

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

No. 425

May 2013

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

Editorial

Mick Atzeni

Hi all, giving Paul a hand while he's convalescing and apologies for being a bit late getting this out.

The run of interesting local sightings of inland species continues including Budgerigars, Black-tailed Native-hens, Red-capped Robins, and incredible numbers of Black Kites with groups of up to a thousand reported around the tip. Further afield, we've had Black Honeyeater at Jandowae and Bustards near Mt Tyson so please look out for both locally.

The capacity crowd at BirdLife's recent Toowoomba Backyards Bird launch and public interest in the irruption of Black Kites indicates to me that there are many people eager for bird news and information but not necessarily keen to join a club. Thus, I'd like to hear what you consider our educational role beyond our own membership could be and what resources we would require to do this.

For example, could we provide a service where we help those interested in the Backyard Birds project get up to steam with the birds in their patch? More importantly, would you be willing to be a volunteer? If so, let us know.



New Holland Honeyeater

Photo: Janet Pearce

2013 Challenge

Tally: 223 spp as of 3/06/13

This Issue

Spotlighting at Highfields Falls

By Pat McConnell

Cooby Dam outing

By Paul Laurie

Murphys Creek outing

By Mick Atzeni

Photographers' Page

Bird of the Month

By Paul Laurie

OUTINGS

Sat/Sun 29/30th June

Raptor Census
Contact Pat McConnell



TOOWOOMBA
BIRD OBSERVERS

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

Feature

Spotlighting Outing, 8 May 2013

By: Pat McConnell

Photo by: Pat McConnell

As I headed home from work on Wednesday afternoon storm clouds were building up and things were looking ominous over Highfields and I wondered if rain was going to wash out the spotlighting outing at Highfields Falls. I need not have worried as the clouds quickly dissipated leaving clear skies.

Eight people attended the first spotlighting outing for several years and despite a slow start the evening turned out to be quite successful even though there was an absence of owls. The night started with the group listening for owl calls near the park entrance as the sun was setting. We were hoping to hear and then see the Powerful Owls that bred in the park two years ago. Luck was not with us however and we moved further into the park still listening for calls and looking for eye-shine. Eye-shine is one way to detect the presence of nocturnal animals. As the spotlight hits their eyes their eye-shine is reflected back towards the person holding the spotlight. We had three spotlights with us on this occasion. These were only 30 watt spotlights and we were very mindful not to shine them at the animals for very long.

As we progressed further down the track, that had thankfully been recently cleared, we were still on the lookout for our first animal. We were more than halfway through our walk before we had any success and this turned out to be a Peaceful Dove. The group was hoping for Powerful, Masked or Sooty Owls not a Peaceful Dove. But by that stage we were happy to see anything. Our next sighting was also a Peaceful Dove. I can't say that I was expecting that but it is not uncommon to see diurnal birds roosting when spotlighting.

By this stage we were only about 100 metres from finishing our walk and I was getting pretty disheartened. It was then that David's sharp eyes found our first nocturnal species. It was a Tawny Frogmouth and it behaved wonderfully giving everyone great views. Things started to pick up from here and in quick succession we spotted a Sugar Glider, two Mountain Brushtail Possums, a Common Brushtail Possum and just as we were approaching the cars we finished the night with a Common Ringtail Possum. The Sugar Glider even showed off by gliding for several metres across the track in front of us.



While we didn't see much in the way of nocturnal birds, the mammals helped make the evening quite enjoyable. It is not often that such a variety is seen in an hour of spotlighting.

Reports

Cooby Dam. Saturday 30 March

By: Paul Laurie

Photos by: Russell Jenkins



The March 30 outing to Cooby Dam started out in misty, overcast conditions with the threat of rain. However 19 members and others including Rob and Barbara Collyer, from Brisbane and Russell Jenkins from Japan turned up to enjoy birding at this interesting and diverse venue.

After housekeeping and meet and greet the group moved off across the picnic grounds to the edge of the lake, hoping to see some Musk Ducks. A range of water birds were visible on and around the water including **Pacific Black Duck**, **Hardhead**, **Eurasian Coot**, **Australian Pelican**, **Gull-billed Tern** and an **Intermediate Egret** apparently nesting in the long grass on the far side. Somebody brought my attention to some splashing in the water near the far bank, wanting to know what it was. After some difficulty in focussing the spotting scope I was able to confirm that it was indeed the wanted **Musk Duck**. Not only was it a Musk Duck but it was a male in full mating display. What a treat for all but it was especially exciting to those of us who hadn't seen it before. **Black Swans** provided another spectacle as they flew low over the water.

As we moved around the lake some small bush birds were spotted. Some of these were **White-browed Scrubwren**, **Striated Pardalote**, **Speckled Warbler** and **White-throated Gerygone**, before we broke off for morning tea under the spacious picnic shelters.

After everyone was revitalised by a warm cuppa and chat we all headed off to the West, down a gravel road that leads to the bank fishing area of the lake where, in the past I have been quite challenged by being able to hear a lot of small birds but not been able to identify many. Here we recorded **Superb Fairy-wren**, **Silvereye**, **Double-barred Finch** and **Tawny Grassbird** among others.

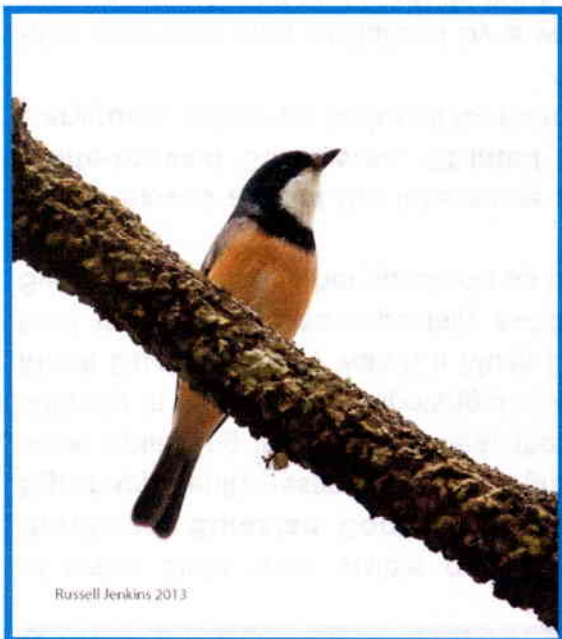
Moving along the walking trail that leads from the end of the road a mature **White-bellied Sea-eagle** was noted along with **Darters**, **Little Pied Cormorants**, a **Yellow Thornbill** and **Dusky**



Moorhens. By this stage the walk had become quite a social affair as members chatted and swapped stories. We then all headed back to the cars to disperse after a thoroughly enjoyable morning.

62 species were recorded.

Bird List – Brown Quail, Black Swan, Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Grey Teal, Hardhead, Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Australian Pelican, White-necked Herron, Intermediate Egret, Whistling Kite, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Black-fronted Dotterel, Masked Lapwing, Bar-shouldered Dove, Galah, Cockatiel, Rainbow Lorikeet, Pale-headed



Rosella, Laughing Kookaburra, Superb Fairy-wren, Variegated Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Speckled Warbler, Weebill, White-throated Gerygone, Brown Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Yellow Thornbill, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Little Friarbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler, Grey Fantail, Willy Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, Richards Pipit, Double-barred Finch, Tawny Grassbird, Golden-headed Cisticola, Common Staring, Common Myna, Gull-billed Tern.

Murphys Creek district. Sunday 28 April 2013

By: Mick Atzeni

Photo by: Mick Atzeni

What I thoroughly enjoy about birding around Murphys Creek, and the Lockyer Valley in general, is the anticipation you feel, knowing that you're a very good chance of seeing something special. **Budgerigars** filled the bill on the April outing, including sightings of two flocks at home - a new bird for "Tiddalac". It's one I'd been really hoping for as there had been several recent reports of small flocks in and around the eastern Darling Downs, Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley. So mission accomplished.

But I'm getting ahead of myself...

The outing kicked off rather nicely with **Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos** gracing the scene at the Murphys Creek Railway Station meeting point. Next stop was the local cemetery and nearby creek crossing on McCanns Rd, where we saw several species including **Black-**

shouldered Kite, Scarlet Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Jacky Winter, Golden Whistler and Grey Fantail. A **Shining Bronze-cuckoo** was heard calling in the distance.

Next we visited my home patch - "Tiddalac", 68 Thomas Rd, Upper Lockyer. No sign of the male Red-capped Robin I'd seen a few days earlier but we were more than compensated with the Budgerigars - firstly, a flock of around 20 appeared briefly above the acacia scrub canopy then disappeared behind it, then a few minutes later a flock about twice the size did likewise. Blink and you missed them!



Fortunately, another flock of six were seen for longer at our next stop at MacDonald's property, as they flew over the creek near Lockyer Siding. Here we were also treated to two majestic **Black Swans** in flight, and numerous **Black Kites**, which have invaded SEQ in spectacular fashion, but also **Whistling Kite, Brown Falcon, Wedge-tailed Eagle, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Brown Goshawk** and **Black-shouldered Kite.** **Tree Martins** were also abundant

(hundreds) but not in the thousands I'd seen the weekend before.

We adjourned to "Tiddalac" for morning tea on the deck, overlooking the creek. Last bird added was Mistletoebird giving us a very respectable tally of 82 species. Thanks to all attendees for their part in ensuring it was a most enjoyable outing, and to Neil MacDonald for allowing us on his property.

Species List

Black Swan, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Little Pied Cormorant, Pied Cormorant, White-faced Heron, White-necked Heron, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Straw-necked Ibis, Black-shouldered Kite, Black Kite, Whistling Kite, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Brown Goshawk, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Brown Falcon, Nankeen Kestrel, Dusky Moorhen, Black-fronted Dotterel, Masked Lapwing, Spotted Turtle-Dove, Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeon, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Galah, Little Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Cockatiel, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Little Lorikeet, Pale-headed Rosella, Budgerigar, Brush Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Laughing Kookaburra, Rainbow Bee-eater, Superb Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren, Weebill, White-throated Gerygone, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Little Friarbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Lewin's Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, White-throated Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Scarlet Honeyeater, Jacky Winter, Rose Robin, Grey-crowned Babbler, Eastern Whipbird, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Magpie-lark, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Figbird, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Torresian Crow, Double-barred Finch, Mistletoebird, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Golden-headed Cisticola, Silvereye, Common Myna

Bird of the Month

Scarlet Honeyeater: *Myzomela sanguinolenta*

Dimensions: 10-11 cm

Photos by: Kevin Williams

Call: Various tweets and squeaks as well as a tinkling, "Deedle-Deedle" sound made by both sexes

Similar species: When the male in full adult plumage there is nothing quite like it in our area. However, the female can easily be confused with the Brown Honeyeater, Dusky Honeyeater and, as western species move east to avoid the current dry period, the female Black Honeyeater might come into the picture.

The male Scarlet Honeyeater is easily identified by his brilliant red head and upper body. The wings and tail are dark in colour, almost black while the underparts are almost white. The rump is red like the head.

The female is brownish where the male is red with the underparts white as well. Immature males are like the female but the gape is yellow.

Scarlet Honeyeater is one of the long-billed honeyeaters. The bill curves noticeably downwards.

Data collected by TBO members over a 20-year period shows that Scarlet

Honeyeaters are more often recorded in the winter months than in summer. They are often seen high in flowering gum trees feeding on nectar. When the sunlight strikes the male's plumage the colour flares brilliantly.

Good places to see Scarlet Honeyeaters in the TBO area are anywhere around the escarpment, in parks such as Jubilee and Redwood. They can sometimes be seen in the leafy, eastern parts of Toowoomba and anywhere where there are nectar bearing plants, especially tall ones.

Areas in Toowoomba region include Highfields Falls and Cemetery Road, Murphys Creek.

Tip: Familiarity with the call can be helpful. Try Morcombe on your I-pod



Immature male



Slightly more advanced

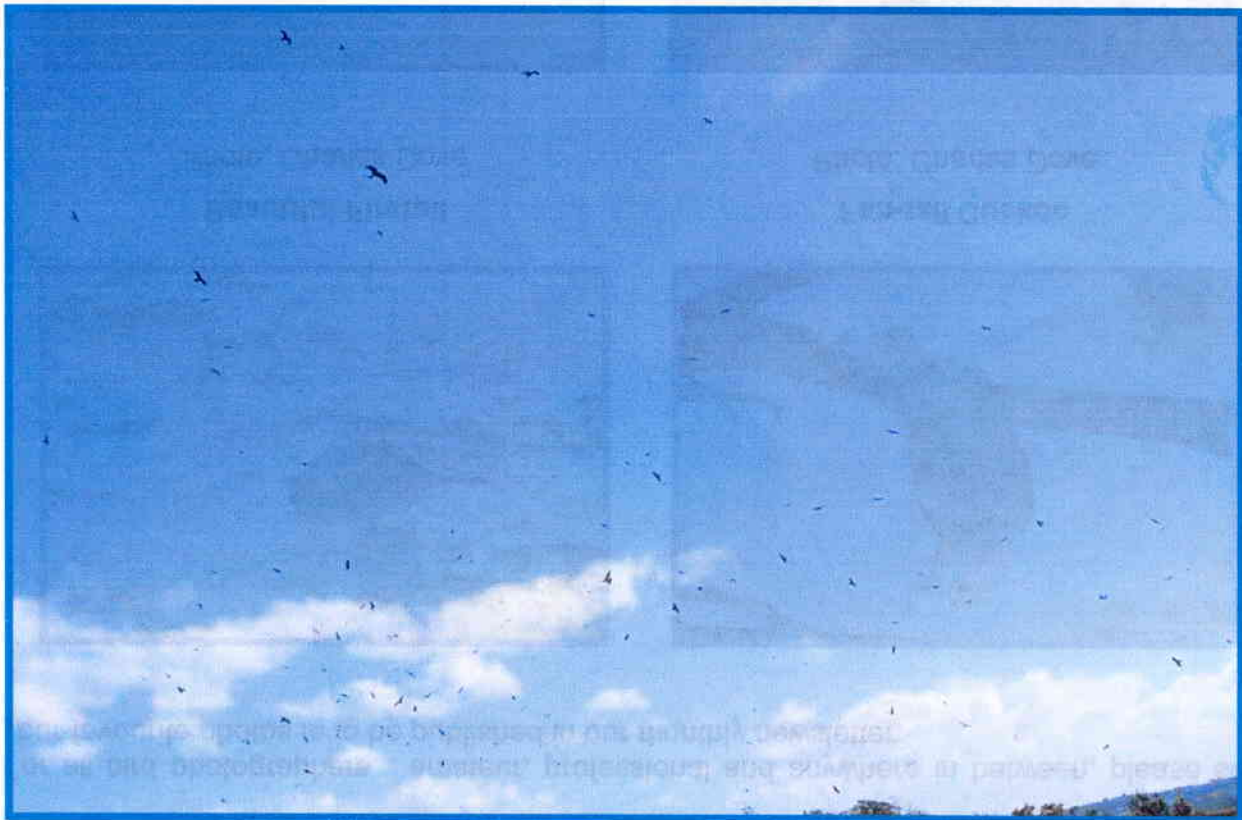
Club Activities

Raptor Census

Our annual Raptor Census will be held on the weekend of **29-30th June**. The usual format will apply, with small teams covering areas to the north, south, east and west of Toowoomba. Team leaders, their contact details and the date they will be surveying their designated area will be published in the next newsletter once finalised.

The census is an excellent opportunity to hone your raptor spotting and identification skills. The huge numbers of Black Kites in the region this year are going to make this census extremely interesting, not to mention challenging! I won't even begin to predict what the final tally will be but I am certain the record will be smashed.

For further information, and to join a survey team, please contact Pat McConnell on 4631 5573.



Hundreds of Black Kites over Toowoomba

Photo: Fay Rossow

Rockville residents, Fay and Colin Rossow, supplied this photo following an article in The Chronicle about the Black Kite irruption in the Toowoomba region. Fay counted over a thousand Black Kites passing over their home on the 6 April. The scale of this irruption is hard to believe and a spectacle we may never see again locally in our life time. Take a trip out to the Toowoomba Tip if you get a chance.

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.



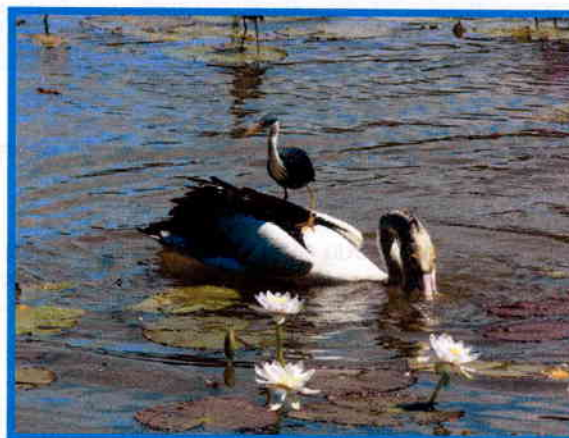
Beautiful Firetail
Photo: Charles Dove



Fan-tail Cuckoo
Photo: Charles Dove



**White-breasted Woodswallow
& Silver Gull**
Photo: Al Young



Pied Heron & Australian Pelican
Photo: Al Young

Bird Notes

All records below were reported 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
Chestnut Teal (2)	07/04/13	private dam, Ashlands Drive, Postmans Ridge	MA
Spotted Harrier	21/04/13	Wyreema	PM, KO
Little Eagle	08/04/13	Helidon	BJ
Black-tailed Native-Hen	08/05/13	Helidon Spa	MW
Gull-billed Tern (3)	20/04/13	"Abberton", Helidon	BJ, MW
Long-billed Corella	01/04/13	"Abberton", Helidon	BJ
Red-backed Kingfisher	21/04/13	Charlton, Toowoomba	PM, KO
Red-capped Robin	25/04/13	"Tiddalac", Upper Lockyer	MA
Spotted Quail-thrush (pair)	09/04/13	Amos Rd, Withcott	DC, PC
White-winged Chough (11)	12/04/13	Connors Road, Helidon	MW
Little Grassbird	28/04/13	Helidon Spa Golf Course	MW

MA, M. Atzeni; **BJ**, B. Jolly; **DC**, D. Cleary; **PC**, P. Cleary; **PM**, P. McConnell; **KO**, K. O'Donnell; **MW**, M. Wood;

Bird notes can be submitted directly to me at mccannel@usq.edu.au or via the Club's mailing address.

Thanks
Pat McConnell

Common Blackbirds and other recent Dalby sightings By Malcolm Wilson

I have been in contact with Mr Damien Cummings who first saw a Common Blackbird on early January 2013 and again 15/5/2013. There are two blackbirds on his property on the edge of Dalby. The January sighting would be the first for Dalby. It is already in Chinchilla.

Other personal sightings of interest:

Plumed Whistling-Duck (2000+)	1/4/13	4 km SW of Dalby
Black-tailed Native-hen (80+)	1/4/13	4 km SW of Dalby
Black Kite (150)	2/4/13	Dalby Rubbish tip
Gull-billed Tern (4)	2/4/13	16 km SW of Dalby

Coming Events

Raptor Census

Sat-Sun, 29-30th June

Contact: Pat McConnell 4631 5573

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Deadline for articles for the next Newsletter is 15th June 2013

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

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