



Birds Australia

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ConTact Call

Birds Australia—North Queensland Group

March 2004: Whistling Kite



Time for a new committee....

This will be my last newsletter piece as president of BA-NQG. After two years in the post I will be standing down at the AGM in May. As there will be a number of positions changing there will be a new look to the committee after the AGM. It is time for an injection of new blood and we would love new people to come forward and stand for committee; it is far from an onerous task and you will be doing something positive for bird conservation in our region. Vacated positions that will be available to be filled are President, Secretary and Treasurer.

For the last year the committee has worked tirelessly and achieved much on behalf of members and for this it should be congratulated. I would like to thank the committee for their hard work over the last two years. All have made a significant contribution to the effective running of BANQ and moved the organisation, and bird conservation, forward on several fronts. I therefore take this opportunity to extend to members and the new committee my best wishes for the coming year.

Alastair Freeman, President

BA North Queensland Group—Events Calendar March-June 2004

March 2004

Saturday 20th—Wave the Waders Goodbye.

Meet on the Cairns Esplanade opposite Tradewinds Hotel at 11am. We will check out the finer points to identifying these migratory waders. Contact Keith Fisher.

Saturday 27th—Special Book Launch

Launch of Cliff and Dawn Frith's new book "The Bowerbirds". Meet at Cliff and Dawn's house at 2pm sharp. More details page 6.

April 2004

Sunday 4th—Klaproths Scrub Atlas.

Meet at Firewheel Farm, Ball Road, Malanda at 8am. Bring smoko. Contact Ian Sinclair ph: (07) 4096 6690.

Friday 9th to Monday 12th - Easter campout

Campout @ Mt Zero homestead with trips to Taravale Both properties now managed by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. 4WD essential. RSVP's required. Contact Helen McLaughlin for trip details and meeting arrangements on (07) 4771 3239 ah (<9pm).

Sunday 18th - Serpentine Lagoon

See what birds have returned since the drought. Meet at the Wulguru servo at 7am. Contact Jo Wieneke for details on Ph: (07) 4771 4707.

Sunday 18th—Leslie Creek Reveg Survey

Leslie Creek revegetation survey. Bring Smoko. Meet at Ian and Rita Sinclairs, RN280 Ball Road, Malanda @ 8am. Contact Ian ph: (07) 4096 6690.

Saturday 24th Information night at

Malanda Hotel. Graham Harrington to show his "Cairns: gateway to tropical birding in Australia" presented at the World Bird Conservation Conference in Durbin, South Africa early March. To be confirmed. Contact Ian ph: (07) 4096 6690.

May 2004

5th & 6th May

Southern Gulf Birds and Wetlands Forum, Karumba

Convened by World Wildlife Fund Australia in collaboration with the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group and the Southern Gulf Catchments Ltd. Registration is \$60. Contact Helen Smart @ WWF Ph: (07) 3839 2677 or email hsmart@wwf.org.au.

Saturday 22nd & Sunday 23rd

BA-NQG AGM Murray Falls, Cardwell

AGM at 1:00pm Sat. 15th and BA-NQG's 10th birthday party in the evening. A new Committee will be elected this year, so please consider whether you would be available to assist the Committee and make a difference. Details enclosed.

June 2004

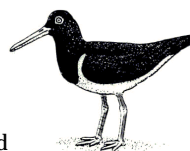
Saturday & Sunday 5th & 6th—Crane Celebration, Malanda Hotel

Buffet dinner @ 6pm. Bookings required with Malanda Hotel Ph 40965488. Presentation @ 7:30pm Cranes in the arts including original Brolga dance by Yungaburra Dance School.

Information on Crane history, conservation issues, a little humour and some cool charts with Crane Count results 1997-2003. Field trips on Sunday. Contact Elinor Scambler on Ph (07) 40953 296.

Sunday 12th—Copperlode brochure launch

Meet at Copperlode Dam from 8am onwards. From the Brinsmead-Kamerunga road take the road to Lake Morris, which is 16km. Bring breakfast, BBQs are available. Leisurely breakfast overlooking the dam before a walk into the rainforest. We will also launch the BA-NQG Lake Morris/Copperlode Dam brochure and finish off with smoko at the kiosk. Contact Keith Fisher on Ph: (07) 4039 0972.



Inside this issue:

- Annual Report 2003
- Southern Gulf Birds and Wetlands Forum, Karumba
- Painted Snipe Survey
- Grey Ternlet in Townsville
- Trip Reports - Australia Day, Redden Island, AGM Cardwell, Cotton Pygmy-goose
- Interesting Observations—Black Butcherbird
- Friths Book Launch—"The Bowerbirds"
- Southern Queensland Congress and Campout
- Research - Townsville's Egrets
- Interesting Sightings
- Notice Board
- Book re-released

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.



The generic name (sea habits of these kites, and tail tip. The **Whistling** terrestrial habitats except

Whistling Kite

goshawk) alludes to the aquatic, often coastal the specific name (wedge tail) refers to the rounded **Kite** is a solitary or gregarious kite of most dense forest, and is often seen around water, including estuaries coastlines, and inland drainages. Its flight action is a rather deep, jerky rowing action with some body movement. Its voice is distinctive: a loud whistle sliding down the scale, preceded or followed by a rapid up-scale chatter. The **Whistling Kite** eats a variety of small animals and carrion: mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, crustaceans, insects, road-killed vertebrates, large carcasses, and offal. The **Whistling Kite's** most characteristic behaviour is its lazy soaring, often accompanied by loud whistling calls. Individuals or pairs also call vigorously from prominent perches or the nest. This bird is not globally or nationally threatened. It is common to abundant on coasts and in the tropics, where it benefits from human activity.

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

Atlas 2—Continuing the Research

Copies of the New Atlas of Australian Birds can be obtained by contacting The Birding Shop: 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

Deputy President—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: riflebird@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 Crouther Ph: 4958 4613

Bowen / Ayr: Jon Wren Ph: 4786 2614

Email: maluras5@tpg.com.au

Townsville: Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707 and

Ingham/Cardwell: vacant

Charters Towers: vacant

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

Email: 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

Mount Isa: Bob Forsyth Ph: 4743 3210

Email: isabirdo@austarnet.com.au



If you would like to become involved in the happenings around north Queensland and are happy to organise an occasional field trip or campout, please nominate for a position at the AGM, Murray Falls 22nd May 2004. See you there.

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.



Thanks go out to our **Executive Committee** who once again provided direction and outcomes for the year: Alastair Freeman (Convenor), Jo Wienke (Deputy Convenor), Keith Fisher (Secretary), Amanda Freeman (Treasurer), Graham Harrington (Conservation Officer) and Helen McLaughlin (Newsletter Editor).

Regional representatives assisted on outings and provided updates: Marion Crowther, Jon Wren, Jo Wieneke, Elna Kerswell, Tony Jurgensen, Keith Fisher, Ian Sinclair, Del Richards and Sue Gould.

A varied and active calendar of events was held throughout the year with campouts, daytrips and speakers. Campouts and daytrips focussed on bird surveying for the BA Atlas, community education and reports for QPWS. Below is a list of the years events, fieldtrips and projects for 2003:

- Members of the group have also been heavily involved in identifying **Important Bird Areas** in the region. Areas such as Lickerbie Scub, Iron Range/McIllwraith, Gulf Plains, Atherton Tablelands, Trinity Inlet have been identified as home to birds with restricted distribution.
- The **AGM** was held at the Centre for Rainforest Study, Atherton Tablelands. Activities included a resurvey of Lake Barrine—50 years after a survey of the lake was carried out by RAOU members. An evening cruise on the Lake was very successful.
- **Ongoing surveys** were conducted at Redden Island, Cairns Esplanade, Kalproth's scrub, Serpentine Lagoon, Blackbraes National Park and some Cape York sites. Other **atlas trips** were made to Kingfisher Park/Julatten, Speerwah, South-east Gulf and Southern Cape York, Meunga Creek Cardwell and Goldsborough State Forest.
- **Bird identification sessions** were conducted on Cairns Esplanade and a very successful "Birdwatching for Beginners" day was organised for Emerald Creek. Nyletta Wetland Atherton was host to a members and friends introduction day.
- **2004 Crane Count** was again very successful with survey teams spread across the Atherton Tablelands and now Townsville surveys conducted at the Town Common and Bowling Green Bay/Giru area thanks to the effort of Elinor Scambler.

- **Beach Stone-curlew surveys** from 1984 to 2002 have been compiled and presented published in Emu (Vol 103 No4) by Amanda Freeman.
- The very successful **Christmas Party** was held at John Clarkson and Marion Crowther's home at Tolga.
- **Monitoring of revegetation sites** across the Atherton Tablelands continues to bring new species.
- Three community markets were attended (Mission Beach and Yungaburra) during the year to raise the profile of the group.

Conservation issues within the North Queensland region included:

- The ancient nest of a breeding pair of **White-bellied Sea-Eagles** in Townsville was relocated in 2002 and saw the successful breeding of two young in late 2003.
- A large population of **Sulfur-crested Cockatoos** which took up residence in Tolga Scrub were the focus of efforts from Atherton Shire Council and QPWS on the most effective way to deal with the birds who were damaging the endangered Tolga Scrub rainforest on the edge of Atherton.
- BA-NQG member Ian Fox provided input to the **Northern Gulf Resource Management Group** on behalf of Birds Australia.
- Continued effort is required by Keith Fisher in regards to providing bird-friendly management of the **Cairns Esplanade revegetation**.
- BA-NQG members provided invaluable data contributing to the Atlas II project.

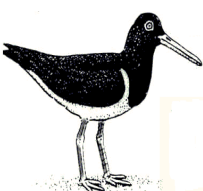
BA-NQG's regional rules are about to change. To be consistent with national rules our group have had to make a few changes. The proposed new rules are enclosed with this newsletter and your involvement is needed. These rules will be discussed in more detail at the AGM, 22nd & 23rd May 2004 at Murray Falls State Forest, Cardwell. All welcome.

Southern Gulf Birds and Wetlands Forum, Karumba 5-6th May 2004

Building regional community capacity, the forum has been convened by **WWF Australia** in collaboration with the **Northern Gulf Resource Management Group** and the **Southern Gulf Catchments Ltd**. The Southern Gulf is home to over 300,000 waterbirds. The region is recognised both nationally and internationally for its important wetlands which cover more than 10,000 km of this unique part of Australia.

Why should you attend?

- Help retain the regions significant natural values relating to birds, wetlands and their management;
- Exchange ideas on key management challenges such as weeds, feral animals and ponded pastures;
- Learn about conservation agreements and lease renewals;
- Discuss management incentives and support options with key agency and local government representatives.



Forum format? Guest speakers include leading bird and wetland ecologists, management specialists, landholders and traditional owners and senior State agency and local government officials.

Other activities include: Field trip to a local pastoral property, cocktail party, morning / evening guided walks, optional guided birds and wetlands flights over the magnificent Karumba wetlands

Details of registration: Karumba Civic Centre, Karumba. \$60 GST inclusive. Registration includes morning and afternoon teas, lunches, forum dinner (5th) and evening BBQ (6th). Fees do not include travel and accommodation expenses. **Contact Helen Smart** by phone: 3839 2677 or hsmart@wwf.org.au.

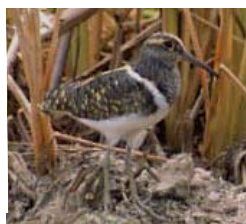
Painted Snipe Survey—17th January 2004

As part of the National **Painted Snipe** Survey this year, we departed Townsville at around 5:00am and traveled via Flinders Highway, through Charters Towers and then out to the Great Basalt Wall (GBW). The countryside was welcomingly green and lush, a stark comparison to our previous visit late 2002 when flora and fauna seemed dry and stressed. Six **Emus**, in strikingly good condition, confidently strolled in front of us when we were only 5 km past the GBW Road turnoff. First stop was Reeves Lake where we atlasted 36 bird species, the best being **Ground Cuckoo-shrikes**, many **Pink-eared Duck**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Cotton** and **Green Pygmy-geese** and **Great Crested Grebe** dancing a duet on the water. Next, and further west, we stopped at Toomba Station where we had arranged permission from Ernest and Robyn Bassingthwaite to enter their property specifically for the PS Survey. Toomba had received some very welcome rain and there were plenty of inviting wetland areas and waterholes. We managed to find a **Latham's Snipe** only, as well as a **Red-kneed Dotterel**, **Squatter Pigeon**, **Weebill**, **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**, two **Freckled Duck**, **Yellow-billed Spoonbill** and multitudes of the 'more common' waterbirds. 58 species atlasted including excellent action views of a **Marsh Harrier** as it descended upon a **Masked Lapwing** chick for lunch. Meanwhile, a pair of **Brolgas** danced on the shore close by.

After our own lunch we traveled further westward along the GBW Road to a dam a couple of kms past Myola Station and then on another 10km to Valley Lagoon. We encountered many **Masked Woodswallow**, a **Brown Treecreeper** and a couple more **Ground Cuckoo-shrikes**. About turn and homeward bound as a steady stream of **Channel-billed Cuckoos** flowed northwardly above us. We took a 15-minute break to marvel at two **Rufous Songlarks** that were displaying conspicuously as they continually song-flighted around us. Our presence did not appear to bother them at all. Storms were brewing in our path so we had to leave them. As the lightning and black of the sky menaced the green of the land ahead of us, we halted once again to watch an **Australian Bustard** in the middle of the road, on a crest of a hill, displaying as only they can do. Its tail was spread up over its back, its neck was inflated to the ground, and its wings were stretched out,

where it just stayed like a statue... that was until we decided to approach for a photo. As soon as we opened the car door, it composed itself into a normal looking bird, slowly walked off the road and disappeared into the bush. One very obvious recurrence during our day's travels was that all of the many **Apostlebirds** we saw were industriously gathering mud from the edges of road puddles, for building their nests no doubt. Similarly, the two families of **Grey-crowned Babblers** we saw appeared to be gathering sticks and other debris for their own nesting endeavours. Though we missed finding any **Painted Snipes**, we did not miss that storm: It was all just part of an excellent day of birding.

Len and Chris Ezzy



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Grey Tern Sighting at Townsville

This is the first sighting of a live Grey Ternlet north of Capricorn and a first for our area. David James found a beach-washed one at Herald Cays about 5 years ago. The account below is that of Dr Bill Laing on his recent trip to Magnetic Island....

Sunday 22nd February 2004, early afternoon. Location: about 200 metres N of the rocky shore (White Lady Rock) of the NE entrance to Horseshoe Bay, Magnetic Island, 17 kilometres offshore from Townsville, North Queensland. Coordinates (AMG AGD 1966) 485500E 7887800N or Lat 19° 6.2'S Long 146° 51.8E. One Grey Tern observed flying above the sea about 100m from our boat, for about 3 minutes. It flew in level flight about 10 metres above the water, around the immediate area, periodically dipping down to the water but not entering the water or taking any food. The tern's sky-blue upper wings were quite striking even at 100metres, and noticed by several crew members independently. They were really quite beautiful and the colour not known to me in any other seabird. No dark areas were seen, as apparently present in the Grey Tern (wingtips etc?) but at the distance observed they may have been missed. The bird had a typical small tern shape, white (to pale grey) (generally) and sky blue (upper wings), and its head pointed downward at times in typical tern fashion. Its tail was fairly deeply forked. No cry was heard. The observations were confirmed as the Grey Tern(let) in Slater (1970) and Pizzey and Knight (1999). The bird was the pale morph of Pizzey and Knight. The upper wings could only be described as sky blue, not (blue-)grey as in the books.

The bird was alone, and the weather was clear and partly sunny. We sailed along the whole N and E coasts of Magnetic Island (20 kilometres) in about 2 hours and did not see any other Grey Terns. With 6 crew members on board it is unlikely that any other Grey Terns were flying along that coast. Two scenarios are most likely: the bird was truly alone, or it was in the company of others who were resting or flying elsewhere. The former is perhaps more likely. The North Queensland weather had been fairly typical wet-season east-quadrant winds from the Coral Sea, light to moderate, for a week or more, with no abnormal weather in the preceding couple of weeks (no cyclones or strong winds). There has been no cyclone yet this season.

Dr Bill Laing, Former RAOU Member (South Australia) 1974-1977.

BA-NQG and Townsville BOCA - Easter Campout 9th-12th April 2004

Mount Zero and Taravale Reserves are owned and managed by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC). AWC is keen for local bird watchers to visit their properties and help to identify and report on the bird life (and other wildlife) of these properties. This campout is for 4WD vehicles only. The terrain is sometimes quite unforgiving. Please bring and be prepared to use your own recovery gear. UHF radio is desirable. The camp base will be at Mount Zero House. A toilet and cold shower are available for use. Campsites will be within the yard of the house.

There are some shady trees. Note: there is no electricity. You must be self sufficient so bring everything you need. Surveys will be conducted on both Mt Zero and Taravale Stations. Day-trippers and Overnighters are welcome. All must RSVP by April 1st. For further details and an itinerary please contact Helen McLaughlin on (07) 4771 3239.



Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten. Australia Day Weekend—24th to 26th January

A small group of members and visitors joined in the birding activities over the weekend, which began on the Saturday morning with a stroll around the park and surrounding country. We managed to see and hear 69 species including good views of **Channel-billed Cuckoos** and **Dollarbirds** nesting. After breakfast we checked out a few local areas starting with McDougall's Road Swamp, here we had the opportunity to compare **Little, Intermediate** and **Great Egret**, as one of each conveniently sat side by side on a log. **White-browed Crakes** were also calling but didn't venture out of the long grass. Next stop Abattoir Swamp where the water level had risen denying us the opportunity to find the **Spotless Crakes** seen a few weeks before, however a quick glimpse was had of a **White-browed Crake** as it flew across the open water. Weatherby Swamp had some water in it and a pair of **Green Pygmy-geese** was taking advantage, this was a new bird for some of our visitors. The afternoon saw us on Mt. Lewis where the target bird for some of the party was the **Blue-face Parrot-Finch**; about 12 duly obliged and gave us stunning views. It was generally quiet here but **Atherton Scrubwrens, Bowers Shrike-thrush** and **Tooth-billed Bowerbirds** were seen. Interestingly I saw a **Pheasant Coucal** at the side of the road at an altitude of about 900m, which I thought was a pretty high for this species. The evening was spent swapping stories before a quick spotlighting trip turned up a 2m+ Amethystine Python. Sunday we headed out towards Mt. Carbine stopping off at Maryfarms to see the **Australian Bustards**. There were at least eight males displaying to nobody in particular as well as several juvenile birds amongst a total of about 40 birds. Mt. Carbine dam had water in it but not many birds, however a party of **Apostlebirds** and **Grey Crowned Babblers** were foraging in the surrounding woodland. Lunch was had at the McLeod River where a **Large-billed Gerygone** serenaded us with its' beautiful song. We had looks at **Common Koel** and **Brush Cuckoo** after lunch along the river. Luster Creek was the next stop and it proved to be excellent. There were many species flitting around including **Little Friarbird, Grey Shrike-thrush** feeding young, **Leaden Flycatcher, Northern Fantail, Cicadabird** and **Olive-backed Oriole**. Mt. Carbine provided an ice cream stop as well as the **Great Bowerbirds** bower and a rather tatty looking **Square-tailed Kite**. Lake Mitchell (Southedge Lake, Quaid's Dam) had a good variety of waterbirds and bushbirds, including **Black-necked Stork** and the resident **Grey-crowned Babblers**. In the evening we gathered together with friends and the who's who of birders in the Daintree area to farewell Carol and Andrew, who had provided bird guiding at Kingfisher for the past three years and were returning to the UK. Ron kindly put on a barbeque for everyone to give a great send off to Carol and Andrew who will be sorely missed. As usual the weekend provided the opportunity to visit a large range of habitats and a wide variety of species along with much socialising. Our thanks go once again to Ron Stannard for his hospitality and hosting the weekend. The determination award goes to Bob Forsayth for his effort in getting to Kingfisher from Mt. Isa, having had to make detours around detours to avoid flooded rivers and clocking up 1800km in the process.

Keith Fisher, Cairns



Redden Island Survey, Cairns—16th February

The rains of the previous two weeks had subsided and the morning turned into a pleasant stroll in the sun. Birds were generally quiet which was understandable as there was virtually nothing in fruit or flower. The insect eaters had the place to themselves. Good views were had of a **Collared Kingfisher** who obligingly sat on top of a dead tree for five minutes giving everyone good looks. Two **White-bellied Sea-Eagles** were perched alongside the Barron River calling to each other. A **Gould's Bronze-Cuckoo** also perched out in the open allowing us to observe the slight rufous wash on the upper breast, less distinct breast barring and dull brownish green nape, back and wings in contrast to the **Little Bronze-Cuckoo** which tends to have more iridescent green colouring in these parts. A quick glimpse was had of a **Crimson Finch** as it flew over. Throughout most of the visit three adult **Brahminy Kites** along with two juveniles circled overhead allowing excellent comparisons between them. A quick detour to the road bridge over Redden Creek failed to turn up the **Great-billed Heron** which is often here, but as usual this area provided us with some very interesting sightings and best of all we kept dry!



Photo © Ian Montgomery

AGM 2004 to be held at Murray Falls State Forest (near Cardwell) on 22nd May at 1.00pm

This year we celebrate 10 years since BA-NQG (BONQ in those days) was formed at Murray Falls and in that time we have come a long way. We have been involved in conservation issues, bird surveys including significant input into the BA Atlas especially with our Cape York work. Some of these surveys have been accomplished with the financial support of QPWS and in return we have surveyed several national parks for them. We have monitored specific species and conducted ongoing surveys in particular areas including revegetation plots. We have been involved in education and information projects such as the information brochure series, conducting birdwatching for beginners, bird identification sessions and attending several venues with our display boards. We have had representatives on catchment and land management committees and are pioneering BirdLife International IBA's (Important Bird Areas) within Australia. Regular field trips and campouts have been conducted. Our newsletter, Contact Call, has provided information as well as a forum for members, growing from one page to eight and is now of a very high standard. The current committee will stand down and a new one will be elected in May. Amanda and Alastair Freeman have been on the committee for two years and will be standing down. I am also standing down as secretary but want to stay. We would like a full compliment of regional reps that can organise a few field trips and keep an eye on the local bird issues. So if you feel you would like to get involved wherever you live in our region, please inform one of the current committee members and fill out the enclosed nomination form - remember many hands make light work.

Keith Fisher, Secretary

Cotton Pygmy-geese North Queensland Survey Sunday 12th September 2004

We will be trying to cover as many known haunts as possible. Some will be accessible on foot, but any offers of small boat transport or even light aircraft will be put to good use. We'll also need eyes in the Townsville area, Lake Tinaroo, Lake Mitchell and Valley of Lagoons. Dates and locations for surveys will be in the June *Contact Call*.

Interesting observations...

Black Butcherbird takes Eclectus Parrot chick

In late November, Jack Leighton of Tinaroo Waters, Nth Qld and myself spent five days around Iron Range NP on Cape York Peninsula. Being my first visit for 31 years there were to be many highlights during our time there. At 0800 hours on 22 November we were birding along Gordon Creek which has a large emergent rainforest tree adjacent the road which is used as a nesting site by **Eclectus Parrots**. Although out of view there was a commotion with very loud calling both by **Eclectus Parrots** and **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**. The noise abated for a few minutes then started again. Jack (who was filming) called to say a **Trumpet Manucode** had flown into a nearby tree. Upon further investigation it was a **Black Butcherbird**. It was carrying a female nestling **Eclectus Parrot**! The nestling was well feathered and probably already dead even though the butcherbird shook it for a time before laying it across a vertical fork. The captor stayed at the fork for 8-10 minutes, probably to rest before departing. For us, it added a new dimension to the hunting capability of the **Black Butcherbird**. It would have had to

overpower this sizeable chick (160cm+) within a nest hollow, haul it vertically to the entrance and fly/glide about 120 metres with prey which may have been 30-40% of its body weight. Later that day we related the scenario to Sarah Legge who in her research has 30+ **Eclectus Parrot** nests under observation. The closest to predation was a record of a butcherbird investigating a Palm **Cockatoo** nest (probably for eggs). Later the same morning I noted a **Black Butcherbird** carrying a large yabby about 100cm long which means they will take advantage of drying rainforest pools. Pair density here appears greater than in the Wet Tropics. Two days later we travelled to Portland Roads. In melaleuca country we witnessed a small smoke-grey raptor fly across the road, diagonally ahead of our vehicle. We alighted and Jack saw the bird briefly again twice as it moved from tree to tree. In flight, it was the size of a male sparrow hawk and upon elimination of other species we feel that it was a **New Guinea Grey-headed Goshawk**. In the five days spent in the area, we observed 103 species of birds.

Del Richards, Mossman

All BA-NQG members are invited to the launch of "The Bowerbirds"

"The Bowerbirds" is the latest book by: Clifford B. Frith and Dawn W. Frith. Publisher: Oxford University Press, Oxford. Consisting of 508 pages plus eight colour plates by Eustace Barnes & numerous text illustrations.

Date: Saturday 27th March 2004 (Note: there is also a Yungaburra Market on this day)

Time: Starting promptly at 14:00 finishing at 16:30

Venue: Cliff and Dawn Frith's house. (*The gate signed "NO ACCESS" at the very end of Pei Rd, off Glen Allyn Rd, Butchers Creek, near Malanda, southern Atherton Tableland - a map can be faxed to you, upon request, if required.*)

Drinks and finger food provided.

Copies of the new book, and a range of other old and recent ornithological titles, will be available – all at favourable prices. (Note: cash and cheques accepted, but credit card facilities unfortunately not available)

Sorry but this is NOT an appropriate function for babies or children. **Please RSVP to:** PO Box 581, Malanda, Qld. 4885.

Phone: (07) 4096 8105, Fax: (07) 4096 8316 or email: friths@austarnet.com.au. Birds Australia Members only.



Sth Qld Congress and Campout

The **Congress** theme is **"Birds, Brigalow and Biodiversity"**. At Highfields Cultural Centre (10km north of Toowoomba) **10 - 12 September**. One theme will be conservation of woodland birds, with 3 sub-sections: *research* studies; good *practice* by landholders; *support* available (Bushcare, Land for Wildlife, Birds on Farms program, Envirofund etc). David Lindenmayer is to be a keynote speaker for this section. Other sections will include reports on current BA projects and research, including Important Bird Areas. The possibility of a segment on bird books, photography, sounds, and art is being considered. Papers on current research and observations of bird life and behaviour will be sought from professional and amateur ornithologists. The **Campout** will be based in the Crows Nest (Qld) Caravan Park 13 - 17 September. All day bus trip to look at on-ground conservation projects; boat trip on Lake Cressbrook for water birds; small group visits to areas of good birding on private property will be included. It is hoped to incorporate some purposeful birding such as IBA surveys.



Cattle Egret explosion

Cattle Egrets arrived in Townsville in 1970. By the end of the 80s there were a few dozen pairs nesting in the colony in the mangroves on Ross River, along with other species of egret and ibis. By 1995 nearly 1000 were recorded and since regular counts began in 1996 numbers have slowly risen with some fluctuations. The egrets usually arrive in late October and numbers build up, typically with a peak in January. In the 2000/01 season the highest count was 3,923 birds but the following year no counts topped 1,000. Last year, (2002/03 season), several hundred birds arrived in December but they had all gone by the end of January and very little, if any breeding had taken place. None of the other egrets bred either. They are making up for it this season with record numbers of Cattle Egrets and the other three species are breeding there too. The highest count to date was 5012 on February 19th. The good rain we have had in the last few months has obviously encouraged breeding.

Cattle Egrets are now present in small numbers in the Townsville area in the dry season but we do not know where the majority go when they leave or if there are any other colonies in Nth Queensland. *Jo Wieneke, Townsville*

Interesting sightings

Species	Date	Location	Observer	Comment
Yellow-tailed Bk-Cockatoo	9/11/03	Issac River, near Moranbah	Richard Atkinson	Approaching far north of range
Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo	1/12/03	Rex Range, Sth of Mossman	Del Richards	Recorded monthly since February 2003
Spotless Crake	30/12/03	Abattoir Swamp, Julatten	Carol & Andrew Iles and Keith & Lindsay Fisher	Regular sightings here over previous month
Little Bittern	1/01/04	Louisa Creek, Townsville	Len & Chris Ezzy	Also Black Bittern on Creek.
Terek Sandpiper	1/01/04	Lake Moondarra, Mt Isa	via Bob Forsyth	Very few records from here
Cotton Pygmy-goose	1/01/04	McDougall Road, Julatten	Carol & Andrew Iles and Keith & Lindsay Fisher	1 pair on small farm dam, 1st record for this location
Varied Sittella	1/01/04	McDougall Road, Julatten	Carol & Andrew Iles and Keith & Lindsay Fisher	Unusual record in open grazing country near dam, in dead tree. 1st record for this location
Masked Owl	13/01/04	Rex Range Lookout	Del Richards	
Freckled Duck	17/01/04	Lake Toomba	Len & Chris Ezzy	Also Cotton Pygmy-goose (6), Green Pygmy-goose (2) and Great Crested Grebe (4)
Ground Cuckoo-Shrike	17/01/04	Great Basalt Wall Road	Len & Chris Ezzy	Three different sightings totally 6 individuals
Rufous Song-lark	17/01/04	Great Basalt Wall Road	Len & Chris Ezzy	Two individuals recorded conspicuously and constantly song-fighting
Beach Stone-curlew	24/01/04	Cungulla	Len & Chris Ezzy and Janet Robino	Twelve Grey Plovers were also seen here
Grey-Shrike-thrush	25/01/04	Luster Ck., N. Mt. Molloy	BA-NQG group	Feeding a single young bird, good breeding record
Red-rumped Swallow	25/01/04	Miallo, near Mossman	Del Richards	Nine individuals recorded
Little Bittern	28/01/04	Daintree River	Del Richards	Adult caught on fence in river, died at vets
Australian Pratincole	6/02/04	Cairns Airport	Keith Fisher	Single Bird - only 3rd record from here.
Singing Bushlark	6/02/04	Cairns Airport	Keith Fisher	50+ birds, unusually high number for Cairns
Beach Stone-curlew	6/02/04	Cairns Airport	Keith Fisher	2 x 2 pairs
Little Kingfisher	6/02/04	Churchill Ck, Julatten	Del Richards	Few upland records
Beach Stone-curlew	13/02/04	Port Douglas	Del Richards	Two individuals recorded @ Sheraton Golf Course,
Blue-faced Parrot-Finch	24/02/04	Mt. Lewis	BA-NQG group	At least 12 birds, increased number on previous seasons sightings
Kelp Gull	17/02/04	Cairns Esplanade	John Crowhurst, Glenn Holmes	1st sighting for about five years here
Banded Lapwing	19/02/04	Woodlands, Townsville	Bill Holmes	8 + 2 adults with chicks 2km away
White-winged Chough	19/02/04	Woodlands, Townsville	Bill Holmes	Seen previously at this location pre drought
Emu	19/02/04	Woodlands, Townsville	Bill Holmes	1km west of Ross River
Varied Triller	19/02/04	Cranbrook, Townsville	Bill Holmes	Between Gleeson's & Black weirs. 1st urban sighting since July 2003
Grey-crowned Babbler	19/02/04	Woodlands, Townsville	Bill Holmes	two flocks, regular location
Southern Cassowary	21/02/04	Davies Creek, between Kuranda & Mareeba	Martin Cachard	1 adult + 1 Juvenile about 720m ASL
Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher	21/02/04	Davies Creek, between Kuranda & Mareeba	Martin Cachard	At around 600m ASL
Black Bittern	25/02/04	Smithfield	Martin Cachard	Flying North from Skyrail lagoon area
Little Kingfisher	26/02/04	Mundy Ck, Townsville	Jo Wieneke	Early arrival
Beach Stone-curlew	2/03/04	Ross River	Bill Holmes	Three individuals noted at mouth of river



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. *Editor*

Welcome new members

- U Dr K Arlett, CRANBROOK;
- U Mr R Atkinson, MACKAY;
- U Mrs W Cooper, TOPAZ;
- U Ms L Curtis, YUNGABURRA;
- U Ms CA Erwin, HERBERTON;
- U Ms I Hemsley, BELGIAN GARDNES;
- U Ms T Forsyth, MT ISA.
- U Ms A Webster, ALLIGATOR CK

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.

Sunday 9th to Friday 14th May 2004

~ Fraser Island Bird Week ~

Stay at Kingfisher Bay Resort and choose your own program for the week—everything from dawn bird walks to photography and painting classes, fine food and great company. \$469 per person twin share includes 5 nights accommodation, catamaran transfers, welcome function and Galah Dinner. Contact Kingfisher Bay Resort on 1800 072 555.

Check out these websites

WWF: www.wwf.org.au
 BASO: www.users.bigpond.com/basqld
 Fraser Island Bird Week: <http://birdwatching.kingfisherbay.com/bweekindex.html>
 Bowen bird list:
www.bowen.qld.gov.au/webs/birds.htm

Do you wish you could read old issues of **EMU**? Do you have a scanner? Here is an opportunity to help realise your dream, even if you won't have a row of leather-bound volumes on your shelves. Birds Australia and CSIRO are arranging to have the first 100 volumes scanned and available as a CD and on the web, but need help with the scanning. If you have a scanner, or have access to one, email garnettcrowley@ledanet.com.au for instructions on scanning procedures that have to be followed and to be allocated a volume. As you scan enjoy reading about bird research from many years ago, and contribute to an extremely valuable project. There is a free copy of the CD for anyone who scans a full volume.

Have you seen a **Cotton Pygmy-goose** lately? BA-NQG are trying to ascertain whether the species is one of Australia's rarest and will be holding a north Queensland survey one weekend in September. However we will need a coordinator for the project who can organise teams and locations and are asking for volunteers to assist. Please contact the Convenor for details.

Have you heard of **Important Bird Areas** (IBA's). BA-NQG have been working on identifying these areas in North Queensland so that management options can be discussed. Interested? Make sure you come to the AGM where these will be discussed. For more information contact the Convenor.

BANQG have been invited by the Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage to take part in the process of developing a **Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds**. Keith Fisher will be coordinating input from north Queensland members.

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@bigpond.com

Australian Birds *their Nests and Eggs*—Gordon Beruldsen

First released in 1980 and sold out by 1986, Gordon Beruldsen has revised and updated the text with much more new material. Approximately 480 pages including over 70 new full colour plates this field guide (215mm x 150mm) is a must for any birder. Gordon is offering a pre-release Special Offer for the first 1000 copies sold before its official release in June 2004. Only \$35.00 (inclusive of packing and postage), the first 1000 copies will be numbered and signed by the Author. Send cheque or money order to Mr Gordon R Beruldsen, 47 Broadmoor Street, Kenmore Hills Qld 4060. Phone or fax (07) 33741253.



Please send items for June 2004 Contact Call by Mid May to: Helen McLaughlin, 44 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens 4810 or Email Helen on helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au.