



# Contact Call

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

March 1997 ♦ Issue : Wandering Whistling-Duck

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## OFFICE BEARERS

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Klaus Uhlenhut (070) 655 181  
Cairns: Lindsay Fisher (070) 581 164

### Atherton Tablelands:

Elinor Scambler (070) 953 296

### Mossman/Daintree:

Del Richards (070) 983 103

### Cape York Peninsula:

Michael Barnett (070) 698 365

### Western Queensland:

Peter Britton (077) 872 188

## BNQ CALENDAR

### March 28th -31st, 1997.

Easter Campout at Lumholtz National Park. This park is still closed to the general public. So get away from the crowds and come to the campout in the central section of the park and help continue the survey at Princess Hills. Contact Graham Harrington or Jo Wieneke for details of camp site and access.

### April 25-27th, 1997.

AGM and Campout at Greenvale.

The township of Greenvale is situated on the Gregory Development Rd, roughly equidistant between Townsville and Cairns and should provide opportunities for some interesting inland birding. Accommodation is available at the caravan park, motel or in self contained cottages. For bookings for cottages or the motel - Phone Doug Corbett (077) 884 222.

See you there!

## WE NEED SOME FRESH BLOOD ON THE COMMITTEE!

Annual General Meetings are usually excruciatingly boring. We try to offset such by offering hours of wonderful birding in exchange for one hour of your time to keep BNQ tottering along by attending the AGM - this year to be held on the ANZAC long weekend at Greenvale.

This our second AGM and our first elections since we formed our Group in November 1994 at Broadwater State Forest Park. I believe it would be good for the Group if we saw a few new faces on the Committee, particularly on the Executive and most particularly as Convenor!

If someone can take over from me I shall be able to support them because the past Convenor is an Executive position. If you would like to be nominated please contact the Secretary or get your nomination form signed by a member and send it in.

We also need Regional Representatives on the Committee. This Committee does not actually meet as the reps. are so far flung. However the reps. are always invited to Executive meetings and are informed of the agenda beforehand. We don't have many Exec. meetings either! Two I think it was last year. So we don't overwork our officers. Reps. are important as the eyes and ears of the Group throughout north Queensland. If you would like to be a Regional Rep. please nominate. Unless we hear to the contrary we will assume that the existing Regional Reps. are willing to stand again!! GH

## AGENDA FOR AGM

Saturday, April 26th, 2.00pm

1. Minutes of previous AGM
2. Convenor's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Reports from the Regions
5. Election of Office Bearers
6. Appointment of Auditor.
7. Business - Items of business must be submitted to the Secretary in writing.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Henceforth RAOU will go by the name 'BIRDS Australia' or where appropriate 'The BIRDS Australia Group'. This was approved at the AGM in Albany last November.

It is going to take some getting used to! However in my book, we are ideally placed now to maintain the professionalism of the Union for the ornithological activities, by using the RAOU title, whilst having a warmer image to the general public for the conservation and bird survey activities with 'BIRDS Australia'.

The implication is that BNQ will need to change its name to something like 'BIRDS Australia: North Queensland Group'. We will make a decision at the AGM. GH

## FIRE IS FOR THE BIRDS?

I have been half-nelsoned into compiling an article for Wingspan summarising the papers and discussion dealing with birds and fire that were presented at the Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress (SHOC) at Albany.

One of the difficulties of managing our ecosystems for the future survival of our species was brought home to me when considering the contributions by a number of authors. A constant anomaly in Australian ecosystems is that fire is a common occurrence and often an essential component of so many of them. The fires often cause drastic, temporary reductions in bird numbers and yet if fire does not ever occur the habitat changes and the species are replaced by others.

This becomes a critical situation in the case of some rare and restricted birds. Alan Burbidge and Alan Danks point out that Noisy Scrub-birds and Western Bristlebirds are now thriving because of fire protection and artificial relocation to nearby habitats. Some of these areas are now unburnt for 50 years. Apart from the inflammability of such old vegetation The Two Alans also indicate that in the 'long-term' the vegetation may change to

a taller type unsuitable for these birds. The long term must be long indeed if 50 years has not shown any important changes!

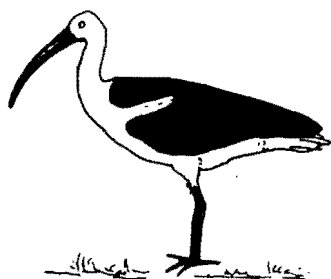
How can we possibly plan and manage over such long time frames? The fact is we cannot. Over the next hundred years the climate will change; society will change its philosophy and priorities; the economic imperatives will be different. No one can predict these things. We cannot expect our grandchildren to view Bristlebirds as we do. They may be seen as more or less valuable. The habitat may have expanded enormously - or disappeared. In a time of war bristlebirds would get short shrift I fear. In Zaire the Rwandan refugees have wasted a World Heritage Park.

All we can do is put the systems in place that allow us to measure the changes as they happen (however gradually), and be poised to make informed, sensible and unselfish decisions in response. Its a doddle really!

Graham Harrington.

#### SOME BIRD NOTES FROM NORTH QUEENSLAND

**Straw-necked Ibis** - *Thresikornis spinicollis*. 8.11.96. Hasties Swamp, Atherton Tableland. Just as we arrived at this excellent waterbird locality we observed a group of approx 15 Straw-necked Ibis with many more Purple Swampheens and a single White-faced Heron. Among the Straw-necked Ibis were several young birds with brown wings and with a dark flush through the white feathers of the head. One bird was outstanding. It was of a different colour pattern to the rest and may be just an aberrant. It was the same size as the rest of the flock, had a black bill and black legs. The head, neck and undersides were white with no dark flush through the feathers of the head. The wings were black with very little shine. We did not note details of the tail and underwing as the bird became obscured by others as they all flew off and did not return. Of special note while the birds were at rest was that the white of the breast continued as a broad white band or stripe between the black of the wing and the black of the back. In other words as a broad white leading edge to the wing.



**Pied Butcherbird** - *Cracticus nigrolaris*. 4-6.11.96. Undara Lodge via Mt Surprise. While camping here we observed a family of Pied Butcherbirds - two adults and two immature scrounging for food. RM noticed one of the adult birds take a small twig off one of the Narrow-leafed Ironbarks - *Eucalyptus crehya* and take it over to a small broken branch of another ironbark. The bird then proceeded to probe the ragged end of the broken branch with the twig as though probing for insects. There was no hollow in the broken end of the branch and the break was very fresh, maybe only a few days old. The bird probed for maybe 10 seconds and, getting no result, dropped the twig of leaves. Are there other records of this or other species of butcherbirds using a tool in this way?

Roy and Margaret Mackay

#### ROUND THE NORTH

**Odd nest sites:** Del Richards reports that Spangled Drongos have been nesting on power-poles around Mossman. Is this to get away from Green Ants or because there is a shortage of suitable trees?

A Willy Wagtail in the Giru area raised three young in a nest balanced on a strand of a barbed wire fence.

**Interesting sightings:** A Little Ringed Plover has been seen regularly earlier this year at Pelican Point, Lake Tinaroo. Pacific Swallows and Barn Swallows have been resident at Newell Beach. Great-billed Herons successfully raised one young at a nest on Barratt's Creek, Daintree.

#### New Wetland Reserve For Ingham

A large wetland west of Ingham was set to be drained and ploughed for cane. Luckily local wildlife consultant and film-maker John Young heard of this and, knowing the area to be habitat for Grass Owls as well as many other species, he is encouraging the Ingham Shire Council to include the whole area in a specially gazetted wetland reserve. John has completed a study of the area and negotiations with the Council are underway.

**Lure of the Daintree** is the title of John Young's latest video. It has some wonderful footage of birds of the Wet Tropics including nesting Great-billed Herons, nest-stitching Golden-headed Cisticolas, displaying Riflebirds to name but a few highlights. If it is not in a local shop you can order it from Ray Smith Productions, PO Box 339, Maleny, Qld 4552.

#### Orange-footed Scrubfowl

Very little appears to be known about the dispersion of young Scrubfowl. They can fly as soon as they leave the nest and have even turned up on boats at sea. They appear in Townsville gardens, at least 11km from the closest known mounds - on Magnetic Island. If you have any records of young Scrubfowl I'd be interested to hear. Jo Wieneke

...and on the subject of megapodes.....

**The Third International Megapode Symposium** is to be held at The Little Desert Lodge, Nhill, Vic. From 6-8 December, 1997. According to the organisers 'it won't be just a dull bunch of academics talking to each other. This time, we are keen to emphasise the personal experiences and adventures of those involved in studying these birds in some of the most exciting and remote regions of the world. Speakers from USA, Indonesia, Oceania, Europe and Australia will be coming.' If you are interested, contact Dr Darryl Jones, Faculty of Env. Sciences, Griffith University, Nathan, Qld 4111.

#### BOOK REVIEW

*Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef - Australia* by Lloyd Nielsen. Pub. Gerard Industries Pty Ltd, Bowdon, South Australia 1996. 332 pages

Lloyd Nielsen's labour of love and expertise is out at last and is creating interesting waves with its revolutionary field guide format plus lots of up-to-date information. It is very clearly written and easy to follow, although users are starting to bypass the constant use of the Index by writing in relevant page cross-references.

Christoph Imboden's Foreword sets a clear bird conservation context, reinforced by the author throughout. Extra comments on 'ethical birding' especially in relation to nest disturbance and the use of tapes would be a welcome addition.

The Introduction includes other useful notes plus a page on responsible rare sightings, an issue faced realistically throughout the book. The only species on which I would have suggested that the author caution the reader more firmly is the Red-headed Honeyeater - many less experienced observers do not know the immature male Scarlet well enough.

The Field Guide is NOT your standard taxonomic order guide and experienced Australian birdwatchers are confused by the new traffic rules. But the 'size - key feature - possible species'

format works very well for learners and visitors and this includes visitors who may be very experienced overseas. To follow up they need a comprehensive Field Guide as well, giving full plumage details and males, females and immatures together on the same page. Nielsen's illustrations are not to scale on each page but this shouldn't matter - his book encourages the observer to assess size constantly, and with conventional texts you often need to compare birds on different pages with different scales, anyway.

Almost all the illustrations are good for basic identification purposes, although one which does need change is the very bright orangey-brown Little Shrike-thrush, which could confuse - especially with the juvenile Golden Whistler (not illustrated). The immature White-eared Monarch also needs to be included. The female Australian King-Parrot could have been added on page 37, it is no less 'brightly coloured' than the Red-winged Parrot; the distribution map for Figbird (race *vieilloti*, north to Townsville only - page 40) shows the whole Wet Tropics area. I am intrigued by the word 'immaculate' applied to plumage - it is not being used in the technical sense of 'spotless'. The Brown Gerygone needs to be listed as a possibility (even if not illustrated) as a 'small brown bird of the rainforest'. Perhaps the summary for the Oriental Cuckoo could have included its (mainly) migrant status, as for the Koel and Channel-billed. Minor errors are few - someone's computer invented a new word which pops up often ('moreso') and the

size of the female White-bellied Sea-Eagle is misprinted as 59 cm instead of 83 cm on page 48 only.

The Field Guide finishes with an excellent section on 'Difficult Groups of Birds' but I don't believe anyone has yet found the Philosopher's Stone which (short of DNA) will infallibly or even frequently ID Atherton Scrub-wrens in the field. (To misquote George Bernard Shaw, if you put all the Atherton Scrub-wren observers in the world end to end, they would not reach a conclusion).

The next major section, 'Status and Range: Habits: Where to See It' gives much extra information about every bird, in taxonomic (Christidis and Boles) order. This section makes the book well worth while for the experienced local birdwatcher who will be stimulated to further investigate issues of range and status. Good coverage is given to all birds and areas although perhaps the southern part of the region is under-represented.

Calls are not covered in this book unless they are particularly relevant to ID but one surprising omission is the Lesser Sooty Owl, whose distinctive call is often the only guide to where you should be pointing your spotlight. The only call resource listed is David Stewart's 2-tape set (a companion to this book). OK, but to assist birdwatchers as much as possible I would always also recommend 'Birds of North Queensland Tropical Rainforest' by A. Griffin and R. Swaby, which is still the best tape for wet tropics rainforest and margins, and has birds not included by Stewart.

The final section - Best areas, maps etc - includes altitudes for major towns, is very useful and punctures a few myths! On the whole directions are clear. Readers need to be aware that businesses, facilities, and access can change over time. Some corrections are: For information on Atherton Tableland National Parks (page 281) call the Lake Eacham office, 070-953768 (not Atherton). Access to Hastie's Swamp (page 293) is not direct from Hastie Rd. Turn right from Hastie Rd into Koci Rd and follow it along to the National Park sign. Blakey's Crossing - page 312 - needs a permit.

Overall assessment: You will not regret buying this book!

Elinor Scambler

advertisement

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☛ CONTRIBUTIONS TO **Contact**  
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**THANKS**

BNQ is very grateful for the assistance provided by the office of the Member for Thuringowa, Ken McElligott, in the production of this newsletter.

**BIRDERS OF NORTH QUEENSLAND - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
GREENVALE, APRIL 26TH, 1997.**

**NOMINATION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

I wish to nominate..... for the position of Convenor.

I wish to nominate ..... for the position of Secretary.

I wish to nominate..... for the position of Treasurer

I wish to nominate..... as representative for..... area.

Signed.....

Please return to the Secretary, PO Box 129, Townsville, Qld 4810. Or Fax to (077)715 899