



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. 275 - March 1999

Editorial

The really exciting news this month is that **BLACK-BREASTED BUTTON-QUAILS** were discovered at **GOWRIE JUNCTION** by Nicci Thompson and Gloria Glass. This elusive and fascinating species is **listed as vulnerable**, so finding a new site is good news all round. Congratulations, Nicci and Gloria!

This amazing discovery is also most fortuitous - it all came about through Gloria's ongoing efforts to save a block of good softwood vine scrub from possible development. It is on elevated land to the west of Gowrie Junction and comes up for auction on the 8th April. During an Atlas survey there with Gloria last week, Nicci noticed **many of the tell-tale platelets** formed by the birds as they feed in the leaf litter. During a subsequent search by Ken, Pat and I on Sunday, Pat briefly saw a male bird.

There appears to be several birds throughout this extensive scrub going by the number of fresh platelets in different areas. The vine scrub also supports a host of rainforest species usually associated with the likes of Redwood Park on the eastern side of Toowoomba, and rarely if ever recorded on the western side. Take a look at some of the 40-odd species seen there so far and you will appreciate the significance of this remnant habitat - **Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, Brush Turkey, Black-faced Monarch**, including a juvenile, **Brown Gerygone, Varied Triller, Spangled Drongo, Rufous Fantail and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo**. Nicci also came face to face with a **White-throated Nightjar** perched on a limb.

This discovery highlights what we are capable of as individuals and as a club. It also illustrates the benefits of atlassing new or little known areas, and shows that we'll never know too much about our local birds. If you're like me, Gowrie Junction was the last place around here I would have expected to find Black-breasted Button-Quail. In fact, I had no idea suitable habitat for them even existed west of Toowoomba.

The question now is whether this scrub can be saved from development. Gloria has contacted various organisations and individuals. **If you can help in any way, then please contact Gloria immediately as time is running out.** You'll be hearing much more about this in the near future. For those interested in visiting the site, Lot 223, RP 34.2408 (Portion 8V, Parish of Meringandan), it is located at the end of Baxter's Road at Gowrie Junction. I would suggest your best chance of seeing the birds is to venture into

the scrub about 20 metres, locate some fresh platelets and sit quietly, listening for movement or scratching on the ground.

If you're not atlassing, then why not?

I can ask that now, because I've just registered and handed in *my* first sheets after procrastinating for 8 months. Eight months into a four-year project - that's really quite unforgivable. Fortunately, Nicci, our all-forgiving Regional Organiser is more than willing to receive your registration any time so please do so. It's a rare opportunity to put your hobby to good use and once you've bitten the bullet and had a go, you'll be regretting you didn't start earlier.

So all you latent listers - let loose and atlas!

Michael Atzeni

Beginner Outings to Toowoomba Waterbird Habitat & Apex Lake, Gatton, 30-31 January.

Due to some poor cooperation from various media outlets during the leadup, the outings were not well-publicised and, unfortunately, new faces were conspicuous by their absence. We learnt a valuable lesson in that you can't beat a feature article with a picture in *The Chronicle*, so we'll be on the ball next year.

As it turned out we did quite well birdwise, cracking 50 species for the Waterbird Habitat, including two unusual species for there in Crimson Rosella and Spotted Pardalote. Lake Apex produced its usual large variety of birds including sort-after species like Cotton Pygmy-Goose, Wandering Whistling-Duck and Little Grassbird. Several waterbirds were nesting including the very obvious Cattle Egret and the not-so-obvious Comb-crested Jacana. One disappointment, was the absence of Baillon's Crake, which are often seen this time of year in small numbers darting around the Smart Weed.

Michael Atzeni and Pat McConnell

Toowoomba Waterbird Habitat: Australian Wood Duck, Mallard, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, White-faced Heron, Nankeen Night Heron, Straw-necked Ibis, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Masked Lapwing, Rock Dove, Spotted Turtle-Dove, Crested Pigeon, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Little Lorikeet, Crimson Rosella, Pale-headed Rosella, Common Koel, Pheasant Coucal, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Yellow Thornbill, Red Wattlebird, Noisy Friarbird, Little Friarbird, Noisy Miner, Brown Honeyeater, Eastern Whipbird, Leaden Flycatcher, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Olive-backed Oriole, Figbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, House Sparrow, Red-browed Finch, Mistletoebird, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Clamorous Reed-Warbler, Golden-headed Cisticola, Silvereeye, Common Starling, Common Myna.

Mt Clunie Cabins

Mount Clunie Cabins are located at the foot of World Heritage listed Mount Clunie Flora Reserve. They are comfy self-contained cabins that make the perfect base from which to enjoy an amazing spectacle of sky, mountains and forest. In the surrounding open forest and rainforest, over 150 species of birds have been recorded, and a host of other wildlife (koalas, wallabies, pademelons, bandicoots, antechinus to name a few).

Spotlighting, mountain-climbing, and rainforest walks are other options offered by the owners. The cabins are located along the Mount Lindesay road, ten and a bit km from Woodenbong, Turn right into Guests Road, which also refers to Mount Clunie.. They are the third house on the right. From Legume, travel just short of 34 km to Guests Road turn-off, on your left.

The timber cabins are gas-powered, including the charm of (quiet and bright) gas lighting, sleep six comfortably and feature a generous kitchen, wood combustion fire, star gazing deck and sweeping

mountain views. Each is equipped with cutlery, crockery, cooking utensils, bed-linen and towels. Guests need to bring personal items, food, wet weather gear, suitable walking boots/shoes and attire. Bring your camera, binoculars, telescope, sketch pad etc. But no pets thanks.

Cost:

Couples \$60 per night (1-3 nights) or \$45 per night (4+ nights)
 Singles \$50 per night (1-3 nights) or \$37.50 per night (4+ nights)
 Extras \$10 per night
 School age children \$5. Children under 5 free
 Check out time 10.30 am

Phone Fran and Jim Standing 07 4666 5118, or write to PO Box 36 Woodenbong NSW 2476 for further information.

Was an immature-plumaged Pied Butcherbird a parent or a helper?

Cast (A) Adult bird; (IM) What turned out to be an immature bird;
 (J₁ and J₂) Two juveniles, both of whom begged for food.

At about 6.25 am on 10 December 1998, I heard two juvenile **Pied Butcherbirds** making 'begging' calls near the windmill. As I approached, they flew east. I saw them next (east) in a Jacaranda tree. An immature (or juvenile? I couldn't tell at this stage) bird (IM) was there with a small hard object, perhaps a beetle, which it was apparently trying to crush. One juvenile (J₁) was begging from it.

My attention was drawn then to the windmill where another juvenile (J₂) was begging from a *mature* Butcherbird (A). I watched for some minutes, then my attention was drawn back to the Jacaranda tree where the first juvenile (J₁) was making begging calls.

Here I saw a non-mature bird (IM) which had an 8 cm soft-bodied morsel which it was bashing on a branch continually. The juvenile (J₁) was following it around the tree, begging. I looked closely at IM; it had a 'blue' bill, with the end third (or quarter) black, whereas J₁ had an evenly-coloured brownish bill. Both immature and juvenile had brownish bibs, but the belly of the immature was brownish-mottled, whereas the juvenile's was more plain-coloured and a lighter brown than the bib.

IM kept looking for a fork to wedge the morsel into, presumably so it could tug at it more easily. IM came onto a stick on the ground, looking at its fork too, but this was not suitable to its purpose. It flew to the windmill, and the juvenile followed. At one point it lent across from one spar to another towards the juvenile with the morsel, but could not reach the gaping bill of the juvenile. It was still trying to soften the morsel when I last saw it.

About the end of December, I heard again the begging calls of a juvenile Pied Butcherbird, and saw that there was an immature bird near it. This immature bird was beginning to get black feathers around the lower outside edges of its 'bib'. A few days later, I saw an immature bird again with a few more black feathers at the edge of the brown bib. I don't, of course, know if it was our old friend IM, or even if the two immatures were the same bird. (Hope you can sort all this out!)

Gloria Glass

Painted Snipe at Seven Mile Lagoon

At 7am on the 25th February, whilst following the drainage ditch at Seven Mile Lagoon at Lockyer Waters, I put up a female Painted Snipe. I followed it until it reached the lagoon. It then flew to the east into the mist.

John Hadley.

Birdwatching on Guadalcanal (Part 1)

It was February 1974. Three things were on the mind of most Queenslanders. The Brisbane floods, the flooding of the Gulf Country and the Pacey family was off to Honiara. (OK, not MOST Queenslanders, but there were one or two who were interested.)

First a geography lesson! Honiara is the capital of the Solomon Islands (then British Solomon Islands Protectorate – doesn't that sound colonial?) and is about three hours northeast of Brisbane by jet. It is situated on the island of Guadalcanal made famous by Hollywood (and World War II). Guadalcanal is about 150 km long by 48 km wide with an east-west axis. It has foothills descending to a narrow coastal plain on the northern side, where Honiara is situated, rising to razorback mountains up to 2500 metres (8000 feet) tall. On the southern side, the mountains tend to fall straight to the sea in precipitous cliffs. Even around Honiara, the driest part of the Solomons, the average rainfall is around the 2250 millimetres per year (for oldies like me that translates to 90 inches). In the mountains behind Honiara, 8000 millimetres (320 inches) per year is not uncommon. Rivers are short, clear and fast flowing and vary in depth from hour to hour as the rain falls on the mountains. Great for driving as only four of the rivers were bridged. The temperature remains around the 30 degree mark for the entire year while the humidity remains extremely high as well.

The first things I noticed were the incredible humidity (it WAS the wet season), the coconut trees (millions of them) and the birdlife. The humidity and the coconut trees were the same for most of the six years I lived there, but the birdlife constantly amazed with its bright colours and diversity.

How do you identify birds in a strange environment? Obviously you find a Field Guide for the area. This was not possible in the Solomons. A soft cover of Ernst Mayr's "Birds of the Southwest Pacific", Macmillan 1945, was reprinted in 1968. This contained only a few black and white illustrations although the text was comprehensive. I was able to obtain a copy of Mayr, eventually, but otherwise had to rely on Australian and New Guinea books. A small booklet "A Honiara Bird Guide" was available but it contained no illustrations. This was still the case six years later.

I used a motor cycle and later a small 4WD to explore the beach areas and the ridges behind Honiara. Further exploration was virtually impossible because of the steep ridges and particularly because of the dense rainforest (jungle) covering the mountains. All the species mentioned in this document were seen within a short drive of Honiara. Many were seen in or from my own yard or in the Botanical Gardens.

According to Mayr, there are less than 100 land and freshwater species known on Guadalcanal. The word "known" is the important one as the centre of the island is virtually unknown even by the original Guadalcanal inhabitants. I saw about 70 of these species during my stay plus numerous seabirds and migratory waders. I am not going to provide a list of all those I saw but write about some of the highlights paying particular attention to those which are unknown or rare in Australia.

Question : What sounds like a steam train approaching through the jungle and is almost impossible to see.
 Answer: Papuan Hornbill (*Rhyticeros plicatus*). This large (80 cm) bird with its grotesque ivory yellow beak is unmistakable. Tail white, back, wings and abdomen black with a greenish gloss. Female entirely black, male has head, hind-neck, throat and upper breast golden buff to chestnut. But that beak!! Unforgettable!! This must be number one on the "birds to see" list.

I have mentioned in a previous article that I think the Spotted Harrier is the most attractive of the raptors. The Rufous-breasted Hawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*) must be very close to that title. The Rufous-breasted Hawk is a beautiful bird with its rufous under-parts, pale ash-grey upper-parts and orange legs. The Osprey were very common and every walk along the beach produced several.

Young Incubator Birds (*Megapodius*) often flew into houses at night, confused by the lights. The adults used the hot sands of Savo Island (volcanic and just off Honiara – a spot of concern there) for nesting. The adults were more secretive and much harder to find.

(To be continued)

A West Victorian Experience - 29 November - 6 December 1998.

My companion and I started birding in the Geelong area. Strong winds and rain eased as we started twitching and by the time we reached the coast all the pelagic birds had moved out. Of course numerous birds were just out of glass view over the wave tops, but the scenery made up for the lack of ticks.

We picked up great views of Banded Stilts at the roadside of Moolap Salt Works and Australasian Shelduck near Brealeas. Point Addis proved beneficial with Rufous Bristlebird calling frequently and Blue-winged Parrots sitting in trees. We searched high and low for Southern Emu-wren without luck. We picked up a Little Raven at Tower Hill Reserve near Warrnambool then headed north to the Grampians National Park, staying in the Victoria Valley for better birding and came up with the Superb Parrot and a pair of Gang-gang Cockatoos. Next, Horsham, and Purple-crowned Lorikeet. A Black Falcon was sighted north of Dimboola over the vast wheat fields. There one minute and gone the next.

Victoria threw one of its nastiest days at us in Wyperfeld NP with temperatures close to 40 degrees C and a dust storm blowing in from the west. We literally dragged our feet over the dunes in search of birds. I questioned my sanity, particularly after being stung on the face by a feral bee or wasp and developing a horrible rash on my hands from a sun lotion allergy. After much effort and litres of fluids to quench the insatiable thirst we came up with Southern Scrub Robin, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Chestnut Quail-thrush and Shy Heathwren, and three Mallee fowl mounds but no fowl.

Hattah-Kulkyne NP was helpful in that a park ranger was present to inform us that the last two years have been very dry in the NW corner of Victoria and no records of breeding Malleefowl or sightings of Striated Grasswren, Red-lored Whistler and Mallee Emu-wren. We still managed Regent Parrots, Yellow Rosella and Grey-fronted Honeyeater.

A desperate call to a "whimpy" at the Little Desert Lodge near Nhill had us retrace nearly 300 km for magnificent views of a pair of Malleefowl over 4 hours. The male uncovered the mound to the egg chamber and the female laid an egg while we watched. During this time we also saw a Gilbert's Whistler and Purple-gaped Honeyeater. Being "burnt-out birds" by this stage, we headed for Ballarat/Clunes and an easy pick up for Painted Honeyeater in the promised "Magic Tree". Two days of searching proved fruitless with no mistletoe in flower (until the great tip-off recently at Jondaryan, west of Toowoomba).

Overall species seen was 125. We were being guided by information from friends, Bransbury (quite old) and Thomas and Thomas. The latter book let us down on a number of occasions with information being poor to totally incorrect.

Patricia Solomon.

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.

Square-tailed Kite	05/01/99	Devon Pk Rd via Oakey	KM
Black-necked Stork	06/01/99	Karrasch's Lagoon, via Grantham	KM
Superb Lyrebird	11/01/99	Mt Mackenzie via Tenterfield	KM
Southern Emu-Wren	22/01/99	Mt Clunie	KM, FW, KW
Blue-billed Duck	13/02/99	Lake Broadwater, via Dalby	KM, NT
Painted Snipe (female)	25/02/99	Seven Mile Lagoon, Lockyer Waters	JH
Forest Kingfisher	??/02/99	East Toowoomba	TP
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo*	Feb'99	Rockville, Toowoomba	OB

* Seen or heard most days from the 13th-26th. Thirteen birds seen on 26th. Prior to that, a maximum of 7.

MA	M. Atzeni	JH	J. Hadley	KM	K. McKeown	OB	O. Booth
TP	T. Pacey	NT	N. Thompson	FW	F. Wells	KW	K. Wells

COMING EVENTS

National Parks Day Weekend

Location: Wilga Campground, Lake Broadwater
Dates: 20-21 March
Contact: May Bennie 07 4663 3553
 Malcolm Wilson 07 4662 2353

Info: See article in the January newsletter.

March Outing

Location: Ravensbourne N.P.
Date: Saturday, 27 March
Contact: John Hadley 07 5465 4445

Info: Meet at 7.30 am at the top picnic area. BYO everything. **In the event of forecast rain, please check that outing will go ahead by ringing John Friday evening.** Expect the usual good assortment of rainforest species including Paradise Riflebird and Noisy Pitta.

April Outing

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

May Outing

Location: Mt Clunie
Date: Friday/Saturday/Sunday, 28/29/30 May

Info: See mouth-watering article on Mount Clunie Cabins in this newsletter. To make the weekend worthwhile it is suggested people arrive Friday evening to make the most of this great opportunity.

June Outing

Location: Helidon Hills
Date: Sunday, 27 June

July Outing

Location: Gorman's Gap, Lower Flagstone Ck
Date: Sunday, 25 July

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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