



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

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

No. 404
May 2011

Editorial

Steve Burke

Thanks once again to all who have contributed articles and photographs for inclusion in future newsletters. It makes the Editor's job a lot easier if there are one or two months copy to choose from. It also makes for more interesting reading if articles come from a range of contributors. At the moment this doesn't occur. There is a small core group of Members who contribute 90% of the articles and photographs for publication.

I'm sure there are a lot of Members who go on holidays and carry out some birding and take photographs of interesting birds or situations while they are away. It would be greatly appreciated if any Members would like to try their hand at writing a short article for a future newsletter. Just one article from each member annually would make my job very straight-forward. If you don't have photographs to accompany the story, don't worry as I can usually find a photograph somewhere. I didn't think I would be able to write an article that other people would enjoy reading but I have learnt that

birders are a forgiving bunch and if you mention a bird or two then they will forgive a grammatical error or misplaced comma. So why not give it a go. You might even unleash the hidden Leon Uris or Sean Dooley hidden inside and waiting to get out. Also remember the Outing this month is a weekender so talk to other Members about car-pooling and accommodation.



A Rainbow Bee-eater with meal.
Photo: Steve Burke.

2011 Challenge
151 species as
at 23/5/2011



(An affiliated member of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia)

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www.toowoombabirdobservers.org

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

(Subscriptions due 31 August)

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Saturday 28th/Sunday 29th
Venue: Lake Broadwater
& Bunya Mtns foothills
Leader: Mike McGoldrick

June Outing
Saturday 25th/Sunday 26th
Venue: Raptor census
Leader: Pat McConnell

Birding in New Zealand – land of the long white cloud.

By Al & Helen Young

In February 2011 we had a great trip to the South Island of NZ. The scenery was stunning, the people were great and the birding was very demanding, especially native land birds. This was mainly due to the low species diversity and abundance and the difficulty in seeing some species in the dense podocarp and beech forests.

We were in NZ for a month and saw 71 species, with 27% being exotic species, such as **House Sparrow, Dunnock, Blackbird, Starling, Australian Magpie (white-backed form), Goldfinch, Greenfinch** to name a few. House Sparrows were almost everywhere, often well away from human habitation. Thirteen species of introduced passerines were seen.

Unfortunately we dipped on a number of iconic species because they are rare, nocturnal; occur in very restricted areas or all of the above. We missed out on **Kiwis, Takahe** (like a very large Purple Swamphen), **Black Stilt, Blue Duck, White Egret, Yellow-crowned Parakeet, Yellowhead, Rock**

Wren and Fernbird. We tried to book a tour to look for the **Brown Kiwi** on Stewart Island and near Okarito, but there were insufficient numbers so both tours were cancelled. It was very disappointing. However, we did see two captive North Island Brown Kiwis (*Apteryx mantelli*) at Hokitika.



A Fiordland Crested Penguin.

Photo: Helen Young.

From Christchurch we basically drove in a counterclockwise direction around the South Island with visits to Stewart and Ulva Islands. Luckily we avoided the earthquakes in Christchurch and Kaikoura. Our first stop was the lovely town of Akoroa on the Banks Peninsula. En route to Akoroa we stopped at Lake Ellesmere and Kaitorete Spit where the following species were seen: **Black Shag (Cormorant), Pied Shag, Black Swan, Canada Goose, Paradise Shelduck, Grey Teal, Pied Stilt and Mallard.**

During a harbour cruise at Akoroa we were very fortunate to see six **Blue Penguin** (white-flipped form), the smallest penguin. One was very busy with meticulous preening while lying on its back in the water, so we got quite close. According to the skipper of the boat, almost nothing will interrupt a penguin while preening. (Like some people I know!). Unfortunately, introduced ferrets, stoats and cats were mainly responsible for a 70% decline in the numbers of Blue Penguins. Baiting programs have significantly reduced

these introduced predators. We also saw on this cruise a small pod (12-15) of **Hector's Dolphin** (*Cephalorhynchus hectori*). It is one of smallest dolphins and also one of the rarest with only about 7000 animals left. Fortunately, the Banks Peninsula is now a marine mammal sanctuary to protect these dolphins from set net fishing.

Back to penguins - We were also fortunate to see a **Yellow-eyed Penguin** near Owaka at Nugget Point and a single moulting **Fiordland Crested Penguin** sheltering in a shallow cave on Ulva Island.



A Kea at Homer Tunnel.

Photo: Al Young.

Everywhere we went in the high country there were signs at rest stops and car parks – “Do Not Feed the Keas”. So, we were nearly half way through our trip and no Keas. We were beginning to think all the poor birds have starved to death! We were expecting to see a similar sign when we arrived at Cannibal Bay in the Catlins District. Fortunately we saw four **Keas** at Homer Tunnel (between Te Anau and Milford Sound). They were ‘working’ the cars parked at the tunnel entrance looking for ‘junk food’. They are quite comical and very

bold in their approach when looking to ‘fleece’ the tourists in the cars.

While birding in the Little River area (Banks Peninsula) we saw the mating display of a pair of **Australasian** or (**Great**) **Crested Grebes** (*Podiceps cristatus*). It was very impressive with the two birds ‘skittering’ across the water towards each other, briefly engaging their necks and then backing off for another charge. I have seen many Great Crested Grebes but this was the first mating display.

From Owaka we spent the day birding in the Catlins Forest Reserve, which is mixture of exotic pine plantations and old growth beech forest. It has been preserved to protect the very rare Yellowhead, a sparrow sized bird with a yellow head and breast. Unfortunately, we dipped on the Yellowhead but did see: **Tomtit, Rifleman, Silvereve** and **Bellbird**.

We left the hire car at Bluff and caught the catamaran to the town of Oban on Stewart Island. En route we saw **Southern Bottled-nosed Dolphin** (*Tursiops truncates*), **Sooty Shearwater**, **Shy Mollymawk**, and **Stewart Island Shag** (pied phase). The next day we went to Ulva Island, which is a 10 minute ferry ride from Oban.

Ulva Island is a very important bird sanctuary of only 270 ha with 18 species of birds, including, Stewart Island Kiwi (Tokoeke), Rifleman, the rare Yellowhead and Kaka, to name a few. Thousands of the introduced rats (*Rattus rattus*, Ship or Black Rat) decimated the bird life on Ulva Island. However between 1993 and 1997 the NZ Department of Conservation eliminated the rats by a huge baiting program. Without the rats, the birds have made a good recovery but unfortunately the rats are back.

Birding on Ulva Island is not easy because most of the island is covered in a dense podocarp forest with trees up to 25m tall. We spent a whole day on the island and saw some great birds: **Stewart Island Weka**, **South Island Saddleback**, **Tomtit**, **Rifleman**, **New Zealand Robin**, **Brown Creeper**, **Tui**, **Kaka**, **Fantail**, **New Zealand Pigeon**, **Grey Warbler**, **Red-crowned Parakeet**, **Bellbird** and **Sacred Kingfisher**.

While on Ulva Island I must have looked like a 'mother weka' because there were three juvenile wekas following behind me as I walked along the beach. We certainly got 'weka-ed' while having lunch on Ulva Island, with one bird carrying off a whole banana. If you disturb the leaf litter on the side of the track on Ulva Island, a **New Zealand Robin** (South Island form) appears almost instantly to snap-up the little critters living in the leaf litter. They have no fear of humans and they have certainly learned to look out for big boots disturbing the leaf litter.



A New Zealand Robin on Ulva Island. Photo: Al Young.

When we returned from Ulva Island to our hotel in Oban we learned of the horror earthquake in Christchurch. Everyone in the hotel was gathered around the TV. Very sad news!



Al talking to a Weka. Photo: Helen Young.

There are only two native extant (living) raptors in NZ – **Australasian Harrier** (same species as our Swamp Harrier) and **New Zealand Falcon** (endemic). The harrier is quite common but we only saw one NZ Falcon. At Lake Mahinapua, near Hokitika we saw a falcon devouring what looked like a gallinule chick, probably a Pukeko (Purple Swamphen). New Zealand once had the world's largest eagle, the Haast Eagle that went extinct about 500 years ago. Females weighed between 10 and 15 kg and had a wing span of about 2.6m. It preyed mainly on giant moas.

New Zealand has quite a good diversity of shags (cormorants) with 12 species. During the trip we saw the following shags: **Black**, **Pied**, **Little** (white-throated and pied phases), **Little Black**, **Spotted** and **Stewart Island**. It is interesting to note that the Black, Pied, Little, and Little Black Shags are the same species that occur in Australia (some with

different common names) and are therefore classified as natives, whereas the other 8 species are classified as endemics because they are unique to New Zealand.

Waste water treatment plants are usually good places for water birds. We stopped at an animal waste treatment plant near Hokitika and saw the following: **Black Swan** (on a nest), **Cape Barren Goose** (a rare Australian vagrant), **Paradise Shelduck**, **Australasian Shoveler**, **New Zealand Scaup**, **Grey Duck x Mallard hybrid**, **Black-backed Gull**, **Red-billed Gull** and **New Zealand (Australasian) Pipit**.

We were surprised to see **Black-backed Gulls** feeding on road kills, mainly rabbits and Brushtail Possums, often well away from coastal areas.

It was a great trip, only marred by the devastating earthquake in Christchurch. The cost of accommodation and meals is similar to Australia but the high Aussie \$ makes things about 22-25% cheaper depending on the exchange rate.



A Tui on Stewart Island.

Photo: Al Young.



A New Zealand White-faced Heron.

Photo: Al Young.

April Outing – Lockyer Valley Wetlands
By Rob & Jocelyn Wilson

Attendees were: Olive Booth, Kay & Kevin Williams, Gayle Lee, Ross & Dan Begent, Rob & Jocelyn Wilson, Dinah Greenlees, Bill Canning, Tim & Marg Roberts and Allan Vogler.

On the last day of April, nine members of TBO, were joined by two members from each of Birds Qld and Birds Australia (from Boonah and Brisbane), for a visit to four sites in the Lockyer Valley. The group met at Lake Apex in Gatton, from where they drove to Adare Road. Here we walked along a section of Redbank Creek. It was a clear, still, crisp morning and a lovely spot, but few birds to be seen. We walked back to the road, across the creek crossing, and along a track on the western side of the road. Here we were rewarded with good sightings of many birds, including **Red-backed Fairy-wren** and **Eastern Yellow Robin**, who provided great photo opportunities.



An Eastern Yellow Robin.
Photo: Rob & Jocelyn Wilson.

The next stop was Coles Road, which has a large Melaleuca Swamp on one side of the road, plus an area frequented by water birds on the other. We were particularly pleased to watch a **Comb-crested Jacana**, feeding along the lower bank of the waterhole.

Then we went onto Lake Clarendon, where the water level is up to the fence-line below the picnic area. Bird spotting continued during and after morning tea. **Great Crested Grebes** were seen on the water. Kevin and Gail, with their big camera lenses, were seen stalking a **Striped Honeyeater** in a Casuarina.

The group returned to Lake Apex and most headed for home. A few walked to the bird-hide and along part of the causeway between Lakes Apex and Freeman. Remarks were made about the turbidity of the water in Lake Freeman and the obvious lack of water plants. **Royal Spoonbills** were feeding along the edge of the Eastern Island and also on the edge of Lake Apex near the main picnic shelter.

This, being our first outing with TBO, it seemed daunting to also be 'leaders' for the morning. However, we found



Black Swans. Photo: Steve Burke.

ourselves with a friendly group who really know how to spot birds. Fortunately, Kay and Olive were recording the names of the birds sighted.

We just wish we had seen all of the birds listed, especially when we looked through our Bird Guide after returning home. May we say a special thankyou to Kevin, Kay and Olive for meeting with us prior to the outing and for their assistance.

Bird List: Black Swan, Mallard, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Hardhead, Australasian Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, White-faced Heron, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, Whistling Kite, Nankeen Kestrel, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Comb-crested Jacana, Masked Lapwing, Crested Pigeon, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Little Corella, Cockatiel, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Australian King-Parrot, Pale-headed Rosella, Laughing Kookaburra, White-throated Treecreeper, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, White-throated Gerygone, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Jacky Winter, Eastern Yellow Robin, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Magpie-lark, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Olive-backed Oriole, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, White-winged Chough, House Sparrow, Double-barred Finch, Red-browed Finch, Mistletoebird, Welcome Swallow, Golden-headed Cisticola, Silvereye.



Part of the group having a break at Lake Clarendon.

Photo: Kay Williams.

New Members

By Steve Burke

The Club Committee and members would like to welcome a new member to the fold of the Toowoomba Bird Observers. **Patricia Walton** lives at Rockmount and I have heard it on good authority that Patricia has a wonderful piece of remnant dry rainforest on her property and if we keep in her good books we might be able to visit there one day. When's your birthday Patricia? I'll send you some flowers.

The Power of Suggestion

By Pat McConnell

I received the photo in the last newsletter from a woman I work with. She said that her neighbours had seen a funny looking kookaburra and that they had photographed it. I said to her - "Send me the photo and I will identify it for them". When I received the photo I thought that it was a funny looking kookaburra but because of the blue tail could not be anything but a **Blue-winged Kookaburra** which would be a new bird for the Club list. I forwarded the photo to Mick Atzeni and another friend of mine who has 30 years of birding experience. Mick replied saying it was definitely not a Laughing Kookaburra and my other friend said that because of the blue tail it had to be an immature Blue-winged Kookaburra – although he said that he had never seen one with that plumage pattern before. I was still concerned about the plumage and started to look through the various reference books to check on all the plumage variations. By this time Mick was also checking through all the field guides and even checking out photographs on the net. After nothing matched Mick then started to think "What am I missing here"? He then realised what was happening. He rang me back and said that he thought it was an immature **Sacred Kingfisher** - and of course it is.

The power of suggestion can do strange things. I assumed that because the people who saw it said that it was a Kookaburra that the bird in question was indeed Kookaburra sized. The angle and closeness of the photograph also give an impression of large size. That is one of the reasons why Rarities Committees also like good descriptions as well as photographs before they make a decision. Photographs can often distort size and colour and should not be used as the sole identification guide.

I thought this was a good learning experience and I hope others did to.

Members' Bird Notes

By Pat McConnell

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES: 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.

Pacific Baza (15+) *	1/05/2011	Helidon	BJ
Square-tailed Kite	24/04/2011	Highfields	PM, KO
Square-tailed Kite	8/05/2011	Highfields	PM
Black Kite (2)	10/04/2011	Gatton	AY
Grey Goshawk (white phase)	24/04/2011	Tor St Toowoomba	MA
Black Falcon	26/04/2011	Helidon	PM, KO
Brolga (3)	26/04/2011	Glenmorgan	KM
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	16/04/2011	Upper Lockyer	MA
Powerful Owl (pair)	20/04/2011	Highfields Falls	PM
White-throated Nightjar	20/04/2011	Highfields Falls	PM
Eastern Spinebill	1/05/2011	Niddrie Dr Toowoomba	MA
Rose Robin	23/04/2011	Niddrie Dr Toowoomba	MA
Rose Robin	27/04/2011	Stevenson St. Tmba.	NM

* 15 Pacific Bazas together would be an amazing sight to see. The largest group I have ever seen was six – Records Officer.

MA, M. Atzeni; **BJ**, B. Jolly; **PM**, P. McConnell; **KM**, K. McKeown; **NM**, N. McKilligan; **KO**, K. O'Donnell; **AY**, A. Young.

Bird notes can be submitted by email to mccommel@usq.edu.au, by post, or via the forum www.toowoombabirdobservers.org/forum/index.php

Thanks

Pat McConnell

COMING CLUB EVENTS

May Outing

Saturday/Sunday, 28th & 29th May 2011

Venue: Lake Broadwater & Bunya Mtns foothills

Time: 8am for 8.30am start

Meet: Lake Broadwater campground. For further details on Day 2 and accommodation choices call Mike McGoldrick.

Leader: Mike McGoldrick

Phone: 07 4635 7371 or 0447 517324

June Outing

Saturday/Sunday, 25th & 26th June 2011

Venue: Raptor Census

Time: Your group to decide

Meet: As above

Leader: Pat McConnell

Phone: 07 4631 5573

July Outing

Saturday, 30th July 2011

Venue: Murphy's Creek

Time:

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Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 20th May 2011
Please e-mail or post articles to the Editor.

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