



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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Treasurer -	Gloria Glass	07 4630 7054			

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

NEWSLETTER No. 264 - March 1998

Editorial

I'm pleased to advise that there are exciting times ahead for the club, following confirmation that the Australian Government will fund the new Bird Atlas project to the tune of \$1.2 million over the next four years. The project is likely to begin in August. I trust all members will seize the opportunity to contribute to the scheme and thereby help improve our knowledge of our wonderful birdlife and assist current and future conservation efforts. As pointed out last newsletter, the plan to extend our coverage area coincides nicely with the new Atlas project.

We met to discuss the extension of the TBO coverage area and its implementation on 17 March. Several members provided excellent feedback and a number of ideas were considered. One of the big difficulties is judging the level of participation and interest, so in the near future, some of you can expect us to contact you to see whether you would like to participate in the monthly survey scheme in the new areas. We will also be targeting various species for more detailed data and, for starters, have put out a call for Grey-crowned Babbler data. More about all this in a future newsletter.

This newsletter contains a Cape York birding report from Richard Thomis where he landed a birder trifecta! Read about the illustrious company he had. Details of the Gould's Petrel found in Toowoomba in January are included along with some strange honeyeater food which Michael Hirst would like identified. Apart from birding skills, within our ranks, we also have other talents being unveiled of late: PatMcConnell was highly commended in the 1997 Australian Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition, and Don Gaydon has released his first CD, featuring contemporary folk music about nature. Further details are included in this newsletter.

Grey-crowned Babbler Records

Following recent events, we are interested in gathering information on Grey-crowned Babblers in the local area to ascertain their status and breeding success in this region. This charming species is sadly on the decline in many parts of its range. Its status in this area is currently unclear. From now on, would all members who observe this species please start noting the date, location, number of birds seen and details of breeding activity (nest-building, eggs, feeding young, immature birds) and submit the details regularly to Pat McConnell or me. Any historical data would also be appreciated.

Unidentified Honeyeater Food

While walking on the Bridle Track in Redwood Park, near its junction with the Grasstree Track, I saw a small party of honeyeaters fly into the crown of a small eucalypt. They then descended to the trunk and I noticed that they were interested in a white substance that looked to have splashed and trickled down the bark, rather as the excreta from a Peregrine Falcon runs down the rock face from its roosting ledge. Several other small eucalypts nearby were similarly affected and also attracted the birds, which consisted of Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters. There were up to 3

or 4 at a time on each tree. They either clung to the bark or hovered and prised lumps of the substance off with their beak. Three Spotted Pardalotes were also attracted to the trunk, but I did not see them take any of the stuff.

Later I removed some with the bark: it looked and tasted just like lerps, but I could not find any psyllids inside. It not only was on the new bark, but also on the old dead bark and splashed onto the ground below, including onto the leaves of a lantana plant. It was sugary in looks and taste and did not resemble the translucent Manna Gum. I could see no lerps on the gum leaves. I did not notice it anywhere else, except for that one small plot.

Michael Hirst, 28/1/98

Wildlife Photography Recognition

TBO Records Officer, Pat McConnell, was placed in the top six in a national photographic competition in which some 700 entries were received. The Queensland Museum and the Wildlife Preservation Society have chosen one of Pat's photos for publication. Pat entered a five-photo portfolio titled "Animals of the Desert", and won a highly commended in the inaugural Wildlife Photo of the year national competition conducted by the same organisations. Well done, Pat.

The 1998 competition is now open and again offers total prize-money of more than \$3000. For information, please contact (07) 3840 7614 or (07) 3840 7602. Closing date is 30 September 1998.

A Gould's Petrel found in Toowoomba

The highly unlikely has happened again: another petrel, this time a Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma leucoptera caledonica* has ended up high and dry in the Toowoomba region.

Many will recall gathering at Bob Doneley's West Toowoomba Veterinary Surgery on Mother's Day 1996 to view an injured Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis*, which was found at Carbarlah, just north of Toowoomba. It and other seabirds were casualties of the widespread rough weather at the time. It was the last petrel anyone expected in the region for a long, long time. That was until club member and wildlife rehabilitator, Clare Gover rang me 12/1/98 around 7.30 p.m. regarding an injured seabird handed in by a concerned Toowoomba local, Ali Frost. Poor Clare, very accustomed to magpies, owls, frogmouths and the like, wasn't quite sure what she had on her hands but her suspicion it was some sort of petrel proved correct when she unveiled a very forlorn Gould's Petrel nursing a broken wing, recovering from concussion, very underweight, and not feeding. With the bird's welfare paramount, we briefly viewed it without handling it - our preliminary identification being mainly based on the upperparts - the dark neck and crown, snowy speckled forehead and lores and lack of an 'eyebrow', distinguishing it from the Black-winged Petrel and other Pterodromas. Our identification, including the subspecies, has since been confirmed by Brisbane seabird expert, David Stewart.

The issue of which sub-species it was, arose after talking to Nicholas Carlile, the Project leader for the Gould's Petrel Recovery Program on Cabbage Tree Island when he suggested it might be the Caledonian race *P.l. caledonica*. The Caledonian race breeds in New Caledonia and does not get a mention in most field guides and is basically impossible to identify in the field. The way to distinguish the races is to check the inner webbing of the outer tail feathers. If it is grey like the outer webbing, it is the Australian race; if it is white, like this bird was, it's likely to be *P.l. caledonica* although size must then be taken into account. The Caledonian race is slightly larger. In any case, given the more southerly distribution of the Australian population, it seemed very unlikely that an Australian bird should become so disoriented, as the weather had not been that rough around SE Qld, despite the cyclones around Townsville.

With the help of local veterinarian, Bob Doneley, Clare nursed the bird back to good condition over a month, before it was transferred by DOE to Brisbane. It was with great dismay that I learnt that all the effort was to no avail. It was discovered that the bone in the injured wing had died, so the bird could never be rehabilitated. Syd, as he was known after the Cyclone that led to his demise, was humanely put down and donated to the Queensland Museum.

The Club wishes to express its sincerest appreciation to Ali, Clare and Bob in their joint effort to save the bird.

Michael Atzeni

Don Gaydon's "Earth Lady" CD

Long-term TBO member and former Editor, Don Gaydon, has released his first album of original contemporary folk music. The album entitled "Earth Lady" is available on CD and contains 12 tracks about wildlife, wilderness and the Earth. CD's are on sale through Bottlenose Records, P.O. Box 365, Bulimba Q 4171 for \$25 each, plus \$3 postage and handling.

Several songs may be of particular interest to birders:

- Track 6 is about a Peregrine Falcon at Mt Cordeaux
- Track 7 is about North Stradbroke Island
- Track 8 is a tribute to Len Harvey, a marvellous amateur naturalist, whom Don and I had the pleasure of birding with before he died. In his final years, Len's passion was birding in the Murphy's Creek area. Some of the older member's will certainly recall the wonderful slide presentation he gave the club at an AGM in the early 1980's. Don has kindly given me permission to publish his tribute below.

The Last of the Quiet Men

I met him in the forest, he wore a silver crown
The morning sky was crystal clear, and life was all
around

"I'm the last of the quiet men", he said without a sound
"God help you I'm the last of the quiet men"
"God help you I'm the last of the quiet men"

And through these trees that reach up to the sky
Comes the everlasting melody, it lifts my spirit high
Long will I rejoice the day this song first found my ears
This is the chorus of the morning, and I've loved it
through the years

We spoke about the morning, the insects and the birds
A Scaly Thrush he'd followed, a Lyrebird he'd heard
I'm the last of the quiet men he said without a word

It is a credit to Don to achieve such a milestone and his empathy with creation and the good things in life, so very apparent in his lyrics, is a welcome change. Anyone wishing to have a listen is welcome to borrow the complimentary copy from the club library. Contact Ken McKeown.

Michael Atzeni

And God help us if he's the last one
God help us to shield the bright sun
God help us if he's the last one

The old birdman from Murphy's Creek lies beneath the
earth
And this song is to honour him, to celebrate his worth
The seeds he'd sown have strongly grown
They'll spread their seeds again

Old Len you're not the last of the quiet men
No Len you're not the last of the quiet men
Dear Len you're not the last of the quiet men

Cape York Birding Adventures

The birding highlight of Christmas in Cairns, if not a lifetime, was three days on Cape York with Klaus Uhlenhut's Kirrama Wildlife Tours. Christmas in Cairns had already been planned when I saw Klaus's advertisement in the newsletter and in a fit of generosity, my wife gave me the all clear to go.

The flight from Cairns to Bamaga was to be in a reassuringly large thirty-seater plane. After arriving at the airport I immediately spotted Klaus checking in, recognised Gordon Beruldsun and was then introduced to Peter Slater, the two accompanying visiting experts. I was both staggered and overwhelmed to hear that I was going to be the only guest for the three days, and that eighteen people would arrive for the following week. Prior to leaving Cairns, my wife reassured me that I had done the preparation and would be fine, as if I was heading off to an exam. Now with a greater sense of inadequacy in such learned company, I attempted last minute study on the plane as I discretely flicked through my field guide.

We were met at Bamaga International Airport by Pajinka's resident naturalist and had a number of stops on the short trip to the Lodge. Much of the country is rather uninspiring scrub, but at the first rainforest stop, a male Magnificent Riflebird was quickly tracked down, my first new bird. Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfishers regularly flew across the

road, and Pied Imperial-Pigeons overhead. In the more open country, Blue-winged Kookaburras made a very pleasant change. At the next stop, a Tawny-breasted Honeyeater was readily observed. I tried hard not to get involved in arguments as to whether other honeyeaters were Yellow-spotted or Graceful, but decided I would go with the majority in all future discussions, and abstain completely from talk of sub-species.

After checking into the very reasonable, screened units, the four of us had a light late lunch, before they oriented me to the immediate vicinity. The very tip was a mere 400 metres away, a rocky headland to the east and Frangipani Beach to the west. A large raptor soared overhead that was clearly a White-breasted Sea-Eagle, but I politely waited for the experts to identify it positively. Fairy Warblers fed around the Lodge and we disturbed a party of Radjah Shelduck in the very dry swamp. Something interesting ran quickly across my line of vision, but no one else saw it, and it could not be encouraged to return, even for the distinguished company. Frangipani Beach was beautiful and the sea breezes quickly settled my concerns about overheating; making swims in crocodile-infested waters quite unnecessary. Few spots compare with Cairns for waders, and, after a few days brushing up on the Esplanade birds, I felt I could just about hold my own with the 'big boys'. Grey Plovers outnumbered Golden and the expected assortment of other birds was seen. Terns in no-breeding plumage were more of a challenge and after much discussion it was decided that the most common tern was just that. On later visits, Lesser Frigatebirds regularly soared overhead.

That night was spent mainly listening to birding stories, with me still not quite able to believe my good fortune. A Test Match being played somewhere in the south seemed almost unimportant. The viewing was not quite complete as a Papuan Frogmouth came to visit the dining area.

Breakfast was at six the next morning, and the four of us headed off soon afterwards. Within an hour, Frilled Monarch, Red-bellied Pitta, Superb Fruit-dove and Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo had been tracked down, with the cuckoo especially posing for protracted viewing. During the occasional downpour, binoculars disappeared into plastic bags and shelter was taken beside trees. Rain disappeared as quickly as it came, and we soon had excellent views of a pair of bedraggled Yellow-billed Kingfishers.

After we moved on to the next location, Trumpet Manucodes were heard and we quickly had good views of them before they disappeared back into the rainforest. Yellow-legged Flycatchers were seen several times before a bird nest-building was located and the spot 'staked-out' for the following week. Grey Whistlers, Gould's Bronze-cuckoo and a family of Lovely Fairy-wrens were seen later in the day. Klaus's value as a guide really came to the fore in our pursuit of the White-faced Robin. We walked into the selected patch of scrub that looked identical to the surrounding scrub. Within moments we had found our prey and were treated to great views of this delightful robin.

The meals at Pajinka were a pleasant bonus, with large helpings of local seafood. Over lunch, the resident Scrub Turkey often worked on its mound. Some of these birds in the north have lilac wattles that look far more exotic than the traditional yellow. Post-lunch was siesta time with the birding resuming after four. However, the after dark birding was more entertaining on this occasion.

Within 30 seconds of its taped call, a young Barking Owl came to check on the intruders and an adult bird appeared in the adjacent tree. Onto the next preselected spot and Marbled Frogmouths were heard responding to their calls. The calls gradually came closer until one bird perched just above our heads and could not have given us better views. Red-necked Crakes decided to lie low that night, but the Papuan Frogmouth was out and about when we got back to the Lodge. A reasonable day with twelve new birds.

The next morning we went slightly further afield with three specific birds in mind. The elusive Northern Scrub-robin duly obliged first, coming in response to its call, allowing good views before quickly retreating. A solitary Palm Cockatoo was seen at a distance, and a further Barking Owl was happily roosting. Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds were eventually tracked down and allowed good views before another brief downpour. Klaus found White-browed Crakes in the area for the first time, and I found the not so rare Shining Flycatcher. On the return trip, the Palm Cockatoos were much better behaved with up to 6 birds seen together. Several of them even flew towards us to provide even closer views.

On my final morning we headed into the mangroves by boat. Lesser Frigatebirds continued to soar overhead and both Azure and Little Kingfishers flew along the creek. We had good views of Red-headed Honeyeaters, the final bird that I was after.

I felt the trip was an outstanding success, and felt very privileged to have such distinguished company all to myself. It was an experience money could not normally have bought. However, Pajinka had dramatically reduced their 'wet season' rates and the whole package worked out quite reasonably. This was the second time I has spent some time with Klaus, and I could not recommend him more highly. He was great company and a terrific tour leader and guide. Attempting such a trip on one's own, at least in the wet season, would be complicated by the need to obtain transport on site, which would be expensive and being without an expert guide as well would make the birding very difficult.

Kirrama Wildlife Tours ph (070) 655181

Richard Thomis

Library Additions

The club receives various newsletters and brochures and all members are welcome to borrow them. In addition we have acquired numerous bird books over the years. Contact Ken McKeown for any of the following (including any back issues) you would like to borrow.

- **The Bird Observer (BOCA's N/L) - Mar'98** (Birds of Coast and Ocean, Woodland Wildlife, Eugella Honeyeater, Mistletoebirds, Garden Survey, catalogue of cassettes, CDs, videos and CD-Roms available through BOCA)
- **Fassifern Field Naturalists N/L - Feb'98**
- **Galah (In-house N/L of Birds Australia) - 18 Feb'98 & 16 Mar'98**
- **IBOC News (Circular of the Illawarra Bird Observers' Club Inc) - Mar'98.**
- **Queensland Ornithological Society N/L - Mar 98** (Includes article on separating Atherton and Large-billed Scrubwrens)
- **Urimbirra (Chinchilla Field Nats N/L) - Feb'98**
- **Wildlife Australia (Wildlife Preservation Society of Qld & Qld Museum magazine) Autumn'98** (Christmas Island Crabs, Orange-bellied Parrots, best Wildlife Photos including one of Pat McConnell's)
- **Wingspan (Birds Australia magazine) Mar'98** (Desert Birds, Plains-wanderers, Coastal Neophemas, the Bird Shop Catalogue)

February N/L 263 Errata

- The first Atlas of Australian birds was published in 1984, not 1996, as reported in my Nostalgia article.
- My apologies to the Rudduck family for misspelling their surname in the New Members.

New Members

The club warmly welcomes the following new members:

- **Tom and Lucy Faithfull, 4 Carlyle Crt, Toowoomba 4350**
- **Debbie and Christopher McMullin, Mulgowie.**

"May many fine birding moments come your way."

COMING EVENTS

March Outing

Location: Moreton Bay
Date: Sunday, 29 March
Leader: Michael Atzeni 07 4639 2761
Time: 8.00 am

Info: Allow a 2-hr drive from Toowoomba. Meet in the carpark of the Manly Yacht Club. Bring a telescope if you have one. We will be visiting the mangroves and foreshores around Lota, Manly, Wynnum and Lytton. Expect to see a wide variety of waders in breeding plumage, as they prepare to depart our shores.

Those unable to attend Sunday may like to link up with the QOSI wader outing on Saturday 28th March, meeting at 7.30 at the carpark east of the Royal Yacht Clubhouse. Leaders are Phil and Linda Cross. At some time during the morning there will be a display of York Opticals. For further information phone 07 5495 2758.

Public Meeting

Location: Helidon Community Hall
Date: ~~Wed.~~ ~~Thursday~~, 1 April 7.30 pm
Subject: Sustainable Management of the Helidon Hills

Info: Project Co-ordinator, Mr Bruce Boyes, will provide details of the proposed action plan for the sustainable management of the Helidon Hills area. This area boasts a rich diversity of flora and fauna including several rare birds. Its proper management should be near and dear to all TBO members. Have your say about what you value about the Helidon Hills and the issues and problems which need to be resolved to guarantee a sustainable and balanced future for the area.

April Outing

Location: Bowenville
Date: Sunday, 26 April
Leader: Michael Hirst 07 4632 5564

Info: Allow a 45 min drive from Toowoomba. Meet at the Bowenville turnoff, km west of Oakey.

May Outing

Location: Peach Trees State Forest Park (nr Jimna)
Date: Saturday, 30 May
Leader: Wes & Norma Sturdee 07 4632 6328

Info: Camping facilities area available if you wish to stay overnight. Wes & Norma have camped there often.

June Outing

Location: Helidon/Grantham
Date: Saturday, 27 June

Reminder: 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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