



Birds Australia

Contact Call

Birds Australia

North Queensland Group

June 1999 • Issue: Grey Teal

TOWNSVILLE →

**AGM & GET-TOGETHER- QUEENS BIRTHDAY
WEEKEND 12th - 14th JUNE 1999 TOWNSVILLE**

Members and non-members are welcome to attend just one event or the whole weekend. Come along and enjoy the birdwatching, talks and socialising. Contact - Jo Wieneke 07 4771 4707 Mud maps will be available for the weekend

AGENDA

- Saturday 1.00** Meet at National Parks conference room at Pallarenda. From Rowes Bay go past the turn off for the Common & continue to end of road, through Pallarenda National Park to the Northern Region Centre in the Old Quarantine Building.
- 1.30** AGM. This is an election year and members are requested to return nomination forms to the Secretary before June 8th.
- 3.30** Afternoon tea.
- 4.00** Presentation by David James on the Birds of Herald Cay, where he visited with an expedition of the Qld Geographical Society.
- 6.00** Visit to the Ross River bird and bat colony. A wonderful spectacle of many birds including ibis arriving to roost as the 1000's of flying foxes depart.
- 7.00** BA-NQG Banquet at the Boiling Billy - Townsville City centre. BYO - \$15 per head. Home cooking with a difference - we'll have the whole restaurant to ourselves. **PLEASE ADVISE JO IF YOU ARE COMING BY 8TH JUNE!**
- Sunday** Excursion to Cromarty Wetlands. Early birds meet at Alligator Creek - Cape Bowling Green National Park at 7am or 8.30 for those who want a lie-in! We'll follow the course of the waterways from the rainforest, through lowlands, the Black Scrub, the Cromarty reed-beds to the coast. This will be led by David James and Mark Stoneman ex MLA who is actively promoting the area. Mark has kindly offered us to have a BYO lunch at his property Cromarty Station.
- 7.00** BBQ at the Bush Garden Mundingburra - catered for by NQCC. Vegetarians and carnivores catered for at reasonable prices and drinks available. This is an excellent birding spot close to town with resident frogmouths. The local Landcare group is doing a revegetation project here.
- Monday 7.30** Meet at the Town Common for a BYO Breakfast with the Birds followed by an Atlas talk at Bald Rock car park - 9am.

Things to bring - Chair, mug, insect repellent, sunscreen, binoculars, money, and umbrella.

Accommodation - Self arranging, there is plenty to choose from - Rowes Bay Caravan Park is handy for Pallarenda and the Common and has a range of facilities. (07 4771 3576)

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EVENTS CALENDAR

- June 12th -14th Queens Birthday** AGM to be held in Townsville
- June 26th - July 11th Atlas** campout, Rutland Plains, Cape York Peninsula - contact Ian Sinclair.
- June 27th Sun** Wader counts, Cairns Esplanade 6.30am, boat 6.30am - contact Keith Fisher.
- July 11th Sun** Half-day activity on the Tableland - contact Ian Sinclair.
- July 25th Sun** Serpentine Lagoon Survey -Townsville - contact Jo Wieneke.
- July 31st Sat** 2.00pm Cairns Crocodile Farm. There will be a small charge, please advise if you are coming along - contact Keith Fisher.
- August 7th - 8th Murray Falls** Campout (near Tully) - contact Jo Wieneke.
- August 29th Redden Island** Count (Cairns). Meet at 8.30am on Cinderella St, Machins Beach at the entrance before the toilet block - contact Keith Fisher.
- September Sat. 11th - Sun 26th.** Atlas campout at Bathurst Heads - Cape Melville on Cape York Peninsula. (The school holidays are from Mon 20th Sept to Friday 1st October). Contact Ian Sinclair
- Sept. 26th - 2nd Oct** Birds Australia National congress and campout - see notice on page 6 for details.
- October 9th Sat** Tableland Crane Count
- Oct 30th-31st** Twitchathon
- October 31st** Serpentine Lagoon Survey - Townsville - contact Jo Wieneke.
- November Tablelands/Cairns** Plath Road, off Atherton-Ravenshoe Rd.
- December** Christmas Party
- Arrangements can change after publication - contact local reps. for the latest info. This will give more flexibility, especially weather conditions. Extra events may also be arranged.**

OFFICE BEARERS

Convenor: Jon Nott (07) 4096 8230
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Secretary: Lindsay Fisher (07) 4039 0972 fax AH (07) 4039 0975
E-mail lkfisher@north.net.au

Treasurer: Elinor Scambler (07) 4095 3296
E-mail dacelo@internetnorth.com.au

Area Representatives:

Mackay: Marion Crouther (07) 4958 4613

Bowen/Ayr: Jon Wren (07) 4786 2614
E-mail jonwren@hotmail.com

Townsville: Jo Wieneke (07) 4771 4707
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Innisfail/Tully: Klaus Uhlenhut (07) 4065 5181
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Cairns: Keith Fisher (07) 4039 0972 fax AH (07) 4039 0975
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Atherton Tableland: Ian Sinclair (07) 4091 4544
E-mail sinclair@dnr.qld.gov.au

Mossman/Daintree: Del Richards (07) 4094 1199

Cape York Peninsula: Michael Barnett (07) 4069 8365

Torres Strait: Denise Fowler (07) 4069 1162
E-mail denisebruce@uq.net.au

Western Queensland: Peter Britton (07) 4087 2188

Conservation Representative: Amanda Freeman (07) 4095 2148
E-mail procella@ozemail.com.au

PROJECT CONTACTS

Lake Tinaroo Faecal Coliform Study
Position Vacant - Any volunteers?

Beach Stone Curlew Study
Amanda Freeman (contact number as above).

Northern Gulf Regional Strategy Group
Ian Fox Ph (07) 4091 4193
E-mail foxi@fastinternet.net.au

Gouldian Finch and Birds at Waterholes Survey
Klaus Uhlenhut Ph (07) 4065 5181
E-mail kirrama@4kz.com.au

Redden Island Survey (Cairns) Keith Fisher Ph (07) 4039 0972 E-mail lkfisher@north.net.au

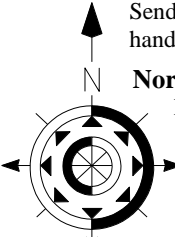
Sarus/Brolga Tableland Crane counts
Elinor Scambler Ph (07) 4095 3296
E-mail dacelo@internetnorth.com.au

Egret & Ibis Counts (Townsville)
Jo Wieneke Ph (07) 4771 4707
E-mail bowerbird@msm.com
or Tania Korn RIVER coordinator (07) 4721 4077

Counts are at Ross River every Thursday afternoon in conjunction with the RIVER group. Phone Jo if you'd like to help.

BIRDS AUSTRALIA ATLAS CONTACTS

Send atlas sheets to: - PO Box 776, Malanda QLD 4885 or hand them to the following RO's/SRO's



Northern Region (Cardwell North and north of Gulf Development Road) Northern
Regional Organiser: -
Graham Harrington ph: 07 4096 5051
email: treetop@north.net.au

SRO'S: -
Stephen Garnett ph: 07 4052 3088 (Cairns)
email: stephen.garnett@env.qld.gov.au

Glen Holmes ph: 07 4091 4364 (Atherton Tableland)
Lloyd Nielsen ph: 07 4094 1549 email: nielsen@tpgi.com.au
(Northern Atherton Tableland)

Elinor Scambler ph: 07 4095 3296 (Atherton Tableland)
email: dacelo@internetnorth.com.au

Eric Sticklen ph: 07 4091 2300 (Atherton Tableland)
Keith Fisher ph: 07 4039 0972 email: lkfisher@north.net.au
(Cairns)

Southern Region

(Comprising of Cardwell south and south of the Gulf Development Road including Mount Isa.)

Southern Regional Organiser:-
Jo Wieneke ph: 07 4771 4707
email: bowerbird@msm.com

SRO'S:-
Margaret Streamer ph: 07 4777 5164 email: marstream@bigpond.com
(Townsville/Ingham)

Jon Wren ph: 07 4786 2614 email: jonwren@hotmail.com
(Bowen/Ayr)

Marion Crouther ph: 07 4958 4613 (Mackay)

Ian Clayton ph: 07 4725 6489 email: birds&bush@ultra.net.au
(Townsville)

COUNTS, SURVEYS and TRIPS

SERPENTINE LAGOON SURVEY

TOWNSVILLE

Jo Wieneke

So far this year Townsville members have carried out two surveys at Serpentine Lagoon. The first, at the beginning of February, was cut short, as there was thigh deep water just as we reached the first site. As one member said, it would not be good for the reputation of Birds Australia if members drowned while surveying a woodland site! However, there were highlights on the higher, drier ground near the gate. A small flock of Black-chinned

Honeyeaters fed in the eucalypts while almost as many Gould's Bronze Cuckoos searched for caterpillars in some lower trees.

By the time we returned at the end of April, water levels had fallen except for one small creek and we were able to survey both 2ha sites and also did an area count of birds seen that morning. Of the 62 species recorded, the most interesting sighting, especially to members of the Heinsohn family, was a group of 5 White-winged Choughs. Townsville is at the northern edge of their range and they are rarely recorded here and so close to the coast. They were seen breeding here in January and it was good to see them still around.

Tentative dates for the next surveys will be July 25th and October 31st.
Phone 07 4771 4707 for confirmation and details.

ESPLANADE/REDDEN ISLAND 21/3/99

Keith Fisher

The scheduled *waving the waders' goodbye* along the esplanade was cut short due to the waders waving us goodbye before the planned start! Higher than normal tides with very few birds left when people arrived. Those that arrived early were treated to a good variety of waders, some in full breeding plumage. Not to waste the morning we adjourned to Redden Island, north of the airport at Machans Beach. The weather was overcast but dry, however flooding of the melaleuca swamp, which spilled over onto the path blocking access through the mangroves, restricted the areas visited. We managed to look at the open woodland from the road to the eastern edge of the mangroves as part of the ongoing atlas surveys. Due to the change we arrived later than normal, but we were rewarded with some excellent sightings including three new species for the Island. These were Common Koel (male and female), Channel-billed Cuckoo and Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher; we also had close up views of a pair of Double-eyed Fig-Parrot with at least another eight present. Some of the melaleucas were flowering, after the recent rains and attracting Yellow-spotted, Yellow, Brown, Brown-backed and Dusky Honeyeaters along with Helmeted Friarbirds. The mouth of the Barron River was not visited due to the high tide. A total of 32 species was seen and the total for the Island now stands at 126.

BIRD MONITORING - TABLELANDS

REVEGETATION PROJECTS - Elinor Scambler

Prior's Creek, Atherton was surveyed again in April and we will be working with Atherton Landcare's consultant on a project report for the NHT. Atlassing continues on Mazlin Creek, Atherton.

The April survey at Donaghy's Corridor was postponed due to access problems (boggy conditions on-farm). Hopefully we can get in before the end of May as it is then getting close to the next survey in July. Meanwhile we are working with TREAT and the QPWS Lake Eacham nursery to address the big gap in resources available for vital bird monitoring in revegetation/ landcare projects. We're developing a kit for bird monitoring in tropical revegetation, plus we will be doing training for TREAT members wishing to become involved in regular surveys. The first draft of the kit will be trialed at Peterson Creek (Yungaburra) in July.

TOWNSVILLE - WHITE MOUNTAINS (BURRA

RANGE SECTION) ATLASSING TRIP AT

EASTER - Alexander Anderson

The Townsville branch of BA - NQG enjoyed a very successful Atlassing trip to the Burra Range section of White Mountains National Park, west of Pentland. Thanks to Jo Wieneke for organising the trip and to Russell Cumming, a botanist with DEH and familiar with the park, for invaluable guidance to areas of interest. Contingents from Atherton and Charters Towers joined the Townsville group. Thirteen in all camped at Bungaree creek and despite the unexpectedly low diversity in the area, brought together a site list of about 60 species. Of particular interest were some very northern White-eared Honeyeaters, and a particularly yellow form of Buff-rumped Thornbill. Brown Honeyeaters dominated the scene, attracted by the deep red flowers of *Grevillea decora*. Other heath plants, though not in flower, promise a great show in June and July. A trek was made toward Poison Valley in an effort to visit some different vegetation on basalt soils. Several counts were made along the way, including one in a redgum swamp, but the condition of the track prevented any further exploration even in the 4Wd's. Weebills were recorded nesting, thanks to some sharp spotting by the Thai contingent. A trip to Torrens creek yielded Variegated Fairy-wrens, Squatter Pigeons and White-plumed Honeyeaters, while an immature Hooded Robin was seen amongst ironbarks in cattle country beside the highway. A group also atlased several sites along the Aramak road as far as Morrinya National Park, seeing Emu, Red-backed and Variegated Fairy-wrens, Crested Bellbirds and Little Crows among many others. At the Park itself the Ranger Ken and his wife Stella made us welcome, and several twenty-minute counts were made. Four species of Woodswallow were seen: Little, White-browed, Masked, and Black Faced,

as well as Grey Crowned Babblers and Brown Tree Creepers. The White-winged Fairy-wrens and Letter-winged Kites eluded us, but constitute a good reason to return to this relatively young and definitely interesting national park.

CAIRNS/TABLELANDS - LAKEFIELD

NATIONAL PARK ATLASSING TRIP AT

EASTER - Ian Sinclair

About 15 people ventured north to Lakefield National Park in search of red and green dots (Cape York atlas sites - red dots near roads, Green dots lots of walking!). The road was fine, although minor bridge works were required at Little Laura. The campsite itself was at Old Laura Homestead, which we shared with a number of insectivorous bats. Most people arrived around Friday lunchtime, although a couple of keen souls from Cairns arrived considerably earlier.

The afternoon's activities set the pattern for the next two days - we broke up into groups to survey sites that were chosen on the basis of the vegetation. Each group was equipped with a topographic map, on which were marked the sites. There was a range of Atlas methods used. All of us experienced some frustration with the birdwatching, particularly trying to identify friarbirds from fleeting glimpses and distant calls. Even the Pheasant Coucals were elusive - leaping out 50 metres in front of the vehicle, instead of the usual suicidal distances of the Tableland variety.

Around the citronella bucket there was much discussion about the merits of each of the Atlas methods. There was also spirited conversation on a wide range of topics, particularly on what or who is a "real Australian". The catering was the usual drab and hardy food typical of Birds Australia camping trips - the Engel is a wonderful invention.

The highlights for the group I was with were the Black-throated and Masked Finches seen on the Saturday, while the Little Kingfisher at the swamp near the campground was a pleasant surprise. There were no real surprises - no Golden Shouldered Parrots visited the campsite, (only the Easter Bunny!) but the number and diversity of birds, while not huge, made for an enjoyable weekend. (Total species list was 91).

The campsite itself was very pleasant, and we are grateful to QPWS staff for allowing us to stay there.

HERBERTON SHIRE BIRD SURVEY

Amanda Freeman

Twenty-five members, friends and local residents took part in the Herberton Shire Bird Survey on 1st May. Obviously Herberton Shire is too big to survey in one day so a number of sites around the Ravenshoe/Mt Garnet area were targeted. The sites covered a range of habitats, including some in rare vegetation types and areas where there are development proposals.

After meeting at Millstream Falls National Park for a briefing on the sites to be surveyed and Atlas methods, groups formed and set off to survey their nominated sites. After the morning's efforts, all met back at Millstream Falls to discuss the findings over lunch.

One hundred and three species were recorded over the eleven sites surveyed. Of particular note were two uncommon species, a Grey Goshawk seen in Wet Sclerophyll at Tomoulin State Forest and Cotton Pygmy Geese at Mt Garnet reservoir. Three sites had Eastern Yellow Robins and two sites had Yellow Thornbills, both species that have restricted distributions in far north Queensland. If anyone is interested in the full lists I am happy to forward them to you.

All the records from the survey will be submitted to the Atlas. They will also be forwarded to Herberton Shire Council and the Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group for their information and use. Herberton Shire is undertaking a biodiversity assessment of their Shire supported by a grant from the Natural Heritage Trust. The Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group is also conducting an NHT-funded project aimed at rehabilitating wet sclerophyll forest. We can contribute to these projects by providing bird records for relevant areas.

Thank you to everyone that took part on the day - especially the BOCA people from Cairns that left home really early in the morning to attend. The good turn out meant we could survey a broad range of sites and obtain quite a comprehensive list of species. Also a big thank you to Elinor Scambler

for organising the media releases that culminated in both a good turn out and wide media coverage of the event.

THE RED-TAILED BLACK COCKATOO

PROJECT Jon Nott

A sacrifice crop of peanuts was planted by QPWS to prevent the RTBC's from eating the crops on other farms. It has been very successful and has attracted letters of support from all the farmers on Lakeland Downs Good one Stephen Garnett! The Peanut Marketing Board & a chemical company have agreed to back the project for a further 3 years. The Normanby Catchment Group is applying for a NHT grant to keep the program going and BA-NQG has given them a promise of support in kind by way of census taking etc, to help monitor the project. BA-NQG has put in for a NHT grant to survey **Red Goshawks** nesting sites on Cape York. More about that if our application is successful.

THE BEACH STONE-CURLEW REPORT

Gary Wilson

Completed survey forms continue to roll in and I thank all those whom have contributed. The rate of submissions has slowed but I suspect that this is due to the fact that many of you are actively involved in the *Atlas* and are submitting BSC data in that format.

The database now contains more than 200 records and some particularly interesting and useful data. The former include long-term records of birds at Cairns Airport and Great Keppel Island in Central Queensland that give some indication of population dynamics, social interactions and breeding success. The latter will cause us to revise our understanding of the biology of the species; for example records of birds laying two eggs rather than the expected one, the successful fledging of two young and repetitive breeding attempts after the loss of nests to disturbance and high tides.

The study has also emphasised some less positive aspects of Beach Stone-curlew ecology. Several contributors have provided detailed records of the loss of eggs and habitat to birds in beachside developments. In some cases the losses were unavoidable and submissions have been made to the responsible authorities and input made to various public hearings in relation to the formulation of coastal management plans. This seems to be another case, in common with that of the cassowary and tree kangaroo, where a holistic ecosystems-based management approach is preferable to a post-action species rescue package.

This is my last contribution to *Contact Call* as BSC Survey Coordinator, I am relinquishing the position in order to concentrate on my university studies. I commend the project to you and ask that you give my successor, Amanda Freeman, the same support that you have given me. Best wishes. P.S. congratulations to Keith Fisher on a superb university assignment on Beach Stone-curlews; it's worth a read if you get the opportunity.

LAKE TINAROO FAECAL COLIFORM STUDY

Gary Wilson

Members may recall that some time ago we made a written submission on the topic of birds in the Barron River catchment to the Barron River Integrated Catchment Group. The submission was, in part, an attempt to contribute some facts to the public debate then raging about the source of faecal coliforms to the river system and Lake Tinaroo.

I mentioned in an article at that time that the source of coliforms could now be determined by a CSIRO - developed system of *sterol* analysis and that this would be performed during a proposed water sampling and monitoring program. A further report indicated that the monitoring program had commenced and some sources of contamination had been identified but that the sterol analyses had not been performed.

I must report that the situation has not changed; the sampling program continues but the results of the particular analyses we are interested in and which will identify and quantify the various sources of faecal coliforms are not yet available.

Watch this space for further developments.

SIGHTINGS



Rosemary Nason saw a leucistic (closely aligned to albinism and results from varying degrees of dilution of normal pigmentation in the plumage), **Masked Lapwing** in Alooomba south of Cairns - another has been seen around Yorkeys Knob. There have been several sightings of leucistic birds, which show predominantly white plumage, over the last few years around the Cairns area. Rosemary also had a pair of Helmeted Friarbirds raising a Koel in Freshwater, Cairns, apparently this has become a regular event over the last few years.

There have been several reports over the last few months of **Papuan Harriers**. Sue Gould reports that near Evans Landing, at Weipa, over a small patch of remnant Eucalypt woodland on 12/2/99 a pair was seen and again on 7/3/99 a solitary bird was present.

Lloyd Nielsen also reported the following on 4/5/99 via BirdingAus: Peter Pal spotted a large black and white harrier about 1 km north of Mt Molloy. He described it as very much black and white with a plain tail and very prominent black wing tips. He is aware of the dark hooded juvenile Spotted Harrier and said it was too black and white for that bird. We went out for 2 hours trying to find it again but without success.

This is just to advise everyone living here and those who may be in the Atherton Tableland, Mt Molloy, Mt Carbine, and Mossman area now or in the next few weeks to keep an eye out for it. Male Papuan Harriers are pretty much unmistakable. One good field character if in doubt is that the tail is plain grey in male semi-adult and adult Papuans (heavily barred in juvenile Spotted). I think I am right in saying that the next record (accepted) for Papuan Harrier will be the first for Australia.

Lloyd was also talking to Ron Stannard on the same day at Kingfisher Park and he and a local fellow had just had a brief look at a striking black and white harrier as it flew over the lodge - very white underparts with prominent black wingtips and long plainish tail. The other fellow said that this 'weird bird' as he called it had been 'hanging around' Highland Park for a few days. Sounds more promising all the time. Highland Park is the country estate about 5 km on the Mossman side of Kingfisher on the north side of the road. So if anyone is in the area, keep your eyes open.

Sue Gould also reported 2 black-backed **Brown Treecreepers** (race *melanota*) in tall open eucalyptus forest just south of Mapoon (near Weipa) - Jan/Feb

At the beginning of April, 2 **Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters** were reported in Kuranda (its normal range is north to about Clermont Qld.) by Ted Barber. Several photos of this bird were taken of it foraging in a callistemon in Ted's front garden and subsequently identified as a Yellow-tufted Honeyeater by a local birdo as well as HQ in Melbourne. This will be a huge range extension if the record is accepted.

Ian Clayton reports a pair of breeding **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** have been discovered in the Paluma Range to the north of Townsville. This is some 400 km north of all previous breeding records. The site is being kept under wraps at moment due to the concern of nest security. The birds were discovered just previous to Easter.

Chris Corben (who now lives in the USA - ex Brisbane) replied to the above sighting. - I was extremely interested to hear about this. Way back in 1982 I walked down the road from Paluma most of the way towards the main road, and at one point I was in a Casuarina forest which looked very suitable for Glossy Blacks and I found several examples of piles of broken Casuarina fruits. To me they looked exactly like what I expect to see from Glossys. At the time I asked around to see if anyone knew of Glossys in the area, or if Red-tails do a similar thing. I came up blank on both questions. Seems incredible that such a large, relatively conspicuous bird could go unnoticed for so long!

22nd April 6 **Australian Wood Duck** at the Cairns Airport - a first in Cairns for me, there are not many records on the coast around Cairns - two from the Cairns Esplanade and one from Cairns Crocodile Farm, anyone else know of any others? Keith Fisher.

Chris Dahlberg reports the odd Wood Duck dropping in and staying a while at the Daintree Village, which is 25 kms by river from the coast, about this time of year.

TAGGED EGRETS



18th April - Bob Murphy of Townsville spotted an **Intermediate Egret** with blue tabs in both wings, no. 468 on one of the tabs, at Ross River Dam, Townsville - David Geering says the egret was tagged in the Macquarie Marshes, north central NSW. Egret + blue tags = Intermediate Egret from the Macquarie Marshes. David contacted Ray Jones, the Ranger for Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve, who did the banding, and he informs him that it was this years young.

David went on to say that he situation this past summer was an interesting one in the Marshes. There was a big long flood, the first prolonged flood for many years. In past years the tagged egrets have left the area soon after fledging because of the drying out of the marshes. This year they stayed a lot longer because of the long "tail" on the flood. Ray thinks that they would be a lot stronger and thus better able to survive as a consequence. Also of interest is the Magpie Goose situation. In the past, Ray is a long time local; he has not seen Magpie Geese young get past the downy stage. This year he has seen many flying juveniles. Again, he attributes this to the long tail of the flood. As a result NPWS are starting to rethink their water management in the area to try and get a longer flood in future.

Back to egrets. Several years ago, when we first tagged a good number of Intermediates in the marshes, we had tagged birds reported from right up the Queensland coast as well as in New Guinea. I expect the same will happen this year. Could you please keep an eye out for wing tagged egrets and to record the colour and coding, if possible, of any tags seen? David is happy to receive and pass on any details. He can be contacted by email - David.Geering@nre.vic.gov.au or by phoning his freecall number 1800 621 056 at work. (Victorian Gov.).

INTERESTING BEHAVIOURS

Ian Clayton in Townsville saw Common Mynas doing night shift! Several times over the last few weeks, when taking the dog for a walk, I have seen a group of four or five Common Mynas hawking for moths and insects around the lights at one of our local car yard. This is at 9.30 at night when any self-respecting bird has its head tucked under its wing and is fast asleep.

29th April I watched two female Magpie-larks locking feet and rolling around on the ground, besides me, there was an audience of 26 Common Mynas crowding around watching and one male Magpie-lark. Maybe they were fighting over him! Another male Magpie-Lark flew in after about 8 minutes and the brawl ended with all four birds flying off and the mynas resuming their foraging on the grass - Keith Fisher.

WHAT' ELSE HAS BEEN HAPPENING?

HASTIES SWAMP BIRD HIDE - John Nott

This project is on hold until negotiations with the local Aboriginal groups have been completed. We have the assurance of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service that the \$ 15,000-00 allocated will still be available after the end of June if the issues have not been resolved by then.

CONVENORS NOTES - John Nott

The first meeting of GROG (**Gouldian Recovery Operations Group**) was held on 15th January. This is a joint venture project between QPWS and BA-NQG. It is hoped the group's efforts will shed some light on the elusive finch's range and abundance.

BA-NQG has also been asked to put forward two members to participate in the **Cassowary Recovery Team**. One to go on the scientific committee and the other on the community committee.

It is great to see so much happening and BA-NQG playing such an active role in **bird conservation** in North Queensland. Thanks to the area reps and others for organising some very good trips and a special thanks to the members, especially Elinor Scambler, who spent their Easter break and many, many hours before and after putting together the **display at the Old Post Office Gallery** on Herberton Road, Atherton.

Chris has also a few migrants still in the Daintree area (beginning of May); the oddest is a solitary **Pied Imperial Pigeon**. Also a juvenile **Great-billed Heron** down from the nest and, if it's like previous years, we will see Great-billed Herons almost daily. Chris also adds that Red Mill House; B&B at the Daintree village, complete with new 4 bedroom wing is for sale. Chris hopes a birdwatcher buys it from the present owners before a developer does, (now is your chance all you rich birdwatchers! -ed).

25th April in suburban Garbutt, (Townsville) 1 **Spectacled Monarch** bathing in the small pond in the garden under the poinciana around 1.30pm. Stayed several minutes - Alex Appleman

25th April Stuart Creek (Townsville): **Cicadabird, Black-faced Monarch, and Barred Cuckoo-shrike** - Alex Appleman.

25th April **Spotted Nightjar** flew off road and over rainforest, Seemark Rd. near Tarzali (Atherton Tableland), altitude 930m. This species appears occasionally, presumably on migration - Graham Harrington.

27th April - Marion Crouther heard the last Koel at Dalrymple Heights, Eungella, west of Mackay.

28th April - Marion also had the last **Channel-billed Cuckoo** of the season pass through Dalrymple Heights at Eungella.

April/May - I have seen **Masked Lapwing** (at least 14), **Black-fronted Dotterels** (2) and **Red-capped Plovers** (at least 4) nesting and as at mid May they are sitting or have chicks. The Masked Lapwing's have 4 eggs apart from one pair that have lost one egg. The ones that have hatched have 3 chicks apart from one pair that have 4 chicks. Red-capped Plovers all have 2 eggs and have hatched 2 chicks. The Black-fronted Dotterels also have 2 chicks each. - Keith Fisher.

29th April **Brown Goshawk, Australian Hobby** and 7 **Black Kites** at Cairns airport - a sure sign the dry weather is coming when the raptors return.

Brian Venables reported seeing **Little Lorikeets** on the Lake Morris Road, Cairns at the end of April. They were also seen on Redden Island back in February. They are very unusual on the coast around Cairns. Also noted has been a marked increase in **Scaly-breasted Lorikeets** using roosts at Cairns Airport (over 500) and the Cairns city center.

30th April A **Banded Lapwing** was present near Kairi (Atherton Tableland) for about a week - Suzanne Cameron.

April/ May Number of species returning to Cairns include: **Little, Great and Intermediate Egret, White-faced Heron, Straw-necked Ibis, Australian White Ibis, Gull-billed Terns** (replacing the Little Terns who have left), **Caspian Terns, Brown Honeyeater and Fairy Martin**.

The first week in May a **Red-backed Kingfisher** was near Kairi - Glenn Holmes.

6th May - 238 **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** were doing over a ploughed cane paddock in Freshwater, Cairns. How would you like that lot roosting at your place for the night? Keith Fisher

16th May 2 x **Bassian Thrush** at The Crater (Atherton Tableland) - Ben Constable.

16th May 17 **Sarus Crane** near Plath Road, (Atherton Tableland) Ben Constable (first moderately large group this season that I know of - Elinor Scambler, Crane counter).

18th May 2 **Masked Lapwing** intermediates of *miles* and possibly *novaeollandiae* at Cairns airport. One was a definite *miles* intermediate the other had a full black cap across the forehead and broad black markings down the hindneck, more than any intermediate I've seen over the last 5 years - this bird looked more like a *novaeollandiae* intermediate. HANZAB states that only *miles* occur in Cairns but intermediates have been regular visitors for the last 5 years at the airport (per.obs.) Townsville is supposed to be the meeting place of both races. Also at the airport was a **White-necked Heron**, which is quite unusual on the coast at Cairns. Keith Fisher

19th May **Rock Dove** numbers seem to be on the increase around Cairns with 142 on the northern end of the Esplanade and a further 122 on Hartley Street (where they are being fed). This doesn't include the city centre populations who dine out on the many cafe tables.

23rd May 80+ **Double-eyed Fig-Parrots** regularly roosting opposite our house in Rainforest Estate, Kamerunga, Cairns - Keith & Lindsay

Finally, a very warm welcome to so many new members. I look forward to meeting all of you very soon. -Happy birding

LOCAL CONSERVATION ISSUES: WHEN DO WE RESPOND? - Amanda Freeman

At the last committee meeting in February I raised the question of how the branch wishes to respond to local conservation issues. I raised this at the meeting because several local issues had been brought to our attention but we had no policy on if or when to respond.

After considerable discussion it was agreed amongst the committee that our general philosophy be that:

- (1) We work towards positive conservation outcomes and to this end have input whenever possible at the strategic planning level for example by commenting on local government planning schemes.
- (2) Due to lack of committee member's time and a desire to retain positive relationships with land managers and decision makers that we not react to individual, small scale issues as an organisation.
- (3) We provide an email service so that members can be informed of local issues that they may wish to comment on as individuals.

We already pass on information to members we know will be interested in particular issues but there may be others who would like to be kept informed. If you would like your email address included on the mailing list for local conservation issues as they arise please let me know. Also, if you have a local conservation issues that you want brought to the attention of interested members send me the details and I will pass them on to people on the list.

WAMPS & MAPIS - Elinor Scambler

Birds Australia prepared bird data to assist the technical advisory panel to the Mitchell-Walsh & Barron WAMPs (water management) and to assist the 5b Rainforest Steering Committee (vanishing rainforest type nicknamed "mapi", the indigenous name for the Tree Kangaroo). Special thanks to Glenn Holmes.

ESPLANADE UPDATE-Keith Fisher



Not much to report here as we are awaiting the next round of community consultations to coincide with the release of the latest plan. Consultants have been appointed for the EIS but concern has come from some quarters that the guidelines have not been set yet. There has also been lots of media speculation as to where the money to fund the redevelopment is coming from - good question. We should know more in the next few weeks

CAIRNS WADER COUNTS - Keith Fisher



Wader counts are becoming easier at this time of the year as most of the waders have disappeared! However this doesn't detract from the importance of the counts and volunteers are still wanted. There are a few species still around but in low numbers (mid May), Eastern Curlew (less than 10), Grey-Tailed Tattler, Red-necked Stint (18), Whimbrel (50+), Bar-tailed Godwit (10-15), Common Greenshank (less than 10)

EASTERN CURLEW TRACKING

The Queensland Wader Study Group in conjunction with the Wild Bird Society of Japan has carried out this project of satellite tracking Eastern Curlews. Movements of birds from Australia northwards on their migration have revealed an area in the Digul estuary in southern New Guinea may be a previously unknown but important staging area for at least some of the population.

13 Transmitters were fitted, 5 in Brisbane (Moreton Bay) and 8 in Melbourne (Westernport) in February to female birds. These transmitters send a signal back every 2 days. The actual aerial may have been preened back into the feathers and difficult to see but the bird has either a green or orange leg flag so keep a look out for them. A couple appears to have made it back to their breeding grounds in Siberia. One named Alfonse, from Brisbane, moved NE off the coast to past Khabarovsk - breeding territory?

One averaged 80kph over one section of its journey. Of the 5 Moreton Bay birds 2 are at the breeding grounds, 2 back in the Bay and, 1 is on Cape York. The Westernport birds don't seem so adventurous 4 are now back, 1 is in the Great Sandy Strait, 1 is in Moreton Bay and 2?

Brian Venables previously reported that one of the QWSG's Eastern Curlew's (called Femie and from Melbourne) had been tracked to the Townsville area (Bowling Green Bay). However she has now moved south and was around Taree in NSW on 8th May and back in Melbourne on the 18th May! If you see any of these birds please contact Peter Driscoll of QWSG (07 3289 0237).

BIRDS AUSTRALIA AT THE OLD POST OFFICE, ATHERTON-Elinor Scambler

Thanks to an 11th hour invitation from the Atherton Shire, and heaps of last minute work from local members, Birds Australia now has a permanent space at the re-opened Old PO Atherton (tourist info centre and art gallery).

The work went into renovating the space as a permanent display area plus preparation of material showcasing local birds and Birds Australia (including the Atlas) for visitors and the local community. One poster presents the work of Jim Bravery, local farmer and pioneer ornithologist on the Tablelands and a 3-D display window uses hessian "rainforest features" with bird photos by Keith & Lindsay Fisher (this received excellent press coverage including a colour photo in the Cairns Post).

We invited the Tree Kangaroo & Mammal Group, and Tablelands Frog Club to share the project and the three groups will work together to get funding for longer term displays on local fauna and their conservation (I'll report on funding aspects at the AGM).

Special thanks to: Jon Nott, Amanda Freeman, Rick & Julie Powell, Glenn & Jenny Holmes, Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Jack Leighton, Pat Daly, Joan Boissevain & John Collins.

BOWEN NEWS from Jon Wren

RED-TAILED BLACK COCKATOOS ENJOY HOLIDAYING IN BOWEN!

At the beginning of April the Bowen residents enjoyed the calls and antics of a flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos numbering 80. A large flock has been active at the Front Beach and make a colourful sight with the coastal backdrop. What attracts the birds to the streets of Bowen is the Terminalia trees commonly called Beach Almonds. The birds are massing in a single tree and feeding on the green seeds that contain a soft kernel similar to an almond hence the common name. Of course the feeding is quite noisy with accompanying disputes over ownership of branches. No complaints to the Bowen Shire Council as yet, let's hope we can enjoy these visitors from the avian kingdom. About five years ago the Bowen Shire Council adopted a Weed Control Strategy that saw the poisoning of many noxious and declared weeds. This included the removal of Prickly Acacia, Rubber Vine, Chonky Apple and Bellyache weed etc. The RTBC always fed on the Chonky Apple fruit and would become regular visitors to Hospital Hill each year where a large infestation of this weed occurred. Since the poisoning of the Chonky Apple trees the birds have now moved into the streets and are attempting to decimate our population of Terminalia trees, much to our pleasure.

BOWEN SHORTS

Remarkable numbers of Owls and Frogmouths have been observed on the Pring to Newlands Rail line over the last four weeks with details being forwarded to BOP Watch. Highest count for 3 hour period over 150Km was 16 on the 24th April

Habitat form for Kings Beach Creek Atlas site has been completed with accompanying photos and will be forwarded shortly. At the site on 11th May, I counted 29 Black Kites settled on a large sand dune at the mouth of the creek; it must have been a grand day at the beach for them.

Flocking Australian Magpie Larks over the first two weeks of May with a group of 150 perched on power lines along Telegraph Road on 7th, in the Pring and Delta area.

MACKAY SHORTS

Like everyone else we've had lots and lots of rain almost 1300mm up until the end of April, so birding outings have been few. Lots of days I can't see the front fence!

The May long weekend was glorious clear and Les Thyer and Rob Farnes were out at Crediton State Forest where they found quite a few Eungella Honeyeaters in a flowering tree in a rainforest gully. (We can always find a pair here and there but groups are unusual).

We've had a few Red-backed Button Quail (just odd pairs), Painted Quail and one lovely little male King Quail at Eungella but no big influx as in previous years. Madge Barnett has had an Oriental Cuckoo feeding with Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes on her property and Rob Farnes has seen one on the coast.

EUNGELLA HONEYEATER

Some BA-NQG members who also belong to Mackay BOCA were part of a team that applied for funding from the Threatened Species Network Community Grants to survey the distribution of the Eungella Honeyeater. Unfortunately they were refused - the grounds for refusal being that the Eungella Honeyeater is not a threatened species because its habitat is in protected areas.

In our experience, it has not been observed in either Broken River or the Crediton area of the National Park. The only places where we have seen large numbers (ie. 50-60) at any one time are private property or State Forest areas. Areas where it used to be seen have been sub-divided and cleared. Clearing is a continuing process on most properties. Since the banning of rainforest logging the resident forester has been withdrawn and supervision is now being conducted from Mackay 80km away. In most of the State Forests cattle graze and fires seem to be a regular event.

Whenever conservation issues are raised the need for base line data becomes imperative. The local birders will keep plugging away building up the file but so far we have not been able to convince others of the wisdom of carrying out detailed studies of what this species really needs to survive before it joins the threatened list.

BUFF-BREASTED BUTTON QUAIL

Lloyd Nielsen

I have had a few recent requests from people for news of the Buff-breasted Button-quail - people who are planning a visit to the Wet Tropics later this year. The news is not good at the moment and quite frankly, I wouldn't waste much time on them about the Mt Molloy area unless things change - and I think that is highly unlikely for the rest of this year. The Queensland Ornithological Society made a grant available last year to try to determine the status of the species. During the wet season - the bird's breeding season - I concentrated on the Mareeba, Mt Molloy, and Mt Carbine area. In over 250 hours of searching, I located just 3 pairs, each seen once and not seen again. We had hoped they would remain to breed but no such luck.

I will be continuing the search further afield when the wet season finally gives up! I will keep Ron at Kingfisher Park and Phil at Cassowary House up with the latest as the year goes on, so you can get information from them.

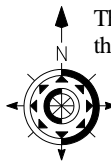
Bakers Road (near Mt Molloy) has long been touted as THE site to see BBBQ and unfortunately it is still being suggested as that in trip lists, especially the overseas lists. The last time I saw Buff-breasted Button-quail there was about late 1993 - early 1994 (and I have been there many many times since then). The grass thickened up at the start of the 1993 wet season (December) and the habitat has not been suitable for them since. There have been quite a few Painted Button-quail there though! Trip list directions to this site have been wrong - 'past the fourth grid'. Trying to find the fourth grid will take you many kilometres to the west onto Font Hills Station (where you have got a rather good chance of running up against a very unfriendly manager). The site was originally past the third grid, but now the old site is 500 metres past the first grid. Two grids were pulled up a few years ago.

I am very keen to hear of sightings of button-quail from Iron Range and particularly keen to have as much detail on birds seen as possible, so if

anyone sees them there I would very much like to hear about it. The sightings from Iron Range do not tally with the rest of the information we have from other areas including the information that McLennan gathered in 1922 from Coen when he collected skins and nests. My data agrees with McLennan's, that makes Iron Range intriguing. The Painted BQ is not known to occur there so any large button-quail should be a Buff-breasted. However, be aware of the smaller, darker Red-backed in that area - the only other button-quail known to occur there.

ATLAS HELP by Andrew Silcocks

CONFUSED BY DATUMS?



The Atlas project requires knowing the location of your survey. For the 2-ha searches it is important that there is a good degree of accuracy of the latitude/longitudes so that the site can be revisited.

Australia is currently undergoing a change in the coordinate system that moves the latitude/longitude grid to a small extent.

There appears to be some confusion over the use of data and how to work out which one you are using.

The Changing Datum's.

The datum/coordinate system that has been used on Australian maps is Australian Geodetic 1966/84 (abbreviated to AGD or AUS). Since the introduction of satellite based navigational systems such as Global Positioning System (GPS) a problem has arisen, as the AGD is not a geocentric datum. This means that it does not originate at the centre of the earth's mass (approximately 200 meters offset), hence the datum is not compatible with the rest of the world. This obviously causes major headaches for boats and aeroplanes as they travel across datum's, for example 106 different map datum's are available for use on the Garmin 11 GPS unit. To overcome this problem a new datum has been developed which has its origin at the centre of the earth, called Geocentric Datum of Australia. This is essentially the same as the World Geodetic System (WGS84), which is another earth-centred datum developed by the US Department of Defence and used in GPS receivers. The WGS84 differs from the GDA in the order of 10 cm and is being aligned to it.

What is the difference between GDA (WGS) & AGD coordinates?

GDA coordinates are in the order of 200m in a northeasterly direction of the AGD system because of the different models. The actual size and orientation of the change will vary slightly from place to place (minimum of 194m & maximum of 207m). The Australian Height Datum (AHD) will not be affected by the adoption of GDA.

How does this effect us?

AUSLIG aims to adopt the GDA by the year 2000. The difference between AGD and GDA maps is only significant at scales of 1:250 000 or larger (more detailed). Due to the long cycle of topographic map revision it will be at least 2006 before all 1:250 000 scale maps are on GDA and even longer (> yr. 2015) for the 1:100 000 scale products. However many of the latest maps of these scales are already using the GDA datum.

It is important if you are using large-scale maps that you know which datum your maps use and if you have using a GPS unit in conjunction with maps then to ensure that the unit is set to the same datum.

How to check your map and GPS datum.

To check the map datum look for the horizontal datum which is usually near the map scale. This will for the vast majority of maps either be Australian Geodetic 1966 or 1984. Some of the modern maps will use Geocentric Datum of Australia 1994. Below are the steps needed to set or check the datum for three of the most widely used GPS units:

Magellan GPS 2000

- 1) From the Nav screen press MENU
- 2) Scroll down to SETUP MENU, then press enter
- 3) Scroll down to MAP DATUM (on the second screen of options), then press enter
- 4) Scroll to select datum

Magellan GPS PIONEER / GPS 300

- 1) Press MENU 6 times until SETUP appears, then select enter
- 2) Scroll up once to MAP DATUM, then press enter

3) Scroll to select datum, then press enter

Garmin GPS II

- 1) From NAV screen press PAGE five times
- 2) Scroll down to NAV SETUP, then press enter
- 3) Scroll down to highlight DATUM, then press enter
- 4) Scroll to select desired datum, then press enter

For further information call the Atlas Project at BA National Office, email <atlas@raou.com.au>

This article was reproduced from *Galah* the inhouse newsletter of Birds Australia.

INFORMATION LEAFLETS

Information leaflet No 4 *Atherton Tableland - Birding Information and Species List* has been finished and available, dated May 1999 it replaces an earlier version which had a few species missing from the list.

No 5 *Townsville and District - Birding Information and Species List* are also now available.

GET WELL SOON

Andree Griffin, one of our enthusiastic senior members and well known for her bird call tapes, has unfortunately been taken ill whilst on a visit to England. We wish Andree a speedy recovery and to cheer her up members can send her a card to the following address: Ward 3, Westmoreland General Hospital, Burton Rd, Kendal, Cumbria. England UK.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS FOR OUR REGION

We look forward to seeing you all on some of our many activities.

Alex Anderson - Townsville, Jane Blackwood - Malanda, Dick Bolton - Cairns, Ms L Burge - Mareeba, Richard Cherry - Cairns, Mrs Tania Cox, M/s L Emerson - Alexandra-Diwan, Pam Gallagher - Bowen, Mr. R. Hayes - Townsville, Brett Herbert - Mareeba, Mr. R.B. Hinchley - Cardwell, Peter Holden - Mareeba, Mrs. G. Jeffries - Cranbrook, Dr. F.J.Kroon - Atherton, Margaret Larcombe, Jeff Middleton - Atherton, Ursula Noonan - Mackay, Darren Peck - Cairns, Michael Short - Cairns, Ms. F. Smith - Townsville, Ms. J. Smith - Atherton, Ms. S Tunney - Croydon, L. White - Kendall River Station, Cape York, Desley Williams - Mackay.

USEFULL WEBSITES

If you have access to the internet there are many bird sites which will give you lots of information on locations, accommodation, species lists and trip reports for areas and latest sightings. Some useful sites are listed below; most of these sites have links to many more sites:

Birds Australia <http://avoca.vicnet.net.au/~birdsaus/>

Birdwatching Australia

<http://www.ausbird.com/qld.html#anchor531223>

Bird Species - Cairns

<http://www.cityofcairns.qld.gov.au/TIMP/birdspp.htm>

Bird Links to the World <http://www.ntic.qc.ca/~nellus/links.html>

Birds of Western Australia & Nearby Areas

<http://cygwww.uwa.edu.au/~austecol/birds.html>

Darwin Birds <http://www.octa4.net.au/niven/>

Frank O'Connors Birding Western Australia

<http://www.iinet.net.au/~foconnor/>

NT Bird Atlas <http://birds.rhyme.com.au/>

Tom Tarrant Homepage <http://ats.com.au/~aviceda/>

Travel & Trip Reports

<http://www.phys.rug.nl/mk/people/wpv/travel.html>

TripReports <http://www.xnet.com/~ugeiser/Birds/TripReports/>

Happy Surfing

NOTICE

1999 Congress and Campout

The 1999 BA Congress will be held on Monday 26 - Tuesday 27 September (informal arrival date Sunday 26) at the Berri Hotel, Berri, South Australia. The main theme will be 'Ecology and Management of Bird Populations'. Offers of papers to Dr David Paton:

Email: <dpaton@zoology.adelaide.edu.au> or
Tel: (08) 8303 4742

Congress will be followed by the Campout at Gluepot Reserve, from Wednesday 28 September - Saturday 2 October. Participants may choose to stay on for the rest of the long weekend.

Full details and a booking form in the June *Wingspan*.

Rose Gums Wilderness Retreat

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Birds Australia polo shirts -\$25.00

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These Items will be available at the AGM.

Please send items for Contact Call
to the secretary at:
P O Box 2209, Cairns Qld 4870
or email : lkfisher@north.net.au

THANKS

Birds Australia North Queensland Group is very grateful for the continuing support given by the office of the Member for Leichhardt **Warren Entsch**, who is himself a keen birdwatcher.