

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

No. 417
July 2012

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

Editorial

Mick Atzeni

Wildlife monitoring cameras are now very affordable and well worth the investment.

Hugh Krenske has been using one in Redwood Park. It's proving to be a handy "birder" and is demonstrating the merits of the weed clearing Hugh and his Friends of Escarpment Parks (FEP) volunteers are doing.

In April, Hugh monitored a bower they found that had some blue decorations. One might have assumed, without seeing the bird, that it was a Satin's but, as the images revealed, it was in fact a immature Regent Bowerbird's bower. Regents only occasionally use blue objects; perhaps behaviour learnt from Satins. And like Satins, male Regent Bowerbirds take seven years to attain their black and gold plumage.

Another bird captured on camera was an Emerald Dove, one of several species that have become scarce in Redwood because of the weeds.

I'm now hoping for snapshots of Russet-tailed Thrush and Black-breasted Button-quail for this year's Challenge!?? We're going exceptionally well; 223 species so far. The record is 228. Full details are on the club forum, including the Wanted List. Just need some waterbirds back ...



Two Regent Bowerbirds at bower in Redwood Park. Note blue decorations. Photo: Hugh Krenske.

2012 Challenge

Tally: 223 spp as of 23/8

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Raptor census report
Pat McConnell

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White-headed Pigeons
Rob Ashdown

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COMING EVENTS

August Outing
Sun 26th

Venue: Lockyer Valley wetlands

Leader: Ken McKeown

September Outing
Sat 29th

Venue: Mt Glorious

Leader: Mike McGoldrick



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS

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www.toowoombabirdobservers.org

MEMBERSHIP: Adult/family \$30,

Pensioner/student \$25 (Subscriptions due 31 August)

Adopt a Farm: Invitation to Survey Properties

By Mick Atzeni

Sheena Gillman of BirdLife Southern Queensland (BASQ) would be very pleased to hear from any TBO members interested in conducting seasonal bird surveys on farms/properties in the greater Toowoomba region. From my discussions with Sheena, one survey per season is all that is expected. It's not a lot to ask. So please help our birds by helping pro-active landholders establish their own comprehensive bird list in this mutually beneficial way.

By the way, the concept of "Adopting a Farm" has arisen out of the Eastern Bristlebird (EBB) surveys, since many farms are close to old EBB habitat.

Sheena's contact details are: Ph/Fax: 07 3201 1982; Mob: 0409 268 076

Annual Raptor Census - 23-24th June 2012

By Pat McConnell

Northern Section

Kath O'Donnell and Pat McConnell surveyed the northern section on Sunday 24 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 10.15am and 3.00pm. They saw six species and 31 individual birds of prey which was one more species than in 2011 but nine fewer birds. (See table below for summarised results). The weather during the survey was cool with heavy cloud cover. The highlight of the day was a Peregrine Falcon.

Southern Section

The southern section was surveyed by Ken and Fiona Wells on Sunday 24 June from 9.15am till 2.15pm. They saw two species and 28 individual birds of prey which was down on species but up on numbers seen in 2011. The route they surveyed was Freestone – Clintonvale - Upper Forest Springs – Pilton – Ascot – Budgee - Steel Rudd Park – Hodgsonvale – Wyreema – Nobby – Clifton – Hendon - Rose Hill.

Eastern Section

The eastern section was surveyed by Gayle Lee, Kev and Kay Williams, Claire Hanney and Michael Atzeni on Sunday 24 June from 10.00am until 3.30pm. They saw 14 species and 101 individual birds of prey. This is the best result. The route they surveyed was from Helidon – Grantham – Placid Hills – Gatton – Adare – Lake Clarendon – Lake Apex.

Western Section

The western section was surveyed by Olive Booth, Mike McGoldrick, Paul Laurie, Al Young, Alastair Silcock and Joe Allen on Sunday 24 June. They saw eight species and 212 individual birds of prey which was an increase in species and number of birds seen from 2011. The route they surveyed was Toowoomba – Oakey – Jondaryan – Bowenville – Formartin – Norwin – Cecil Plains – Dalby – Kaimkillenbun - Oakey - Toowoomba.

Table of Sightings for 23 – 24 June 2012

Species	N	S	E	W	Total
Osprey			1		1
Black-shouldered Kite	12	10	10	60	92
Square-tailed Kite			1		1
Black Kite			36	18	54
Whistling Kite			10	3	13
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	1		4		5
Spotted Harrier				1	1
Swamp Harrier			1	2	3
Brown Goshawk			1		1
Wedge-tailed Eagle	2		2		4
Little Eagle			1		1
Black Falcon				1	1
Brown Falcon	2		7	7	16
Australian Hobby			1		1
Black Falcon			1		1
Peregrine Falcon	1				1
Nankeen Kestrel	13	18	25	120	176
Total number of raptors	31	28	101	212	372

Three more species were seen in 2012 than in 2011 and 372 individual birds were seen in 2012 compared with 272 in 2011. Seventeen species seen over one weekend is a very high number of raptors for any part of the country.



Incidental sightings over the weekend included three Black-shouldered Kites from Tricia Walton seen in Rockmount and six Nankeen Kestrels, three Black-shouldered Kites and one Brown Falcon seen by Gloria Glass and Diana Beal all in sector N1. Bill Jolly also saw a Spotted Harrier at "Abberton".

New members, Steve and Diana Rayward, couldn't be with us but did their own survey. They are currently located at Nairana NP (halfway between Clermont and Charters Towers) carrying out

caretaking duties and were rewarded for their efforts with Grey Falcon, Australian Hobby, Whistling Kite, Black Kite, Little Eagle, Pacific Baza and Square-tailed Kite. They have been fortunate to sight the Grey Falcon three times in the area since 15 June.

A big thank you to all involved especially the leaders.

A Top Notch Pigeon!

By Mick Atzeni



Melanistic Crested Pigeon, Westbrook St, Newtown, 17/6/12. Photo: Samantha Beasley.

Abnormal plumages in wild birds (e.g. hybrids, mutations) are always intriguing and great to see. Over the years, we've had some interesting ones but I must say this latest one - a melanistic Crested Pigeon - has to be my favourite.

It was photographed on 17/6/12 by Toowoomba resident Samantha Beasley at her home in Westbrook St, Newtown (western side of Clifford Park racecourse). Samantha said it hung around with the other Crested Pigeons in her yard for half a day but unfortunately hasn't been seen since.

Melanism is a rare condition in birds, brought about by a genetic mutation that causes excess melanin production in the plumage. This results in the birds being dark brown to black in appearance. Another example of melanism was a black Laughing Kookaburra which was photographed at Laidley in 2009. I am not aware of its fate. I guess the one question that always springs to my mind is how these oddities are perceived and treated by their kin? Would love to know.

Thankyou Samantha for allowing us to publish your photos in our newsletter, and also for posting another one on our FaceBook page. Yes, you do have every reason to be excited and proud of this very unusual record; it's looking like a once in a lifetime thing.



A normal and melanistic Crested Pigeon, 17/6/12, Westbrook St, Newtown. Photo: Samantha Beasley.

Soaring Flight

By Paul Laurie

On TBO's recent Raptor Census weekend some members were marvelling over the way raptors are able to remain perfectly stationary while they are soaring. That is not to say that the bird's body is stationary. While birds soar, their tails, wings and body are constantly moving about in response to changes in the wind direction and velocity but the position of the bird in relation to the ground can remain fixed. Raptors sometimes seem to be sitting above an observer looking back at them. So the questions arise, "How do birds soar?", and having established that, "How can they stay still while they are doing it without falling to the ground?"

Most people who are interested in birds or flight understand that air flowing over two different surfaces of the wing (flat on the underside and curved on the upper) causes a difference in air pressure between the two. Lower pressure over the top of the wing and higher pressure below lifts the bird and allows it to soar. Once in motion the bird can choose from several options. It can seek out rising air caused by a thermal or air that rises as it encounters hills or mountains which birds can use to carry them high into the air. Pelicans and eagles are particularly adept at this form of soaring and once the desired height is reached they can and often do travel great distances. A pair of White-bellied Sea-eagles that nests somewhere on high ground between Bridgewater and Dromedary (35 minutes from the centre of Hobart), on the Northern bank of the Derwent River, can be seen every other year leading a pair of juveniles to circle high above the Pulpit Rock lookout before heading off up the river valley into the interior of Tasmania. As the bird soars this way, contrary to what some may think, altitude is not lost as the wind helps them to remain at the same height from the ground. But, this is not the only way or the only reason birds soar.

Soaring is an important part of the way raptors hunt or search for carrion. Two examples of this are the way an Australian Kestrel will soar into the wind, scanning the ground for a meal, coming to a complete stop before sliding away sideways and at some speed before turning back to face the wind and begin its search again; and a Swamp Harrier that makes quick glides, just above a crop, interspersed with sudden reckless looking, turns and drops onto prey. These two behaviours demonstrate two of the options available to a bird once it has achieved soaring flight but how does the bird get to the point where enough air is passing over and under its wings to allow it to soar?

There are two main techniques birds use to gain sufficient air flow to soar. The first is rather obvious. The bird can simply fly by flapping its wings until it has enough speed for soaring. The other is a little more spectacular. Some birds just drop head first from a high place such as a rocky outcrop and dive until sufficient speed is attained before deploying their wings to control the flight. Another way that may not be as common is used by some sea birds in windy environments where they simply spread their wings while facing the wind and allow the air to lift them.

Once a bird is soaring a number of techniques can be employed as it moves about. Firstly, the facilities used by pilots of aeroplanes are also available to birds. To execute a turn, a pilot tilts the aircraft, lowering one wing and raising the other. At the same time he/she operates the rudder in the tailplane. The turn is achieved in two ways. Tilt is achieved by controlling the flaps on the wings to alter the flow of air on either side, which gives the tilt, and the air flowing past the angled rudder pushes the rear of the plane around. The Swamp Harrier mentioned earlier is using exactly the same technique as it makes its sharp turns.

The kestrel, on the other hand, is using a completely different set of skills. The kestrel is utilising the breeze to aid its manoeuvres. As it soars into the wind the kestrel comes to a complete stop in relation to the ground. At this point, the bird is actually flying forward into the wind at the exact same speed as the wind velocity in the opposite direction. This is what allows the bird to remain apparently stationary. Now, in order to move to the left or right the bird has only to tilt its body to a slight angle away from the wind. The wind will then actually carry the bird roughly at a right angle to the wind. In fact, if the bird was to hold that position it could continue moving sideways until it reaches the edge of that particular air flow.

This idea has been adopted by sailors and kayakers in slightly different ways. If the sailor gets everything correct between the wind, the sails and the direction of the hull he/she can sail much closer to directly into the wind than might be expected. And, because water behaves in exactly the same way as air, the kayaker can travel directly across a rapidly flowing river without being pushed downstream. He/she does this by paddling upstream then allowing the bow to turn slightly away from the current. By the paddler using rudder strokes at the rear of the craft and bracing strokes, he/she can hold a steady course across the flow. However, the paddler must tilt the kayak so that the water is pushing against the hull. If this is not done the kayak will tilt towards the flow and capsize. The kestrel would probably have to do this as well or risk losing control of the manoeuvre.

Now, returning to those two questions posed in the introduction of this article; birds soar in a number of different ways but all of those methods require air flowing past their wings. The differences arise out of the various ways the bird uses the facility of soaring. And how can raptors remain still in relation to the ground while soaring? At the point where the bird is not moving forward over the ground it must be facing into the wind. Also, the speed of the bird's flight must exactly match the velocity of the wind blowing in the opposite direction. At this point there is enough air still flowing past the wings to keep it aloft. For the bird to fall out of the air it would have to be going backwards at the speed of the wind. Now there would be no air flow around the wings so there would be no lift occurring.

The marvel of soaring is, that birds have done it ever since there have been birds. Flying reptiles used soaring to get about millions of years before that but it took until around the turn of the Twentieth Century for people to understand how it happens well enough to be able to achieve soaring flight.

Thanks to Sudanta Balage of the Science Faculty USQ for technical advice in writing this article. Paul Laurie.

One Good Tern *By Pat McConnell*

I recently received a call from a man near Bundaberg saying that he had caught a black and white bird while fishing. As he cast his line the bird grabbed the bait and got hooked. By chance the bird had a band on it. The fisherman recorded the number and released the bird unharmed. I took down the details and contacted the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme.

The bird turned out to be a Crested Tern that was banded by the Victorian Wader Study Group on Phillip Island on 21 December 2011. In 6 months and 10 days it had moved 1690km to Rules Beach north of Bundaberg. This information fits in with the species northern migration during winter.

Suburban Street, Rainforest Pigeons

By Rob Ashdown

Why not complicate things? Suffering from a bad cold and recovering from a painful back, I go walking late on a Friday afternoon. It's complicated because I'm keen to photograph some birds, but have a dog and a lad with a scooter along. Recreational conflicts abound, with the dog being the least interested in birds, other than to chew on them. The lad is resigned to my distractibility (is that a word?) when birds are about — a pair of soaring Peregrines just slow us down and the dog can't even see them.



Keeping one eye out for trouble. White-headed Pigeons (also known as Baldy Pigeons) are one of Australia's 22 native species of pigeons. While they are mainly fruit-eaters, they are related closely to Rock Doves. These birds are found down the east coast of Australia, in mainly rainforest and wet eucalypt forest.

Down at the park again. For months now I've been spotting White-headed Pigeons around Queens Park in Toowoomba, and lately there has been a large group of these native rainforest fruit pigeons feeding on the fruit of ornamental Camphor Laurels.



Lurking among the Camphor Laurels, trying not to be noticed. A flock of White-headed Pigeons (*Columba leucomela*) in a Toowoomba street. Described as "among the wariest and most secretive" of rainforest pigeons, they can be seen near cars and off-leash dogs in suburban Toowoomba.



Once threatened in Australia by land-clearing, these pigeons have made a recovery since [Camphor Laurel](#) became a popular shade and street tree. Their numbers have increased and they are now seen in towns such as Toowoomba. Introduced species may have their occasional benefits (but of course there are many more disruptions to ecosystems caused by feral plants).

These are wary, nervous birds, and my previous attempts to get close with a little compact camera have been a dismal failure. The birds arrive early morning and late afternoon, adjacent to a road and near the dog off-leash area. As a result they are often disturbed, but seem content to wait for a while before returning to their meals. I sneak up slowly with an SLR and grab a few images.

Thanks to Harry for looking after the dog while I raced off with the camera.



The two immature White-headed Pigeons seen here in the foreground have a grey crown, nape and breast, as well as darker eyes.

(Source: <http://www.robertashdown.com/blog/> ; Article posted 27/7/12; Photos:Rob Ashdown)

Members' Bird Notes

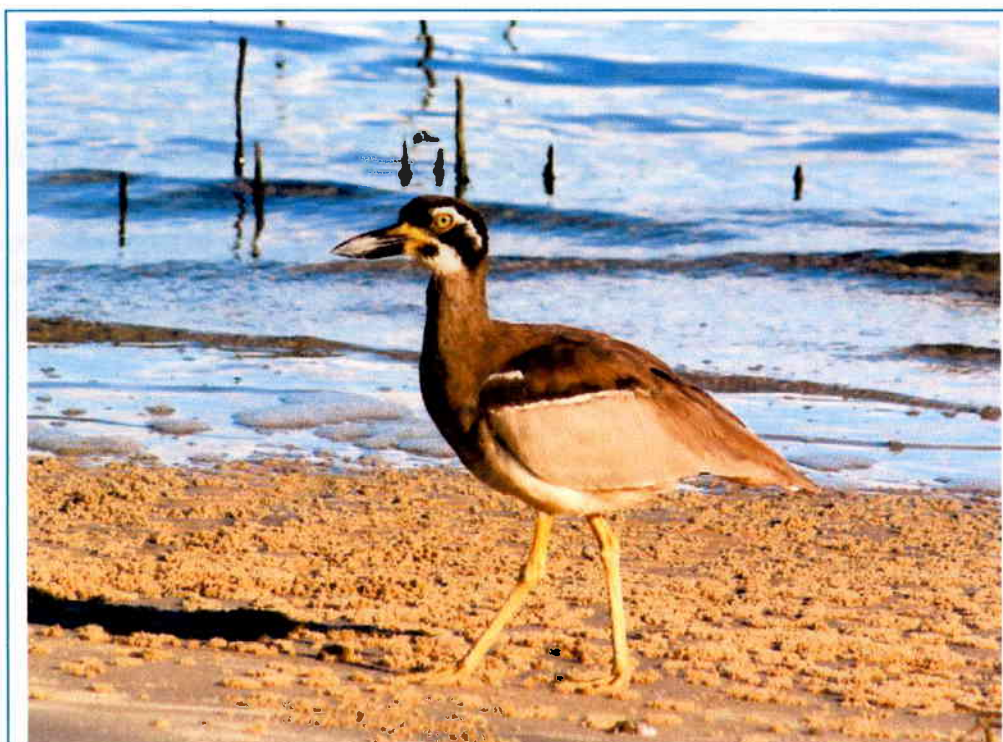
By Pat McConnell

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
Osprey	24/06/2012	Lawler's Rd Helidon	GL; K&KW; CH; MA
Square-tailed Kite	24/06/2012	Helidon	GL; K&KW; CH; MA
Beach Stone-Curlew (2)	1/07/2012	Inskip Point	PM; KO
Black-breasted Button-quail	1/07/2012	Inskip Point	PM
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	9/06/2012	Upper Lockyer	MA
Eastern Barn Owl (roadkill)	22/06/2012	Murphy's Creek	MA
Black-chinned Honeyeater	6/07/2012	Ashland's Drive Reserve	MW
Eastern Spinebill	22/06/2012	North Toowoomba	K&KW
Spotted Quail-thrush	29/06/2012	Withcott	P&DC

MA, M. Atzeni; **P&D**, P&D Cleary; **GL**, G. Lee; **CH**, C. Hanney; **PM**, P. McConnell; **KO**, K. O'Donnell; **K&KW**, K&K Williams; **MW**, M. Wood.

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



Beach Stone-curlew, Inskip Point

Photo: Pat McConnell

COMING CLUB EVENTS

August Outing

Sun 26th August 2012

Venue: Lockyer Valley wetlands

Time: 7am

Meet: Withcott Hotel carpark

Leader: Ken McKeown

Mobile: 0408303774

September Outing

Sat 29th September 2012

Venue: Mt Glorious

Time: 7.30 am

Meet: Minden-Lowood Rd turnoff, Minden

Leader: Mike McGoldrick

Phone: 4635 7371; **mob:** 0447517324

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Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 20th September 2012

Please e-mail or post articles and photos to the Acting Editor.

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