



Contact Call

*Birders of North Queensland
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union:
North Queensland Group*

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OFFICE BEARERS

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BNQ CALENDAR

June 28th, 7.00pm Social evening at 22 Bishop St Belgian Gardens. BBQ and see David James' slides of Antarctic birds. BYO. Ph (077) 714 707.

July 20-21st Weekend camp and bird survey at the Butchers Creek property of Jon and Peta Nott. Ph (070) 968 230.

October 26-27th Twitchathon.
More details in the next Contact Call

November: Expedition to Archer River NP on Cape York to search for Golden-shouldered parrots. Contact Graham Harrington if you wish to go. 4WD essential. Passengers may be able to get rides. Be warned. It will be uncomfortably hot at that time of year.

THOUGHTS ON BNQ AND THE FUTURE

From Graham Harrington

Following the AGM on 4th May it is timely to reflect on who we are and what we are doing.

This is in recognition that the changing face of RAOU includes a much higher profile for groups like ours if the RAOU is to grow and be a force to be reckoned with in bird study and conservation.

In the field of conservation the RAOU is unlike any other organisation. In no other field except ornithology is so much technical expertise residing in the amateur members. Added to which, these skills are enhanced by the professional ornithologists who are also members. So we can undertake accurate and wide-ranging surveys and monitoring of birdlife employing the amateurs who cover the nation whilst utilising the professional skills in design and data analysis and interpretation.

BNQ covers a vast area. It is not possible for the Executive to be informed and active on bird-related issues over such a vast distance. However the BNQ brief is to further the aims of the RAOU in north Queensland by:-

- a) recruiting new members,
- b) contributing to bird conservation in our area,
- c) studying birds and collecting and publishing useful data, and
- d) publicising our activities and function.

To be effective, we need activity at the local level. By all means ask the BNQ Executive or HQ in Melbourne for advice and logistical support. But the initiative must come from our far-flung members and their local representatives on the Committee BECAUSE ONLY YOU KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON IN YOUR AREA.

Some of the threats to our birds attain the status of national issues but the most

pervasive and insidious is the piecemeal dismemberment of their habitats and the by-product of the increasing use of chemicals. It is the death by a thousand little cuts. Each one is minor in effect but in total they are surely removing our birds. Most go unnoticed except at local level. Do we simply wring our hands or do we do something about it? This is a personal decision for each one of us. By making the RAOU better known and respected we can take strength from the organisation and avoid being personally over-stretched.

So what can YOU do? A few examples may help.

* Jon Wren is on the local Council in Bowen and is very active in retaining local bird habitat and persuading other councillors to recognise its value. Judy Fitzsimon has persuaded the editor of an Atherton tablelands newspaper to let her write a bird column. Could other local reps or members do the same?

* Some members monitor newspapers and submit letters for publication on bird matters. These don't have to be controversial. Local information on birds and your address may inspire interest and gain us some new members.

* Prepare or tactfully correct birdlists for tourist operations and nature reserves. Where possible get the RAOU acknowledged.

* Take part in and publicise locally, national surveys such as the Birds On Farms project. Report on results to the public.

* Watch out for creeping developments and remind Shire Councils and the public of its impact on bird life.

* Give talks and walks to school and youth groups (Lindsay and Keith Fisher have done some of this kind of activity).

* Join a LANDCARE group.

* Don't bust a gut. Just do a bit and make sure the RAOU gets the credit.

EASTER CAMPOUT AT PRINCESS HILLS

Thirty members and friends from Nth Qld and Tanzania enjoyed good company, an idyllic camp-site on a bend of the Herbert River, eating, drinking, canoeing and swimming in the river, and continuing with our bird surveys of Princess Hills at the Easter Campout in Lumholtz National Park.

The riparian vegetation along the river held far more birds than the open eucalypt woodland, some of which showed signs of the prolonged drought. The absence of birds provoked a few unfavourable comments and comparisons from our African visitors!

Our thanks go to Dave Green of DOE who had organised to have our campsite and tracks to the river and Falls slashed, and for taking us out spotlighting on Sunday night. This was a highlight of the weekend. We all had excellent views of two Owllet Nightjars, Tawny Frogmouths and Greater Gliders. The previous night Dave had seen 8 Owllet Nightjars along the road - a very high population density.

A report of our surveys of birds found in various vegetation types has been compiled and will be sent to DOE.

AGM AND CAMPOUT AT BROADWATER CREEK STATE FOREST PARK

Graham Harrington read his Convenor's report in which he outlined the establishment of the group, its aims and achievements to date.

Klaus Uhlenhut and David James reported on the Gouldian Finch Survey and the Coastal Forest Remnant Monitoring Survey.

The use of birdcall tapes was discussed. General opinion was that they are harmless when used briefly in one-off situations but should not be used by tourist operators or anyone else repeatedly at the same site, or for a long period.

David James spoke on the Karumba Port Proposal which would severely impact on a major staging and wintering area of thousands of migratory waders. No account has been taken of Australia's responsibilities under JAMBA, CAMBA or RAMSAR all of which recognise its importance. Members are urged to put in submissions. Phone Nth Qld Conservation Council (077) 716 226 for details.

Twenty seven members came to the meeting and over 50 were at the campout which finished early because of rain!

GOULDIAN FINCH SURVEY

At the AGM Klaus Uhlenhut reported on last year's Gouldian Finch Survey in which the under-whelming total of one finch was sighted. However all those who took part enjoyed the experience and are keen to continue. This year the survey is to be broadened and participants will also survey, on an hourly basis, all birds which come in to drink at waterholes. This will provide valuable information on the habits of our inland birds. Klaus is again coordinating this survey and if you wish to take part please contact him. Ph (070)655 181.

SEABIRD SURVEYS

GBRMPA, the Qld Dept of the Environment and ANCA are co-operating in a seabird monitoring project on the Great Barrier Reef and Coral Sea.

There may be opportunities for members to go on these trips as volunteers. Anyone who is interested should contact Tony Stokes Phone (077) 500 700 or write c/o GBRMPA, PO Box 1379, Townsville, Qld 4810.

THE CAIRNS ESPLANADE

The long-running saga continues. The mayor of Cairns seems intent on widening the Esplanade from the city to Aplin Street. For this, impact studies will be needed but as yet these have not been initiated, and until they are, no decisions can be made. Lindsay will alert members when something has actually happened, to comment on or protest about!

Graham Harrington has had discussions with Grahame Finnegan of Cairns BOCA about a joint project to put a display stand on the Esplanade giving information about migratory birds to promote public awareness.

RAT-BAIT UPDATE

The Bureau of Sugar Experiment Station (BSES) recently held a two day seminar aimed at giving cane growers and government officials the latest information on issues relating to rat control in North Queensland. John Young who has been campaigning against the use of *Klerat* (see Contact call March 96) which has decimated owl and raptor populations in the Herbert Valley, spoke of relationship between owls and rats in canefields and led a group on a spotlighting tour during which they watched a Grass Owl swoop down on a rat.

At the May campout John said the use of *Klerat* had already decreased and he was very hopeful that it would be banned completely. A 'wildlife friendly' bait is already in use in the UK and under trial here.

TINAROO DAM

The Management Plan for Lake Tinaroo and its Immediate Surroundings is being prepared and a draft will be released for public comment in the next few months. DPI Natural Resources are particularly anxious to receive input from experienced birders (and have expressly asked for input from BNQ members) on the values of Tinaroo for birding and as breeding habitat. Elinor Scambler has offered to coordinate responses and would like to hear from any members with data, comments or suggestions. Have your say or it may be overrun with jet skis and water skiers!!!!!!

BIRDS ON FARMS

This nationwide RAOU project is up and running! It is a very worthwhile project and something anyone can join. Ask your area representative.

AROUND THE NORTH

In the Mossman area 2 Oriental Reed Warblers and Broad-billed Flycatchers were reported in March.

In April, Black-faced Woodswallows at Mt Molloy and 2 Rajah Shelducks at Mt Carbine were unusual for that area.

Pacific Swallows have been reported between Mossman and Daintree all year.

A male Australian Shoveler, 150 Black-tailed Godwits in breeding plumage and Plum-headed Finches were a highlight of the Giru area in mid-April.

A small dam near main road near Mingela is worth watching. Australian, Baillon's Crakes, Buff-banded Rails and Banded Lapwings were seen there in April and early May.

Unusual in the area, a Black-breasted Buzzard was seen at the bottom of Paluma Range road and a few days later a road-killed Spotted Nightjar.

Late departures. Channel-billed Cuckoos on Tableland and Pied Imperial Pigeons in Townsville, at the beginning of May.

* Are some birds in Innisfail becoming computer literate? One member has reported a bird calling "Spellcheck Spellcheck" outside her window.