

BirdLife Northern Queensland - Convenor's Report 1 March 2014

2013 has been only our second year of the newly merged BirdLife group for Northern Queensland. It's been an absolutely full year of meetings, outings, projects and conservation activities.

Let me start with the conservation efforts we have made and the outcomes we have achieved.

For the past six years, under the guidance of Graham Harrington, we have been monitoring the populations of Carpentarian and Kalkadoon Grasswrens in the Important Bird Areas of Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park and the Buckley River and Wollgorang IBAs. This past year we investigated the impact large extensive bush fires had on the Carpentarians. This information is being used to revise the conservation status of the grasswren, and a set of recommended actions have been made to BirdLife national office, the Queensland Threatened Species Unit, and Southern Gulf Natural Resource Management group. This work was summarised in a recent Birdlife magazine article.

We have continued our monitoring of two species of bowerbirds endemic to the higher altitudes of the Wet Tropics IBA – the Tooth-billed and Golden. This year we expanded to an additional location.

We continued the annual crane count on the Atherton Tablelands, and attempted some daytime counts to monitor feeding sites and also expanded into a new location at Woodleigh station. The results of these counts will appear in a forthcoming issue of the national Birdlife magazine. A crane reporting page was added to our website. A workshop held with local farmers investigated how to deal with the vexing issue of cranes on croplands. This has now led to a new initiative to develop ways of deterring birds on crops in the Tablelands.

We continued our annual Torresian Imperial Pigeon count at Mission Beach area, and expanded into other locations along the coast, especially adjacent to known breeding islands and the Cairns area.

We continued and expanded bird surveys with several partners, including with:

- Bush Heritage at their Yourka property, adjacent to the Wet Tropics IBA. and with
- Northern Gulf NRM, assisting them with surveys on Werrington station and the Steve Irwin Reserve.

Members of your committee have been involved with community efforts and responses to the AQUIS development at Yorkeys Knob, Great Barrier Reef coastal zone strategic assessment, and Cape York draft regional development plan.

We have promoted the appreciation and understanding of birds through a full program of monthly meetings. These have spanned a wide range of topics and interests, and even expanded beyond the world of birds alone. The meeting venues have alternated between Cairns and other locations within the region, in an effort to reach out to as many of our far-flung members as we can. Despite this, we realise that many members have to travel considerable distances to reach our meetings, and we appreciate the time, effort and costs that you our members make to attend these events.

We have also run two workshops this past year – the ever popular “Wave the Waders Good-bye” in March, and “Conservation of Beach-nesting Birds” organised by our national office. And we also held the workshop along with farmers on Cranes on Croplands, as noted before.

Regular outings were made to different locations in the region, both near and far – including Artemis station on Cape York, Yungaburra, Port Douglas, Julatten and Etty Bay.

Another 4 issues of our newsletter, the “Contact Call” have been expertly produced by our new editor, Ceri Pearce. Each has been jammed with loads of fascinating articles and photographs provided by you our members, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have contributed to make the newsletter such an interesting read.

We also have revitalised our web site, along with an updated domain name. As well as providing easy access to current information, it also maintains all archival information of our past history as Birds Australia. The new crane reporting page has been incorporated into it, and has already obtained more than 50 sightings. Brochures of popular birding sites have been all updated and are available on the website. If you haven't already viewed the new website, I recommend you to have a close look at it.

Our membership has grown over the year by around 15%, which is on track with the national target of growing our membership base to 15,000, a figure calculated for self-sufficiency for meeting our core administrative costs.

Your committee members are involved in regular national link-ups with the other branches to share and discuss common matters on IBAs, conservation issues, as well as the national priorities for our strategic plan, and administrative and budget matters. There are regular phone hook-ups, and the annual meeting in Melbourne.

Your committee has been able to complete our business with only 4 face-to-face meetings through the year, but numerous decisions are made via our email group.

In a volunteer organisation such as ours at the regional level, what we can achieve is dependent upon you the members, and local champions who are prepared to take on a role and ensure that what needs to get done is done. So I would like to personally thank each of the committee members who have taken on these roles for a job well done. And I also wish to thank you the members for your efforts and friendships over this past year to help us to better understand, enjoy and protect our precious birdlife – Thank you all!!