

# TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS



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

No. 406  
July 2011

## Editorial

Steve Burke

The raptor census 2011 was a great success again, mainly due to the organisational efforts of the area leaders, and all those who were involved have reported that they had a very entertaining and socially interactive day out with fellow avid birders. One more species was seen this year when compared to last year's results but the total number of birds seen was down from 2010.

The eastern section again came up trumps with the greatest number of species and the western section was again way out in front with the greatest number of individual birds.

The Club is holding a hot-pot lunch at the Uniting Church Hall in August and all members and friends are warmly invited to attend. The date chosen is Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> and the time is 11.30 am. Please bring a hot dish to share with other attendees. The Committee looks forward to seeing a lot of members and friends come along to share some hot food and birding stories and holiday highlights.

Jeff and I attended a Rural Fire meeting of local residents who border McEwan State Forest this afternoon and were treated to a BBQ lunch and a presentation by the local Rural Fire Commander and a National Parks representative Brett Roberts. It was great to see the good attendance and to know that there are a number of locals who are concerned for the future of this local resource.



Grey Fantail on our verandah.  
Photo: Steve Burke.

**2011 Challenge**  
**167 species as**  
**at 28/6/2011**



TOOWOOMBA  
BIRD OBSERVERS

## This Issue

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## COMING EVENTS

**July Outing**  
**Saturday 30th**  
**Venue: Rockmount**  
**Leader: Michael Atzeni**

**August Outing**  
**Saturday, September 3rd**  
**Venue: Karara**  
**Leader: Kay Williams**

**September Outing**  
**Sunday, September 25<sup>th</sup>**  
**Venue: Redwood Park**  
**Leader: Pat McConnell**

(An affiliated member of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia)

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[www.toowoombabirdobservers.org](http://www.toowoombabirdobservers.org)

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

## Bowra Station – a jewel amongst the Mulga.

*By Steve Burke*

In October 2010 I decided to venture west on a week-long birding holiday and settled on visiting Bowra Station near Cunnamulla in south-west Queensland. I had heard a great deal about the beauty and the extraordinary array of wildlife to be found on the property from fellow Club members. I also visited the Australian Wildlife Conservancy website [www.australianwildlife.org](http://www.australianwildlife.org) and found it to be an extremely informative and helpful site. If you think back to that time it had been quite wet (a prelude to what was to come later) and I set out on the trip not knowing how far I would get or if I would be delayed by floodwaters in returning to work.

The trip was reasonably mundane until I got to just this side of Moonie. I pulled up randomly on the side of the road where a large paddock of wheat was standing like rice in knee-deep water on one side of the road and the pasture paddock on the opposite side was flooded also. The Brigalow, Belah and Bottletree scrub at the side of the road was also standing in copious amounts of water. It was here, at this random spot, that I had



Painted Honeyeaters near Moonie. Photo: Steve Burke.

my first of many exquisite birding experiences of the week. A pair of **Painted Honeyeaters** flitted through the Brigalow, there were also **Singing Honeyeaters**, **Variegated Fairy-wrens**, **White-winged Trillers** and **Brown Thornbills** all about. When I looked above me I noticed two juvenile **Brown Falcons** watching me from their nest at the top of a Belah nearby. There were also thousands of **Plumed Whistling-Ducks**, **Pacific Black Ducks** and **Grey Teal** in the flooded paddocks which all took to the air each time one of the parent **Brown Falcons** flew overhead.

I took another pit stop at Westmar and ticked off the first **Rufous Songlark** for the trip. Little did I realise that by the end of the trip I would tire of their song. I arrived at Bowra about an hour before sunset and set about putting up my tent beside the lake and about 100 metres from the old shearers' quarters. I made myself known to the property caretakers and other campers and also to a large group of AWC employed scientists who were doing a property flora and fauna survey.



A Chestnut-crowned Babbler in front of my tent.  
Photo: Steve Burke.

I woke up the next morning to find **Emus** ambling around the tent and my first ever **Chestnut-crowned Babbler** foraging about 6 metres from my tent. I never tired over the next few days of watching these delightful birds around my campsite. They had a couple of apartments very close to my own living quarters and I found it quite comical how they seem to fall out of their apartments in the morning.

That first day was an eye opener as the property caretaker took me and another birder out for an early morning drive around the hot spots. We couldn't believe our fantastic luck when, within ten minutes of leaving the camping area, we flushed a **Grey Falcon** out of a roadside Cypress Pine. It flew past us, across the road and into some trees nearby. We scrambled out of the car and chased it through the trees for a couple of minutes, getting reasonable views, before it flew out of sight. We couldn't believe our good fortune. Lifer number four for the trip.

We then drove further up the road to a stretch of cleared Mulga with some areas of regrowth. It was here that I saw my first **Black Honeyeaters** and **Splendid Fairy-wrens**. It began to shower lightly but not enough to chase away the **White-browed Woodswallows** feeding their young or the **Crested Bellbirds** which were calling from all directions.



A male Splendid Fairy-wren.  
Photo: Steve Burke.

It wasn't hard to see **Brown Falcons** and **Zebra Finches** but my first **Bourke's Parrots** came as a bit of a surprise as they were perched low down in a Mulga under which I stopped to have a drink of water. It was in this area of Mulga and *Eremophila* that I was told the **Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush** were most often seen. And yes there they were. I caught fleeting but adequate sightings as I tracked them through the scrub and was able to get a couple of mediocre photographs.

It was then off further down the track to photograph a pair **Ground Cuckoo-shrikes** sitting on their large fluffy chicks. It was while we were parked here that I saw my first **Mulga Parrots** (what a bird). Lifer number seven. There were also some **Australian Ringnecks**

in the area as well. By this time we were getting a bit hungry as none of us had had breakfast or planned to be out so long, so we headed back to the camp site spotting birds like **Pallid Cuckoos**, **Red-backed Kingfisher**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Spotted Pardalote**, **Striated Pardalote**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **White-breasted Woodswallow** and **Chestnut-rumped Thornbills**.

One of the most enjoyable parts of the trip was the bird call at the end of each day which took place in the old shearer's quarters with nibbles and a glass or two of wine. Not only was there talk of the best birds of the day but with the group of scientists staying in the quarters there was much talk of their activities and sightings for the day. This was a good way to suss out where might be a good part of the property to head off to the following day.



A male Black Honeyeater. Photo: Steve Burke.

That next day I headed to a higher part of Bowra, a flat topped mesa with great views of the surrounding Mulga country. There were quite a few **Hall's Babblers** here, **Southern Whiteface**, **Hooded Robin** and **Rufous Whistlers**.

From here I travelled further out the back to a large area of open grazing country with areas of low bushes that proved a haven for **White-winged Fairy-wrens**. Further on I came upon a small group of three **Brolgas**. Heading back to camp at the end of the day I

saw my first **Major Mitchell's Cockatoos** and a large family group of **Red Kangaroos**. The adult male is a magnificent animal.

After a great night's sleep I made my way to a fresh section of Bowra covered in mostly Cypress Pine and Eremophila and was soon rewarded with great sightings of **Spotted Bowerbird**, **Brown Treecreeper**, **Plum-headed Finch**, **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo**, **Budgerigar** and **Diamond Doves**. I had lunch at a large billabong where **Whistling Kites** were nesting in the River Red Gums and there were **Australian Pelicans** on the water and were a couple of **Eastern Great Egrets** on the bank. It was here that I was lucky enough to get my binnies onto my first **Black-breasted Buzzard** as it flew down the billabong and was amazed at how beautiful the bird's underwing markings were. I felt extremely lucky to be where I was at that time and vowed that I would return soon.

On the second-last day I decided to go for a drive to Lake Bindegolly near Thargomindah. It was a little further away than I thought and took nearly half the day for the return trip. I had heard that it was a great place for a variety of waterbirds. When I got there I have to agree that it was a magnificent sight with water everywhere but the fact was that the

birdlife was a little spread out. There were plenty of **Variegated Fairy-wrens** near the carpark with **Great Crested Grebe**, **Little Black Cormorant**, **Plumed Whistling Ducks**, **Caspian Tern** and **Whiskered Tern** among the waterbirds to be seen on or above the water.

I had to leave the next day and packed up as early as I could but still didn't get away until about 9 am. After saying goodbye to my birding comrades and the **Red-winged Parrots** in the African Boxthorn near my campsite, the **Yellow-billed** and **Royal Spoonbills** and the **Black-fronted Dotterels** at the waterhole I drove past the old shearing shed and the homestead to the road. Just past the homestead I was lucky enough to get a good look at my second **Painted Honeyeater** for the trip.

The trip home proved eventful with plenty of **Emu**, **Whistling Kite**, **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Brown Falcon**, **White-winged Fairy-wren** and **Australian Ringnecks**. Then to top off the trip, a **Square-tailed Kite** came gliding straight down the highway toward me near Bollon as a fitting finale to the best birding holiday I have ever had.

I cannot recommend Bowra highly enough as a holiday destination, whether you're into birds, lizards, plants or ants, as it is truly a magnificent section of Queensland and fits admirably into the acquisitions of the Wildlife Conservancy Group and the work they do to conserve and educate.



A pair of Mulga Parrots at the campsite waterhole.

Photo: Steve Burke.

## **A Brahminy's Belligerence**

*By Jenny Matheson*

### **PROLOGUE**

#### **January 2010**

Territorial instincts kicked in as the **Brahminy Kite**, in a near vertical downward swoop with talons outstretched, attacked the **White-bellied Sea Eagle** from behind while it attempted to steal some of the Bream from the shoal making its way downstream along Tallebudgera Creek. Locked in a dogfight, the Brahminy drew on all its inner strength, clawing, biting and colliding head-on with the Sea Eagle. Unrelentingly protecting its food source, the Brahminy drove its adversary out to sea well beyond the breakers. Only then did it notice the **Osprey** effortlessly satisfying its hunger with plenty of nutritious Bream. By this stage the shoal was nearly at the creek's mouth and almost beyond the Brahminy's reach. Hours of scouring Tallebudgera Creek for tasty morsels sadly remained unrewarded for the Brahminy.

#### **April 2011**

With the Easter holidays upon us, Mum and I again found ourselves engaging in one of our Gold Coast traditions – exploring Tallebudgera Creek's intertidal zone at low tide. Armed with burley, prawns, hand held nets and an eco-aquarium we scrutinized the many pools encasing the bases of the bridge pylons while two nearby **Pied Oystercatchers** nonchalantly ignored us.

As nothing new was uncovered we shifted our efforts to beyond the oyster-clad rocks. By gently dragging my net over the wet sand in the intertidal zone and slowly sifting the resulting contents in the creek's shallows, repeatedly I gathered scores of blue soldier crabs which efficiently buried themselves again upon release. A number of **Caspian Terns** sunning themselves close by occasionally shot a knowing glance in my direction.

Suddenly in this process, I found some baby Flathead, each approximately six centimetres long, lying on the creek bed waiting to ambush an unwitting prey. Only their eyes, located on the top of their heads, were visible. Placing each in my eco-aquarium revealed that one was struggling to survive, as it floated upside down in the container.

As a family of **Silver Gulls**, two parents and two fledglings, very gradually moved towards us, inquisitive about our catch, I threw the now dead Flathead towards the fledglings. One immediately devoured the nutritious head while the other carried the remaining carcass to the water's edge where it repeatedly washed and attempted to eat it. Giving up allowed one of the parents to fill its crop with the fish's remains, before the family again took to the air.

Immediately from behind, a raucous bleating drowned even the traffic noise. A pirate Brahminy materialised into a fierce downward swoop, talons outstretched and targeting the adult Gull with the full crop. The other adult quickly became a shield between the Brahminy and its opponent, while the two fledglings hastily copied their brave parent. A ferocious dogfight between one parent and two fledglings and the pirate Brahminy was irrevocably

climaxing as the birds aggressively clawed and bit each other. The adult gull's throat was consistently the Brahminy target. Rapidly the opponents moved out over the basin, thus allowing the parent with the full crop to peel off over the caravan park. Sadly, the Brahminy soon realised that its efforts were again to be unrewarded and that it would have to invest more hours scouring Tallebudgera Creek if it was to enjoy any tasty morsels today. Meanwhile, the gull family gathered on the sand as one adult emptied its crop contents for the enjoyment of the two fledglings.

## **EPILOGUE**

Nearly eighteen months transpired between the two events during which time Mum and I have sat about two metres from a Brahminy while it fed on a dead Bream at North Burleigh, thrown a washed up Trigger Fish to a Brahminy at The Southport Spit and watched two Brahminies build a nest on Miami Heads. Nonetheless, sadly we have never seen a Brahminy triumphantly fight for food. Evaluating the effectiveness of a Brahminy's fighting tactics remains an unanswered question, at least for us. However, we can only hope that the poor Brahminy at Tallebudgera Creek is consistently rewarded with sufficient tasty morsels to guarantee future belligerent dogfights for its human audience.

## **June Outing – Raptor Survey** *By Pat McConnell*

### **Northern Section**

Kath O'Donnell and Pat McConnell surveyed the northern section on Sunday 26 June. This section was divided into four sub-sections as in previous years. These were Highfields to Cooby Dam, Cooby Dam to Goombungee, Goombungee to Cooyar and Cooyar to Highfields. The survey was done between 10.20am and 2.40pm. We saw five species and 40 individual birds of prey which was the same number of species as in 2010 but five fewer birds. (See table below for summarised results). The weather during the survey was cool with some cloud cover. The highlight of the day was a **Spotted Harrier**.

### **Southern Section**

The southern section was surveyed by Ken and Fiona Wells on Sunday 26 June from 10.00am till 12.30pm and from 2.30pm till 4.30pm. They saw five species and 26 individual birds of prey which was down on numbers seen in 2010. The route they surveyed included Freestone Valley, Clintonvale, Goomburra, Hirstvale, Wyreema, Cambooya, Greenmount, Nobby and Allora.

### **Eastern Section**

The eastern section was surveyed by Jenny & Nicholas Matheson, Claire Hanney, Kev & Kay Williams and Michael Atzeni on Saturday 25 June from 10.00am until 3.00pm. They saw 11 species and 47 individual birds of prey. The route they surveyed was from Helidon – Placid Hills – Gatton – Adare – Lake Clarendon – UQ Gatton.

### Western Section

The western section was surveyed by Mike McGoldrick, Olive Booth and Gayle Lee on Saturday 25 June. They saw five species and 159 individual birds of prey. The route they surveyed was Toowoomba – Oakey – Jondaryan – Bowenville – Formartin – Norwin – Cecil Plains – Dalby – Bowenville (via Irvingdale) – Oakey (via Mt Tyson Rd) – Toowoomba (via Kingsthorpe).

**Table of Sightings for 25 – 26 June 2011**

Species	N	S	E	W	Total
Black-shouldered Kite	5	9	6	17	37
Square-tailed Kite			1		1
Black Kite			3	16	19
Whistling Kite			5	1	6
White-bellied Sea-Eagle			1		1
Spotted Harrier	1				1
Swamp Harrier			1		1
Brown Goshawk	2 *	1			3
Wedge-tailed Eagle	7		2		9
Little Eagle		1	1		2
Black Falcon			2		2
Brown Falcon				3	3
Australian Hobby		4	1		5
Nankeen Kestrel	25	11	24	122	182
<b>Total number of raptors</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>272</b>

\* One Brown Goshawk was a road-killed bird.

One more species was seen in 2011 compared to 2010, and 272 birds of prey were recorded compared to 318 seen in 2010.

### Other Surveys

Gloria Glass and Esther Townsend surveyed Sector N1 on Monday 27 June and saw three Black-shouldered Kites, two Wedge-tailed Eagles and 14 Nankeen Kestrels. Gayle Lee saw an Australian Hobby at Wyreema on Saturday 25 June and Dinah Greenlees saw a Collared Sparrowhawk at Tabletop Estate on 28 June.

A big thank you to all involved especially the leaders.

### New Members

*By Steve Burke*

The Club Committee and members would like to welcome two new member to the fold of the Toowoomba Bird Observers. **Mark & Tanya Beech** live in a beautiful part of the world, Rainbow Beach, and must have some interesting birding stories from areas near them such as Inskip Point and the Cooloola National Park. We all look forward to meeting Mark and Tanya in the future and possibly seeing an article from them for the newsletter.



## 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.

Species	Date	Location	Observers
Stubble Quail (3)	6/07/2011	Bowenville - Norwin Road	RH
Stubble Quail (4)	12/07/2011	McEwan State Forest	RH
Chestnut Teal (male)	27/06/2011	Hood's Dam Helidon	MA
Musk Duck	14/07/2011	Lowe's Road Swamp	KW, MM
Little Bittern (imm.)	7/07/2011	Lake Broadwater	RH
Black Kite	14/07/2011	Dinner Corner Helidon	OB, KW, MM, CM
Black Falcon	10/07/2011	Nass Road Preston	RH
Peregrine Falcon	10/07/2011	Upper Lockyer	MA
Painted Button-quail	5/07/2011	Table Top Dr Toowoomba	RH
Bush Stone-curlew	1/07/2011	Beacon Ct Toowoomba	MA
Powerful Owl	23/06/2011	JubileePark Toowoomba	MW
Crested Shrike-tit	23/06/2011	Jubilee Park Toowoomba	MW
Ground Cuckoo-shrike (3)	4/07/2011	Mt Tyson	SB
White-breasted Woodswallow (6)	30/06/2011	Hursley Rd. Toowoomba	RH
Dusky Woodswallow	23/06/2011	Jubilee Park Toowoomba	MW
Common Blackbird (imm. male)	17/07/2011	Highfields	PM, KO

**MA**, M. Atzeni; **OB**, O. Booth; **SB**, S. Burke; **RH**, R. Hobson; **PM**, P. McConnell; **CM**, C. McGoldrick; **MM**, M. McGoldrick; **KO**, K. O'Donnell; **KW**, K. Williams; **MW**, M. Wood.

Bird notes can be submitted by email to [mccommel@usq.edu.au](mailto:mccommel@usq.edu.au), by post, or via the forum [www.toowoombabirdobservers.org/forum/index.php](http://www.toowoombabirdobservers.org/forum/index.php)

Thanks

Pat McConnell

## COMING CLUB EVENTS

### July Outing

**Saturday, 30th July 2011**

**Venue:** Rockmount

**Time:** 7.30 am

**Meet:** Flagstone Ck & Stockyard Ck Road intersection

**Leader:** Michael Atzeni

**Phone:** 4688 1318 or 0458 948 955

### August Outing

**Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2011**

**Venue:** Karara

**Time:** 7.30 am

**Meet:** Karara Hall

**Leader:** Kay Williams

**Phone:** 4659 5475 or 0429 465 954

### September Outing

**Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2011**

**Venue:** Redwood Park

**Time:** 7 am

**Leader:** Pat McConnell

**Phone:** 4631 5573

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

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**Surface Mail**