



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

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

No. 390
January, 2010

Editorial

Nicci Thompson

To put out artificial food for garden birds is still a controversial subject and I do not intend to discuss it here. I don't put out food but I do put out water in shallow dishes above the ground and protected by overhanging branches. During the recent spells of hot, dry weather it has been rewarding to watch the passing parade of birds using it for both drinking and bathing.

+++

Many of our members have provided articles for this month's newsletter and so there is an interesting variety. Olive and Kay cover the final club outing of 2009. Neil McKilligan discusses the results of an opportunistic nest count he organised at that outing. Neil has done long term studies of Cattle Egrets during his professional career and is the author of *'Herons, Egrets and Bitterns - Their biology and conservation in Australia'* which is part of The Australian Natural History Series published by CSIRO.

Our roving reporter interviewed new club president, Steve Burke. Gloria Glass and Helen & Al Young share two very interesting snippets with us and Steve has written an article on birding in West Creek Park - a very urban park within the built environment of Toowoomba. It

would be nice to feature some of the other 'birding' venues in Toowoomba that are enjoyable places to visit but also have an interesting bird population. Do as Steve has done - go for a morning's walk; write up what you saw and heard and share it with the rest of us.

Please join Mick for the January outing at Prince Henry Drive especially as it is being advertised as a beginners' outing. The more club members available to mentor new folk and make them feel welcome, the better. You don't have to be an 'expert' to help others and Mick will be there to assist with any, tricky ones.

The Toowoomba Regional Council have changed our meeting room from the City Hall to Council rooms in Little Street. If you wish to attend an executive club meeting ring Olive Booth for details on the new venue

2009
Challenge



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS

This Issue

Breakfast with the Birds
By Olive Booth & Kay Williams

Nest Count on West Creek
By Neil McKilligan

Birder in Focus - Steve Burke
By Our Roving Reporter

Eight Kookaburras in one Tree
By Gloria Glass

Attack of the Killer Willie :
By Al & Helen Young.

Birding in West Creek Park: By Steve Burke

Members' Bird Notes ; By Pat McConnell

COMING EVENTS

January outing:
Saturday, 30th January,
Venue: Prince Henry Drive
Leader: Mick Atzeni

Saturday & Sunday: 27th & 28th February, 2010
Venue: Bunya Mountains

(An affiliated member of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia)

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

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

Breakfast with The Birds End of Year outing

Olive Booth and Kay Williams



Assembling for the count Photo: K.Williams

We met at West Creek Park at 6:30 am on 28th November 2009. There was a great turnout of 25 members; all there to enjoy the company of birds and people.

Neil McKilligan asked if we would assist in counting the nests of Australian White Ibis and Cattle Egret in the nearby trees.

Many did so and others stayed to look after the breakfast ingredients. Eighty three saw many coming back for a well earned breakfast. There was lots of talk and chatter while eating.

The count was approximately 750 nests. The active members went for a walk to burn off their breakfast, while others sat and discussed ideas for the year's activities for 2010.

Bird List for the Morning; Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Hardhead, Australasian Grebe, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Cattle Egret, Australian White Ibis, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Masked Lapwing, Spotted Dove, Crested Pigeon, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Pale-headed Rosella, Eastern Koel, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Noisy Friarbird, Noisy Miner, Magpie-lark, Olive-backed Oriole, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, Australian Reed Warbler, Golden-headed Cisticola, Common Starling, Common Myna.



TBO members relaxing: Photo: K.Williams

Nest Count on West Creek, Sunday 28th November, 2009

Neil McKilligan

Working up an appetite before the Club's Xmas Breakfast, members counted the number of nests in the egret/ibis colony on West Creek near Spring Street. They systematically tagged nest trees and counted all nests. The first eggs had just started to hatch making it a good time to do the count as the adults were not going to desert at that stage and the chicks were not sufficiently mobile to leave the nest and risk falling out of the tree. Six hundred and seventy six nests were counted. It was not possible to distinguish the Cattle Egret and Australian White Ibis nests but a count of adult birds from a distance, made from



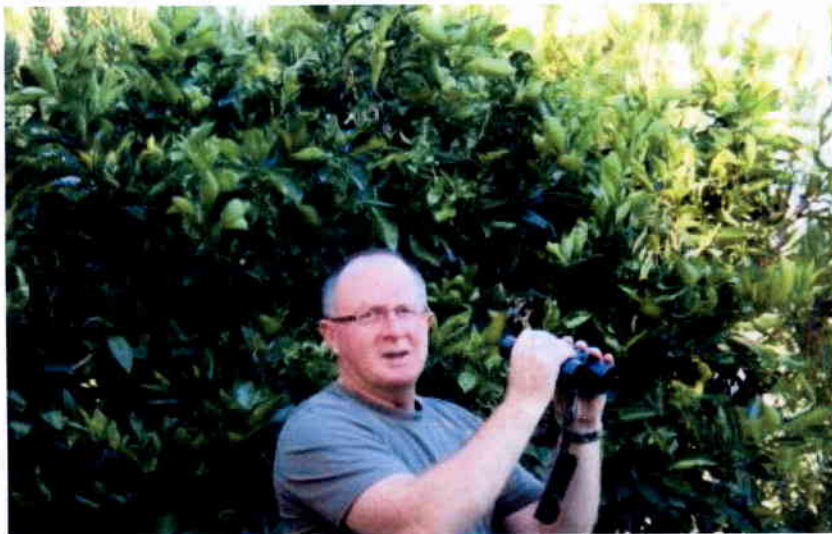
the very conveniently located, restaurant side of the heronry, indicated a ratio of 1.7 egrets to 1 ibis. There would therefore have been about 426 egret nests and 250 white ibis ones. This is considerably fewer than when these birds nested at the Water Bird Habitat.

I am currently studying the situation in the Lockyer Valley where Cattle Egret nest trees were destroyed at Lake Apex. It is unlikely that any of these displaced egrets re-located to Toowoomba to nest but a new heronry at Lake Galletly (UQ Gatton) and large expansion of the one at the Minden Lake suggests that these birds were accommodated this nesting season. My thanks to all those who participated in this nest count. I am donating a copy of

my and Ian Savage's new bushwalking book to the Club in appreciation. It should provide the Outings Coordinator with the locations of some good birding places.

Birder in Focus – Steve Burke

Roving Reporter



Steve Burke

Photo: K. Williams

Hi Steve, How long have you been interested in birds?

As a child on the family farm, about 40 years ago.

How did you get started?

When I was taken on a bird outing with my parents' neighbours at the age of 10 years.

When did you join the TBO club? Approximately 4 years ago.

Why did you join this club?

To get a focus on my birding, and to further my knowledge.

What are the reactions of friends and family with your birding activities?

All good, as they are like minded people.

What is the best or worst thing about birding?

The excitement of sighting a new bird, ("a lifer") is one of the best aspects. The outdoors and fresh air is another plus.

When or where would you like to go birding next? Mt Isa

Where are some of your favourite birding spots?

1. Mount Isa.
2. Kakadu
3. Durikai.
4. Lake Coolmunda.

Steve, when did you realise you were hooked on bird watching?

As a ten year old when I went on that first club outing.

What is on top of your list of places to go birding, in Australia?

Bowra Station, Cunnamulla

Do you constantly write lists?

No, but I try to remember the birds I've seen when I get home.

What is your favourite bird?

The Apostle Bird, they are fun birds.

Describe one of your best birding experiences.

When I went birding with Bob Forsyth and Phil Venables at Lake Moondarra, Mount Isa,more lifers than you could imagine. I think we got about 132 species for the morning.

What is on top of your birds to see list?

Grey Falcon.

Where is your favourite local birding area?

Goomburra State Forest.

Steve as the new Club President for the TBO can you name some of your goals for 2010?

To see our active membership increase.

Encourage variation in outings and club activities.

Hope that our listing on the TRC Community information Directory brings forth

Memberships

Thank you very much Steve, for giving me your time.

Till next time, The Roving Reporter.

Eight Kookaburras in one tree

Gloria Glass



On 13 November, at breakfast time, there were a lot of Kookas laughing their heads off, as they do, in the big *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* near our house at Gowrie Junction. I nipped out with binoculars to try to see how many, and did actually focus on three sitting on a branch; then the 'shadows' moved near them and one further up the branch and another lower materialised. The Kookas started to fly to another tree and it was then that I was able to count at least eight. Perhaps that was the lot. There was much coming and going as they called and settled to call some more. Altogether the most Kookie pandemonium we have had for some time

Attack of the Killer Willie

Al & Helen Young

Recently we stopped for lunch at a picnic area in Limeburners National Park near Port



Photo: A.Young

Macquarie. Almost immediately three adult Australian Magpies arrived looking for some free junk food. There were also two Willie Wagtails nearby.

Suddenly one Willie Wagtail attacked one of the Magpies. It flew at the Magpie with "talons" out-stretched like a miniature raptor zeroing in for the kill. It landed on the Magpie's back and then flew off and launched another attack on the same Magpie. This continued for about 30 minutes and it was always the same Magpie

that was attacked. Judging by the damage to the feathers on the Magpie's back this onslaught must have been going on for sometime. I guess every species has its nutters.

West Creek Park Birding

Steve Burke

In early December I decided to spend a bit of time wandering through the more well frequented parts of Toowoomba's public parks and gardens just to see what could be seen by the general public if they kept their eyes open. So I did the section of West Creek between Alderley and Stenner Streets on Saturday afternoon December 12th and Sunday morning December 13th.

It is quite a picturesque walk with some unrestrained parts of West Creek and other areas which are a little more constrained with concrete. I started both days at the Stenner Street end of the walking track, wandered around each of the waterholes on the way upstream with all the usual water fowl present and the area around the pond with all the lilies yielded a White-winged Triller and a female Rufous Whistler. It has quite good habitat around this part of the creek for smaller honeyeaters and fairy-wrens.



One of the ponds along West Creek Photo: N.Thompson

Further up the creek near where the barbecues are located I spotted a male Buff-banded Rail on the floating plant material at the edge of the creek. Olive, Kay and Kevin had seen the entire family, including three chicks, the weekend before but I only managed the male.

The highlight of the weekend happened on the Sunday when, after checking out the egret and bat rookery, I decided to go into Spring Street Garden World and check out the rookery from their side of the fence. As it turned out they have a very good view of the area with their restaurant al-fresco eating area adjacent to the pond and breeding area. While watching the nesting Cattle Egrets, Australian White Ibis and Little Black Cormorants a dark bird swept past my field of vision and went around the back of a Weeping Willow on the island and disappeared out of view. I thought it was a Glossy Ibis but I had to be sure, so I made my way to the other side of the trees and began to scan the nesting area hoping it might be nesting amongst the other birds. I couldn't find it anywhere and I dropped my gaze to put my binocs away and there it was standing in the mud right in front of me. That sighting made my weekend and reinforced my view that an ordinary day can become extraordinary very quickly.



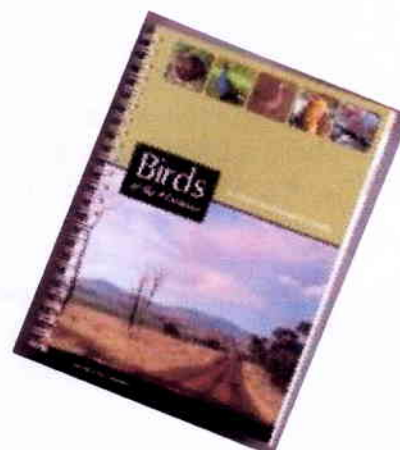
Glossy Ibis Photo: S.Burke

The birds sighted were Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Hardhead, Australian Darter, Australasian Grebe, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Cattle Egret, Intermediate Egret, Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Buff-banded Rail, Masked Lapwing, Spotted Dove, Crested Pigeon, Rock Dove, Galah, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Red-rumped Parrot, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Superb Fairy-wren, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Noisy Friarbird, Little Friarbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Brown Honeyeater,

Rufous Whistler, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Grey Butcherbird, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, White-winged Triller, Figbird, Australian Magpie, House Sparrow, Australian Reed-warbler, Common Myna, Common Starling.

'Birds of the Maranoa – a land manager's guide' was published in December 2009. It is the third in the series of Birds on Farms guides that Greg Ford and I have co-authored in recent years. Its scope is basically the area covered by the new Roma Regional Council. Its intended audience are the land managers and bird watchers of that area.

Nicci Thompson



Members' Bird Notes

Pat Mc Connell

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

Blue-billed Duck *	16/12/2009	Lake Galletly Gatton	NM
Glossy Ibis	13/12/2009	West Creek Toowoomba	SB
Lewin's Rail	17/12/2009	"Abberton" Helidon	BJ, EJ
Spotless Crake	20/12/2009	Spa/Iredale	PM, KO, KM, MA
Black-tailed Native-Hen (2)	20/12/2009	Helidon farm dam	BJ
Marsh Sandpiper	20/12/2009	Hood's Dam Helidon	MA, PM, KO
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (20)	14/12/2009	Gowrie Junction	GG
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (11)	15/12/2009	Highfields	PM, KO
Australian Owlet-nightjar	6/12/2009	Table Top Estate	KM

* Male & female with two ducklings plus another two males across the lake.

MA, M. Atzeni; **SB**, S. Burke; **GG**, G. Glass; **RH**, R. Hobson; **BJ**, B. Jolly; **EJ**, E. Jolly; **PM**, P. McConnell; **KM**, K. McKeown; **NM**, N. McKilligan; **KO**, K. O'Donnell.

If anyone wishes to submit bird notes they can do this directly to me at mccconnel@usq.edu.au or via the Club's mailing address.

Thanks
Pat McConnell

A new edition has just come out!

The Toowoomba Bushwalker's Bible

BUSHWALKS OF THE TOOWOOMBA REGION: With notes on natural history; 4th edition.

Authors Neil McKilligan and Ian Savage, 2009

This 4th edition has 12 new walks and many new illustrations. It is not just for the dyed-in-the-wool bushwalker. It provides an introduction to local natural history and a guide to where field naturalists can go to enjoy nature and BIRD WATCHING in our local bushlands.

It has maps and descriptions to take you on short or long walks, on good tracks and off-track and always with the option of walking as little or as far as you might wish. Available from local map/camping/book stores/info centre and next Field Nats meeting

Ed: This is the book which Neil is donating a copy of to our club.