Contact Call

Birders of North Queensland
Royal Australasian Ornithological Union: North Queensland Group

June 1995 ◆ Issue: Australian Brush-turkey

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

We are recommending to members that they use the name **"RAOU North Queensland Group"** rather than **BNQ** when dealing with the media, government departments and other people. The **RAOU** has a fine reputation that is to our advantage and as we become an effective force in bird study and conservation, we want the **RAOU** to get the recognition.
Graham Harrington

BNQ CALENDER

23? July - Bird census at TFTA
Townsville Field Training Area (TFTA) is the Army reserve including "High Range" on Hervey's Range. A biological survey of this quite diverse area was completed in 1992 and the Army is now keen to see some follow-up. A half-day outing is tentatively set for 23 July (date still to be approved). Meet at 6 AM at the gate to TFTA which is the first left off Hervey's Ra. Rd. at the top of the escarpment. We want to break up into at least two groups to adequately survey Melaleuca wetlands, riparian tracts, open woodlands, rocky outcrops and vine thicket. Contact Dave James (077) 75 1507.

19-20 August - Remnant habitat blocks in Ingham and Cardwell Shires
The clearance of remnant habitat blocks and corridors for the expansion of sugar cane is a major ecological crisis in full-swing. Virtually all of the remaining tropical lowlands mosaic between the Burdekin and Tully Rivers is under threat, and this means the loss of wintering habitat for southern migrants and Wet Tropics highland species, local extinction of Cassowaries and other birds, and possibly complete extinction of Mahogany Gliders, six butterflies, six orchids and an antplant. Data is urgently needed to strengthen the conservation argument. This weekend we hope to make preliminary surveys in as many blocks as possible to identify areas for regular monitoring. The amount we can cover is dependant on the turn-out, so come along for the weekend or just a half day. Details of meeting and camping spots, and maps of habitat blocks will be available in Aug. Contact Dave James (077) 75 1507, or your local rep.

Sun. 20th August Redden Island (Cairns)
Meet at gate near toilet block on road to Barron River mouth, Machans Beach, 7.00.

Sept 23rd-24th Sat/Sun
Campout at Princess Hills. Phone area reps for details.

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EASTER AT PRINCESS HILLS

Arrangements for the Easter campout were thrown into disarray with the late release of the March issue of **Wingspan.** This was due to problems at the printers and we hope in future that **Contact Call** will reach members in plenty of time with details of field trips. An account of the campout may be found in **Wingspan.** Saturday afternoon we relinquished the pleasure of birdwatching in order to have a meeting. About twelve members attended

A number of topics were discussed and two proposals were voted on. The first was that the next AGM would not be held until April-June 1996 as it was felt that the Group had only just started (ie the first formal meeting was in November 1994), and next year would be soon enough for an AGM. It was also noted that elections of office bearers would not be necessary until the 1997 AGM.
The second topic to be voted one was regarding BNQ's finances. At present the only income was from an allocation given to us for each member by Head Office. In order to supplement this, it was decided to charge members attending campouts $5 per family or $2 concession. This will give us some money to afford any extra expenses. Other funds can be raised by sale of T-shirts and RAOU greeting cards.

Problems of distributing **Contact Call** through **Wingspan** were discussed after the delay in the release of the March edition. It was decided that due to the high expense of mailing **Contact Call** ourselves, (there are over 100 members in BNQ) we would persevere with the present method.
Lindsay Fisher

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RETURN TO PRINCESS HILLS

Members are asked to return to Princess Hills and undertake further survey work either with the next official BNQ visit in the school holidays, centred around September 23-24, or privately at your own convenience. If going alone, please take a map showing track section numbers and the official census form, (obtainable from me) and confirm with the Ranger Dave McDowall that your visit is convenient (Ph 070 971 448). The park is not open to the public and visits by our members must be part of the survey work. Non-members should not be invited without clearing it with the BNQ Executive Committee.

Townsville members will be relieved to hear that DEH will try to open the track through from Wallaman Falls by September. This will greatly reduce travel time.

Having inspected the Herbert River bend at the western end of the Park, I believe that is where we should camp in September. It is only 35 minutes drive from the Park entrance and offers a variety of vegetation types including riverine woodland, tall dry eucalypt forest and very dry wooded grasslands not seen on the Easter campout. In September the park is likely to be very dry and the nearby river pools will be welcome to both birds and surveyors alike!
Graham Harrington.

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WADER WATCHING AT CAIRNS Sunday 23rd April

A windy sunny afternoon on the Esplanade attracted 10 members to watch the incoming tide push the wading birds into shore. These notoriously difficult to identify brown jobs scurrying around the mudflats were identified and shown to those who were trying to come to grips with them. Identification pointers such as size, bill shape and length, as well as feeding behaviour was pointed out. The advantage of a spotting scope for watching these birds was demonstrated - they actually became recognisable from the blobs of mud! The tide pushed the birds in close and the sun setting behind gave optimum viewing conditions. Some of the birds such as Curlew Sandpiper, Lesser Sand Plover and Red-necked Stint were coming into breeding plumage. The Black-tailed Godwits flew in just before the tide forced the birds to head off to high tide roosts. Royal Spoonbills caused some amusement as they scurried up and down the tide line in a pack sifting the water in unison.

Waders are a difficult group to identify and are usually put in the too hard basket when starting out. With patience and regular visits to places such as the Esplanade they will suddenly become easy to identify. Don't give up! In all 32 birds were identified, a species list is available on request.

Keith Fisher

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EDWARD RIVER CROCODILE FARM Sunday 7th May

Seven hardy souls braved the wintry weather (cold. raining and only 24º!) and dodging the crocodiles to record a species list of 47 birds. Of interest were Buff-banded Rail and White-browed Crakes both with chicks and Little Kingfisher. We also looked at a suitable area to place a hide. The farm situated off the Yarrabah road, south of Edmonton, about 40mins from Cairns is well worth a visit. The complex has many varied habitats attracting a wide variety of birds. A species list is available. Don't forget to check out the turf farm on the way.

Keith Fisher

HEATWAVES AND SPARROWHAWKS?

Collared Sparrowhawks are occasionally seen in the Lake Eacham area on the Atherton Tableland and on my birthday this year (31st January) I recorded our first since we bought the farm in 1988. We had excellent views of the bird (an adult male), as it was harassed by Pied Currawongs in mature Sallee Wattles (*Acacia aulacocarpa)* close to the house. It flew away to the south east towards the farm dam. Next morning our early arrival at the dam to look for platypus flushed the sparrowhawk from the young rainforest trees about 4m high. We watched, again with excellent views, as it flew into a nearby pine plantation.

The temperature on the 30th and 31st January was 36º and on the 1st February, 35º - our annual heatwave and distinctly the hottest period of this summer. Reading a local aboriginal language (YIDINY) dictionary, I was intrigued to find the following entry:- *Jugalawurr* - sparrowhawk (said to appear only in a heatwave).

I know Collared Sparrowhawks are seen at other times, but it would be interesting to compare this record with others (time of year, weather, sex and age of birds). Certainly the heatwave affected other local birds. Compared with "normal" days of up to 33º, the almost total absence of bird activity from soon after dawn on those days was remarkable.

Elinor Scambler

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INTERESTING SIGHTINGS FROM CAIRNS.

2/4/95 Yellow Wagtail at Yarrabah road turf farm, Edmonton. Lovely plumage, Bright yellow, usually observed here in Sep-Dec in dull non-breeding colours.

7/5/95 2 Spur-winged Plovers Yarrabah road turf farm, Edmonton, mixed in with 88 Masked Lapwings. North of usual range.

8/5/95 10 Channel-billed Cuckoos over Cairns cemetery, heading North. Late leavers

8/5/95 Several hundred Metallic Starlings still roosting in the City Place Cairns. Adult and Juviniles, too lazy to return to PNG?

9/5/95 Juvenile Swamp Harrier at Cairns Airport. Unusual on coast at Cairns.

9/5/95 Torresian Imperial Pigeon flying over Mcleod St. in the centre of Cairns. Most pigeons have gone north several weeks ago, Mid-April.

Lots of bird movements occurring around Cairns in the month of April, Straw-necked and Australian White Ibis returned after a couple of months away, presumably breeding somewhere. Sacred Kingfishers and Spangled Drongo numbers built up, moving north or south? Gull-billed Terns returned at the end of April after being away for about six weeks. Grey Teal returned at the beginning of May after a six week absence. These movements need to be looked at and field notes collated to build up a pattern. I'm one to talk my field notes are almost non-existent! Take Rainbow Bee-eaters as an example, I know that they come and go at different times of the year from a roost tree outside where I work in central Cairns. I think they come and go about four times a year, but not quite sure, time to start making notes. Moral of the story, keep detailed field notes, one day they will be useful when they get collated. Another project for BNQ? In our spare time of course!

Keith Fisher

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WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH SQUATTER PIGEONS?

There are two subspecies of Squatters, a southern one with bluish orbital skin and a northern one with red orbital skin. For many years it has been thought that the hybrid zone is between the Burdekin Ri. and Proserpine. This is incorrect since I have seen southern birds around Townsville, Charters Towers and Einsleigh. I'm fairly sure that it is the southern subspecies at Georgetown and birds seen at Princess Hills during the Easter camp-out did not have red orbital skin. Furthermore, I have not seen the northern form south of Mt. Molloy. Reading Harry Frith's *Pigeons and Doves in Australia* (1982), it seems that the problem stems from a misunderstanding of the colour of the orbital skin. He thought that specimens from the Burdekin district that had bluish orbital skin with a little red in the front corner were hybrids. However, apparently all the birds with blue skin have a little pale red in the corner and this is not a hybrid character. Good photos of both subspecies are in the 2nd edition of *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds* and the NPIAW *Parrots and Pigeons of Australia.* Have a look and you will easily see the difference, but be careful of the switched captions in NPIAW. The hybrid zone, if such there be, of Squatter pigeon is completely unknown, and the southern subspecies is listed as vulnerable. So please check the photos and then next time you see a Squatter <u>anywhere</u> at all jot down the colour of the orbital skin, location etc. and send me the details:

Dave James
c\ BNQ
Townsville 4810.

T-SHIRTS

What group would be complete without its own T-shirt? BNQ now has available quality T-shirts. Our Pied Imperial-pigeon logo in dark green with the words '*Birdwatching with a purpose'* printed underneath, looks great on a calico coloured shirt. For just $15 you can let FNQ know that you are a member of BNQ!

Contact Sue Clegg or Lindsay Fisher**.**

<u>FOR SALE</u>

Zeiss 7x42 Binoculars $1200.00, half new price. Just serviced by Zeiss.

Also available are three bird call tapes recorded by Fred Van Gessel at $12.50 each.

1. Bird Calls of NE.Queensland contains 43 species from Bush hen to Tropical Scrubwren.
2. Bird calls of the N.T. Rufous Owl to Broad-billed Flycatcher. 44 species.
3. Bird calls of the N.T. Leaden Flycatcher to White-fronted Honeyeater. 43 species. Both these tapes contain many species from our area. So now is the time to bone up on your bird calls, as we will be testing you on our next camp out! Proceeds from these sales will help raise funds our impoverished group. All these items are available from Keith and Lindsay,

PO Box 2209 Cairns QLD 4870

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If you are still awake by the time you have got this far with the newsletter you might have noticed that it reads like its all a Townsville-Cairns area self indulgence. Well, it's up to you all to send in your news, sightings, field trips and reports. We will try and include as much as possible on the two sides available, but space is limited so try and make reports brief. Send reports to Lindsay at PO Box 2209, Cairns QLD 4870. They need to be in a month before Wingspan comes out. We will try to get a more precise time from HQ.