



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

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

p.o. box 4730 - toowoomba east - 4350

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

CLUB OFFICERS:

President -	Ken McKeown	07 4630 3774	Editor -	Michael Atzeni	07 4639 2761
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'To encourage the observation and study of the birds of the Toowoomba area'

NEWSLETTER No. 262 - January 1998

EDITORIAL:

I've always been intrigued by the fact that our membership remains basically static and is rather small. We lose a few and gain a few each year but never seem to achieve a steady increase as might be expected in a city with an increasing population of around 90,000. Historically, we have promoted the club at Hobby'n'Craft shows, and more recently at World Environment Day. We have had limited success obtaining new members in this manner. In contrast, over the last couple of years, Michael Hirst has been recruiting new members from the U3A's "Birding for Beginners" course left, right and centre!

Our newsletter is sent to various local and interstate birding and environmental groups as well as the Toowoomba Municipal Library and the USQ library. My gut feeling is that very few of the public read the newsletters distributed locally. I'm not even sure if they are made readily accessible. In the '70's, I religiously read the newsletter sent to the Toowoomba Municipal Library during the 4 years it took me to join the club, but I don't recall one other person wanting to fight me for it in that time. Nor has any other member indicated to me that this was their mode of introduction to the club.

Most new members join after attending one of our monthly outings. The executive have decided this is by far the best way to attract members so, this month, we have resorted to the media and advertised our next outing in the Toowoomba Chronicle and hopefully, the Gatton Star. We have separate outings organised for Saturday, 24 January, to the Toowoomba Waterbird Habitat (7 am start) and Apex Lake, Gatton (7.30 am start). These outings will be repeated on the Sunday for convenience and, hopefully, those that get hooked Saturday, will roll up for another dose next day. Members are encouraged to attend and assist beginners.

We have an amusing report from Don Gaydon on the Stradbroke Island outing, one from me on the Ravensbourne outing and two from Nicci Thompson including one on the Birds Australia campout. The other big news is that an injured Gould's Petrel was found near the USQ in Toowoomba on 12th January. The bird was rescued from the road by a caring local, Alison Frost, and is currently being rehabilitated by TBO member, Clare Gover, with the help of local vet, Bob Doneley, and advice from a network of interested people. Further details will be published at a later date. At this stage, it appears to be *Pterodroma leucoptera caledonica* rather than the nominate race *P. l. leucoptera* described in the Australian field guides. Those interested in seeing the bird can contact me so we can arrange a mutually convenient time, once it has sufficiently recovered.

OUTING REPORT - STRADBROKE ISLAND 29/11/97

Slumbering peacefully on that hot, humid summer's morning, poor old Stradbroke Island lay blissfully unaware of the onslaught to which it would soon be subjected. For, not 15 km away, secretly disguised as holiday-makers and giving all the pretences of normality, several members of the Toowoomba Bird Observers slipped silently onboard the Stradbroke Island Ferry at Cleveland, unnoticed.

It was only upon landing at Dunwich that their real purpose was revealed. In the flash of an eye, and before any of their fellow passengers could react, binoculars, telescopes, field guides and giggle-hats appeared and the Toowoomba Bird Observers were unleashed upon the unsuspecting island like a cage full of hungry sparrowhawks into a pet shop. First on the agenda, of course, was a 'cuppa'.

It was high tide at Dunwich, so the wader-roost at 'One Mile' was the first to feel the brunt of our enthusiasm. Several hundred Bar-tailed Godwit were the dominant species, along with an occasional Eastern Curlew. A lady with two dogs, threatening to release them for some exercise amongst the resting birds, changed her mind at the last moment and decided to walk peacefully by. She may never realise just what a lucky decision that was, or how close she came to a gruesome end; clubbed to death with binoculars on the glorious waterfront of 'One Mile'.

North Stradbroke Island has two beautiful freshwater lakes in its central highlands, Brown Lake and Blue Lake. The former is surrounded by large stands of Melaleuca and Leptospermum which leach 'tannin' into the water, giving the lake a tea-coloured appearance. Blue Lake, however, is surrounded by Eucalypts, Banksia and grass-trees and contains water of exceptional clarity; a true oasis on a hot summer's day as large numbers of picnickers and swimmers testified. The birds drifted in and out of both locations, seeing many things the noisy throng had probably missed, such as Rainbow Bee-eaters, Brown Falcons, White-cheeked Honeyeaters, flowering Persoonia, and several species of carnivorous plant, Drosera. Then it was on to Amity Point for lunch, via Myora Springs. Along the way, a resplendent pair of Forest Kingfishers surveyed us from the wires, vibrant in their coats of blue and white. The mere sight of Ken McKeown, however, was enough to send them fleeing for their lives, white wing patches flashing like beacons in the midday sun.

Amity Point is often a good spot to find Dugong lolling in the shallow channel water where the sea-grass grows. Today, however we were not to be so lucky, and had to be content with the antics of Noisy Friarbirds and Brown Honeyeaters to entertain us as we ate our lunches.

The ocean was much more generous at Point Lookout where we had clear views of Manta Rays, Loggerhead Turtles, and a fairly large Seven-gilled Shark the moment we cast our eyes to sea. Things only got better with several schools of tuna, pods of Bottlenosed Dolphins, and an Osprey to add some variety. Unfortunately, I then had to leave the group for work commitments on the mainland, so duly said my goodbyes. Almost on cue following my departure, a Lesser Frigatebird appeared along with such verbal gems as "Thank heavens he's gone, we might finally see some birds now."

Wildlife then proceeded to flood in from all directions, I'm told. I particularly wish I'd been there to see that Osprey take the Dolphin, Richard. Many thanks to Ken McKeown, Nicci and Graham Thompson, Adele Warburton, Derrick and Helen Wilson, and Richard Thomis for your fine company. Species total: 43.

Don Gaydon.

OUTING REPORT - RAVENSBOURNE NATIONAL PARK. 14/12/97

When visiting Ravensbourne N.P., I always experience a degree of anticipation that something interesting will show up. Of course, Black-breasted Button-Quail are always high on the wish list but more often than not - and this trip was no exception - they fail to show and we have to settle for less cryptic thrills. Ken McKeown might well like to bracket the Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove alongside the Button-Quail: while many of us nonchalantly ticked the Rose-crowned Fruit-dove on call, having seen a few over the years, Ken was still trying to glimpse his first somewhere in the thick, uncompromising canopy and dipped yet again! Yes, the President has to earn his birds, just like everyone else. And everyone had to be content this time with only hearing the Paradise Riflebird and Noisy Pitta.

The highlight for several of us was the perfect view of a pair of Wompoo Pigeons perched fairly low and out in the open, a species that has no trouble evoking considerable pleasure on the rare occasions one gets to see them and even more so when you don't have to break your neck trying. I'm still looking forward to the day I find them in our survey area, perhaps in Redwood Park. To date, the only record in our Toowoomba survey area is of a dead specimen, handed in by a member of the public after it crashed into a household window.

Overall, a pleasant outing and a nice way to wrap up 1997.

Michael Atzeni

Species List: Grey Goshawk, Masked Lapwing, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Wonga Pigeon, Wompoo Fruit-Dove, Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, Topknot Pigeon, Galah, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Australian King Parrot, Crimson Rosella, Pale-headed Rosella, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Common Koel, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Pheasant Coucal, Laughing Kookaburra, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird, Noisy Pitta, White-throated Scrubwren, Large-billed Scrubwren, Brown Gerygone, Brown Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Lewin's Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Scarlet Honeyeater, Eastern Yellow Robin, Eastern Whipbird, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Black-faced Monarch, Magpie-lark, Rufous

Fantail, Grey Fantail, Cicadabird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Regent Bowerbird, Satin Bowerbird, Green Catbird, Paradise Riflebird, Richard's Pipit, Mistletoebird, Silvereye, Russet-tailed Thrush.

TWITCHING THE DAY AWAY

For several years now, the Queensland Ornithological Society has organised a Twitchathon to raise money for conserving endangered species. Participating individuals and teams have to locate as many species as possible in the set 24 hour period. There is no restriction on where you go, provided you stay in Queensland and don't resort to aircraft! Use of taped calls is not allowed and identification can be by call or sight, provided the majority of the team agree on the ID. To perform well requires a lot of thought on how to optimise your time. The event is demanding but nonetheless, great fun. Understandably, the whole event has to be an honour system.

Toowoomba has been represented by the one and only Unleaded Petrels most years. Pat McConnell, Ken McKeown, Kath Watson and I comprised this year's team. The following account details our latest effort, which yielded 198 species, and third spot overall.

Saturday 1/11/97

Half an hour before the noon start, we arrive at Lota expecting a low tide, but find a high one instead. This means we can now get most of the expected waders at the Manly Harbour high tide roost, thus saving valuable time by not having to track them down on the mudflats around the bay as originally planned. It seems luck is with us. Nonetheless, one nameless person who can't read a tide chart, copped some gentle ribbing!

We spend the lead up time checking out all the waders and terns, making sure we know roughly where a representative of each species is roosting. There are hundreds of birds here and it is quite challenging to locate all the different wader species, particularly those in low numbers. Midday and the twitch begins! Flitting between telescopes trained on particular species, and constantly confirming who has seen what, we record Pied Cormorant, Caspian, Little, and Gull-billed Tern, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Pied Oystercatcher, Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek, Curlew, and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Red-capped Plover, Greater and Lesser Sand Plover, Greenshank, Great and Red Knot; then Pacific Golden Plover, Richard's Pipit, House Martin and Brahminy Kite on the walk back to the car. By quarter past we're heading for the mangroves at Lota where we tick Little Egret and Mangrove Gerygone, but dip on Mangrove Heron and Mangrove Honeyeater.

At the next stop, the Wynnum Boardwalk, we pick up Rainbow Bee-eater, Bar-shouldered Dove, Mangrove Kingfisher, Osprey, White-browed Treecreeper, Grey Shrike-thrush, Variegated Fairy-wren, Mistletoebird, White-breasted Woodswallow and Great Egret. We catch up with the Mangrove Honeyeater near Fisherman's Island and score an unexpected Brown Goshawk. Time is all important and we have to leave the coast missing Whistling Kite, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Reef Egret and Mangrove Heron. We had already decided to skip Lake Samsonvale, a place we went to the previous year, but in hindsight, made a mistake as we probably could have added at least 4 or 5 more species. Instead we head across Brisbane, up through The Gap, on our way to Mt Glorious. This proves very unproductive travel time.

An afternoon tea stop near Ferny Grove finally gets the list ticking over again with Forest Kingfisher, Cicadabird, Lewin's and Scarlet Honeyeater, Striated Pardalote, Spangled Drongo and Dollarbird. On the way up Mt Glorious, passing many oncoming motorcyclists, each brandishing a death wish. We stop briefly and tick Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Striated Thornbill, Eastern Whipbird, and Red-browed Finch. In and around the rainforest at Miala NP on top of Mt Glorious, we add Regent and Satin Bowerbird, Brush Turkey, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Wonga Pigeon, Russet-tailed Thrush, Noisy Pitta, King Parrot, Yellow-throated, White-browed and Large-billed Scrubwren, Brown Thornbill, Brown Gerygone, Eastern Yellow Robin, Eastern Spinebill and Green Catbird. Further along, in D'Aguilar State Forest, we struggle long and hard for Crimson Rosella, Black-faced Monarch, Rufous Fantail, Paradise Riflebird, White-naped Honeyeater and White-headed Pigeon. Unfortunately, many species were not calling and as a result we dip on the likes of Wompoo and Rose-crowned Fruit-dove, Red-browed Treecreeper and Chowchilla. During a brief spotlighting session on dusk we hear a Boobook Owl, but there was not a Sooty, Powerful, or Masked Owl in sight. Surprise, surprise.

We then drive back to Kath's place at Highfields north of Toowoomba, but not before a well-earned feed of McDonalds near Gatton. We *did* deserve better grub. Hard to believe, but we didn't see one Barn Owl the whole way back, despite driving mainly quiet roads, including some of the usually reliable back roads around Grantham. However we did encounter a large Carpet Snake on the Murphy's Creek road - one that was extremely reluctant to move. In fact it became quite cranky with Pat's effort to coax it to the safety of the verge using an extended tripod. Eventually it got the message.

After a tally, cuppa and reflection on what could have been, we hit the sack around 10.30 p.m. with 106 species.

Sunday 2/11/97

We rise at 3.30 a.m. to catch the dawn chorus at Highfields Falls. We only add Little Lorikeet, Koel, Superb Fairy-wren, Grey Butcherbird, and Emerald Dove - a somewhat disappointing start to the day. However, the next foray is far more productive, namely, a quick drive around suburban Highfields capitalising on a bit of local knowledge. We pick off the various expected species including Galah, Common Bronzewing, Red-rumped Parrot, Scaly-breasted and Musk Lorikeet, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Grey-crowned Babbler, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and an unexpected Yellow Thornbill. We also cross paths with the resident Long-billed Corellas, but being a feral population we can't count them. On the way to Toowoomba, we tick Nankeen Kestrel, Black-shouldered Kite, and a lone Apostlebird. Unfortunately, Kath and I are the only ones to see a Ground Cuckoo-shrike take flight from a gully not far from the farmhouse where Ken and Pat are still viewing the Apostlebird, so we can't count it. You feel as though you've dipped on a 'lifer' when this happens on a Twitchathon.

In Toowoomba we score Banded Lapwing on the aerodrome, Red Wattlebird near the Waterbird Habitat, Tawny Frogmouth, Noisy Friarbird and White-winged Triller in the University grounds, and at the Waterbird Habitat, Large Cormorant, Coot, Moorhen, Purple Swamphen, Clamorous Reed Warbler, and Intermediate Egret. Next stop is an unscheduled one at Redwood Park, in the hope of compensating for the poor show on Mt Glorious the day before. There we add Leaden Flycatcher, Speckled Warbler, Weebill, Barred Cuckoo-shrike, Double-barred Finch and Peaceful Dove. Unfortunately, we have to keep moving, minus Varied Triller and Spectacled Monarch.

Next additions are Chestnut Teal, Red-necked Avocet, Black-fronted Dotterel, Plumed Whistling-Duck and Grey Teal *en route* to Helidon. No luck however, with the usually dependable Azure Kingfisher at the Helidon Rest Area: the age-old story of not being there when you most need them. A quick dash up the Lower Flagstone Creek Road and we get Rufous Songlark, Singing Bushlark, Red-backed Fairy-wren, nesting Brown Falcon, Spotted Harrier, Zebra Finch, Darter and White-backed Swallow but again miss the Azure Kingfisher at another normally reliable site along the creek. We also missed Tawny Grassbird, which was seen the week before near the Flagstone Creek School.

North of Helidon township the ticks come thick and fast with the likes of Fuscous Honeyeater, Crested Shrike-tit, White-winged Chough, White-necked Heron, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Brown-headed, Black-chinned and White-throated Honeyeaters, Jacky Winter, Restless Flycatcher and Buff-rumped Thornbill. We were certainly not expecting the Black-chinneds and the Restless Flycatcher.

Next we attack the remaining waterbirds. West of Grantham, at Diner's Corner we pick up Chestnut-breasted Mannikin. At Placid Hills we do well with Cotton Pygmy-goose, Wandering Whistling-Duck, Magpie Goose, Little Black Cormorant, Marsh Sandpiper, Comb-crested Jacana, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis and Red-kneed Dotterel. At Gatton Apex Lake we net Australasian Shoveler but dip on Whiskered Terns which were there a week before. The clock ticketh and we whittle the remaining half hour away checking other wetlands around Gatton without adding to our tally. Throw in your magpies, starlings and other suburban regulars and we ended up with 198 species.

And so ends another epic Unleaded Petrels adventure. We had hoped to pick up 210 species but luck most certainly deserted us somewhere between Moreton Bay and Mt Glorious on the Saturday, ruining any chance we had. Back to the drawing board!

Michael Atzeni

1997 BIRDS AUSTRALIA CAMPOUT

From 05 to 11 October, Birds Australia (formerly RAOU) conducted their annual Campout, following a very successful Congress in Albury. The campout was based at the Cornishtown Community Hall, giving participants access to the Chiltern Box Ironbark National Park in the Chiltern Hills.

The Chiltern Hills were the site of a major gold rush in the 1860's and the area is riddled with shafts and mullock heaps. Many of the wetlands are dams built to service the larger mines that followed the initial rush. Some leases are still current so pose a threat to the future conservation of the area. Most of the timber in the hills was completely cleared last century to provide timber for the mines, houses and furnaces. Later the regrowth woodlands of the hills were managed by the Victorian Forestry Department as a pole forest, so it is not an old woodland and there are very few old trees to provide nesting or shelter hollows.

The campout was organised and conducted by the Victorian Branch of Birds Australia and had a very strong conservation theme. Participants could do their own thing or join in a range of activities lead by persons with expertise in that field. These leaders came from groups such as Vic Parks or Friends of the Chiltern Hills. Activities included such enticing titles as Regent Honeyeater Survey, Swift Parrot Survey, Turquoise Parrot Count and Nest Box Survey and Survey of the Reserves and River Red Gums along the Murray River. The conservation concept was an excellent way to conduct the campout. Whenever possible the nightly guest speaker was a researcher or Vic Parks official connected with the project to be worked on the following day. These people were very happy to share information. In return they were able to use fairly large groups of birders to collect specific field data for them.

The advantages for the birders were many. All activities had a purpose and we had the opportunity to contribute in a small way to bird conservation in Victoria. In some cases we gained access to property and country normally off bounds to birders and we benefited from the local knowledge and skills of the leaders.

It proved to be a thoroughly enjoyable week despite some very wet weather and cold nights. We saw and enjoyed a lot of birds. Probably the most common birds in the woodlands are Fuscous and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters. The large numbers of these two species were often quite distracting when searching for other bush birds. The southern section of the Chiltern Hills is also home to an astonishing number of Painted Button-Quail which feed nonchalantly through the litter, making platelets. They do flush but seem to more often run a short way when disturbed and resume feeding. The top bird of the campout had to be the Regent Honeyeater - a pair of which was nesting in the park.

It was a week of sharing good birding, companionship and fun and I hope we shall be able to attend next year. The rumour at the end of Camp was that next year's venue would be Gluepot Station but the RAOU Council Meeting that would decide on the venue wasn't scheduled to take place until after the Campout, so it remains purely camp gossip which can at times be quite extraordinary.

In total, we spent six very enjoyable but cold weeks in the south. Birding highlights for me, apart from the Regent Honeyeater, included the Malleefowl, Striated Grasswren, Mallee and Southern Emu-wren and Striated Fieldwren. I won't mention all the ones I dipped on. I tell myself it's not good for the soul to get everything you want at the one time, but I'm sure I could have survived a surfeit.

Nicci Thompson

PICNIC REST AREAS

Continuing Michael Hirst's thread of finding birds in picnic/rest areas, while travelling between Sale and Bairnsdale we stopped for lunch in the unprepossessing Stratford Highway Park about 800m off the Princes Highway. It was early afternoon, approximately 1.30 p.m. standard time and fairly hot. I had a headache and was sitting on a picnic bench absently looking at the swamp in front of me with a jaundiced eye and thinking what an ugly, degraded wetland it was when a small bird ran rapidly across an open patch of greyish mud between two straggly clumps of sedges.

Momentarily I thought it was a Purple Swamphen chick (the Wetland was well supplied with Swampheens and not much else) but it had a short cocked tail and a smooth rapid gate - a crake! I retrieved my binoculars from the car, located it again and had excellent views of an Australian Spotted Crake until one of the Swampheens chased it deeper into the sedges. Seeing it there in the open, in the middle of the day, in a fairly well frequented spot was I feel against the odds.

I haven't changed my mind about the swamp though. It was ugly and degraded.

Nicci Thompson

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.

Black Bittern (male)	27/11/97	Old Ropely Road, Lower Tent Hill	JH
Wandering Whistling-Duck ^a	07/12/97	Cooby Dam	JG, MH, MW
Little Egret	30/12/97	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	MA, PM
Plum-headed Finch	11/01/98	Karrasch's Lagoon, via Grantham	MA, KM

MA	M. Atzeni	JG	J. Grant	JH	J. Hadley	MH	M. Hirst
PM	P. McConnell	MW	Malcolm Wilson	KM	K. McKeown		

^a Single bird with group of 14 Plumed Whistling-Duck

COMING EVENTS

January Beginners Outings: **Locations:** Toowoomba Waterbird Habitat /
Apex Lake, Gatton
Dates: 24 & 25 January
(N.B. Both outings repeated on Sunday)
Time: 7.00 a.m. Toowoomba
7.30 a.m. Gatton
Coordinator: Michael Atzeni 07 4639 2761

Info: Please note the Toowoomba venue has been changed from Redwood Park to the Waterbird Habitat on account of the deafening cicadas in Redwood at present, which make birdwatching very unpleasant. Definitely, not the ideal introduction to the hobby! Meet at the Mackenzie Street entrance, south of Alderley St, for the Toowoomba outings, and at the kiosk at Apex Lake, for the Gatton outings. These outings have been advertised in the Chronicle and Gatton Star so there may be some strange faces around. Please make them welcome and, if you have a name tag, I suggest you wear it. BYO everything plus spare pairs of binoculars, if you don't mind sharing them.

February Outing **Location:** Gatton area
Date: 22 February
Leader: Ken McKeown 07 4630 3774

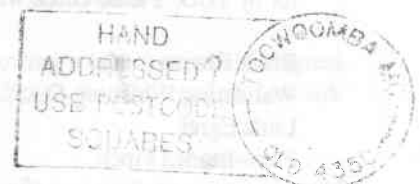
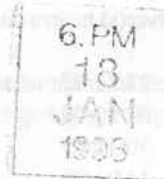
March Wader Outing **Location:** Moreton Bay
Date: 29 March

April Outing **Location:** Bowenville
Date: 26 April

Reminder to Leaders

Leaders should take the **Attendance Book** and **First Aid Kit** on all Outings. All attending members and visitors should sign the Attendance book for insurance purposes.

If undeliverable return to
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