



Birds Australia

Contact Call

Birds Australia

North Queensland Group

June 1998 • Issue: Cotton Pygmy-goose

Send correspondence to secretary at:
P O Box 2209, Cairns Qld 4870
email : lkfisher@north.net.au

wishing to nominate for these positions please contact the Secretary.

lkfisher@north.net.au This way we can keep members up to date.

CALENDAR

TRIP REPORTS

Send newsletter reports to:
Jo Wieneke, 22 Bishop Street
Townsville Qld 4810
email: bowerbird@msm.com

WAVE THE WADERS GOODBYE

OFFICE BEARERS

Convenor:
Graham Harrington (07) 4096 5051

Secretary:
Lindsay Fisher (07) 4058 1164
Fax (AH)(07) 4058 0337

Treasurer: Elinor Scambler
(07) 4095 3296

Area Representatives:

Mackay:

Bowen/Ayr: Jon Wren (07) 4786 2614

Townsville: Jo Wieneke (07) 4771 4707

Innisfail/Tully: Klaus Uhlenhut
(07) 4065 5181

Cairns: Keith Fisher (07) 4058 1164

Atherton Tableland: Jon Nott
(07) 4096 8230

Mossman/Daintree:
Del Richards (07) 4098 3103

Cape York Peninsula:
Michael Barnett (07) 4069 8365

Western Queensland:
Peter Britton (07) 4087 2188

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE NEWS

Graham Harrington, as most people should know by now, is standing down as convenor of BA-NQG to become National President of Birds Australia. We wish him well with his new position and are very privileged to have the National President in our group.

Jon Nott has agreed to be convenor and this will be confirmed at the AGM, unless anyone else would like the position. Jon's contacts are Ph/fax: (070) 968230, PO Box 776, Malanda QLD 4885 or by email : Nott@internetnorth.com.au

Ian Sinclair has offered to replace Jon as Tableland Rep. and Marian Crouther has offered to be the rep. for Mackay. Denise Fowler has agreed to be Torres Strait rep. - a new position. These positions will be confirmed at the AGM. Anyone else



June 27th - 28th AGM. Mission Beach. See separate sheet for details. **PLEASE ADVISE LINDSAY IF YOU ARE COMING!** We need to know for catering. BA shirts/stickers will be for sale bring your \$\$\$\$!

July 26th Sun - Redden Island with BOCA. Meet at 8.30am on Cinderella St, Machins Beach at the entrance before the toilet block. Species list will be available (119 species). Contact Keith Fisher.

August 8th - 9th: Campout at Murray Falls forestry camping area near Tully. Contact Keith Fisher.

August 29th - Sat Tableland BOP watch. For details see report p2. Contact Gary Wilson 015 962 668

September 6th Sun - Lamb Range transects count. Meet at Platypus Park, Atherton at 7.30am or 7.45am at Henry Hannam Drive on Mareeba-Atherton Rd. Contact Graham Harrington.

21st-31st: BA campout at Geraldton WA-- Organised by the West Australian Group.

October 10th Sat - Sarus Crane count - Elinor Scambler

October 18th Sun - Redden Island Count

STOP PRESS- Talk on New Zealand birds at CSIRO in Atherton on Thursday evening 25th June by Karen Baird - Check details with Jon Nott - Don't Miss this one!

Arrangements can change after publication of Contact Call, contact local reps. for the latest info. This will give more flexibility, especially with weather conditions. Extra events. may also be arranged

E-MAIL

Could members who have e-mail and would like to be on the BA-NQG e-mailing list please send your address to:

A joint display and talk to farewell the waders was held on the Cairns Esplanade by members of Birds Australia and the Bird Observers Club of Australia on Sunday 15th March 1998. Perfect weather greeted the 70 people who attended. Graham Finnegan, from Cairns BOCA, gave a talk on the importance of the Cairns foreshore for migratory waders and Lindsay Fisher talked about the white birds of the Esplanade. Varied Honeyeaters in our shade tree tried to compete with the speakers! General information from both birding groups was handed out along with posters from Environment Australia, thanks to Doug Watkins.

The tide started to recede just as the talks finished, but the birds were absent with only a solitary Eastern Curlew obliging us with its presence. Slowly other species appeared - Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey-tailed Tattler, Lesser and Greater Sandplover, Red-necked Stint, Pied Oystercatcher and Great Egret. A Black-necked Stork soared above - quite an unusual event and an Osprey was fishing offshore. An array of telescopes was on hand for people to use and an enjoyable and informative morning was had by all. We even made the front page of the Cairns Post the next day, a picture of one of our members, Dawn Magarry, looking at the waders. More Esplanade news page 2.

Keith Fisher

STARCKE STATION



(Mt. Webb NP.)

22 members, two visitors from Canada and another two from Brisbane attended the four-day Easter campout on the edge of Mt. Webb NP. This is situated 80 km north of Cooktown, 1½ hrs. drive along bitumen and gravel station roads. Our HQ

was a disused block station house picturesquely set in a sea of Sicklepod weed overlooking another vista of Sicklepod! It was fully equipped with natural air conditioning (a few missing windows) and sliding doors that had been left open, allowing the cattle in. Thanks to John Clarkson and Jon Nott with his family of cleaners for making the place habitable. Some people camped in the house whilst the rest of us camped outside amongst the weeds. Running water was supplied via a large water tank.

The evenings were spent having communal Pasta, Curry and Bitsa meals washed down with the odd bottle of vino - An amusing menu was supplied for the Bovine International, as we christened the HQ.

Over the three days we did do some serious work, surveying the different habitats of the area. These ranged from rainforest, riverine rainforest, and woodlands to heath and coast. The coastal dunes south of Cape Flattery were especially spectacular. Members were given training in survey techniques in preparation for the upcoming Atlas project. Some interesting species seen were Tropical Scrubwrens which were common in riverine and rainforest pockets, White-streaked Honeyeater in dune heath habitat, White-browed Robin heard and seen in most habitats including open woodland, rainforest (including riverine rainforest), Black-winged Monarchs were common and three Satin Flycatchers were seen. White Cedars adjacent to the house attracted large numbers of Wompoo Pigeons. We ended up with a total of 93 confirmed species. Spotting proved to be more fun for the herpetologists with frogs and snakes spotted but we did manage to see a Large-tailed Nightjar and hear Papuan Frogmouth.

The Queensland Department of Environment will be given a list of birds for each habitat at Starcke as part of our aim of producing species lists for National Parks in North Queensland.

Thanks to the organisers John Clarkson, Jon Nott and Graham Harrington and all those who helped make it a fun and productive weekend. A full trip report and species list is available by e-mail or can be posted.

Contact **Keith or Lindsay**.

Mt. FOX FIELD TRIP

May 16th-17th. The Mt Fox area, west of Ingham is a mixture of open eucalypt woodland, closed mixed eucalypt - casuarina woodland, rainforest and

pasture. It is well of the usual 'beaten track' of birders and Townsville members spent a pleasant weekend at Margaret Streamer's property there. On Saturday afternoon we birded around the property and from the verandah. Little and Grey Shrike-thrushes, Barred Cuckoo-shrike and various honeyeaters were among the birds seen.

Sunday morning saw us climbing Mt Fox crater - not a prolific birding area but we flushed a party of Brown Quail that had been feeding near pellets regurgitated by Pied Currawongs and Red-backed Fairy-wrens hopped around in some low bushes. From the top of the crater we watched a large winter flock of about 60 Currawongs moving noisily across the woodland below. We also visited the rainforest patch that Margaret surveys regularly for the Forestry Dept. but by this time of the morning birds apart from Fan-tailed Cuckoos and Brown Gerygones were quiet and rain was threatening again.

We look forward to a return visit.

Jo Wieneke

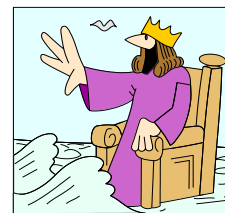


KABAN FIELD TRIP

Members and guests were treated to a weekend on a private property at Kaban off the Tumoulin road on 23rd-24th May, thanks to Joan and John Collins. The diverse habitats in a small area contributed to us seeing 69 species of birds and six species of mammals. Habitat types included *Eucalyptus tereticornis*, *Corymbia intermedia* woodland where we spotlighted Common Brushtail Possum, Common Ringtail Possum, Greater Glider, Sugar Glider and Barking Owl. *Eucalyptus resinifera*, *Corymbia intermedia*, *Syncarpia glomulifera* and *Allocasuarina torulosa* open forest where there were Crested Shrike-tit, Grey Shrike-thrush, White-throated and Brown Treecreepers along with Fuscous Honeyeater. *Eucalyptus crebra* and *Corymbia citriodora* woodland where there were Varied Sittellas, White-naped Honeyeaters, Jackie Winter and a Grey Goshawk soaring overhead. In the *Eucalyptus molucanna* woodland there was Grey Butcherbirds as well as both Laughing and Blue-winged Kookaburras and a Barn Owl visited the camp in the evening. Rhodes Grass (*Chloris gayana*) paddocks had Golden-headed Cisticola, Tawny Grassbird and Eastern Grey Kangaroo in them. A full trip report and

species list is available by e-mail or can be posted. Contact **Keith or Lindsay**.

WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON?



ESPLANADE UPDATE

BA-NQG has had a policy of positive publicity for the birds of the Cairns foreshore. As part of this policy a letter was sent to the Mayor of Cairns, Tom Pyne, suggesting that our group along with Cairns City Council apply for joint NHT funding for a bird interpretive centre. This we proposed would be situated at a suitable place along the Esplanade. The Mayor liked the idea and instructed his officers to meet with our group and discuss the proposal. Graham Harrington and Keith Fisher had a meeting, with CCC in which it was discovered that the council have advanced plans to upgrade the existing Esplanade interpretive display. We were asked to contribute to this display, which we will do.

Our proposal, which is separate from the existing CCC display update, is to situate a world class bird observatory overlooking the foreshore equipped with telescopes and aids for identification of the shorebirds. The observatory could also include a video display of the migration routes of the birds that spend time on the foreshore, highlighting their breeding behaviour and the plumage changes that take place between breeding and non-breeding seasons. An advisory service for tourists wishing to see birds in any part of north Queensland could also be included.

This was enthusiastically received and it was made clear that we could proceed now with our application and not wait for any outcome of redevelopment plans.

Consultants have now been appointed to gather the community's ideas before letting out tenders for redevelopment designs. We have had a meeting with the consultants, to put forward our views and they have expressed a wish to retain a bird concept in their plans. This means (we assume and pray) that they are unlikely to do anything which will actually damage the bird spectacle. It seems it is sometimes better to propose our own strategies than to oppose those

of others. Cairns BOCA have also been involved in these talks

Graham Harrington & Keith Fisher.

GOULDIAN FINCH AND BIRDS AT WATERHOLES SURVEY

This combined survey is an ongoing exercise to gather information of all birds that come to drink during daylight hours at waterholes or dams. Nobody has done any work on it previously, and it's interesting to see a pattern developing in regards to the arrival and departure times of different species. This survey is mainly meant for the dry areas of Queensland, with the hope of finding Gouldian Finches at the same time. If you are heading anywhere inland and plan to sit at a waterhole, pond or dam please ring Klaus or Brenda 07 4065 5181 or send an email to: kirrama@4kz.com.au and we can send you the forms. It's an easy procedure and very rewarding. We are looking forward to hearing from you. Happy birding!

Klaus Uhlenhut



BOPPING (Bird of Prey Watch)

Following the success of last years Tablelands BOP Watch, and in order to obtain comparative data, BA-NQG will conduct another watch on Saturday August 29th. The data gathered will be forwarded to the national office and will assist in determining raptor population dynamics and the effects on diurnal raptors of the release of the Rabbit Calicivirus. The format of the activity will be similar to the last years, ie. members are requested to spend several hours driving from their point of residence, observing and recording birds of prey as they go. Anyone wishing to join up with other members may meet at Platypus Park at 1pm. The Watch will conclude at Platypus Park in Atherton sometime between 1630 and 1700 to tally and review birds seen. A barbecue and an informal meeting regarding the second Atlas of Australian Birds will follow this. (See end of page 3).

This activity is an ideal opportunity for members not resident on the Tablelands eg. from Mossman, Cairns, Gordonvale and Innisfail, to make a valuable contribution to BOP watching, as these coastal locations are in the same observation zone. Three or four people in a vehicle is useful in this activity and the whole family can be roped in - just remember to record the time taken,

distance travelled and number and species of birds seen and to have the driver keep their eyes on the road! BOP Watch record sheets, instruction and identification sheets can be obtained from me either by mail or at Platypus Park at 1.00pm on the day. You do not have to be a registered BOP Watcher to participate.

Gary Wilson

NORTHERN GULF REGIONAL STRATEGY GROUP MEETING

On the 1st of May a regional strategy group met in Georgetown to continue with preparation of the Northern Gulf Regional Strategy. This is a bioregional strategy for the area covering the catchments of the Mitchell, Staaten, Gilbert and Norman Rivers. Groups and organisations attending included State Government Departments, the Shires of Cook, Mareeba, Etheridge and Croydon, the North Queensland Land Council and a number of Landcare and ICM groups. Ian Fox represented Birds Australia. The primary purpose of the meeting was to commence the development of the Northern Gulf Regional Strategy under guidelines established by the Queensland LCMC (Landcare and Catchment Management Council). Under these guidelines, no future Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding applications will be considered unless they fall within the priorities set by regional strategies. It would seem that the continued presence of Birds Australia on the group could be valuable in providing advice on long term strategic goals for habitat management. The time frame for completing the strategy is tight. The group intends to have a draft document ready for release and consultation within the next few months, with a final strategy required well before the end of the year, prior to the next round of NHT funding applications. The next meeting is in Croydon on 11th and 12th of June, while a meeting in Normanton on 30th and 31st of July is planned for finalisation of the draft strategy. If anyone would like to attend these meetings on behalf of Birds Australia or to obtain details about the process to date, please contact Ian Fox on (H) (07) 4091 4193.

Ian Fox

BEACH STONE-CURLEW SURVEY

Record sheets for this species continue to trickle in and I thank all those who have submitted them. Recently I have not been as active on this project as I should have

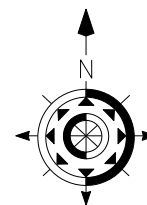
been and I apologise for this, it is now time to crank activities up a notch and to report on those records thus far submitted.

Record sheets for eight locations, six on public land, one on private and one on a national park, have been submitted; one bird was reported on two occasions, two on two occasions and three, in each case two adult and one juvenile, three times and the eighth indicated that the species was absent from a section of Central Queensland Coast. Two record sheets provided details of birds being disturbed by human activities. I am about to submit the records obtained thus far to DoE Far North Region so that they can be entered in the main database. Copies of records from the area around Townsville have been supplied to Margot Warnett of DoE Northern Region who is involved in a study of Stone-curlews in that area. Margot is also coordinating the production of displays in the new interpretative centre in Cardwell and I recently spent an hour there with her - the displays are excellent and the Beach Stone-curlew and Dugong feature prominently

I have included another record sheet with this newsletter and request that members spend a few moments to detail their sightings and send them to me. Second and subsequent records from the same location are particularly valuable. Additional sheets may be obtained by writing to me at 1/15 Golf Links Road, Atherton 4883 or by phoning me during business hours on (07) 40928444.

I particularly request members to consider completing record forms whilst they are travelling on the Cape or in the Gulf and in future to complete one in parallel with **Atlassing** activities. Your assistance in furthering our knowledge of this vulnerable species is much appreciated.

Gary Wilson.



ATLAS PROJECT

An atlas workshop was held in Melbourne during April and was a huge success generating a lot of discussion. A major article about the Atlas Project, including information about the workshop, will appear in the June issue of Wingspan. Those coming on the BOP watch in August will have an opportunity

to discuss the atlas and in particular how our group will approach it.



CATTLE EGRET NEWS

This season Cattle Egret numbers at the Ross River colony passed the 2000 mark. Most left between February and March but a few remained at the roost until mid May. Many cattle herds in the Cromarty/Giru/Woodstock area have attendant Cattle Egrets this year but we'd like to know where the rest have gone. Counts at the river continue every Thursday night. If you would like to be involved phone 07 4771 4707.

Jo Wieneke

LAKE TINAROO FAECAL COLIFORM STUDY

Some months ago BA-NQG responded with a submission to a call for public comment on the draft Barron River ICM Plan. We were particularly keen to present data regarding the number of waterbirds on and about Lake Tinaroo and to add balance to the suggestion that they may be responsible for a substantial input of faecal coliforms into the lake.

Recent work by CSIRO has enabled researchers to determine the source of faecal coliforms eg. from mammals, birds, bovine herbivores etc, by the analysis of coliform sterols and Dr Rhys Leeming of that organisation recently visited the location in company with Barron River forum and *Birds Australia* members and ICM coordinator Graham Wilkinson. A multi-site and cross season sampling regime has been planned and a pilot run was undertaken on April 21 when few birds were observed and inflow rates were high due to recent rains. Initial results of the survey indicate that faecal E. coli and Streptococcus levels at the six sites sampled were very low; sterol analysis results are yet to come. Later and more extensive sampling, including above and below town sewer discharge points, will broaden our understanding of the level and source of faecal coliforms in Lake Tinaroo, BA-NQG members can assist in the study by maintaining records of numbers and breeding activities of birds in and about the lake and by completing **Atlas** sheets for locations about it or joining the next survey on June 1st. Further information about the sampling

project can be obtained from me or from Graham Wilkinson of the Barron River ICM on (07) 40 928521.

Gary Wilson

MACKAY NEWS

Good rains this year have attracted dry country birds to the rainforest edges including a small flock of Cockatiel, Red-winged Parrots and Grey Butcherbird - a first in 8 years residence, they are normally found much further west. Other good sightings have been a Square-tailed Kite and a Black-headed White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike (see David James article). Foggy nights have attracted in quail including regular visitors Red-backed and Painted Button-quail. Two not so common King Quail were seen and caught for banding. Tess Brickhill found two Eungella Honeyeater nests, her observations were written up in the March Bird Observers magazine and sent to HANZAB, as was the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher work that Marion and Tess have been doing in recent years.

Marion Crouther

WHAT HAVE THE BIRDS BEEN DOING?



David James in Townsville posted this interesting item on BirdingAus (e-mail discussion group) recently: - Last week near Innisfail I saw a **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike** with a face pattern very similar to that of a typical adult **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** of the humid northeastern form. I have seen quite a few such birds in North Qld., mostly around Townsville, but a flock of eight or so was hanging around N.E Herald Cay in the Coral Sea last June. They are more common than dark-morph WBSC in North Qld in my experience. This particular BFCS-like head-pattern is not dealt with in any of the contemporary field guides. I think there is much potential to miss-identify these WBCS as BFC if observers concentrate on face-patterns, as the field guides suggest. To me, these birds usually stand out as WBSC by call and jizz, especially the shorter wings and tail. I am looking into other differences like wing-pattern and tail tip. Has anyone seen these birds, or have any information about them? (See Mackay news).

Send to: **David James** PO Box 5225 Townsville Mail Centre 4810

We better all take a second look at BFCS and WFCS!

28th March. **Black-breasted Buzzard** at Mt. Carbine - Del Richards. On 3rd May an immature BbB was at Pelican Point on Lake Tinaroo - Gary Wilson.

25th March. **Long-toed Stint** at Port Douglas - Del Richards.

April. Two **Rufous Owls** reported on the Cairns Botanic Gardens boardwalk.

8th April. Nine **Pink-eared Ducks** At Saltwater Creek, Mossman - Del Richards and a flock (?) seen by visitors on 8th May at the Cairns Esplanade (per Andy Anderson).

25th April. Six **Plum-headed Finches** Townsville Town Common - K&L Fisher

26th April. Nine **Black-necked Stork** (7adult+2juvs) at the turnoff to AIMS on Cape Cleveland (Townsville). This is the largest aggregation of this species that I have seen in Eastern Australia (I have seen similar numbers in Kakadu). Gary Wilson. On 26th May Jo Wieneke reported that on the Townsville Common there were 17 **Black-necked Stork**, mainly immature. They are usually seen here in pairs or small groups of 4-5 and this is by far the largest number I've ever seen together. Anyone improve on that!

9th May. Four adult **Banded Lapwing** seen at the Cairns airport (no they weren't tourists!), unusual in Cairns, although the odd single bird has been seen on the coast in recent years. There have also been records near Mareeba over the last few years. KF.

20th May. Two **Australian Pratincole** and four **Pacific Golden Plover** at Cairns Airport. KF.

23rd May 200+ **Plum-headed Finches** at Serpentine Lagoon nr Townsville. Jo Wieneke

24th May. Five **Sarus Crane** south of Malanda. KF.

25th May **Black-chinned Honeyeater** feeding **Brush Cuckoo** at Cromarty south of Townsville. Jo Wieneke

25th May AIMS Turnoff, south of Townsville 150+ **Black Swans**. JW

31st May **Black-throated Finches** nesting at Serpentine Lagoon nr Townsville. Jo Wieneke

THANKS

Birds Australia North Queensland Group is very grateful for the support given by the office of the Member for Leichhardt **Warren Entsch**, who is himself a keen birdwatcher. Also thanks to all the contributors for making this a bumper edition.

Keith and Lindsay