

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS INC



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

No. 375
June 2008

Editorial

By Plaxy Barratt & Michael Wood

Cold and clear days seem to be the norm in this part of the world in recent times. Numbers of certain species seem to be about in robust numbers, particularly in the "valley" and "downs", including Golden Whistler youngsters, Grey Fantails and White-throated Gerygones. There have even been the odd migratory species over-wintering, such as the odd **Rufous Songlark** (new for this year's Challenge), White-winged Triller, and various cuckoo species. It was nice to see the return of **Crimson Rosellas** too, a couple of birds seen at Adrian Gilloway's bird-feeder on Kitchener Street. A recent addition to the list was this gorgeous male **Red-capped Robin** (below), photographed by Bill Jolly at his home 'Abberton', last week.



And congratulations to Michael Wood and Mick Atzeni for the latest official addition to the Toowoomba species list, none other than a **Grey Falcon!!!** It was spotted last Sunday over Birdwood Park, west of Gowrie Junction. The record has been accepted by the Rarities Committee and a New Bird report will appear in a coming newsletter!

And on that note don't forget the Raptor Census this weekend. For more details go to page 7.

Another unusual species spotted recently was an Indian Ring-necked Parakeet, seen near town last week by Ian Bryant (EPA). The ringneck has potential to establish populations in Australia as a pest, so be sure to report any you see to Freecall 1800 084 881.

Ron and Sandra Dungleison have asked us to put out a call for anyone who might like to join them on a trip in August to Kilcowera Station. For more details see page 7.

We'd like to welcome our newest member, Louise Teese, who has already made it to an outing – great work Louise!

And last of all, we'd like to ask those sending articles or photos to please send them to each of the co-editors. It makes our jobs much easier if both of us have access to the information.

**2008
Challenge**
201 spp as at 25/06/08



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS INC

(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)

This Issue

Western Medicine...

By Mick Atzeni

Raptor observations

By Chris Cameron

Highfields in May

By Pat McConnell

Outing report – Jubilee and Redwood Parks

By Mick Atzeni

Invitation to Kilcowera Station – August 08

Ron and Sandra Dungleison

COMING EVENTS

**Saturday 28th & Sunday
29th June 2008**

Annual Raptor Survey
Contact Pat McConnell
(07) 4631 5573 (more
details page 7)

Sunday 27th July 2008
Ropely & Lockyer Valley
Leader: John Hadley
Contact Olive Booth

All-Natural, Western Medicine Beats the Winter Blues (Part 1)

By Michael Atzeni

There are times when despite the other demands on your time you realise some things just have to wait and do personally important things you've been putting off, before fate decides otherwise and you end up regretting you never did. Such was a long overdue birding trip with my father Laurie last June, despite having a lousy cold and hardly any voice, and dad having to contend with a painful, dicky knee.

We hadn't been on a serious birding trip since one to Lawn Hill National Park and Mt Isa area with Al Young and Pat McConnell 14 years ago. In the intervening years, I'd quashed plans to visit Africa (too expensive), and this time I turned down dad's offer to fly us to Western Australia, which I had never been to. Lifers weren't particularly important to me. Where wasn't either. Well that's a little bit of a lie – truth be known we were both itching to see some mulga country again – and dad, who seems to know someone just about everywhere he goes, had planned it all before you could



Emus - icons of the Outback. Photo Plaxy Barratt

say "Black-breasted Buz...". Oh, and of course to spend some quality time doing what we both enjoy most together: pulling over whenever we damn well feel like it! Can't tell you how good that feels.

So it was a 6:30am Toowoomba departure in dad's X-trail with a breakfast stop in Dalby. There dad actually managed a surprise lifer for the trip – a Bacon and Egg McMuffin! Now, for a grandfather of nine, how he managed to avoid one for so long beggars belief! While devouring his "bird" in the hand, some Figbirds in a lillypilly over the road became #18 for the trip.

It was very much a leisurely stop and start trip to Cunnamulla the whole day.

Yellow-throated Miners and **Apostlebirds** signalled the transition into more interesting habitat.

By Moonie we'd seen 35 species including **Red-capped Robin**, **White-winged Chough** and an **Inland Thornbill**. The first of many **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters** for the trip was seen near

Southwood NP; the first **Red-winged Parrots** at Westmar; **Australian Ravens** kicked in about 25km further west; and the first **Emus** were seen 48km west of Westmar. Another 34km further

on, after I glimpsed a male **Hooded Robin** flying across the road, we enjoyed a pair of them at

close quarters and also added **White-plumed Honeyeater**, **Richard's Pipit** and **Striated Pardalote** (#46).



Black-breasted Buzzard, showing white 'bulls-eyes'. Photo Mick Atzeni

A **Spotted Bowerbird** (#52) and more Red-wings greeted us where we parked in St George, and stopped for lunch and to catch up briefly over a welcome cuppa with dad's cousin and clone, Kevin Yet Foy and his wife. A little further on, our first **Singing Honeyeater**, the only **Double-barred Finches** we saw all trip, and a group of **Australian Ringnecks** joined the list. By Cunnamulla, we had 63 species including **Southern Whiteface**, **Splendid Fairy-wren** (male only in eclipse plumage, unfortunately),

Crested Bellbird, Major Mitchell Cockatoo (two eating paddy melons on roadside about 15km W of St George), and **Brown Treecreeper**.



Black Swan, sewage treatment plant, Cunnamulla.
Photo Plaxy Barratt

In Cunnamulla, we enjoyed the hospitality of the legendary Fr Rod McGinley – a former parish priest in St Anthony’s parish in Toowoomba in the 70’s. I was in high school back then. There were friends of Rod’s from Pittsworth passing through too, who just happened to be related to a mate at work. And a couple of others I grew up with in Harristown had been there earlier that day as well. Told you he was a legend!

Rod took us to the Cunnamulla weir next day where we added **Restless Flycatcher** and **Fairy Martin**, and then he dropped us off at the “sand dunes” near the cemetery and sewage treatment plant. I’ve never seen so

many **Willie Wagtails** in one location! The place was alive and we added the following to the list: **Rufous Songlark, Pallid Cuckoo, Horsfield’s Bronze-Cuckoo, Grey Fantail, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Western Gerygone**, as well as **Hardhead, Australasian Grebe** and **Black Swan** on the treatment pond.



Vigilant Chestnut-crowned Babbler. Photo Plaxy Barratt

Twenty kilometres out of Cunnamulla we saw our first **Black-breasted Buzzards** (a pair), **Chestnut-crowned Babblers** and **Black-faced Woodswallows** for the trip. Across the highway from the Eulo Bore/Paddabilla turnoff we had a rapid-fire run of newies with **Jacky Winter**, at least 20 **Bourke’s Parrot**, **Varied Sittella** and **White-browed Treecreeper**. About 4km further on we ventured into the mulga and saw our one and only party of **Hall’s Babblers** and first **Diamond Dove**.

At the Eulo store, **White-browed Woodswallows** were passing over while dad had a losing battle with the public phone which

refused to cough up his \$10 phone card after just one local call to let friends of his know we had arrived in Eulo. We were planning to visit their property “Garrawin” the next day and would be staying in Eulo overnight, but they wouldn’t hear of that and soon we were making our way along the Pitherty Rd between Eulo and Hungerford to “Garrawin”. (To be continued)

Avian observations from the north

By Chris Cameron

Ed’s note: Chris Cameron, who lives in Ayr, has included a number of interesting fauna observations in recent correspondence to Mick Atzeni. Chris was happy for us to share these with TBO members via the newsletter...

Wednesday 18 June

Birding is a bit quiet at the moment, a lot of migrants are away, though we are hosting quite a heap ourselves... hundreds, no, thousands of **Martins** (mostly **Fairy**), dozens of **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes**, **Figbirds**, and **White-breasted Woodswallows**.

This is a great hawk area, after only a bit under 2 years in total here I have only four species to see to complete the entire Australian list! They are Grey Falcon, Letter-winged Kite, Red Goshawk and Black-breasted Buzzard. There is a fair chance of getting all of them! A lot of interesting things ... farming grassy blocks brings a swarm of **Black Kites** and **Whistling Kites** after grasshoppers and lizards. If there are quail there will be **Brown** and **Black Falcons**, though the Browns seldom manage a kill, the Blacks seldom miss a shot and are equally adept at snatching full grown rats that even the 'whistlers' struggle with.

Most interesting though is the treatment of snakes. There are a LOT here, a lot of species too, and some big ones at times, **Water** and **Carpet Pythons** sometimes come to grief and it is not too good when they go under a big set of offset discs. Impossible to see any ground at all when ploughing stuff 1.5 - 2m tall and thick enough almost to walk on! The kites and whistlers will not eat snake but it repeatedly seems that they have some form of communication as it is often only a few minutes after rolling one that one or more **White-bellied Sea-Eagles** will turn up (the river is several kilometres away), grab the snake and head off back again!! Occasionally a **Wedge-tail** will have a go, but it is normally Sea-Eagle tucker ... quite strange. The most distant block is some 30km from the Burdekin but they were still doing collecting runs from there when I was working it recently.

Saw another seemingly unusual one last week... a **Black Falcon** taking a full-grown **Masked Lapwing**. He came over carrying the partly eaten body and later I found the heap of feathers where he had killed and plucked it. I think they (the Blacks) still have chicks in the nest – I see them carrying food the same way often. The destination is not in this property though, so it's a bit hard to check.

Tuesday 24 June

I live on the edge of town, a couple of hundred yards from a busy waterbird rookery! I DO NOT go investigating though, a large **croc** was recently scooped out, and then promptly dropped back by a bloke with a modified excavator that has a big "rake" out the front, clearing weed from the irrigation channel that feeds through this swamp..... The birds have a most efficient "minder service"!!

At the moment we have an interesting influx of **Budgies** and **Diamond Doves**. No sign of **Crimson Chats** sadly, we might be a bit far North for them though. These were normally signs of a drying interior when they showed up at "Rockwood" [Chris' former property near Chinchilla].

We have just been through a week of low water levels in all the Sunwater channels as they do their annual servicing of all the pumps and gates etc. It serves to really concentrate the fish / eels etc, and with that, the birds.

At one of "our" gates there have been maybe 50 **Intermediate Egrets**, 30 **Darters**, scats of various **Cormorants**, 30+ **Pelicans** + **Spoonbills** and **Ibis** with a couple of **Brahminy Kites** and **White-bellied Sea Eagles** just to make it really competitive all crowding around a channel 20m wide where there was a boiling mass of small fish up against the (closed) upstream gates some probably survived the onslaught! Not all the fish are small. A son of one of my workmates went out on Sunday and caught (and released) 6 **Barra** ranging from 70 odd cm to over a metre! They are obviously finding the channels VERY agreeable spots indeed. Unfortunately though they taste pretty yucky when they live just in channels, maybe lucky for them though!



'Budgie'. Photo Plaxy Barratt

Highfields in May

By Pat McConnell

While many bird species are present in the yard all year round the arrival of autumn brings with it some changes. **Satin Bowerbirds** build up in numbers at this time of year and it is not uncommon to see eight female/immature birds drinking and bathing in the water-bath near the kitchen window. The adult male is very secretive and is rarely seen. After watching their antics we also found out that they were responsible for eating our cherry tomatoes – mystery solved. And all this time we were blaming the local **Common Brushtail Possums**.

Immature **Golden Whistlers** are also commonly seen and heard at this time of year as they pass through the neighbourhood. Adults rarely put in an appearance. This to me would seem to indicate a dispersal of this season's young rather than a distinct movement of the local population.

The **Southern Boobooks** have been very vocal of late, calling for hours on end. One bird has been making the typical more-pok call and the other the more unusual croaking type call. From what I can determine the croaking call is more characteristic of the female at the start of the breeding season. These owls, which are Australia's smallest, will hopefully breed near by as in past years. They will probably go quiet soon and remain fairly elusive until the young become vocal with their trilling call, probably in about September or October.



Southern Boobook. Photo Bill Jolly

This time of year is also very good for raptors, and lately I have heard many alarm calls from such species as **Noisy Miners**, **Pied Butcherbirds** and **Australian Magpies**. On Saturday 3 May I went to investigate some alarm calls that were coming from the front yard. There were several very vocal Noisy Miners and whatever they were distressed about was obviously at or near ground level. As such I suspected the neighbour's cat but was pleasantly surprised to see a beautiful female **Grey Goshawk** eating one of the local **Crested Pigeons**.

On Saturday 10 May a **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater** put in an appearance. They only visit once or twice a year and usually don't stay for very long – usually a couple of days to a week. Rarer still, in the yard, is the **Striped Honeyeater** which also turned up on Saturday. Another species that rarely visits is the **Apostlebird**. They have turned up about four times over the last six years so it has been great to see them regularly this year. Five individuals have been using the bird bath and the bird feeder most days for the last few weeks or so. Kath and I were also pleasantly surprised to see 16 of them just around the corner from the house – the biggest number we have seen locally.

Sunday 18 May also saw the arrival of some **Grey Fantails**. I am currently waiting for the **Eastern Spinebills** and **Rose Robins** to put in their first appearances for the year. I don't think I will have long to wait.

Outing: Jubilee & Redwood Parks, Toowoomba 31 May 2008

By Michael Atzeni

Present: Ross & Dan Begent, Louise Teese, Michael & Edwina Ryan, Claudiane Ouellet-Plamondon, Richard Colclough, Michael Atzeni

The rain held off but the wind was off-putting for both birds and birders. We did our best to avoid the wind which meant a truncated walk in Jubilee Park for starters, then, rather than walk along the bridle trail in Redwood Park, we headed down through Eagle's Nest instead.

Nevertheless, despite a low tally of 30-odd species in 3 hours, it would be good to meet new member Louise (who incidentally is very strategically located at the Helidon Spa) and there was unprecedented interest in just about everything we saw – bird, plant, rock formation, lichen - for our visitor from Quebec, Claudiane, who'd only been in Australia a couple of weeks and this was her first bird outing, which put a whole new spin on proceedings.



'Oui! Oui!' Claudiane, Ross and Dan at Redwood Park. Photo Mick Atzeni

Even the likes of **Pied Currawong**, **Laughing Kookaburra** and **Lewin's Honeyeater** were cause to pause and to point them out in the field guide - and we'd only taken a few steps into Jubilee Park at that point. There were more lifers around the bend with **Eastern Whipbird**, **Red-browed Finch**, **White-browed Scrubwren** and a female **Golden Whistler** just a few more metres further on. Then the wind ...

Over the road at Redwood Park, the main interest proved to be a group of four **Brown Cuckoo-Doves** that posed cooperatively for our photographers Edwina, Dan and Claudiane. One had a tail feather askew revealing some lovely dark spots that I hadn't realised they had in their plumage. We had a go at sorting out which were immature and adults by the colour of their eyes.

Further along, we came across a flowering gum with **Brown**, **Scarlet** and **White-naped Honeyeaters** feeding in it and nearby in a dead tree a single female **Regent Bowerbird** which hung around for a lesson in how to pick these from afar by just looking for the dark throat patch. Earlier on, I feigned finding a nest in a tree as we led our overseas guest towards a very large Brush Turkey mound, then revealed I was standing on it.



Brown Cuckoo-Doves. Photo Edwina Ryan

Back at the cars, another couple of familiar locals were also firsts for Claudiane, namely, **Magpie Lark** and **Willie Wagtail**. I think the **Magpie** with them was the only one that wasn't a lifer all morning! It was good for everyone to be able to impart knowledge about so many subjects that are generally not raised. I hope I can make others feel equally all-knowing whenever I'm on an outing in a new country!

Species list: Bar-shouldered Dove, Peaceful Dove, Brown Cuckoo-dove, Rainbow Lorikeet, Little Lorikeet, Laughing Kookaburra, Striated Pardalote, Spotted Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, White-throated Treecreeper, Brown Thornbill, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Scarlet Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Golden Whistler, Eastern Whipbird, Eastern Yellow Robin, Willie Wagtail, Magpie Lark, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, Regent Bowerbird, Red-browed Finch, Mistletoebird.



Mick Atzeni and the 'nest'. Photo Claudiane Ouellet-Plamondon

Invitation to Kilcowera Station – August '08

Ron and Sandra Dunglison

Ron and Sandra Dunglison will be visiting Kilcowera Station (www.kilcowera.com.au) Wednesday 13 August for 3-4 nights if anyone would like to join them.

Kilcowera Station is a remote 49,000 ha cattle property between Thargomindah and Hungerford. The 6000 ha saline Lake Wyara, creeks, waterholes, swamps, and lagoons provide refuge for local wildlife and migratory water birds. Over 160 species of birds have been observed to date.

Accommodation is either in the shearers' quarters, with linen, fridge and communal kitchen, at \$35pp / night for a twin share room, or, camping adjacent to the quarters at \$30 per vehicle, for up to 4 people. Owners Greg and Toni Sherwin are most hospitable and the birding is great. Please contact Toni directly if interested and let her know that you are from the TBO. Email gtsherwin@bigpond.com or phone (07) 4655 4960.

Ron and Sandra can be contacted on (07) 3848 7765, although, they will be away until 10 July.

Raptor Census – this weekend!

Contacts for the Raptor Census leaders are listed below. Anyone wanting to go can contact these people for the starting date (Saturday or Sunday), time, and meeting place. It should be quite a good year for birds of prey, given the reports that have been coming in over the preceding months.

Northern Section	Pat McConnell	4631 5573 (work)
Southern Section	Ken Wells	4661 2547
Western Section	Darren Fielder	4699 4348 (work)
		4636 0174 (home)
Eastern Section	Mick Atzeni	4688 1318 (work)

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 28th & Sunday 29th June 2008

Annual Raptor Survey

Contact Pat McConnell (07) 4631 5573

Sunday 27th July 2008

Outing to Ropely & Lockyer Valley

Contact Olive Booth (07) 4633 0553

Second Saturday of each month

Black-breasted Button-quail survey

'Birdwood Park', Gowrie Junction area

Contact Mick Atzeni (07) 4688 1318

Executive Committee Members

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	Richard Colclough	4688 6654
	Gayle Lee	4638 5561
	Mike McGoldrick	4635 7371

Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 15th July 2008

Please e-mail or snail-mail your articles to Michael Wood and Plaxy Barratt.

**If undeliverable return to
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Surface Mail