



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:

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

NEWSLETTER No. 273 - January 1999

Editorial

I've been reading "Naturalist", the scientific memoirs of celebrated American biologist, Edward O. Wilson, and found it very inspirational. Wilson is a world authority on ants, collecting a wealth of field data on hundreds of species, and describing many new ones. Can you imagine the diligence that would be required in documenting his field observations for future reference and scientific publications! Not just keeping track of the specimens he collected, but having excavated a colony, detailing social structure and their behaviour as well. Anyway, it made me realise just how woeful my own notations of my bird observations are, particularly, the lapses and lack of details on interesting sightings and behaviour, so I've decided to do better in future, and hope others follow my lead.

If you need any more incentive as to how **NOTEworthy** birds are, then look no further than David Attenborough's current ABC documentary, "The Life of Birds", on Sunday nights. He has provided a visual feast in bringing various aspects of their biology to the screen, but when you consider there are thousands of species in the world, the series can only just skim the surface. The full biology of so many species remains virtually a mystery. So I encourage you to at least document the things that have intrigued you, and consider publishing your observations, either through a newsletter such as ours or BOCA's magazine, or if appropriate, in a scientific journal. We'll never know too much.

The discovery of **Painted Honeyeaters** near Jondaryan has brought the twitchers out of the woodwork and an article appears in this issue. **White-rumped Swiftlets** were reported from Helidon in November by club founder, Bill Jolly, following widespread storms, and were also seen at Bribie Island. Details of the latter sighting are in the **November outing report**. Rosalie Rudduck reports on a whirlwind **trip to Mackay**, and Michael Hirst reports on a **basket-case Olive-backed Oriole**.

The **waterbirds are back in numbers** and should provide plenty of variety for this month's **Beginner's outings**. Please come along and help out any newcomers. Keep your eyes peeled for the return of the Red-tailed Black Cockatoos. It will be interesting to see if they show up this year, given the tremendous widespread rainfall recently.

Thanks for the flood of contributions lately. Keep up the good work.

Outing Report - Bribie Island, 28 November 1998.

Bribie Island / Toorbul was a break with the traditional Wynnum / Manly wader outing usually run in March, but it was a pleasant and productive change. Many members elected to incorporate the outing into a weekend at the coast, but those who drove down on Saturday morning were pleasantly surprised to find that the route via the Gateway Bridge reduces the time on the road to a little over 2 hours.

After meeting on the mainland we drove onto Bribie and began the real birding of the day at Buckley's Hole, a brackish, reed-lined water hole separated from Pumicestone Passage by a row of Casuarina-covered sand dunes and some mangroves. Birding is very pleasant here, whether from seats under shady trees on the high side, from within the hide on the very edge of the hole or along the sand dunes. As with most of southeastern Queensland at that time, water birds were scarce, except for the ubiquitous Black Duck and Dusky Moorhen. Along the dunes we encountered our first migratory waders of the morning, and members new to waders, had good views of Bar-tailed Godwits and Eastern Curlew.

After morning tea, we enjoyed some bush-birding through the banksia scrub to Red Beach. The highlight of this area was the very large flock of swifts feeding over the beach and adjacent scrub. The flock included White-throated Needletails, a few Fork-tailed Swifts and about 200 smaller swifts, which caused a lot of excitement and discussion as we searched for field marks on the fast flying swifts - some of us resorted to telescopes to better assess fine details. The final conclusion was White-rumped Swiftlets, an unusual species so far south. The sighting has been forwarded to QOSI Rarities Committee for verification.

By this time our thoughts were turning to food again and we adjourned to Banksia beach for lunch and fellowship. A short walk through the mangroves that border the National Park, turned up excellent views of Striated Heron and Mangrove Kingfisher.

As high tide was approaching we drove back to the mainland and north to the Toorbul Esplanade where there is a high tide wader roost. Once again it was very pleasant to set up telescopes on grassy lawns under shady trees to watch the waders. I think most members obtained excellent views of the birds and had opportunities to compare the distinguishing features of the various species at fairly close range. In the face of an approaching band of storms, the outing broke-up just after 4.00 p.m. Thank you to all those who joined us and made the day such a happy birding experience.

Nicci Thompson

Species List:

Non-passerines: Black Swan, Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Australasian Grebe, Little Pied Cormorant, Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Australian Pelican, White-faced Heron, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Striated Heron, Osprey, Black-shouldered Kite, Brahminy Kite, Buff-banded Rail, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew, Common Greenshank, Grey-tailed Tattler, Great Knot, Red Knot, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover, Masked Lapwing, Silver Gull, Caspian Tern, Crested Tern, White-winged Black Tern, Spotted Turtle-Dove, Crested Pigeon, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Galah, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Pale-headed Rosella, Common Koel, Pheasant Coucal, White-rumped Swiftlet, White-throated Needletail, Fork-tailed Swift, Laughing Kookaburra, Collared Kingfisher, Rainbow Bee-eater, Dollarbird

Passerines: White-throated Treecreeper, Superb Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Mangrove Gerygone, Brown Thornbill, Little Wattlebird, Noisy Friarbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Eastern Yellow Robin, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Magpie-lark, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Cicadabird, Olive-backed Oriole, Figbird, White-breasted Woodswallow, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Torresian Crow, House Sparrow, Red-browed Finch, Welcome Swallow, Golden-headed Cisticola, Silvereeye, Common Myna

Total: 85 species

Wader Identification Days at Toorbul

On Sunday 7th February, 12 Noon, and Sunday 7th March, 11.00am, the Queensland Wader Study Group (QWSG) is holding Wader Identification Days at Toorbul. All interested persons are welcome – and you don't need to be a QWSG member or of QOSI. For further details, contact Nicci Thompson 07 4634 3074.

National Parks Day Weekend – 20/21 March 1999.

Members of Toowoomba Bird Observers are invited to attend the National Parks Day Weekend - 20th-21st March, which is being hosted this year by the Lake Broadwater Natural History Association Inc. at the Wilga Campground in the Lake Broadwater Conservation Park. People are welcome to arrive on the 19th March.

The secretary of TBO has the program for the two days which includes birdwalks on the Saturday and Sunday mornings. It is available to anyone wishing to see it. For further information, contact either the President, Mrs May Bennie (Ph 4663 3553) or the Secretary, Mr Malcolm Wilson (Ph 4662 2353) of the Lake Broadwater Natural History Association.

Of Painted Honeyeaters and Closet Twitchers

For a long time, I've been reluctant to actively pursue Painted Honeyeaters, and for that matter, Regent Honeyeaters, for my life list, confident that some day I'd stumble across them in our local survey area, thereby making the experience all the more momentous and exciting.

I'm not sure what made me change my mind. Perhaps it was David Attenborough's obvious policy of seizing a golden opportunity, or a realisation that things don't necessarily follow the script, and that both these unusual species may never cross my path in my local patch. Or am I just a closet twitcher who could resist no longer? Probably a mixture of all three.

Anyway, when Pat McConnell informed me he'd seen Painted Honeyeaters near Jondaryan just before Christmas, I decided this time they had my name on them. At the first opportunity after Christmas, I beelined to the remnant patch of brigalow opposite the Oakey Golf Club, and added a long-wanted species to my life list, and memoirs. Several others since, have done exactly the same, and for most, it was a lifer! Pat Solomon, I understand had dipped on them on a recent trip south, despite putting in a gallant effort, so was most pleased to be informed that they were here.

And what a nice bird it is, the male with its black upperparts, white breast, flashes of yellow in the wings and tail, a somewhat incongruous lipstick pink bill thrown in at the artists' whim, and a call that matches the description in the book perfectly, by Georgie!

I had good views of a pair in brigalow, preening mostly, but occasionally feeding in mistletoe on the tree. For some reason, preening seemed to be a preoccupation for an inordinate amount of time, and was focussed mainly down the middle of the breast. I lost sight of the female, identifiable by her brown upperparts, for several minutes in the thick tangled mistletoe, and I wondered if she had a nest somewhere amongst it. Do they nest in mistletoe? The male periodically flew to the crown of a nearby gum, staying a couple of minutes, calling occasionally, then returning to the original tree each time to preen or feed.

Another thing that I found interesting, is a toiletry problem, which I didn't think any birds had, but in hindsight may be a regular necessity for Painted Honeyeaters. The male had to use its bill to flick off mistletoe seeds (presumably) that had clung to the plumage after being voided.

If memory serves me correctly, my previous new bird was also in this area and a "reluctant" twitch for similar reasons outlined above. On that occasion I was essentially kidnapped: lured into a car by Pat McConnell and Kath Watson, under the lame excuse they had a surprise for me, then spirited away to Bowenville, and forced to look at some nesting Letter-winged Kites! What a lousy thing to do to your friend!

To those suffering delusions similar to mine, I'd like to remind them that life's too short and to take a leaf out of the twitcher's book and see those new birds while you can. Otherwise, you may live to regret it. My mates have never let up on me for being too slack to twitch the Red-necked Phalarope at Helidon about 12 years ago when I was living in Canberra. What other incentive did I need to return home and visit family? OK fellas, I've finally turned the corner. Now find me a phalarope!

Michael Atzeni

Botswana Birdwatching, 22 June to 14 July 1998(Part 3).

(This is a shortened version of the article. Paragraphs about animals have generally been shortened to, e.g., "... elephants ...". Please e-mail us (g.glass@bigpond.com) if you would like the full version of 10 pages. If you would prefer the 21-page version, say so. Also if you would like the full bird list.)

The next day a boat cruise on the Moanachira River was scheduled. It became water-bird day supreme. ... We pulled out through many channels lined with tall, stiff reeds, and later, papyrus in places. All these channels looked the same, and we had to admire our guide who flew along them confidently. When we arrived at the main river channel, which was much wider, our first group of birds were African Darters, sunning themselves on shrubs at the water's edge. We came to waterlilies, not quite open, and quite a number of jacanas feeding as they walked about, with their long toes, being supported by the floating lily leaves and some water-weed. Then pygmy-geese flew in, and we saw quite a few of them in flight and on the water that day. There was an Open-billed Stork and a fish eagle, then a Yellow-billed Stork, and the others had a good view of a Common Stonechat. With one of the jacanas was a smaller bird. It turned out to be a Lesser Jacana, so that was a coup, for it was the only one we saw during the trip.

We pulled in to land after swiftly negotiating many narrow channels and sharpish turns. Here we were to walk on an island called Marulla. Our bird list includes Little Bee-eaters. As these obligingly returned to the same exposed dead log after each sortie after insects, many photos were taken. Later there were also Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters.... elephants ... We were fortunate to come upon a Giant Eagle-owl sitting in good view on the outside of a tree. It is a very large bird, 60 cm, according to the book. We also all saw baboons and warthogs and some Red Lechwe. Here it was also that we came upon a similar scene to that a few days earlier, with pink mistletoe, sunbirds, and Red-faced Mousebirds flying off swiftly. On our return journey, we saw Wattled Cranes flying over, six egrets, probably large white egrets, and our first Malachite Kingfisher. There were also a Dabchick or two and a Purple Gallinule. On our drive back to camp we added White-faced Whistling-ducks to our list..... elephants, giraffes, zebra, antelopes, wild dog, baboons

...

We had seen vultures in the air several times; difficult to identify, though we tried, and Brodie named a few. However, on this drive we came upon four Lappet-faced Vultures and about eight White-backed at the remains of a kill. There didn't seem to be much left, and what was there looked like the remains of the lower bowel. antelope ... We entered Chobe National Park, and my bird list includes Red-billed Woodhoopoes, doves and Red- and Yellow-billed Hornbills (common along much of the way, most days) and some more Ostriches. ... elephants...

The next morning we had woken to, not exactly a dawn chorus (strangely absent in Botswana) but at least one bird was calling softly, a Barred Owl. We packed up our camp. Near the Savuti gate as we were waiting for Brodie to finalise our paperwork, we saw and identified a Black-backed Puffback and Diana saw it puff out its white lower-back feathers. Our route took us into country that had a shrub with white flowers at the ends of its branches, 150 cm or so high. Brodie told us it was *Combretum mossambicense*. When we stopped for a while, I found sunbirds here too, which Brodie's book helped me identify as White-bellied.

(To be continued)

Gloria Glass & Diana Beal

The Mackay Connection

The Challenge: A three-day trip to Mackay and only two hours of uncommitted time in a drive back to Mackay from 120 kms south of the city.

For a bird observer, where do you go to make the most efficient use of those precious hours? The benefits of our club affiliations certainly came to the fore, with our President Ken making contact with one of the Mackay Group members.

Marge Andrews met me at the McKewin's Beach turnoff and we set off past a number of large coastal wetland areas close to the road. There were large flocks of birds to check out here before we eventually moved to a mangrove inlet near McKewin's Beach.

The highlight for me were the groups of Radjah Shelduck with their pure white heads and necks contrasting strongly with the rich red-brown wings and low neck stripe. The Mangrove Honeyeater eluded me, but it was still a wonderful two hours sharing the pleasures of birdwatching and developing a friendly contact with a local enthusiast.

The bird list was as follows:

Australasian Grebe, Little Pied Cormorant, Australian Pelican White-faced Heron, Great Egret, Little Egret, Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Magpie Goose, Plumed Whistling-Duck, Black Swan, Radjah Shelduck, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Australian Wood Duck, Osprey, Brahminy Kite, Whistling Kite, Swamp Harrier, Brush Turkey, Dusky Moorhen, Purple Swamphen, Comb-crested Jacana, Masked Lapwing, Black-fronted Dotterel, Black-winged Stilt, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Forest Kingfisher, Australian Magpie-Lark, Willie Wagtail.

Rosalie Rudduck

Disturbing Reflections

Examples of male passerines attacking their reflections are common: assaults on windows, car mirrors and hub-caps can be so frequent as to become quite tedious, especially when the mirror etc has to be repeatedly cleaned.

However my daughter, in the leafy Brisbane suburb of Corinda, has been witnessing an interesting variation on this theme. An Olive-backed Oriole has been coming to the kitchen window and offering fruit to it, mainly ochona berries, and also to the car windows, depositing the berries inside. While we were there the oriole frequented the kitchen window, though I never saw the action in question.

As well as the familiar "or-i-ole" call, it often uttered a whistle that, with its scratchy quality, reminded me of a drongo. (I see the 'old' Pizzey calls them "scratchy warbles" which describes the calls much better than I.)

Did the bird recognise itself as a potential mate (feeding often occurs in courtship) or did it believe that it was offering food to a fledgling? Perhaps a psychologist would go away muttering darkly about a Narcissus complex. Any way, that bird has problems, as the behaviour has been going on for over two months.

Michael Hirst, 30/11/98

Members' Bird Notes

Members of the Toowoomba Bird Observers have submitted all sightings. Accuracy not vouched for by TBO. Please check with observer(s) before citing.

Little Bronze-Cuckoo	07/11/98	Lake Samsonvale	MA, PM, KM
	08/11/98	Connor's Rd, Helidon	MA, PM, KM
Little Grassbird	08/11/98	Apex Lake, Gatton	MA, PM, KM
	08/11/98	UQ campus, Lawes	MA, PM, KM
Black Falcon (2)	08/11/98	Lawes	MA, PM, KM
Port Lincoln Parrot	19/11/98	Range St, Toowoomba	DM
White-backed Swallow*	30/11/98	Toowoomba Waterbird Habitat	TP
Painted Honeyeater**	Dec'98-Jan'99	opp Oakey Golf Club, Jondaryan	PM et al
Black-eared Cuckoo (2)	31/12/98	Lower Tent Hill	MA, KM ,NT
Marsh Sandpiper (1)	31/12/98	Colquhouns Road, Lower Tent Hill	MA, KM ,NT

* Second record for Waterbird Habitat

** Currently resident in a remnant patch of brigalow opposite the Oakey Golf Club. Best to try along the edge bordering the highway. See article in this newsletter.

MA	M. Atzeni	DM	D. Mears	KM	K. McKeown	PM	P. McConnell
TP	T. Pacey	NT	N. Thompson				

New Member

The club extends a warm welcome to **Robin Ellis**, from St. George.

COMING EVENTS

January Beginners Outings

Locations: Toowoomba Waterbird Habitat
Apex Lake, Gatton
Date: 30-31 January
Time: 7am
Contacts: Michael Atzeni 07 4639 2761 (Toowoomba outings)
Ken McKeown 07 4630 3774 (Gatton outings)

Info: For Toowoomba Waterbird Habitat outings, meet at the Mackenzie St entrance. Those prepared to travel to Gatton will see a far greater variety of waterbirds, hopefully including the likes of Cotton Pygmy Goose, Wandering Whistling-duck. Meet at the Apex Lake kiosk.

February Outing

Location: Goomburra State Forest
Dates: Saturday, 27 February
Leader: Ken McKeown 07 4630 3774
Time: 7 am in the camping grounds

Info: A marvellous place to relax and bushwalk. BBQ facilities available for those wanting to make a day of it. The Goomburra turnoff is just south of Allora.

National Parks Day Weekend

Location: Wilga Campground, Lake Broadwater
Dates: 20-21 March

Info: See article in this newsletter.

March Outing

Location: Ravensbourne N.P.
Date: Saturday, 27 March
Contact: Michael Atzeni 07 4639 2761

April Outing

Location: Killarney area
Date: Sunday, 25 April
Leader: Ken Wells 07 4661 2547

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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