



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

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

NEWSLETTER No. 265 - April 1998

Editorial

Traditionally, I've found this time of the year is good for birding. However, this year, it has been exceptional, and what's more, I haven't even been trying! For months, I'd seen little of interest around town, then over the past few weeks, at work (DPI on the western side of Toowoomba) and around my home (on the eastern side), there have been plenty of surprises.

In what is now becoming an annual event, the influx of those magnificent birds, the Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, into suburban Toowoomba is always a thrill, and even a talking point for non-birders. From my yard lately I've seen the Red-tails, as well as Musk Lorikeets and Little Lorikeets, Collared Sparrowhawk, and Brown Goshawk fly over, and also Fork-tailed Swifts on dusk a couple of times. In the yard, Superb Fairy-wrens have taken up residence, while Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Scarlet Honeyeaters, Golden Whistlers, and Brown Thornbills drop in occasionally. The flowering Umbrella tree has a constant stream of visitors, particularly, Rainbow Lorikeets, Red Wattlebirds, Brown, Lewin's and Blue-faced Honeyeaters. A bonus was a Restless Flycatcher that visited for a couple of days over my Easter holiday, a species I can't recall seeing in suburban Toowoomba before.

Well that's what's been going on in my neighbourhood. Take a stroll around yours and I dare say you'll be pleasantly surprised too. What's more I'd like to hear about it. How about starting a monthly list for the yard and beyond, as the first step towards documenting and understanding what is really going on with regards the birdlife in your area.

Seems like the raptors have been out to impress lately too. Amongst an unusually long list of sightings, there have been a couple of very interesting reports including a **Grey Falcon at Helidon** and an **Osprey at Leslie Dam** (Warwick). On a trip to Brisbane over Easter, normally a very dull drive bird-wise, I scored a dark phase Little Eagle at Withcott, a White-bellied Sea-Eagle at Grantham and a Spotted Harrier at Plainlands. Speaking of **Seas-eagles**, Nicci Thompson relates an interesting account of their **hunting strategy at Cooby Dam**.

Waterfowl have been getting in on the act too. A **Freckled Duck was seen at Hood's Lagoon** over Easter, as well as 3 Cotton Pygmy-Goose and 2 Wandering Whistling-Duck. Hood's is looking great and is well worth a visit.

The moral of the story is that there's ALWAYS something interesting around and it's just a matter of making your own luck. Cast your eye over the **Members' Bird Notes** for inspiration and hopefully we'll see some of your sightings soon. Please let the club know of any interesting sightings as soon as possible. And keep those articles coming. I'm desperately in need of more material.

Outing Report - Lockyer Valley, 21 February 1998

A convoy of thirteen cars wended its way around the Lockyer Valley, after meeting at Lake Apex, Gatton. Areas visited included a dam at Dalton Rd, Blenheim, Bill Gunn Dam (Lake Dyer), Karrasch's Lagoon and the Lowes Road swamp at Placid Hills. A dazzling Azure Kingfisher at Blenheim was perhaps the bird of the day but the highlight for me was the presence of three members under 12 years of age, thus lowering the average age of participants considerably. Could augur well for the club in the future.

Ken McKeown

Species List: Magpie Goose, Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Australasian Grebe, Australian Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Australian Pelican, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Royal Spoonbill, White-faced Heron, Glossy Ibis, Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Brown Goshawk, Nankeen Kestrel, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Comb-crested Jacana, Black-winged Stilt, Black-fronted Dotterel, Masked Lapwing, Rock Dove, Spotted Turtle-Dove, Crested Pigeon, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Galah, Cockatiel, Brush Cuckoo, Pheasant Coucal, Azure Kingfisher, Laughing Kookaburra, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, Eastern Whipbird, Grey Shrike-thrush, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Spangled Drongo, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Cicadabird, Figbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Torresian Crow, Double-barred Finch, Red-browed Finch, Mistletobird, Welcome Swallow, Clamorous Reed-Warbler, Golden-headed Cisticola, Silvereeye, Common Myna,

Outing Report - Moreton Bay, 29 March 1998

There's nothing like a wader outing to flush long lost members out of the woodwork. Given the distance, it was gratifying to watch 17 people gather at the Yacht Club carpark at Manly. A "Long time, no see!" went out to Ron and Nancy Gooding from Warwick, who also brought along their friends, the Meeks. New member, Rosalie Rudduck, was there for another slice of the action - her personal list is growing at a great rate of knots (reminds me of the good old days). Latest recruit, Jirik Haselgrove, impressed with his enthusiasm and depth of knowledge, for his tender years.

An exceptionally high tide meant the waders had conveniently assembled at the Manly roost by our 8 o'clock start, even though peak high tide was not until about 10.30 am. Before setting off to the roost, we observed a Collared Kingfisher and a couple of Striated Herons perched on the rocks above the waterline. Just as well we saw them there, because neither were found later on the Wynnum Mangrove Boardwalk.

With time on our side, we leisurely scanned the hundreds of waders and set the telescopes on individuals of each species for everyone to see. We picked up all the waders commonly found at the roost, bar the Eastern Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. We also dipped on Black-tailed Godwits and Red Knots. Alas, there were no rarities (yet again), despite my undying faith I'll one day see my first Asian Dowitcher or second Broad-billed Sandpiper there.

Everyone enjoyed seeing the breeding plumage on many of the birds: the claret-coloured Curlew Sandpipers; the russet neck of the Red-necked Stint; the rich chestnut breast band and appealing black and white throat and facial markings of the Lesser Sand Plovers; the rufous wash on the Bar-tailed Godwits; and the delicately-barred underparts of the Grey-tailed Tattlers. And let's not forget those charming, scurrying, Red-capped Plovers. The opportunity to line up birds in breeding and non-breeding plumage was also helpful. This, in conjunction with the field-guide and some helpful assistance is a great introduction to wader identification. There was also the usual collection of terns - Caspian, Crested, Little and a solitary Gull-billed Tern. Some tried long and hard to lower one particular Crested Tern to Lesser Crested status, but in the end conceded it was the former species.

After correcting our wader deficit disorder, a condition symptomatic of living on a mountain range, it was then onto the mangroves to try for the Mangrove Gerygone, Collared Kingfisher and Mangrove Honeyeater. We only managed to locate the gerygone as we enjoyed the tranquil stroll along the Wynnum Mangrove Boardwalk out of the rather hot autumn sun - a nice way to round off the morning's birding.

Michael Atzeni

Species Lists:

Manly High Tide Roost. Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Striated Heron, Osprey, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler, Great Knot, Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Pied Oystercatcher, Pacific Golden Plover, Red-capped Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Greater Sand Plover, Silver Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Crested Tern, Little Tern, Collared Kingfisher, Richard's Pipit, Tree Martin

Wynnum Board Walk. Australian White Ibis, Brahminy Kite, Rainbow Bee-eater, White-throated Treecreeper, Mangrove Gerygone, Grey Shrike-thrush, Rufous Whistler Grey Fantail, Spangled Drongo,

Coot-scoopin' Sea-Eagle

On 1 March, I did a survey at Cooby Dam from a power boat with one of the Rangers. As we left Loveday Cove for the backwaters we observed three White-bellied Sea-Eagles over the Sailing Club area - two adults and an immature. We headed to the buoy line at the northern end where there were extensive flocks of coot, swan and duck.

As the Ranger throttled back the boat to turn, one of the adult Sea-Eagles left its companions and flew rapidly towards us. When the boat turned and began to gather speed the large flock of Eurasian Coot spread out and half-ran, half-flew in many directions ahead of it. That was the signal for the Sea-Eagle. It came in over the boat and made three unsuccessful attempts to procure a coot, by flying very low over the water and lunging at the fleeing bird. Finally, it crossed our path, scooped a coot from the water and with the hapless bird dangling from its talons, flew off to a tree on the shore.

The Ranger says it is a regular occurrence and that the Sea-Eagle almost always responds to the throttling back of the power-boat. Apparently it has learned that the coot spread out before the boat instead of flocking defensively and so, with a minimum of fuss, it procures breakfast.

Nicci Thompson

Junk Food Kills Birds

It is not necessary to kill birds with kindness. Many of us love to have birds visiting our gardens. But it is distressing to see misguided members of the public 'helping' birds by providing bread, seed or sugar water. These are all junk foods for birds and sadly introduce disease and distress to the birds.

Native birds behaving naturally will provide hours of interest when they are provided with the food that suits them best and, as we sit back and watch, we can be happy that we are really assisting their survival.

WHY NOT FEED BIRDS ARTIFICIAL FOOD?

- **Salt** present in bread and processed food and not present in birds' natural diet
- **Fat** also limited in natural diet. Kookaburras eat lizards, frogs, insects etc, all low in fat unlike the processed meat often fed to them.
- **Bird Seed** often not the type of seed that the birds would naturally eat. Seed left out in damp conditions rots, grows mould and introduces disease to the birds.
- **Spread of disease** by concentrating food and birds in large numbers in one place.
- **What happens when you stop?** Birds often become dependent on the provision of food and lose the ability to forage for themselves, particularly if they have been reared to this type of feeding by the parent birds and not taught how to find food in natural circumstances.

- **Illness** 'Runners' are created by a virus spread from bird to bird and causes loss of flight feathers and therefore prevents flying. These birds become easy prey for cats and foxes. They also can get a bleeding disease that is caused by a lack of pectin, normally obtained from the pectin in nectar of flowers and is not in honey or sugar.

WHAT ARE NATIVE BIRDS FOR?

- **Pollination** - many Australian plants need birds to fertilise them so that they can produce seed. Without the birds, reproduction of native flora species can be severely affected. (European Bees do not do this job).
- **Dispersal of fruit** - many Australian plants are dependent on birds to spread their seed. Often seed viability depends on passing through a bird's gut.
- **Behaviour changes** - aggression and increased stress through different species feeding together. Birds can often be observed squabbling like rats around feeding tables.
- **Feral Birds** - If you live in a city area, the only birds you sometimes attract are feral birds, along with rats and cockroaches.
- **Wants of people versus the needs of the environment** - it is unfair to treat creatures as though they are only there for our own pleasure, without considering the welfare of the animals. Often people have a mistaken belief that birds need supplementary feeding. This is an old European idea where plants and insects shut down over the long cold winter. In Australia, plants do not shut down and there is plentiful food all year round. Lots of native flora flower in winter and the birds are adapted to the provision of natural food and move around as necessary.
- **Ecosystem** - The Australian environment is intricate and complex, and has evolved over millions of years. Much disruption is caused by habitation loss and agriculture and what little remains of our natural heritage needs to be protected - not further disrupted by inappropriate treatment of fauna.

Attracting birds to your garden

The best way is by planting native locally indigenous plant species and providing a simple birdbath in a place that is safe from cats. Plant species should include understorey plants like native grasses and ground covers, shrubs and trees. Most birds eat a balanced diet, 90% eat insects plus nectar, seed or fruit.

This article was reproduced, courtesy of Jenny Adams, 'TREECREEPER'.

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New Members

The club warmly welcomes the following new members:

- **Jirik Haselgrove, 4/9 Bruce St, Toowoomba 4350**

"May many fine birding moments come your way."

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.

Pallid Cuckoo (immature)	04/02/98	Waterbird Habitat, Toowoomba	MH, KK
Black-shouldered Kite	08/02/98	East Toowoomba	MH
Brush Cuckoo (immature)	22/02/98	Redwood Park, Toowoomba	MA
Brown Goshawk	23/02/98	DPI, Toowoomba	MA
Australian Hobby	24/02/98	Perth St, East Toowoomba	MA
Osprey (1)	01/03/98	Leslie Dam, Warwick	KW
Brown Goshawk	13/03/98	Perth St, East Toowoomba	MA
Grey Wagtail (1)	14/03/98	Lamington NP	RH, PM
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo ^a	30/03/98	Rockville, Toowoomba	O&JB
Collared Sparrowhawk	03/04/98	Perth St, East Toowoomba	MA
Grey Falcon (1)	12/04/98	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	PM
Musk Lorikeet	13/04/98	Perth St, East Toowoomba	MA
Peregrine Falcon (1)	13/04/98	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	MA
Restless Flycatcher	14-15/04/98	Perth St, East Toowoomba	MA
Freckled Duck (1)	14/04/98	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	PM, KW
	16/04/98	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	PM, KM
Cotton Pygmy-Goose (3)	16/04/98	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	PM, KM
Plumed Whistling-Duck (800)	16/04/98	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	PM, KM
Wandering Whistling-Duck (2)	16/04/98	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	PM, KM
Spotted Harrier	16/04/98	Ford's Rd, north of Gatton	PM, KM
Little Wattlebird	16/04/98	Forestry Rd, Gatton	PM, KM
Eastern Spinebill	16/04/98	Forestry Rd, Gatton	PM, KM
Black-chinned Honeyeater	16/04/98	Connor's Rd, Helidon	PM, KM

MA	M. Atzeni	RH	R. Hobson	PM	P. McConnell	KM	K. McKeown
KW	K. Watson	KW	K. Wells	O&JB	O & J Booth	MH	M. Hirst
KK	K. Kerr						

^a Regularly seen in the Rockville area during March and April. Reports in eastern, northern and western parts of Toowoomba from various members as well.

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) - April'98 (Birding in Nth Queensland, Button-quail, Birding in New Zealand, Western Port Survey, Mud Islands, Port Phillip Bay)
- **Suncoast Bird Observers Group N/L** - Jan-Mar'98
- **Birdlist for Sundown National park**

COMING EVENTS

April Outing

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

Info: Allow a 30-40 min drive from Toowoomba. Meet at the Bowenville turnoff, on the Warrego highway, northwest of Jondaryan. BYO lunch and a telescope if you have one. We will be visiting a couple of private properties and the Bowenville Reserve on Oakey Creek.

May Outing

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

Info: This is a Saturday outing but camping facilities are available if you wish to stay overnight. Contact Wes & Norma for camping information. BYO Everything

June Outing

Location: Helidon/Grantham
Date: Saturday, 27 June
Contact: Michael Atzeni 07 4639 2761

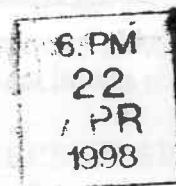
Wanted:

- outing leaders (enthusiasm rather than experience, the key quality required), and
- suggested venues for outings.

Please contact Michael Hirst

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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