



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. 277 - May 1999

Editorial

Seasoned birders tend to take a lot of what they see for granted, and often need a timely reminder from the likes of an exuberant beginner to jolt them out of their nonchalance. Even non-birders can't help but be impressed occasionally by our feathered friends, and I enjoy hearing about such encounters. It's uncanny how some of the most intimate and unique encounters seem to be reserved for the uninitiated.

A point in case is John, my brother-in-law, who is not a birder, and lives on a property near Withcott. A couple of weeks ago, he rang to inform he'd just seen his first **Musk Lorikeets**, boasting he had no problem identifying them, because they were only a foot away from his face! The birds were totally preoccupied with eating the lerp on regrowth sprouting from a gum tree stump in their yard. He was so close that he could clearly see some lerp stuck to the bill of one of them. Now, not only are Musk Lorikeets extremely uncommon below the range, but such close encounters are rarely afforded we birdwatchers, as you know.

This follows on other fabulous stories, such as the **Brown-headed Honeyeater** that decided John's beard had great nesting material potential. It proceeded to have a great old tug'o'war with his face, much to John's amusement and bewilderment. Now *I'd* already read about this sort of behaviour occurring during the nesting season, and *I've* seen literally hundreds of Brown-headed Honeyeaters over the years, but *I've* never ever looked like being greeted, let alone "attacked" by one! And yet, this was John's first encounter, and I don't think he has seen one since. And then there was the **White (Grey) Goshawk** that patrolled his creek for days - except those days I went down looking for it. Anyway, I'm sure you've got the picture, and if you've suffered similar experiences then please share them with us.

A recent admission to Bob Doneley, local veterinarian, turned out to be a majestic adult **Powerful Owl**, found **unconscious in the Geham area**. I understand it has made a remarkable recovery and has since been re-released. To all concerned - well done!

For the twitchers out there, John Hadley saw an **Australasian Bittern** in the reeds below the dam wall near the pumping station at Lake Clarendon last weekend. That's a species well worth chasing up in Queensland.

Ken and Fiona Wells delivered the goods, with **Albert's Lyrebirds** on the **April outing**. Read all about it in the outing report. Gloria wraps up her **Yowah/Lake Bidegolly trip report**. Other articles this month include a **summary of swift records** in this area, and lots of **member's bird notes**.

Outing Report - Killarney Area, 25 April 1999.

A glorious bright crisp autumn morning greeted us at the little park in Killarney, on the bank of the Condamine River, not far from its source through the Condamine Gorge at the foot of Wilson's Peak. A large flock of Little Corellas was an interesting sighting shortly before descending into Killarney, and the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were heading off to their early morning feeding ground. Eastern Rosellas were seen as well. In the river, a Little Black and a Little Pied Cormorant were peering into the water hopefully, while a Pacific Black Duck floated nonchalantly from right to left.

On the way to our first major area, Queen Mary Falls, we stopped briefly at a little rest area at the foot of the climb, and at Dagg's Falls, which were looking well from recent rain. We were pretty well the first visitors for the day at Queen Mary Falls where we completed the top circuit. A Red Wattlebird was the first to greet us. King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas were about, but not numerous yet. They do that later in the day when people start to feed them at the kiosk. A White-throated Honeyeater, White throated Treecreeper, and a Red-browed Finch were among others we saw there.

From the Falls we drove next to Inez and David Rosser's wonderful rainforest property further up the range. The road to The Head and Boonah beyond goes through their place, and the forest may be enjoyed from there; however, the Rossers had very generously consented to our closer inspection, and met us at their ingress to show us the way. They had seen an **Albert's Lyrebird** already that morning, so our hopes were high. Fairly soon we heard one, but it was not until the visit was almost over that Trent and Hugh actually saw two! They were not on the ground as one might have expected, but fifteen to twenty feet up.

The view from Carr's Lookout was as impressive as ever. Besides Wilson's Peak (the source of the Condamine River), in the valley below could be seen the Boonah road winding into the distance, and the beginning of the alternative road from The Head to Killarney entering the Condamine Gorge immediately to our north. A little further on we ate our lunch still enjoying the view, and afterwards followed the Queensland-NSW border some little way on foot. Good views of a Logrunner and an Echidna were the reward.

Ken Wells

Species List: Pacific Black Duck, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, White-faced Heron, Straw-necked Ibis, Black-shouldered Kite, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Nankeen Kestrel, Crested Pigeon, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Australian King Parrot, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Laughing Kookaburra, Albert's Lyrebird, White-throated Treecreeper, Superb Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Weebill, Yellow Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Red-Wattlebird, Little Friarbird, Noisy Miner, Bell Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, White-throated Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Eastern Yellow Robin, Eastern Whipbird, Varied Sittella, Magpie-Lark, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, Green Catbird, Satin Bowerbird, Red-browed Finch, Welcome Swallow, Silvereye.

Trip to Yowah & Lake Bindegolly, SW Queensland, in October 1998 (Part 2)

We had arrived from Yowah at Lake Bindegolly, (between Eulo and Thargomindah) at midday. We decided to have lunch and a good look around before setting up camp. The first birds to be seen were some Silver Gulls flying over, then on the water some Coots and many Black Swans, one with three cygnets. "Freckled Duck!" called Nicci and Diana together. It was a female, with five ducklings, which were rather difficult to count because they kept diving. "There's another one," this time with eleven ducklings! It took us a while to agree on the count.

We walked out onto the old bridge, which stretches out into the water and has vegetation on each side almost forming a hide. Birds came thick and fast. Darter, Great-crested Grebe, Hoary-headed Grebe, Hardhead, Inland Thornbill (no, not swimming; in the bushes), Diamond Dove calling, Blue-billed Duck, Tree Martin, Welcome Swallow, Fairy Martins feeding nestlings in bottle nests under the new bridge, Caspian Tern. We walked along the shore, northwards a little. The list continued: Rainbow Bee-eater, White-faced Heron, Willie Wagtail, Variegated Fairy-wren, Masked Lapwing, White-plumed Honeyeater, Zebra Finch, Brown Falcon, Common Bronzewing, Emu, Grey Shrike-thrush, 8 Pelicans in the air, Straw-necked Ibis, Nankeen Kestrel, and more and more Swans and cygnets.

We had to cross the road and find a spot for our camp in that southern area. There was a good grove of large shrubby trees which looked a suitably flat spot for us. Here we pitched our tents and had a cuppa, watching the passing parade over the lake: Little Black Cormorants, thirteen Glossy Ibis flying up and back a few times, eventually increasing to 18, and two Swamp Harriers low over the clumps of vegetation in the lake. We drove back towards the highway, but we would have been quicker walking because we stopped continually. There were White-winged Fairy-wrens 'in every bush' it seemed. We actually learnt to recognise their rolling call.

There were Pink-eared Ducks in and out of the clumps of vegetation in the water. There was a pair of Freckled Ducks, including the first male we saw. He was resplendent with the red at the top of his bill, and looked so proud of his lady-love. More White-winged Fairy-wrens ... more Pink-ears ... more Freckled Ducks ... Wait, there are two males! And there were. Who was 'with' the female? And who was the interloper? We couldn't tell. We watched a couple of scuffles and much swimming fast and round and round. After each scuffle, the female wagged her tail vigorously, "That's my man!" We couldn't see *which* he was. However, eventually one of the males must have decided it wasn't him, because he swam away. On we went.

Black-faced Wood-swallows, Dusky Moorhens, Little Pied Cormorant, Pied Butcherbird, Whiskered Terns overhead. Nicci and Graham were stopped rather purposefully up ahead. When Diana and I arrived we too were able to watch two Chirruping Wedgebills fiddling around in the shrubbery and on the ground within good viewing distance. Oddly enough, the birds stayed longer than we did. How *could* we stop watching birds we wouldn't see until perhaps we came this way again? Call ourselves birdwatchers!

But a storm was brewing, so we decided we had better return to the tents before rain beat us. It turned out we didn't have any rain, but we certainly had some wind. We tied our tent to a few logs but even so, at one stage, the wind threatened to take me and the tent off to join the eagles. Fortunately Graham came to help while I tied the tent to the trees, and Diana returned with more logs and the wind dropped. We learned the next day that the rain was heavy elsewhere, but we were glad to miss out.

The Rangers for Lake Bindegolly, Mark and Jenny Handley, visited us to confer with Nicci about the Atlas and told us the trees we had camped under were *Acacia ammophila* and quite rare. Mark said they occurred only on the eastern ridge of the lakes.

After a peaceful night we packed up early, but stayed for several hours in the lake area before departing east. More of the same birds including Coot chicks with wispy red feathers on their heads; Nicci saw a Black-tailed Native-hen, before it ducked into the clumps in the water 'never' to emerge again; another pair of Freckled Ducks, some White Ibis (so all three species of Ibis were here, but not in large numbers), a Gull-billed Tern, more Blue-billed Ducks one at a time, well out in dark patches of water; Great Egrets, a few Black-winged Stilts, more chicks with a Coot, nine this time; a Brown Falcon being chased by a Nankeen Kestrel. There were perhaps 300 Black Swans, very many with two to six cygnets. We had seen six or seven pairs of Freckled Ducks and three females with young.

Nicci had rung the managers of Dynevor Downs and arranged for us to call in there, and that was especially interesting for Diana because her mother had lived there as a small child and had passed on many stories of her family life there. We were able to visit the site of the old homestead, near a lagoon, on the other side of which had lived 'the Chinaman' who had rowed across each day with vegetables he had grown. There were quite a few interesting birds to be seen as we examined the remains of sapling fences and causeways, then Nicci identified, definitely this time, the call of a Painted Honeyeater and Diana and I were able to see it too. A beautiful bird with its red bill and yellow wing-flashes enlivening its otherwise black-and-white plumage. My third 'new' bird.

We crossed the Paroo River near Eulo about lunch time and found a Kookaburra with a nest hole in a dead tree in the middle of the stream, as well as a number of other birds. I forgot to mention that before we'd left St George, we'd taken a walk along the Balonne in the pleasant mown park and had seen a Kookaburra carrying a large unfeathered chick. Perhaps, a baby Currawong, or perhaps Crow or Raven. We watched it feed it to unseen young inside a hole in a large River Redgum on the bank. So here at the Paroo was another Kookaburra nest in a hole in a tree. I had thought they used termite's mounds in trees. (In November, I was on yet another trip to the west, to Carnarvon National Park and here we did find a Kookaburra feeding young inside a termite mound in a tree. Incidentally the diet, besides cicadas and grasshoppers, included *Bos taurus*, ie barbecued steak from campers!)

The birds were varied and plentiful as we hurried on to Cunnamulla and another three hours to St George, White-winged Choughs being the only addition to our list. We had a Chinese meal, a hot shower in our motel and retired very weary to bed. It's hard work enjoying yourself, isn't it!

We were up early the next morning, determined to enjoy to the full the last day of our little holiday. We started with the usual scout along the Terrace, but this time we started below the weir, because we had seen as we had come back into St George that the Balonne was much higher than it had been when we had crossed it only four days earlier. That had certainly been some storm that we missed. One of the weir gates was open, pouring turbulent water into the lower reaches. Diana and I had several nesting birds already marked out for Nicci when she arrived: a White-browed Wood-swallow on a scrappy nest in a tiny scoop in a large tree, with at least one nestling; a Little Friarbird feeding chicks in a pendant grass-fibre nest in an acacia; and there were Brown Treecreepers flying into a dead spout in a high tree over the water, one bird staying there.

Before we left we checked up on the Kookaburra mentioned earlier. This time we saw two adults bringing in food, a frog, much elongated by being bashed, and a mouse. No Herefords in convenient give-away chunks available around here, as there were at Carnarvon. Our journey back included a diversion to the tiny Erringibba National Park near Glenmorgan, 880 hectares of brigalow and melon-holes and, we were told, a possible site for the reintroduction of nail-tail wallabies.

A great trip. Diana and I clocked up 130 bird species, while Nicci had 150. It's a superb area and I'd gladly return any time, good season or poor.

Gloria Glass

Swift Sightings in the Toowoomba Area

Every year, around the end of October, swifts appear in our survey area. To the naked eye, they are dark scythes slicing through the heavens at tremendous speeds, often in the path of storm fronts, and along hilltops and timbered ranges. White-throated Needletails (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) arrive like clockwork each year, but Fork-tailed Swifts (*Apus pacificus*) are rather unpredictable in this area.

White-throated Needletails arrive in Australia from mid-October and reach SE Qld by late October-early November, and can be seen throughout Summer, and into Autumn, departing by mid-April. Fork-tailed Swifts turn up intermittently, and tend to arrive later (December), but depart about the same time as the White-throated Needletails. These two species are currently the only two swifts on the official club list. However, there are two other species that may be added in the future.

House Swifts (*Apus affinis*) have been reported in Australia in recent summers, and increasingly so. This species has perhaps been a casual visitor to Australia for longer than the records suggest. The other likely candidate is the White-rumped Swiftlet (*Collocalia spodiopygius*), an occasional visitor to these parts, but still to be officially recorded by the club. It is similar to the Fork-tailed, but smaller, with a less forked tail, and lacks the white throat.

The following table summarises the club's monthly swift records within our survey area, essentially the Toowoomba/Helidon area, for the period 1981-1998. The records clearly show their seasonal presence, and the relative scarceness of Fork-tailed Swifts, in our survey area.

Anecdotal evidence from the Birding-Aus forum suggests that this season, swift numbers have been very low throughout their Australian range for some unknown reason. Unfortunately, swift numbers have not been collected by TBO to date, but in the future, an indication of abundance would be useful information to submit as well.

Michael Atzeni

Records of White-throated Needletail (W) and Fork-tailed Swift (F) in the Toowoomba region for the period 1981-1998 (Source: monthly records submitted by TBOI members).

Year	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1981	WF	W	WF								W	W
1982	WF	W	W							W	W	W
1983	W	W	W	W							W	W
1984	WF	WF	W							W	W	W
1985	WF	W	W	WF							W	W
1986	W	W	W							W	W	W
1987	W	W	WF							W	W	W
1988	W	W	W	W						W	W	W
1989	WF	W	W	W						W	W	WF
1990	WF	WF	WF	W							W	W
1991	W	W	W							W	W	WF
1992	W	W	W							W	W	WF
1993	W	W	W								W	F
1994*												W
1995*	W	W	W	W						W	W	W
1996	W			F							W	W
1997	W	W	WF							W	WF	W
1998*		W	W							W		

* missing or incomplete records

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.

Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (2)	15/01/99	Murphy's Ck, via Toowoomba	PM
Chestnut Teal (2)	24/01/99	Hood's Lagoon, Helidon	PM, RH
Australian King Parrot (11)	04/02/99	Bowen St, Helidon	OB
Red-tailed Blk Cockatoo (12)	06/03/89	Rockville, Toowoomba	OB
Nankeen Night Heron (2)	20/03/99	Grandchester	JL
White-breasted Sea-Eagle (4)	05/04/99	Karrasch's Lagoon, Placid Hills	PM
Plum-headed Finch (8)	05/04/99	Lockyer Ck, Helidon	PM
Sooty Owl	08/04/99	Ravensbourne NP	PM
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (4)	12-16/04/89	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Little Eagle (2) ^a	15/04/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Square-tailed Kite	15/04/99	Blacksoil	PM, KW
Collared Sparrowhawk ^b	21/04/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Painted Honeyeater	25/04/99	Jandowae	TP
Red-capped Robin	25/04/99	Jandowae	TP
Little Eagle	01/05/99	Mt Kynoch, Toowoomba	PM, KW
Bush Stone-Curlew ^c	01/05/99	Connors Rd, Helidon	JL
White-breasted Sea-Eagle (2)	01/05/99	Lowe's Rd Swamp, Placid Hills	MH
Red-necked Avocet (6)	02/05/99	Helidon Spa	WJ
Hoary-headed Grebe (3)	2-9/05/99	Helidon Spa	WJ
Spotted Quail-thrush (pair) ^d	03/05/99	Waller's Rd, Helidon Hills	PM, KW
Black-breasted Button-Quail ^e	03/05/99	Baxter's Rd, Gowrie Junction	GG
Peregrine Falcon	09/05/99	The Big Hill, Hodgsonvale	MA
Powerful Owl ^f	11/05/99	Geham	various
Barn Owl (1)	12/05/99	DPI, Tor St, Toowoomba	MA
Pied Cormorant ^g	16/05/99	Over East Toowoomba	MA
Australasian Bittern (1) ^h	23/05/99	Lake Clarendon, via Gatton	JH

^a Performed plunging display flight

^b attacked an Azure Kingfisher

^c Single bird flushed along the creek on private property

^d Saw a male and heard a female calling nearby.

^e Single female seen in softwood scrub on the land at end of Baxter's Rd.

^f Taken to Toowoomba veterinarian, Bob Doneley after being found injured near Geham.

^g Mixed flock of Large and Pied Cormorants flying southwest

^h Rare in Queensland

MA	M. Atzeni	GG	G. Glass	MH	M. Hirst	JL	J. Lund
KM	K. McKeown	PM	P. McConnell	OB	O. Booth	JH	J. Hadley
WJ	W. Jolly	KW	K. Watson	RH	R. Hobson		

New Members

The club warmly welcomes the following new members:

B. Collyer, Toowoomba

P. Murphy, Toowoomba

B. Weier, Allora

J. & S. Scanlan, Highfields

Good birding to you all!

COMING EVENTS

May Outing

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

Info: Please arrange all bookings through Ken. Anyone wishing to link up over the weekend can ring Ken on the above number that will be redirected to his mobile phone.

World Environment Day

Location: Lake Annand
Date: 10.00 am – 3.30 pm, Sunday, 6 June

Info: We will have a stall there to advertise the club, so if you have time, please offer to look after the stall for a while to give others a break. Contact Olive Booth on 4633 0553 if you can help.

June Outing

Location: Helidon Hills
Date: Sunday, 27 June

July Outing

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

Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater Survey

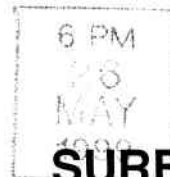
Date: 7-8 August

August Outing

Location: White Rock, Ipswich
Date: Saturday, 28 August

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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