



# 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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## CLUB OFFICERS:

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

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**NEWSLETTER No. 261 - November/December 1997**

## EDITORIAL:

Firstly, if your name is highlighted on the mailing label, then at last count you were **unfinancial** and this will be your last newsletter pending receipt of your subscription, since we're on a tight budget. We value your membership so please renew. Any back issues will be issued when you are once again financial. Secondly, please note our **new postal address and telephone numbers** and accordingly adjust your diaries, mailing lists etc. A 3-month mail redirection is in place. Thirdly, this is a joint November/December issue, with the next due in January.

Fitting tributes to **Ann Shore** appear in this issue which can merely touch on her remarkable life and impact on others, her contribution to this club, the Withcott community and society in general. And whilst I'm sure many of us are still feeling an enormous loss, I'm equally sure Ann would be wanting us to display some of her trademark resilience, and get on with life and, of course, birdwatching - so we'll do exactly that.

Terry Pacey reports on **strange, annoying, suburban Torresian Crow behaviour** and Malcolm Wilson reports on **thornbill breeding activity around Dalby**. We catch up on a backlog of **bird sightings** including a swag of **impressive seabird records** from Rod Hobson and Michael Mathieson on Fraser Island. Thanks to everyone for their bird notes and please keep sending them in.

And there was no shortage of birdwatching on our **October species census**. Several regular participants enjoyed that birdwatch-as-if-there's-no-tomorrow sensation yet again, while others did so for the first time. Some indulged both days and the census was very successful with **around 150 species** recorded by the 20-odd participants. Waterfowl numbers were relatively low, and raptors and cuckoos were few and far between. It was only due to some last ditch efforts that the number of raptor species picked up. The lack of cuckoos begs the question as to what happens to them during drought conditions. Are their numbers down everywhere or do they concentrate in areas not so hard hit by the drought? And what effect will the resultant excellent breeding conditions, following the good rainfall, have on their numbers locally?

Highlights of the day depended on the individual, but personally it was the wonderful view of an extremely co-operative Singing Bushlark dust-bathing by the roadside, with a Richard's Pipit in close attendance, both birds apparently unnerved by the three carloads of birdwatchers pulled up alongside them. With the added bonus of being able to directly compare these similar species, it proved a great identification exercise, particularly for the young players and it was, as it turned out, a good refresher course for others. A genuine multiple choice situation if ever I saw one! A full census report will appear at a later date.

The QOS Twitchathon has also been and gone and the TBO's Unleaded Petrels came in third with 198 species in 24 hours, recovering well from an inglorious Mt Glorius visit on Saturday afternoon, where a few expected species just didn't play ball! The winning team bagged 224 species. We live and learn and are already planning for next year's twitch! Many thanks for the generous donations received so far.

Finally, on behalf of the Executive I wish everyone a safe, happy Christmas/New Year break and hope you get a chance to enjoy some quality birding time and the inclination to write me an article. Cheers!!

### **OBITUARY: ANN HILTON SHORE (9 October 1928 - 16 October 1997)**



**“That lovely young lady from the bird club with a voice like a lark.”  
Del Atzeni (1979)**

I have never forgotten this priceless quote from my mother, made even more so by the fact that, at the time, she had suggested Ann might be the girl for me.

It was my mother's first impressions of Ann following a phone conversation with her not long after I'd joined the club, having never seen her, and not realising Ann was 34 years older than me and happily married! The irony of it was, that it wasn't that far from the truth. I *did* end up with a charming lady for a friend and the best Secretary a bird club President could wish for.

And it was no surprise to hear her eulogy conclude with the observation that Ann *was* a lady in every respect and that would be how most will remember her.

Fortunately, we had time to formally thank Ann in writing following our recent AGM, before she passed away two days later. She was deeply moved and appreciative of the club's vote of thanks.

Ann had many interests besides birdwatching, both in England and then in Australia after she married and settled here in the late 1970's. We honour Ann and showcase her life with tributes from Pat Cleary and Marilyn Jacobs, and conclude with an extract from the Club's letter of thanks which was read to her by Dana McCown at her hospital bedside in the presence of Pat Cleary and myself on 14 October.

Michael Atzeni

### **ABOUT MY FRIEND**

Before Ann came to Australia in 1978 she worked as a designer in the Textile Industry and lived in Central London. Ann was an active political worker from 1961 to 1978, in the Westminster district of Mayfair/Soho and was district secretary from mid 1960 until 1978.

Ann was a foundation member of the Soho Society, founded in 1972 as an amenity body serving the local community and was their secretary for the Society's first nine months and thereafter a member of their Management and Planning Committees. She represented this Society on the Planning Committee of the Westminster Society, viewing all planning applications coming before Westminster City Council from aesthetic, conservation and general aspects.

As well as her long service to the TBOI., Ann was greatly involved with the community as a member of the Withcott Progress Association Inc. She served as secretary from September 1991 until July, 1997. Only illness prevented Ann from continuing in this role. In her capacity as secretary for this organisation, she represented Withcott at various conferences and meetings concerned with problems and future land use in the

Lockyer Valley. These included the State Government initiative, South East Queensland - 2001, and more recently Queensland Transport's Toowoomba Region Transport Network Study re a second range crossing.

Bush regeneration, tree planting projects and Clean-Up Australia Day were high on Ann's list of community activities. Ann's support and encouragement of her fellow executive members was unwavering and Life Membership of the Withcott Progress Association Inc. was awarded to Ann in 1997.

Ann was also a member of the Toowoomba group, Friends of Escarpment Parks, and their logo is based on Ann's original design. She was greatly involved with the Department of Environment and Heritage Nature Search 2001 recording birds in South-East Queensland. She participated in its conferences and undertook surveys with her usual diligence. For her services to the community, both here and in England, the Withcott Lions Club nominated Ann for the District Governor's Community Service Award which she received in 1993.

Ann's love of the Arts - classical music, opera, ballet, art and literature was shared by her close friends. Regular trips to Queensland's Performing Arts Complex were undertaken to hear and see such performances and exhibitions which were shared with great enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Ann loved meeting people and visiting family members and friends here and overseas. She was a caring and loving friend whose cheerful and positive attitude to life was an inspiration and wonderful encouragement to those of us who loved her.

It's truly been a great privilege to have known Ann Hilton Shore.

Pat Cleary.

### VALE ANN SHORE

#### **"Farewell to our dear friend, long-standing secretary and fellow 'birdo'."**

It was with disbelief and extreme sadness that I read the funeral notices in the October 17 edition of The Chronicle. Not Ann! I knew she had cancer, but because of her spirit and determination I was confident she would overcome any problems - after all she had been a Bird Club officer for 18 years and I just figured she would always be there if we needed her.

I knew Ann for the 19 years she had been a member of the Toowoomba Bird Observers Inc (formerly the Toowoomba Bird Club). She and John joined the club in November 1978 as they knew the founding president, Bill Jolly, who was a neighbour just down the road from "Shorelands" in Withcott. It was only a year later, on 13 October 1979, that Ann was elected as Secretary/Treasurer of the club. I can recall that she was a bit reluctant to take on the role of Treasurer but she said she would be happy to do it if we had confidence in her - which we all did. She held that difficult joint position until the AGM in October 1985 (a total of 6 years) when the job was split into the two positions of Secretary and Treasurer. Ann was very pleased to give up the Treasurer's portfolio but happy to continue as Secretary, a position which she carried out in a most competent and efficient manner for 12 years until this past AGM (Oct 1997) where, due to ill health, she was forced to resign.

Ann wrote many articles for the newsletter, lead many club outings, helped with numerous bird counts and Hobby 'n' Craft shows and was a guiding light for many of the seven presidents she served under - Bill Jolly, Ron Hopkinson, Marilyn Jacobs, Lesley Beaton (twice), Angela Kilmartin, Pat McConnell, and Michael Atzeni (twice). I remember the cups of coffee during our executive meetings at her kitchen table and the talks about bird sightings and club business.

Ann was loved and respected by all members of the Bird Club over the years. She always had a cheery word for everyone and was such a friendly, lovely person, always willing to help out wherever she could.

Even though I have not been very active with the Club during the past 10 years (except for the monthly checklists), I always maintained contact with Ann as I knew she was always there. As Michael Atzeni says in his October '97 editorial, "An enormous hole has been left in the club and Ann will be missed by all those who had the pleasure of knowing her."

Thankyou Ann for your many years of dedication and service to our club. I know you loved your time with us and we loved our time with you. We will miss you tremendously - but we will never forget you!

Marilyn Jacobs

#### **Extract from the Club's Letter of Thanks**

"Last night spelt the end of an era within the club and our AGM was not the same without you. Whilst we may have elected a new TBO Secretary, both past and current members and the thousands of individuals and groups you have corresponded with over the years will only ever associate one person with the Secretary position - Ann Shore.

So congratulations on becoming a legend in your own time. No words can adequately sum up your influence in the club. Your dedication and diligence as secretary, your level of involvement with other club affairs, and your accommodating, kind and friendly nature are second to none. Your willingness to take on the Secretary office continuously for nearly 20 years has most certainly been the difference between the club surviving and folding on several occasions in the past. You thoroughly deserved the only life membership awarded by TBO and you are an inspiration to those that have had the pleasure of working alongside you. We also acknowledge the contribution of your late husband, John, for supporting you in your role, particularly during the times when you were both extremely busy with other things.

Your love affair with the club has always been very obvious. I hope you are aware it has never been a one-sided affair; that the club loves you just as dearly and that your involvement in club affairs and outings will be deeply missed by everybody. On behalf of all those associated with TBO, both past and present, for want of better words, thanks for being such a staunch and stalwart Secretary and a marvellous ambassador for the club. We will strive to maintain your high standards in the years to come but you can never be replaced."

#### **BLUE ROCK THRUSH**

For the twitchers and listers among us, a male Blue Rock Thrush, the first Australian record of this species, has been resident in the Devil's Kitchen Headland area of the Noosa N.P. for about a month and is still present. The most recent news is that it has been roosting in the Sea Cave near Paradise Point. From first light to about 0600 seems to be the best chance of seeing it.

My limited knowledge of the species is that it is resident around the Mediterranean region and some of the population migrates to various parts of Asia. The theory is that this particular bird saw all the smoke and just kept flying, liked what he saw at Sunshine Beach, so decided to stay for the summer! Anyone interested in further details can contact me or the Records Officer.

Michael Atzeni

#### **THORNBILL NESTING OBSERVATIONS AROUND DALBY**

On our travels through the Bull Oak country at Lake Broadwater on 23rd September 1997, we saw several Chestnut-rumped Thornbills. Proceeding on to an area of Bull Oak, Belah and Poplar Box, we observed two more Chestnut-rumped Thornbills. One observant member of our group noticed one bird fly up to a dead hollow tree. On investigation we found a nest in a split in the tree, approximately four metres above the ground; the bottom part of the nest appeared to

be old material and most likely the upper section looked to have been added recently. One of the birds entered the nest and settled down comfortably.

Gordon Beruldsen in "A Field Guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds", states "the nest is a dome shaped structure with a small, slightly hooded entrance made from soft dry grasses, bark and other dry vegetation, loosely and sparingly bound with spiders' webbing and lined with fine soft grasses, plant down and feathers."

Other thornbill nestings noticed were at Dunmore Forestry where Inland Thornbills were observed gathering nesting material; and at our home near the centre of Dalby, where the Yellow-rumped Thornbills have already raised one family and judging by their refurbishment of the nest, are preparing to start another. The last two recordings were during the month of October.

Marjorie and Malcolm Wilson, Dalby.

### STONE THE CROWS!

The antics of crows and ravens have supported many a tale since European settlement of Australia. Why this fascination for these brash, plain, noisy members of the Family Corvidae? Is it because the immediate association with European corvids gave them special significance to home-sick settlers or are they truly as clever as the myths suggest?

We all have heard the stories of crows that can count. You know the one. Six people go down to the creek and one hides with his gun while five return. But are the crows fooled? No way - the crows wait until the sixth person has finally deserted his lonely post and returned to the others as a much deflated hunter. Or what about the one where the crows can tell the difference between a stick and a gun? I have it on good authority that this is "ridgy didge" or any other expression Australians use to enforce upon us the sincerity of the story we are currently being told.

Being a natural sceptic, I have actually tried a few of these "tricks" to test the intelligence of crows. Whenever I have stated this, I have always been assured that, "It's the crows where you live, mate. Fair dinkum, the crows out near ...(insert your favourite place)... can't be fooled. Yours have become too urbanised." Who am I to doubt such statements? Look at the city drivers .. they have obviously suffered a decrease in intelligence so maybe it could happen to crows.

Recent events in my backyard, however, have convinced me. *Corvus orru*, at least, is a formidable foe worthy of respect by all of us. What has brought about this change on my part? No, not senility, but rather recent events in my own suburban backyard have converted me to a true believer.

With pressure of work and declining health, it was decided that some of the large garden beds in the back yard and the beds of annuals in the front yard should be converted to bark gardens with natives planted. The idea was to cut down on gardening and to encourage birds at the same time. The ground was dug up thoroughly and let rest for a week or two. It was then dug again to remove any last bulbs, weeds, etc and then saturated. A thick (I mean thick) layer of newspaper was then laid over the bare earth and also saturated. Pine bark then covered everything. Plants were then carefully placed for maximum effect and my wife and I sat back and congratulated ourselves on a job well done. I know this is all very ho! hum! and you've all done it yourself at sometime but as they say in all the best stories, "This is only the beginning."

Our troubles started very early. The neighbour's cats found that the bark on the front gardens was hampering their daily toiletries and simply removed the bark in a number of places and proceeded to do what cats do when confronted with wet paper above their usual "spot". An "emu parade" every second day and some clever use of the hose seemed to solve the problem. I think my neighbour was at a loss to explain how her cats were so wet during a very dry period. Mission accomplished. Once more my wife and I drank the celebratory fluid.

Suddenly a more formidable foe emerged. This was in the back garden beds. Bits of bark were appearing all over the lawn, the washing, the patio, the driveway and even in the rain gauge. This was then followed by shredded paper blowing in all the aforementioned places as well as the neighbour's yard, the fence and the established trees. This was obviously not the work of some, by now, very wet cats. Careful observation and some brilliant thinking ruled out earthworms, spiders, small children and small birds. That left the crows and currawongs. Which was it? Neither were very cooperative for some time and the poor currawongs were being equally blamed. (I hardly think that currawongs are the most innocent of birds, but that is another article.) Finally it was recognised that the humble Torresian Crow was the culprit.

It was all very well deciding who was to blame, but what could be done? For several weeks, patching became the norm, on a daily basis. Have you ever watched the men working on the roads patching up potholes only to see new ones develop right next door within a few days? Well now I know why those workmen look as if they don't like their job. Our brilliant idea to cut down on gardening had become a daily nightmare. After several weeks the decision was finally made. Dig up the lot and start again with a new lot of paper and bark, even thicker this time.

This worked - for a week - and then it started again. I was finally able to observe one crow at work by hiding in the sunroom and peeping through the blind. If the neighbours had spotted me they would have immediately labelled me as a pervert. Come to think of it, maybe I was seen. One neighbour seems to go to extremes to avoid me these days.

The crow carefully scraped away the bark leaving something like the circular scrape of *Turnix melanogaster*. This area was about 30 cm in diameter. When it was completely cleared of bark, the pecking and tearing of the paper began. Some of this paper was simply scattered while other pieces were carried off. How far they were carried I do not know but judging by the condition of the neighbour's yard at times, I do not think it was too far. There seems to have been no recurrence as yet but I have been fooled before.

All this raises a number of questions.

1. Why are the birds doing it? Is it to obtain nesting material? Is it to obtain food (seems unlikely)? Is it just to aggravate me (my first choice)?
2. How many birds are actually behaving like this? I don't know about you but I have difficulty telling one crow from another.
3. Why only the backyard? Don't crows like performing in the full view of the public?
4. **HOW DO I STOP THEM?????????????**

Terry Pacey

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

Fan-tailed Cuckoo	12/05/97	Redwood Park, T'mba	MH
Varied Triller	13/05/97	Redwood Park, T'mba	MH, KK, JG
Red-capped Robin	04/06/97	Connor's Rd, Helidon	JL
Little Eagle	10/06/97	Prince Henry Drive, T'mba	NT
Topknot Pigeon	10/06/97	Prince Henry Drive, T'mba	NT
Barn Owl	11/06/97	Mahogany St, T'mba	A&SF
Little Eagle	19/06/97	USQ, Toowoomba	PM
Fairy Prion <sup>a</sup>	23/06/97	Govi Creek, Fraser Is.	RH
Fairy Prion <sup>a</sup>	25/06/97	Eurong, Fraser Is.	RH
Southern Giant Petrel	23/06/97	Eurong, Fraser Is.	RH, MM
Southern Giant Petrel <sup>a</sup>	25/06/97	Poyungan Rocks, Fraser Is.	RH, MM

Sooty Albatross <sup>b</sup>	23/06/97	Eurong, Fraser Is.	RH, MM
Westland Petrel <sup>a,c</sup>	24/06/97	Poyungan Rocks, Fraser Is.	RH, MM
White-headed Petrel <sup>a,d</sup>	24/06/97	Poyungan Rocks, Fraser Is.	RH, MM
White-tailed Tropicbird	25/06/97	Eurong, Fraser Is.	RH, MM
White Tern <sup>d</sup>	25/06/97	Eurong, Fraser Is.	MM
Antarctic Prion <sup>a,d</sup>	25/06/97	Eurong, Fraser Is.	RH, MM
Little Shearwater <sup>a,d</sup>	26/06/97	Eurong, Fraser Is.	RH, MM
Red-tailed Blk Cockatoo	29/06/97	Connor's Rd, Helidon	JL
Ground Cuckoo-shrike	03/07/97	E. of Withcott	NT
Ground Cuckoo-shrike	20/07/97	Morris Rd, nr. Gowrie Junction	NT
Little Eagle	27/07/97	E. of Helidon	NT
Topknot Pigeon	09/08/97	Upper Flagstone Ck	KK, MH
Little Corella	12/08/97	Trost Rd, Helidon	JL & family
Little Corella	23/08/97	Withcott Village	AHS
Rainbow Bee-eater <sup>e</sup>	28/08/97	Lake Broadwater	MW
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	30/08/97	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	JL & family
Bush Stone-curlew	30/08/97	Harlaxton	O&JB
Curlew Sandpiper (2) <sup>f</sup>	31/08/97	Lake Broadwater	MW
Latham's Snipe (2) <sup>f</sup>	31/08/97	Lake Broadwater	MW
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (6) <sup>f</sup>	31/08/97	Lake Broadwater	MW
Latham's Snipe	06/09/97	Lowe's Rd Swamp, via Grantham	A&SF
Comb-crested Jacana	06/09/97	Lowe's Rd Swamp, via Grantham	A&SF
Glossy Ibis	06/09/97	Karrasch's Lagoon, via Grantham	A&SF
Forest Kingfisher	20/09/97	Dalby	MW
Apostlebird	25/09/97	Baillie Henderson Hosp., T'mba	A&SF
Red Wattlebird	04/10/97	Clifford Gardens, T'mba	A&SF
Osprey (1)	05/10/97	Lowe's Rd Swamp, via Grantham	MA, KM
Pacific Baza (4)	05/10/97	Ford's Rd, N. of Grantham	MA, KM
Dollarbird <sup>e</sup>	06/10/97	Dalby	MW
Crimson Rosella	14/10/97	Russell St, Toowoomba	MH
Black Falcon	26/10/97	Wellcamp Rd nr Westbrook	A&SF
Little Curlew (12)	27/10/97	Bill Gunn Dam, via Laidley	JH
Nankeen Night Heron	01/11/97	T'mba Waterbird Habitat	A&SF
Black-chinned Honeyeater	02/11/97	Connor's Rd, Helidon	MA, PM, KM, KW
Barred Cuckoo-Shrike (1)	02/11/97	Redwood Park	MA, PM, KM, KW
Brown Falcon (with chicks)	02/11/97	Iredale	MA, PM, KM, KW
Spotted Harrier (immature)	02/11/97	Iredale	MA, PM, KM, KW

MA	M. Atzeni	A&SF	A&S Frederiks	JH	J. Hadley	MH	M. Hirst
RH	R. Hobson	MW	Malcolm Wilson	PM	P. McConnell	KM	K. McKeown
KW	K. Watson	O&JB	O&J Booth	KK	K. Kerr	MM	M. Mathieson
AHS	Ann Shore	JG	J. Grant	NT	N. Thompson		

<sup>a</sup> Specimen held Queensland Museum

<sup>b</sup> One of two Queensland records. First live bird.

<sup>c</sup> Second Queensland record.

<sup>d</sup> Rare visitor to Queensland waters. Kerguelen Petrel and Blue Petrel also recorded on Fraser Is (RH).

<sup>e</sup> First record for season in Dalby district.

<sup>f</sup> Gone three days later.

