUTING REPORT - FRANKLINVALE, 23 February 1997

The advantage of our 7:00 a.m. rendezvous was well demonstrated on the trip to Franklinvale near Grandchester. It allowed us to walk in comparatively cool conditions along a tree-lined gully in one of the station paddocks, though it did not protect us from the swarms of mosquitoes, that we put up in the long wet grass.

Pheasant Coucals were climbing clumsily in the roadside trees, and a Channel-billed Cuckoo called as we started off, while we disturbed what was probably a button-quail from a ditch.

Grey-crowned Babblers were calling and when we caught up with them, one flew over a nest and poked its head inside. There were a couple of Sacred Kingfishers, several Dollarbirds and numerous Scaly-breasted Lorikeets. A single Brown Quail took off at our approach, but we could not flush the remainder of

the covey. We decided to move and on the way to our hosts, many of us caught sight of a flock of White-throated Needle-tails.

By the time we arrived at the homestead, we were quite warm and appreciated the cold drinks which Mrs Mort so kindly provided while we ate our smoko on the large shady veranda. It was a privilege to see this lovely old house, the home of the Morts since 1870 and its beautiful garden.

We then drove down to the Franklinvale Creek where the sceptics among us were dumbfounded when the Mort's son Harry and his dog Brandy escorted the entire group on a raft along a peaceful stretch of the river. The raft, built by Harry, was powered by a silent electric motor. The slow, quiet progress up the surprisingly long and deep waterhole was a joy, and ideally suited to bird-watching in luxury on such a hot day. Undoubtedly the highlight of the day was the Azure Kingfisher seen to good advantage by all. Harry cut the motor, allowing us to see its profile and admire its rich rufous underparts as it moved to a nearby twig and displayed its wonderful azure back.

A pair of Plumed Whistling Ducks swam ahead and walked out onto a sandbank at the end of the waterhole. We saw Superb Fairy-wrens, Bar-shouldered Doves and many water dragons. A Dusky Moorhen fled in panic, keeping well in the shelter of the vegetation lining the banks. We heard Brown Honeyeaters in the Callistemons but saw no finches, not even in the garden, where they used to be plentiful. Thankyou Harry for a wonderful experience.

We are most grateful to Paul, Leith and Harry Mort for allowing us to visit their property and enjoying their kind hospitality.

Michael Hirst

**Species List:** White-necked Heron, White-faced Heron, Straw-necked Ibis, Wandering Whistling-Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Australian Wood Duck, Australian Kestrel, Brown Quail, Dusky Moorhen, Feral Pigeon, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Crested Pigeon, Galah, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Pale-headed Rosella, Common Koel, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Pheasant Coucal, White-throated Needle-tail, Azure Kingfisher, Laughing Kookaburra, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Willie Wagtail, Grey-crowned Babbler, Noisy Miner, Brown Honeyeater, Mistletoebird, Striated Pardalote, Figbird, Australian Magpie-lark, Grey Butcherbird, Torresian Crow.

## THE COMMON MYNA

Over many years, the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* has been spreading westwards from Toowoomba and surrounding areas. Several introductions of the Common Myna are recorded in Australia in the period between 1862 and 1872. According to R.B. Walker (1952), they were first released at Cairns in 1918 by a Mr B. Robinson, who also took eight to Toowoomba in the Darling Downs. Walker records that they were thought to have been introduced in the Biddeston area by the Hon. A J Thynne, and nested there in 1921-22.

Mrs J Loveday (1958), the then President of the Toowoomba Field Naturalists' Club wrote in March 1958 - "for some time now the Indian Mynah has been quite common in the country areas and it was quite a surprise to find it in Toowoomba. However, now it is the most unusual when driving around the suburbs, or even in the city itself, not to find these birds. Recently, I found parties of ten or more in the town area. Last Saturday, 8 February, I was attracted by a large flock of Starlings flying over. However, an unusual call made me pay more attention, and I discovered several Indian Mynahs in the flock".

Although the birds were there, I did not keep any records of them between Toowoomba and Bowenville on the Warrego Highway. The Mynas were at Biddeston in July 1961, and Brookvale Park on 7 September, 1968.

Mr M J Hirst (1974) in a letter to the Editor of "Urimbirra", the monthly Newsletter of the Chinchilla Field Naturalists' Club, wrote "Today I saw three Indian Mynahs on *Carn Brea* on Oakey Creek. Hence they have moved another 7 km west since I saw them on the Bowenville Reserve in October, 1973". The letter was dated 25 July 1974.

On 20 June 1976, they were at Irvingdale, north of Bowenville and were well established at *Victory Downs* 15 km east of Dalby during 1976. During February 1983, Mynas were recorded perched on cattle at *Kommamurra*, north of *Victoria Downs* and at Kaimkillenbun, 20 km north-east of Dalby.

At Bell, 30 km north of Dalby, Mr J Sorley (pers com) told me that four birds arrived at his property 10 km north-west of Bell during 1991. Now they are well established in the area and have been recorded east of Bell in the foothills of the Bunya Mountains.

The birds continued moving on a wide front. On 21 September 1989, Mocatta's Corner received its quota. At Loudoun Bridge on the Condamine River 8 km south-west of Dalby on 26 September 1992, I saw five birds perching on cattle. In October-November 1993, several birds were noted, also perched on cattle 9 km west of Dalby. My final record is 15 November 1996, when I recorded two birds at Macalister, 26 km north-west of Dalby.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that these birds have moved through these districts over a broad front. The spread of these birds is of a slow but steady colonisation, and after a period, it appears that excess birds move on to the next suitable location.

As it has taken all those years for these birds to arrive at Dalby and district, I wonder if there is any limit to the extension of their range?

Malcolm Wilson

#### REFERENCES:

- Hirst, MJ      1974, "Urimbirra" Vol.7 No. 11.  
 Loveday, J    1958, *The Darling Downs Naturalist* No. 68.  
 Walker, RB    1952, "Indian Mynah on the Darling Downs" *Emu*: 64-65

#### PEACH TREE NATIONAL PARK

Wes and I thought other members may be interested to read of our recent visit to the Peach Tree National Park via Jimna, where we observed 34 species including the usual Rufous and Grey Fantails, Satin Bowerbirds, Eastern Yellow Robin, Bell Miners and Spangled Drongo.

However, we received our greatest thrill in observing the antics of a Paradise Riflebird quite close to our camp. He was prising the bark off a large gum tree, working meticulously around the tree, and seemingly unperturbed by our presence.

The Peach Tree Park has a large variety of birds owing to the diverse habitats in the area, and I've attached a complete species list of birds we noticed there.

Wes and Norma Sturdee

**Species list:** Australian Magpie-lark, House Sparrow, Satin Bowerbird, Laughing Kookaburra, Noisy Miner, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Paradise Riflebird, Australian King Parrot, Crimson Rosella, White-throated Treecreeper, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Rufous Fantail, Variegated Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy wren, Grey Shrike-thrush, Restless Flycatcher, Lewin's Honeyeater, Grey Fantail, Australian Magpie, Torresian Crow, Golden Whistler, Eastern Whipbird, White-browed Scrubwren, Jacky Winter, Eastern Spinebill, Brown Gerygone, Spangled Drongo, Red-browed Firetail, Bell Miner, Emerald Dove, Crested Pigeon, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.

### MANLY/WYNNUM OUTING 9 MARCH 1997

It seems that every excursion I lead with the TBO, there is a wet weather forecast for some time of the day. The same for our recent "Shorebird Sunday". I was pleased with the attendance of people from Dalby, Esk, Toowoomba and Brisbane.

Our first port of call (or in this case harbour) was the breakwater behind the Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron at Manly. This is the most accessible high-tide roost for waders in Moreton Bay and never fails to turn up at least a dozen wader species. With scopes of all shapes and sizes in hand, we settled at the first of the three ponds to observe its lodgers: Pied Stilts, Red-necked Stints, Lesser Golden Plover, Whimbrels, Large Sand Plover, Bar-tailed Godwits, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers. Then onto the next two ponds which revealed Terek Sandpipers, Mongolian Sand Plovers, Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers (lots of Pied but only one Sooty), Grey-tailed Tattler, Ruddy Turnstone, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Eastern Curlew. With 17 waders seen, a number of members were racking their brains trying to figure out how many "lifers" they had just added. A start of 27 species was worth getting wet for, although not in the fashion that I had expected with Cyclone Justin whipping up the incoming tide against the breakwater and producing lots of spray in areas where we were often standing. At this stage, Don Gaydon had to depart so we continued onto our next stop - the Wynnum Boardwalk.

The boardwalk, which stretches some hundreds of metres through a mangrove forest is an ideal spot to observe those species that frequent this habitat. Here we added Collared Kingfisher, Mangrove Gerygone, Large Egret, Grey Fantail, possibly a Leaden or Satin Flycatcher female and a White-throated Treecreeper. What had seemed to be quiet and birdless at the start turned out to be fruitful when a group of us had good views at the gerygone and an immature and adult kingfisher together. Another 22 species were added here. We then took the long way around to Lytton which was effectively just a strip of water about 20 metres wide from where we had been standing, but that is another story.

I had planned to join the Wader Study Group netting on Fisherman Island, and unable to make contact by mobile phone, we travelled to the site to find it had been a quiet day with only forty birds netted. We then returned to the now dry Lytton "swamps" for one last chance at adding some more birds to the list and like a good batsman we were aiming for fifty species for the day. After a brief look and lots of conversation we reached the half century and another six as well.

A good day was had by all and I hope that it can continue for years to come as even some of the more experienced birders were still unsure about some of their waders and the newer ones with writers' cramp from all their ticks.

John Harris

### LESLIE DAM WATERBIRD SURVEY

Three years ago, Fiona and I began monthly waterbird counts at Leslie Dam as part of the R.A.O.U. Murray-Darling Waterbird Project. The dam site was previously grazed by cattle and sheep and largely cleared of trees, so the shoreline is mostly open grassland on soil that is granite derived.

Our surveys began during the recent protracted drought. At its worst in late '94, the dam's capacity was down to 3% of its total, when Sandy and Glen Creeks were within their old banks, and mud flats and sand banks were prevalent.. These soon were largely covered by vegetation up to a metre tall, and it was in this period that we recorded the greatest number of species (21), though never particularly large numbers of any one species. Sightings then included Marsh Sandpipers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-capped Plovers, Glossy Ibis and Red-necked Avocets which disappeared once the water level rose sharply overnight in February '95 and inundated most of the sandbanks, mudflats and shallow waters.

There was another sudden rise of water level in January '96 to 38% of capacity and the subsequent count of eight species - sixteen birds.

Since April-May '96, the dam has been more or less full, and there is now only one inlet where we hope to see something unusual. Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills, Straw-necked Ibis, the occasional Darter, and White-necked Heron are generally there. Ducks vary in numbers as do the Pelicans. We counted over 200 Eurasian Coot (all ages) in June '96; by September we saw none. Now we get quite excited by other than Australasian Grebe, Silver Gull, Hardhead, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, maned Duck, Pelican, and Little Black and Little Pied Cormorant. Once it was three Australasian Shovelers, another time a solitary Black-fronted Dotterel and three Chestnut Teal, and yet another a pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles, which we haven't seen again.

The species sighted during the three years since October '94 are listed:

Great Crested Grebe, Hoary-headed Grebe, Pelican, Darter, Pied, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Little Egret, Intermediate Egret, Great Egrets, Glossy Ibis, Sacred Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Black Swan, Australian Shelduck, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, Australasian Shoveler, Pink-eared Duck, Australian Wood Duck, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Masked Lapwing, Red-capped Dotterel, Black-fronted Dotterel, Black-winged Stilt, Red-necked Avocet, Marsh Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Silver Gull, Whiskered Tern.

Ken Wells

