



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS INC

No. 372
March 2008

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

Editorial

By Plaxy Barratt & Michael Wood

Welcome to Autumn and another season's birding! After two bumper issues of the newsletter, this month's is a little on the lean side. So, the first thing we should do is remind people to keep the stories coming in! We would like to hear about everyone's birdwatching adventures.

Graeme Chapman's photography workshop earlier in the month was a great success. Fifteen people attended and, going on the feedback, there was a great deal learnt over the few days. We should see the result of these efforts paying-off in the coming months when the quality photos come flooding in! There will be a write up in the next newsletter.

Also, we would like to thank Bill Jolly on behalf of the club for his tireless efforts in sorting through and compiling the new Christides & Boles nomenclature and sequence and making it available to everyone – as we've said before; "It's best to get the pain of change out the way quickly".

Congratulations too must go to Darren Fielder (our ex-newsletter editor) and his wife Kristy on their

baby boy howler named Luca. Well Done!

The last month has seen another ten bird species added to *The Challenge - 2008* (summary p5), tallying 176 compared to 183 species at the same time last year. Keep up the good work everybody!

The *Summer Within 250km of Toowoomba (excluding TBO Area)* also proved to be well-covered, with reports of 255 species.

TBO welcomes our newest member Russell Jenkins. His name might be familiar to some; he is responsible for producing the regional raptor chart last year, available on the website. Russell has returned home to Japan, but given his passion for Australia and its birds I'm sure we'll be seeing him again soon!

**2008
Challenge**
176 spp as at 19/3/08



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS INC

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

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www.toowoombabirdobservers.org

MEMBERSHIP: Adults/Families \$22, Students \$11

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29th March 2008
Goomburra State Forest
Meet at the Kurrajong Picnic
Area at 7am.
Leader: Michael Wood
Contact: 0402283856

26/27th April 2008
Lockyer Valley Wetlands

Outing Report – Spotlighting: Ravensbourne National Park

23 February, 2008

By Pat McConnell

Attendees: Plaxy Barratt, Ross & Dan Begent, Carol & Richard Colclough, Glyn Hughes, Kath & Pat McConnell, Jenny & Nicholas Matheson, Mary Petr, Edwina & Michael Ryan, Kevin & Kay Williams, Sandra Wilson, Lloyd-George Worth.

Fortunately, by the time everyone arrived at Ravensbourne National Park at 4.30pm the temperature had dropped and the wind had decreased to a light, cool breeze making for a pleasant start to the outing.

Like many areas the national park had suffered from the long drought, and weed invasion is very obvious along the tracks near the parks edges. These things, combined perhaps with habitat fragmentation are possible reasons why birding in the park is not as fruitful as it was back in the 1980's. Despite this, recent rains have meant that the park is looking green and hopefully this year has been a successful breeding season for many species.



Tawny Frogmouth. Photo: Pat McConnell (23/2/08)

Before the group went spotlighting we went for a quick walk around the Rainforest Track to see what birds were present. Things were pretty quiet until after about 10 minutes walking we came across a fruiting fig tree that was full of birds. Numerous **Topknot Pigeons** were flying in and out of the tree giving us good views both in flight and perched. There were also several **Wompoo Fruit-Doves** sitting in the open and it was possible to see these and the topknots in the same field of view. Also visiting the tree were **Regent** and **Satin Bowerbirds**, **Green Catbirds** and **Figbirds**. Further along this track species of interest were **Brown Cuckoo-Dove**, **Crested Shrike-tit** and **Black-faced Monarch**. After an hour birding it was time to head up to the top picnic area where we had tea and waited for nightfall.

Spotlighting anywhere is hit-and-miss but everyone headed off with high hopes of seeing something rare or unusual. We were only 20 metres along the track when we saw a **Scarlet-sided Pobblebonk** (a large native frog). These frogs approach the size of Cane Toads which unfortunately we saw a lot of that night. Also seen were two Green Catbirds, a Black-faced Monarch and an **Eastern Yellow Robin**. No rare owls but a distinct improvement on last year's spotlighting effort at Highfields Falls. With the walking track at the top picnic area checked out several of the group wanted to stay on and we continued

on to the bottom area of the park for another 30 minutes viewing. A small **Carpet Python** was seen along the road and most got a good look at it.

While checking out the bottom track we had good views of a **Tawny Frogmouth** (pictured) and a **Mountain Brushtail-Possum** as well as numerous spiders and a very large **Hawk Moth**.

One Sunday Afternoon Visitor

By Rosalie Rudduck

We were quietly relaxing after lunch on 3rd February when we were disturbed by the familiar antics of yet another bird in the house. The open plan and clear windows seem to invite them in from time to time. Jonathon said: "It must be that Sacred Kingfisher again", but my initial glimpse indicated it was too dark and I thought it was one of our **Grey Butcherbirds**. When it settled however, I realised it was too small for 'Butch' and too blue for the **Sacred Kingfisher**.

It then shifted to the clean clothes heap and obligingly spread one of its wings to reveal the identifying white spot. We had opened some more windows, but I was able to observe it for some 15 to 30 seconds at a distance of approx. 2.5 metres (no binoculars needed) to take in the full beauty of this bird with its royal-blue strip from the back of its head to its back, and stark white chest and partial collar – a female **Forest Kingfisher**. Before I could catch it and put it outside, it found one of the open windows and left in a direct and swift flight-path.

Filling out the unusual bird report was a bit of a joke – description accurate but perhaps habitat and activity of the bird was not quite what is expected to assist and confirm the identification.

Habitat description: Flew into the house and thought about escape routes while sitting on the clean clothes heap!

What was the activity of the bird under observation: Initially flying around and bumped some windows; then settled for the time observed at close range before flying out of a window. Looked scared!

Will They Return?

By Nicci Thomson

This is not a happy story, but I feel it needs to be told. Since Spring of 2006 I have been involved in a national, monitoring project which includes 50 sites in Queensland. The sites are each two hectares in area and are surveyed for birds, vegetation, insects and soil fauna. When the survey began, the country was in drought which continued up until the time of the last survey, with devastating effects on the farm stock and, of course, the birds.

I have chosen one site that is particularly sad, to illustrate the birds' plight. The site is pasture with a few scattered trees which are mostly kurrajongs. The two hectares are part of a large paddock which adjoins a well treed stock route which is approximately a kilometre in width. I took photos of the sites each time we visited.

During the spring 2006 survey we counted thirteen **White-winged Fairy-wrens** and a **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** that were using the scattered trees to traverse the area. Numerous other flocks of White-winged Fairy-wrens and a number of **Richard's Pipits** were observed in the surrounding paddock.

In Autumn 2007 we were able to find one group of five White-winged Fairy-wrens. Seven **Galahs** and a **Torresian Crow** were observed crossing from the stock route to a nearby cultivation paddock. We also found numbers of Fairy-wrens and Pipits in the rest of the paddock but they were more scattered. It was noticeable that grazing stock had depleted the cover available for the birds.

The spring 2007 survey turned up 1 Richard's Pipit in the survey area. I found another Pipit outside the area, but could not locate any Fairy-wrens. All the kurrajongs had been lopped to provide some fodder for the starving cattle, as all the palatable fodder (which is also the cover for the wrens) was gone.

No one can say for certain what the fate of the Fairy-wrens was, but I presume they died *in situ*. They had nowhere to go. The drought and the grazing stock have stripped not only this paddock of White-winged Fairy-wren habitat; it adjoins thousands, if not millions, of hectares that are in the same condition. The stock route is woodland which is reasonably intact, but it provides the habitat for **Splendid Fairy-wrens**, not suitable for White-wings. I believe the area has now had good rain. The big question is – how long will it take for White-winged Fairy-wrens to return?



Spring 2006 Photo: Nicci Thomson



Autumn 2007 Photo: Nicci Thomson



Spring 2007 Photo: Nicci Thomson

The Challenge 2008 Update

These are the ten additions to the Toowoomba Bird Observers' *Challenge 2008*. Accuracy not vouched for by the TBO. Please check with observer before citing.

Bush Stone-curlew 17/3/2008 Welcombe Ave, Toowoomba NT
Little Eagle 11/03/2008 Prince Henry Drive MA
Striated Thornbill 9/03/2008 Highfields Falls MW
Buff-rumped Thornbill 7/03/2008 Thomas Rd, Murphy's Ck MW
Black-chinned Honeyeater * 7/03/2008 Lockyer Siding Rd, Helidon MW
Jacky Winter 7/03/2008 Thomas Rd, Murphy's Ck MW
Large-billed Scrubwren 3/03/2008 Mount Table Top RH
Spotted Harrier 1/03/2008 Magpie Lane, Gowrie Junction GG, MW
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater 1/03/2008 Magpie Lane, Gowrie Junction GG, MW
Australian Owlet-nightjar 24/02/2008 Flagstone Creek Rd DF
Ground Cuckoo-shrike * 17/02/2008 Helidon BJ

MA -Mick Atzeni, GG -Gloria Glass, DF -Darren Fielder, RH -Rod Hobson, BJ -Bill Jolly, NT -Nicci Thomson, MW -Michael Wood *rare or unusual

COMING EVENTS

29th March 2008 – Goomburra State Forest. Meet at the Kuarrajong Picnic Area at 7am
Leader: Michael Wood (Contact: 0402 283 856) There are toilet facilities at the campsites and it is a delightful spot to spend the night.

26/27th April 2008 – Lockyer Valley Wetlands
Details to be determined

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Plaxy Barratt

Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 15th April 2008
Please e-mail or snail-mail your articles to Plaxy Barratt or Michael Wood.

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Webjet

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