



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. 268 - July 1998

Editorial

Winter is understandably a turn off for many of us where birding is concerned, but the reality is there's still a wealth of species to see as demonstrated by the 80+ species seen on last month's Helidon outing. A week later in the same area I picked up 60 species in two hours, and Nicci Thompson saw 94 in a drive centred around the Flagstone Ck area recently. On my outing I was pleased to catch up with the Western Gerygones, an annual winter visitor to the acacia scrub opposite the Helidon Dip, and was surprised to see Yellow-rumped Thornbills building a nest. I often wonder if we should hold a seasonal species census, rather than just the annual one in October. I'm sure there'd be enough support and it would prove an interesting exercise. Any comments?

Nobody could have missed the elevated Red-tailed Black Cockatoo activity around Toowoomba in the past 6 months and this fascinating phenomenon, which has occurred for the past 8 years, prompted me to ask how widespread this influx has been on the Birding-Aus email list and the significance of White Cedar. An article appears in this newsletter.

After procrastinating for many years, another thing I finally got around to doing was to chase up the diaries of the late Len Harvey from the Victorian Museum. Len's final years were spent in Toowoomba, and Don Gaydon and I were lucky to have made his acquaintance and spent some time birding with him. Some members may recall Len giving a memorable slide presentation at an AGM in the early '80s. His diaries include anecdotal breeding records of many local species and details of unusual local sightings such as Little Crow, Purple-crowned Lorikeet, and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters. Of particular interest are Len's notes on the Paradise Parrot, which he'd told me he'd seen, without elaborating further. So I'll leave you in suspense too and reveal more about Len's records in a later newsletter.

This newsletter also contains the Helidon outing report (we did so well we didn't end up going on to Grantham as originally planned), a report from Ken McKeown regarding mixed flocking of Pardalotes, and Member's Bird Notes including some interesting records from Rod Hobson on Fraser Is.

Don't forget the next national Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot Surveys takes place on 8-9 August and as many people that can help, should do so. A far better chance this time around of landing some in SE Qld. Contact Nicci for further information.

The Grey-crowned Babbler recording sheet, maps of our survey area plus Atlas recording information will be posted out separately pending receipt of the Atlas information.

Finally, I'm short on articles, so PLEASE PITCH IN, all you latent authors.

Outing Report – Helidon, 27 July 1998

We began in grand style with a pair of Platypus in the creek at the Helidon Rest Area, and Trent Clark & I arrived back home with a fine "Welcome to Toowoomba" courtesy of a large flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos. They were feeding in the large White Cedar in the median strip at the top of the Toowoomba Range, which has proven a very reliable site for them over the years. We sandwiched another 85 species, attaining the goal we set of at least 80 species for the morning. A good Winter outing to say the least.

Highlights of the morning of course were the Platypus, which were surprisingly approachable, the Azure Kingfisher along the Creek, Spotted Harrier over Helidon, a good look at a perched Collared Sparrowhawk, the charming male Rose Robin at the Helidon Dip along with the large numbers of Little Lorikeets perched in the tree crowns, but for once, out in the open, their bright red faces as clear as day in the good light. No luck though with the Grey-fronted Honeyeaters reported a week earlier, despite putting in a gallant effort, checking each Fuscous Honeyeater out carefully.

A look over the road for Buff-rumped Thornbill, Western Gerygone and Red-capped Robin proved futile, so we shifted our focus to waterbirds and visited Hood's Lagoon. There we added several species including Black Swan, Australasian Shoveler and Comb-crested Jacana. A White-backed Swallow overhead was an unusual sighting for Hood's, as was the party of three Grey-crowned Babblers checking out hollows in the dead tree on the western approach to the lagoon.

We were resigned to maybe having to see the Red-necked Avocet at the Helidon Spa for the 80th species of the outing, when No. 80 arrived on cue overhead - a flock of Pelicans - as I was getting in the car. We split into 2 groups, one going via Connor's Road near the Helidon dump, and my group headed back home via the Spa for the lone Avocet seen the week before. It was still there, and this was the perfect finish for several attendees.

Michael Atzeni

Species List:

Stubble Quail, Black Swan, Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal, Hardhead, Australasian Grebe, Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Australian Pelican, Cattle Egret, Straw-necked Ibis, Black-shouldered Kite, Spotted Harrier, Collared Sparrowhawk, Nankeen Kestrel, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Comb-crested Jacana, Black-winged Stilt, Red-necked Avocet, Black-fronted Dotterel, Masked Lapwing, Rock Dove, Spotted Turtle-Dove, Crested Pigeon, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Galah, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Little Lorikeet, Australian King-Parrot, Pale-headed Rosella, Azure Kingfisher, Laughing Kookaburra, Variegated Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Speckled Warbler, Weebill, White-throated Gerygone, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Little Friarbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Fuscous Honeyeater, White-throated Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Scarlet Honeyeater, Jacky Winter, Rose Robin, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey-crowned Babbler, Eastern Whipbird, Varied Sitella, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Magpie-lark, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, White-winged Chough, House Sparrow, Double-barred Finch, Red-browed Finch, Mistletoebird, White-backed Swallow, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Silvereye, Common Starling, Common Myna.

Forty Spotted and Striated Pardalotes

I was digging some scraps into the compost heap recently when I heard rustling and clicking noises near me. The source of these noises eluded me until I made out small colourful birds flying high and sometimes hanging upside down in eucalyptus trees. After racing inside and retrieving my binoculars, I discovered a mixed party of about forty Spotted and Striated Pardalotes zooming about, probably obtaining lerps.

As I had never seen or heard any pardalote species on the block in ten years at Table Top Estate, I was pretty excited to have about forty of them visit. Incredibly, they seemed to ignore the Noisy Miners, the resident scourge of all visiting small birds, and moved up the fence line going about their business.

As I discovered later, most field guides document the formation of large wandering flocks in winter. The clicking sound made by their bills when removing the lerps is characteristic of their feeding.

Who knows why they appeared? About five years ago a neighbour cleared twelve hectares not only destroying a pristine habitat for small birds but further enraging all his neighbours by requesting we pay for half the cost of the fence. This clear felling is probably why we have never seen wrens, thornbills or finches in this cleared area, birds which are quite common over the highway in Redwood Park.

Hopefully, our small birds are slowly returning.

Ken McKeown

[Rumour has it that following this sighting, Ken's claiming Forty-spotted Pardalote on his life list! Sorry Ken, when I read the title of your article, I couldn't resist. Ed.]

Call for Papers relating to Native Vegetation on the Darling Downs

In last month's newsletter, you were sent a flyer advising that Ian Menkins, the Grasslands Project Officer for the Toowoomba Field Naturalist Club, is arranging a symposium / field tour of the floras of the Darling Downs, which will be held on 10 October.

The field tour will examine the ecology of the botany, and natural history of brigalow/belah communities, mountain coolibah and poplar box woodlands, grasslands and dry scrubs. Presenters and guides will include many distinguished experts from the Queensland Herbarium, various government departments and regional environment organisations.

The aims of the tour are to bring together people interested in the native vegetation of the Darling Downs, to raise awareness of remnant vegetation, and to produce a publication a set of "conference papers" for future reference.

They intend publishing the papers prior to the day, and have requested possible papers from our membership for inclusion. Papers may be on any of the above plant communities, and preferably 1-3 pages long, and relevant to the Darling Downs district. Topics on soils, geology, climate, fire, human interference, and drought may also be covered, providing they can be tied to the functioning of those ecosystems. Papers may deal with the entire plant community or ecosystem, or with specific plants, animals, or birds within a community.

It has been suggested that the TBO compile a list of birds for the Darling Downs. Such a list would be of limited value unless it could be broken down into habitat types within the Darling Downs. If anyone is interested in contributing to this exercise, particularly now that the second Atlas is about to start, then please contact Ken McKeown or Ian Menkins.

Ian can be contacted at work on 07 4632 1505 1-5pm (Tues-Thurs) or by fax on 07 4638 2891, or you can phone him at home on 07 4691 2659.

Red-tailed Black Cockatoos in Toowoomba and their association with White Cedar (*Melia azedarach*).

Since 1991, Red-tailed Black Cockatoos (RTBCs) have been annual visitors to Toowoomba. Until then, I had not seen them anywhere in SE Qld. For the years 1975-1990, there are only 4 RTBC records held by the club. Prior to 1975, I know of nobody who has seen them in this region, so I am interested if anyone has.

I have been intrigued by this turn of events, and attributed their annual appearance since 1991 to the prolonged drought forcing them towards the coast each year. However, their arrival in recent years cannot be attributed to the extreme drought conditions of earlier years, and I can only surmise that they liked what they saw, and keep coming back for more.

It seems their key food source in suburban Toowoomba is the berry of the White Cedar (*Melia azedarach*). In fact, it is the only species I've seen them feeding in, and if there is a tree in your neighbourhood, there is a fair chance a flock of these magnificent birds will descend on it sooner or later, their distinctive call usually heralding their approach long before you see them.

Even the general public have understandably been impressed by the presence of RTBCs around here. Some may remember the local paper featured them a couple of years ago and didn't have to travel far for a photo - they had a white cedar full of them in their carpark, near the centre of town. Other members and I have reported seeing them in or near the CBD too.

This year, the birds arrived in early January and seem to be more numerous than previously. Flocks of 3-15 birds are typical, although they sometimes gather into a flock of up to 40-50 birds. In past years they have arrived no earlier than February (1992), but usually around June. The period they stay is rather variable, but this also could be due to low numbers of birds and lack of observers in the right areas. Table 1 shows the monthly records for our survey area, the majority being from Toowoomba.

The continued annual appearance of RTBC in Toowoomba, even beyond the drought, raises a few interesting questions:

How widespread is this phenomenon elsewhere in SE Queensland?

How long has it been occurring elsewhere?

Has there been corresponding absences elsewhere?

Is the white cedar a key food source elsewhere?

Where are these Toowoomba birds coming from?

Is it possible they now prefer Toowoomba's white cedars to some previous food source in another locality, and therefore, will we be seeing them every year from now on, even in good years?

Table 1. Monthly records of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos in the Toowoomba region.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1975-1990												
1978												✓
1979										✓		
1983												✓
1986			✓									
Jan 1991 - July 1998												
1991								✓	✓	✓		
1992		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
1993								✓				
1994*						✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
1995*				✓		✓		✓		✓		
1996							✓	✓				
1997						✓						
1998	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					

* incomplete records

From the responses I received it appears that the birds favour White Cedars in suburbia. They are regular visitors in northern Queensland centres such as Townsville and Mackay, and have been turning up between Gympie and Tin Can Bay in recent years. Some were seen this year in white cedars at Mooloolah and Caboolture. They used to also visit the Thargomindah pub before they knocked the white cedars down.

There was no indication from anyone suggesting they are regular visitors elsewhere in SE Queensland so let's enjoy our blessing and be grateful that Toowoomba, with its White Cedars, seems to be the flavour of the decade.

Michael Atzeni

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.

Grey-crowned Babbler	01/04/98	Preston	KK
Yellow-throated Miner*	26/04/98	Kearney's Rd, Oakey	NT
Silvereye (large flocks of Tas. race)	13/05/98	Redwood Park, Toowoomba	MH
Masked Owl	27/04/98	Central Station, Fraser Is	RH
Peregrine Falcon	29/04/98	Inskip Point	RH
Black Kite	30/04/98	Tuan Forestry	RH
Black Kite	30/04/98	Maryborough	RH
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo**	May'98	Rockville	OB
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo	May'98	Gowrie Junction	GG
Powerful Owl	21/05/98	Central Station, Fraser Is	RH
Glossy Black Cockatoo	24/05/98	Wathumba, Fraser Is	RH
Eastern Spinebill	24/05/98	Highfields Falls	NT
Antarctic Prion	29/05/98	Waddy Point, Fraser Is	RH
Spotted Harrier	07/06/98	Grantham	RH, PM
Square-tailed Kite	07/06/98	Gatton	RH, PM
Hutton's Shearwater	18/06/98	Yidney Rocks, Fraser Is	RH
Rainbow Bee-eater	21/06/98	Connor's Rd, Helidon	MA, KM
Beach Stone-Curlew	27/06/98	Second Ck, Fraser Is	RH
Australasian Shoveler (114)	02/07/98	Keong's Lagoon, Oakey	KM, NT
Pink-eared Duck (150)	02/07/98	Keong's Lagoon, Oakey	KM, NT
Western Gerygone	12/07/98	opp. Helidon Dip	MA
Black Falcon	19/07/98	Wyreema	NT

* Eastern edge of range

** Flocks ranging from 5 to 36 birds seen most days. Regular sightings in Wilsonton, Highfields, and East Toowoomba by other members. A truly memorable year for these magnificent birds.

MA	M. Atzeni	RH	R. Hobson	KM	K. McKeown	PM	P. McConnell
GG	G. Glass	OB	O. Booth	NT	N. Thompson	MH	M. Hirst
KK	K. Kerr						

Library Additions

Contact Ken McKeown for any of the following (or any back issues) you would like to borrow.

- **The Bird Observer** (BOCA's N/L) - May'98 (Regent Honeyeater, Raine Island, Duck Shooting, Albatross threats, Garden Birds) & Jun'98 (Gould's Petrel, South Georgia Island, Screaming-woman bird, BOCA camps, Scarlet-chested Parrot)
- **Galah** (in-house N/L of Birds Australia) - No. 25., May'98 (include. Atlas2 update), No. 26, June'98
- **Suncoast Bird Observers Group N/L** - Apr/May'98
- **Fassifern Field Naturalists Club Inc N/L** - April'98, May'98, & Jun'98
- **I.B.O.C. News** - June'98, No.210 (Illawarra Bird Observers N/L)
- **The Sunbird (Journal of QOS) Vol 28(2), June 1998**
- **Urimbirra (Chinchilla Field Nats N/L) - June'98, Vol 32(6)**
- **Wildlife, Winter 1998**

COMING EVENTS

July Outing

Location: Upper Flagstone Ck/Preston
Date: Saturday, 25 July
Leader: Keith Kerr 07 4635 6978
Time: 7.30 am

Info: Drive south along Ruthven Street (New England Highway) and meet at the power sub-station, just before the turnoff to the Upper Flagstone Ck Road, approximately 1 km south of the intersection of Nelson and Ruthven Street.

National Regent Honeyeater
/ Swift Parrot Survey

Location: SE Qld
Date: 8-9 August
Contact: Nicci Thompson 07 4634 3074

August Outing

Location: Sundown National Park
Date: Saturday, 29 August
Leader: Peter Haselgrove 02 6737 5235

Info: Peter is the Ranger stationed at the park and is very conversant with the wildlife of the region.

September Outing

Location: Coolmunda Dam
Date: Saturday, 26 September
Leader: Ken McKeown 07 4630 3774

Info: For an idea of what to expect, see Nicci Thompson's report in last month's N/L. This will also be another opportunity to locate the Regent Honeyeaters if they return to the area.

Guided Field Tour of
Darling Downs' Vegetation

Coach departs: USQ Education Centre
Date: 10 October (8.30am -5:30pm)
Leader: Ian Menkins 07 4632 1505

Info: The tour aims to bring together people interested in the native vegetation of the Darling Downs, to raise community awareness of remnant vegetation, and to produce a publication for future reference. Trip \$25, incl. lunch.

Annual Species Census

Date: 24/25 October

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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SURFACE
MAIL



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