

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS INC



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

No. 361
February 2007

Editorial

By Darren Fielder

Welcome to the first TBO newsletter in the new format. The Executive Committee members endorsed the new look at our last meeting – we hope you like it!

This newsletter is packed full of articles and photos. Thankyou to all who continue to provide birding stories for our enjoyment. We even have an article from our visiting Canadians, Alan & Carol German, who helped Michael Atzeni and Olive Booth in last year's species census.

Following from the Corvid story in last month's newsletter, here is a photo of a strange, ultra-tame, blue-eyed crow that Pat & Dave Cleary photographed last year (Amos Road Withcott). It seems to have a deformed upper bill as well. Mick Atzeni believes it to be a Torresian Crow, but he is happy for anyone to say otherwise so that he can include it in last years Challenge?



The *Summer Target: 250 species Beyond club survey area* is going well at 262 species sighted so far. Recent sightings include a **Crested Turn** (Pumice Stone Passage), **Glossy Ibis** (Lake Apex) and **White-bellied Cucko-shrike** and **Scarlet Honeyeaters** (Mogill State Forest).

The Challenge 2007 has been clocking up the species as well with recent additions being **Square-tailed Kite** (Highfields), **Glossy-black Cockatoo** (Neilson Park) and **Yellow-tufted** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters** (Murphy's Ck).

Congratulations to Ken & Eileen Munro for winning the field guide from the January club outing! Also, a big welcome to our new members: Joe & Sue Scanlan and John Lahooslouma.

The Challenge 2007

174 spp as at 18 Feb



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS INC

(An affiliated Group of the Bird Observers Club of Australia)

P.O. Box 4730, Toowoomba East 4350

www.toowoombabirdobservers.org

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COMING EVENTS

Saturday 3 March 2007 - **Highfields Falls** – Meet at Dau Road entrance at 4.30pm. Bird watching until 6:30pm, then a quick cuppa and a bite to eat. At 7:15pm – owl spotlighting for about an hour. The night should finish between 8.00 and 8.30pm. There are no facilities at the park. Please bring torch, jumper and insect repellent and some food/drink if required. Contact Pat McConnell (07) 4631 5573.

24/25 March 2007 - **Species Census**. Contact Mick Atzeni (07) 4639 2761

Square-tailed Kite Lockup!

By Neil Huth

I was having lunch with the family when we heard a scuffle break out in the garage. Lo and behold this **Square-tailed Kite** (see pictures) was stuck down behind the kid's bikes. An adult **Crested Pigeon** was trying in vain to get out of the closed window. Just before this happened we were watching what we thought was our old **Square-tailed Kite**¹ out the back of our place (not this bird).



An adult Square-tailed Kite that had decided to fly into Neil Huth's garage, 10th February 2007.

After the two large birds were released, we found a small baby pigeon on the floor in the garage. Most pigeons and doves nest behind our house (Don Gaydon has seen photos of these) in the large hedges etc and so we were surprised to see the baby. Is it likely that the baby was snatched nearby, the adult pigeon gave chase and startled the kite enough for it to fly into the house rather than between the houses? I cannot think of too many ways you end up with three birds caught in the garage!! Unfortunately, the babe died soon after from a wound on its back. We have four kites around Gatton at the moment. They were all circling at the same time above me as I lay back in my pool. They could be the same four we had last year which would suggest this bird may be not so young.

What on earth happened?

Neil Huth, Gatton.

P.S. These are the first birds we've caught in the garage. We normally catch old Salvation Army ladies. Each year they come door knocking. Enter the garage. Assume the button on the wall is a door bell. Press it and close the garage door behind them. I then help them exit via our front door. So far only the baby pigeon has died in our hands. Just a matter of time though.

Editors note: Thankyou Neil for sharing this story with our membership.

¹ Neil has seen the kites at his place regularly each season.

Raining birds...

By Colin Lorback

I was golfing this Saturday morning (3rd February 2007) when, at 8:30, something landed with a thud about three metres away from my playing partner and myself. I immediately thought it was one of our many **Scaly-breasted** or **Rainbow Lorikeets** on our course which had finally succumbed to its frenetic screeching and flying behaviour – just "hypered" itself to death. But no, it was a plump little baby bird, just beginning to fledge. Dead.

I think it was a magpie but my knowledge of infant birds is pretty well non-existent. We both simultaneously looked up, expecting, I guess, to see a large tree bough (plus nest) extending over the fairway. Not so. Instead, high, high directly above was quite a large raptor slowly gliding away, which I have to suppose dropped his breakfast near us. A gift? Or a juvenile raptor lacking fine talon dexterity?

The raptor was so high that I could not identify any colouring. The shape seemed to me to be that of a **Black Kite**, **Square-tailed Kite**, **Little Eagle**, or possibly a **Wedge-tailed Eagle**. Sorry about the vagueness of all of this. I have never noticed any raptors while golfing, although the course is right on the escarpment. We do, though, often see evidence of some type of **Australian Wood Duck** predation on the fairways - multiple feathers in a clumped arrangement, and nothing much else remaining.

Finally, we are able to get very close to the Wood Ducks on the golf course - they are quite used to those stupid shorts-wearing, swearing club-swinging humans who mean no harm. Today for the first time I noticed a flock of about 12-15 ducks "sunning" themselves in the open, all with their heads cocked heavily sideways. I was only two metres away, and they did not turn their heads to check me out as is usual for them. It was around the time of the falling infant episode, and I have never noticed this head-cocking behaviour previously. Would the ducks have been keeping one eye out for the raptor overhead?? I can only assume so. Anyway, it was an event that helped alleviate much of the agony of a very poor round of golf this morning.

Editor's note: My bantam roosters cock their heads when on sentry and let out a warning crow for the hens to take cover if a raptor is about.

The tree that ate the Zebra Finches

By Alan & Carol German,

Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

When Mick Atzeni, President of the Toowoomba Bird Observers Inc., placed a notice on the club's web site inviting "anyone" to join one of the groups conducting the October bird census, he probably didn't bargain on a couple of Canadian birders responding. But, that's exactly what happened.

We were planning to visit eastern Australia during the month of October and were scouring the Internet looking for "hot" birding locations and tips on where to find particular species.

Not that we were too particular about the latter. There is very little overlap in the birds found in North America and in Australia. So, for us, any bird was going to be a good bird!

Mick was kind enough to invite us to join his team for the census. And so, early on Saturday morning we climbed aboard the vehicle and started out on the adventure. The any-bird theory was soon substantiated as Mick quickly went through our list to date. "You haven't seen xxx" was a regular refrain as he reviewed the unchecked listings for many common (to him!) species. Sure, but we found birding in Australia pretty difficult. It's obvious that Australian birds are incredibly shy. They sit amongst the deepest, densest foliage and never move. They do call out, but if you don't know any songs – and they don't ever move – they are pretty hard to spot, let alone identify. (Note to self – buy the bird song CD before the next trip to Oz.)

So, with shy birds everywhere, the census technique proved to be quite illuminating. With Laurie Atzeni at the wheel of the truck, Mick had all the windows open. Both Mick and Laurie were listening intently, as the vehicle moved along, and were listing multiple species in quick succession. Meanwhile Olive Booth tried desperately to keep a faithful record of what had been seen, in which sector. Quite an impressive display of teamwork!



Meanwhile the Canadians were basically along for the ride, not knowing any of the songs, and so unable to help in any meaningful way. But, then came a chance – a favourite stop, with the promise of target species, yielded – a pair of **Zebra Finches** on the fence line at the side of the road. But, of course, by the time the assembled crew had poured out of the vehicle, the birds had flown – straight into the foliage of one of those Australian trees. And, despite the group surrounding the tree, those little guys were nowhere to be seen. The wind was blowing, and the leaves were swaying, but there was nary a feather to be observed. And, these birds didn't know the rules. They kept quiet, in addition to remaining hidden. Finally, it was obvious that the finches had somehow escaped, unnoticed by any of us, or else had been eaten by the tree!

So, it was time to admit defeat on this species, and give up the quest. But then, as we climbed back into the truck and started off down the road, two little birds peeled out of the tree, and flew down the road ahead of us. Finally, they settled back down on the fence line, thinking that they were hidden by sparse vegetation. But, they were obviously unaware of the power of binoculars and so were fairly readily observed despite their best efforts at concealment.

Quite a few species proved to be equally difficult. Ask Mick about the **Mistletoebirds** that he saw everywhere, but of which the Canadians could never get a good view until, once again, one male made the mistake of sitting still for thirty seconds!

But, perhaps we are being unkind to Australian birds. They weren't all so uncooperative. At one point we had three different species of fairy wrens in view at the same time. The **Australian Hobby** perched on top of a tree long enough to get the 'scope focused. And, there was no missing the **Pink-eared Duck** in the middle of the pond. But, for most species, we certainly needed the help of our new birding friends – to identify the **Channel-billed Cuckoo** in flight at long range, and the **Pale-headed Rosellas** whizzing past our field of view at high speed.

But, all joking aside, we had a terrific morning's birding. We came away with over twenty life birds, and a true appreciation for the skills of our companions. We met more of the group over lunch for a preliminary review of the species seen across the different areas covered and it was great to see the enthusiasm of these birders.

But, as the group broke up and headed home, we weren't quite finished. Olive took us to Mick's work place where a couple of new (to us) species were possible. Sure enough, she soon located the nesting **Tawny Frogmouth**, a bark-plumaged bird sitting bolt upright against a background of bark. Now, there's a species that's just a little different from anything we see in the Great White North! And, while we couldn't locate the **Musk Lorikeets**, there was another bonus bird in store for us. The adult Frogmouth was snapping his (or her) beak. Initially we thought that this was because it was annoyed at the **Pied Butcherbird** (Number 23 for the day!) that was swooping down and hitting the Frogmouth on the top of its head. But, then Olive discovered another possible reason. At the foot of the tree, immediately adjacent to where we were standing, was one of the nestlings, barely able to fly, and probably in a location of considerable concern to its parent. Time to back slowly away, return to the car, and head home – after a really memorable experience – at the end of a really memorable day.

Thanks everyone for letting us join your census. We hope that you all had just as good a day as we did. But we seriously doubt that any of you got 23 lifers!

The New Atlas of Australian Birds

By Nicci Thompson, Atlas Co-ordinator for Southern Inland Queensland

I should like to clarify some of the statements Pat made regarding *The New Atlas of Australian Birds* (RAOU 2003), and the way in which data were collected between August 1998 and December 2001. Selected TBO data were entered, but only those which were extracted from the October Censuses for those years. Targeting the census records ensured that they were collected during a short time frame. The records were entered onto Atlas Record Forms by Olive Booth, as 5 kilometre area searches.

The only atlas survey which is repeatable, and was ever claimed to be so, is the preferred 20 minute 2 hectare survey. It is the data from these surveys that are used for comparisons over time and space. Atlassers are encouraged to make repeat seasonal visits to these 2 hectare sites. They are also encouraged to complete an Atlas Habitat Form for these sites and to report ongoing changes, such as fire etc.

The 500m and 5kilometre surveys are used for quite different purposes such as mapping distribution, and are not claimed to be repeatable. The longest duration for 500m or 5km surveys is 1 week, not many months. All atlassers are asked to include starting and

finishing times for each survey and the time actually spent surveying within that period so that effort can be ascertained. As it is usual in any group, for one person to enter the records either manually or electronically, the number of people participating in the survey is stated on the Atlas Record Form.

All Atlas Surveys are based on a central point, preferably located by the use of a GPS or a good map. Of course, as in all volunteer efforts, individual knowledge and skills vary and errors occur in all aspects of the data collection. However, the atlas effort was overseen by a management committee of scientists, statisticians and others to ensure the integrity of the resultant data base. In this part of Queensland, many of the volunteers who regularly submitted record forms to the Atlas were members of TBO.

“Two Trips” Girraween National Park

By Michael Wood & Darren Fielder

Recently, Darren Fielder and I spent a couple of brief periods at wonderful **Girraween National Park** - as he outlined in the previous newsletter; one in mid-December and the other in early January, both times of the year when one would normally expect warm, if not at least mild weather conditions. But we found that the opposite was the case; it was quite cool, particularly on our first visit, and there were several occasions when it rained and blew a gale, sending shivers up the spine.

I had visited the park several years ago, so long ago I had trouble recalling all that occurred. But, as soon as I stumbled upon a delicate fern along the upper parts of **Bald Rock Creek** I remembered where I was –the rest presumably being burnt in a fire back in 2002. It was the habitat I recalled back then. And at that moment all of those brilliant experiences came flooding back; the diversity of thick acacia scrub, heath and woodlands, along with the huge slabs of granite which back then to a novel birdwatcher meant very little. I had no idea of what might be present around me back then and, as a result, no doubt missed out on much.

So happy was I to see for over a year my first **New Holland Honeyeater**, a bird familiar back home in the suburbs of Adelaide but not at all widespread here in Queensland. I knew then that experiences would be novel and exciting from that time onwards.

One morning, Darren and I undertook a walk along ‘**Junction Track**’ and managed to record a pair of **Chestnut-rumped Hylacola** hopping about in the regenerating heath, along with a rather nice observation of a **Turquoise Parrot** drinking at a pool, both species lifers for Darren. Here too were more New Hollands, a calling **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, **Dusky Woodswallows** and several **Yellow-tufted Honeyeater** -surely one of the most attractive of Australia’s honeyeaters, one of their calls sounding akin to a hybrid of the **New Holland** and **Noisy Miner**.



Chestnut-rumped Hylacola
Photo: Graeme Chapman

As much of our work consisted of being near the creek, we were fortunate enough to be surrounded by an abundance of birds during all hours of the day. One of these was the **White-eared Honeyeater**, the bird's presence being a little surprising to me for I would have thought it far from typical habitat for the species. **Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo** were frequently encountered, likewise just a single **Striped Honeyeater** on several days, a small group of the pale-headed form of **Varied Sittella**, and a brief sighting of an **Azure Kingfisher** as it darted along the well-vegetated creekline. Incredibly, the **Double-barred Finch** was not seen until our second visit, whereupon just two birds came down to some trees near the swimming hole. Four species of lorikeet were encountered during our visits, small numbers of each of the **Little Lorikeet**, **Rainbow Lorikeet** and **Scaly-breasted Lorikeet**, whilst unusually the **Musk Lorikeet** outnumbered them all. And there was a nice moment too when travelling along a narrow path near the "Barracks" when a flush of small passerines were unearthed; a good opportunity to compare the behaviour, diagnostics and calls of the **Buff-rumped Thornbill**, **Striated Thornbill**, **Brown Thornbill** and **Weebill**. And not too far away from these there were three or four **Yellow-rumped Thornbill**.



Yellow tufted Honeyeater

Everything was distracting, each and every sound and movement, but still both Darren and I managed to record the presence of so many other species, the **Sacred Kingfishers**, **Grey Butcherbird** and **Silvereye** confusing the chorus somewhat. Through all of this we were able to notice a few differences in the make-up of the species between our two visits, the **Rufous Songlark** and **Rufous Whistler** being nowhere near as common on our second visit, whereas the **White-winged Triller** was absent altogether, or at least its presence went undetected. And the **Eastern Spinebill**, which had been comparatively abundant, was nowhere near as numerous. It couldn't have been that long ago since we were here!

During the night Darren and I spent much of the time pulling in nets from Bald Creek, which amused me greatly as Darren's feet went from beneath him and he went for impromptu swims on several occasions –he'll say the opposite, of-course, and suggest it was me. Most of the time the nets contained nothing, but there was a run of the sickly aromatic **Long-necked Turtle** *Chelodina longicollis*, and then even the sharp-edged carapaces of the **Bald Rock Creek Turtle** *Elseya belli* or two, and even a few with radio collars - the babies we were after. We were fortunate enough to capture a good few of these and process them back at the house, after which they would each be assigned a letter of the alphabet and released. And this was the best part, for as the turtles took to the water -for a time many of them remaining on the surface- it appeared as though someone had let fly a handful of yellow plastic letters and evenly distributed them over the water.

Most of the captures took place during daylight hours, though, with the vividly-coloured **Red Spiny Crayfish** *Euastacus suttoni* turning up occasionally in the nets; the crustaceans always prepared to take off a finger or two at the first hint of complacency, as they had this trick of being able to bend their claws right over the back of their body and snaffle any unsuspecting finger. The small **River Black Fish** *Gadopsis marmoratus* also turned up often, and if one became bored with such things, something most unlikely, there was always the **Leaf-tailed Gecko** *Saltuarius wyberba*, a rather unusual and exotic-looking animal that "mooned" on the side of one of the huts.



Euastacus suttoni. Photo: Darren Fielder,
Girraween National Park

One of the better non-avian discoveries along the creekline whilst Darren was submerged beneath the water was of a snake that I initially thought was a Tiger Snake. All I saw was the striped tail disappear into a clump of grass just a few metres in front of me. How it didn't see me was astonishing. I called everyone over, including the ranger, Neil, and another guy called Rod. When Darren poked the snake with a stick to see what it was we were all

surprised to see a two metre long **Carpet Python** *Morelia spilota* swollen half way along its length with a prey item in its stomach.

On the second of the trips we bumped into an Irishman named Shane. He agreed to come with us next day looking for signs of the **Southern Emu-wren** at the eastern end of the park, along a narrow tributary known as 'Racecourse Creek'. We stalked as quietly as possible amongst the heath in this area of the reserve, managing only to obtain brief, almost inaudible spurts of a possible song. If asked, they are still there. I feel reasonably confident I heard their call. Still, their presence here remains indefinite.

Despite the lack of a sighting of an emu-wren we managed some excellent avian records along 'Racecourse Creek', among them a beautifully-marked **Peregrine Falcon**, a male **Scarlet Robin** – a first for me in Qld, calling **Wonga Pigeons** and the **Superb Lyrebird** – Darren actually managed to see the bird –both Shane and I heard it. The initial call of the lyrebird had us all bemused, sounding something like the continuous loud piping of a bush-hen. Eventually, though, the bird sounded out its usual song. It was strange to see the scratchings of the bird in such dry earth. If it wasn't for this experience, and another several years ago when the lyrebird was heard along the 'Junction Track', I would have looked sideways at anyone who said they were present.

Next morning, Darren was keen to get a **Spotted Quail-thrush**, so we set out to the site after checking the nets. As he mentioned in the previous newsletter, we were stalking an area a few kilometres east of the "Barracks" –prime quail-thrush habitat. Very little was calling, however, apart from what we thought was the drawn-out, repetitive piping of a treecreeper. There was something different about it, though, which had us both throwing about theories; it was nowhere near as sharp as the treecreeper and for a moment we both considered the **Rufous Whistler**. But it was far more constant and not quite so musical. On approaching the bird, partly hidden amongst the foliage of a native cypress, it flushed and a male quail-thrush alighted on a granite slab and skulked off into the undergrowth. Never get sick of seeing this bird!

Another really nice discovery was of a **Diamond Firetail** not far from the "Barracks" – a finch nest not far from where the bird first emerged. Also, there were two breeding pairs of **Jacky Winter** –a pair attending a nest and another attending a juvenile, a breeding pair of **Leaden Flycatcher** and a **Collared Sparrowhawk**. This sparrowhawk was encountered on several occasions in the general area directly east of the "Barracks" and it seemed that it was heard on just about each and every visit to retrieve the nets at this site, suggesting that the bird may be nesting on the opposite side of the river. There were even signs of a kill here, probably that of a **Crimson Rosella** –a convenient kill not far from a nest?

Recorded at Girraween NP during the two visits:

Silvereye, Mistletoebird, Diamond Firetail, Red-browed Finch, Double-barred Finch, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Rufous Songlark, Australian Raven, Torresian Crow, Pied Currawong, Australian Magpie, Pied Butcherbird, Grey Butcherbird, Dusky Woodswallow, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Cicadabird, White-winged Triller, Olive-backed Oriole, Satin Bowerbird, Leaden Flycatcher, Willie Wagtail, Grey Fantail, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Scarlet Robin, Jacky Winter, Eastern Yellow Robin, Spotted Quail-thrush, Eastern Spinebill, New Holland Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Red Wattlebird, Striped Honeyeater, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Brown Thornbill, Weebill, White-throated Gerygone, White-browed Scrubwren, Chestnut-rumped Hylacola, Superb Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, White-throated Treecreeper, Varied Sittella, Dollarbird, Sacred Kingfisher, Laughing Kookaburra, Azure Kingfisher, Tawny Frogmouth, Southern Boobook, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Common Koel, Turquoise Parrot, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Australian King-parrot, Red-winged Parrot, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Rainbow Lorikeet, Musk Lorikeet, Little Lorikeet, Galah, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Wonga Pigeon, Common Bronzewing, Peregrine Falcon, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Collared Sparrowhawk, Nankeen Night Heron, Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck

Carpet Python *Morelia spilota variegata*, Eastern Long-necked Turtle *Chelodina longicollis*, Bald Rock Creek Turtle *Elseya belli*, Wallaroo *Macropus robustus*, Eastern Grey Kangaroo *Macropus giganteus*, Red-necked Wallaby *Macropus rufogriseus*, Water Dragon *Physignathus leuseurii*, Water Skink *Eulamprus quoyii*, Bearded Dragon *Pagona barbata*, River Black Fish *Gadopsis marmoratus*, Red Spiny Crayfish *Euastacus suttoni*, Stony Creek Frog *Litoria wilcoxii*

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 3 March 2007 - Highfields Falls – Meet at Dau Road entrance at 4.30pm. Bird watching until 6:30pm, then a quick cuppa and a bite to eat. At 7:15pm – owl spotlighting for about an hour. The night should finish between 8.00 and 8.30pm. There are no facilities at the park, but toilets can be found at a nearby service station. Please bring torch, jumper and insect repellent and some food/drink if required. Contact Pat McConnell (07) 4631 5573.

24/25 March 2007 - Species Census - instead of the traditional October Species Census we thought we'd run it in a different season for a change. Contact Michael Atzeni (07) 4639 2761

April 2007 (date to be advised) - Lockyer Wetlands

27th May 2007 – Toowoomba's southern escarpment

23/24 June 2007 – Annual Raptor Survey

28th July 2007 – Helidon region

26th August 2007 – Warwick area

29/30 September 2007 – Karara/Lake Coolmunda - overnight (optional)

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Deadline for articles for the March Newsletter is 16 March 2007.
Please e-mail or snail- mail your articles to Darren Fielder, our Newsletter Editor.

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