

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS INC



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

No. 367

September 2007

Editorial

By Darren Fielder

Get your binoculars out of their cases! There's work to be done. We are currently about 10 species down on the Challenge from last year's tally at the same time.

Six species have been added to the Challenge this month. A **Noisy Pitta** was heard along the Fire-tail Walk near Picnic Point and **Wompoo Fruit-Dove** was seen on Tabletop. Flocks of **Masked** and **White-browed Woodswallows** have been flying over Toowoomba this month and there was a confirmed pair of **Blue Bonnets** in the Hodgsonvale area. Jan Christensen has photographed and observed a male **Painted Button-Quail** in her backyard at Middle Ridge. She provides details of this in her article below. Another unusual sighting was of a **Brown Cuckoo-Dove** in a backyard in Pittsworth. Alastair Silcock was made aware of it by a friend whose yard it was in for a couple of weeks.

As the **AGM** approaches (1/11/07) there are opportunities to get involved in the Executive Committee of the TBO. Nomination forms for the office positions are attached (either electronic or hard copy).

I will be standing down as the Newsletter Editor at the AGM, with the October newsletter being my last. (I will comment more on this next month.) If you have any "mystery bird" photos that could be used in the **AGM Quiz**, please contact Michael Atzeni or Michael Wood (ph 0402283856).

Congratulations to Greg and Toni Campbell on the arrival of their baby twin boys – Joel and Hayden.



The **Powerful Howls**. Photo: Greg and Toni Campbell

2007 Challenge

211 spp as at 25th Sep



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS INC

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

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www.toowoombabirdobservers.org

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COMING EVENTS

29th September 2007 –
Redwood Park outing, meet
at the bottom entrance
down the range at 7:00.
Contact: Al Young 4630
1602

27-28th October 2007 –
Galvin's property near
Thornton – optional
overnight stay. Full details
next newsletter. Contact:
Michael Atzeni (AH) 4639
2761

A Backyard Surprise

By Jan Christensen

This morning (4/09/07) I was working in my home office and glanced out the window. There was a bird I couldn't identify moving around in my veggie patch. I rushed to get my binoculars, and caught a glimpse of quail-like markings on its back before it disappeared into the spinach. Hoping for a further glimpse, but doubting that anything like a quail could possibly be in my small suburban backyard, I kept the binoculars by my side, and got my camera ready as well.

My patience was rewarded, when some time later, the bird came out again. It settled down for a sit in the sugar cane mulch, and I saw it was a button-quail - a male **Painted Button-Quail**. Having never seen a button-quail before, let alone one in my own yard, I am nervous of my identification.

After resting for a while in amongst the thyme and the chives, it went for a wander around the paths and the grass, and I was able to snap plenty of pics. Its back was barred black, with some rufous, and with white streaks. There was a small patch of chestnut on its shoulder. Its eyes were dark, and its legs yellow. Its breast was buff, with lighter spots.



A male **Painted Button-Quail** in the backyard at Middle Ridge, Toowoomba. Photo: Jan Christensen (4/09/07).

Here is a photo of the welcome visitor on my grass.

Somehow, I don't seem to have got much work done this morning - bird watching has been much more interesting than usual in my backyard.

An Extraordinary Day

By Jenny Matheson and Nicholas Matheson-Kozakis

If the race to the Chapel exit last period Thursday was not enough, the thought of spending the afternoon and early evening with Junior Boy Boarders while waiting for Mum and the Year 12 Legal Studies students to return from Brisbane, was weighing heavily on my mind. Aimlessly meandering to the back of the Chapel, my eyes caught sight of a colourful lump snugly huddled in a corner formed where a Chapel buttress and the retaining wall met. Squatting down I realised an intact **Striated Pardalote** carcass lay before me. 'No external injuries', I noted. Scooping it up gently, an adult voice boomed, 'Don't touch that Nicholas! You will get diseases!' My music teacher materialised over me.

'Of course not Mrs Laws!' was my immediate response, as I stood up and busied myself searching for my school bag. Surreptitiously glancing over my shoulder to ensure Mrs Laws had left, I found an old plastic chips packet and carefully bagged the carcass. Over afternoon tea, I enthusiastically shared my find with the Head of Junior Boys Boarding, Mr Bailey who insisted on firmly encasing the bird in a more appropriate plastic bag.

That night, hunched over the carcass, I was exacerbated trying to identify the pardalote's race and Mum was worried about correct storage techniques. I quickly resorted to expert telephonic advice. Gathering information through a series of questions, Mick soon suggested that my specimen was an *ornatus* and *melanocephalus* hybrid, a carcass in which the Queensland Museum would certainly be interested. 'Careful storage was essential,' I instructed Mum as she wrapped it in plastic and alfoil before placing it in the freezer.

Animated discussions resulted in a trip to Brisbane that Saturday. Becoming progressively agitated by the time-consuming process of parking in the Museum Car Park, I impulsively grabbed the esky and raced to the Inquiry Counter on Level 3. The attendant was already asking me questions and completing a form by the time Mum arrived. If the pardalote's cause of death could be determined, I would be contacted, the attendant assured me. I sauntered around the natural history section for a while, noticing new exhibits of a **Brown Falcon** and an **Nankeen Kestrel**. I also managed a look at my favourite section, the Museum Zoo, as well as the endangered species, tropical rainforests and the turtle exhibit before Mum suggested that we have our picnic lunch on the grassy knoll outside the Gallery of Modern Art. Soon we were joined by **Fairy Martins** and **Welcome Swallows** bathing in a shallow nearby pool, **Superb Fairy-wrens** fidgeting in the mangroves, **Willie Wagtails** loitering for any crusty morsels, and, of course, the proverbial **Rock Doves**. This was not even a prelude to what the afternoon had in store for us.

Armed with two loaves of bread, we arrived at the Port of Brisbane lake. Bounding out of the car, I was mortified to see a **Royal Spoonbill** colony of an estimated 95 birds, sharing their island haven with approximately 30 **Australian Pelicans**, 65 **Little Black Cormorants**, a dozen **Pied Cormorants** and a couple of **Black-winged Stilts**. Keeping their distance, a flock of **Pink-eared Ducks** followed me as I walked along the waterline and threw bread in their direction. Increasing to a gale, the sea wind forced the **Australian Wood Ducks**, **Chestnut Teals**, **Hardheads** and **Pacific Black Ducks** to constantly tack as they eyed the bread. **Purple Swamphens** and **Dusky Moorhens**, disinterested in the food, populated the far bank. Although the ducks were being ward off by the dozen or so fresh water eels, a nonchalant **Black Swan** confidently devoured the bread, often sharing large pieces with the eels. **Silver Gulls**, **Common Mynas**, **Straw-necked** and **White Ibises**, and Willie Wagtails lurked nearby, waiting for their opportunity to feast. Even a **Brahminy Kite** hovered overhead. I noticed a group of people on the far side, often focusing their binoculars on the nearby paperbark forest. 'Why on earth would anyone look at the paperbarks when there are so many birds on the lake?' I wondered.

'Bread can cause waterfowl digestive ailments, young man!' Intimidated, I looked up to see a lady in an official-looking khaki uniform striding towards me. Unsure what to say or do, I was relieved to see Mum approach the officer and engage her in conversation. With the viscosity of wine, the conversation flowed from pardalotes, to waterfowl, to slingshots and on to raising boys in contemporary society. Soon, they too were staring at the paperbark forest. 'What is it about paperbarks today?' I thought. Squinting, I still could not see anything of interest, just paperbarks. Exuberantly, Mum called me over and requested me

to focus my binoculars on the paperbarks. Obediently, I followed instructions, concentrating until my head hurt. Suddenly I could make it out, hidden among the trees. I couldn't believe my eyes. I had only ever seen the one I sponsor at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, but there it was, one in the wild! This was an absolute first for me – a juvenile **Black-necked Stork!** What was it doing here amid semi-trailers, coal trains, cargo ships and low flying jets?

According to Hammy, the lady from Pelican and Shorebird Rescue, the bird, evicted by its parents from a small Black-necked Stork colony in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, had arrived approximately six weeks ago. Unfortunately, a blue plastic ring firmly sealing its beak had prevented food intake for about five weeks. Having set up six snares, members of their group monitored and will continue to monitor the stork 24/7, until it is caught and the ring is removed. I couldn't take my eyes off the Jabiru. It moved to the water's edge, it waded scaring the smaller nearby birds, it ran into the reeds, it stood immaculately still, it ... 'The sun will set soon and you want to see the birds near the mangrove boardwalk and from the Whyte Island bird hide, My Man,' I heard Mum say. I couldn't shift my gaze from the Black-necked Stork. 'We'll come back here after dusk, if you like. You told us that jabirus do not fly at night, so it will still be here. Let's go, My Man.' That was the prompt I was waiting for.

Although we saw **Pale-headed Rosellas**, **Rainbow Lorikeets**, corellas, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**, a **Collared Kingfisher**, colonies of **Black-winged Stilts**, Australian Pelicans, **Great Egrets**, a **Black-shouldered Kite**, an Nankeen Kestrel, an **Osprey** and even **Eastern Curlews** and **Bar-tailed Godwits** which had arrived early, my mind was still on the Black-necked Stork. As the stars became more luminous, we returned to the lake. The rescuers on the opposite bank had retreated into the car park while the Black-necked Stork strutted across the picnic area. Suddenly it became temporarily airborne, before landing on the island. On mass, the colony of spoonbills took flight, forming a massive, impervious white cloud, which turned seaward. Shadowing close behind were the pelicans. A reformation of the island population was occurring. After another conversation with Hammy, culminating in an exchange of contact details, Mum and I headed to a favourite West End restaurant for dinner. We had plenty to discuss over our meal. Most importantly, I wanted to persuade Mum to let me attend one of the Park Ranger-directed, bird rescue courses Hammy was describing to us. After all, we have the contact details and I could become involved in rescues during my school holidays. I know I'd treasure that opportunity. Lying on my pillow in the back seat of the car, the gentle hum of the engine was putting me to sleep. I couldn't help but think what an extraordinary day today turned into!

Bowerbirds bow out...

By Hugh Krenske

On Sunday 12th August, the **Satin Bowerbirds** left our place after a continuing presence since October 2006. This article documents some of my observations and conclusions.

Prior to October 2006, the only times Satin Bowerbirds visited our place (south-west Toowoomba – an inner suburb) were after fire events on the escarpment. They would hang around for a couple of days and then leave.



Female **Satin Bowerbirds** inspecting the work of their mate. This photo was sent in by Wes and Norma Sturdee. It seemed appropriate to include it here in Hugh's article. Photo taken in a backyard Crotty's St Toowoomba.

In October 2006, one **Satin Bowerbird** female stayed. It built a nest but appeared to abandon it. If you went looking for the bird, you invariably would not find it. Instead, you just came across it as it worked its way through the undergrowth or as it glided from bush to bush.

In November 2006, it was joined by a second bird, presumably a female. During the early part of 2007, the number grew to five, although the new comers appeared smaller in size. I do believe that the birds did successfully breed somewhere in the area and it could have been in the

nest that was built in October, although I did not see any evidence of birds visiting the nest.

Occasionally we saw the males, but these sightings were very few as the birds were very furtive - you more or less just glimpsed him. I am of the opinion that the male visitor was just that - visiting and keeping an eye on things.

In recent months, the birds started visiting the balcony where left over fruit (mostly apples) for possums was the target. They had to share this with daytime visits from **Australian King-parrots** and **Rainbow Lorikeets**. They also ate fallen fruit from the mandarin and orange trees. The bowerbirds' presence was constant - you only had to sit somewhere quietly and you had a good chance of seeing them.

The **Noisy Miners** targeted the bowerbirds initially, but they held their ground and now are fairly well accepted by both the **Noisy Miners** and the **Blue-faced Honeyeaters**. I have also noticed that currently there are fewer **Noisy Miners** and their territory seems to have increased so that they visit much of the western side of the City Golf Links. The side benefit of this is that we are hearing and seeing more of the little birds that they chased away - pardelotes, whistlers, and occasionally hearing what we think is a **Lewin's Honeyeater**.

Last Sunday, 12th August 2007, a male bowerbird appeared in the morning. The difference with this visit was that he easily seen feeding in the leaf litter and undergrowth, eating citrus with the females. He seemed less wary. We could walk past the area where he was foraging without him taking flight. He was taking a commanding role in the birds' activities. He stayed all day.

On Monday, 13th August 2007, the bower birds were gone. It is now Friday and there has been no sign of them. There are various conclusions that I have come up with.

1. It is the breeding season and they left to visit his bower. The juveniles went as well.
2. They sense a coming change in the weather and have returned to more suitable habitat.
3. Because of the drought conditions, suitable food for them in our area is becoming scarce and they have moved on.
4. Finally, it almost appears that the male maintains a harem of females. In dry, less secure times, he disperses his harem around the district in suitable locations, visiting each outpost occasionally until there is a need to get them back together or move them on to newer areas.

Nevertheless we enjoyed their visit over the last 10 months, but we miss their harsh calls and almost scissor grinding vocals.

Picture perfect...

By Al Young

Al sent in three photos from a recent trip of his that he would like to share with you...



Just a few **Straw-necked Ibis!** Taken near Bedourie on 16/06/07. According to one of the locals most of the adult birds left about a week before this photo was taken, leaving a very large number of immature birds. It was very difficult to estimate the numbers present but at a wild guess about 5 to 6 thousand!



Little Corellas basking in the morning sun at Bedourie on 16/06/07. This photo only shows about ¼ of the birds present on the sand hill.



What bird is this? Photo taken at Melrose, SA on 24/05/07. *Answer provided on the last page of the newsletter.*

Queen Mary Falls outing report

By Sandra Wilson

Eleven of us met at the picnic area at the Queen Mary Falls National Park, 11 kilometres east of Killarney, at 7.30 am on Sunday 26th August. After a week of miserable weather, we scored a perfect early spring day.

We took a couple of hours to walk the circuit around the park, not finding anything outstanding but seeing enough to keep us interested and of course, finding several little brown birds that defied identification. Was that a **Buff-rumped Thornbill**?

The park obviously had benefited from the recent rain and there was a reasonable amount of water coming over the falls, but the effects of the drought were evident in the vegetation – trees looked stressed and the tree-ferns in particular have suffered.

After morning tea back at the picnic area, the majority of us decided to venture to Koreelah National Park over the border in NSW. We broke the journey at the border gate, just after the turn-off from the Killarney-Boonah road, where we spotted **Red-browed Finches** and **Brown Songlarks**, not to mention three koalas, including a juvenile with its mother. [Well-spotted, Kevin.] Koreelah National Park, where we enjoyed our lunch, gave us more **Red-browed Finches**, a **Golden Whistler**, **Eastern Spinebills**, and a **Brown Falcon**, who posed obligingly in a tree across the creek for some considerable time.

This small park is appropriate for basic camping – no facilities except for picnic tables and a toilet – and is well worth a day visit. There is dirt road involved in getting there but this is suitable for conventional cars in dry weather. We headed home in mid-afternoon via Old Koreelah village, where the road rejoins the Mount Lindsay Highway, thence through Legume and Killarney.

Bird List – includes birds seen in transit from the outskirts of Killarney onwards

Plumed Whistling-Duck, Australian Wood Duck, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Brown Falcon, Masked Lapwing, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Australian King-Parrot, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Laughing Kookaburra, White-throated Treecreeper, Superb Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Brown Thornbill, Red Wattlebird, Bell Miner, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Jacky Winter, Eastern Yellow Robin, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Dusky Woodswallow, Grey Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Australian Raven, Torresian Crow, Satin Bowerbird, Richard's Pipit, Red-browed Finch, Brown Songlark

Seagull Criminal

A seagull in Scotland has developed the habit of stealing chips from a neighbourhood shop. The seagull waits until the shopkeeper isn't looking, and then walks into the store and grabs a snack-size bag of cheese Doritos. Once outside, the bag gets ripped open and shared by other birds. The seagull's shoplifting started early this month when he first swooped into the store in Aberdeen, Scotland, and helped himself to a bag of chips. Since then, he's become a regular. He always takes the same type of chips. Customers have begun paying for the seagull's stolen bags of chips because they think it's so funny.

Really spring! and a new bird for Abberton.

By Bill Jolly, Abberton

Our Australian practice of considering the four seasons to start on the first day of four designated months is a crude implement.

There is a traditional Chinese calendar of 24 solar (or seasonal) terms, each of a little over 2 weeks duration, with descriptive titles such as "Spring Begins", "Insects Awaken", "Grain in Ear", "Slight Heat", "Great Heat", "Cold Dews", "Frost Falls", "Winter Begins", "Slight Cold", "Great Cold", and so on. I guess the routine of seasonal changes was more dependable back then.



Red-backed Fairy-wrens, from the garden at "Abberton". Photo: Bill Jolly (1/09/07)

Here and now in Queensland, after the usual presages of spring that so excite us including a couple of weeks of 'false spring' that we write about every year when new birds turn up on sunny days in late winter, at last, and suddenly, the real thing has come in with a bang!

Saturday was the 1st of September and of our official spring, and it was appropriately a day full of warmth and bird sights and sounds galore - 66 species in the garden on Saturday and Sunday alone, many of them singing, courting or nest-building. We had our first **Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo** of the spring, and a **Brown-headed Honeyeater** was a first ever for here, bringing our garden list to 208spp.

Red-backed Fairy-wrens, **Variegated Fairy-wrens** and **Superb Fairy-wrens** are all paired off and making themselves obvious, **Rainbow Bee-eaters** are overhead and on trees and powerlines in numbers, wheeling and calling all day. Raptors too were plentiful over the weekend – **Black-shouldered Kite**, **Whistling Kite**, **Spotted Harrier**, **Brown Goshawk**, **Collared Sparrowhawk**, **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Little Eagle**, **Black Falcon** and **Nankeen Kestrel**. I've put photos of some of these on the website at www.abberton.org.

The Chinese name for the couple of weeks following the Vernal Equinox, is Chingming – Clear and Bright, and so it is.

COMING EVENTS

- 29th September 2007** – Redwood Park outing, meet at the bottom entrance down the range at 7:00. Contact: Al Young 4630 1602
- 30th September 2007 – Armchair Twitch™** Let the birds come to you! Nomination forms are available. Contact Lesley Beaton 07 4630 8481, lbeaton@westnet.com.au. We already have 40 groups expressing interest so far. Have a fun day and raise some money for the birds. [BASQ event]
- 27-28th October 2007** – Galvin's property near Mt Mistake via Thornton – optional overnight stay. Full details next newsletter. Contact: Michael Atzeni (AH) 4639 2761
- 1st November 2007** – Annual General Meeting (AGM) – Tor St DPI Conference Room. Bird quiz, guest speaker Ross Whitefood on South American birds. Contact: Ross Begent 4697 7198.
- 24th November 2007** – Murphy's Creek.

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Yellow x Adelaide Rosella

Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 12 October 2007.

Please e-mail or snail- mail your articles to Darren Fielder, our Newsletter Editor.

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