



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. 276 - April 1999

Editorial

Winter certainly can be testing for birdwatchers, but the Atlas should give people more incentive to get out and about than normally, in endeavouring to document winter bird distributions. On the local scene, it's certainly the time to see a few winter migrants, including a couple of our most charming and beautiful birds, the Rose Robin and Red-capped Robin.

Forever the optimist, I'm also always on the lookout for a couple of the other migratory robins whose Queensland distributions, I feel, are very poorly documented and ill-defined. They are the **Scarlet Robin** and **Flame Robin**.

The Scarlet Robin, with only two confirmed records in our survey area, is one of the least recorded species on our local list. It is more common south of here, e.g. Girraween NP, Goomburra State Forest. Flame Robins - although the distribution maps suggest otherwise - have not been officially recorded around Toowoomba. They too have been seen around Girraween NP but are much rarer in Queensland than the Scarlet. So may I suggest that a useful ongoing winter task would be to maintain a "**Robin Register**" and see if we can put together a much better picture of their distribution in southern Queensland.

After the exciting events of last year, everyone should also **be on the alert for Swift Parrots**, particularly in association with feeding lorikeets, from now through to Spring. Note that the national **surveys for Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters** are on again in May and August (see article in this newsletter), so how about setting the dates aside and helping out with these very worthwhile projects.

This month we **update on the Black-breasted Button-Quail** at Gowrie Junction, conclude Terry Pacey's reflections on the **avifauna of the Solomon Islands**, and begin another great travel report from Gloria, this time on a trip to **Yowah and Lake Bindigolly**. It's a fine example of how trips are all the more enjoyable and worthwhile if **atlassing** is incorporated into them.

We also have the outing report for **Ravensbourne NP**, and some **member's bird notes**, but how about a few more from **everybody** please.

Good birding!

Outing Report - Ravensbourne National Park, 27 March 1999

I arrived early at the top picnic area and the weather was very cool, but fine and clear. However, by 7.30 am start time it had clouded over. Nevertheless, the eight participants had a splendid morning's birding. The lilly-pilly (*Syzygium sp*) were fruiting, hence the numerous fruit-pigeons on the list, with the White-headed Pigeon being the most numerous.

After two hours in the top picnic area, we proceeded down to the bottom one, where three Pacific Baza were moving amongst the trees. No monarch flycatchers were seen or heard, so presumably they had already departed for the winter. Forty-three species were seen in all.

John Hadley

Species list:

Australian Brush Turkey, **Pacific Baza**, White-headed Pigeon, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, **Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove**, Galah, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Australian King Parrot, Pale-headed Rosella, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Laughing Kookaburra, Rainbow Bee-eater, White-browed Treecreeper, Spotted Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Large-billed Scrubwren, Brown Gerygone, Brown Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Lewin's Honeyeater, Scarlet Honeyeater, Eastern Yellow Robin, Eastern Whipbird, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Magpie Lark, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, **Paradise Riflebird**, Torresian Crow, **Regent Bowerbird**, Satin Bowerbird, Red-browed Finch, Mistletoebird, Silvereye.

Latest on the Black-breasted Button-Quail Site at Gowrie Junction

The Black-breasted Button-Quail block was passed in at auction. Rosalie Shire Council was unsuccessful in obtaining federal help with funding. Please contact one of the TBO Executive if you have any ideas about how we can save this block for the button-quail and other scrub species, including the rich array of flora. There is already \$45,000 available. Do *you* know of anyone who could come up with a further \$100 thousand?

A few members have now been to the location, and as is usually the case, have seen the fresh platelets, but not the quarry. Keep trying though! And please pass on any species recorded there to the Records Officer.

Gloria Glass

October 1998 in South-western Queensland - Yowah and Lake Bindegolly

Nicci and Graham Thompson came with Diana Beal and me on a short trip to Yowah and Lake Bindegolly in October 1998. I'd had an August trip out that way, which included some days near Thargomindah and in Currawinya National Park, with a group of bird observers. This second trip was only six days, but we were still able to see many of the very special birds of that area and, although there weren't as many flowers as there were in August, there were still quite a lot and the overall vegetation was just as lush after all the earlier rain.

Where on earth are Yowah and Lake Bindegolly, you ask? I would have asked the same a few months ago. They are certainly well-kept secrets, for the journey was easy, on good quality bitumen roads (except for the last 20 km into Yowah) and we didn't have to carry extra petrol.

We travelled to St George the first day via the Moonie Highway. Common Bronzewing did become 'common' along the road, seeming to replace the Crested Pigeons we see in our home patch. Emus started to appear in twos and threes, along with similar numbers of kangaroos and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. We stopped to take photos of roadside flowers, our botanical expertise not really extending to giving names to the flowers, though one was a hopbush. There were the usual crows and magpies and a few ducks on watercourses and one Dollarbird.

We were off before 7 the next morning for the long stretch to Cunnamulla. Nicci had mooted the idea of our stopping to do twenty-minute Atlas surveys as we travelled. Diana and I walked along the bushland on one side of the road while Nicci traversed the other. We were to cover two hectares altogether. Diana and I saw or heard Rufous Whistler, Red-winged Parrot, Scarlet Honeyeater, Rainbow Bee-eater, Grey Shrike-thrush, Yellow Thornbill, Pallid Cuckoo and also a Singing Honeyeater who was bashing a hard-shelled insect against a small log.

Nicci added more to the list. On a second survey a little further along the road, Diana and I contributed Major Mitchell Cockatoo, Crested Bellbird, Olive-backed Oriole, Galah, Willie Wagtail, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Magpie, Raven, Pied Butcherbird and Grey-crowned Babbler, besides four from the first survey seen again. These short surveys were becoming fun. We would certainly not have seen very many of those birds had we whizzed past in the car. And we would not have heard one of them.

We had a short stop for a cuppa at Bollon, which has a pleasant area under large trees beside Warran Creek. Here, in the town, on a street wire, I saw a 'new' bird, which had eluded us all on the August trip. This was the Blue-

winged Parrot. My previous companions had kept 'promising' we would see lots of them but we never did, and here was one in a small town! It sat on the wire until we all had good views. We arrived at Cunnamulla, had lunch there and filled up the cars with petrol. We stopped only 17 km out to look at Wedge-tailed Eagles in a tree. We heard wren-like calls and gave some shrubs and bushes a go-over with the binoculars to find the wrens were the White-winged variety. Who needs to go to the back of beyond to see these spectacular birds when you need only stop at the roadside? Would you like yet another special bird? How about Plum-headed Finches? Yes, they were there too, along with a few other more 'ordinary' birds.

'We must stop at the crest before Eulo Bore,' I had said. And so we did, but the Hall's Babblers eluded us, or perhaps they'd gone off for the day. We did, however, see a Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush, and some Chestnut-crowned Babblers, Bourke's Parrots and Mulga Parrots, so the stop was not wasted! And Striped Honeyeaters were feeding nestlings. Nicci took notes for a nest record sheet and the three of us conferred about the species of the nest tree, while Diana was able to give confident measurements for 'height of nest' and 'height of tree'. We stopped at the Bore also, where there was a Spotted Bowerbird with a few honeyeaters and waterbirds including a Black-fronted Dotterel.

On to Eulo, then to the turn-off north, and on to Yowah. Significant birds along this stretch included Budgerigars in small flocks, White-breasted Woodswallows, a flock of Little Corellas, some Blue Bonnets and more Chestnut-crowned Babblers.

We set up our camps in the Yowah free camping area after visiting Irene and Errol Baxter, kind and generous birdwatchers and opal miners. There were Splendid Wrens and Inland Thornbills about the camp. You ain't seen a blue wren if you haven't seen a Splendid! White-browed Woodswallows with their brilliant red-chestnut bellies and gleaming white brows sat around at the top of trees. Irene kindly guided us the next day, on a trip to the top of the nearby mesa. Crested Bellbirds called almost everywhere. Birds seen included more White-winged Wrens, Chestnut-crowned Babblers, Mulga Parrots and Blue-winged Parrots, besides a Chirruping Wedgebill that Diana saw, some Red-capped and Hooded Robins and Southern Whitefaces.

Nicci had information for another nest record when she discovered a White-winged Triller sitting on a nest in a *Eucalyptus terminalis* (identified with the help of Irene's book). With a lot of help from Nicci and Irene, I had good views of my first Hall's Babblers. So two 'new' birds for me so far. The woodswallow count went to four with Dusky and Black-faced. Irene was disappointed that the Peregrine Falcons that she had seen there every visit for very many years seemed to be absent, although they had nested there only a few months earlier. Crimson Chats flashed their crimson about and Diamond Doves called and were later seen. At the bore drain we saw and heard Clamorous Reed-warblers and again observed Striped Honeyeaters feeding nestlings.

Errol gave us a surface tour of his opal mine and he and Graham fossicked while the female members of the party looked for more birds in the heat of the afternoon. There were a Red-backed Kingfisher and Brown and Rufous Songlarks, while later at Errol and Irene's home, Nicci took particulars of nesting Crested Pigeons and White-plumed Honeyeaters.

To bed in our tents again, after soft bore-water hot showers in the new shower units. Yowah is a great place to camp at - except perhaps in the summer!

We were off on the next leg by 8 the next morning, after much watching of baby birds being fed: White-browed Woodswallows and White-winged Trillers. At a twenty-minute survey when we arrived at the bitumen again, Diana and I had to tear ourselves away from the Chestnut-crowned Babblers to see what else there was in the area! They were really lovely to watch as they babbled from one lot of fallen branches and logs to another. Nicci kept her mind on the job and had a respectable list, then Diana announced she could hear baby birds in the *Eucalyptus populneus* we were standing under. We moved away and watched for a while until a Galah came to check on its chicks. Yet another nesting record.

At our next twenty-minute survey, after morning tea, Nicci heard a call that she said she thought was that of a Painted Honeyeater, but she hesitated to write it down. On we went to the highway, then west towards Thargomindah, arriving at Lake Bindigolly at 12.30. This is a string of large lakes stretching north and south of the road, part of the former Dynevor Downs pastoral lease, but the lakes are now a National Park.

Here we are only half-way through and I'm up to two pages already. Stay tuned for Part Two next month. And "you ain't heard nuttin' yet"!

Gloria Glass

Birdwatching on Guadalcanal (Part 2)

The Buff-headed Coucal (*Centropus milo*) is about the size of a Pheasant Coucal but much more attractive with its huge bill, buff head, upper back and breast and black with a purple sheen elsewhere. I think that it is even noisier than the Pheasant Coucal and its raucous call can be heard for miles.

The Solomon Islands is rich in pigeons and doves with sixteen species reported from Guadalcanal. A number of these only live in thick forest in the high mountains so I only saw seven species in six years. The famed Nicobar Pigeon (*Caloenus nicobarica*) was even seen in the grounds of Government House in the middle of town. I don't know if such a sighting could be made today.

One of the most fascinating sights was a Gray Pigeon (*Ducula pistrinaria*) picking at a fish carcass on the rocks at the edge of the sea. What a dull name for a spectacular bird. It has a pale grey back with darker tail, a white line across the forehead, a white ring around the eyes and a faint greenish gloss to the wings. The under-parts are tinged with a claret coloured wash with purer and paler gray abdomen contrasting with chestnut under-tail coverts. With dark red iris and cherry red feet, it is a sight to behold.

I was lucky enough to also have two sightings of a Chestnut-bellied Pigeon (*Ducula brenchleyi*). This is an uncommon bird generally restricted to the higher mountain forests. Another spectacular bird! The back, wings and tail are dark, slate grey. The top of the head is paler grey. Underneath it has the upper throat buff coloured, the rest of the throat and breast dark rufous grey with abdomen and under tail a bright purplish chestnut. The feet are a purplish red.

The most obvious of the parrot family were the Coconut Lory (Rainbow Lorikeet), Cardinal Lory and King Parrot (Eclectus Parrot). Unfortunately, I didn't see any Pigmy-Parrots.

I smile when I think of the difficulties associated with seeing Eclectus Parrots in Australia. Just head for the airport near Honiara any afternoon and watch (and listen) to the large numbers flying back to their roosts in the forest. The flight is quite distinctive and the difference between the male and female is striking.

The Cardinal Lory (*Eos cardinalis*) is a large parrot (lorikeet) with a rather long tail. The head and body is bright scarlet with the wings and tail a darker brownish blood red (almost maroon). It is easy to see where the common name comes from. These birds are very common in the coconut trees, especially west of Honiara.

The kingfishers were also different with only the Sacred Kingfisher and Mangrove Kingfisher familiar to Australian birdwatchers. The most attractive was probably the rather small Ultramarine Kingfisher with its entire underparts white except for the vent which is chestnut purple. The upperparts were mostly a brilliant ultramarine with a white collar, middle of back white in males and violet patches on either side of the rump.

The Beach Kingfisher (*Halcyon saurophaga*) is about the size of a Kookaburra. The head and underparts are white. The back, wings and tail are a brilliant azure blue. This bird perches on coral rocks as well as branches overhanging the beach and feeds on terrestrial and marine animals including fish, crabs and lizards.

One of the most interesting birds is the Whiskered Tree Swift (*Hemiprocne mystacea*). This is a large swift with a deeply forked tail with elongated outer tail feathers. The back and underparts are blue grey. The top of the head, wings and tail are a glossy blue black. The interesting features, however, were the crest like eyebrows and a pair of narrow whiskers coming from the base of the bill to the sides of the throat. These were white. Like all members of the Swift family, it was an agile flyer and I spent many an hour simply watching its aerobatics.

One of my favourite birds was the Cockerell's Fantail (*Rhipidura cockerelli*). This medium sized flycatcher is black except for a white abdomen and its distinguishing feature of white, teardrop shaped spots on its chest. The first time I saw this bird, I simply sat and stared for about 30 minutes. I never saw them around town and had to look in the more difficult areas. The best place I found was a cleared area, which had been a vegetable garden but neglected for some time. There were fallen trees and other rubbish lying around. Like many of the birds found out of town, there was little sign of fear and the birds were more likely to come and investigate than fly off. This is certainly a plus that I could do with in Australia (except for mynas and sparrows).

Much more could be said but suffice to say that those who think that birding in an area with such a small list is boring have never lived on Guadalcanal.

Note: All names (common and scientific) are from Mayr and may be outdated.

Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Surveys, 22-23 May and 7-8 August

The Swift Parrot and the Regent Honeyeater are two of Australia's rarest nectarivores. Each year, volunteers search for these species at locations from western Victoria through to southern Queensland.

The Swift Parrot migrates from Tasmania to the mainland and appears to reach SE Queensland more often than previously thought. Most will recall that Swift Parrots were recorded in northwest Toowoomba last year, when two specimens came to grief after flying into the wire around a tennis court (in the Hogg St/Greenwattle St area). They may well prove to be annual visitors to this area of Toowoomba, which has not been surveyed all that well in the past. It will certainly come under close scrutiny from now on.

Anyone interested in joining the surveys or passing on info on flowering-budding trees in their area can contact President Ken who is coordinating the club's effort.

Wyberba Bed and Breakfast

We have a cottage which people can stay in overnight, weekends or a week located 7 km from Girraween National Park and only minutes from the famous Stanthorpe wineries, where you can taste the local wines at your leisure.

The cottage holds up to 10 people and the property attracts a variety of birds. There are 5 bedrooms available - three bedrooms with double beds, one room with a single bed, and one room with double bunks. You can also pitch a tent for \$5 per night.

Leave us to babysit your children (we are about the only bed and breakfast to offer a baby-sitting service) and go out and enjoy yourselves, allowing the children to discover country life.

Our tariffs are very affordable, only \$30 per person, which includes a hearty cooked country breakfast. By the way, pets are welcome too.

Costs:

Single: \$25.

Double: \$35.

Children: Up to 9 years - \$10 per night, and up to 14 years - \$15 per night.

Breakfast: \$5 per person.

Your hosts, **Les and Joyce Willard** (Phone 07 46 845 115)

[The Girraween/Wyberba/Wallangarra area is rich in birdlife, including many rarely if ever found around here. Some you can expect to see include Turquoise Parrot, Hooded Robin, Scarlet Robin, White-browed Babbler, Southern Whiteface, Brown Treecreeper, Diamond Firetail, and White-eared Honeyeater. Ed.]

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.

Nankeen Night Heron*	02/99	Redwood Park, Toowoomba	MH
Noisy Friarbird**	13/02/99	Gowrie Junction	GG
Grey-crowned Babbler (4+)	25/02/99	Fairway Cres, near Toowoomba Golf Course	MH
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo***	31/03/99	Rockville, Toowoomba	NT
Apostlebird (3)	04/04/99	Hermitage Rd, Cranley (NW Toowoomba)	GG
Little Eagle (1)	06/04/99	Helidon	MA
Great Crested Grebe (1)	14/04/99	Apex Lake, Gatton	JL
Dusky Woodswallow	17/04/99	Walker Springs Rd, Hodgsonvale	KM

* Seen by the bridge at lower entrance

** While it was feeding Grevillea nectar, it caught, softened and swallowed a green bladder cicada.

*** Scarce during most of March. Apparently have not decided to stay in suburbia this year.

MA	M. Atzeni	GG	G. Glass	MH	M. Hirst	JL	J. Lund
KM	K. McKeown	NT	N. Thompson				

Rejoined Members

The club welcomes the return of its founding members, **Bill and Eileen Jolly**, Helidon.

COMING EVENTS

April Outing

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

Info: Meet at 7.30 am in Killarney at Bush Park, Willow St, a picnic area located on the main road through town. It's on the southern side of the Condamine River, opposite the sawmill. The outing will include Queen Mary Falls. Expect a good mixed bag of rainforest and woodland species. There's also a chance of an Albert's Lyrebird, which has been seen in the Carr's Lookout area. BYO everything.

Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater**Surveys**

Date: 22-23 May and 7-8 August
Contact: Ken McKeown 07 4630 3774

Info: See article in this newsletter.

May Outing

Location: Mt Clunie
Date: Friday/Saturday/Sunday, 28/29/30 May
Contact: Ken McKeown 07 4630 3774

Info: See mouth-watering article on Mount Clunie Cabins in March newsletter. To make the weekend worthwhile it is suggested people arrive Friday evening. **Please arrange all bookings through Ken.**

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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