

Contact Call

Birds Australia

Conservation Through Knowledge

Birds Australia Centenary 1901-2001

Celebrating Bird Conservation

Birds Australia—North Queensland Group

September 2002 Issue: Pacific Baza



Picture courtesy Featherdale Wildlife Park

New Leader for North Queensland Birds

Hi all. This will be my first report for the group as the newly elected president. I have been involved with the group for 5 years. Amanda and I arrived in north Queensland in 1997 from New Zealand. Within three weeks we had attended our first Birds Australia AGM in Greenvale and thoroughly enjoyed it. What impressed us the most was the friendly and helpful nature of the group. Friendships made during this trip have remained strong. I see my time as convenor as an opportunity to give something back to the group that has been so good to us.

I guess I would call myself a herpetologist with a general interest in natural history, particularly reptiles and frogs but also birds. I currently work as a technical officer for Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in Atherton where most of my work revolves around threatened fauna. At the moment cassowary issues dominate much of my time. As an aside I am also collecting data on the distribution and ecology of pythons in the far northern region.

What I hope to see over the coming months is a greater participation of the group in conservation issues that effect birds and bird habitats. For example, at the moment the committee is developing an appropriate submission from the group to the Vegetation Management Committees in the region. These committees are currently in the process of developing regional policy to manage native vegetation in the state. It is therefore important for us to be active in this forum as an advocate for bird conservation.

Keep an eye out for upcoming fieldtrips and excursions. There will be some good ones coming up including a couple of Atlasing expeditions planned for next year.



A group such as Birds Australia is many things to many people and it is this diversity which keeps us strong. During my time as convenor I hope to see the group continue to cater for the full range of interests of the members.

Alastair Freeman

Birds North Queensland Group—Events Calendar Sept-Dec 2002

September is Biodiversity Month

8th - Cairns Esplanade. Welcome the Waders back. Meet opposite the Tradewinds Hotel at 11am. Great chance to brush up on your ID skills. Contact Keith Fisher for further details.

October 2002

5th - 6th Annual Crane Count. All Welcome. Tablelanders-Meet at 3:30pm Hasties Swamp, Atherton. Innot Hot Springs are also counting their cranes—contact Elinor for details. This is a roost count—therefore meet late in the afternoon and count till dark. Contact Elinor Scambler on 4095 3296 for forms.

5-6th Bowling Green Bay NP campout.

Meet at the Alligator Creek campground at 8am. Survey a variety of vegetation types on Mt Elliot. Possibility for a crane count in the vicinity & visiting a variety of coastal areas on Sunday. RSVP's needed. Contact Helen Mc on 4771 3239 for details.

13th Klaproth's scrub.

Meet at Ian & Rita Sinclair's for another atlas of Type 5b scrub. Phone Ian for details on 4096 6690.

November 2002

3rd - Painted Snipe Survey. As part of the National survey (details page 5), BA-NQG have been asked to participate in regional surveys. Meet at Lake Mitchell and Townsville's Town Common at 8am. Contact area representatives for confirmation on arrangements.

December 2002

7th & 8th - BA-NQG Christmas party. All welcome. Survey the much-talked-about Mt Zero holding recently purchased by Oz Wildlife Conservancy with Christmas dinner celebrations at Hidden Valley cabins (approx. \$25pp). Cabins & Camping available. More details in December newsletter. RSVP needed ASAP to Helen Mc.

AGM 2003

31st May & 1st June. Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the RAOU campout at Lake Barrine, the AGM will be held at Lake Barrine. Further details will be provided in future newsletters.

Field Trips may change after publication. Contact local reps. for the latest information. This will allow for more flexibility, especially concerning weather conditions. Additional events may also be arranged.

Inside this issue:

- **New Executive Committee**
- **AGM June 2002 report**
- **Trip Reports - Christmas Island, Klaproth's scrub, Redden Island, Cairns' wetlands**
- **Around the Nation - Painted Snipe Survey, Courses at Barren Grounds**
- **BA-NQG issues for 2002**
- **Tolga Scrub and Sulfur Crested Cockatoos**
- **Unusual Sightings**
- **BA-NQG Position Vacant**
- **Cairns Ecological Conference**
- **Memberships due**

Pacific Baza



The **Pacific Baza** or Crested Hawk refers to the small erectile crest on the nape, which enhances a cockatoo-like appearance as the bird jumps or clambers among tree branches in search of food. Feeding on mainly foliage insects and tree frogs, this omnivorous bird will also take snakes, lizards, small nestlings and birds and small fruits such as figs. The **Pacific Baza** is a solitary or gregarious hawk of eucalypt woodland and rainforest, particularly along tree-lined watercourses in the tropics and subtropics. Their flight is slow, of leisurely flapping and gliding on broad, rounded wings, allowing the birds to manoeuvre easily and acrobatically. The breeding season is from September to March (usually October–December) in Australia, and although infrequently gathering in groups, they breed solitarily. Male and female share not only nest building, but also incubation and the brooding and feeding of young. Both will protect the nest, raising their crests in threat or swooping in attack. As the young grow, the female spends much time attending the nest while the male concentrates on hunting. The **Pacific Baza** is common in the tropics and is not globally or nationally threatened. *Information sourced from "The Birds of Prey of Australia" by Stephen Debus and the Reader's Digest "Complete Book of Australian Birds"*

Atlas 2 contacts

Send your Atlas forms to the following coordinators:

Northern Region (Cardwell north incl. Cape York)

Regional Organiser—Graham Harrington 4096 5051

- Stephen Garnett (Cairns) Ph: 4052 3088
Email: stephen.garnett@epa.qld.gov.au
- Glenn Holmes (Atherton Tableland) Ph: 4091 4364
Email: dasyornis@ledanet.com.au
- Lloyd Nielsen (Nth Atherton Tableland) Ph: 4094 549
Email: nielsen@tpg.com.au
- Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) Ph: 4095 3296
Email: dacelo@austarnet.com.au

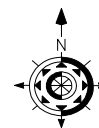
South Region (Cardwell to Bowen)

Regional Organiser—Jo Wieneke 4771 4707

- Ian Clayton (Townsville) Ph: 4725 6489
Email: birds&bush@ultra.net.au
- Jon Wren (Bowen/Ayr) Ph: 4786 2614
Email: maluras5@tpg.com.au

Southern Region (Bowen to Mackay, including Mt Isa)

Regional Organiser- Marion Crouther 4958 4613



NEW 2002-2003 BA-NQG Management Committee

Office Bearers

- Convenor**—Alistair Freeman Ph: 4095 2655
Email: procella@ozemail.com.au
- Convenor Elect**—Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707
Email: bowerbird@msn.com.au
- Secretary**—Keith Fisher Ph: 4039 0972
Email: lkfisher@austarnet.com.au
- Treasurer**—Amanda Freeman Ph: 4095 2655
Email: procella@ozemail.com.au
- Conservation Officer**—Graham Harrington Ph: 4096 5051
Email: treetop@austarnet.com.au

Project Contacts

- Beach Stone Curlew Survey** Amanda Freeman (Ingham north) 4095 2655 and Paul O'Neill of QPWS Rockhampton (Ingham to Bowen) 4936 0547.
- Redden Island Survey** Keith Fisher 4039 0972
- Tableland Crane Count** Elinor Scambler 4095 3296
Email: dacelo@austarnet.com.au
- Townsville Egret & Ibis Count** Jo Wieneke 4771 4707 or
Glenda Jeffries 4773 1802.

Cape York Atlas Surveys Graham Harrington 4096 5051

Area Representatives

- Mackay:** Marion Crowther Ph: 4958 4613
- Bowen / Ayr:** Jon Wren Ph: 4786 2614
Email: maluras5@tpg.com.au
- Townsville:** Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707 and Helen McLaughlin Ph: 4771 3239
- Charters Towers:** Elna Kerswell Ph: 4787 7718
Email: elnakers@httech.com.au
- Ingham / Cardwell:** *vacant*
- Innisfail / Tully:** Tony Jurgensen 0408 190 605 (>6pm)
Email: raj@naturelover.com.au
- Cairns:** Keith Fisher Ph: 4039 0972
- Atherton Tableland:** Ian Sinclair Ph: 4096 6690
Email: ian.sinclair@nrm.qld.gov.au
- Mossman / Daintree:** Del Richards Ph: 4094 1199
- Cape York:** Michael Barnett Ph: 4094 8916
Email: mike.barnett@bigpond.com
- Mount Isa:** Bob Forsyth Ph: 4743 3210
Email: isabirdo@austarnet.com.au

Birds Australia Membership

Subscriptions: \$68 Single \$108 Family \$50 Single Concession \$87 Family Concession

This includes membership of the national organisation plus membership of our regional group, Birds Australia—North Queensland Group.

Members also receive four issues of the full-colour bird magazine *Wingspan* and four issues of *Contact Call*, the BA-NQG newsletter. Membership forms are available from the Secretary or send subscriptions directly to:

Birds Australia, 415 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn East, Victoria 3123

You can now join directly through our web site: www.birdsaustralia.com.au



Birds Australia

BA-NQG car stickers, featuring a Pied Imperial Pigeon on a tropical green background are still available. A donation of \$2.50 each or two for \$4.50 plus postage will secure them for you. They will be available on field trips and from the Secretary.



Birds Australia

AGM June 2002 - An Ornithological Occurrence



This year's AGM, held at the Australian Sugar Museum at Mourilyan and associated weekend activities, were considered a hit. About 30 members gathered Friday night with a feast at the MenamKhong Lao-Thai Restaurant in Innisfail. Stories of travels were fuelled with appropriate doses of red wine, setting the scene for a great weekend.

The weather seemed to be closing in, but the group still met in the morning to check out the recent work of the Innisfail

LandCare Group at Mourilyan Harbour. An amazing start to the weekend was the gathering of over 80 **Bush Thick-knees** on one vacant block along ETTY Bay Road—believed to be the largest gathering of **Bush Thick-knees** ever witnessed.

Thanks to Tony Jurgensen who led the morning brigade, taking us to the Bulguru swamp, walking through some amazing Melaleuca woodland and revegetation areas to the recently built Birdhide.

Congratulations go to the Innisfail LandCare group for their dedication to the project, managing to build the hide with a less than desirable budget. The group then headed for Warrina Lakes for a lunch stop. It was however the ducks and geese crash-landing on the wet grass that provided the best entertainment.

The AGM kicked off at 2:40pm at the Sugar Museum with a good turnout of members (25). The outgoing Convenor (Jon Nott) provided a summary of the past year's highlights, including: involvement with the recently formed vegetation management committees; participation in the continuing Atlas project, including Cape York surveys; the completion of the bird hide and interpretative signage at Nyletta wetland, Atherton; as well as BA-NQG being recognised as an important conservation group. The Treasurers Report was tabled—major items were the Red Goshawk NHT project and sales from Bill Cooper's print.

A notice of motion, enclosed with the previous Contact Call newsletter, was discussed. Graham Harrington explained the need to update and revise the original rules to bring them in line with the current structure and procedures of the group. The revised constitution will not become operable until it has been submitted and ratified, with a unanimous decision, by the Birds Australia council at a future meeting. Those present agreed to the amendments as documented.

The Election of Officers saw a new Executive Committee of Alastair Freeman—Convenor, Keith Fisher—Secretary, Amanda Freeman—Treasurer, Jo Wieneke—Convenor Elect. Other officers of BANQG were Graham Harrington—Conservation Officer and Helen McLaughlin—newsletter Editor. **Thanks must go to our outgoing Committee: Jon Nott for his past 6 years as Convenor, and to John Clarkson and Bill Bray.**

There were also some changes to Area Representatives, the new representatives include: Mackay—Marion Crouther, Bowen/Ayr—Jon Wren, Townsville—Jo Wieneke/Helen McLaughlin, Cape York—Michael Barnett, Innisfail/Tully—Tony Jurgensen, Atherton Tableland—Ian Sinclair, Cairns—Keith Fisher, Mossman/Daintree—Del Richards, Charters Towers—Elna Kerswell, Ingham/Cardwell—vacant. **Thanks also goes to Klaus Uhlenhut and Marion Buchanan for their time as Innisfail and Atherton Tableland representatives.**

Bill and Wendy Cooper were thanked for their very generous donation to Birds Australia and BA-NQG of a limited edition print (500) of a **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo** painting. Bill

and Wendy paid all the expenses associated with the postage of these prints so that the entire proceeds from the sale of these prints (\$79) will go towards production costs for the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (HANZAB), except \$2000 of these monies, which will go to BA-NQG as a levy to cover overheads. Bill and Wendy have also undertaken all the work associated with packing and posting the prints. Just over half of the prints have been sold. Anyone wanting to purchase a copy of this amazing print should contact BA-NQG. **Thanks must go to Bill and Wendy Cooper for their generous donation as well as the time and effort they put into the promotion of the prints.**

Some money is still available for projects on Nyletta wetland and members are being asked for their priorities. Options include: additional pull-off area or raised level platform near the entrance to allow people to view the birds on the northern side; additional landscaping; a notice board for visitors to record unusual sightings; or visitor book. It was agreed that the committee would look into these options.

Jon also mentioned that the funds from the proposed *BirdFest* could be used to hold a Bird-week in January 2003, to be targeted at tour operators. The aim would be to increase awareness and potential economic benefits that recreational birdwatchers can bring to the tourism industry. It was agreed that the committee would discuss options.

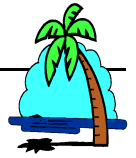
Graham Harrington thanked Keith Fisher for the work he had put into the running of the group during the previous year, to Helen McLaughlin for producing the newsletter and to Ian & Rita Sinclair for assistance with the photocopying and mailing out of the newsletter. Lindsay Fisher also thanked Graham Harrington for organising the AGM and weekend activities.

Guest speaker this year was Helen McLaughlin to explain the Vegetation Management Planning process established under the Vegetation Management Act proclaimed in 2000. Regional committees have been established, of which BA-NQG are involved, to advise the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines on issues relating to vegetation management. The committees consist of industry reps, indigenous groups, local government, conservation and community with State government officers available as technical experts. Recently there has been a lot of information circulated on the loss of woodland birds through grazing and land clearing. This is one of the issues facing BA-NQG during his process. As identified by Barry Trail (Birds Australia 2000) the major threatening processes for bird populations is the clearing of native vegetation, excessive grazing and inappropriate fires, logging, lack of environmental flows for freshwater ecosystems, marine fishing practices, invasion of habitat by invasive species. The Vegetation Management Plans will seek to address some of these issues and propose suitable management outcomes. Community consultation across north Queensland will occur early 2003.

Detailed minutes of the AGM are available from the Secretary.

As next year is the 50th anniversary of the RAOU campout at Lake Barrine it has been proposed to have a re-enactment at the Lake on the weekend of 31st May/1st June 2003, so keep your diaries free.





Easter at Christmas

Christmas Island has few birds, but there are rewards for those who visit in the wet season. Jenny and I spent five weeks there from 2 March to 7 April, documenting rare flora for Environment Australia. Such surveys have become imperative recently, with the invasive Yellow Crazy Ant, new mining prospects and proposed developments such as a space base and detention centre all having implications for the vegetation.

The birding highlights included a **Malayan Night Heron**, **White Wagtails** and **Pin-tailed Snipe**. Residents such as the now numerous **White-breasted Waterhen** and all endemics except **CI Hawk-Owl** and **CI Goshawk** were observed almost daily. The canopy-nesting **Abbott's Booby** is a special delight for seabird enthusiasts, as its long-winged proportions and large head give it a primeval appearance. We decided to go through Tokyo and Java because of cost savings and extra opportunities for birding and botanising at these sites [Jenny keeps a world ticklist of plant families !!]. In particular, Gunung Gede-Pangrango near Jakarta can be recommended highly. David James reports that the nearby Mt Halimun is also worthwhile. Some of the specialties likely to be observed during a week's visit include **Javan Cochoa**, **Spotted Crocias**, **Javan Hawk-Eagle**, **Javan Tesia** and **Pygmy Tit**. Despite being just the wrong side of 50, I decided to climb Mt Gede to about 2600 metres. There I saw the rare **Volcano Swiftlet** after taking an inadvisable shortcut on an abandoned track, where sulphurous fumes caused me to retreat rather hastily. Being an obsessive birder, I instinctively covered my binoculars, before my eyes, nose and mouth!

Glenn Holmes, Atherton

Klaproth's Scrub, Yungaburra

On the 28 April eight unsuspecting and trustworthy souls joined me on a short walk down my backyard to look at some birds in the neighbourhood. The idea was to get an idea of the species occurring on a patch of scrub on Mt Quincan, and also on an adjoining block, and then compare with species found on revegetation sites between these two sites. A couple of problems emerged – I was sentenced to house sitting in Mareeba for two weeks and did not have time to check out the sites. The result? some very muddy and scratched BA members emerged on the slopes of Mt Quincan somewhat behind schedule, while someone who has spent time bush walking in SW Tassie had a different definition of what is really muddy compared to other people! The group did see some birds, especially towards the Leslie Creek section, and all appeared to have a good/interesting/challenging time. Not perturbed by this, we gathered again on 28th July for another adventure and actually managed to see a variety of species. Due to our increasing success, we will be atlassing again on the 13th Sept to see what the change in season brings.

Ian Sinclair, Malanda

Redden Island June 30th.

Redden Island (16°51'32"S 145°45'27"E) just to the north of Cairns Airport, provided an opportunity to test observational skills as the birdlife was very scarce due to the extremely dry conditions and the death of any fruiting

or flowering plant life. We managed a total of 45 species but most of these were shorebirds at the mouth of the Barron River. Four surveys were completed. The woodlands had nothing unexpected in them with a **Grey Goshawk** being the highlight. At the mouth of the Barron River it was a different story with a good variety of shorebirds for the time of year, most notable were 8 **Pacific Golden Plovers** five of which were in their winter breeding plumage. Others present were **Whimbrel**, **Eastern Curlew**, **Terek Sandpiper**, **Grey-tailed Tattler**, **Great Knot**, **Red-necked Stint**, **Red-capped Plover**, **Lesser & Greater Sandplover** and **Masked Lapwing**. Other birds present were **Silver Gull**, **Gull-billed Tern**, **Caspian Tern**, **Lesser Crested Tern**, **Crested Tern** and an **Osprey**. This collection of birds represents a greater variety than the Cairns Esplanade has on offer at the moment. It was a pleasant few hours strolling around the island and one, which will be repeated later in the year

Keith & Lindsay Fisher

Wetlands of Northern Cairns July 14th

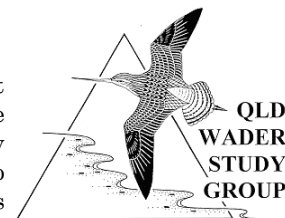
Four wetlands within 5 km were visited in the northern suburbs of Cairns starting off with the lagoon at the Skyrail terminal in Smithfield (16°50'56"S 145°41'39"E), not many waterbirds but there was a **Comb-crested Jacana** and **Green Pygmy-goose** (present at all four wetlands). Second stop was the Cattana Road Lagoon also at Smithfield (16° 50'07"S 145°41'48"E), the water level was low here due to the dry weather we have been experiencing but a few birds were foraging around in the shallows including **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Black-winged Stilt** and a **Pelican**, even a few ducks, **Pacific Black Duck**, **Hardhead** and a few **Grey Teal**. Around the edge were **Crimson Finches** and **Chestnut-breasted Manikins** along with very obliging **Golden-headed Cisticolas** who posed on the top of grass stems for all to see. Third stop was Yorkeys Knob Lagoon beside the golf course, the highlight for the morning was a **Little Kingfisher** (thank you Dawn), the second record for this location. There was plenty of **Plumed Whistling-Duck** here along with a couple of **Eurasian Coots** and **Moorhens**. **Australasian Grebe**, **Black-fronted Dotterel** & **Brown-backed Honeyeater** were amongst some of the other birds present. Our final call was to a private lagoon at Holloways Beach for morning smoko, where our hosts Vicki & Ted run Billabong B&B (16° 50 145° 43). A superb spot for birdos as the open house is on an island completely surrounded by the lagoon and a great variety of birdlife. There were 4 **Radjah Shelduck** here, an uncommon species in the Cairns area, and according to Ted were resident for most of the year. Other birds here, not seen at the other wetlands were **Magpie Geese**, **Black-necked Stork**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **Grey Fantail** & **Yellow Oriole**. There were also many ducks and some very large Barramundi swimming around showing off to us. Check out their web site at www.bnbng.com.au. Despite or because of the water levels dropping in the region a good variety of birds were recorded in the 4 wetlands and a total of 51 species was recorded.

Keith & Lindsay Fisher



National Painted Snipe Survey ... Chris Tzaros

Nobody knows what **Australian Painted Snipe** do in the winter. The one thing we are sure of is that they manage to elude birdwatchers - fewer than 10% of past **Painted Snipe** sightings have been made in the austral winter. Do they vanish into undiscovered wintering areas, perhaps in the sparsely inhabited centre or north of Australia? Or does their behaviour change so they become even harder to find? Or does birdwatcher behaviour change, with wetlands in southern Australia being checked less carefully in winter than in summer? In an attempt to find out, we are holding a winter survey of Painted Snipe and are inviting people to join in.



WHAT SORT OF FIELDWORK IS INVOLVED?

It's fairly simple: Go to a likely looking wetland or wetlands, search it for **Painted Snipe**, and let us know how you go. The scheduled survey date is the weekend in October. This serves as some kind of focal date, but if that weekend doesn't suit, we would also be interested in searches made at any other time. OK, we might have glossed over one tricky bit. **Painted Snipe** are not easy to find. A fair proportion of those found are found standing in quite open sites (usually on mud or very shallow water) and are located by simply scanning wetlands, especially (but not always) at dawn or dusk. However, **Painted Snipe** are capable of being very bashful, and to search a wetland really thoroughly for them, it is best to walk through surrounding vegetation to see if any are flushed. Usually they camp in grasslands (and probably less often in reeds) but it is hard to know what to expect in winter. Some recent records suggest that **Painted Snipe** "campsites" can be several hundred metres from the focal wetland, even in apparently unpromising habitats like improved pasture or ditches. We are aware that this kind of search is not always possible, and would welcome assistance even in cases where scanning is the only searching option.

In all honesty, volunteers for this winter survey are not that likely to see a **Painted Snipe** - we would be pleased if one in twenty reported success, as that might be enough to give us some idea of what **Painted Snipe** are up to in winter. So why get involved? Well, there is the never-failing pleasure of birding in wetlands, the virtuous feeling that you are doing something positive that hasn't been tried before, and the remote but real possibility that you will get to see one of the worlds most striking birds.

ANY BUREAUCRACY OR PAPERWORK?

Hopefully not too much. It would help us a great deal if volunteers who are able to go searching on or around the survey date could contact us before the end of June, so we can co-ordinate matters to some extent - e.g. making sure that we don't have situations where several people search one wetland while another nearby one remains unsearched. There is a simple form to fill in, whether or not a Painted Snipe is located. This can be emailed or snail-mailed on request. The Painted Snipe survey is a joint project of the Threatened Bird Network (TBN) and the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG), co-ordinated by Danny Rogers, Chris Tzaros, Ian Hance and Steve Paton.

NORTH QUEENSLAND SURVEYS

BA-NQG will be assisting with the National survey by searching Lake Mitchell, north of Mareeba and the Townsville Town Common, on Sunday 3rd November. Contact your area representative for local events. The official *Painted Snipe Report Forms* have been sent to all area representatives for use in their surveys. Please return these to Chris Tzaros for collation.

Birds Australia Barren Grounds (formerly Barren Grounds Bird Observatory)

The Barren Grounds Nature Reserve, a 2000 hectare plateau on the Illawarra escarpment, is home to many threatened species, including the **Eastern Bristlebird**, **Ground Parrot**, Giant Burrowing Frog and Long-nosed Potoroo. This is a summary of courses available. Contact Brendon Neilly on barren.grounds@bigpond.com for more details.

Nature Writing 27-29th September

I am sure you have all heard that a picture paints a thousand words, well what if you were given a thousand words to paint a picture! This course is a must for anyone wanting to capture the beauty of nature in Australia on paper.

Wildflowers of the Heath 15th Sept and 9th Nov

With several books on plants of the Sydney region under his belt as well as publications on bushwalking in the Sydney region, who better to spend a day in the heathland of Barren Grounds with? Join Alan for one or both of these days in the beautiful heath of Barren Grounds. Cost: \$80 per day including lunch and snacks, or book for both and pay only \$150.00.



Wildlife Survey Techniques 11-13th October

Australia's fauna doesn't usually make itself easy to observe and survey. This course will cover everything from mist netting to harp trapping and will discuss the ethical and scientific merits behind each technique. Student rates apply.

Song and Dance 18-20th October

Australia's birds have some of the most magnificent calls and displays in the world. With a unique perspective on birds and a great sense of humour a weekend with Win will be fun and informative.

A warden's life is never dull 1-3rd November

Spotlighting, bush walks, story telling, bird watching, and some other great activities.

Slitherers & Croakers 15-17th November

This is a very popular course so be quick to book. Come and bask in the sun with lizards and snakes slithering around Barren Grounds by day and by night explore froggy haunts for nocturnal amphibian loud mouths. The course has previously found several new species for the reserve help us find more!



2002-03 BA-NQG Executive Committee meeting

The first meeting of the 2002-03 BA-NQG Executive Committee was held on 13th July. Of course a gathering of birders on a verandah surrounded by birds made it difficult to concentrate, especially when the **King Parrots** were close enough to touch. Summarised are the details of current conservation issues:

1. **Tolga Scrub:** Graham Harrington has been involved with discussions regarding the recent damage caused to the Tolga scrub (Endangered Type 5b rainforest) by the **Sulfur-crested Cockatoos** and bats. Graham will continue to liaise with the Atherton Shire Council about the damage and possible management options.
2. **Vegetation Management Committees:** The executive were briefed on the issue including involvement and current timeframes. The Convenor will be coordinating BA-NQG input by developing a position paper for each of the bioregions in north Queensland outlining priority species and their habitat. It was agreed to have further regional meetings to discuss issues pertaining to each of the bioregions. This information will then be forwarded to each of the Vegetation Committees.
3. **Gulf Plains wildlife impact on grassland birds:** Questions have been raised as to the impact on grassland species as a result of the wildfire this year which burnt around 2 million hectares. This issue will be discussed as part of the vegetation management planning process for the North West Highlands bioregion.
4. **Beach Stone-curlew Monitoring:** Amanda Freeman will continue to administer the database for sightings north of Ingham, while Paul O'Neill (QPWS Rockhampton) is the contact for southern records. Amanda has also written a paper (not yet published) for EMU on the BA-NQG survey results. See December Contact Call for a summary of Amanda's findings.
5. **Pied Imperial Pigeon Data:** Year's of data on the pigeon counts have been accumulating in the Ingham QPWS office. It was highlighted that this data should be captured electronically and analyzed. Alastair will be following up the option of a student (JCU) to assist BA-NQG with this project.
6. **Gouldian Finch at Waterhole Survey:** Unfortunately this project has proven very time consuming in the past and its recent inactivity has resulted in closure of the project. The Committee thanked Klaus Uhlenhut for his work.
7. **GBRMP rezoning:** GBRMPA are currently undertaking a planning process to rezone the park using a Representative Areas Program. The Committee will be making a submission following liaison with local seabird experts.
8. **Encouraging Ornithological Research at Universities:** It was suggested that BA-NQG should become more involved with local universities and encourage ornithological research. The Committee will be developing a list of appropriate project which could be used to assist students.
9. **Painted Snipe:** A National survey is being conducted in October & November. See page 1 for details on regional surveys.
10. **Threatened Species Consultation Register:** The Commonwealth government are compiling a register of interested people/groups who would be consulted on issues concerning threatened species in their area. BA-NQG believe this as an opportunity to be involved in important issues and will request inclusion on the register.

Other general business included:

1. **Nyletta Wetlands:** \$3000 was raised for interpretive work at the wetlands but has not been used due to another government grant for signage. BA-NQG agreed to update and reprint the bird list, possibly erecting a blackboard or visitor book for visitors to note their comments and interesting species. The Committee has also proposed an information day at Nyletta Wetlands in February 2003 to promote the work completed. Details in the December newsletter.
2. **Mareeba Wetlands Bird Expo:** Mareeba Wetland Foundation is having a bird expo at the wetlands on Saturday 31st August 2002. BA-NQG will be in attendance to promote recent wetland projects.
3. **AGM 2003:** next year is the 50th anniversary of the RAOU campout at Lake Barrine and the Committee agreed to have the 2003 AGM at Lake Barrine to commemorate this historic occasion. More details in following newsletters.

TOLGA SCRUB AND SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOOS

A few facts that may not be generally known and may be relevant to the current problem of Cockatoo and bat damage.

1. In 1956 the northern end of the Tolga Scrub was severely damaged by wind. This opened up the canopy and encouraged pioneer tree species and this may be when the White Cedar trees established.
2. The dead and defoliated trees would have been attractive to roosting birds (and possibly bats). Possibly the White Cedars have since also attracted birds and bats when they have shed their leaves.
3. **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** were using most of the Scrub as a roost in the early eighties and did so for three years. There are earlier recollections of Cockatoos using the Scrub.
4. Two species of bats use the Scrub as a roost. Spectacled Flying Foxes are there on a permanent basis but numbers fluctuate considerably. Little Red Flying Foxes use it from time to time. The last time Little Reds appeared was immediately after the roost trees in Mareeba were felled in



5. The damage to the trees from the bats is considerable. Little Reds hang closely together and tend to break branches. Both species of bats are known to nibble growing shoots. Physical damage is an inevitable result from such intensive use.
6. It is possible that the damage by bats attracts the cockatoos to trees with bare branches.
7. The number of Cockatoos in the district reflects food availability. We do not know how far a field the Tolga Cockatoos forage, however it is possible that they fly very long distances. Although they feed in agricultural fields they are also commonly seen feeding in natural forests in the district.
8. They may have increased in numbers in this district because of the dry conditions elsewhere. It is probable they will decline naturally given time.
9. If the Cockatoos are moved from the Tolga Scrub they will gather somewhere else. They may all move together and cause a similar problem elsewhere or they may split up.

Graham Harrington, Conservation Officer

Interesting sightings



Ian Clayton was amazed to see a rather bedraggled "Rainforest" **Australian Bustard** at Paluma, some 900 metres above sea level, walking through the village on the 27th May. John and Carole Carpenter from NSW stayed up at Hazlemere Station, north of Cooktown (the owners run a B & B there) at the beginning of June and had a few interesting sightings. A **Channel-billed Cuckoo** was over wintering there and an influx of **Banded Honeyeater** were feeding on *Eucalyptus Miniata*, a lone **Common Starling** was seen around the homestead and a **Brown Songlark** was well out of its normal range. They also had 20+ **White-bellied Crimson Finches** at the Hann River Crossing in Lakefield NP. On Sun 9th June at the Cairns Esplanade, David Anderson and Andy Anderson watched an immature **Grey Falcon** being sent packing by the local pair of **Peregrine Falcon**, which are again nesting on the Matson Plaza hotel, the falcon was seen again, north of Cairns, on 11th June by Ben Blewitt. This is a first record for the Cairns Esplanade. Martin Cachard had a male **Pale-headed Rosella** in his suburban Freshwater yard on 9th June, an unusual find for Cairns. Martin also spotted a single adult **Great-billed Heron** in the Upper Goldsborough Valley on 23rd June. Michael Barnett noted **Channel-billed Cuckoos** at Rocky Point, Weipa on 22nd June and 3rd July. A single **Freckled Duck** was recorded 7th July at the Mt. Isa Sewage Ponds by June Harris, a visitor from NSW. Still at the ponds, Bob Forsyth reports that a single **Avocet** there was joined by a 2nd bird at the beginning of July, also here were **Spotted Crakes** and **Black-tailed Native-hens**. Bob also pointed visitor Jim Davis in the right direction at the Isa as he found a **Peregrine Falcon** and south of the Leichhardt River crossing a **Red Goshawk**. Bob also says that the **Dusky Grasswrens (race Ballarae)** are still being regularly recorded at the Mica Creek site and several visitors have sighted the **Carpentarian Grasswren** near the cairn (and visitor's book) at McNamara's Road 60km NW of Mount Isa. At midday 100's of **Painted Finches** still arrive to drink at Warrigal Waterhole with several dozen **Grey-headed Honeyeaters** and a few **Grey-fronted Honeyeaters**. If you intend to visit Mt. Isa check out Bob's birding spots on the Gazetteer pages of the Birds Queensland web site www.birdsqueensland.org.au. Several observers, including John Crowhurst, Dawn Magarry, Kath Shurcliffe and Keith Fisher reported up to 4 **Great-crested Grebe** on the Cairns Esplanade during July/August, again this is a first for here. Grant Phillips had an amazing 60,000 est. **Magpie Goose** flying over the Malanda to Atherton Road on the 4th July, they were heading west and disappeared over the Great Dividing Range. Michael Barnett saw the third sighting of a **Willie Wagtail** in 12 years – at a Weipa sewage treatment plant. Also behind the Napranum Sewage Treatment Plant Michael found a flock of **Rufous-throated Honeyeaters**. Some had no throat patch, some a thin line, others the full throat patch. The distribution maps and range descriptions in Schodde & Mason, Simpson & Day and Slater don't describe the northern limit. Pizzey & Knight list the northern limit as the Embly Range 80km inland from Weipa without reference (although appears to be from Claridge, G.F. "A Range Extension for the *Rufous-throated Honeyeater Conopophila rufogularis* on the Cape York Peninsula", Sunbird 19 (1) October 1989). Ian Cowan reported **Red-winged Parrots** at Clifton Beach on 27th July and the first **Pied Imperial Pigeons** for the season turning up here on 3rd August. Keen English birder Dave Willis, over here on holiday, found 2 **Painted Snipe** at Cairns Croc. Farm on 28th July, they were subsequently found and confirmed by Phil Gregory. Keith Fisher & Kath Shurcliffe had a **Red-kneed Dotterel** at Yorkeys Knob Golf Course and 5 **Australian Wood Duck** at the Cattana Road Lagoon on 3rd August, both uncommon species in Cairns. Brian Venables saw 2 possible **Laughing Gulls** (Gull with all dark head) off Forbes Island northern Cape York Peninsula on 5th August, he also said that other observers had reportedly see one at Portland Roads, CYP. about the same time, worth keeping a look out if you are up that way. Brian also saw **Pale-White-eye** and **Mangrove Golden Whistler** on Forbes Island, the whistlers were in open woodland as there is little mangroves on the island. While at Toonpan (Townsville), Marleen Action and friends saw **Double-banded Plover** on 18th August in breeding plumage. This is the first recording for Toonpan which now has more than 200 species recorded. Thanks to those that sent in sightings and other who posted them onto Birding Aus.

Keith Fisher

New Marine Park for Cairns

A new marine park has been declared for tropical north Queensland taking in Trinity Inlet, Cairns' northern beaches and Wonga Beach near Mossman. Environment Minister Dean Wells said that declaring Trinity Inlet and the Marlin Coast as a multiple-use marine park would help ensure the area's values were protected while allowing ecologically sustainable use. The area is not only renowned for beautiful scenery and magnificent views, Trinity Inlet and the Marlin Coast also have immense natural values including extensive fringing mangroves, seagrass beds, turtles and dugongs. The area also has significant cultural and heritage values. The marine park will provide greater protection for our waterways and help preserve the ecosystem.

The Trinity inlet/Marlin Coast Marine Park boundaries generally extend from the level of highest astronomical tide on the coast out to the three nautical mile territorial sea limits of Queensland.

Supplied by EPA / QPWS, Cairns

New NQ Brochures:

Uningan Nature Reserve - Weipa.
Sponsored by Birds Australia & Comalco,
this list of 180 species give visitors a guide as to what might reasonably be expected at the 2800ha reserve. Walking tracks and footbridges, established by volunteers, promote access throughout the western end of the reserve

Town Common Conservation Park - Townsville .
Townsville Region Birds Observers Club of Australia supported by the Qld Parks & Wildlife Service have reprinted a checklist of birds for the park. With over 250 species recorded, this Park will keep any birder occupied for days.



Welcome to new members...

- 👤 Ms J. Boyd, AITKENVALE;
- 👤 Mr J. Collins, HOME HILL;
- 👤 Ms S. PIEZ, JULATTEN;
- 👤 Mrs M.Thorsborne, CARDWELL
- 👤 Mr R & Mrs L Murphy, SOUTH TOWNSVILLE

We look forward to seeing you on some of our many activities or drop us a line about your recent birding adventures.

Check out these websites

Featherdale Wildlife Park: www.featherdale.com.au
Birds Queensland - www.birdsqueensland.org.au
Birds Observers Club of Oz: www.birdobservers.org.au
Ecology 2002 Conference: www.tesag.jcu.edu.au
Australian Wildlife Conservancy: www.australianwildlife.org



The Arctic isn't just for the birds....

Over the years we have enjoyed amazing success with our Birds Australia raffles. The commitment & enthusiasm shown by our supporters heartens us, and again, its time to ask for your help. Supporting Birds Australia in this way will help us enormously with the care of our wonderful birds and their environment.

Jim Downey, Chief Executive Officer, BA.

First Prize: See Canada and Greenland on an Arctic cruise for two with Peregrine Adventures....including flights. Polar bears, Puffins, Inuit ruins and Viking tales. Here's your chance to experience the wonders of the high arctic on a 14 day cruise. **Second Prize:** Top of the range optical package by Leica and Kowa. Get up close and personal with the birds. **Third Prize:** A magical week for two at Somerset Apartments, Lord Howe Island, flights included.

With a \$2 ticket, you could experience the trip of a lifetime!

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

Padaminka Wildlife Reserve

184 acres of bushland under a conservation agreement with QPWS. 155 bird species for the year. Camping and bush kitchen, caravan sites, Free BBQ, Self-contained cottages, single rooms with wheelchair access. Affordable rates. Tag-along-tours welcome. Only 15 minutes from Mackay, easy drive to Eungella and Kinchant Dam.



Contact Maureen Cooper
P.O. Box 113, Walkerston, 4751.
Phone (07)4959 3770.
Email: padaminka@mrbean.net.au

Notice Board

POSITION VACANT

The Executive Committee of BA-NQG has agreed that due to the increased involvement in the number of community projects, there is a growing need to have a **Publicity Officer** on board. Main duties will be to liaise with the Executive Committee (especially the Conservation Officer) and local newspapers on the issues and events of the group and to write and coordinate press releases across the region. If you are interested in this very rewarding, voluntary position, please email Keith Fisher (Secretary).

ECOLOGY 2002 CONFERENCE 2-6Dec02

The Ecological Society of Australia and the New Zealand Ecological Society are hosting their 2nd joint meeting. Full registration is \$495 for the four days and \$148.50 for non-members. Concession rates available. Contact Jill Landsberg on (07) 40421443 or email: Jill.Landsberg@jcu.edu.au or check out their web site www.tesag.jcu.edu.au

NOTE FROM BIRDS AUSTRALIA

Dear *Birds Australia* Member,

At Birds Australia we are always looking for ways of saving money, and one important way that you can do to help us do this is to pay your membership subscription when it falls due. Without renewal, your membership will expire at the end of September. We are about to send you a renewal form so that you can renew your membership before then. By returning the form and your payment promptly you will help us minimise administration costs and ensure more money goes to our bird life. You may like to consider renewing through the web site at www.birdsaustralia.com.au. If you have any queries, please send a message to us at: membership@birdsaustralia.com.au.



Thank you for your support!
Regards
Hugo Phillipps,
Birds Australia Communication Officer BA.

Please send items for December 2002 Contact Call by Mid November to: Helen McLaughlin, 44 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens 4810 or Email either Helen or Ian on helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au or ian.sinclair@nrm.qld.gov.au.