

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

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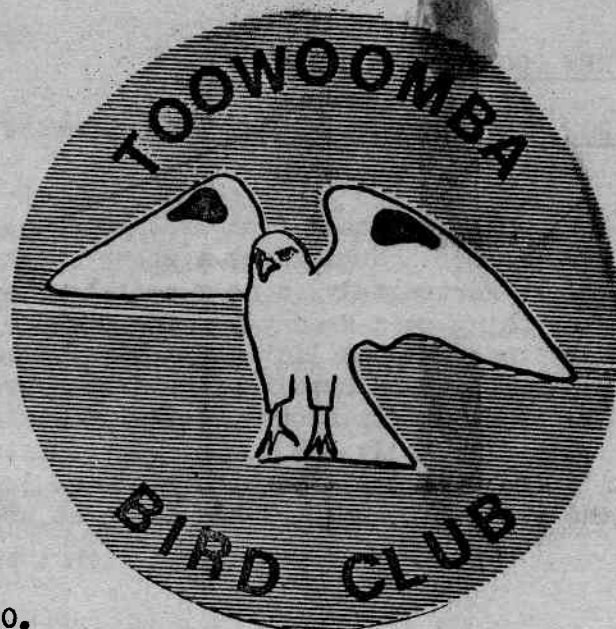
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NEWS-SHEET No. 40 - APRIL, 1979.

Although Sunday, June 24th was promulgated as a Field Day (News-sheet No. 36 - December, 1978) the preceding week-end, 16/17/18th June, is the Queen's Birthday long week-end. This creates an excellent opportunity for a camp-out, so to this end the Executive is planning a trip to Mudjimba. The last camp there produced Mangrove Heron, Osprey, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Brahminy Kite, Pied Oystercatcher, Mangrove Warbler (out of a total list of 78 species). It is hoped that members can adjust their plans and come along.

If you can make it would you please advise Bill Jolly so that the site can be booked. We hope you can be there for the three days but even if you can only come for a day or night please join in.

John Coman has been involved in further discussions with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and it now seems that approval for the Black-shouldered Kite survey will be granted. Contact John with confirmation of your offer to participate.

Following the talk on field identification given recently to State High School students, Bill Jolly presented a similar lecture to students of Toowoomba Grammar School on April, 4th. Once again it was well received which encourages our aim to reach more young people with our birding.

Following the sighting of a Goldfinch on a recent Field Day (referred to in the Field Day report in this issue) certain questions are raised in regard to birds which could be aviary escapees and yet are seen sufficiently close to their known range to be wild birds.

The Club Executive is endeavouring to lay down guidelines which would lead to a policy to be followed in such cases. It is not necessarily questioning identification as such, but trying to ascertain the factors which would lead to a decision whether or not to admit the bird to the list.

There have been difficulties in the recent past with News-sheet deadlines. In Members' Bird Notes we try to maintain topicality so that a bird you saw in March is reported in the April issue. To help achieve this we ask those members who post their check-list to address it direct to the Editor/Records Officer, if possible on the first of the month. Those members who hand their list to Bill Jolly at DDIAE please continue to do so but again we request that you do it early in the first week of the month.

Ron Hopkinson,  
Editor.

NEW TOOWOOMBA BIRDS.

202. Black-necked Stork (Xenorhynchus asiaticus). 2.4.79. Hood's Property, Helidon.  
Ann Shore, Eileen Jolly.

An early phone call from Mrs. Lund who lives on Hood's property, reporting the sighting of a huge black & white stork - could surely only mean a Black-necked Stork. Fortunately, a near neighbour and member, Ann Shore, was willing to drop everything on a Monday morning to join me in an attempt to add this spectacular bird to our local list. On arrival at about 10.15 a.m. we were immediately able to pick out its massive form from a great distance on the far bank of the lagoon. Closer proximity showed us its glossy green head, huge black bill and very pink legs, especially the knees - an unmistakable "Jabiru".

A subsequent early morning visit on 3rd by several other members was greeted with the news that the bird had flown at about 11 a.m. the previous morning!

Eileen Jolly.

SUMMER MIGRANTS.

Thursday, 8/2/79. 1700 hrs. Harristown. 46 Rainbow Bee-eaters flying to the N.E. in a tight flock estimated about 500 feet up.

It is perhaps interesting to speculate on the northward migration of birds in Australia. Much is in the literature about the southward arrival of such birds as the Bee-eater but not so much about their departure.

Miss Ella Pratt of Murwillumbah, NSW, has for many years kept records of migrant movements and the QOS ran a survey for a while which now seems to be in limbo. I suggest that maybe in conjunction with other Club surveys the arrival and particularly the departure of such species could be added.

I realise that the departure of a particular species is difficult to nail down to a specific day, it not being as dramatic as the arrival of the Bee-eater in Spring, for example. But if a regular watch on migratory birds was kept it could be fairly accurately pinpointed.

John Walter.

Editor's Note: John's suggestion serves to revive a request made in the editorial of News-sheet No. 22 (October 1977). This was for members to note on their checklist the date of their first sighting of Summer Migrants. In line with John's note we might ask members to note the date of sightings late in the season.

BLUE-FACED HONEYEATERS.

I would be interested to know if other members have noticed that apparently not all adult Blue-faced Honeyeaters do have the characteristic blue face patches. We have been much entertained over the past few months by watching the behaviour of visitors to our newly-set-up bird table some 12m. from the house. Far the most frequent callers have been the Blue-faced Honeyeaters, at first single birds, with either blue or green faces, which we soon suspected of feeding young as they often departed with large mouthfuls. This was confirmed when a family party with three fat babies started making regular visits, adding the bird table with it's fare of brown bread crusts to their round of calls to our various flowering bananas.

It was very noticeable that in these parties, sometimes numbering 5 individuals, there was not one blue-faced bird to be seen and that the ever-demanding young were certainly being fed by a bird with a green or turquoise-green face, to all intents similar to their own. When one of the strikingly attractive blue-faced birds did come, as far as I could tell, it was always on it's own. Is it possible that some young adults breed before the facial colour has changed to blue or might this be an odd isolated instance? Perhaps members may have some other theories to suggest.

Ann Shore.

BIRDS IN NEW ZEALAND.

We visited New Zealand last December-January spending a week in the South Island and two in the North Island.

We arrived in Christchurch, the English city. For me, an Englishman, it was not the architecture or the surrounding countryside, and certainly not the weather (which was beautiful), that was English but the flora and fauna. Everywhere Blackbirds sang and clanged their familiar alarm call, Songthrushes were nearly as common but, sadly, don't sing their sweet song in summer in N.Z., Sparrows chirped, as common here as in most other temperate and sub-tropical cities of the world, and Chaffinches and Greenfinches were common. On the pretty Avon River running clean and clear through the middle of the city, were Grey Duck (our Black Duck - *Anas superciliosa*) and Mallards.

Going south across the Canterbury Plains with a back-drop of snow-capped mountains and thoughts of Keas and Kakas, our English friends of Christchurch were joined by Goldfinches, Yellow-hammers, Starlings and Welcome Swallows. The only hawk we saw was a harrier with a prominent white rump - the Australasian Harrier (*Circus approximans* syn. *aeruginosus*).

We stayed for a week at Tekapo with its ultra-marine glacial lake cradled by snow-capped mountains - very beautiful. The country is dry and devoted almost totally to sheep grazing. The only trees are introduced pines (mainly *P. radiata*).

Still the birds were all familiar with harriers frequent, the occasional Little Shag (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*), and many Sky-larks. They were the only birds we saw when we climbed Mt. Edwards (1971m.) and built a snowman at the top; no Kakas or Keas!

One day we drove up the south-western side of Lake Ohau and came finally to patches of native forest. Here, at last, we saw native Fantails (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) but looking very familiar all the same since they are closely related to our fantails. Also beside the track were a pair of Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*) which allowed themselves to be photographed from the car. These handsome waders as well as being native to N.Z. are, like many other waders, very widely distributed.

On a pool near Lake Tekapo we disturbed a family of Paradise Ducks (*Tadorna variegata*) - seven ducklings and the parents. These handsome native N.Z. ducks are large members of the Anatidae. The duck is the more handsome being bright, rusty brown with a white head and white wing patch whilst the drake is predominantly dark brown with a prominent white wing patch. Immatures resemble the male. We were to see these ducks fairly often in the North Island usually in family groups with one rusty brown female leading.

Before leaving Tekapo we swam in Lake McGregor in the unusual company of a Great Crested Grebe. Interest appeared to be mutual.

We sailed from pretty Picton to the North Island and saw the usual range of gulls following the boat: In these waters Red-billed gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*), the larger Southern Black-backed Gull (*L. dominicanus*), terns which we weren't able to identify positively, and large brown birds probably petrels.

The North Island has considerably more diversity of vegetation, although it wasn't until we got into the mountains above the Hawkes Bay area that we finally saw native N.Z. bush at close quarters. At the head of a beautiful wooded valley we saw within a few minutes Tuis and Bell-birds, Whiteheads and Silver-eyes. The Tui is a handsome, darkly-sheened honeyeater with a characteristic tuft of white feathers at the throat. The Bell-bird (*Anthornis melanura*), is another honeyeater, slightly smaller than the Tui (about the size of the Lewin Honeyeater) dark greeny-brown with a long, notched tail. The bell-like notes are more melodious and not so regular and continuous as our Bell Miners.

The Whitehead (*Mohoua albicilla*) is a smaller, brown insectivorous bird with a totally white head. Its genus is the Maori name for a related species with a yellow head in the South Island.

The Silver-eye (*Zosterops lateralis*) is our Grey-breasted Silvereye.

BIRDS IN NEW ZEALAND (cont/d.)

In the agricultural parts of Hawkes Bay, which is most of that area, we saw a wide variety of birds mostly introduced and including the Rook apparently the only corvid in N.Z. White-backed and Black-backed Magpies were common and the Common Mynah was waddling about everywhere.

Game birds are common and we saw pheasants and Brown Quail and frequently heard the clanging call of the cock pheasant. Turkeys also breed in the fox-free hedges and coppices molested only by the occasional stoat, the odd feral cat and, I suppose, the N.Z. falcon.

The Sacred Kingfisher, which is native to N.Z., was common.

Along the coast we saw gulls and terns and many Gannets since there is a large gannetry at Cape Kidnappers on Hawke Bay.

At Rotorua we saw, in captivity, both Kiwis and Keas, as well as the Red-crowned Parakeets. The Kiwis are housed in crepuscular areas which are dark enough to make it necessary to stand for a few minutes of eye adjustment. The birds then become apparent in the dimness and were very active and busily scratching. The Keas are big, solid parrots which bounce around on the ground in a jolly sort of way. The parakeets were quite ordinary parakeets.

We travelled north through Auckland across the 5km of land which separates Northland from the rest of the North Island and arrived in the steeply undulating land between the mangrove inlets of the west coast and the rocky bays of the east coast and to the south of Mt. Tangihua.

This country has been largely cleared for grazing with some cultivation in the narrow valleys but there are still a lot of steep hangars of native forest. Not surprisingly there was a good variety of bird life here. On our first walk we saw all the introduced passerines already mentioned and, rather to our astonishment still brilliant flashes of colour in a mixed pine-oak-ash-eucalypt wood were two pairs of Eastern Rosellas. Next morning a clear, resonant, single-note piping call repeated regularly and sounding not unlike the second note of the Stubble Quail, turned out to be a California Quail on a post. These introduced game birds have a strange black crest which hangs over the beak like an inverted comma and certainly has cryptic camouflage value.

Our best sighting was in a patch of native woodland where we saw the handsome New Zealand Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) not unlike our Wonga Pigeon with irridescent green and brown on top and white below, the Shining Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*), fantails, tuis and a hen pheasant with seven poults moving warily through grassland and reeds.

Round the farm dams we saw the Pukeko (our Swamphen - *Porphyrio porphyrio*), Sacred Kingfishers, the usual ducks, and once a large Black Cormorant (*P. carbo*).

We left New Zealand from Auckland. As we drove out to the airport Blackbirds sang from the streets.

Mike Russell.

FIELD DAY REPORT - 18.3.79. - WESTERN PERIMETER, TOOWOOMBA.

Part One - The Day.

As a result of the absence of our proposed leader-of-the-day due to another commitment, the Club's exploration of the Western perimeter of our local study area was necessarily more ad hoc than is normally the case - with yours truly leading the group along some roads which ultimately proved untrafficable as well as others which with hindsight must surely be so judged despite our having succeeded in staggering and bouncing our vehicles along their course.

Features of the day which remain distinct from an overall recollection of having seen rather few birds per kilometre are the sighting of a European Goldfinch at

(cont/d.)

FIELD DAY REPORT (cont/d.)

Cranley, two entertaining Wedge-tailed Eagles at Gainsborough Lodge and lunch at the South Toowoomba Lions Park.

The list of the 45 species observed during the course of our travelling follows.

Species List - Western Perimeter, Toowoomba - 18.3.79.

- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Australian Grebe        | Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike |
| Pied Cormorant          | Willie Wagtail            |
| Pacific Heron           | Tawny Grassbird           |
| White-faced Heron       | Golden-headed Cisticola   |
| Straw-necked Ibis       | Sup. Fairy-wren           |
| Pacific Black Duck      | Yellow-rumped Thornbill   |
| Grey Teal               | Noisy Miner               |
| Maned Duck              | Lewin's Honeyeater        |
| Black-shouldered Kite   | Striated Pardalote        |
| Wedge-tailed Eagle      | Silvereye                 |
| Australian Kestrel      | European Goldfinch        |
| Dusky Moorhen           | House Sparrow             |
| Masked Lapwing          | Zebra Finch               |
| Feral Pigeon            | Double-barred Finch       |
| Bar-shouldered Dove     | Chestnut-br. Mannikin     |
| Crested Pigeon          | Common Starling           |
| Galah                   | Common Mynah              |
| Scaly-breasted Lorikeet | Aust. Magpie-lark         |
| Cockatiel               | Pied Butcherbird          |
| Pale-headed Rosella     | Australian Magpie         |
| Red-rumped Parrot       | Pied Currawong            |
| Laughing Kookaburra     | Torresian Crow.           |
| Welcome Swallow         |                           |

Part Two - What of the Goldfinch?

Much discussion during the day, and since, concerned the implications of the sighting of the Goldfinch. Successful populations of this beautiful Old-world seedeater have flourished in South East Queensland for about half a century now, and in the Brisbane area and on the Granite Belt the status of the Goldfinch as an introduced resident is well established. It seemed not at all unreasonable to most of those present that Goldfinches might well find themselves at home in the Toowoomba region, which fits neatly within their general range and provides much of the desirable farmland and suburban habitat which the Goldfinch most enjoys. Indeed, the individual which so delighted members at Cranley looked most comfortable in the setting of weed-filled creek-bank and weed-fringed railway line in which we met him.

None-the-less the Goldfinch is a popular aviary bird, and whereas our bird might have been a free-born new-Australian he might equally well have been Joey from North Street absent without leave.

How then may we resolve this sort of dilemma? The short answer is that we can't, but we can move some way towards making the best possible decision in such cases by giving some thought to exactly which questions we ought to be asking ourselves about any new bird we encounter in the local study area.

In order to consider just these questions the club's three officers met one evening recently, and with the help of a number of thoughts set down on paper by club member Ron Wilson, we came to a concensus concerning a set of four basic points which it would be of value to routinely consider before any new species is added to our list. These questions will, it is felt, assist us to assess the probable status of any newcomer species in a systematic manner, rather than through the more subjective process of reacting to thoughts which happen to come to mind at the time. It must be stressed that we are not setting up anything resembling a Rare Birds

FIELD DAY REPORT (cont/d.)

Committee but merely establishing a set of guidelines to be applied to the consideration of the status of a bird of known identity.

1. Is it a reasonable assumption that the hand of man might have been involved in the bird's introduction to the area? (e.g. The Goldfinch is a popular aviary bird. We know that some Little Corellas were released in Middle Ridge a few years ago.)

No - add to the list.

Yes, evidence to that effect - do not add to the list.

Yes, perhaps - continue questions.

2. Is our local study area either within the bird's known range or reasonably close to it, having regard to all known circumstances? (e.g. Blue-winged Kookaburras have been recorded as close as Laidley. The Sooty Tern found on the Range Highway appeared in cyclonic weather conditions).

No - Do not add to the list.

Yes - Continue questions.

3. Is the bird within its known ecological amplitude, having regard to all known circumstances? (Consider habitat, time of year, sedentary/nomadic/migratory nature of species).

No - Do not add to the list.

Yes - Continue questions.

4. Is there anything about the bird's appearance or behaviour which suggests an introduction or aviary escapee? (e.g. Does it fly on to your shoulder and say "Scratch Cocky!" Is it wearing a coloured leg ring?)

Yes - Do not add to the list.

No - ~~summate~~ conclusions.

As an example of the use of such procedures, it will be seen that application of these questions to the sightings of Little Corella (which fails Q.1.) and the Long-billed Corella (which fails Q.2.) verifies that these species have been omitted from the local list on valid grounds.

We cannot use these guidelines to establish that any species should be listed. It can be regarded only as a weeding-out device, a tool which will serve to establish for us the grounds on which certain birds should be omitted.

A few birds will escape the application of this "hoeing" as it were only to leave us still wondering whether they should have been where they were and feeling that probabilities have to be considered. The view of the group was that if at that stage of consideration we have doubts remaining, then that in itself should serve to cause us to look for further sightings or further information. The Goldfinch is the first bird to which we have applied these guidelines and he has been seen to fit into exactly this category, for which reason we have not felt it proper to include him as bird number 202 on the local checklist.

Should any member care to offer observations on the appropriateness of the points listed above I would be very pleased to hear from you.

I might just add that after considerable discussion number was rejected as a relevant variable as it could not be held to be a consistent factor either for or against the likelihood of a bird's having arrived in the area unaided.

Bill Jolly.

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

Rufous Night Heron. 25.3.79. Ma Ma Creek. RGH.  
Black Bittern. 8.3.79. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ.  
Sacred Ibis. 31.3.79. East Toowoomba. DN.  
Collared Sparrowhawk.(pair) 23.3.79. Alderley St. swamp. RGH.  
Grey Goshawk. 1.3.79. Ocean St. JEC.  
Wedge-tailed Eagle. 15.3.79. "Shorelands", Withcott. AHS.  
Black Falcon. 10.3.79. Rangeview. JEC.  
Brown Falcon. 23.3.79. Schwabes' Property, Withcott. EJ.  
Glossy Black Cockatoo.(2) 5.2.79. "Corandru", Withcott. AJD.  
Aust. Owllet Nightjar. 9.2.79. South St. DN.  
White-throated Nightjar. 12.3.79. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.  
White-throated Needletail. 4.2.79. Eymard St. MGW.  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.(feeding young) 9.2.79. Eymard St. MGW.  
Cicadabird. 7.3.79. Rangeview. JEC.  
Leaden Flycatcher. 4.3.79. Redwood Park. WJ. AHS. JS.  
Restless Flycatcher. 26/28/29.3.79. "Shorelands", Withcott. AHS.  
Clamorous Reed Warbler. 3.3.79. Gabbinbar swamp. GC.  
Red Wattlebird. 5.3.79. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ.  
Striped Honeyeater. 4.3.79. Withcott. WJ. AHS. JS.  
25.3.79. Flagstone Creek. RGH.  
Fuscous Honeyeater. 7.3.79. Flagstone Creek. RGH.  
Chestnut-breasted Mannikin.(5) "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.  
Spangled Drongo.(partial albino) 16.3.79. Eymard St. MGW.  
Australian Magpie.(white-backed race) 3.3.79. Ramsay St. RGH.

GC: Graham Corbin. JEC: Jim Corbin. AJD: Mick Dolley. RGH: Rod Hobson.  
EJ: Eileen Jolly. WJ: Bill Jolly. DN: David Newlands. AHS: Ann Shore.  
JS: John Shore. MGW: Max Wood.

FIELD DAY FOR APRIL.

Date: Sunday, 22nd April, 1979. Place: Mango Vale, Withcott.  
Leaders: Ann & John Shore. Assembly Point: Pigott's Car Park.  
Time: 8.15 a.m. - depart 8.30 a.m. sharp.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

Ecus - February, 1979.  
The Bird Observer - March, 1979.  
Urimbirra - February, 1979, March, 1979.  
The Darling Downs Naturalist - March, 1979.