

Photo courtesy of NSW NPWS

Volunteering is hard work

Volunteer organisations survive only because of the hard work of their members; Birds Australia is no exception. My year as President of BA-NQG has made me realise just how much work is involved. The committee this year has worked extremely hard on maintaining the profile of the group and supporting the members. In particular I would like to recognise Keith Fisher who as secretary is the “backbone” of the committee. His efforts have been most vital to the smooth running of the committee. Conservation officer, Graham Harrington has dealt with a range of conservation and other issues, in particular the Sulfur-crested Cockatoos at Tolga Scrub, with a degree of professionalism which reflects well on the organisation. While, our presence and profile south of Tully has been raised through the considerable efforts of Helen McLaughlin and Jo Wieneke in Townsville. Helen has also continued to maintain the excellent standards set by Keith Fisher as newsletter editor. Finally, as treasurer, Amanda Freeman has managed to negotiate the minefield of bookkeeping in the era of GST with aplomb.

Thanks to all the committee for their input of time and energy over the last year. Whatever changes arise from the AGM on the 31st May the efforts of the old committee are much appreciated.

Alastair Freeman

BA North Queensland Group—Events Calendar June-Sept 2003

June 2003

Saturday 7th - Monday 9th Queen's Bday Blackbraes National Park, Hughenden

Although chilly, this June weekend should prove to be successful. 4WD essential, self sufficiency necessary, bush camping only available. RSVP's needed. Contact Helen McLaughlin for more details.

Saturday 28th June

Beginnings day at Emerald Creek Falls

Bird watching for beginners. Meet at the car park at 8:30am Take the Kuranda road from Mareeba and turn right a few km down the road - it is clearly signposted. A variety of binoculars will be available to look at, as well as Field Guides. Find out what bird characteristics to look for to decide what sort of bird it is and how to effectively use a field guide. All welcome

July 2003

Saturday 5th July

Serpentine Lagoon, Townsville

Winter Atlas the lagoon. Meet at the Wulguru Service Station at 6:30am. Contact Jo Wieneke for details.

Sunday 20th July

Nyleta Wetlands Open Day, Atherton

Bring the kids and the bino's for some fun activities at 'Hasties Swamp' National Park. Bird

watching tours will be at 7am, 11am and 2pm. Children's activities will be throughout the day. Help is needed from members to make this a great day. Please contact Alastair Freeman for details.

September 2003

Saturday 6th September

Wildlife Week @ Mareeba Wetlands

Tropical Tablelands Tourism are organising Wildlife Week 2003. BANQG will be having a display at the Mareeba Wetlands to celebrate. ALL WELCOME. Contact TTT on 4091 7444.

October 2003

Saturday 4th October

2003 NQ Crane Count

Count Brolgas and Sarus Cranes as they fly in to roost for the night, then add up the numbers (and celebrate) at the National Tally Room party after. As in 2002, prolonged drought conditions in many areas could make this a very challenging survey. Meet 3.30 pm at Hasties Swamp, for local Atherton Tableland sites. Townsville members will be surveying the Serpentine/Ross River Dam area on the same day. Other NQ sites very welcome - Gulf Country, Ingham, Cape York whatever. Contact Elinor Scambler, 4095 3296 or dacelo@austarnet.com.au.

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:

- *Executive Committee meeting in Cardwell*
- *Nyletta wetland open day*
- *Mt Zero Easter campout,*
- *Pied Imperial Pigeon count*
- *Trip Reports - Serpentine Lagoon, Cairns Esplanade, Meunga Creek Gorge, Goldsborough State Forest*
- *Gouldian Finches back to Mareeba*
- *Charters Towers adventures*
- *Unusual Sightings*
- *Tree clearing to stop by 2006*
- *Notice Board*
- *AGM details*

THOUGHT OF THE DAY
A duck's quack never echoes

The **Square-tailed Kite** get his scientific name *Lophoictinia isura* from them having a small occipital crest and a square-long with a wingspan of 131-145cm. On the males (501g), similar in size to typical kites and splayed primaries, giving a wider wingspan. In flight, the **Square-tailed Kite** can be distinguished from similar birds of prey by showing a white cap, wings being the broadest near the tips, and a long square or notched, sharp-cornered tail, which is twisted and fanned when soaring in the wind. The adult has dark brown upperparts with a white forehead and face, rufous dark-streaked nape, and pale upperwing bank, some birds have a pale lower back and rump. The tail is grey-brown with a dark terminal band, with underparts being rufous with heavy dark streaks on the breast. The underwings have rufous leading edges, barred secondaries and pale bases to the primaries. The **Square-tailed Kite** is a solitary hawk of open forest, woodland, scrub and heath in coastal and subcoastal areas and riverine trees in the inland. Recently seen around Cungalla (south of Townsville) and west of Charters Towers by some local birdwatchers, this bird gets the heart rate going. *Information sourced from The Birds of Prey of Australia by Stephen Debus.*

Square-tailed Kite

name *Lophoictinia isura* from them cut tip to the tail. This kite is 50-56cm average females are larger (650g) than harriers, but have longer and more



Atlas 2 contacts

The Atlas Report is due out in June 2003.

Please continue to send your Atlas forms to the following coordinators:

Northern Region (Cardwell north incl. Cape York)

Regional Organiser—Graham Harrington 4096 5051

PO Box 680, Malanda Q4885

- Keith Fisher (Cairns) (07) 4039 0972
PO Box 2209, Cairns Q4870
- Glenn Holmes (Atherton Tableland) (07) 4091 4364
PO Box 1246, Atherton Q4883

- Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) (07) 40953296

MS1318 Gadgarra Road, Yungaburra Q4872

Southern Region (Cardwell to Bowen)

Regional Organiser—Jo Wieneke 4771 4707

22 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens, Q4810

- Jon Wren (Bowen/Ayr) (07) 4786 2614
PO Box 868 Bowen Q4805
- **Southern Region (Bowen to Mackay, including Mt Isa)**
Regional Organiser- Marion Crouther 4958 4613
PO Box 1, Dalrymple Heights Q4757

2002-2003 BA-NQG Management Committee

Executive Committee

Convener—Alastair Freeman Ph: 4095 2655

Email: procella@ozemail.com.au

Convener Elect—Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707

Email: bowerbird14@bigpond.com

Secretary—Keith Fisher Ph: 4039 0972

Email: lkfisher@optusnet.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 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: Sue Gould Ph: 4069 8415 (wk)

Email: susanfgould@yahoo.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

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.



April 2003 ~ Committee Meeting in Cardwell

The last meeting of the Executive Committee was held at the QPWS Reef to Rainforest Centre in Cardwell. Presented is a summary of the events and issues Birds Australia - North Queensland Group (BANQG) are involved in. Each newsletter will aim to provide a summary from these meetings, which hope to be located across the region, and followed by an outing in that area.

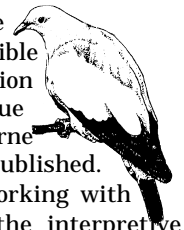


If there are any activities or issues you would like more information on, or would like to get involved with, please contact any of the committee members.

- J **Nyleta Wetlands Open Day Sunday 20th July** - will provide an opportunity to invite locals to join in with guides bird tours of the wetland (@ 7am, 11am and 2pm). There will be some activities for the kids and every opportunity to learn more about the local birds.
- J **Resource Materials** - BANQG have recently purchased some display boards for use at public events. The group will gradually build on their display material, its first outing was the May Yungaburra markets. This will provide the group an opportunity to show case the activities and bird conservation issues.
- J **Website development** - watch this space. Over the next year, BANQG will be developing their own web site, where people will be able to gain information on bird conservation issues and local outings.
- J **Conservation Issues** - Townsville's local pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles have managed to keep their ancient nest through its relocation to Louisa Creek, away from developers. Although the pairs feeding and nesting trees were destroyed to make way for a development, the nest was relocated onto a steel pole. Time will tell whether they will adopt their new nest.
- J **Black-throated Finch Recovery Team** - has been recently formed in Townsville to identify the threats to the northern population of the southern subspecies and to assist with their recovery from their threatened status. If any of this subspecies of finch are sighted, they are encouraged to report them through the usual Atlas forms, or email Jo Wieneke.
- J **GBRMP rezoning plan** - BANQG have submitted

information to this process and will keep members informed of the issues in subsequent newsletters.

- J **Important Bird Areas** - Dr Stephen Garnet (QPWS Cairns) will be presenting information to the group at the AGM. However this process will see BANQG identify IBA's in North Queensland, and help with the protection of these species.
- J **Hinchinbrook Island bird list** - BANQG have been working with QPWS on finalising a bird list for the island and will be printed very soon.
- J **Wet Tropics bird posters** - the WTMA are putting together a set of eight wildlife posters in conjunction with the Cairns Post. BANQG have therefore been working on two bird posters, "Rainforest Birds of the Wet Tropics" and "Open Country Birds of the Wet Tropics". These will be available through collecting vouchers from the Cairns Post and redeeming them for the posters. This will be a great opportunity for the group and we are hoping they will be very popular. If any members have close-up photos (preferably slides) of any birds from the wet tropics, please contact Keith Fisher as soon as possible.
- J **Yungaburra markets in May** - BANQG were able to have a display at the markets to promote bird conservation and advertise other bird activities and outings coming soon.
- J **Pied Imperial Pigeon Data** - the Committee have been exploring possible ways of publishing data on the population growth of the PIP. BANQG will continue to work with QPWS and the Thorsborne Trust to make sure the information is published.
- J **Cairns Esplanade** - BANQG are working with the Cairns City Council to ensure the interpretive signage which will be located on the new boardwalks, is accurate and informative.



Next committee meeting, will be the weekend of the Nyleta Wetland Open Day. The September/October meeting will be in the Mission Beach area. The Committee will inform members of an associated outing or guest speaker in the September newsletter.

Nyleta Wetland Open Day ~ Sunday 20th July 2003



Birds Australia—North Queensland Group have been working with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to upgrade the facilities at Nyleta wetland. A bird hide, created to suit the surrounds of Nyleta, was built in 2002 and has quickly become a major tourist attraction of the Atherton Tablelands. This area is an amazing place, having with a huge number and diversity of birds which frequent the Wet Tropics bioregion.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to brush up on your birds with the experts.

Sunday's program of events

- J Children's activities throughout the day;
- J Guided bird tours at **7am, 11am** and **2pm** around the wetland;
- J Information on the best places on the tablelands to go bird watching;
- J Find out about local bird conservation issues;
- J Beginners welcome. Members will have their scopes and binoculars to assist

Nyleta Wetland, or Hasties Swamp, as it is known to locals, is only 10 minutes from Atherton on the Herberton Road .



Easter camp at Mt Zero



Members from Townsville, Cairns, Mt Isa and the Atherton Tablelands came to our Easter Camp at Mt Zero, the reserve owned and managed by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. The manager Ernest Dunwoody made us welcome at the homestead and provided power, showers and a campfire each night. The camp kitchen was set up under the house and some members of the group retreated to rooms upstairs when the rain persisted and tents, unaccustomed to wet weather, proved to be non-waterproof. On the first night Ernest told us of his own background as a scientist, Governmental adviser in the US, then as an environmental-award-winning cane farmer in Mackay. He described the property and the problems involved with managing it as a reserve. First priority for the property is a plan for maintaining the wet sclerophyll forest and preventing the encroachment of rainforest. After that will come facilities for visitors and provision of access to some of the more inaccessible areas. As a large part of the property has no easy access, this will be a challenge.

On Saturday afternoon we revisited Puzzle Creek and surveyed an area that seemed only slightly greener than on our previous trip in December. Those who took a 'short cut' across country enjoyed the walk via the creek and gorge but found very little water coming over the falls and few birds. **Scarlet Honeyeater, Spotted Pardalote, Red-backed Fairy-wren** and plenty of **White-throated Honeyeaters** however kept most birders occupied.

Saturday was spent in the wet sclerophyll – following the power-line track where possible, then visiting sites off the Taravale road in the afternoon. Highlights were excellent sightings of **Crested Shrike-tits**, seen infrequently in this area, **Victoria's Riflebird, Yellow-breasted Boatbill**, and **Pied Monarch**. Later in the afternoon we joined Roy Mackay and Andree Griffin at the Rosegum *Eucalyptus*

grandis site along the main road where **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** had previously nested. Right on time at 6pm a pair of Glossy's arrived - their call and smaller size noticeable different from the **Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos** which were also present in the casuarinas. By Sunday the rain had set in, but undeterred we drove to Spinifex Creek – along the road to Laroona. This is supposedly on the drier side of the property but no one begrudged the rain. We walked up the creek to the top of a hill with a good view over the surrounding country. The three frog species found along the creek were *Limnodynastes ornatus*, *Litoria lesueuri* and *Litoria inermis*. Unexpected sightings along the creek included both the **Spotted and Owlet Nightjars**. Common **Bronzewing** were also sighted in low eucalypt forests on spinifex plains, while an **Australian Raven** was also noted. Not far from this site, while heading back to the Paluma markets for the afternoon, a **Diamond Dove** and **Kestrel** were spotted along the road. The rest of the group continued on in the rain to search for an old mine site. After over an hour we had still not reached it but did find a spectacular mixed flock of small yellow birds - **Buff-rumped Thornbills, White-throated Gerygones** and **Weebills**. Ernest later located the mine over the next hill from where we had stopped and also found a more direct track for a future visit.

The owners of Taravale kindly allowed us to go spotlighting there that evening and it lived up to its reputation as a top spotlighting area. Without too much effort we found seven Greater Gliders as well as one Ring-tailed Possum and one Brush-tailed Possum, a roosting kookaburra but no owls. Many thanks to AWC and especially Ernest for allowing us to go there and providing the campsite and facilities, and to Helen and Marty McLaughlin for organising the camp.

Jo Wieneke, Townsville

Brook Island Pied Imperial Pigeon Update 2003

During the summer of 1965/66, Arthur and Margaret Thorsborne began counting **Pied Imperial Pigeons** (PIP) on the Brook Islands, by scribbling tallies on old scraps of paper. Back then individual counts barely reached 5000. In later years when the bird numbers increased, additional people - volunteers, conservation enthusiasts and QPWS officers - helped with the counts. Recording sheets were developed, counting methods refined and the population monitoring became an annual event. Thirty-seven years on, individual counts of birds returning to North Brook Islands during the breeding season has continued to steadily rise. Counts between 1996 and 2002/03 have fluctuated between 31,000 and 36,5000, with the highest count of 45,134 recorded on the 29/12/94.

The idea of monitoring pigeon numbers was borne off a recommendation from former DPI Chief fauna officer Charlie Roff, who expressed concerns of pigeon populations on the Brook islands. This was an era when sport shooting saw pigeon numbers drop rapidly. Counting has consistently been undertaken over the thirty-seven year period with five counting days from October to January. Counts that have taken place outside these times often registered low numbers.

Consistent information obtained from the seasonal counts have been useful in analyzing population changes of the PIP on the Brook Islands. In 1988 John Winter, formerly with the EPA, and Arthur and Margaret Thorsborne, documented the population changes of the PIP over twenty-one years on North Brook island, and the results published in *The EMU**. In the absence of detailed analysis of results of 1989 – 2003 counts, which are currently being compiled by John Winter, seasonal variations in numbers appear to be consistent with the 1998 analysis with the highest counts for each season being recorded from December through January.

The Brook Islands lie 30 km ENE of Cardwell and have been the site of large colonies of the breeding **Pied Imperial Pigeons** - **Torresian Imperial Pigeons** or **Nutmeg Pigeons** as they are otherwise known. The above counts were recorded on North Brook, one of four islands in the Brook group. These islands are also important breeding sites for Threatened species such as the **Roseate Tern, Beach Stone Curlew** and the **Sooty Oystercatcher**, which have been identified in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Seabird Monitoring Strategy.

Other important survey work continues to be conducted as part of the long running PIP surveys: coral surveys, bleaching, siltation and anchor damage by Lyndon DeVantier; turtles, dugongs and sea grass bed surveys by Tony Preen; vegetation surveys by Peter Stanton, Russell Cumming and Paul Williams; bird lists by André Griffin, Graham Harrington, Jo Wieneke, John Winter, QPWS staff and many others. PIP counts, coordinated by Dave Green, and supported by GBRMPA and QPWS staff and volunteers, are currently being planned for 2003/04.

Justine Douglas, QPWS Cardwell



Photo courtesy of Tanya Schreier

* J Winter and A & M Thorsborne, 1988, "The Emu: Population Changes of the Torresian Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoa* Over Twenty-one Years on North brook Island, North Queensland", Vol 88, Pt 1.

Serpentine Lagoon 2nd March 2003

Despite Townsville's first heavy rain for the season the night before, there was a record low amount of water in the wetland. As rain fell on Mt Elliot, the few birders who risked the weather were able to walk to the wetland with few problems of getting waterlogged. Unfortunately there were few birds today, compared to our last visit in November 2002. A juvenile **Glossy Ibis** was seen combing the creek, while a **Forest Kingfisher** flittered back and forth from nearby shrubs. A lonely **Black Swan** travelled up and down with creek, closely followed by both **Cotton** and **Green Pygmy-goose**. Unfortunately there were no signs of the **Black-throated Finch** or **Latham's Snipe** this time, but well worth the visit with a total of over 50 species.



Helen McLaughlin, Townsville

Cairns Esplanade 16th March 2003

A small crowd of enthusiastic members and visitors gathered to see the waders along the esplanade and to share the finer points of identification. The tide was perfect, slowly retreating and allowing the birds to fly onto the mudflats in small groups which made sorting them out easier. **Eastern Curlews** with their long curved bills were separated from the **Whimbrel** with their shorter curved bill, **Black-tailed Godwits** showed the distinct black band in the tail, as they flew in, separating them from the similar **Bar-tailed Godwit**. A few **Terek Sandpipers** were busily scurrying across the mud, occasionally stopping to probe their distinctly up turned bill into the mud. **Lesser** and **Greater Sandplovers** are always difficult for the less experienced but good views were had of the greater alongside the lesser. This showed the greater's larger and heavier bill and its longer legs as good identification features to separating them out. A pair of **Pied Oystercatcher** flew in calling and did not present any identification problems. A couple of **Little Terns** were fluttering back and forth before landing and giving everyone good looks. Other migratory waders present were, **Common Greenshank**, **Grey-tailed Tattler**, **Great Knot** and **Red-necked Stint**.

This was the last opportunity to view the waders from the walkway before work started on upgrading the area. The area from the new lagoon, at the southern end to the playground halfway along, has now been fenced off as a construction site (the only access is along the mudflats). A new seawall is being put in along with a 5m wooden boardwalk, jutting onto the mudflats. There will be three interpretive centres including one depicting the natural history of the inlet along this part of the Esplanade.

Keith Fisher, Cairns



Interesting visitor to a Cairns lounge

About 11:30am on 3/4/03 I glimpsed something flutter across the curtains in our lounge. Grabbing my small butterfly net, on investigation I could see it was a small brown chicken-sized bird. I eventually cornered it and managed to get it into the net. On a closer look I could see it was either a young Brush Turkey or Jungle Fowl. Arnold and I quickly checked our Pizzey handbook and on first glance couldn't decide. But looking closer we could see the difference in the bill shape, yellowish feet, pale eye-ring and what finally clinched it was the barring on the wings—a young **Orange-footed Scrubfowl**. It was very strong and struggled all the time I held it. After showing it to our neighbour with whom we share both turkey and scrubfowl, I took it down to the garden to release it among the leaf litter. It immediately took off and flew strongly about 30m into the big Poinciana tree at about 10m high. How it arrived in the lounge I have no idea, but earlier I had heard and chased a cat from the garden so maybe that was what upset it.



Dawn Magarry, Cairns

Meunga Creek Gorge 6th April 2003

Following a meeting of the Executive Committee in Cardwell, a trip to Meunga Creek Gorge was a must. The water supply for Cardwell and Kennedy Valley is fed by Meunga Creek, and this 2km walk to the intake was spectacular. Stopping at some Melaleuca lined creeks the group saw great views of **Yellow-breasted Boatbill**, **Pied** and **Spectacled Monarch**, while **Red-browed Firetail** were gathering grass material for their nest. A **Noisy Pitta** casually hopped along the road, a **Superb Fruit-dove** called in the rainforest, and even the **Orange-footed Scrubfowl** were obliging. Attie Creek Falls was a great venue for smoko were the group walked through the Gympie Messmate *Eucalyptus cloeziana* forest to the falls. There we watch two pairs of **Red-browed Firetail** clinging to the falls, in mid stream of the waterfall, feeding on insects and playing. Jo likened this to the Australian version of a Wallcreeper. Thanks to QPWS and NR&M for allowing access to Meunga Creek.

Helen McLaughlin, Townsville

Goldsborough State Forest 18th May 2003

Situated SSW of Cairns along the Mulgrave River, this State forest contains good patches of lowland rainforest and open woodlands. The weather was fantastic, clear blue skies, cool and dappled sunlight reaching the forest floor. Starting out from the day use area we were surprised to see a female **Victoria's Riflebird** foraging around the trunk of a tree only 3m off the ground. Several trees were fruiting and attracting a noisy **Figbird** who were being harassed by **Wompoo Fruit-Dove** trying to stake a claim on the fruit. Great views were had of the many wompoo's as they perched motionless in the trees digesting their meals, whilst making little grunting noises. The edge of the rainforest also had many **Grey Whistlers** on view, one **Bridled Honeyeater** was sitting on the ground sunning and a pair of **Australian King-Parrot** looked at their best in the sunlight. The walk up to Kearney Falls through the open rainforest produced many good sightings including; **Yellow-breasted Boatbill**, **Black-faced Monarch**, **Pied Monarch**, **Spotted Catbird**, plus a **Noisy Pitta** called once and **White-eared Monarchs** were heard calling from the tops of the trees but not seen. Out in the open woodland it was very quiet with only a few honeyeaters gleaning insects. Back at the day use area we saw a juvenile **Little Shrike-thrush** begging food from its parents, whilst we were having our smoko. We managed to see 39 species in a couple of hours in an area which is easily accessed from Cairns and the Tableland; it's a pleasant place to have an overnight camp if you avoid public holidays. The birdlife is varied and the walks are easy, the facilities are excellent and the setting is magnificent, what else could you want?

Keith Fisher, Cairns

Gouldian Finches once again in Mareeba



Forty **Gouldian Finches** have been released at Mareeba Wetlands this month. The release aviary is across the lake from the breeding cage and visitor centre. Tim Nevard also took digital video footage to give a better idea of the release site. It has a carpet of *Schizachyrium* with seed just ripe and falling and numerous *Eucalyptus platyphylla*. **Black-throated Finches** are breeding in some hollows but there appear to many others. The released birds consist of 20 males, 20 females and 40 uncoloured juveniles. It is ten fewer than we had intended to release but we were reluctant to catch birds with dependent young. It means more birds will be available for release in July, if that is justified from the results of the current release. All birds were treated with Ivomectin but we have not yet killed any to look for airsac mite inside. All birds seemed healthy on release and all have been individually colour-banded. Soon after they were released they flew down to the ground and started feeding on *Schizachyrium pachyarthron* and *S. fragile* seed in the company of **Black-throated Finches**, although the Gouldian's had never seen seed in those circumstances in captivity. At about 12.30pm they fed from the seed provided for them in the predator-proof cages, but only a small amount is being provided there beside the

water dish, which is kept replenished. About nine roosted back in the release cage, which is being left there for three days, the remainder roosting in trees nearby. Six returned to the breeding cage across the dam, but the same birds have also been seen back with the newly released flock. This morning a **Pied Butcherbird** came near the flock but the Gouldian's gave numerous warning calls before the butcherbird was sighted by Will. Will also saw a **Brown Falcon** fly past, during which time the finches remained still and quiet. The only other difficulties they had were from **Scarlet** and **Yellow Honeyeaters** immediately after they were released but the honeyeaters, which are feeding on melaleuca flowers, soon stopped chasing the finches. Nearly all of the finches were resighted over a half hour period this morning and males were also seen displaying to females. Congratulations to Will who has done a sterling job in preparing the release cage and the birds at an extremely busy time of year for the Wetlands. The publicity surrounding the release has also drawn several contacts from the region of possible recent sightings of the birds - one person had four birds in his Kuranda garden this morning and there are flocks of them near Mossman!

Stephen Garnet, QPWS Cairns

Adventures around Charters Towers



On Saturday, 17th May, I joined Len and Chris Ezzy and Janet Robino at Reeves Lake in Basalt Wall National Park, north west of Charters Towers. The Townsville "birders" had driven through from Townsville on Friday, via Paluma, Hidden Valley and Blue Range, camping at Fletcher Creek. On my way out in the morning I was lucky to see 4 **Australian Bustards** and a **Wedge-tailed Eagle**. Reeves Lake was rewarding as usual, with **Black Swan**, **Australasian** and **Great Crested Grebes**, **Cotton** and **Green Pygmy-goose**, **Australasian Shoveler**, **Little Pied**, **Little Black**, and **Great Cormorant**, **Plumed Whistling-Duck** and the obligatory **Australian Pelican**. Did I mention coots? Believe me, they are not endangered in this area! **Royal Spoonbill**, **Great**, **Little** and **Cattle Egret**, with **Intermediate Egret**, **Yellow Spoonbill** along with all three ibis species. **Black-fronted Dotterel**, **Black-winged Stilts** and **Masked Lapwings** fossicked along the shores of all watering places, but the prize for having the most jacanas still goes to Reeves Lake, which last year, we christened Jacana Heaven. The water-lilies there are increasing in area as the Lake recedes from its record-high of last year. As usual, a **Whistling Kite**, which has a nest (last year we saw the chicks) near the Lake, while some **Black Kites** and a **Australian Kestrel** occasionally appeared, as did a couple of **Whiskered Terns**. In the bush at Reeves - **Sacred** and **Forest Kingfisher**, **Brush Cuckoo**, **Red-winged Parrot**, **Pale-headed Rosella**, **Crested** and **Squatter Pigeon**, **Little Friarbird**, **White-winged Triller**, **White-breasted Woodswallow**, **Grey Butcherbird**. I need to say that every time we stepped out of our vehicles we heard **Striated Pardalote**, and a couple of times saw their little burrows.

Most of the water-birds seen at Reeves, were also at Toomba, while **Black Swans** and **Eurasian Coots** were even more prolific. **Jacky Winter**, **Rufous Whistler**, **White-throated Gerygone**, **Grey Fantail**, **Apostlebird**, **Cockatiel** and **Brown Falcon** were seen in the bush. The forest surrounding these lakes looks very healthy, thanks to the huge flood that inundated that area in



February 2002, and we were pleasantly surprised to have a total lack of dust on the well-maintained dirt roads, thanks to the 20 or 30mls of rain that fell last week. It is an interesting drive heading south from Lolworth Station towards Pentland, as the road winds picturesquely through a range, with creeks flowing along the bottom of the gorges to join the Cape River. Found some **Grey-headed Babblers** at our afternoon tea spot on the Cape River, not too far north of Pentland. **Emu** and **Brolga** were also seen along the road west from Toomba.

There is a very pretty, clean and spacious caravan park at Pentland, which birds obviously feel welcome at, too, as **Great** and **Spotted Bowerbirds**, **Red-winged Parrots**, **Zebra** and **Double-barred Finches**, **Red-backed Fairywrens** and a **Black Falcon** passed through or nearby, while a **Southern Boobook** called in the evening. On Sunday morning, we headed west to White Mountains National Park (Burra Range), to check out the *Grevillea decora* and other flowering bushes that bloom so gloriously at this time of the year. We were not disappointed. A splendid chorus of honey-eaters greeted us as we stepped out of our cars at an old quarry just over the range. **Spiny-cheeked**, **Brown**, **Singing Honeyeater** and **Little Friarbird** were the most prolific, but a fleeting glimpse of a **Black Honeyeater**, then a longer look at a **Weebill**, **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, and a **Hooded Robin**. A sizeable flock of both **Masked** and **White-browed Woodswallows** circled overhead for a while. Later, we were thrilled to the sightings and sounds of the **Crested Bellbird**. Definitely a "lifer" for me. Perhaps the best was yet to come - about 30 kilometres west of Charters Towers, a **Black-breasted Buzzard** circled around in front of us and then about 3kms further along, another one, even closer, wheeled in the sunlight to show us his white wing markings. High above, we saw (with Len verifying it in his telescope), a **Square-tailed Kite**. Both of these were "lifera" for me. What a great finish to a rewarding weekend. I believe the "count" reached 107 for the two days, with many common water-birds and bush-birds with the added excitement of seeing a few rarer ones.

Elna Kerswell, Charters Towers

Interesting sightings

Species	Date	Location	Observer	Comment
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	09/03/03	Mt Lousia, Townsville	Len & Chris Ezzy	Pair returning regularly to check out their relocated nest on Louisa Creek
Ruddy Turnstone (x34)	18/03/03	Toomulla Beach, Townsville	Len & Chris Ezzy	Unusual number for this area
Square-tailed Kite	24/03/03	Blackbraes National Park	Alex Kutt	First recording for the park
Papuan Frogmouth	1/8/02- 17/5/03	Freshwater, Cairns	Fiona Stewart	Originally 3 birds (2 adults+ previous years young?). Christmas time 2 adults were with a juvenile + previous years bird
Grey Falcon	5/4/03	40k N E of Julia Creek	Marc Gardiner	Julia Creek - Punchbowl Road near the Flinders River
Black-necked Storks (x2)	12/4/03	Mussellbrook section, Boodjamulla NP	Mark Parsons	Unusual this far from coast (about 200km directly to the coast)
Hoary-headed Grebe	14/4/03	Julia Creek Sewerage Treatment Works	Marc Gardiner	
Cotton Pygmy -Goose	18-21/4/03	Georgetown area	NQ Naturalists Club via Dawn Magarry	4th record at Easter in 20 years
Black-breasted Buzzard	18-21/4/03	Georgetown area	NQ Naturalists Club via Dawn Magarry	1 pair
Varied Lorikeet	18-21/4/03	Georgetown area	NQ Naturalists Club via Dawn Magarry	Last recorded at Easter in 1989
Pallid Cuckoo	18-21/4/03	Georgetown area	NQ Naturalists Club via Dawn Magarry	
Rufous-throated Honeyeater	18-21/4/03	Georgetown area	NQ Naturalists Club via Dawn Magarry	Adults+ independent young
Pictorella Mannikin	18-21/4/03	Georgetown area	NQ Naturalists Club via Dawn Magarry	
Rufous Songlark	18-21/4/03	Georgetown area	NQ Naturalists Club via Dawn Magarry	
White-bellied Sea-Eagle (x2)	18-21/4/03	Glenella, Mackay	Ursula Noonan	Foraging over cane fields, unusual location
Crested Shrike - tit	19/4/03	Mt Zero, Paluma	Jo Wieneke	unusual sighting
Dollarbird	26/4/03	McLeod River, North Mt. Carbine	C & I Iles, K & L Fisher	Late in season
Plum-headed Finch	19/4/03	30km north of Louisa Creek, Mackay	Desley Williams	Some sighted with Zebra Finch, Black-faced Woodswallow and Brown Songlark
Black Swan	29/4/03	Cattana wetlands, Cairns	Dawn and Arnold Magarry	Uncommon on the coast
Galah (x2)	4/5/03	Bruce Hwy, Edmonton, Sth of Cairns	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	Sitting on light pole, probable escapees.
Grey Falcon	5/5/03	Combo Waterhole, via Kynuna	Marc Gardiner	A pair. (Julia Creek/Kynuna Road)
Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher	9/5/03	Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten	Carol & Andrew Iles	Last sighting for season at the lodge
Channel-billed Cuckoo	10/5/03	Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten	Carol & Andrew Iles	Last sighting for season at the lodge
Common Koel	10/5/03	Lake Moondarra, Mt Isa	Marc Gardiner	Juvenile begging food from host, White-plumed Honeyeater
Painted Finch (x3)	10/5/03	Lake Moondarra, Mt Isa	Marc Gardiner	2 males + 1 female.
Victoria's Riflebird	11/5/03	Rex Hwy. near lookout	Stella Martin/Denis Walls	1 Male displaying on dead stump at the side of hwy.
Grey Goshawk	11/5/03	Ross River Bush Garden, Townsville	Marleen Acton / Merrian Kuerschner	White phase, alerted by Tony Grice
Metallic Starling	11/5/03	Eimeo Creek, nr Mackay	Geoff McLaughlin	1st seen in 15yrs residence here. Southern limit-late stragglers
Australian Bustard (x3)	12/5/03	Marks Lane, Atherton	David and Margaret Merrall	Seems a favourite location most years.
Metallic Starling	13/5/03	Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten	Carol & Andrew Iles	300+ Juveniles, unusual number for the lodge
Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher	14/5/03	Mt.Lewis, Julatten	Carol & Andrew Iles	Late in season. Phil Gregory 13/5 at this location
Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (x5)	15/5/03	Glenella, Mackay	Ursula Noonan	Unusual time of year-normally present Oct-Nov.
Torresian Crow (x3)	15/05/03	Machans Beach	Grant Phillips	Ian Cowan also saw one at Clifton Beach on 18/5.
Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo	16/5/2003	Mowbray State Forest, Julatten area	Carol & Andrew Iles	Resident population?
Crested Bellbird (x3)	18/05/03	White Mountains NP	Len & Chris Ezzy with Elna Kerswell	Extreme north-east or their distribution
Noisy Pitta (juvenile)	21/5/03	Sidlow Street, Smithfield, Cairns	Sigi Edwards	FNQ Wildlife Rescue picked up injured juvenile in house yard
Little Corella (approx.50)	21/5/03	Freshwater, Cairns	Martin Cachard	Unusual to find so many on the coast at Cairns

NOTE: Please check with observers before quoting any of these sightings. Please send any sightings to Keith Fisher -post or e-mail OK. Thanks to the contributors to this sightings column, plenty of interesting birds over the last few months.

Welcome to new members..

- U Mrs J. Baxter, HUGHENDEN;
U Mr A & T Forsyth, DAINTREE;
U Mr WE Holmes, CRANBROOK;
U Ms T Young, CAIRNS;
U Ms O King, KEWARRA BEACH;
U Ms F STEWART, STRATFORD;
U Dr K Turner, SLADE POINT.

Welcome new members.

Please join us on any of our outings.

Check out these websites
Cairns Esplanade: www.cairns.qld.gov.au
Yungaburra historic village: www.yungaburra.com.au
Tree clearing news: www.wwf.com.au
Birdway: www.birdway.com.au

Tree Clearing in Queensland to come to an end!

Birds Australia members will be aware of the continuing rates of clearance of native bushland in Australia. Around 600,000ha of bushland are still cleared annually in the nation—destroying or degrading the habitat, and ultimately killing, more than 10million birds each year. This is by far the biggest threat to terrestrial birds in the country.

The good news is that the Queensland Government has finally put a temporary stop to tree clearing applications until the Federal and State governments can come to an agreement. Premier Beattie has said clearing will stop immediately in sensitive environments and be phased out altogether by 2006. This announcement followed the moratorium on all new tree-clearing applications until the package was implemented in an effort to prevent a repeat of panic clearing. Farmers will be compensated under the joint state-federal plan which is expected to be in force by the end of July. The package was unveiled yesterday along with a salinity map for the Burdekin catchment and a draft plan to protect the Great Barrier

Reef from damaging runoff. Premier Peter Beattie said a regional ballot system could decide which farmers could clear remnant vegetation over the next three years under a statewide cap of 500,000ha.

Information courtesy of the Courier Mail 23/5/03

Notice Board

Crane Count 2003. 4th October 2003. Everyone welcome to survey their area. Check out September newsletter for further details.

2003 Congress and Campout. Held in Coonabarabran, NSW, from 6-12 September 2003. Registration forms will be sent with June Wingspan. For further information contact Shirley Cook on (02) 67727262

May 2003 Yungaburra markets. Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Virginia Simmonds and Elinor Scambler attended the Yungaburra Market with our new display boards to promote BA-NQG. Thanks to Virginia and Graham Harrington who donated plants and fruit we raised \$90 for BA-NQG, also thanks to Helen McLaughlin who helped with the display material. Whilst we were at the display we kept a running bird list and managed 20 species and gave out lots of brochures and membership forms. Hopefully we can run this type of promotion all over our region in the future.



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.

AGM to celebrate 50th Anniversary of the first RAOU Campout

This year our AGM will be held in conjunction with a "re-enactment" of the campout held at Lake Barrine on the Atherton Tablelands in 1953. Activities start on Friday night with a Dinner and surprise guest speaker at the Centre for Rainforest Studies, only 8km from Lake Barrine, where the majority of the formalities will occur. There will be a bird survey at Lake Barrine early Saturday morning followed by a morning tea at the Lake Barrine Teahouse. Following lunch we will squeeze an AGM in at 1pm at the Centre, followed by a presentation by Dr Stephen Garnet from Qld Parks and Wildlife Service about Important Bird Areas, an international methodology for defining areas of international significance for the conservation of birds at a global, regional or subregional level. A sunset cruise around Lake Barrine has been organised for

Saturday at 5pm (8\$ adults & 5\$ children donation to go to Birds Australia). Nibbles will be provided. The official dinner on Saturday night is a 1950's theme (although optional). Sunday morning will provide an opportunity to atlas around the Centre's rainforest, with a farewell brunch planned for around 10am, although you are welcome to stay longer. Cabin accommodation and meals will be available at the Centre for around \$50/person/day. For further details and to book a bunk contact Amanda or Alastair Freeman on (07) 4095 2655 or Keith Fisher on (07) 4039 0972. All WELCOME.



Please send items for September 2003 Contact Call by Mid August to: Helen McLaughlin, 44 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens 4810 or Email Helen on helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au.