

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

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NEWS-SHEET No. 30 - JUNE, 1978.

The Club's Annual General Meeting will be held this year on Friday, 20th. October, and the evening will include a showing of excellent bird slides by Marilyn Jacobs. Our third Annual Bird Count will be taking place on Sunday, 22nd. October, so please keep these two dates free.

Each month we are trying to include some photos related to the items published, or of general interest to members and this month we are fortunate to be able to include the prize-winning picture exhibited by Marilyn Jacobs at the Ipswich Show. Anyone contributing items to the news-sheet is invited to include black & white prints with their article.

Further information about the Black-shouldered Kite project is contained in this news-sheet. The project is beginning to get underway but further helpers would be welcome.

The Bird School being held at Armidale may be of interest to some members. More information is included inside. Unfortunately, the dates fall outside Queensland school holidays.

Our next outing, to the Museum on Saturday, 24th June should prove very interesting. We are fortunate to have Don Vernon to show us the skin collection. Articles on the preparation of bird skins and specimens for the museum have been included to give members some insight into the preparation which goes into such collections.

Sue Elmes,  
Editor.

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

These will now be found at the back of this news-sheet. As these bird notes cannot be compiled until Gold Checklists are received, it was felt that a change in position would facilitate the preparation of the news-sheet, while at the same time maintaining the topicality of our bird notes.

(Thank you again to those members who return their checklists in the first few days of the month, it helps a great deal in news-sheet preparation).

Editor.

## HOW TO SAVE DEAD BIRD SPECIMENS FOR MUSEUM USE.

With the proposed visit to the Museum, it was felt that the following article would be of interest to members, and would give some insight into the preparation that goes into such collections.

1. Put specimen in plastic bag and store in deep freeze until arrangements can be made to get it to a museum. Take care to label the specimen with locality found, date, collector's name and any other relevant information.
2. Save at least head and neck by cutting off with a knife and placing in a bottle of methylated spirit and provide data. Write only in pencil (not biro) or Indian Ink.
3. Prepare the dead bird so that it can be used as a museum study skin.  
(Copies of "How to Prepare a Bird Study Skin" available).

### Bird Skin Making.

Minimum Tools required:-

- 1 fine sharp scalpel
- 1 coarse scalpel
- 1 sharpening stone
- 1 pair dissecting scissors, 6" long
- 1 pair fine, straight forceps
- 1 probe (not essential, but desirable)
- 1 pair side-cutting pliers
- 1 small flat file

Materials:-

- Powdered borax (minimum 4ozs.)
- 1 roll cotton wool (Johnson & Johnson)
- Powdered maize meal if available
- Straight pieces of monel or galvanised wire or fine wooden medical applicators.

### Method:-

First weigh the bird in grams. Then measure wingspan and total length from tip of bill to end of tail. Take measurements in mms. Make a colour note of all soft parts such as bill, tarsus, skin around eye, wattles or cere.

Plug the mouth with cotton wool to prevent seepage of fluids. If blood on feathers clean off with cold water, then use Acetone or Shellite with maize meal. Dust the tail out with a fine brush or if in a laboratory use an air compressor or air blower.

Lay bird on its back and make an opening cut from end of sternum to near the cloaca. Use scalpel, take edge of skin with fingers and skin down to expose the knee joint. Push the knee joint up and cut through, cut flesh off leg, rub on borax and bind lightly with cotton wool. Repeat this procedure for the other leg. If body juices emerge, dust on borax powder or maize meal.

With scissors, cut through the end of the intestine close to the cloaca and through the vertebrae at the base of the tail. Do not cut tail quills. Continue until the tail is free, then proceed to skin down the back using the scalpel and sometimes the handle of it to help press the skin from the body.

Skin down the back until the bases of the wings are exposed. Cut them off at the shoulder joint. Continue turning the skin forward until the neck is reached. Work along the neck and expose the base of the skull.

Carefully move the skin forward to the ears and, with forceps or probe, lift the skin out of ear hollows. Proceed to the eyes and cut through the membrane which is between the eyeball and eyelid. Try to avoid cutting the eyelids. Dust cavity with borax and insert ball of cotton wool. Cut off neck at skull endeavouring to take out body, neck, lower back of skull and tongue in one piece. Scrape brain clean and

(cont/d.)

### Bird Skin Making (cont/d.)

dust with borax. (In regard to birds with large heads and small necks such as ducks, make a 2" incision down back of head and neck. This will permit one to clean out eyes and brain. Check to see whether the skull is fully or partially ossified and note on label. Note the size of gonads in mms. length by breadth (e.g. 6 x 4 mms). Note condition of oviduct. Is it straight or convoluted? Note food contents in crop and/or gizzard.

Dampen skin of head and neck, then turn back. This requires practice. It is like pushing back an inverted finger of a glove. Scrape fat off, also cut off any muscle adhering to the skin. Clean the muscles from the wing-bones including muscles between radius and ulna, dust with borax and lightly wrap with cotton wool. If you use wire, roughen it before use. Make the artificial body a little smaller than the body. Insert into skin and push neck end as far as possible into brain cavity. Sew up the cut with needle and fine thread and arrange feathers. Stitch through the nostrils and tie the upper and lower mandibles together. Use the forceps on the feathers and try to make the cabinet skin symmetrical from above and smooth from the side. Put skin in either a cylinder of newspaper held with a pin to keep feathers intact, or gently wrap in flat film of cotton wool.

#### Labelling:-

Take a piece of clean white card approximately  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " x 1" and on the face side write, in ink, locality, collector's name, date and sex of specimen. On the reverse side, write colour of iris, bill, legs and feet, and any other known facts. Tie this label to the crossed legs of the bird skin with good quality linen thread.

#### Determination of Sex:-

Lay the bird body on its back and cut with scissors from near the cloaca to the ribs. If the specimen is a male, two small, smooth, elliptical organs - the testes - will be found at the anterior end of the three-lobed kidneys. Do not confuse male testes with flat, pale yellow adrenal glands situated also at the anterior end of kidneys. The size of the gonads varies with age and season. If the specimen is a female, the single organ - the ovary - will be found lying a little to the left side at the anterior end of the kidney. The ovary is granular, and appears like a tiny bunch of grapes and varies in size, getting larger in the breeding season.

Note: Arsenical soap is sometimes used in lieu of borax. It is an excellent bird skin preservative but is poisonous, although not dangerous if used with caution.

D.P. Vernon,  
Queensland Museum.

### RESIDENTIAL COURSE: THE STUDY OF BIRDS.

26th August to 3rd September, 1978.

Armidale University and Dorrigo National Park.

Cost: \$170 plus motel accommodation for three nights in Dorrigo.

This includes meal and full accommodation except for these three nights.

The course includes lectures and films on evolution of birds, behaviour, migration, breeding biology etc. plus practical field work including use of mist nets, banding, carrying out censuses and ecological studies.

The course sounds exciting and worthwhile. Enrolments are limited to 30 people so early enrolment is important. For further information contact Mike Russell, Dept. of Biology, D.D.I.A.E.

Ed.

BIRDLIFE ON QUEENSLAND AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE POND.

I was most interested to read the article in T.B.C. News-sheet No. 27 about the Apex Lake at Gatton together with the very comprehensive list of birds which Sue and Phillip Elmes recorded there.

Whilst they were recording there I, together with a series of wild-life students, was studying the birdlife on the rather smaller pond at Queensland Agricultural College. I was, in fact, closely associated with those members of Apex who initiated the Apex Lake project, in particular Jim Galletly and Dennis Minson.

At the College we recorded quantitatively, but with less expertise than Sue and Phillip, over the term-times of four years (1973 to 1976 incl.). There are thus no recordings for December and January, the long vacation.

Water-birds that we did not record that were recorded on Apex Lake were:- Darter, Black Cormorant, Jabiru, Glossy Ibis, Lotusbird, Royal Spoonbill, White Pygmy Goose (but seen during the period on Dyer's Lagoon).

The only bird we saw that you didn't was the Little Bittern. We found a dead specimen on the dam in 1974. This is still in the deep freeze at the College. I have photographs of it. A pair were seen at 8.00 a.m. on 20th September, 1976 on the edge of the pond. The Marsh Crake was not seen at the pond but it was seen several times in long green panic grass on campus.

Our recordings for Japanese Snipe were:- 26.8.74. (1) - 10 am. 26.9.74. (2) - 8.15 am. 30.9.74. (3) - 10.30 am. 2.9.76. (1) - 10.15 am. 9.9.76. (1) - 1.30 pm. 23.10.76. (11). None were seen in 1973 or 1975.

We confirm a marked increase in Cattle Egrets in 1975 and 1976 but I don't have figures because of the difficulty of differentiating between them and the Little Egret.

Our commonest duck was always the Grey Teal with sometimes over 200 on the hectare of water. Second were Black Duck with occasionally more than 80. Grass Whistle-duck arrived in smallish flocks in winter: up to 12 from March in 1973; none in 1974; up to 35 from July in 1975; up to 30 but usually less from March in 1976. White-eyed Ducks were seen most of the time but were rare in 1974. 30 was the largest number recorded in August 1975.

The difference in duck species distribution on our two lakes must reflect differences in type of lake. The Gatton Apex Lake is clear, well-oxygenated and probably already has a good population of water fauna. This would encourage the diving and carnivorous White-eyed Duck. The College pond is turbid and often approaches eutrophication due to piggery and abattoir effluents. It has a very high algal content but conditions are less satisfactory for diving, carnivorous birds. They seem, however, ideal for herbivorous, edge feeders. I must talk to Alan Young, our freshwater ecologist, about this.

Observations were by myself and by many students from 6.00 am. onwards. Few days were missed and on some days there were as many as five separate observations. Most of the students were not trained bird-watchers but learned the birds on the pond from me and by using Slater.

Mike Russell.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE STUDY.

David Hope has devised a method of catching the kites which I believe has every chance of success. He has based it on a method used in an American study to investigate the biology of Ospreys.

In the Osprey study, a dead fish had its gas bladder inflated so that it would float just beneath the surface. The fish was then enclosed in a mesh cage with a large number of fishing line nooses. As the Osprey strikes at the fish its legs are entangled.

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BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE STUDY (cont/d.)

David's technique makes use of this noose idea. The trap is a mesh square (chicken wire) with a border of timber covered with fishing line nooses. The live bait (mice) is then attached to the mesh or put in a perspex box which would also be covered with these nooses.

In the field kites can easily be approached by car as they perch on telephone poles or roadside trees. After approaching as close as possible the trap is stealthily fixed by pegs to the ground and the car reversed away.

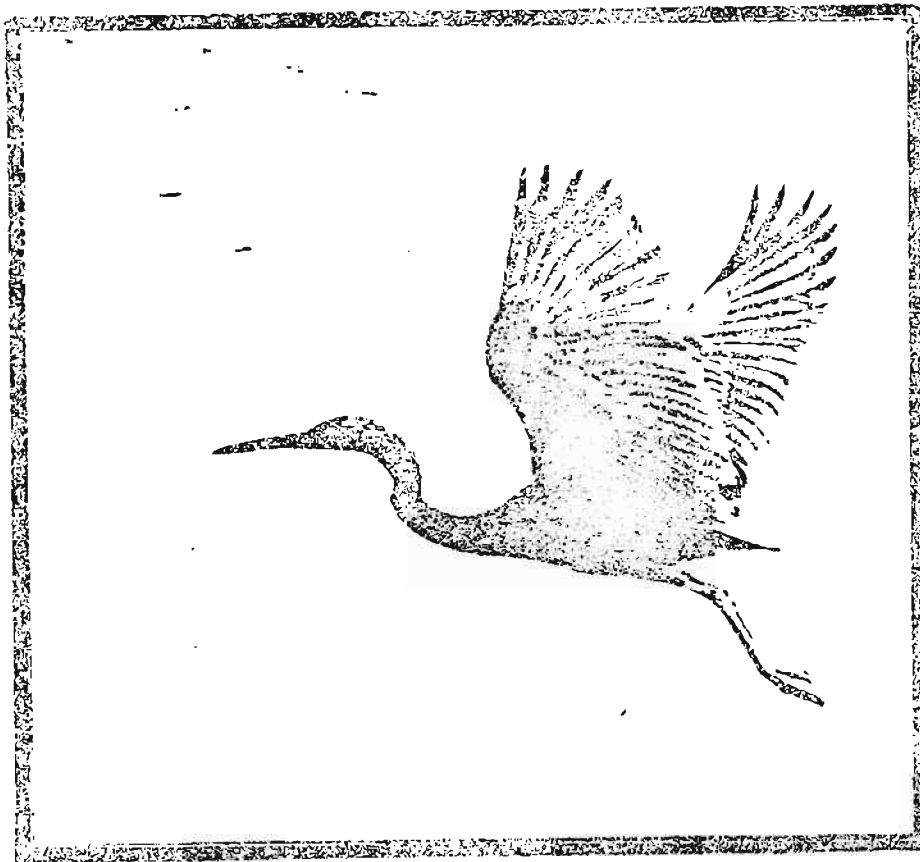
If and when the kite attacks the bait, its legs are ensnared and capture accomplished.

Submissions are currently being prepared to obtain permits to trap and band the kites from the Director, National Parks and Wildlife and the Australian Bird Banding Scheme. Mike Russell has kindly made available the plastic material used for wing tagging. He used it on Swamphens at Gatton Agricultural College and obtained it in the first place from Veronica Parry who used it in her well-known study of Kookaburras. In a personal communication with Mike she has suggested that he might use her surgical technique for sexing Swamphens. It may be that we will have to resort to this with the kites.

I am hoping Don Vernon will be able to help us with sexing the kites when we go to the Museum. Their collection should be very interesting and helpful in this study.

John Coman.

"REEF HERON IN FLIGHT".



I took this picture of a grey phase Reef Heron in December, 1977 while attending a bird school on Heron Island (see News-sheet No. 26 - February, 1978). I used a Pentax camera with a 200 mm. lens and Ilford FEM film. Normally a colour photographer, I began using black & white film after encouragement from Peter Slater, who was a lecturer at the school. I was stalking this heron when he took off, enabling me to capture his seemingly effortless flight. Peter Slater plans to use a copy of this photograph in his forthcoming book on bird photography. In addition, it was recently awarded 1st place in nature prints at the Ipswich Show.

Marilyn Jacobs.

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FIELD TRIP REPORT - 27.5.78.

We must have selected the coldest, windiest day so far this year for our excursion to Deongwar State Forest.

The undaunted group met at Pigott's Car Park at 8.30 a.m., rugged to the hilt. Before commencing our journey we made a slight detour to David Hope's residence to see his collection of birds of prey - including a Brown Falcon, a Nankeen Kestrel, and two Brown Goshawks, and, in addition, his colourful collection of pheasants, parrots, lorikeets, finches etc. On our arrival we were treated to a 'wild' Brown Goshawk visiting the captive ones, however 'he' made a hasty exit on detecting our presence.

Once down in the forest, the day became slightly more pleasant, leaving the wind behind us. Unfortunately, the birds must also have felt that it was a day for staying at home, and the forest was not quite the hive of activity that one usually finds. We followed a trail through an Open Eucalypt Forest down into a creek bed surrounded by Rainforest Vegetation. Due to the terrain and distance from the vehicles, lunches were left behind; so after 4 hours "cups of tea etc." were certainly enjoyed in the picturesque (though somewhat colder) surroundings of Ravensbourne National Park.

Our bird tally at Deongwar included a Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, 2 Glossy Cockatoos by the roadside, Eastern Yellow Robins, numerous Grey Fantails, White-crowned Scrubwrens, Brown Thornbills, White-throated Tree-creeper, Lewin's Honey-eaters, Eastern Spinebill and Red Wattlebird, whilst an Eastern Whipbird and a Satin Bowerbird were heard.

Barbara Barrett.

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

Australian Pelican. 24.5.78. Flagstone Ck. PG.

Jabiru. 7.5.78. Cooby Dam. PG.

Royal Spoonbill. 26.5.78. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.

Black Kite. 4.4.78. James St., T'mba. GC. JEC.

12.4.78. T.S.H.S., Mt. Lofty. JMC. JD. BM.

7.5.78. (4) East Ck. Park, T'mba. RW. VW.

9.5.78. (1) Gatton. SE.

12.5.78. (2) " SE.

13.5.78. (2) " PE.

20.5.78. (4) " SE. PE.

21.5.78. (2) T'mba. Bacon Factory Area. Club outing.

21.5.78. Ravensbourne Area. EJ. WJ.

21.5.78. (2) Gatton. SE. PE.

22.5.78. (1) " SE.

22.5.78. (3) Grantham. SE.

" (1) Helidon. SE.

" (1) James St., T'mba. SE.

26.5.78. Bedford St. Dump. JEC.

27.5.78. (1) South of Mt. Peel, Drayton. FR. MR.

28.5.78. (2) Railway Yards, T'mba. RW. VW.

28.5.78. (15) Oakey. JMC.

Whistling Kite. 11.5.78. Flagstone Ck. turnoff. SE.

28.5.78. (1) Dam, nr. Redbank Ck., Gatton. SE. PE.

" (2) Swamp, nr. Lake Clarendon. SE. PE.

Brown Goshawk. 6.4.78. Ocean St., T'mba. GC. JEC.

21.5.78. Allentby St., T'mba. Club Outing.

Grey Goshawk. 15.5.78. Ravensbourne. JMC.

XX Spotted Harrier. 27.4.78. Kingsthorpe. MW.

21.5.78. Ravensbourne. EJ. WJ.

22.5.78. Logan St. Bridge, Gatton. PE.

27.5.78. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.

(XX This Spotted Harrier was incorrectly reported by us as a Little Falcon in last month's news-sheet. Apologies to MW.)

(cont/d.)

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES (cont/d.)

- Swamp Harrier. 6.6.78. Redbank Ck., Gatton. SE. PE.
- Little Falcon. 29.5.78. Oakey. JMC.
- Red-kneed Dotterel. 22.5.78. Apex Lake. PE.
- Silver Gull. 27.3.78. Apex Lake. RGH.  
20.4.78. Hill nr. Apex Lake. SE. PE.
- Spotted Nightjar. 21.5.78. Castle Hill, Townsville. RGH.
- Red-backed Kingfisher. 1.5.78. Gordonvale. RGH.
- White-headed Pigeon. 19.5.78. Ravensbourne. JMC.
- Brown Pigeon. 24.5.78. Eymard St., T'mba. MW.
- Glossy Cockatoo. 21.5.78. Deongwar. EJ. WJ.
- Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. 15.4.78. D.D.I.A.E. Area. BM.
- Fan-tailed Cuckoo. 4.4.78. Rangeview. JEC.
- Cicadabird. 12.4.78. Rangeview. JEC.
- Crested Shrike-tit. 19.5.78. Ravensbourne. JMC.
- Shining Flycatcher. 7.5.78. Cape Tribulation. RGH.
- Striped Honeyeater. 22.5.78. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.
- Eastern Spinebill. 6.5.78. Eymard St., T'mba. MW.  
25.5.78. Ocean St., T'mba. JEC. GC.
- Plum-headed Finch. Th'out. May. Large flocks roosting, "Ringmere". EJ. WJ.  
27.5.78. 20 plus. Woodland State Forest, SE. PE.  
Gatton.  
4.6.78. 50 plus. " " " " SE. PE.

JMC: John Coman. GC: Graham Corbin. JEC: Jim Corbin. JD: John Duff.  
 PE: Phillip Elmes. SE: Sue Elmes. PG: Paul Gredig. RGH: Rod Hobson.  
 EJ: Eileen Jolly. WJ: Bill Jolly. BM: Bill McKenzie. ER: Elizabeth  
 Russell. MR: Mike Russell. RW: Ron Wilson. VW: Viv Wilson. MW: Max Wood.

FIELD TRIP FOR JUNE.

Date: Saturday, 24th June. Queensland Museum, Brisbane.  
 Departure: 8.30 a.m., Withcott Hotel - to meet at Museum at 10.30 a.m.  
 Members will be shown the skin collection etc. by Don Vernon. To be followed  
 by picnic lunch in the new Botanic Gardens.

FIELD TRIP FOR JULY.

Gatton Area - Apex Lake and Woodlands State Forest. Sunday, 23rd. July.  
 Leaders: Sue & Phillip Elmes.

NEW MEMBERS.

The Club is pleased to welcome the following new members:-  
 Mike Russell & family, "Baringa", Wyreema Rd., via. T'mba., 4352.  
 Jim Syme & family, 30, Rome St., T'mba.  
 Mark Stewart, 1A, Arthur St., T'mba.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

Darling Downs Naturalist, June, 1978.  
 R.A.O.U. Information Booklet. This includes the aims and objectives  
 of the R.A.O.U., plus subscription forms. Anyone interested, please  
 see the Editor.