

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

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NEWS-SHEET No. 41 - MAY, 1979.

The June camp-out at Mudjinba is still on. We have had fair response from members but there is always room for more. So if you want to join in what promises to be an interesting week-end contact Bill Jolly so that he can arrange the final details of site booking, etc. We look forward to hearing from you.

Members will note that the check-list accompanying this issue is a new revision which includes all 202 species. This represents the total of confirmed identifications for the Club's local study area, up to the present time. It may be appropriate here to reiterate the value of a steady, regular feedback of check-lists from members who move about the area. Keep them coming.

A reminder too about the monthly visit to Redwood Park. This happens on the first Sunday of the month when any members available meet at the entrance opposite Yukana Vale at 7 a.m. The Redwood list now stands at 110 species. With its variety of habitat Redwood Park forms a most interesting area, close to Toowoomba and those members who make the monthly visit vote it worthwhile.

Of special interest this month is the sighting by Rod Hobson of two Barking Owls. This took place on April, 21st. on Glen Lomond Creek off the road to Trail Park. Members who have been on Field Days to Flagstone Creek will know that this road to Trail Park forms a junction with the Flagstone Creek road at Rod Turner's property.

Ron Hopkinson,
Editor.

PORT LINCOLN RINGNECK.

On Thursday morning March, 29th. the Night Officer coming on duty at Rangeview at 8 a.m. remarked on the beautiful parrot feeding beside the line at Rangeview. I noted all the marks and hurried home to pick up the family but the bird had disappeared when we returned.

On Friday it was present from 5.30 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. and was seen by six men.

On Saturday morning Graham rode his bike down by 6 a.m. and Margaret Warren arrived at 6.30. The parrot arrived to feed on spilt grain along the line about 7.45 a.m. and was identified as a 28 Parrot. It is a large green bird with a black head and a yellow stripe around the back of the neck, with a bright red spot above its gray beak. It is really a magnificent bird.

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PORT LINCOLN RINGNECK (cont/d.)

While waiting, rather disappointed by its late arrival, we saw, in a flock of orioles and figbirds one almost white with pink legs and beak also breast stripes of pale grey. This was assumed to be an albino oriole which was a very rewarding end for a very early start.

Jim Corbin.

Editor's Note: Since this was written, Jim reports, two of this species, the Port Lincoln Ringneck (*Barnadius zonarius*), have been seen in the same situation quite regularly by several railway personnel. This sighting is particularly interesting in view of the publishing last issue (No. 40 - April, 1979) of the guidelines laid down for such sightings. Obviously this bird would not get beyond the second question so there is no doubt of their being avairy escapees, and therefore not admissable to the list.

PARDON ME.

It may be questionably said that the highlight of my article "Upon Certain Eggs and their Layers", - News-sheet 39, is the faux pas appearing in paragraph seven, sentence three. The consensus of opinion, however, is that the slip is typographic rather than Freudian. The sentence should have read:

"These nests are often reduced by marauding pigs and goannas and scratching land rails and jungle fowl, therefore they may not always be in evidence."

If, in my peregrinations, I should ever come upon a goanna or wild boar thus athletically engaged as reported in News-sheet No. 39, readers may rest assured that I shall immediately inform them of such a newsworthy event.

Red Hobson.

SOME NOTES ON A HUNTING BARN OWL.

Under an annui which becomes more palpable on every birthday which has proceeded my twenty first the night of March fourteen found me travelling the road which connects Gowrie Junction with the Toowoomba-Oakey highway. Thus disconsolate, I had driven about halfway along that road when I noticed a bird above the roadside in the glare of my headlights. The time was approximately 8 p.m. Before I could come to a halt I had travelled some distance on. Upon reversing and angling my vehicle so that the lights fell upon the subject I saw a bird hovering about two metres above ground level. My interest was immediately aroused as I thought I had come upon a *night hunting kite but on closer inspection I identified the bird as a Barn Owl, *Tyto alba*. This was the first time that I had witnessed such behaviour and was not aware that Barn Owls employed this hunting technique.

The owl hovered about one metre above grass level with head and tail downwards but with the tail slightly splayed. This attitude gave the owl a "hunch back" appearance. The legs hung loosely with the conspicuous "knee-breeches" apparent in the headlights. The beat of broad, rounded wings was much slower than the speed and precision kestrels and kites employ when engaged in hovering, consequently, there was an up/down variable of some 25-30mm's in the owl's hover. In the time that I observed the bird it maintained the hover for some 80-90 seconds before dropping into the long grass. I do not know the exact hovering time as the owl was hovering when I arrived at the scene. After several seconds in the grass the bird returned to a nearby fence post, empty-handed (taloned?). From here it made several sorties into the grass but to no avail. When I left, the ignition scared the bird which decamped in a Kingsthorpe direction. The car lights appeared to have no effect on the bird during this interlude.

On searching popular literature on Australian Barn Owls the only reference which has come to light regarding hovering is in David Fleay's "Nightwatchmen of Bush and Plain." In chapter nine Fleay reflects (on Barn Owls): "..... I recall that American researchers experimented with this bird in dark, totally enclosed rooms

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SOME NOTES ON A HUNTING BARN OWL (cont/d.)

with deadened walls.

Using hidden watching devices, they have released individual mice inside on a spread of leaves to find the hungry owl instantly overhead, hovering head down, with the disc-like feather arrangement of the face acting as a large 'ear'. Sure of its strike, the owl throws up its wings and drops with talons spread wide so that they lie in the path of hearing and avoid parallax error from the difference in position between feet and ears."

- An interesting insight into the hunting method of the Barn Owl and for myself, confirmation of my observation.

In the "Norfolk Bird and Mammal Report, 1971 - Vol. 22 Part 5" under the title "Barn Owls and their Prey in East Norfolk," sub-heading "Habitat and Hunting," J. Buckley and J.G. Goldsmith comment regarding the English counterpart of our owl:

"The Barn Owl, however, is an open country hunter of pasture, marshland, fields and hedgerows. It can be seen at dusk or early morning quartering a field and pausing before dropping on to unseen prey in the grass."

I think that this "pausing" can be construed as a "momentary hover" but in no instance do Buckley and Goldsmith make mention of a maintained hover. Bill Jolly informs me that the abovementioned quartering of fields at dusk or dawn is the classical method associated with Barn Owl feeding. Bill also states that this is a method very similar to that employed by harriers whilst hunting. He has observed Barn Owls hunting many times in England but has not observed prolonged hovering.

It would be interesting to know if any readers have comment on hunting Barn Owls. I must admit that this incident was totally new and unexpected to myself.

Rod Hobson.

*John Coman mentions the capture of a Black-shouldered Kite "at night in an exercise to study night hunting of hawks and falcons" - "Footnote to 'Observations on a Pair of Black-shouldered Kites' " News-sheet No. 15 - February, 1977.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS WITH THE BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE STUDY.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service on receipt of our application asked me to consult with Dr. T. Kirpatrick of the Hermitage Research Station as there were some aspects of the study they would query.

Dr. Kirpatrick came to Toowoomba early this year to discuss the project with Mike Russell and I. In his opinion the project seemed to be fairly straight forward. He did not know the reason for the query from Brisbane. On his suggestion we decided to use leg tags rather than patagial tags. He did point out that since the birds are certainly territorial and very aggressive at nesting and since the numbers in an area appear to fluctuate they are almost certainly partly nomadic. He felt the question we would finish up trying to answer was "What happens to kites outside the breeding season?" He felt this was an interesting question and worth knowing the answer to. He did point out that the problem of locating all our tagged birds if they wander may prove too difficult, but that is our worry.

After this discussion I was most surprised to receive a letter dated April 12th. signed by Mr. G.W. Saunders, Director of the N.P.W.S. part of which I quote below:-

"Your application has been considered both by the Research and Planning Branch and the Management and Operations Branch of the Service and the consensus is that on the present data the study would not achieve anything worthwhile.

Under the circumstances I regret to advise that a permit is refused."

Another letter has been written to the N.P.W.S. asking why they think nothing worthwhile could be gained from the study and how in their opinion the program might be modified so as to achieve something worthwhile.

John Coman.

NEST-BOX INSTRUCTIONS.

We have received from the Bird Observers Club a four page instruction-sheet on the making and use of nest-boxes. Although some work is being done on the use of hollows by our animals, it is a subject which so far has been somewhat neglected. There is sufficient evidence, however, to encourage experimentation, as a number of birds in addition to possums, gliders and bats have been recorded utilising artificial sites.

The leaflet can be obtained from the Bird Observers Club, P.O. Box 185, Numawading, Victoria, 3131, and two 20c postage stamps should be included with the request. Any further information can be obtained from the Secretary of the BOC, Mrs. Ellen M. McCulloch at the above address.

Ron Hopkinson.

FIELD DAY REPORT - 22.4.79. - MANGO VALE, WITHCOTT.

After the preceding cool weather it was a surprise to have a warm summer-like day for the Bird Club outing to Mango Vale, Withcott. This was the childhood home of my husband, John, and, despite the close proximity of today's roaring traffic, it is still preserved as a sanctuary for all forms of wildlife by his sister, Mrs. Maggie Drabsch.

So it was with high hopes of interesting finds that we met at that point on the Range Highway where the property has a common boundary with Redwood Park and thus marks the dividing line between the upward and downward sections of the Bird Club's area of study.

At first all was quiet as we started to drop downhill, apart from the calls of Pied Currawongs, sightings of a Spangled Drongo, a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and a lone White-faced Heron flying over. Then in a clearing by the lantana-edged creek one became aware of many small twitterings and movements and identified a number of Red-browed Firetails, a pair of Striated Pardalotes, an Eastern Yellow Robin by sight and heard various others. Members were at first puzzled by a smallish bird of non-descript appearance busy among the mistletoe on a low tree but finally decided that despite its drab looks it was an immature Mistletoebird as its shape and behaviour were similar to that of the adults. More small finches; Firetails and Silvereyes; plus Double-bars, Willie Wagtails, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, Wrens (probably the Superb Blue) a Bar-shouldered Dove and the calls of Lewin's Honeyeater and others; while a White-faced Heron perched on the tip of a dead tree nearby regarding us curiously until we got too close for comfort.

Leaving the creek and moving upward over open ground we were interested to watch the vocal and acrobatic behaviour of a pair of Striped Honeyeaters and to see Pied Butcherbirds.

walking along the lower edge of the wooded hill and continuing slowly upward, leaving the house and farm buildings below us, we suddenly noticed a Tawny Frogmouth sitting almost motionless in a small ironbark tree beside the path. This, for me, quite made the day as this weird-looking bird, so much larger in life than I had been prepared for and camouflaged so beautifully that it was almost indistinguishable from the dead branch it sat on, allowed us to observe it from very close quarters while doing no more than move its head a little, the better to see what we were up to.

Again continuing upward, after a pause for refreshments, through the thinly spaced gums and wattles on that sandstone-bouldered hill with a few birds flitting among the branches overhead, our next port of call was the high dam, silent and secluded as ever. Above it rose more tree-covered slopes while below to our right a damp gully fell away, its sides clothed in a thick jungle of shrubs and small trees of a quite different nature to those on the sandstone we had come through. It seemed at first as if the dam, now some five years old and with its banks and shores fast being

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FIELD DAY REPORT (cont/d.)

colonised by grasses, aquatic plants and small shrubs, was quite deserted but then an immature and solitary Australian Grebe could be seen quietly going about its business of diving for food in the muddy waters.

A few more steps uphill to the left above the dam brought us out onto an open cleared and once cultivated shoulder of the Range with views up to the Redwood Park boundary and Prince Henry Drive above, round to Picnic Point and Table Top. No bird life just there in the open but as we started to descend, again among the gums, some of them in flower, there were calls from all quarters and looking up we made out Scarlet Honeyeaters, Little Lorikeets, Grey Fantails, White-throated Tree-creepers, Sittellas and White-naped Honeyeaters, while the harsh call of the Noisy Friarbird sounded nearby.

Once down the hill our party was regarded with great curiosity by my sister-in-law's small Jersey herd, now making their way up to seek out the best pasture, but luckily not even the bull thought it worth his while to bother to see off these strange interlopers who had dared to invade his property - so thus peacefully ended a fascinating, and for me at least, a very instructive and enjoyable morning.

Ann Shore.

Species List - Mango Vale - 22.4.79.

Australian Grebe	Wh.-throated Treecreeper
White-faced Heron	Striped Honeyeater
Straw-necked Ibis	Noisy Friarbird
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Little Friarbird
Masked Lapwing	Noisy Miner
Bar-shouldered Dove	Lewin's Honeyeater
Little Lorikeet	White-naped Honeyeater
Tawny Frogmouth	Scarlet Honeyeater
Laughing Kookaburra	Mistletoebird
Bl.-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Spotted Pardalote
Eastern Yellow Robin	Striated Pardalote
Jacky Winter	Silvereye
Golden Whistler	Red-browed Firetail
Rufous Whistler	Double-barred Finch
Black-faced Monarch	Common Mynah
Grey Fantail	Olive-backed Oriole
Willie Wagtail	Spangled Drongo
Eastern Whipbird	Australian Magpie-lark
Superb Fairy-wren	Pied Butcherbird
Weebill	Australian Magpie
Wh.-throated Gerygone	Pied Currawong
Varied Sittella	Torresian Crow.

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

Black-necked Stork. 2.4.79. Hood's Property, Helidon. AHS.
8.4.79. Haigslea. REH.
Glossy Ibis. 14.4.79. Hood's Property, Helidon. RGH. REH.
Black Swan. 2.4.79. Hood's Property, Helidon. AHS.
Collared Sparrowhawk. 3/18.4.79. MacKenzie St. EJ.
Brown Falcon. 21.4.79. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ. WJ.
Bush Thick-knee. 12.4.79. Bryden. RGH.
Emerald Dove. 21.4.79. Rangeview. JEC.
Fan-tailed Cuckoo. 16.4.79. "Mango Vale", Withcott. AHS.

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MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES (cont/d.)

Barking Owl(two birds). 15.4.79. Glen Lomond Creek. RGH.
Azure Kingfisher. 12.4.79. Wivenhoe crossing. RGH.
Rainbow Bee-eater(5 birds). 27.4.79. "Ringmere", Withcott. EJ.
Cicadabird (feeding young). 10.4.79. Eymard St. MW.
Satin Flycatcher. 5.3.79. "Corandru", Withcott. AJD. CD.
30.3.79. Holmes. RGH.
Restless Flycatcher. 31.3.79. Alderley Street swamp. RGH.
Large-billed Scrubwren. 1.4.79. Redwood Park. RGH. WJ.
Striped Honeyeater. 14.4.79. Postman's Ridge. GC. JEC.
Spangled Drongo. 21.4.79. "Ringmere", Withcott. WJ. EJ.

GC: Graham Corbin. JEC: Jim Corbin. CD: Coranne Dolley.
AJD: Mick Dolley. RGH: Rod Hobson. RHH: Ron Hopkinson.
EJ: Eileen Jolly. WJ: Bill Jolly. AES: Ann Shore. MW: Max Wood.

FIELD DAY FOR MAY.

Date: Sunday, 27th. May, 1979.

Place: Ravensbourne National Park.

Leader: John Coman.

Assembly Point: Pigott's Car Park.

Time: 8.15 a.m. - depart 8.30 a.m. sharp.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

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