



**Birds Australia**

Conservation Through Knowledge

*Looking after Australia's native birds since 1901*

# ConTact Call

**Birds Australia—North Queensland Group**

**December 2003 Issue: Black Kite**



Photo © Ian Montgomery

## End of year reflections....

In the March newsletter I talked about Important Bird Areas (IBA) an international bird project which aims to identify areas of global significance to bird species around the world. IBAs began in Europe and have been so successful there that each country in the European Union is now obliged to protect their IBAs. Subsequently, IBAs have been identified in Africa, North America, South America, Asia and the Pacific. The good news is that the Birds Australia North Queensland Group, mainly thanks to the efforts of Stephen Garnett, has now started the IBA process in Australia. So far a number of areas have been identified and documented including Lockerbie, Iron Range/McIllwraith, as well as sections of the Gulf Plains and Atherton Tablelands. It is hoped that a draft document will be available by the middle of next year (for more general information on the process visit the Birdlife International website at [www.birdlife.net](http://www.birdlife.net)). If you are interested in being involved in the process do not hesitate to contact myself or Stephen Garnett.

On another positive note it was great to see the New Atlas of Australian Birds finally out. It is a credit to Birds Australia and all those members who participated in the project. As well as those individuals who did general atlasing, members of BANQG were involved on the State Vetting Committee and as Regional Organisers, while a number received special mention in the remote atlasing acknowledgements. This work will be a tremendous resource for land managers, scientists and naturalists.

Finally to all the group have a great Christmas and a natural history New Year.

**Alastair Freeman, President**

## BA North Queensland Group—Events Calendar Jan—March 2004

### **\*\*\* Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2004 \*\*\***

A reminder to Birds Australia members that our on-line auction of the original vignettes for the New Atlas of Australian Birds ends **Friday 19 December**. This is an opportunity to get that unique and lasting Christmas or anniversary present for someone who loves both birds and fine art. For further information, and to have a look at the drawings themselves, go to the Birds Australia website [www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au) and click on 'Art Auction' in the quick menu.

#### **January 2004**

##### **Australia Day Weekend - Kingfisher Park**

**Saturday 24th to Monday 26th**

Camping, bunk house or self contained rooms. Book accommodation directly with Ron (ph 4094 1263) or email [sootyowl@bigpond.com](mailto:sootyowl@bigpond.com).

#### **February 2004**

##### **Sunday 15th Redden Island Survey.**

Meet at 8:00am at the entrance on Cinderella Street (before the amenities block), Machins Beach, Cairns. Contact Keith Fisher.

#### **March 2004**

##### **Sunday 14th or 21st Wave the Waders**

##### **Goodbye. Check March newsletter for date.**

Cairns Esplanade opposite Tradewinds Hotel. Dates and time will be dependant on tides. Details in the March newsletter. Contact Keith Fisher.

#### **April 2004**

##### **Easter campout**

##### **Friday 9th to Monday 12th. Check March newsletter for details.**

Potential campout to Mt Zero & Taravale or Princes Hills. Suggestions welcome. RSVP's will be required.

#### **May 2004**

Stephen Garnett has suggested that we conduct a Cotton Pygmy-Geese count on the Atherton Tablelands (particularly on Tinaroo). If anyone is keen in organising this even, please contact me and I will notify members in the March newsletter.

#### **June AGM 2004**

##### **Saturday 26th June**

A new Committee will be elected this year, so please consider whether you would be available to assist the Committee and make a difference. Yungaburra Dance School may be available to perform their Broлга Dance. Further details will be provided in March newsletter.

**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:

- Crane Count 2003
- FNQ Wildlife Week
- Cairns Esplanade update
- PIP Research
- Trip Reports - Redden Island, Cape York and Speerwah atlas
- Regional Observations
- Community Markets Report
- Davies Creek
- Interesting Sightings
- Notice Board
- Book Review

Quote by Groucho Marx:

*"Those are my principles. If you don't like them I have others"*



**Black Kite** *Milvus*

## Black Kite

*migrans* is one of the most abundant hawks in the associated with people and urban environments and stockyards. In the bush they are usually the first to turn up to fires. There, with astonishing dexterity they take insects from the air as they flee from the fire. Often confused with **Whistling Kites**, the **Black Kite** is slimmer, darker and more agile with narrower, more pointed wings a narrower band on the upperwings and a forked (not rounded) tail. The **Black Kite** eats a variety of small animals and carrion; mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates, road-killed vertebrates, large carcasses and offal. Human food scraps are often scavenged from camping grounds etc. The **Black Kite** is not globally or nationally threatened. It is common to abundant in Australia, and most numerous in areas of human influence, although very scarce in the far south and scarce away from human activity in the arid zone.

*This information sourced from The Birds of Prey of Australia by Stephen Debus.*

## Atlas 2 Report is out!!

Copies of the New Atlas of Australian Birds can be obtained by contacting The Birding Shop: [sales@thebirdingshop.com](mailto:sales@thebirdingshop.com) Please continue to send your Atlas forms to the 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

## 2003-2004 BA-NQG Committee

### Executive Committee

**President**—Alastair Freeman Ph: 4095 2655

Email: [procella@ozemail.com.au](mailto:procella@ozemail.com.au)

**Deputy President**—Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707

Email: [bowerbird14@bigpond.com](mailto:bowerbird14@bigpond.com)

**Secretary**—Keith Fisher Ph: 4039 0972

Email: [lkfisher@optusnet.com.au](mailto:lkfisher@optusnet.com.au)

**Treasurer**—Amanda Freeman Ph: 4095 2655

Email: [procella@ozemail.com.au](mailto:procella@ozemail.com.au)

**Conservation Officer**—Graham Harrington Ph: 4096 5051

Email: [treetop@austarnet.com.au](mailto: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](mailto: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 Crouther Ph: 4958 4613

**Bowen / Ayr:** Jon Wren Ph: 4786 2614

Email: [maluras5@tpg.com.au](mailto:maluras5@tpg.com.au)

**Townsville:** Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707 and

Helen McLaughlin Ph: 4771 3239

**Ingham/Cardwell:** vacant

**Charters Towers:** Elna Kerswell Ph: 4787 7718

Email: [elnakers@httech.com.au](mailto:elnakers@httech.com.au)

**Innisfail / Tully:** Tony Jurgensen 0408 190 605 (>6pm)

Email: [raj@naturelover.com.au](mailto:raj@naturelover.com.au)

**Cairns:** Keith Fisher Ph: 4039 0972

**Atherton Tableland:** vacant

**Mossman / Daintree:** Del Richards Ph: 4094 1199

**Cape York:** Sue Gould Ph: 4069 8415 (wk)

Email: [susanfgould@yahoo.com](mailto:susanfgould@yahoo.com)

**Mount Isa:** Bob Forsyth Ph: 4743 3210

Email: [isabirdo@austarnet.com.au](mailto: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



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.





## Toonpan, Townsville

Thanks to NQ Water, BANQG members Beth Ballment, Trish Hammond and I took advantage of access of a key to the locked gate to drive into the Woodstock end of the Ross River Dam catchment at Toonpan. We first stopped in bushland close to the gate. At the end of a very long dry spell it did not look very promising. However some of the poplar gums, *Platyphylloides alba*, were flowering and attracting a surprising number of honeyeaters. A **Whistling Kite** watched us from its nest while a pair of **Zebra Finches** attended their own nest in the lower sticks of the kite's nest.

We drove on to the now demolished bridge to await the cranes. It was hard to imagine that the broad expanse of grassland in front of us had been under water and alive with waterbirds in their hundreds a few years ago. Now there was a solitary **Great Egret** perched on a mound near the last remaining pool of water. However further away we saw **Bustards** – six ... then a few more ... and more till we had counted 13.

Then what had appeared to be a stump demanded further scrutiny through the scope and it turned out to be a magnificent male **Bustard** in full display. Unfortunately none of the other birds seemed to take much notice of the enlarged neck, bristling white cheeks, black mohawk crest, drooping wings, tail cocked up over its back and the pendulous throat enlargement dangling near the ground. He mostly stayed still but occasionally turned slightly possibly so that the sun would show up his features and posturing to prospective mates. After half an hour or so he gave up and stalked off, feathers back in place but head still held high.

As there had been no sign of any **Brolgas** we drove round to the Oak Valley end of Toonpan which would be closer to any water. But it too was dry with not even a bustard in sight.

**Jo Wieneke, Townsville**

Reed Beds Road, Giru-Woodstock Road and Horseshoe Lagoon, Ayr

Townsville enthusiasts Len and Chris Ezzy, Lynn Schluter, Pat Salter and I headed south for this years crane count, driven by recent reports of hundreds of brolgas at Cromarty. Our first stop was to a 'wetland' along Reed Bed Road, where Mark Stoneman had reported being awoken by hundreds of Brolgas during September. Due to the lack of rain this wetland was barely recognisable compared to the same time last year. We still managed to record 28 species, including Rufous-throated Honeyeater, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Great Crested Grebe, Marsh Sandpiper with no shortage of Zebra Finch. We continued south along the highway, where we saw a couple of Brolgas on a small creek. A quick change of plans and the troupe detoured along the Giru-Woodstock Road to check the cane fields. To our delight we managed to spot 13 Brolga in one distant paddock which had recently been harvested. The group then decided to head further south to Horseshoe Lagoon on Hodel Road. Allan Blaik manages the surrounding cane farm and is very proud of his recent achievements using a weed harvester to clear the choked lagoon of aquatic weeds. Now the lagoon is home to hundreds of waterbirds, including Comb-crested Jacana, Black-winged Stilt, four species of cormorants, Green and Cotton Pygmy Goose, Whiskered Tern, and even an early Koel calling in the distance. And with all the grass seed around, plenty of Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Crimson Finch, and Zebra Finch. Congratulations to Allan for such a great job. With the sun going down behind Mount Elliot fast, we decided to drive to the end of Hodel Road to the boat ramp in search of any Brolgas which may have landed to roost. Three pairs of Brolga were seen among the cane paddocks, bringing our total for the afternoon to 21.

*Helen McLaughlin, Townsville*



Thanks to everyone who helped with a very successful Crane Count despite difficult drought conditions which increased the land area of some sites dramatically.

Key results this year include virtually no Sarus in the Outer zone. A new Outer site located near known Sarus feeding areas, intriguingly recorded 683 Brolgas but no Sarus. "Unknowns" from this and other Outer sites will mostly count as Brolgas in final estimates.

The Inner Tableland experienced a clear case of flyover dropout, with 260 Tinaroo birds disappearing off the radar despite very good observer coverage. If (as expected) GIS analysis supports it, these will count as landed - bringing the Inner total to 1671, much the same as years 97, 98, 99 and 2002. Most Inner "unknowns" will be estimated as Sarus. Sadly the important Brolga site at Ingham could not be counted this year due to local fire fighting emergencies.

Townsville zone had a tough year, most Brolgas left the region earlier. Townsville district sites are so important historically, but with special counting problems, that over the next few months we will be reviewing Crane Count coverage and timing in this area, with help from BA members and others. If you have thoughts on this, do please contact me or Helen McLaughlin.

Finally, thanks to all teams and landowners; to the ABC for excellent radio coverage; and especially to Jack and Pat Leighton, who hosted a great Tally room dinner at very short notice.

**Elinor Scambler**



	Inner Tableland	Outer Tableland
Sarus	356	20
Brolga	96	2237
No ID	964	344
LANDED	1416**	2601

\*\* explained in text

## Cranes at FNQ Wildlife Week

A Mareeba Wetlands poster with superb photography of Brolgas and Sarus with about 20 people, decorated the room for the final Wildlife Week talk. This was the first performance for the public Crane PowerPoint Show, designed to be strong on graphics, activity and (of course) facts including some of our results. Topics covered – the crane as symbol; cranes in various art forms; human/crane interactions both positive and negative; identification of Australian cranes; range; breeding & dry season habitat; arrival/evolution of Sarus in Australia; how we do our crane counts; charts 1997-2003 & photos for 4 sites (Bromfield, Hasties, Mareeba Wetlands, Lakeside); discussion of totals; future GIS work; invitation to come to crane count & tallyroom. Feedback was good with wide-ranging discussion including whether cranes are roosting later in the day, and why; history of cranes on Tablelands; why Outer Tablelands have so few flyovers; whether peace or war on the Korean Peninsula is likely to threaten endangered cranes. Thanks to Mareeba Wetlands for all their organisation and Ross Storey/ DPI for lending the data projector. Yungaburra Dance School has offered to perform an original work for us, a short Brolga dance, and we hope to combine this with the Crane PowerPoint show in 2004 – details in March Contact Call. I am still collecting images of our count sites (to show habitat and the counters at work) – please let me know if you have any BA could use with acknowledgement of course. I would also really like an image of the bronze Brolga statues in front of the Burdekin Theatre in Ayr, if any member would be willing to offer one.

**Elinor Scambler, Atherton Tablelands**

## Cairns Esplanade Update—Keith Fisher

The new boardwalk and sea wall was opened along the Cairns Esplanade during September 2003. Overall my first impressions are of a job well done by the Cairns City Council. The boardwalk does not appear to have interfered with the birds too much; in fact they are more visible now to both birders and non-birders. The boardwalk is 5m wide and this is quite adequate to set up a scope without interference from walkers. However if there are a lot of people walking at the same time it creates quite a bit of vibration. There are three “pods” jutting out from the boardwalk which make ideal bird viewing areas. With the birds more visible non-birders are constantly asking what birds are they on the foreshore. Unfortunately the interpretive work leaves a lot to be desired, it is very minimal not adequately stating why the foreshore is important. There is an information panel which points out that “The Esplanade offers a superb vantage point for watching wading birds, particularly bird species which are international visitors to this tropical city.” It goes on to state that about 50 bird species have been identified in Trinity Inlet – much better if they said that 239 species of birds had been recorded along the Esplanade to date. A few species are mentioned including the **Mongolian Plover**, a name that was revised to **Lesser Sand-Plover** in 1994. A strip of 13 photos depicting some of the bird species of the foreshore is placed at each of the three pods, the name **Lesser Sand-Plover** is used here. There was a distinct lack of coordination with the interpretive display material and BANQG’s offer to help out was not even replied to, very disappointing. Having said all that I’d like to think that the input that BA-NQG members had in the consultancy phase of the Esplanade development project contributed to an outcome, which at the moment appears to have a minimal effect on the bird numbers and their behaviour.



Photo courtesy of Tanja Scheut

Some birds have been easy to catch but others such as the large fruit pigeons and small fruit-doves have remained elusive. Although we still need a few more individuals for a good sample size, what we have achieved in recent times is a watershed. Our field data collection is close to completion, as are the community level seed shadows for continuous forest. The next step is to complete the same work in fragmented landscapes. From experience these are likely to be an easier undertaking than in undisturbed forest. The two sets of data – the movement patterns and rates of seed passage—are combined to produce seed shadows - an estimate of the proportion of seeds moved a given distance from a source by a particular frugivore, which is representative of a functional group. This forms the core of a model that also uses data on visitation and consumption rates at fruiting trees to produce a map at a landscape scale of the distribution of seeds after handling by a whole community of frugivores. While we have been able to collect good data on the bowerbirds, honeyeaters, **Silvereyes**, **Metallic Starlings**, riflebirds, figbirds, **Barred Cuckoo-shrike**, **Pied Currawong**, **Southern Cassowary**, flying foxes, musky rat-kangaroos and native rats, we had only managed to catch one **Wompoo Fruit-Dove** out of the whole pigeon group, until recently (except for a bunch of **Brown**

## Current Research

**The measurement of movement patterns and the rate of passage of seeds through the guts of frugivores from eight functional groups in the examination of seed dispersal as a threatened ecological process.**

**Dr Andrew Dennis reveals some birds have proved elusive.**

**Cuckoo-Dove**, which aren’t really seed dispersers but more on that later). Following a successful collaboration with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Thorsborne Trust we have now captured nine **Pied Imperial-Pigeon**, radio tagged seven of those and conducted gut passage rate trials on five of them using native tropical fruits. We are currently in the process of finishing off the movement studies on these birds, who are foraging primarily in the Mission Beach area but roosting on Brooke Island. Soon though, we are expecting them to begin the northward migration back to New Guinea. While our telemetry equipment is not capable of tracking them that far we will at least hope to pick up the beginnings of the move north. With the assistance of Earthwatch Institute volunteers we also undertook some intensive netting using large gauge mist nets hauled into the forest canopy and struck success with the capture of our first superb fruit-dove. Having now been through several days of tender loving care in captivity being fed only the very best fruits on offer and producing a lumpy kind of fruit just a little later, the superb bird is now back in the wild carrying a transmitter and providing the world with a glimpse into the movement patterns of these important seed dispersers.

**Reproduced from Forest Matters (June 2003)  
Rainforest CRC newsletter:  
[www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au](http://www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au)**

Redden Island (Cairns) 28<sup>th</sup> September

A small group of enthusiastic members spent a pleasant few hours exploring Redden Island and compiling 3 atlas surveys. Highlight of the morning was a Great-billed Heron flying over from Redden Creek and across the Barron River towards Casuarina Point. Other birds of interest included a Brown Goshawk flying over and several Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove. Whilst numbers and species were not great due to the lack of flowering and fruiting trees and the very dry conditions it was, as always, an interesting morning with good views of some normally hard to see species.

*Keith Fisher, Cairns*

Cape York Trip 12<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> October

Four members, Graham Harrington, Jo Wieneke, Harry Cassidy and Keith Fisher took part in this extended field trip to the South-east Gulf and southern Cape York Peninsula. The main reason for visiting these areas was to confirm previous records of Trumpet



© Copyright Andrew Plant  
Birds Australia 2003.

Manucode on the Alice River in the Alice/Mitchell Rivers NP and to follow up on a sighting of ground-thrushes NE of Coen; both these records would be big range extensions. Keith Fisher and Eric Sticklen had previously heard Trumpet Manucodes calling from beside the Alice River in December 2000 but were unable to sight the birds as they were on the opposite bank of the flooded river. Subsequently an atlas record was submitted of several birds seen within a few hundred metres of the 2000 record. The trip out via Wrotham Park to our first nights camp on the Mitchell River was uneventful with mainly incidental sightings of raptors logged. There were two BA-NQG red spot atlas sites adjacent to our camp so we surveyed these in the morning before heading along the Oriners St. road stopping to atlas other red/green spot sites. One of these proved to be interesting as there were several Cooktown Ironwood *Erythrophleum chlorostachys* in flower bringing in honeyeaters. It was here that we saw a Yellow-tinted Honeyeater and a Tawny Frogmouth on a very untidy nest. Lunch was at the Alice River crossing before backtracking to the Kowanyama Road to head for the Alice/Mitchell Rivers NP via Kowanyama township. An overnight camp in the park had us recording Australian Owllet-nightjar, Boobook Owl, Large-tailed Nightjar and Koel before a host of honeyeaters descended onto more flowering Ironbarks in the morning. This site turned up 10 species of honeyeater including Brown-backed, Rufous-throated and Banded. The Brown-backed Honeyeaters were on the edge of their recorded range in the atlas. The following two days were spent searching and atlassing along the Alice River and around the park. There was no sign of the manucodes due to a lack of fruiting trees and the forest fringing the river was extremely dry providing unsuitable habitat. There was a few stretches of the river which had a little water in but not for swimming, a night time spotlight showed a very large healthy population of crocodiles, mainly freshwater.

From the Alice River we headed north along the road (track) to Pormpuraaw, where we had lunch overlooking the mudflats of the gulf and watching at least 12 Sarus Cranes forage on them. We then headed for Coen via Musgrave Station. The area NE of Coen we were visiting needed us to get permission from the landholder and was definitely 4WD only. We took nearly 2hrs to travel the 10km into the rainforest site the following day, recording the race of Australian Brush-turkey with the purple throat

pouch in several places. This patch of rainforest, west of the MacIlwraith Ranges, was dry like everywhere else but proved to be a very interesting spot. There were a few fruiting trees and these attracted both Wompoo and Superb Fruit-Doves along with Magnificent Riflebirds. We searched this patch of forest looking for ground-thrushes but found none; instead we found several Northern Scrub-Robins, always a pleasure to see these stunning birds. Also here were other northern endemics: Yellow-billed Kingfisher, Tropical Scrubwren, Tawny-breasted Honeyeater, White-faced Robin and Frilled Monarch. The most interest came from a party of Green-backed Honeyeaters which gave us great views; this species has only rarely been recorded in atlas records away from Iron Range so it was quite significant finding them here. They have been seen and collected on the Rocky River NE of our site previously. Over the week we managed to compile 36 atlas surveys and recorded 123 species.

*Thanks to Jo for her wonderful cooking and Graham and Harry for putting their vehicles to the test.*

*A full report will be lodged in the BA-NQG library.*

*Keith Fisher, Cairns*

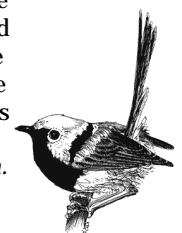
Speerwah Atlas—16<sup>th</sup> November

On Sunday a small but enthusiastic group of 8 birders turned up at the Speerwah Trailhead at the southern end of the Baroon Gorge National Park to have a look around the recently completed campground and adjacent areas. Even at 8am the day was turning out to be fairly warm and this was reflected in the relative paucity of bird life that was encountered. First-up as a group we spent just over an hour walking around the perimeter of the camping area, the highlight being Mountain Thornbills. We also encountered a Alexandra's Parrot (*Polytelis alexandrae*) which was well outside its normal range but the fact that it was calling from a perch on a campers Kombi van probably indicated how it got here.

At this point we split up into two groups. Five people started along the walking trail to carry out a survey in the rainforest while three of us trotted off to a nearby rural residential development called Boonooloo Estates to check out a section of remnant scrub amongst the more open housing blocks. The rainforest walk was enjoyed by the group though identification of some calls proved difficult and the warming day was reducing the bird activity. Many Wompoo Pigeons were calling and there was an extended opportunity to watch a Tooth-billed Bowerbird with a large leaf firmly grasped in its bill. The amount of activity within the remnant contrasted with that outside with a reasonable selection of species seen. A Little Bronze-Cuckoo was the most interesting sighting, with a White-bellied Sea-Eagle also drifting by on the breeze. There was a small flock of Spice Finches in a grassy gully at the edge of the remnant and curiously enough these were the only exotics seen (there were no sparrows, mynas or turtle doves recorded in the two and a half hours of surveying).

After the business end we all retired to our house in nearby Hidden Valley where we nibbled on a early light lunch and enjoyed the view to the south over our five acres and beyond. We took our guests for a quick walk down to the creek and surrounding scrub where we saw Pied and Spectacled Monarchs and also Lovely Wrens in the thickets at the edge of the scrub. All up 34 species were recorded in the three sites. A good day was enjoyed by all.

*Mark and Lisa Newton, Speerwah.*



© Copyright Kate Gamage Smith  
Birds Australia 2003.

## Interesting observations...

### Egg Colour as Camouflage

Reading through the field guides available it is apparent that there is such variety in the overall egg colour of many species. We recently located the nest of a **Black-fronted Dotterel** at Lake Mitchell, north of Mareeba. It was somewhat difficult to show my guests the eggs because of the cryptic colouring of the shell which matched more or less perfectly the surrounding pebbles and grit. In this case they were very finely speckled brown over a buff surface. Growing up in the Hunter Valley of NSW this species commonly nests by bitumen road-sides which were finished with blue metal. In these cases the eggs were normally deep grey base with large deep blue blotches. Again superbly camouflaged. It seems likely that there is a mechanism within their visual appraisal of a chosen nest site environment which can in turn manipulate egg colour. Pretty clever.

### Changing Nesting Strategies

In the Mossman area there seems to be an increase in the variety of species using



© Copyright Ian Venables  
Birds Australia 2003.

manmade structures as nesting sites. This is more usual with introduced birds so I will not touch on those species. It is usual to see **Woodswallows**, **Willy Wagtails**, **Magpie larks** and crows using power poles. However species that build more specialised nests such as **Helmeted Friarbirds** and **Spangled Drongos** are doing the same. Recently I located a pair of **Figbirds** nesting in a **Magpie Larks** nest—a real surprise. And in a noisy automotive repair shop in Mossman a pair of friarbirds have slung their nest high in the roof structure of a new shed. Against the roof the young appear to suffer from heat stress however they have fledged successfully. It appears that a factor in the change in practice may stem from the presence of the endemic green tree ants which can be a problem for lots of species.

**Del Richards, Mossman**

### Quite a Gathering

On Wednesday 17th September 2003, I observed a group of **Peaceful Doves** on the roadside opposite Betta Electrical on Ingham Road, Townsville. I stopped a little way passed them and counted 33 birds all concentrating on feeding amongst gravel and grass between the road and railway. **Roy Mackay, Paluma**

## Community Markets Report—Yungaburra and Mission Beach

This year BANQG have been participating in community markets to raise the profile of the group using our newly purchased spyder display boards. Thanks to Graham Harrington, Virginia Simmonds and Harry Cassidy the December **Yungaburra Markets** raised about \$200.00. Thank you to all those members who donated time and goods for the market stalls.

BA-NQG members Harry Cassidy, Jo Wieneke plus Lindsay & Keith Fisher braved the wind and rain showers to put on a display at the **Mission Beach Markets** (30th November) and collect some donations to help pay for the display boards. We handed out brochures and other information and hopefully made people more aware of other birds in the area, not just Cassowaries. If members have any ideas about other venues we can display at and would like to volunteer to help just let one of the committee members know. Thanks to those that donated items for the stall and helped out.

**The BANQG Committee sincerely thank Keith and Lindsay Fisher for organising our displays at these markets and to those members who participate during both days.**



## Davies Creek - Always fantastic Birding

Considering the dry conditions in the Cairns area at the moment, it is still extremely rich with birds. I spent a recent weekend in the Davies Creek National Park and included the walk to the top of Lambs Head. Saturday night was spent overnight in the beautiful rainforest at the very end of Davies Creek Road at 720m a.s.l. All up from the falls area to the top of Lambs Head we recorded 88 species and all Wet Tropics endemics were seen. These are some of the highlights.

On Saturday (1/11/03) from the Davies Creek National Park boundary in the dry forest up to the falls area some highlights included **Grey Goshawk** (single adult female grey morph), **Squatter Pigeon** (party of 5), **Fairy Gerygone**, **Noisy Friarbird**, heaps of **Scarlet Honeyeater**, **Eastern Yellow Robin**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Grey Shrike-Thrush**, **Cicardbird** (all in dry forest and were of the inland Tableland form), and a **Great Bowerbird**. On the road above the falls climbing up steadily to where the habitat changes to wet sclerophyll Rose Gum/Casuarina forest (at approximately 650m a.s.l.) we recorded **Scaly-breasted** and **Rainbow Lorikeet**, **Australian King Parrot**, **Olive-backed Oriole**, **Yellow-faced**, **White-naped** and **Scarlet Honeyeater**, including a group of 20 **Banded Honeyeaters** (all adults and in same tree the following day). Once into the rainforest (above 650m a.s.l.) we continued on until end of road (720m a.s.l.). From here the rather steep walk to the top of Lands Head (Kalphalam Rock) was done in the afternoon. From nearby the road and along the walking to top and on return to campground we saw **Peregrine Falcon**, **Yellow-throated**, **Large-billed** and **Atherton Scrubwrens**, **Fernwrens**, **Mountain Thornbill**, and **White-cheeked**, **Lewin's**, **Bridled**, **Scarlet**, **Dusky**, **White-naped Honeyeaters** and **Eastern Spinebills**. **Yellow-breasted Boatbill**, **Pale-yellow Robin**, **Grey-headed Robin**, **Bower's Shrike Thrush**, **Barred Cuckoo-shrikes**, **Tooth-billed Bowerbirds** (about 17 bowers counted) and a **Golden Bowerbird** (male) which we observed for about an hour-Fantastic. Back at the camp we heard **Red-necked Crakes** and **Chowchillas** farewelling the day, with **Southern Boobook** (25 heard along a 5km transect), **Lesser Sooty Owl** (2 heard and 1 seen), one Northern Quoll and a Lesueur's Tree Frog while spotlighting nearby. The morning chorus (2/11/03) brought **Double-eyed Fig Parrot**, **Little Kingfisher**, **Noisy Pitta**, **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Macleay's Honeyeater** and **Eastern Spinebill**, **Black Butcherbird**, **Eastern Whipbird**, **Grey Whistler**, **Victoria's Riflebird** and **Spotted Catbird**. There can't be too many places where you can find **Golden Bowerbirds**, **Little Kingfisher** and **Banded Honeyeaters** within 5km of each other!



© Copyright Andrew Plant  
Birds Australia 2003.

## Interesting sightings .....

Species	Date	Location	Observer	Comment
Lemon-bellied Flycatcher	28/07/2003	Eulumu Creek Road, Julatten	Del Richards	Feeding young, early record for this area
Cotton Pygmy -goose	30/08/2003	Clearwater Lagoon, 15km N of Mt Isa	Marc Gardner & Bob Forsyth	A pair at least 500km west of normal range
Cockatiel	4/09/2003	Mt. Molloy	Phil Gregory	A wanderer from drier climates
Black-winged Monarch	28/09/2003	Daintree Village	Del Richards	Probable 6th wet tropics record
Red-backed Kingfisher	26/09/2003	Atherton - Kairi Road - Atherton	Alan Gillanders	
Common Koel	2/10/2003	Mt. Isa	Bob Forsyth	1st for the season here.
Gould's Bronze-cuckoo	4/10/2003	Daintree River	Barbara Maslin & Lee Lafferty	4 birds displaying to each other
Spangled Drongos	4-11/10/2003	Daintree River	Lee Lafferty	Migrating through to the south
Satin Flycatcher (M)	4/10/2003	Daintree River	Barbara Maslin	Daintree Villiage
Bassian Thrush	6/10/2003	South Mossman River	Del Richards	
Brown-backed Honeyeater	13&14/10/2003	Alice River, 32km NE of Kowanyama	K.Fisher, G.Harrington, J. Wieneke & H.Cassidy	Edge of known range
Australian Spotted Crake	15/10/2003	Clearwater Lagoon, 15km N of Mt Isa	Marc & Vickie Gardner	Scarce in this area
Painted Finch	15/10/2003	Clearwater Lagoon, 15km N of Mt Isa	Marc Gardner	Also Pictorella and Long-tailed Finch. Edge of range
Silver-crowned Friarbird	15/10/2003	Clearwater Lagoon, 15km N of Mt Isa	Marc Gardner	Edge of range
Green-backed Honeyeater & Northern Scrub-robin	16-17/10/2003	10km NE of Coen	K.Fisher, G.Harrington, J. Wieneke & H.Cassidy	Southern edge of distribution
Black Swans	22/10/2003	3 on Cattana Wetlands, Cairns	Yvonne Nicoll, D&A Magarry	
Radjah Shelduck	20/10/2003	Southern Treatment Works, Cairns	Dawn & Arnold Magarry	Odd few around Cairns. Also Little Corella
Black-winged Stilt	21/10/2003	Cairns Crocodile Farm	Dawn & Arnold Magarry	With fledglings, appeared to have bred here
Lewins Honeyeater	21/10/2003	Daintree Villiage	Barbara Maslin	Late departing for higher altitudes
Satin Flycatcher (F)	24/10/2003	Barratt Creek, Daintree Village	Barbara Maslin	Catching insects
Latham's Snipe	24/10/2003	Centenary Lakes	Dawn & Arnold Magarry	
Oriental and Pallid Cuckoo	24/10/2003	Oonoomba Vet. Lab Townsville	Bill Holmes	First for the season
Spiny-checked Honeyeater	27/10/2003	Double Swamp, ~150km N Julia Ck	Bill Holmes	Nth edge of range. With Banded Lapwing
Oriental Plover	29/10/2003	Julia Creek Treatment Works	Marc Gardner	40 +
Sanderling	30/10/2003	Julia Creek Treatment Works	Marc Gardner	1 immature, rare inland
Square-tailed Kite	30/10/2003	Lower Rex Range, Sth of Mossman	Del Richards	
Blue-faced Parrot-Finch	1/11/2003	"Rosegums" Lake Eacham/Malanda	Alan Gillanders	Adults + Juveniles
Atherton Scrubwren	2/11/2003	Mt. Lewis	Tania Ireton, K&L Fisher.	Feeding one young
Southern Cassowary	2/11/2003	Mt. Lewis	Lindsay Fisher	1st one seen in over 100 visits.
White-throated Needletail	2/11/2003	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Tania Ireton, K&L Fisher.	Latham's Snipe also seen nearby
Grey Phalarope	4/11/2003	Lake Mitchell	Glenn Holmes	Unusual record, not seen again
Little Curlew	4/11/2003	Lake Mitchell	Glenn Holmes	Small numbers in area each year
White-winged Triller	5/11/2003	Redden Island, Cairns	Tania Ireton, Keith Fisher.	Unusual on the coast in Cairns
Little Pied Heron	5/11/2003	Southern Treatment Works, Cairns	Tania Ireton, Keith Fisher.	Appear to be resident here
Great Cormorant	5/11/2003	Southern Treatment Works, Cairns	Tania Ireton, Keith Fisher.	Unusual in Cairns
Common Starling	7/11/2003	Daintree River - Chris Dahlbergs trip	Tania Ireton	Hope it is the only one!
Great Crested Grebe	7/11/2003	Lake Tinaroo	Jack Leighton	200+. 100+ reported Lake Barrine by D & M Magarry in October.
Square-tailed Kite	8/11/2003	Nr Rifle Creek, Mt. Molloy	Keith & Lindsay Fisher.	soaring low over road
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	8/11/2003	Lake Mitchell	Keith & Lindsay Fisher.	Few records from this area
Red Knot	9/11/2003	Cairns Esplanade	Keith Fisher & John Crowhurst	15 birds -Highest number recorded here
Broad-billed Sandpiper	9/11/2003	Cairns Esplanade	Keith Fisher & John Crowhurst	3 birds
Red-necked Phalarope	23/11/2003	Lake Moondarra, Mt. Isa	Bob Forsyth & Graham Wardle	At least 3 previous records from here
Red-backed Button-Quail	2/12/2003	Surburban Cranbrook, Townsville	Bill Holmes	Male stayed o/n in Schinus terbinthofolius

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. Apologies to those records which were omitted, for a full list, please request. Editor

## Notice Board

### The Southern Gulf Birds and Wetlands

**Forum** organised by the WWF, Northern Gulf Resource Management Group, Southern Gulf Catchments Inc. and funded by the Natural Heritage Trust was due to be held on 12-13 November 2003 in Karumba. This community forum has been postponed until 2004 due to the lack of wetlands in the area. For more information, contact Russell Kelly WWF Australia or email: [hsmart@wwf.org.au](mailto:hsmart@wwf.org.au).

The **Birds Australia New Atlas of Australian Birds** has arrived and is presently being posted out to those who have already ordered it. If you haven't, don't miss out on this essential reference tool on where birds are in Australia. This is a wonderfully presented publication. Sales of the Atlas book help Birds Australia in its conservation and research work. Contact

The Birding Shop at Birds Australia on (03) 9813 5488 or email: [sales@thebirdingshop.com](mailto:sales@thebirdingshop.com). Also available from **The Birding Shop**: The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds - Revised and Updated. Now with a clear plastic cover to help keep your guide clean. 344pp \$32.95 ID:4-093. Field Guide to the Birds of Australia - Pizzey & Knight 7th Edition \$39.95 ID:4-064.



Congratulations to a pair of **Black-necked Storks** at the Port Douglas Rainforest Habitat

### Padaminka Wildlife Reserve

184 acres of bushland under a conservation agreement with QPWS. 155 bird species for the year (including the Bushhen).

Five camp sites on creek, 2 campervan sites, free BBQ, Fully self-contained cottages, single rooms. Small workshops and seminars catered. Affordable rates. Tag-along-tours welcome. Only 15 minutes from Mackay, easy drive to Eungella and Kinchant Dams.



**Contact Maureen Cooper**  
**P.O. Box 113, Walkerston, 4751.**  
**Phone (07)4959 3770.**

**Email: [padaminka@mrbean.net.au](mailto:padaminka@mrbean.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.

Welcome new members

U Mr DA & AM Anderson, CAIRNS;

U Mr J.Bass, TOLGA;

U Mr B Blewitt, BRINSMEAD;

U Ms S Chalenor, WEST END;

U Mr D Chaplin, BUNGALOW;

U Ms L Curtis & Mr G Douglas, YUNGABURRA;

U Mrs NN Fairbairn, KURANDA;

U Mr J Harrington, PORT DOUGLAS;

U Mr T Heinenreich, MALANDA;

U Ms J MacDonald, FINCH HATTON;

U Mr M & Mrs S Murdoch, THURINGOWA;

U Mr B Price, MACHINS BEACH;

U Mr B J Smith, BLUEWATER;

U Mrs J Stephenson, TOWNSVILLE;

U Ms N Stewart, NORTH CAIRNS;

U Mrs B Walsh, MALANDA;

U Ms F E Yates, WULGURU.

### Check out these websites

WWF Australia: [www.wwf.org.au](http://www.wwf.org.au)

Rainforest CRC: [www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au](http://www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au)

Yungaburra: [www.yungaburra.com](http://www.yungaburra.com)

## Birds Australia Special Christmas Offer — DEAD PARROT by John Huxley

**A** novel with a difference: a bird-watcher thriller set in Sydney Birds Australia Members' price: \$20.00 (plus postage and handling if applicable). All proceeds go to Birds Australia. When the partially-clothed body of a TV wildlife documentary-maker, popularly known as 'The Birdman', is found by early-morning birdwatchers on a notorious Sydney beach, it looks very much like he has fallen from the sky. But forensic tests show he was brutally bashed and then buried alive. Police searching for his killer are drawn inexorably into the world of bird-people with precious reputations, professional by long-ago rows over the existence of elusive birds, is a novel with a difference: a bird-watcher thriller with elements of the intrigue and romance of the Sydney, it combines a suspenseful read with astute insights into both the life of the city and the world of bird-watching. John Huxley is associate editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, and a senior writer for both the paper, The Age and their magazine Good Weekend. He has written several books on subjects ranging from British industry to Australian cricket. **DEAD PARROT** is his first venture into fiction. **DEAD PARROT**, 263pp, is published by Walla Walla Press. Retail price \$24.95 from selected bookshops and from the publishers at PO Box 717, Petersham, 2049. Postage and handling fee of \$6 for up to 2 copies. Also available from: Birds Australia Sydney Office, PO Box 1322, Crows Nest NSW 2065. Phone: (02) 9436 0388 or Fax: 02 9436 0466 or email: [rosella63@bigpond.com](mailto:rosella63@bigpond.com).



© Copyright Ian Venables  
Birds Australia 2003.

Please send items for March 2004 Contact Call by Mid February to: Helen McLaughlin, 44 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens 4810 or Email Helen on [helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au](mailto:helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au).