

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS INC



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

No. 366
August 2007

Editorial

By Darren Fielder

An outstanding find over the last month has been a **Masked Owl** seen and photographed (31/07/07) by Alison McDonald in her yard in Stonehaven St, east Toowoomba. The attached photo was submitted for confirmation and the record was accepted by TBO. This is very exciting news as there have only been a handful of records in the survey area, and it has been a few years since the last record.



The TBO **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** is coming up on the 1st November. It will be another fantastic occasion with an invited guest speaker on South American birds and an **Bird Quiz**. So bring along your friends for a great evening out.

If you have any "mystery bird" photos, nests, feathers, scats, owl pellets or other items that could be used in the **Quiz**, please contact Michael Atzeni or Michael Wood (ph 0402283856). They would appreciate any articles or photos at least two weeks prior to the AGM so it can be included in the quiz. Here is an example of a mystery bird photo: *(answer can be found on back page)*



Happy birding and keep the stories and photos coming.
Reminder – subscriptions due!

2007

Challenge

203 spp as at 20 August



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS INC

This Issue

Serendipity 'saves' a Powerful Owl

By Michael Atzeni

Bird experience at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary

By Jenny & Nicholas
Matheson-Kozakis

Flocking to the Lockyer

By Ross & Dan Begent

Choosing native fleshy-fruited plants

By CRC Weeds

COMING EVENTS

26th August 2007 –
Killarney area – meet at
7.30 am at Queen Mary's
Falls, opposite cafe.
Contact: Sandra Wilson
0412 065 221

8-9th September 2007 –
Lake Coolmunda and
surrounds – overnight
(optional). Leader Michael
Atzeni. Contact: Sandra
Wilson 0412 065 221

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

P.O. Box 4730, Toowoomba East 4350
www.toowoombabirdobservers.org

MEMBERSHIP: Adults/Families \$22, Students \$11
(Subscriptions due 31 August)

Serendipity 'saves' a Powerful Owl

By Michael Atzeni

On Wednesday, 8/8/07 - while we were still relishing the earlier news of a **Masked Owl** being seen and photographed in East Toowoomba - a member of the public brought a dead **Powerful Owl** into the USQ Biology Department around lunch time. He found it while driving up the Toowoomba range, about 250m past the saddle.

Now the lab manager there is none other than Pat McConnell, our Records Officer! But the coincidences and drama had already started 3hrs earlier. Liz Houston, a friend at DPI&F with a passing interest in birds, had rung me around morning tea to say she'd seen a large, grey owl-like bird dead on the range on her way to work. Way too big for a frogmouth, she added emphatically. And certainly not a coucal!



Masked Owl (7/05/91) and a Powerful Owl (8/08/07) found dead on the range crossing near Redwood Park. Photo: Pat McConnell.

With Redwood Park on the other side of the highway, the alarm bells were immediately ringing. Suspecting one of Redwood's resident Powerful Owls had been killed, I rang and asked Ken McKeown, who lives nearby at Table Top Estate, to drive up and check it out. He did so straight away, but there was no sign of it. We concluded someone had probably picked it up and I was going to relate all this to Pat after lunch, when I received an email message *from him* about a dead Powerful Owl!

But what were the odds of such a trophy even being handed in? And then landing right in the hands of Pat?

That's one very lucky (albeit unlucky) Powerful Owl, which will now serve a distinguished role in education and research at the Qld Museum.

Bird Experience at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary

By Nicholas Matheson-Kozakis (with a little help from mum, Jenny)

Wednesday Morning:

I was very nervous about my impending birdkeeper experience at the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary. This caused me to feel a bit nauseous. However, the awaiting wildlife officer, Penny, was very kind and once I began feeding the friendly lorikeets, my first scheduled experience, I recovered. Penny took a small group including me to a nearby shed where we met the man who made the food for the lorikeets. He demonstrated the recipe by

combining then stirring equal quantities of honey, wombaroo lorikeet mix, and hot water. Then some cold water was added. It tasted delicious!

Penny took us to the Education Centre where she told us about the diets and behavioural habits of granivores, carnivores, fish eaters, insectivores, omnivores, herbivores and frugivores before distributing a study guide containing information and activities. We were then led to a grassy knoll where we met a **Barking Owl**. Penny lectured us about its food, its habits at dawn and dusk, and other such pieces of information. I was the first to hold the bird. A photographer took my photograph. Interestingly, the **Noisy Miners** continuously harassed the poor Barking Owl. After morning tea, Penny took us on the Behind the Scenes tour where we met Mousy the Dingo and Brad the **Brahminy Kite**, and observed a **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo** being de-wormed, before visiting the food preparation centre. We could have participated in dicing an ox heart, but I abstained.

Wednesday Afternoon:

We stopped for lunch before coming back to the food preparation centre where we cut up bananas, honeydew melons, watermelon, pawpaw, tomatoes and grapes, and mixed all the ingredients in a bucket. Carrying the bucket, Penny took us to the **Cassowaries'** pen via the pen containing two wedgetail eagles. Unfortunately, the male and female **Wedge-tailed Eagles** could not fly since farmers had shot them. Consequently, they were housed in an open enclosure that was previously used by kangaroos. At the cassowaries' enclosure, each of us grabbed handfuls of food from the bucket and threw it into the pen. The cassowaries shovelled up the food by the mouthful while cheeky **Australian Brush-turkeys** sneaked individual pieces of food whenever possible.

We then went to the Free Flight Bird Show area to see the premiere of the tricks learned by a new **Whistling Kite**. It snatched a chicken carcass from a nearby barbeque and while in flight, transferred the food from its talons to its mouth. Perfecting this trick had taken a few months of solid training.

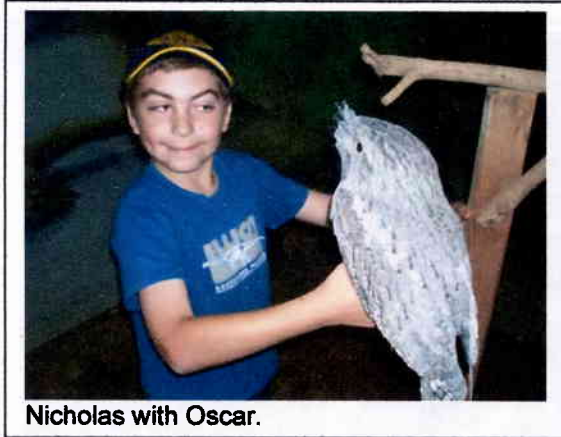
Next we went to the wetlands area where we saw **Plumed and Wandering Whistling-ducks, Black Swans, Pacific Black Ducks, Magpie Geese, Purple Swamphens and Australian White Ibis**. My **Black-necked Stork**, the one I sponsor, was standing nonchalantly. On the way back to the collection point where we were to meet our parents, I saw the Sanctuary's peacock. Unfortunately, the peahen the Sanctuary had acquired to accompany the peacock, had recently died. Seeing mum, I knew I certainly had a lot to tell her that night.

Thursday morning:

After my previous day's experience, my stomach was filled with butterflies in excitement while driving towards Currumbin. Again we firstly fed the lorikeets who viewed me as a tree as I had five perched on me simultaneously. This morning Penny took us past the land mullets' and the scrub python's enclosures, to the nocturnal animals Behind the Scenes section. Here we made pinecone treats for mammals and birds. We put peas, fruit and seeds into the cones.

Passing through the Forest Fringe, I saw **Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, Sacred Kingfishers, Rose-crowned Fruit-doves, Black-winged Stilts, White-breasted Woodswallows**, and a turtle. Since one girl particularly liked kingfishers, I took some photographs for her.

We were taken to the education centre where we were introduced to two Tawny Frogmouths, Oscar and Droppy. I held Oscar as the photograph below shows. The wildlife officers thought that Oscar was a male until she laid an egg! As Droppy's sense of balance was underdeveloped, he kept falling off visitors' hands; hence his name. We were lectured about their diet, habit and behaviours. We then went to the Australian Pelican



Nicholas with Oscar.

and eel feeding session. Two local pelicans, Hook and Line, were unusual as they were twenty-five years old. The four pelicans present were fed whiting and mullet while the eels were fed day-old chickens and sand whiting. I fed a sand whiting to an eel. However, Australian White Ibises managed to steal some of the fish. We stopped at the endangered birds section where I saw some Hooded Parrots, Noisy Pittas, a Black-headed Honeyeater, Black-breasted Buttonquails, Gouldian Finches, a Squatter Pigeon of the race *scripta* and two Spinifex Pigeons of the race *leucogaster*.

Thursday afternoon:

After playing on Wild Island, patting a bobtail, eating lunch and sitting a test, we went to the gift shop where I purchased a stuffed green macaw and a toy bat. We then walked to the train via the Forest Fringe Behind the Scenes where we saw a pair of Yellow-bellied Sunbirds and a male Superb Fruit-dove. While waiting for the train I observed Chiming Wedgebills darting in and out of a bush, a Rufous Whistler and a Sacred Kingfisher in the scrub and woodland enclosure. Contentedly riding the train back to the animal hospital where mum would pick me up, I was thinking of how to successfully word my request to attend a reptile themed ranger course during the next school holidays. I hope she says 'yes' as this workshop was so much fun.

Flocking to the Lockyer, Helidon Outing

By Ross and Dan Begent

Lost and Found: there was a pair of **reading glasses** left behind on the outing. If these are yours, please phone Michael Wood on 0402283856.

Saturday 28th July started clear and cool as we gathered at the Helidon Rest Area for a morning exploring the far Western Lockyer Valley. Great to see around 20 birders on the outing and a few new faces too!

Dan and I had done some preliminary research with a couple of reconnaissance missions in the days leading up to our outing – a sure way to guarantee some good, reliable birding spots on the day, right?Wrong!! It seemed that the bird numbers and species were especially sparse; only to be compounded by the increasing wind as the day progressed.

The Helidon Rest Area is usually a great place to start, but with the adjacent Lockyer Creek completely dry, it could not live up to its usual offerings.

Next stop was at the Helidon Skate Park which is usually a good spot to explore the riverbank area for honeyeaters, **Silvereyes**, fairy-wrens and the odd **Eastern Whipbird**. Next stop was at Murphys Bridge on Lockyer Creek just south of Helidon. Murphys Bridge has been known to provide some excellent bird watching lately as it appears to be one of the few stretches of Lockyer Creek with a reasonable body of water. The **Mallards** appear to have vacated the area without leaving a forwarding address, but Nicholas was quick



Explaining the positioning of a Yellow-faced Honeyeater. Photo: Dan Begent (28/07/07)

enough to spot a resident platypus just before it took a dive below the surface. The **Azure Kingfisher** made its usual appearance right on cue. This is a great spot to visit and sit quietly on the creek bank just on dusk. Birds fly in from the surrounding area to arrive at the waters edge for a nightcap before retiring. The local waterbirds and platypi sail past almost silently as night draws near.

We then drove the full length of a very dry Spa-Iredale Road making numerous stops along the way before proceeding to Thomas Road at Murphys Creek. Spa-Iredale Road was alive with **Red-backed Fairy-wrens** just a few days earlier, but they were far more elusive on the day of our outing. At least they did manage to put in a brief cameo appearance for us! The long convoy then returned towards Helidon via Lockyer Siding Road. As the trail of dust cleared on reaching the bitumen we realised that we had lost the majority of our convoy. A quick retrace of our route soon revealed the roadside hazard which had claimed the attention of those who had been



Willie Wagtail. Photo: Dan Begent (28/07/07)

left behind – **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos!** – It seems that those of us with less refined spotting skills missed out on quite a gala performance by the cockies!

A quick look along Airforce Road brought us back to Helidon just in time to arrive at Bill and Eileen Jolly's delightful property, 'Abberton' for morning tea. Bill treated us to a guided tour, and even though the bird numbers were down as the wind kept increasing with gusto, there is always so much to see at Abberton – not just the birds but the entire ecosystem which Bill and Eileen have re-established over a number of years. A **Western Gerygone** was an unexpected treat! A very special thank you for your hospitality Bill!

Species recorded included; Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Little Pied Cormorant, Straw-necked Ibis, Nankeen Kestrel, Masked Lapwing, Rock Dove, Spotted Turtle-Dove, Crested Pigeon, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Galah, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Pale-headed Rosella, Azure Kingfisher, Laughing Kookaburra, Variegated Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Superb Fairy-wren, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Weebill, Western Gerygone, Yellow Thornbill, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-throated Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Eastern Whipbird, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Magpie-lark, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, Zebra Finch, Double-barred Finch, Welcome Swallow, Silvereeye. For a complete list of birds spotted X TBO Grid, just email me on begent@australiainmail.com.

Members' Bird Notes

By Pat McConnell, Records Officer

All sightings seen by members of the Toowoomba Bird Observers. Accuracy not vouched for by the TBO. Please check with observer before citing.

Square-tailed Kite (2)	25/05/2007	Warwick	SW
Square-tailed Kite	3/07/2007	Helidon	BJ
Spotted Harrier	8/07/2007	Helidon	DB, RB
Little Eagle	4/06/2007	Helidon	BJ
Peregrine Falcon (2)	5/06/2007	DPI Toowoomba	MA
Powerful Owl	1/07/2007	Highfields	MM, MW
Brown Gerygone	28/07/2007	Murphy's Creek	MA
Western Gerygone	1/06/2007	"Abberton" Helidon	BJ
Western Gerygone	22/06/2007	Murphy's Creek	MW
White-plumed Honeyeater	27/05/2007	"Abberton" Helidon	BJ
White-plumed Honeyeater	22/06/2007	Murphy's Creek	MW
Fuscous Honeyeater (3)	27/07/2007	Highfields Falls	MW
Crested Shrike-tit	1/07/2007	Highfields Falls	MW
White-winged Chough (10)	11/07/2007	Murphy's Creek (south)	KM

MA, M. Atzeni; **DB**, D. Begent; **RB**, R. Begent; **BJ**, B. Jolly; **MM**, M. McGoldrick; **KM**, K. McKeown; **SW**, S. Wilson; **MW**, M. Wood.

How to choose native plants to replace fleshy-fruited weeds?

By Cooperative Research Centre for Weeds

This information is from the Weeds CRC's latest research on environmental weed management.

Weeds are an important conservation and economic problem worldwide. Invasive species are regarded as second only to habitat loss as a threat to birds in Australia. New web-based tools to help choose replacement plants for fleshy-fruited weeds will be a welcome relief to our feathered friends. As weeds greatly modify the habitat of birds via contributing to changes in fire regimes and vegetation structure, altering the quantity, quality and/or seasonal availability of food, and directly ensnaring birds, these web-based tools will be of great use to land managers, restoration practitioners, gardeners, nursery industry personnel and others.

While weeds often have negative impacts on natural ecosystems and individual species, there are also cases where weeds appear to benefit native species, or at least provide support for them in highly disturbed landscapes. Positive ecological contributions by weeds can also be a source of conflict in conservation management. Should the weeds be removed, or should they be retained because they support native animals? Providing alternative (or replacement, if combined with weed control) food resources for birds is one approach to minimise the impacts of control of fleshy-fruited weeds.



Topknot Pigeon, an affected native bird. Photo: CRC Weeds website.



Native red-fruited palm-lily (*Cordyline rubra*) as a replacement for weeds. Photo: CRC Weeds website.

Dr Carl Gosper and Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith's Weeds CRC project, 'Selecting weed replacement plants for use by frugivorous birds' produced these tools to help end-users choose replacement plants for fleshy fruited weeds. The web-based tools include:

- Two replacement plant factsheets for target weeds - one focused on northeast NSW and south-east Qld and the other on Weeds of National Significance.
- A how-to guide for plant selection based on traits such as fruit size and structure, fruit colour and fruiting season.
- Native plant trait databases. These are provided as Excel spreadsheets, suitable for searching, sorting, extracting data etc by end users.

More information:

www.weeds.crc.org.au/projects/project_3_2_3_1.html

Contacts: Dr Carl Gosper (carl.gosper@yahoo.com.au) or Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith (gabrielle.viviansmith@nrw.qld.gov.au) 07 3375 0700

COMING EVENTS

26th August 2007 – Killarney area – meet at 7.30 am at Queen Mary's Falls, opposite cafe.
Contact: Sandra Wilson 0412 065 221

8-9th September 2007 – Lake Coolmunda – overnight (optional). Those staying overnight can book into the Coolmunda Caravan Park (ph 46524171). See details below. We won't stay at "Ballancar" as previously suggested. It will be more convenient at Coolmunda. We will visit "Ballancar" Sunday morning.

Saturday 8th Sep, meet at dam wall picnic area 3.30pm for afternoon birding session.

Sunday 9th Sep, meet at "Ballancar" at 8am. Leader: Michael Atzeni. Contact: Sandra Wilson 0412 065 221

Directions to "Ballancar", 3094 Mosquito Creek Road, INGLEWOOD Telephone: 4652 1367.

Coming from Coolmunda, travel 31 km up Mosquito Creek Rd from turn-off on highway at the dam. **Coming from Toowoomba**: Take Stonehenge Rd turn-off just after the bridge at Leyburn. After about 26 kms, turn left into Nyora Road. After about 5 kms there is a T-junction. Turn right into Mosquito Creek Road. Follow Mosquito Creek Road about 10 kms to Ballancar. **Alternatively, coming from Toowoomba**: After Leyburn, travel about 17 kms along the Leyburn-Karara Road and turn right into Millmerran Road (just before Costello's Bridge) After about 8 kms, turn left into Strathyre Road. Follow the road for about 21 kms to Ballancar (Strathyre Road becomes Mosquito Creek Road at the rabbit fence). Either way, there is a lot of dirt road.

29-30th September 2007 – Local outing. To be advised.

27-28th October 2007 – Thornton Property – overnight stay. Contact: Michael Atzeni

1st November 2007 – Annual General Meeting (AGM) – Tor St DPI Conference Room. Bird quiz, guest speaker on South American birds. Contact: Ross Begent 4697 7198.

Executive Committee Members

President:	Ross Begent	4697 7198 (h) 4696 7900 (wk)
Vice-president:	Michael Atzeni	4688 1318 (wk) matzeni@westnet.com.au
Secretary:	Sandra Wilson	0412 065 221 zandru@optusnet.com.au
Treasurer:	Rosalie Rudduck	4697 6190
Records Officer:	Pat McConnell	4631 5573 mcconnel@usq.edu.au
Newsletter Editor:	Darren Fielder	4636 0174 (h) 4699 4312 (wk) darren.fielder@epa.qld.gov.au
Librarian:	Ken McKeown	0408 303 774 kenmck1@bigpond.net.au
Committee Members:	Richard Colclough	4688 6654
	Mike McGoldrick	4635 7371
	Michael Wood	0402 283 856 mswode@hotmail.com

Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 14 September 2007.
Please e-mail or snail- mail your articles to Darren Fielder, our Newsletter Editor.

**If undeliverable return to
Toowoomba Bird Observers Inc
PO Box 4730, Toowoomba East Q 4350**

Surface Mail

Black-breasted Buzzard