

"To encourage the observation and study of the birds of the Toowoomba area."

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NEWS-SHEET No. 28 - APRIL, 1978.

This month has proved a particularly exciting one for the club with six new Toowoomba birds. The first two were the Pied Stilt and the Lotusbird which were observed by many club members on our first downrange outing to Helidon. The day was a great success with many members sharing the excitement of confirming these new Toowoomba birds.

March was also to bring an influx of birds of prey to our area with many records particularly of local sightings of the Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*). Bill Jolly has outlined some of these exciting events in a separate item in this news-sheet.

At this point I would like to remind members of the importance of the gold check-lists in keeping club records accurate and up to date. They are also used to fill out Atlas Sheets for our area and this is why we ask you to mark birds in two separate areas - UPRANGE - signified by "U" on your check-list and - DOWNRANGE - represented by "D". The dividing line is approximately Withcott, with Redwood Park in the uprange grid. Please try to fill out your check-lists every month. They may be posted direct to me at 28A, Whittle Street, Gatton, or handed to any club officer.

The large number of new birds this month highlights the need for club members to share these sightings with as many others as possible. If you see something exciting, your club executive are only too willing to share your news and pass it on. All three officers are now available at the D.D.I.A.E. phone 30.1300. Information for the News-sheet, for example Members' Bird Notes, can also be phoned.

Following the success of our first camp-out, plans have now been made for our April outing to take the form of a weekend camp at Mudjimba Beach on the Sunshine Coast. This is a well recommended camping spot where we would be able to combine some wader and sea bird watching with other away from it all activities. Further details later in the news-sheet. See you there.

Sue Elmes,  
Editor.

NEW TOOWOOMBA BIRDS.

189. Pied Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*). 19.3.78. Hoods property, Helidon.

This unmistakable long-legged stilt, already familiar to most members, was well observed inside our local study area by all those attending our March outing.

NEW TOOWOOMBA BIRDS (cont/d.)

190. Lotusbird (*Irediparra gallinacea*). 19.3.78. Hood's Property, Helidon.

The bird was identified by the distinctive forehead comb of red, black back and wings and long legs trailed behind in flight. (March outing).

✓ 191. Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*). 24.3.78. "Ringmere", Withcott.  
Eileen & Bill Jolly, Graham Corbin, Jim Corbin.

Six Kites were observed in one tree at "Ringmere" and 21 more were seen heading east past Table Top Mountain.

This bird is a large brown kite showing a forked tail, black primaries - slow flying, climbing as a group on thermals. Several subsequent sightings of local Black Kites are reported in a later item.

✓ 192. Square-tailed Kite (*Lophoictinia isura*). 26.3.78. Redwood Park.  
Rod Hobson, Bill Jolly, David Newlands.

Two birds were well seen in the area of the Range Highway by these members. Details of this and other sightings of the Square-tailed Kite in the following item. (First seen by Max Wood on 20.3.78.).

✓ 193. Glossy Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*). 26.3.78. Prince Henry Drive.  
Rod Hobson, Bill Jolly, David Newlands.

Two Glossy Black Cockatoos, viewed from above while flying speedily eastward over Redwood Park. The birds were clearly observed to be showing distinctive bands of red in the tail and were heard to utter a somewhat plaintive and drawn-out call, quite unlike the harsh and unpleasant sound of the other black cockatoos.

✓ 194. Whistling Kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*). 31.3.78. "Ringmere", Withcott.  
Eileen & Bill Jolly.

Yet another new bird of prey for Toowoomba. Details also in the following article.

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

Little Grebe. Resident two full months. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.

Nankeen Night-heron. 3.3.78. Flagstone Creek. RGH.  
26.3.78. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.

Shoveller. 25.3.78. Dyer's Lagoon. RGH.  
27.3.78. Apex Lake, Gatton. SE. PE.

Grey Goshawk. 6.3.78. Cambooya. RS.

White-breasted Sea-eagle. 19.3.78. Leslie Dam. MJ. SP.

Spotted Harrier. 18.3.78. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.  
31.3.78. Cambooya. RS.

Little Falcon. 5.3.78. Bass St., Twmba. REH.  
16.3.78. Toowoomba Airport. CB. WJ.

Red-kneed Dotterel. 25.3.78. Dyer's Lagoon. RGH.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. 27.3.78. Apex Lake, Gatton. PE.

Papuan Frogmouth. 21.3.78. Cairns. RGH.

White-throated Nightjar. 24.3.78. Flagstone Creek. RGH.

Fork-tailed Swift. 26.3.78. Redwood Park. RGH. WJ. DN.  
26.3.78. Gatton. SE. PE.  
27.3.78. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.  
27.3.78. Bass St., Twmba. REH.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike. 4.3.78. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.

Chestnut-breasted Mannikin. 18.3.78. Helidon. CB. WJ.  
20.3.78. Rangeview. JC.

CB: Chris Bianchi. JC: John Coman. PE: Phillip Elmes. SE: Sue Elmes.  
RGH: Rod Hobson. REH: Ron Hopkinson. Marilyn Jacobs. EJ: Eileen Jolly.  
WJ: Bill Jolly. DN: David Newlands. SP: Sandra Pottinger. RS: Ron Skilton.

SOME MARCH MEANDERINGS.

The first indication that something, somewhere, might be causing a movement of birds of prey into our area came with a phone call from Max Wood in which he related the first recorded sighting in these parts of a Square-tailed Kite (*Lophoictinia isura*). Max is a new member of our club, but his bird-watching activities go back many years and include a lengthy spell in Nigeria where he gained a good working knowledge of birds of prey. He relates his observation from his home close to Picnic Point as follows:

"On Monday, 20th March 1978, about 4 p.m. my wife and I watched a big solitary kite circling and performing aerobatics fairly high up in front of us on the Eastern side of the Range. I know the Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) very well and this one at once struck me as bigger and very reddish in colour with whitish on the face. My wife confirmed that the wings were upcurved in flight. It seemed to move the tail sharply to alter course and perform evolutions, and once it nearly looped the loop. After a time it was mobbed by three black and white birds that I did not look at closely. I took them to be Butcher-birds, but they could have been Peewees as both are here. So the kite circled and soared off East between Table Top and Withcott. I have no doubt it was the Square-tailed Kite, *Lophoictinia isura*."

M.G. Wood,  
7, Eymard St., Toowoomba.

Needless to say during the days which followed a few of us were keeping our eyes skinned for this new Kite, hoping to be able to provide the formal confirmation needed to allow the club to admit the bird to our Toowoomba list, but from Max's sighting on Monday, 20th March up until the end of the week nothing unusual had presented itself. On Good Friday morning however half-eaten hot-cross buns were temporarily abandoned when a large bird of prey was spotted heading down the gully towards the dam at Ringmere. Local Peewees were bombarding the intruder who wheeled to avoid the onslaught, revealing the unmistakable forked tail of a Black Kite! Not *Lophoictinia isura*, but still a new bird for Toowoomba.

As our new visitor dropped into the top of a tall ironbark we were surprised to find that he had been preceded by four others of his kind who were already established sentinel-like on various vantage points about the same tree. The five kites decorated that tree like candles atop a birthday cake for some two hours, with individuals embarking upon the occasional wheeling sortie which provided us (including by now the Corbin family who had responded to the urgent messages passed along the bush telegraph) with close views of this very dark, somewhat buzzard-like bird of prey in flight.

During the course of Good Friday morning (24th March) we were to note a total of 27 Black Kites from the verandah at Ringmere, while Mick and Coranne Dolley were also to observe 16 from their property approximately two miles to the South of us.

More developments followed on Easter Sunday, 26th March. While John Coman was watching a party of 30 Black Kites at Oakey and Marilyn Jacobs found a solitary *Milvus* at Esk, with large numbers also at Somerset Dam, Rod Hobson, David Newlands and I were emerging from Redwood Park to wrestle with the problems of identification presented by two large and unfamiliar birds of prey which were cruising the tree-tops alongside the Range Highway in a very kite-like manner, but which clearly were not Black Kites, showing a long square tail, a bullseyed wing pattern beneath and distinctive areas of white about the face. While the pattern of the wings resembled that of the Little Eagle (*Hieraaetus morphnoides*) both Rod and I expressed the opinion that the proportions of these new birds were not those of the Little Eagle with which we are both familiar (Rod more so than myself). The white face combined with the other observed field characteristics pointed in fact to the Square-tailed Kite.

In the hope of gaining better views, preferably from above, the three of us headed quickly up to Katoomba Point where we settled down to a session of scanning the valleys below us in a manner which was for me remarkably reminiscent of so

SOME MARCH MEANDERINGS (cont/d.)

many hours I have spent sea-watching from East Anglian cliff-tops waiting for a skua or shearwater to rise above the horizon or emerge from a trough, as we were here waiting for a bird of prey to rise above the tree-line or emerge from a gully. And emerge he did. One bird only and somewhat distant, but again we were all three able to observe the white face, square tail and patterned wings, along with distinctly reddish areas on the upperwing, sufficient to satisfy us that he was indeed a Square-tailed Kite. Soon after, Rod Hobson found himself confronted by both birds as they rose over the Koorootang area to the North of Prince Henry Drive, on which occasion in addition to the previously noted field marks the upswept set of the wings was also displayed.

Easter Monday, 27th March, provided yet more local sightings of a variety of birds prey. In the morning we were watching Wedge-tailed Eagles and a passing Spotted Harrier at Ringmere, while Rod Hobson was up at Picnic Point enjoying yet another encounter with two Square-tailed Kites, including this time a display of tail-twisting and clear views once again of the white face when the birds approached closely. Later in the same day we had a party of Black Kites at Ringmere and later still a lone Square-tailed Kite flew over the house, revealing to us his underwing patterns and twisting his square tail as he went. At this time Alison McCallum and Rob Robinson, heading back from an Easter spent South of the border, were sighting large numbers of Black Kites around Tenterfield.

On the following Friday, 31st March, a third new Toowoomba kite put in an appearance at Ringmere. This new immigrant was a very scruffy and very wet Whistling Kite, a bird which most of us know well in the Lockyer Valley, but which had not previously been recorded in our Local Study Area. We were of course very happy to have this bird appear so close on the heels (tarsi?) of some of his less regular brethren, emphasising for us how drably distinctive the Whistling Kite really is with his uneven general colouring, his pale under-parts and his long rounded tail. Two days later on Sunday, 2nd April there were two Whistling Kites in the trees behind the dam, seen and heard also by Sue and Philip Elmes who were visiting at the time; Ron Skilton was finding Black Kites at his Cambocya property; and at Oakey on the same Sunday John Coman met with a party of 120 Black Kites!

In the space of little more than a week three new birds of prey had found their way onto the Toowoomba List; the Square-tailed Kite had been scrutinised by Max Wood, Rod Hobson, David Newlands and Eileen and myself, with a total of five separate sightings; large numbers of Black Kites had been seen by large numbers of club members in a large number of places; and two Whistling Kites had selected Ringmere as a weekend staging-post. In fact we had enjoyed at Ringmere in the space of five days from Monday, 27th to Friday, 31st March no less than seven species of raptore, viz: Black-shouldered Kite, Black Kite, Square-tailed Kite, Whistling Kite, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Spotted Harrier and Nankeen Kestrel.

The Black Kite is of course a renowned nomad, responding to the stimulus of rain situations and ranging wide in search of a food supply. The Whistling Kite is known to roam in the same way and it is thought that this might be the case also with the Square-tailed Kite. There can be little doubt that what we were observing around Easter-time represented the symptoms of a condition appertaining elsewhere, probably in the West. We may well hear from other sources of the cause of this particular effect and of a locally observed exodus or at least a related movement. Meanwhile at our end, our club members have jointly recorded a large scale movement of birds of prey in March 1978 as it affected our own local study area. Over and above the enjoyable and satisfying process of meeting and observing new species, beyond our regular employment of clarifying month by month the status of very nearly 200 bird species in our area, members have in March provided a large and detailed piece of the jigsaw which when completed will eventually reveal the overall picture of the movement of birds of prey in Australia.

Bill Jolly.

IT'S AN ILL-WIND.....OR ECOLOGY OBSERVED.

No. 41d.

The truth of the old adage that nature will not tolerate a vacuum was amply illustrated to me recently in a grass paddock near Gordonvale, south of Cairns.

The field in question is that containing the radio masts for broadcast station 4 Q.Y. and is situated on the Yarrabah Mission Road near Gordonvale. It is approximately seventy hectares in extent and is bounded on three sides by cane fields and the fourth by the Yarrabah Aboriginal Mission Road.

Originally the paddock consisted almost entirely of waist high Bladey Grass and Buffalo Grass. Due to a shallow water table, about one metre in depth, there were several marshy areas of Sensitive Mimosa and Water Couch. A particular avifauna utilised this area of heavy grassland. Such birds as King and Brown Quail, the Land Rail and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin; birds usually associated with this habitat type were common. However, this entire area was "slashed" by tractor to facilitate better working conditions and in a matter of three days, 1st - 3rd March, the original habitat was destroyed and the inhabitants displaced. Initially this seemed a desecration of a once prolific feeding and breeding area. At the time I noted both Lane Rail and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin breeding in the area. However, such is the flexibility of nature that in two days the original population was replaced by an entirely new avifauna. Birds suited to open, bare paddocks and grasslands replaced the original inhabitants of the dense, heavy grasses. Hereunder I have made a short, and by no means detailed, list of the original birds and alongside one of the replacement birds.

Original Birds.

Replacement Birds.

Brown Quail  
King Quail  
Land Rail  
Pheasant Coucal  
Rufous Songlark  
Red-backed Wren  
Golden-headed Cisticola  
Tawny Grassbird  
Red-browed Finch  
Crimson Finch  
Chestnut-breasted Mannikin  
Spice Finch  
House Sparrow  
Indian Myna

Nankeen Kestrel  
Masked Plover  
Japanese Snipe  
Southern Stone-curlew  
Brown Songlark  
Singing Bushlark  
Richard's Pipit  
Magpie-lark  
Willie Wagtail  
House Sparrow  
Indian Myna  
Magpie.

From the list it can be seen that within the space of a few days, with the alteration of habitat an entire population of species had been replaced by a new population better suited for the new habitat type. No doubt as the grass renews itself the present population will gradually be replaced by the original inhabitants. The only species which appear to have survived the transition of habitat are those two adaptable imports, the House Sparrow and Indian Myna.

Although, regrettably, nests and their contents were destroyed during mowing operations, within two days of completion a pair of Southern Stone-curlews had laid on some high ground in the middle of the paddock. The eggs, two in number, measured approximately 37mm x 17mm and were of a dun colour with puce blotching over the entire surface. There is no attempt at nest construction, the eggs being laid upon the bare ground. The incubating bird can be approached quite closely before abandoning the eggs. The sitting bird will attempt to remain unnoticed by flattening itself against the ground, its cryptic colouration blending with the surrounding landscape. Its yellow eye is the only conspicuous feature. If hard pressed the bird will run off, taking to wing only in extreme urgency. It is always joined by its mate which has taken up a squatting position some four metres off whilst the other is incubating.

IT'S AN ILL-WIND.....OR ECOLOGY OBSERVED (cont/d.)

The return to the eggs is always hesitant and accomplished on foot with several stops en route to check that things have returned to normal. When about three to four metres from the eggs they go into an unusual performance which could best be described as a ritualised feeding. They peck around the area but don't appear to pick up or eat anything. This lasts for some three minutes and both birds seem at this stage to be highly agitated. The ritual is commenced and finished simultaneously by both birds. I do not know if this is designed to detract any potential predator from the real reason for their presence in the area or if it is a physical outlet for nervous tension redirected as it is into ritual feeding. I have observed this behaviour on three occasions.

I hope to be on hand for the hatching of the chicks and to note any new arrivals in this altered habitat. Originally there were two pairs of Japanese Snipe but over the last fortnight the number has increased to ten pairs. The Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, originally displaced from the paddock are now nesting in the Bladey Grass along the fence line. One nest has five young and another three white eggs. A Pheasant Coucal is nesting nearby in the cane and a pair of Masked Plovers are nesting about 200 metres from the Cuckoos.

Lastly, News-sheet No. 26 reported my sighting of Red-chested Button Quail, the location of which should have read "Kelly Saint George River" which is little more than a dry bed on the Cooktown Road.

Rod Hobson.



**New owl in the Andes**

The bird pictured above is completely new to science. It is a new genus and species of owl discovered by John O'Neill and Gary Graves of the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science, in cloud forest high on the eastern slopes of the Andes in northern Peru. The tiny owl is a member of the family Strigidae but has been given a genus and species of its own because of its unique features. Its facial feathers are long

and delicate filaments that extend in a fringe beyond the edge of its head. It also has long bristles at the base of the bill, and these grow up between the eyes to form a fan-like crest. These two features earned the owl its common name, Long-whiskered owl. The owl has also been given a scientific name *Xenoglaux loweryi*. The generic name, *Xenoglaux*, refers to the fact that, because of its whiskers and staring amber eyes, the new owl is a stranger among owls. And the species, *loweryi*, commemorates George H. Lowery Jr, Director of the Museum.

(From a recent issue of  
"New Scientist").

FIELD TRIP REPORT - 19.3.78.

The club's March field trip took us to several corners of Helidon which we had not previously explored, but which proved themselves worthy of more regular scrutiny in the future.

Our initial foraging around the creekside picnic area alongside the Warrego Highway was mainly an exercise in counting Dusky Moorhens with just two Azure Kingfishers and a small party of Clamorous Reed Warblers brightening the scene where the creek passes beneath the road.

(cont/d.)

FIELD TRIP REPORT - 19.3.78. (cont/d.)

Of considerably more interest was the lagoon situated on Hood's property to the North of the railway. A mighty earth dam which was constructed across this muddy gully during the recent drought will eventually add 3 to 4 metres of water on top of the existing few centimetres, but on the day of our field trip conditions were more appropriate for the sustenance of a variety of shallow-water feeders such as Egrets, Ibis, Spoonbills and the first Pied Stilts and Lotusbirds in our local study area. It will be most interesting to watch this body of water grow and to observe the changes in the make-up of the bird population over that period. Maybe this is where our first local Great Crested Grebe will turn up.

As is most usually the case on hot days the group disbanded once we had lunched, produced our composite bird list for the day (58 spp.), and taken a trek around the vicinity of our lunch spot, being on this occasion the dry sclerophyll of the Helidon Hills, in which we encountered a good selection of woodland birds such as Rufous-tailed Bronze-cuckoo, Spangled Drongo, Satin Flycatcher etc.

The day represented a rewarding first look at our Eastern perimeter and served to emphasise that there may be many pockets of a variety of habitats which remain to be explored even within our own local study area.

Bill Jolly.

Species List - Helidon - 19.3.78.

Little Grebe	E. Yellow Robin
Little Black Cormorant	Rufous Whistler
White-necked Heron	Satin Flycatcher
Large Egret	Grey Fantail
Plumed Egret	Willie Wagtail
White Ibis	Eastern Whipbird
Straw-necked Ibis	Golden-headed Cisticola
Royal Spoonbill	Superb Blue Wren
Yellow-b. Spoonbill	Speckled Warbler
Black Duck	Brown Thornbill
Grey Teal	Varied Sittella
Wood Duck	Wh.-thr. Tree-creeper
White-eyed Duck	Noisy Miner
Nankeen Kestrel	Lewin's Honeyeater
Dusky Moorhen	Yellow-f. Honeyeater
Masked Plover	White-n. Honeyeater
Black-fronted Dotterel	Brown Honeyeater
Lotusbird	Striated Pardalote
Pied Stilt	Silvereye
Bar-shouldered Dove	House Sparrow
Crested Pigeon	Double-barred Finch
Pale-headed Rosella	Ch.-br. Mannikin
Rufous-t. Br.-cuckoo	Common Starling
Azure Kingfisher	Common Myna
Kookaburra	Spangled Drongo
Sacred Kingfisher	Aust. Magpie-lark
Welcome Swallow	Grey Butcher-bird
Fairy Martin	Aust. Magpie
Richard's Pipit	Torresian Crow.

FIELD TRIP FOR APRIL.

Date: Saturday/Sunday/Monday, 29th April/1st May.

Place: Mudjimba Beach, Sunshine Coast.

Assembly Point: Queen's Park Kiosk, 7.30 a.m. Saturday, 29th April.

This long week-end campout has been arranged at a spot which is pretty away-from-it-all, yet at the same time provides all the facilities one might need for a family week-end. Birds should include a good variety of terns and waders (including stints) and we will be close to a spot near Maroochy which has already been strongly recommended to us by several members.

For any further information contact Bill Jolly at 30.1300 (daytime) or 30.3206 (a/h).

NEW MEMBERS.

The Club is pleased to welcome the following new members:

Max & Sylvia Wood, 7 Eymard St., Toowoomba.

Paul & Betty Gredig, 39A Philip St., Toowoomba.

Ron & Lorna Skilton, Eton St., Cambocya.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

The Bird Observer, March/April, 1978.

Urimbirra, March, 1978.

Q.O.S. Newsletter, February, 1978.

Darling Downs Naturalist, April, 1978.

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