

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

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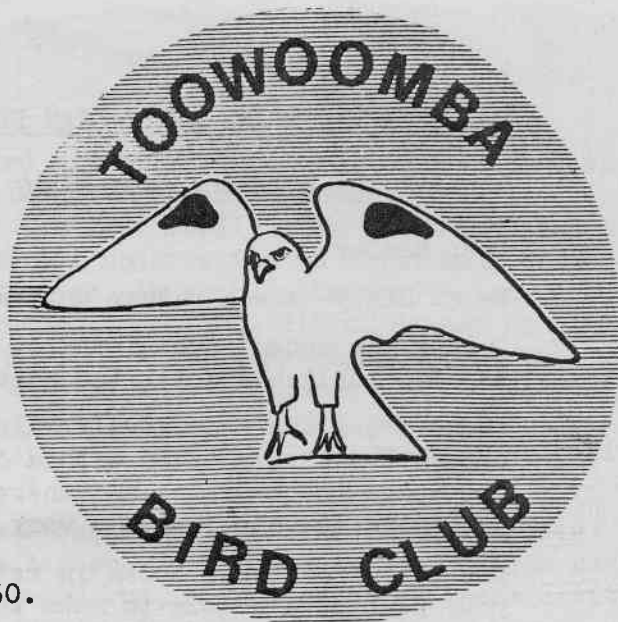
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NEWS-SHEET No. 39 - MARCH, 1979.

Because of delays not of the Club's making, the survey on Black-shouldered Kites has not yet begun. But, as evidenced elsewhere in this issue it should soon be under way. We will keep you posted on this important scheme and hope that you will join in.

In the past there has been a variety of understandings as to the actual starting time of Club field days. Some confusion has arisen as to whether we depart at 8.30 a.m. or simply meet then to leave later. To set the matter clearly for all members, on future field days we will meet at 8.15 a.m. and DEPART at 8.30 a.m.

During the month Bill Jolly delivered a talk on field identification to students of Toowoomba State High School. The group, which numbered well over one hundred, was at Yukana Vale Camp on a biology study. The talk was accompanied by slides and was well received. The Club is willing to perform this service for other schools as a means of reaching young people with the message of the value of birding.

We have received the third issue of "BIRDS" (the magazine of the English RSPB) to which the Club subscribes. This is a really professional job and we commend it to members. Contact Graham Corbin if you would like to borrow a copy.

Regretfully this issue is the last one we can deliver to members who have not renewed their subscription. If your sub is outstanding, a note to that effect will accompany this issue.

Ron Hopkinson,
Editor.

NEW TOOWOOMBA BIRDS.

- ✓ 200. Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*). 11.2.79. Flagstone Creek I.W.S.
Rod Hobson, Ron Hopkinson.

Bird seen in overhead flight - overall dark colouring - head and neck retracted in typical heron-like flight.

201. Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*). 25.2.79. Hood's property, Helidon.
Eileen Jolly, Bill Jolly.

Responding to an early morning telephone call from Mrs. Lund, who lives on the property, we found two swans on the lagoon and one more on the dam behind. When disturbed the lone bird lifted its head and uttered a thin mewling call which was answered by the other two.

RARE AND VANISHING AUSTRALIAN BIRDS.

Herewith is a letter from Rigby Ltd. book publishers to members.

Dear Member,

We at Rigby have a rather unique offer to make to you.

During the recent publishing of Peter Slater's RARE AND VANISHING AUSTRALIAN BIRDS we also published a limited edition, of which only 1,001 copies were printed.

These books are beautifully illustrated and are personally signed by Peter, and come attractively bound with a contrasting slip cover. This publication took Peter two years to complete, and there are 42 beautiful colour reproductions and 15 black and white sketches, with a very informative text.

The price for these books in retail stores is \$40, but as an offer to members of your Club we are able to make them available to you at less 30% discount.

Owing to the strictly limited edition, fulfilment of orders is subject to availability at time of receipt of your order.

Yours faithfully,
IAN R. COOK.

Editor's Note: If you would like to avail yourself of this offer contact any member of the Executive. The discount price is \$28.00.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

We probably all know of a farmer called Farmer or a baker called Baker but in 1977 Britain's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds appointed Mr. A. Bird as assistant manager. He joined a staff already consisting of Dorothy Rook, Helen Peacock, Celia Peacock, John Partridge and Barbara Buzzard.

Rod Hobson.

SILVER GULL AT LAKE ANNAND.

On the morning of Thursday 15th February an immature Silver Gull was noticed at Lake Annand. Each day we checked to see if it was still there. On Sunday morning 18th February it was found dead at the Perth Street end of the lake. As we were on our way to the bird outing it was placed in our freezer to be collected later and prepared as a specimen. When this is done we hope to have some idea of what caused the injury which resulted in its death.

Was it a cat or a dog, or perhaps the victim of vandals?

Jane Corbin.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE SURVEY.

Following discussion with Dr. Tom Kirpatrick, (Head, Nat. Parks & Wildlife, Hermitage Research Station, Warwick.) concerning the Black-shouldered Kite Program, the approval to start the programme should be forthcoming in the very near future. We have made one change to the original proposal. Instead of using patagial tags we will use leg tags.

Dr. Kirpatrick also pointed out that if the birds are nomadic or partly so then the task of locating the birds in the large area we are studying may be beyond us.

Keep watching further issues to see how you can help.

John Coman.

UPON CERTAIN EGGS AND THEIR LAYERS.

Fortunately for the cause of ornithology, bird egg collecting is now restricted to the bona fide scientist. The amateur oologist and "bird nester" has passed into history, at least according to the letter of the law. Still, much about eggs and the birds which lay them can be gleaned by direct observation of nests and the inspection of material from used or deserted sites. In such instances photography has replaced old, wasteful collecting as a recording method. Although many species of bird remove egg shells from the nest and nesting area, fossicking around the vicinity may often turn up shell fragments. This is also a good method of ascertaining bird diet from food wastes and disgorged pellets. In the case of magpies, butcherbirds and plovers (lapwings) recourse to reliable texts, as regarding nesting habits, may be more advisable.

On Moa Island, Torres Strait, late last year I came upon some egg shell remnants upon the sand bordering a brackish, mangrove lagoon. They being large, whitish pieces, my immediate thoughts were of the ~~X~~Great-billed Heron, a frequenter of these latitudes and habitat. Surely this was the only bird capable of laying such a large egg of which I had discovered the remains. My cogitations on the subject were curtailed by the arrival of a three metre saltwater crocodile on the scene. Crocodiles are probably one of the most effective reverie intruders I have encountered in my travels, with the possible exception of trail bikes. It was at this stage (at a distance far removed) that I realised the egg shells were Crocodilian, not Ardean, in origin.

Similarly, a friend of mine living at Gatton was puzzled by small pieces of egg shell appearing about his home. Although his house had been "proofed" against bird pests, he could only attribute the shells to breeding sparrows which had, in some way, gained access to the ceiling space. After much deliberation the problem was solved. The remains in question proved to be of that most appealing little lizard, the Variegated Gecko, *Gehyra variegata*. These are very common little lizards much given to living in close habitation with man in rural areas.

In both the above cases the factor which caused us to seek an avian rather than reptilian solution was the brittle state of the egg shell. I suppose most people are reminded of the parchment like egg shells of those of the saltwater turtles and the majority of our ~~XX~~snakes and lizards when envisaging reptile eggs. However, in Australia, especially along water ways you may encounter white, brittle egg shell fragments. Although these could easily belong to such water birds as grebes or ducks, there is also the highly likely chance that they could belong to one of our eleven species of freshwater tortoises. Unlike their saltwater counterparts, our freshwater tortoises lay brittle, calcareous shelled eggs. As well as those of freshwater tortoises, in the north of Australia, bird egg shells could be confused with those of our two crocodiles, the Saltwater Crocodile, *Crocodylus porosus*, a known man-eater; and the harmless fish-eater, Johnstone's River Crocodile, *Crocodylus johnstoni*. As we have seen small egg shell fragments from the geckoes may be confused with those of such small passerines as Estrildid finches and introduced weaverbirds, Ploceidae.

Aside to the invertebrates, the remaining egg laying animals belong to the amphibians, ~~XXX~~ the bony fishes, the sharks and rays and our two unique monotremes - the platypus and echidna. Confusion between the eggs of these animals and those of birds and reptiles is, however, impossible.

When encountering egg fragments, especially along water-ways, then, consideration must be given as to their origin, whether reptilian or avian? Tortoise and crocodile eggs are always white to dirty white. This eliminates the choice to reptilian egg fragments or those of ducks and grebes as far as water birds are concerned. The possibility arises that they could have fallen from overhead trees, been carried there by predators, or washed there by flood or tidal influence. As reptiles bury their eggs to assist in incubation, digging in the area may reveal more egg fragments or even unhatched or infertile eggs. In the case of crocodiles it may also reveal the presence of the female adult as they remain in the nest area until hatching is complete. Her untimely appearance is somewhat perturbing to the preoccupied egg detective.

The presence of heaped mounds of decomposing vegetation, approximately 2 metres across by half a metre deep on a hard bank protected by river side scrub, is indication of crocodiles. These "nests" are constructed by the adult as incubators and

UPON CERTAIN EGGS AND THEIR LAYERS (cont/d.)

the presence of these may give a clue to egg shell origin. These nests are often reduced by marauding pigs and goannas and scratching landrails and jungle fowl, therefore they may not always be in evidence. At a certain spot on Moa Island, Torres Strait, the presence of a discarded lunch box and beach towel indicate that egg fragments in the immediate vicinity are those of the Saltwater Crocodile and not the Great-billed Heron.

Leastways, the collection and recording of egg shell remains can prove an instructive and rewarding, if not fatal, pastime. I hope this article has given persevering readers an idea of the alternatives available when identifying egg shell fragments and their originators.

x At the time this incident occurred I was unaware that the egg of the Great-billed Heron was pale blue-green.

xx Not all Australian lizards and snakes lay eggs. Some are ovoviparous, that is the eggs are hatched within the female and the young are born without placental attachment. All sea snakes are ovoviviparous. Two common examples of live-bearing reptiles in the Toowoomba area are the Common or Red-bellied Black Snake, *Pseudechis porphyriacus* and the Common Bluetongue Lizard, *Tiliqua scincoides scincoides*.

xxx Many bony fishes and sharks and rays are ovoviviparous.

Rod Hobson.

FIELD DAY REPORT - 18.2.79. - ATKINSON'S LAGOON.

Members met at the Gatton Apex Lake which was teeming with birds. There were Black Duck, Grey Teal, a Hardhead or two, Australian Grebes, and Dusky Moorhens on the water. On the banks and in the shallows there were Pelicans, Pacific and White-faced Herons, Cattle Egrets (some very yellow), Plumed Egrets (one still with magnificent nuptial plumes), a stately Great Egret, Masked Lapwings being snooty with each other, Royal Spoonbills busily sifting the mud, and a pair(?) of swamphens in tall water-side growth. On the dead blue gums on the island dozens of Little Black Cormorants were resting or drying themselves with two rather grubby Little Pied Cormorants and a Darter.

For me the most exciting bird viewing was to see all three ibises together for the first time: Two Glossy Ibis were feeding in the shallows all the time, a skein of Sacred Ibis flew over whilst we were watching and shortly after a skein of Straw-necked Ibis took off.

We also saw three Silver Gulls flying over the lake and resting on it, White-backed Swallows, a family of Sacred Kingfishers (one parent fed the youngster with a fair-sized skink), Magpies, Noisy Miners, Pied Butcherbirds and Magpie-larks!

We drove through the back of Gatton to Redbank Creek. On a swamp we saw large numbers of egrets, herons and swamphens and overhead a Whistling Kite looking for unwary chicks or rodents.

At the Redbank Creek crossing in the fairly dense growth of eucalypts, bottlebrushes and wattles we saw Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, a Spangled Drongo, a Dollarbird, a female Koel, and several beautiful Rainbow Bee-eaters which nest in the sand banks nearby - Jim Corbin told us that these beautiful birds are not mis-named as he had seen them visit his bee-hives on one occasion and take many bees before taking the hint when he let off a shot gun.

We continued past Schultz's swamp where we saw immature as well as mature swamphens in open grassland, and many egrets, but no Whistling Kites which Bill Jolly told us used to nest there.

(cont/d.)

FIELD DAY REPORT (cont/d.)

We had lunch at Lake Clarendon and had a close view of a Whistling Kite overhead. The water which is rather heavily invaded with water-hyacinth, teemed with water-birds. Swans, a flock of Plumed Whistling-Duck, Maned Ducks, a Great Cormorant, and a Comb-crested Jacana walking over the water-hyacinth were water-birds additional to those seen already. Two Latham's Snipe were also seen briefly.

After lunch at a creek crossing we saw no less than four handsome Rufous Night Herons in a clump of black ti-trees (*Melaleuca bracteata*). We also saw Golden-headed Cisticolas, a Little Egret, and a Restless Flycatcher here. Other birds such as Grey-crowned Babblers and Australian Kestrels were seen on the road to Atkinson's Lagoon.

When we reached Atkinson's Lagoon we wondered if there was much more we could see but were immediately rewarded by a flock of terns which, after close study, were confirmed as Whiskered Terns.

As well as a number of duck of species already seen the sighting of a Pied Cormorant completed the cormorants and darters for the day.

The large raptor which had been nesting in the A.L.E.S. area was not seen. The club was grateful to the Atkinson's Lagoon Ecological Society for permission to use their land which is being maintained as a wilderness area.

This excellent day produced 69 species.

Mike Russell.

Species List - Gatton Apex Lake - Lake Clarendon - Atkinson's Lagoon - 18.2.79.

Australian Grebe	Feral Pigeon
Australian Pelican	Common Bronzewing
Darter	Crested Pigeon
Great Cormorant	Cockatiel
Pied Cormorant	Pale-headed Rosella
Little B. Cormorant	Red-rumped Parrot
Little P. Cormorant	Common Koel
Pacific Heron	Laughing Kookaburra
White-faced Heron	Sacred Kingfisher
Cattle Egret	Rainbow Bee-eater
Great Egret	Dollarbird
Little Egret	White-backed Swallow
Intermediate Egret	Tree Martin
Rufous Night Heron	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Glossy Ibis	Rufous Whistler
Sacred Ibis	Restless Flycatcher
Straw-necked Ibis	Willie Wagtail
Royal Spoonbill	Grey-crowned Babbler
Plumed Whist.-Duck	Golden-headed Cisticola
Black Swan	Weebill
Pacific Black Duck	Noisy Miner
Grey Teal	Mistletoebird
Hardhead	House Sparrow
Maned Duck	Zebra Finch
Black-shouldered Kite	Double-barred Finch
Whistling Kite	Common Starling
Australian Kestrel	Common Mynah
Dusky Moorhen	Spangled Drongo
Purple Swamphen	Aust. Magpie-lark
Eurasian Coot	Pied Butcherbird
Comb-cr. Jacana	Australian Magpie
Masked Lapwing	Torresian Crow.
Bl.-fr. Plover	
Bl.-winged Stilt	
Latham's Snipe	
Silver Gull	
Whiskered Tern	

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

- Hoary-headed Grebe. 17.2.79. Ringmere, Withcott. EJ. WJ.
- Cattle Egret. 22.1.79. Nr. Gatton. MW. BW.
- Little Egret. 22.1.79. Nr. Gatton. MW. BW.
- Pink-eared Duck. 11.2.79. Nr. Laidley. RGH. REH.
- Whistling Kite. 14.2.79. Range Area. RGH.
- Grey Goshawk. 28.2.79. Rangeview. JEC. 28.2.79. Ocean St. GC. JCC.
- Black Falcon. 28.2.79. Rangeview. JEC.
- Peregrine Falcon. 14.2.79. Rowbotham St. RGH.
- Brown Quail. 22.2.79. Gowrie Junction. RGH.
- Stubble Quail. 7.2.79. Ringmere, Withcott. EJ.
- Silver Gull. 15.2.79. Lake Annand. JCC. JEC. GC.
- Common Bronzewing. 15.2.79. Rowbotham St. RGH.
- Brush Cuckoo.(2) 4.2.79. Blanchview Rd. EJ. WJ.
- Fan-tailed Cuckoo. 4.2.79. Blanchview Rd. EJ. WJ.
- Common Koel.(young bird being fed by Aust. Magpie-lark) 27.2.79. Withcott. AHS.
- Pheasant Coucal. 20.1.79. Toowoomba Cemetery. JD.
- Tawny Frogmouth. 15.2.79. Ocean St. JEC. JCC.
20.1.79. Eymard St. MGW.
- Fork-tailed Swift. 2.2.79. Ringmere, Withcott. EJ. WJ.
- Dollarbird.(3) 20.1.79. Toowoomba Cemetery. JD.
- Eastern Whipbird. 28.1.79. Toowoomba Grammar School. MW. BW.
- Chestnut-breasted Mannikin. 18.2.79. Murphy's Ck. Rd. MW. BW.
- Dusky Woodswallow.(4) 27.2.79. Withcott. AHS.

GC: Graham Corbin. JCC: Jane Corbin. JEC: Jim Corbin. JD: Joe Deuble.
 RGH: Rod Hobson. REH: Ron Hopkinson. EJ: Eileen Jolly. WJ: Bill Jolly.
 AHS: Anne Shore. BW: Brough Warren. MW: Margaret Warren.

FIELD DAY FOR MARCH.

Date: Sunday, 18th March, 1979. Place: Western Perimeter of Local Study
 Area - Toowoomba/Gowrie Junction.

Leader: Ron Hopkinson. Assembly Point: Pigott's Car Park.

Meeting time: 8.15 a.m. for departure 8.30 a.m. sharp.

NEW MEMBERS.

The Club is pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Joe Deuble, 171, Bridge Street, Toowoomba.
- Craig Seawright, 55, Wirra Wirra Street, Toowoomba.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

- Q.O.S. Newsletter - February, 1979.
- The Bird Observer - February, 1979.
- Birds (magazine of the RSPB), Vol. 7, No. 4.