



Contact Call

Birders of North Queensland
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union:
North Queensland Group

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BNQ CALENDAR

During January

Townsville Suburban Street Survey summer count. Contact Jo Wieneke for record sheets.

March 28th -31st, 1997.

Easter Campout and continuing the survey at Princess Hills.

April 25-27th, 1997.

AGM and Campout at Greenvale.

GOLDEN-SHOULDERED PARROT CHASE

Part of the activities of the Golden-shouldered Parrot Recovery Team operations is to search for the species in areas where they have been seen in the past but not in recent memory. BNQ

recently conducted such a survey on Rokeby National Park to the north and west of Coen on Cape York Peninsular.

The exercise was based on the study of this species by Gabriel Crowley and Stephen Garnett. They found that small flocks of GSPs associated with Black-faced Woodswallows in the late dry season. The parrots appeared to gain protection from predators by this behaviour. Stephen suggested that it would be relatively easy to check if parrots were in an area in November because the woodswallows are much more visible than are the parrots, which spend much of their time sitting quietly in trees.

The trouble with this time of year is that it is "the mad dog season" - very hot, very humid and a strong possibility of storms. The BNQ party got all three.

The first part of the program was to go to Artemis and be trained by Susan Shephard in the parrots' behaviour. Susan and her husband Tom are the pastoralists who run Artemis as a cattle station. They allowed Gabriel and Stephen to live on the station and study the parrots and assisted them with their studies in 1994-96. Now Susan is formally part of the study team and is conducting experiments to test some of the theories about the ecology of the parrots.

What Susan showed us was that birdlife appeared to be concentrated in 'hot-spots'. Most of the country was deficient in birds but every now and then we would find patches of woodland that were teaming with birds. Banded Honeyeaters were the most numerous but other common species were Black-throated and Masked Finches, Little Friarbirds, Bar-breasted, Brown and Yellow Honeyeaters and Black-faced Woodswallows. Often there were GSPs in the same area. Activity started at dawn

and continued until about 9.00am. After that it was difficult to find the birds.

Armed with this information and an impression of the country in which we had seen the parrots, we set off for Rokeby. Peter Stanton of Qld National Parks had shown us areas on the map that might have suitable habitat. On arrival in Coen we got more detailed briefing from the Ranger Mike Delaney, and ominous portents about the state of the tracks and the weather.

Bird concentrations were far less impressive on Rokeby and we saw no woodswallows at all. This was despite the prolific flowering of *Melaleuca viridiflora* and some Eucalyptus blossom. Perhaps the most notable birdlife was the large number of Red-browed Pardalotes. No one in the party had seen such dense populations anywhere else. However, we found no GSPs.

We only searched a small part of the Park so we cannot say that they are not there but we are fairly sure they are not in the areas we managed to reach. We had fun trying and some members got new ticks!

The party consisted of BNQ members Sue Clegg, Graham Harrington, Eric Sticklen and Jo Wieneke. Also along were Peter Nicholls and Alex and Rob Stockland from Brisbane, and Sue Gould and Judy Pacey from Weipa.

R.I.P. CAIRNS CASSOWARIES

It is sad to report that the last known cassowary living on Whitfield Range in suburban Cairns, died on Saturday, 2nd November when attacked by two dogs. A survey conducted in 1992 concluded that about nine adult cassowaries still lived on the range, however it was realised that their long term viability relied upon the cooperation and education of the suburban population that surrounded them. Their home had become an island,

isolated from access to the coast and the coastal range. They were constantly putting themselves in danger by visiting gardens in search of food and water and it was only a matter of time before the small population disappeared, victims of dogs and vehicles. Sadly there has been more public outcry and concern now than could be mustered a few years ago, when a cassowary conservation group tried to interest people in becoming involved with helping the cassowary's plight on Mt Whitfield.

A few days before this death a number of fires were lit on the same hillslope, effectively destroying a community tree planting area that had been established over the last few years. The plantings were made in an effort to protect the hillslopes from grass fires and give extended habitat for the cassowary population. Sadly, a small minority of people with no respect for the environment can have such an effect.

It is up to groups like BNQ to continue to publicise environmental matters and try to help educate people and make them appreciate and conserve our natural heritage.

1996 TWITCHATHON REPORT

BNQ had two teams taking part in the Champagne section of the Twitchathon, while several other teams from Cairns, the Tableland and Townsville took part in the main 24hr twitch. The Champagne twitch was designed as a fun event, but was also focused on fund-raising.

Based at Murray Falls, half way between Townsville and Cairns, twitching was restricted to a 50km radius. The two teams were the Old Age Parrots - Dawn and Arnold Magarry and Andree Griffin and the Seek Harder Birds - Sue Clegg, Ivor Preston, Keith and Lindsay Fisher and Graham Harrington. Starting time was 1.00pm and all team members had to be back at camp by 6.00pm for compulsory dinner (and champagne). Unfortunately rain washed out any possibility of the 2hrs allowed for spotlighting. Twitching resumed at 6.30 am on Sunday and continued till 1.00pm. The OAPs stayed around the Falls and covered the area thoroughly while the SHBs went further afield, up Kirrama Range and to Mission Beach. Final totals were OAPs 89 and SHBs 122 and all agreed it had been a most enjoyable weekend.

Other groups included top-scorers Andy Anderson, John Grant, Glen Holmes and Eric Sticklen who after much preparation and a trial run, limited themselves to a radius of 45 km of Lake Tinaroo and came up with 243 species. Townsville's Eggs team of Ian Clayton, Ken Cross, Martin Schultz and Malcolm Turner covered more ground from Chillagoe to Cairns and recorded 210. Steve Mannix, Lloyd Nielson and Peter Pal opted for the environmentally friendly method of walking and covered 39 km on foot to record 131 species from their base at Mt Molloy. We hope more members will become involved next year.

SHOC

North Queensland was well represented at the recent Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress in Albany, WA. Some BNQ members took advantage of the location and combined the congress with a birding holiday in the west. Papers given on north Queensland topics were: 'Implications of fire management for bird conservation in tropical forests of North Queensland' - Angela Chapman and Graham Harrington; 'Bird communities of North Queensland in Dry rainforests' - Jacqui Coughlan; 'Patterns of diversity in the terrestrial birds of the rainforests of the Australian wet tropics' - Steve Williams; 'Use of altered riparian habitats by rainforest birds and implications for a corridor planting project on the Atherton Tablelands, north-east Queensland' - John Grant.

AROUND THE NORTH

* House Swifts *Apus afinis* were seen at Rokeby National Park on 19.11.96.

* First Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher of the season was heard at Julatten on 7.11.96 and in Cairns on 12.11.96.

* Numbers of Pied Imperial-Pigeons are up from last year. The October count on North Brook Is recorded 35,676.

* A pair of Beach Stone-curlews are nesting on the Oyster Point site at Cardwell for the third successive year. Despite requests to government bodies, there is no provision for preserving their nesting area once they have finished breeding this year!!

* Over 3000 ibis and 1000 egrets have been counted coming in to roost in the evening at the Ibis and Egret Colony on the south bank of Ross River, 2.3km

from the centre of Townsville. After the birds have returned to roost at dusk thousands of flying foxes, which use the same mangroves, take to the air in a spectacular fly-past. HANZAB lists no other colonies in North Queensland even approaching these numbers.

* On 3rd November Kerry Redding, Elinor Scambler and Graham Harrington held a very successful public bird walk along a rehabilitated section of Prior's Creek, close to the centre of Atherton.

* While staying at Artemis, the Golden-shouldered Parrot team paid a visit to Lotus Bird Lodge on Violet Vale station. This property adjoins Lakefield National Park and the lodge and cabins, built of local timber are situated beside a beautiful bird-filled lagoon. An idyllic setting for a luxury birding holiday.

CROC FARM - FOR THE BIRDS

The Cairns Crocodile Farm is one of the newest 'must-go' places for birders in the north. It is especially good for crakes and rails. The new management are interested in suggestions from our members as to how they can publicise the farm and encourage more birds. They have also pledged \$500 for each of three years to the RAOU's Research Fund. The farm, formerly known as Edward River Crocodile Farm, is on Redbank Rd which runs off Yarrabah Rd, 4km south of Edmonton.

NEW BIRD-CALL TAPES

Along with this Contact Call we are enclosing information on David Stewart's new tapes of birds of the Wet Tropics. These will be fully reviewed in the March Wingspan.

So far the tapes have attracted very favourable comment with a few minor quibbles about the choice of birds. Overall the quality of sound is excellent and the innovative concept of naming the bird **after** the actual call should aid in learning the calls.

David is kindly donating \$2.00 to BNQ for each single tape or \$3.00 per set, sold via Contact Call.

BIRDS OF MAGNETIC ISLAND

by Jo Wieneke. For sale from BNQ \$10.00 per copy including postage.

THANKS

BNQ is very grateful for the assistance provided by the office of the Member for Thuringowa, Ken McElligott, in the production of this newsletter.