

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

No. 421

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

Editorial

Paul Laurie

Happy New Year to all from everyone involved in the Newsletter. Already we are receiving lots of pictures and articles from the members and we look forward to them continuing to come in.

This issue is a celebration of common but beautiful birds, birds that are often underestimated simply because we see them all the time.

A ready example of this is the Galah which, any way you look at it, is a spectacularly beautiful bird. Kevin Williams' photograph in *Glorious Galahs* clearly demonstrates this. The Members Photo Page also shows examples of birds we see every day and may take for granted.

Another feature of this issue is that we have an updated front page.

Keep the fabulous material coming and, Good Birding



Scaly-breasted Lorikeet

Photo: Russell Jenkins

2013 Challenge

Tally: 122 spp as of 6/01/13

This Issue

Lord Howe Island

By Alastair Silcock

Aussie Birds in Rome

By Diana Beal

Glorious Galahs

By Paul Laurie &

Kevin Williams

Cambooya Bird Surveys

By Paul Laurie

OUTINGS

Sat 23 February

Venue: Lockyer wetlands

Leader: Mick Atzeni.

Time: 6.30am at Lake Apex



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS

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MEMBERSHIP: Adult/family \$45
Pensioner/student \$40

Lord Howe Island

Alastair Silcock

For those in mixed marriages (i.e., a birder and a non-birder), Lord Howe Island offers the perfect holiday destination.

Being a seabird novice, I scored 19 lifers in our week's holiday - 17 in the first two days, leaving five days fully free for compatible non-avian activities appropriate to our 33rd wedding anniversary.

Even for birders in the 500 and 600 clubs, Lord Howe Island presents first time visitors with at least one lifer - the flightless **Lord Howe Woodhen**, snatched from the jaws of extinction in the 1980s.

Thirty years ago, less than 30 individual birds were clinging precariously to life atop the island's almost inaccessible 850 metre Mt Gower.

Removal of all cats, pigs and goats from the island, combined with a captive breeding program, has rescued the species, its population stable now between 200 and 250 birds roaming unconcerned on all parts of the island.

Then there are the endemic sub-species of **Emerald Dove**, **Pied Currawong**, **Golden Whistler** and **Silvereye**.

Once you tick off the 35 resident species and regular visitors – I only missed the **Masked Owl** and **European Song-thrush** – the 11km long island becomes an ornithological desert, except for storm-tossed vagrants.

But it remains a sub-tropical paradise with coral reefs, amazing fish and fishing, stunning scenery, bushwalks, mountain climbing, turtles, kayaking, snorkelling, swimming, restaurants etc.

Its history is fascinating, if not always uplifting. Since discovery in 1788 and settlement in 1834, humans have managed to wipe out nine endemic bird species, more than 50 per cent of the original landlubbers. Two were eaten, one shot out, five killed by rats, which came ashore from a shipwreck in 1918, and one by owls brought in to control the rats.

On the other side of the ledger, 11 new species have colonised the island over the past century. A multi-million dollar program to eradicate rats enters its on-ground phase in 2016.

On this green dot in the middle of the vast blue Pacific Ocean - 11 km long, 1km across and 600 kms east of Port Macquarie - life is laid back beyond horizontal.



Lord Howe Woodhen

Photo: Alastair Silcock

Lord Howe Island (Continued)

There are no mobile phones, the few cars stick to the 25km/hr speed limit, and life is conducted at pedal and pedestrian pace. Civilised!



Golden Whistler

Photo: Alastair Silcock

A trip to Lord Howe Island reveals fascinating stories in geology, scenery, marine life, natural history, settlement and conservation.

The birds are a bonus.

Birdlist: (seen between 15th and 22nd December 2012)

Resident land species (17):

LHI Woodhen, currawong, Silvereye and Golden Whistler, Emerald Ground-dove, Sacred Kingfisher, Pacific Black Duck / Mallard hybrid, Buff-banded Rail, White-faced Heron, Magpie-lark, Masked Lapwing (since 1991), Nankeen Kestrel, Common Blackbird, Song Thrush, Common Starling, Purple Swamphen (since 1990), Rock Dove.

Breeding seabirds (10):

Red-tailed Tropic-bird, Masked Booby, Sooty Tern, White Tern, Black Noddy, Brown Noddy, Black-winged Petrel, Grey Ternlet, Fleshy-footed Shearwater, Wedge-tailed Shearwater

Vagrants/visitors (12):

Pacific Golden Plover, Australian Wood Duck, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Red-necked Stint, Whimbrel, Latham's Snipe, Grey-tailed Tattler, Little Black Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Masked Woodswallow, White-browed Woodswallow.



White Tern

Photo: Alastair Silcock

Glorious Galahs

By Kevin Williams and Paul Laurie



Galahs

Photo: Kevin Williams

Galahs surely deserve their reputation as the clowns of the bush. Watching a flock of these cheeky parrots as they perform their acrobatic comedy routines has been the source of endless delight for birders and non-birders alike for many generations. Little wonder the word Galah has entered the Australian idiom. To call someone a 'silly galah' is to suggest that they are a loveable clown. However, Kevin Williams' image demonstrates the often forgotten aspect of Galahs. That is how beautiful this bird is with its pleasing combination of colours in pinks and greys. Surely, if the Galah was not such a common sight it would be one of the most sought after of Australian birds.

Kevin's picture also highlights the difference in eye colour between the sexes in Galahs. The pink of the female's eye and the brown of the male's are clearly visible. Any other identifying features would seem redundant. Galahs are hard to mistake.

Text by Paul Laurie

Photographers' Page

For all bird photographers... amateur, professional and anywhere in between, please send your favourite photos in to be published in our monthly newsletter.



Cattle Egrets
Photo: Paul Laurie



Mistletoebird
Photo: Trevor Quested



Rainbow Lorikeet
Photo: Sandra Jones



Nankeen Kestrel
Photo: Russell Jenkins

Aussie Birds in Rome

Diana Beal



Cockatiel

Photo: Kev Williams

I was in Rome last October. I checked into a monastery on Via Cavour, which is practically the main street of old Rome and runs from the Centrale Roma railway station, Termini, past the large church, Santa Maria Maggiore, down to the old Roman Fora. Hundreds of monasteries and convents in Italy which are now bereft of viable religious communities have been converted to middle-standard bed and breakfast establishments. (See monasterystays.com)

I went up to my room, opened the windows, threw open the shutters and looked down onto a courtyard. Soon I tuned in to some busy bird chatter while watching Rock Doves and seagulls

swooping about the rooftops. In a few seconds, it hit me. That chatter was not from some unknown foreign town birds – surely they were **Budgerigars** calling. I listened for a while and became more convinced they were budgies. The notion jelled even more so when I heard the unmistakable call of **Quarrions**, then the tinkle of **Pale-headed Rosellas**.

This required investigation. I immediately went downstairs and out into the courtyard, and there were a couple of aviaries, one filled with 20 or so budgies and the other occupied by **Quarrions**, and **Pale-headed**, **Eastern** and **Crimson Rosellas**.

This collection of Australian birds should have not been a great surprise. The most common street trees in Italy are Australian eucalypts, with the weeds oleander, prickly-pear and sisal being runners-up. Lantana, the scourge of our hilly country of good soils, is a favoured Italian garden plant. Indeed, it is thought our lantana weeds were introduced here from European garden stock.



Pale-headed Rosella

Photo: Russell Jenkins

Cambooya Bird Surveys Report

Paul Laurie

Late in 2012, the club was contacted by the Cambooya Landcare Group for support. It represented an opportunity to improve knowledge of the birdlife in the district so we offered to conduct bird surveys on private properties of interested landholders. Three landholders requested surveys. These were Tex and Vicky Barrett of "Brooklyn", 216 Felton-Cambooya Rd Cambooya; Hugh and Kate Reardon-Smith of 2110 Karara Rd Cambooya; and Rob and Sally McCreath of "Prestbury", 223 Counsell Rd Southbrook.

The first farm visited was "Brooklyn". After meeting in the centre of Cambooya at 6am on Thursday 29 November the group headed out for the venue. It was fortunate that I had done a reconnaissance trip the day before because it had taken 45 minutes to locate the place. "Brooklyn" is a small farm with some flat land, a bare watercourse and a rocky hill. Several small species such as **Superb Fairy-wren** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbill** were seen close to the house, along with a **Nankeen Kestrel** that roosted in the shed, keeping the rodents in check. As we moved around the hill the most common species were **Noisy Miner** and **Pied Butcherbird**. A few birds were seen around the watercourse and a magnificent, young **Wedge-tailed Eagle** soared over some of the flatter land. In all, 32 species were observed. Participants: Paul Laurie, Gayle Lee, Nicci Thompson, Joe Allen, Olive Booth.

Then on Monday 3 December we visited the Reardon-Smith's property. Again, the farm consisted of some flattish land and a rocky hill. This was hard going at first as we tackled the hill. **Apostlebird**, **White-throated Gerygone** and **Pacific Baza** were noted. The baza caused some frustration as we were hearing its little songbird-like call but nobody thought of raptors until later. The paddock behind the house finally rewarded us with some nice smaller birds, especially around the poultry run. Here we saw some finches, a **Mistletoebird** and **Striped Honeyeater** among others. Thirty-two species were observed. Participants: Paul Laurie, Gayle Lee, Kevin and Kay Williams.

And lastly, on Sunday 8 December we visited the largest of the three properties, "Prestbury", which is about 1000 hectares of cropping and grazing land with a large dam and a well-maintained creek. As we toured through the outbuildings and on to the back of the property we recorded **Red-rumped Parrot**, **Apostlebird**, **Welcome Swallow**, **Sacred Kingfisher** and **Australasian Grebe**. Then, moving through the croplands we noted several raptors but it was at the creek where our bird list took a real boost with **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin** and **Australian Reed-warbler** prominent. A total of 39 species were recorded here. Participants: Paul Laurie, Gayle Lee, Joe Allen, Kevin and Kay Williams.

Bird Lists:

"Brooklyn": Pacific Black Duck, Little Pied Cormorant, White-faced Heron, Great Egret, Straw-necked Ibis, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Nankeen Kestrel, Black-fronted Dotterel, Masked Lapwing, Rock Dove, Crested Pigeon, Galah, Pale-headed Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Pheasant Coucal, Superb Fairy-wren, Striated Pardalote, White-throated Gerygone, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striped Honeyeater, Lewin's Honeyeater, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Olive-backed Oriole, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Torresian Crow, Richards Pipit, Common Myna

2110 Karara Rd: Pacific Baza, Crested Pigeon, Bar-shouldered Dove, Galah, Pale-headed Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Common Koel, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Laughing Kookaburra, Superb Fairy-wren, Speckled Warbler, Weebill, White-throated Gerygone, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Grey Shrike-thrush, Magpie-lark, Willy Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, Apostlebird, Double-barred Finch, Mistletoebird, Fairy Martin, Golden-headed Cisticola, Silvereye, Common Myna.

"Prestbury": Stubble Quail, Australian Wood Duck, Australasian Grebe, Darter, White-faced Heron, Intermediate Egret, Straw-necked Ibis, Black-shouldered Kite, Spotted Harrier, Nankeen Kestrel, Rock Dove, Crested Pigeon, Bar-shouldered Dove, Galah, Little Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Pale-headed Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Laughing Kookaburra, Superb Fairy-wren, Striated Pardalote, White-throated Gerygone, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Magpie-lark, Willy Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, Apostlebird, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Welcome Swallow, Australian Reed-warbler, Golden-headed Cisticola, Common Myna.