

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

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NEWS-SHEET No. 48 - DECEMBER, 1979.

Because of the upcoming Christmas season this month's Field Day has had to be scheduled a week earlier than usual. This and other factors affecting the preparation of this News-sheet means that you probably won't read this until after the excursion. For this we apologize. However in the hope that we might make our deadline, we can advise that the Field trip will follow the form announced elsewhere in this issue but will conclude with a barbecue at "Ringmere", Withcott. This will be catered on the same basis as the one held in October.

Subscriptions for next year are now due. Although it is now \$6.00 and \$3.00 (student fee) it still represents good value. May we have yours soon?

And on a brighter note, the members of the Executive would like to take this opportunity to wish all Club members a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Ron Hopkinson,
Editor.

COMMON MYNAE (*Acridotheres tristis*).

As a newer member of the club, but being an "Oldie", my birdwatching days go back to seeing - approximately 1920 - Brush Turkeys cleaned but still feathered, hung for sale on nails outside an open fronted mart in Russell Street, opposite Mylne street.

Later, as a boy scout and ardent bush walker, I became familiar with most local birds and later still whilst on leave in Townsville in the early 1940's, I was interested to spot a bird I had never seen before and on enquiry from a "local" I was informed that it was a Myna.

During my employment from 1954-1961 it was necessary for me to visit Dalby once a week and in the early part of this period I made my first sighting of a Myna at Dalby, and during my weekly trips over the years I interestedly watched this bird progress towards Oaky and beyond, and in 1964 made my first local sighting on my cousin's farm at Wellcamp, where Gainsborough Lodge now stands and on asking him to name this bird he told me that it was a "Brown Leghorn" (the Myna colour is remarkably similar to the Brown Leghorn Powl). This was his own name

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COMMON MYNAH (cont/d.)

for the bird, which he had never seen before and which had only recently appeared on the farm, thus confirming my observation of its movements.

The Myna eventually appeared at the Toowoomba Aerodrome and spread over most of the local area. Eventually it dipped over the range to Grantham and on to Gatton. Bill Jolly reports that it is no further east than the College at Lawes as far as he knows.

The bird is obviously headed for the "City Lights" and it will be interesting to watch its continued progress. Due to my limited field of observation I believe the bird, which is adaptable to man, followed the Warrego Highway. Any further notes on this

THE EASTERN MOVEMENT OF THE COMMON MYNAH THROUGH OUR AREA
would be appreciated by me.

Joe Deuble.

THE LAST GREAT WILD BEAST SHOW.

Why have zoos? How can the incarceration of wild creatures for the mere amusement of human spectators be justified? Is the whole concept an abomination that has survived from an earlier stage in our history? Would society do well to remember Blake's line "A Robin Redbreast in a Cage, puts all Heaven in a Rage", and outlaw zoos altogether?

We have both spent the majority of our working lives involved with wild animals and their welfare, in particular with those kept in captivity, so it is not surprising that we have become natural targets for this hysterical type of cross-examination. To establish an understanding of a zoo's role in the modern world, we should make a clear distinction between the zoo and the circus, for, surprisingly enough, many people still consider these two quite separate organisations as synonymous. The idea is of course absurd and one would be hard-pressed to find any genuine animal lover who would give support to the circus on any grounds. It can be objected to for many reasons: cruelty does undeniably exist in training, the travelling animal wagons are always foully cramped, and ultimately it has no purpose other than to amuse an apparently witless audience.

But a zoo is an entirely different concept. First, it cannot be viewed simply as a place where wild animals are locked up for the amusement of humans: that image belongs to the Victorian era. The zoo has a far more serious part to play, and its primary functions are concerned with research, education and vital breeding programmes associated with the preservation of those species gravely threatened with extinction in the wild. It might be thought of as a sort of Noah's Ark, complete with laboratories and classrooms.

No wild animal is free in the sense understood by the average citizen. Each living creature is confined by a maze of restrictions. These may be environmental, or may involve the presence of other animals or members of its own species, or the availability of food. If these factors are taken into consideration and the animal's normal biological needs are catered for, what does it suffer by being captive? As our scientific knowledge improves, so does the lot of the zoo animal. It is infinitely better off than its wild counterpart (and also the average pet hamster), for it has a regular, well-balanced diet, constant shelter, no territorial disputes, plus the benefits of the most up-to-date advances in surgery and medicine. Is it to be wondered at that the zoo specimen can expect a longer life than it would in the wild?

We have presented this defence of the institution many times and have occasionally had the rewarding experience of seeing a bitter opponent of zoos, realising that

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THE LAST GREAT WILD BEAST SHOW (cont/d.)

their function is one of promoting a respect for life rather than denigrating it, become converted. But in recent years doubts have begun to cloud our minds. Gradually we have had to come to terms with the fact that we are merely presenting a credible hypothesis of the functions of the modern zoo.

To start with those three justifications for zoos: research, education and conservation. Hardly a zoo in the British Isles actively undertakes, or sponsors, research of any kind. Of those that provide educational programmes, the majority that seem to do so are really only trying to appear respectable and, thus, hardly merit serious consideration. As for conservation: on a world-wide basis only five species can be considered saved from extinction by captive breeding, and even one of these was a chance success. Nevertheless, there are notable exceptions. Several British zoos devote an incalculable amount of time and money attempting to conserve just one species and they have already made significant contributions. It is only when these contributions are compared against the total number of zoos in the country that they pale to insignificance.

Quite apart from these factors, one has to visit only a few of our wildlife collections to see that something is clearly wrong. Our own numerous visits to zoos have produced little that can be put forward in their favour and we estimate that about 90 per cent of those we have inspected are keeping some, if not all, of their animals in a state of deprivation that must result in physical, emotional or mental illness. Considered in this light, the zoo immediately assumes the role of an animated fun-fair. But it is too easy to produce an argument for the abolition of zoos, bearing in mind the neglect and suffering so often seen in them, and although it might seem expedient simply to arouse hostility against an apparently loathsome institution, it is more constructive to show that that same institution has the potential and can be of unique value to man and wildlife. Indeed, the survival of the zoo has become essential if only because for some species captive breeding is the only alternative to extinction.

Viable business prospects?

The root cause of the present lamentable state of zoos can be traced to the basic rules of economics. Zoos are costly to run, so costly that if the needs of the inmates are to be adequately catered for, the zoo does not present a viable business prospect. Yet all too often the main reason for opening a new zoo is to make money, and this can easily be achieved if the zoo does not intend to carry out scientific research, organise educational programmes or specialise in breeding endangered species. With visitors clamouring to get into the gates, one can hardly express surprise at the commercial exploitation of the zoo, or that so many have opted for a share in this newly discovered business. For the zoo boom is a fairly recent development.

To create a zoo, animals have to be captured and transported from their country of origin: they can easily die in the process; many do. Animals have to adapt to a new environment and if this is ill-conceived they can suffer permanent physical or mental damage, which many do. If they reproduce in captivity, it is vital that the offspring are healthy in body and mind. This will depend, largely, on their social and physical environment and other factors, like diet. But because of inadequate research into their specific needs, a large number of zoo-born animals are not normal.

It must therefore be obvious that it is in the ultimate interest of the zoo as an institution that the capture, maintenance and breeding of wild animals are handled solely by those who have the technical and practical experience necessary and, equally important, who have a high-minded regard for the well-being of each creature.

Behaviour in a straitjacket.

Do animals in captivity pace up and down because they want to get out? Why do some species, like elephants and bears, stand on the same spot and sway from side to side? And why do some birds pull out all their feathers and mammals groom themselves until their bodies are covered in bald patches? Is it normal for

THE LAST GREAT WILD BEAST SHOW (cont/d.)

animals to chew their tails until only a vestigial stump remains, or eat their faeces?

That this type of behaviour exists is undeniable and most of us have probably seen this sort of thing in zoos or wildlife parks at one time or another. But is this behaviour normal? Can it be seen in the wild? If not, then why does it happen and can it be avoided.

As captive animals are obviously not captive by choice, we feel they are entitled to have their needs met as fully as the present state of knowledge allows, and that the only way to realise this ideal is to develop, as quickly as possible, the attributes of the good collections and close down the multitude of animal concentration camps dotted across Britain. If this does not happen, the day could easily come when public opinion turns against the zoo altogether; as an institution it could become as endangered as the species it purports to protect.

By Bill Jordon & Stefan Ormrod.
Reprinted from New Scientist - 16.3.78.

VENTRILQUISM IN THE CRESTED BELLBIRD.

Hamish and I had a very interesting experience recently. We had a picnic lunch out at Murra Dam. On the way home we heard the call of a Crested Bellbird and soon saw the bird sitting in a tree about 20 feet away in full view on a dead limb. As we were watching it we both said simultaneously, "There's another one over in the distance somewhere". As we stood there the call seemed to come closer and closer until, after about the fifth call we realised that the one we had been watching had been doing it all.

After about a 30 second pause it began again and this time I watched it through the binoculars, and sure enough its beak was moving. Even when we saw the beak moving it was difficult to believe the noise was all coming from one bird. The first four slow high notes seemed to come from just to the left of it and the two quick lower notes came from the right. When it turned its back and called again, I thought all that might reverse, but it didn't. Then a female came swooping down beside it and they flew off, playfully diving and rolling. The female had a bright chestnut colour under its tail which doesn't show in the Slater picture. We had a good view of a black stripe along the top of the head of the female.

Sue Patterson.

Editor's Note:

Does any member have any further comments to offer on this ventriloquial quality which seems to be shared by our local Spotted Pardalotes? (Ed.)

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

Little Black Cormorant. 4.11.79. Withcott. AHS. JS.
Black-breasted Buzzard. 25.11.79. Cunnamulla. EJ. WJ. SP.
Caspian Tern. 26.11.79. Lake Bullawarra. EJ. WJ.
Crested Bellbird. 29.11.79. Cunnamulla. EJ. WJ. SP.
Black-faced Monarch. 4.11.79. Redwood Park. AHS.
Grey-crowned Babbler. 10/28.11.79. Flagstone Creek. GC. JEC. JCC.
Chestnut-crowned Babbler. 27.11.79. Nockatinga. EJ. WJ.
Orange Chat. 25.11.79. Cunnamulla. EJ. WJ. SP.
Mistletoebird.(pair) 24.11.79. Shorelands, Withcott. AHS. JS.
Dusky Woodswallow. 28.11.79. Toowoomba. GC.

GC: Graham Corbin. JEC: Jim Corbin. JCC: Jane Corbin. EJ: Eileen Jolly.
WJ: Bill Jolly. SP: Sue Patterson. AHS: Ann Shore. JS: John Shore.

FIELD DAY FOR DECEMBER.

Date: Sunday, December 16th, 1979. Place: Lake Dyer & Lake Clarendon.

Leader: Bill Jolly. Assembly Point: Pigott's Car Park.

Time: 8.15 a.m. for departure at 8.30 a.m. sharp.

This Field Day will conclude with a BYOGG. barbecue at "Ringmere".

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

The Bird Observer - November, 1979.

Q.O.S. Newsletter - October, 1979.

Darling Downs Naturalist - December, 1979.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1980.

Any members who have not yet remitted their subscription for 1980 are requested to complete the slip below and forward it with their subscription to the Secretary/Treasurer at the earliest opportunity.

To: The Secretary,
Toowoomba Bird Club,
"Shorelands",
Withcott, 4344.

I am enclosing herewith the sum of \$6 (\$3 for students) being my membership subscription to the Toowoomba Bird Club for the calendar year 1980.

Signed _____