



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:

President -	Ken McKeown	07 4630 3774	Treasurer -	Gloria Glass	07 4630 7054
Vice-President -	Jack Lund	07 4697 6390	Records Officer -	Pat McConnell	07 4697 6141
Secretary -	Nicci Thompson	07 4634 3074	Committee Members-	Olive Booth	07 4633 0553
Editor -	Michael Atzeni	07 4639 2761		Helen Wilson	07 4636 4362

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

NEWSLETTER No. 282 – October 1999

Editorial

Top marks to **Terry Pacey** who took up the challenge of developing a **web site** for the club, and handling it with aplomb. It is almost complete pending receipt of summary information about the various hotspots around here and accompanying photographs of the habitats and birds. Here's your chance to have your favourite birding snapshots displayed on the web site. You'll be acknowledged for the images and all photos will be promptly returned.

More great news with the club being formally invited by David Geering, the national **Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program** Co-ordinator, to **help on an ongoing basis with monitoring** the birds in Queensland. The area around Gore/Cement Mills east of Inglewood is proving to be a favoured destination and it is desirable to survey this area on a regular basis. David recognises the convenience of having a club like ours so strategically located.

What's needed is a committed and dedicated group of volunteers, prepared to cover the area regularly, particularly at certain times of the year, to help clarify the distribution, habitat preferences and population status of the Regents locally, so that they can be better managed in the future. If you're interested in helping, **President Ken**, as acting **local co-ordinator** would love to hear from you.

Speaking of Regent Honeyeaters, they've been somewhat of a saviour for the small rural NSW town of **Barraba**, the subject of one of this month's articles.

We also gain more insights into what makes an **atlasser** tick, this time from Helen Wilson's perspective. (I encourage other atlassers to share their stories to). Everything you wanted to know about **alternatives to recording "lats and longs"** is also provided, if that's all that's deterring you from lodging those unfinished atlas sheets. For those interested in the **progress of the Second Atlas**, particularly in Queensland, there's a **presentation** on the **21 October** in Brisbane (See Coming Events). Regan Scheuber makes his article debut with a nice piece on the **joint outing** with the **Stanthorpe Field Nats**, and we have a note on **Pied Butcherbird** song from Gloria.

Don't forget the **AGM on 19 October** with **Mark Weaver** (EPA) talking about **Golden-shouldered Parrots**.

By the way, I'm still waiting to hear from the **next Editor**. If you are even remotely interested please discuss it with me. I'm willing to help as much as I can with any teething problems.

Finally, **thanks** to everyone who contributed to the newsletter during the year, making it a pleasure to produce. Hope you enjoyed them and keep up the good work. Remember it's your forum, as well as a permanent public record for your birding experiences, so please continue to make good use of it.

Outing Report – “Upson Downs”, via Stanthorpe, 19 September 1999

The beautiful dry spring weather attracted a large crowd of birders and Stanthorpe Field Nats in a joint outing to “Upson Downs”, a property near Stanthorpe owned by Geoff and Rose McDonagh. For a start **Crimson Rosella** and **Bar -Shouldered Dove** were seen as people arrived at the entrance of the property.

We gathered alongside a small dam for morning tea where **Striped Honeyeaters** called persistently. Next, we walked to a point where we divided into two groups. The larger group ventured through the bush guided by yellow ribbons to a rocky escarpment with superb views. The small party kept to the main track heading to the dingo fence at the edge of the property. **Eastern Spinebill, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Eastern Yellow Robin, White-throated Treecreeper** and a female **Rufous Whistler** were seen, while a possible **Speckled Warbler** was too far back to identify.

The small party had arranged to meet the rest at the escarpment for lunch and when they arrived, **Inland Thornbill, White-eared Honeyeater** and **Leaden Flycatcher** were reported. Afterwards we ambled back to the house and enjoyed a pleasant chat, while Field Guides were checked and checklists were updated.

Using our eyes and ears, 31 species were recorded and a great time was enjoyed by everyone.

Regan Scheuber

Species list:

Bar-shouldered Dove, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, White-throated Treecreeper, Superb Fairy-Wren, Variegated Fairy-Wren, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Weebill, Brown Thornbill, Inland Thornbill, Red Wattlebird, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Eastern Yellow Robin, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Leaden Flycatcher, Grey Fantail, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, Olive-Backed Oriole, Grey Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Welcome Swallow, Fairy Martin.

Pied Butcherbird Song

Gowrie Junction's Pied Butcherbirds are singing their 1999 spring pre-dawn song. They have a different song every year. This year there are definitely two birds calling, one seeming to be an apprentice as 'he' doesn't quite finish the phrases the dominant bird sings. In previous years there has been only one bird calling.

This morning's call (10 Sep 99) started at 5 am with a few notes now and then. (These are all flute-like, individual notes, obviously by the same songster who sings those beautiful calls through the day, but the spring phrases are new each year.) By 5.15 he started in earnest, singing in somewhat random order five or six phrases.

The main phrase is just two notes, descending a semitone, the first staccato and second not. This short phrase occurs frequently. This morning, two, and later three, high notes were appended, and I came to think a second bird added these. The main song continued until 5.45, then a short pause, and then he began again and we found him on top of the wheel of the windmill. He didn't finish until 6 o'clock.

Daylight, light enough to read by, is about 5.50 am, but it was cloudy this morning, so the light was not bright at six.

We have had these birds singing different spring songs since 1989. They start mid-August and continue until October.

Gloria Glass

Confessions of an Atlas Addict

You've heard of choc-o-holics and steam train enthusiasts? Well I'm an Atlas Addict. I wasn't to begin with. In fact, I scorned the 20-minute survey. What on earth could you see in 20 minutes! As a beginner, it took me that long to find a bird let alone identify it, while those around me were identifying dozens of species by call, behaviour or flight pattern.

At first I did not bother with the 20-minute time slot, concentrating on an area search. I chose 2 places within walking distance of home and spent as long as I wanted with the emphasis being on positive identification, rather than numbers of species. By regularly visiting these sites I soon began to recognise these without referring to the book. Slowly I added more and more to them. On trips with seasoned birders I found my birds in other locations and from this foundation broadened my knowledge.

For a long time I was happy with my area searches, only doing 20 minute ones if I was in a hurry or with more experienced people. Gradually I found these shorter times becoming a challenge. How many could I actually write down in a time span? They were also useful when travelling or picnicking with non-birding friends and their offspring. Stop at any one play area, shop or garden centre for a break ... wait till everyone is absorbed ... then make your escape for 20 minutes. You can happily note down a few feathered friends before anyone one's noticed, as long as you don't do it too often!

A word of warning here - DO NOT DO THIS if you are in charge of children. A tiny peep from an unidentified bird can totally eclipse the yells of a screaming child, particularly if it's not yours.

Where picnics are concerned take my advice and hide your binoculars until the car is unpacked and everyone is fed, no matter how many raptors are overhead or how much fluttering you hear close by. With luck, these "winged birds" will become accustomed to your lurching and return when you are ready to jot them down. Should you begin observing them immediately, time will be forgotten and you will find the others have unpacked and probably eaten, before you realise it and the atmosphere will be decidedly chilly!

A good idea is to recall your partner or friends deep interest in gardening/shopping/machinery/history/mining or whatever takes their fancy and suggest visiting such sites. Whilst they become enthralled you can take a 20 min break and see what birds area around.

The joy of birdwatching is it can be done anywhere, be it the centre of town or a railway station or the middle of a cotton crop or roadside pull-in. Nor does it matter for Atlassing, if you only see two or three species, they are just as relevant as 22 or 23, probably more, as most Atlassers go for the popular birding sites.

The biggest problem I find is putting down your locations in lat and longs. Actually you don't have to do so. As long as you give as accurate a description of where you atlassed, the RO whom you send you forms to will work it out. Alternatively for Nicci Thompson's area, your committee will do it for you.

If you stop on a journey put the mileage down or set the odometer to zero and when you get to the town or road junction note down how far you've travelled and the names on the signposts and the direction you came. Give as much information as possible. Property names - railway line - creek - highway. The RO's would much rather have your Atlas records without lats and longs than none at all.

I personally still find area surveys the most satisfying, particularly on holidays when travelling in new areas in which there are odd birds. Out comes my "Pizzey" then and I'm taken back 2 years, to my very early days of trying to locate the moving object and getting it to remain still long enough to identify. Occasionally I cheat and get my husband to drive slowly down a dirt rad for 5 km, stopping en route at the odd dam to see what's on the water. It is amazing how many birds we see without even getting out of the car.

There is no doubt in our mind that atlassing is not only fun, but by doing it everyone is helping Australia record the distribution and changes in bird populations since the last survey. Who knows how valuable this will turn out to be to future generations?

Happy Atlassing!

Helen Wilson

"Lats and Longs" – A Compromise.

In last month's article, I meant to suggest that if people like to use particular maps and say where they did a survey, I could work out the latitudes and longitudes.

Maps suggested are:

RACQ: give NAME of the map, use a metric ruler and state: "x cm on road from Y to Z". Or you might have taken a speedo reading either before or after your survey, so you could state km distances. You might also have to say something like "It's sort of SW of where-ever".

Downs*Lockyer 2 (yellow-covered map book): give MAP NO, and reference, eg "Map 34,2D". Actually if you have this book, use a metric ruler to the nearest ringed township from your survey point. 1 cm = 1 km, and give direction, eg NE, NNE etc.

Any of the **1:100 thousand maps series**. State the NAME of the map, its SHEET NO. and give the reference if you can work it out from the explanation entitled "Grid Reference". If that proves a bit difficult just state, eg: "Between 65 & 64 down the left, and between 15 and 16 across the bottom". For these maps also, 1 cm = 1 km, for your distance from a town.

I've got a good collection of the 1:100 thou maps, and I'm sure I can access others for more distant places.

Start Atlassing. Don't let lats and longs put you off! If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me or any of the executive.

Gloria Glass

Barraba District – Regent Honeyeater Country

The town of Barraba is approximately 550 km SW of Brisbane in NSW, nestled in the Nandewar Range west of Armidale and has a history dating back 160 years.

Barraba has taken the **Regent Honeyeater** on as its faunal emblem to encourage awareness of its plight and preservation. They have established a sequence of bird watching trails along travelling stock routes within the district. These routes, which include fenced reserves, are accessible to the public often by gates and ramps or open laneways.

Local knowledge reports the Nangahrah Bird Route (10) as a Regent Honeyeater breeding area when Mugga Ironbarks are in flower. Needless to say, the Muggas were not flowering but in early bud stage at the time I was there in April (Anzac Day long weekend). Birds Australia (formerly RAOU) and Landcare groups have erected a large sign along Route 10 at an ideal spot. To take advantage of the region's abundant birdlife, the local birdos established the bird trails with a view to encourage tourism into the area.

More details including bird routes and contacts are available at the Barraba Information Centres.

Even though we missed the targeted bird, we enjoyed a relaxing break birding in the area. Fifty-eight species were seen.

Pat Solomon

[The project recently won an award for environmental tourism at NSW's Big Sky Country Regional Tourism Awards. 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.

Pacific Baza	16/08/99	Connor's Rd, Helidon	JL
Varied Triller	18/08/99	Redwood Park	MH
Variegated Fairy-wren ^c	23/08/99	Boyce Gardens, E. Toowoomba	DM
Eastern Rosella	03/09/99	Toowoomba Waterbird Habitat	HW
Black-necked Stork (2) ^a	04/09/99	Lake Broadwater, via Dalby	MW
White-breasted Woodswallow	04/09/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Brown Treecreeper	04/09/99	Highfields	KW
Western Gerygone ^b	09/09/99	Dalby	MW
Pelican (8)	12/09/99	over middle Ridge, Toowoomba	MA
Square-tailed Kite	18/09/99	Yuraraba	MA, LA, KM
Freckled Duck (71)	20/09/99	Thargomindah	PM & KW
Black-breasted Buzzard	20/09/99	Thargomindah	PM & KW
White-browed Treecreeper	20/09/99	Thargomindah	PM & KW
Hall's Babbler	20/09/99	Thargomindah	PM & KW
Orange Chat	20/09/99	Thargomindah	PM & KW
Bourke's Parrot	21/09/99	Eulo Bore	PM & KW
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	21/09/99	Apex Lake, Gatton	MA
Banded Land-Rail	21/09/99	Helidon Spa	MA
Australian Pratincole (47)	22/09/99	Cunnamulla	PM & KW
Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush	22/09/99	Thargomindah	PM & KW
Osprey	22/09/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (3)	24/09/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Nankeen Night Heron (2)	26/09/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Spotted Harrier	26/09/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Topknot Pigeon (25)	27/09/99	Highfields	PM & KW
Black Falcon	29/09/99	Highfields	PM & KW
Grey-crowned Babbler (4)	29/09/99	Back Flagstone Ck Rd, 2.2 km S of Helidon	RR

Spring arrivals

Rainbow Bee-eater (10) ^d	04/09/99	Lake Broadwater, via Dalby	MW
Common Koel	16/09/99	East Toowoomba	OB, HW
Channel-billed Cuckoo	17/09/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Little Bronze-Cuckoo	21/09/99	Spring Ck, nth of Lake Clarendon	MA
Spectacled Monarch	21/09/99	Redwood Park, Toowoomba	MA
Black-faced Monarch	21/09/99	Redwood Park, Toowoomba	MA
Channel-billed Cuckoo	30/09/99	Rockville, N. Toowoomba	MA
Dollarbird	03/10/99	Duggan Park, E. Toowoomba	PM, KM
Dollarbird	03/10/99	Anthony's Rd, Withcott	MA
Common Koel	04/10/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Black-faced Monarch ^e	04/10/99	"Wallingford", 9 km NW of Pittsworth	GG
Dollarbird	05/10/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ
Channel-billed Cuckoo ^f	07/10/99	Prince Henry Drive, E. Toowoomba	KK, HW
White-throated Needletail (3)	10/10/99	Karrara	WJ
White-throated Needletail (2)	10/10/99	"Abberton", Helidon	WJ

^a Circling high over the lake. Didn't land and flew off in a westerly direction.

^b In our garden

^c Group of about 10 birds in the rainforest at 6 Range St, Toowoomba (Boyce Gardens). First record for the property

^d First personal record for this area at this time of year.

^e In casuarina/vine forest, perhaps 50% cover, in road reserve beside unmade black-soil road, with similar forest up the hill in the property adjoining.

^f While on U3A Birding for Beginners outing, for 4-5 minutes watched Magpies trying to drive them from their area. One Magpie actually caught a Channel-bill on the back of its neck and the two birds spiralled downwards, only breaking off as they approached a house roof.

MA	M. Atzeni	OB	O. Booth	GG	G. Glass	PM	P. McConnell
LA	L. Atzeni	MH	M. Hirst	RR	R. Rudduck	JL	J. Lund
WJ	W. Jolly	KM	K. McKeown	KK	K. Kerr	MW	M. Wilson
DM	D. Mears	HW	H. Wilson	KW	K. Watson		

