

Birds Australia

Contact Call

Birds Australia

North Queensland Group

September 1998 • Issue: Green Pygmy-goose

CALENDAR

Sept 5th Sat - Egret Count - Meet at Hasties Swamp, Atherton 12.30 Bring Lunch. Tally room at Jon Notts with a BYO BBQ.

Sept 12th Sat - Atlas Information Meeting. After the Townsville BOCA Meeting at Thuringowa Council Chambers, 3.00pm.

Sept 13th Sun - Townsville, meet the President, Graham Harrington, for a BYO Breakfast get-together at the park at Rowes Bay 8.30am - talk over issues including the Atlas. (Townsville to Mackay members see insert)

Oct 10th Sat - THE 1998 ANNUAL TABLELANDS CRANE COUNT

Please join us this year for our second historic crane count on Saturday, October 10th. We hope to count at least 12 roost sites for Sarus Cranes and Brolgas. This means at least 24 people, so please organise all your birdwatching friends and family to come along and enjoy the event (and add more data to the little we know about crane movements in North Queensland).

PROGRAM: MEET 3.30 pm at Hasties Swamp, Atherton for birdwatching and afternoon tea

LEAVE 5.00 pm for your site

AFTER DUSK Head for BBQ - at Peta and Jon Notts place to enjoy a night out & share results with other teams. BRING Telescope if possible, binoculars, sensible shoes, afternoon tea, BYO everything for the BBQ.

Contact Ian Sinclair, Tablelands rep AH 07 4091 4544 or Elinor Scambler 07 4095 3295 for details. YES, please do offer to count a particular roost site if you wish, let Ian or Elinor know.

Oct 18th Sun - Redden Island Count, Cairns. Meet at 8.30am on Cinderella St, Machins Beach at the entrance before the toilet block. Contact Keith Fisher.

Oct 21st Wed -Townsville launch of John Young's Owl video. Townsville members will be notified of the venue and time.

Oct 24th-25th Sat-Sun -Twitchathon. Get your teams ready and raise some funds! Contact secretary.

Oct 31st Sat - Serpentine Lagoon Townsville atlas counts, details from Jo Wieneke Ph (07) 4771 4707 (see article under atlas heading)

Nov 29th Sun - Lamb Range transects count. Meet at Platypus Park, Atherton at 7.30am or 7.45am at Henry Hannam Drive on Mareeba-Atherton Rd. Contact Graham Harrington. Ph 4096 5051

Dec 12/13th Sat-Sun Tablelands/Cairns Christmas Party. Please book with the secretary. (Cairns/Tableland members see insert)

Arrangements can change after publication of Contact Call, contact local reps. for the latest info. This will give more flexibility, especially with weather conditions. Extra events may also be arranged

AGM 1998

Our venue for this years AGM was the excellent facility at C4 - The Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation. This community group oversees the well being of the cassowaries of the Mission Beach area by monitoring their movements and trying to protect their habitat by revegetation and liaising with landholders, councils, and government departments. It is a mammoth task, which is done on a voluntary basis with huge enthusiasm. Their information centre also has a small theatre, where we held the AGM.



On the Saturday morning members followed the Licuala Forestry walk which, while botanically beautiful, was almost devoid of birds. Another forestry path led us to a bird wave which included Brown Gerygone, Fairy Gerygone, Macleay's Honeyeater, Little Shrike-thrush, Spectacled Monarch, White-eared Monarch and Pied Monarch. Returning to the car park we found a young male cassowary foraging for fallen fruit. He was over friendly and relieved a picnicker of a sandwich while posing for his photo to be taken. This we found out later was a young male without a territory.

The afternoon saw us get serious with the AGM. 24 members from as far away as Mackay and Charters Towers were present and as this wasn't an election year, there weren't too many tedious procedures to go through. However, we did elect a new Convenor as Graham Harrington stood down due to his commitments of being the new Birds Australia national president. We were pleased to elect Jon Nott as the new Convenor. Jon is from the Atherton Tableland and has been involved in BA-NQG since it's inception four years ago. The outgoing Convenor gave his report followed by the treasurers showing us to be in the black. Reports from the area representatives from Mackay, West Queensland, Townsville, Tableland and Cairns were presented outlining the previous year's activities. On-going projects include Cattle Egret monitoring in Townsville, Crane count and BOP count on the Tableland, Beach Stone Curlew survey (coastal areas) and Redden Island (Cairns) survey. Camp-outs were held at Princess Hills, Kingfisher Park, Kaban (Tableland), Mt. Fox and Starke Station north of Cooktown. These were all well attended and successful both ornithologically and socially. Two public information days on the Cairns Esplanade were held to welcome and farewell the waders. A proposal for an interpretive centre on the Esplanade, utilising NHT funding was well received by the Cairns City Council. We also put in a submission on the proposed upgrading of the Esplanade to the consultants employed to oversee the project. A bird list for Hasties Swamp National Park near Atherton was launched in February in conjunction with the QLD Department of the Environment. We hope to produce similar lists for other National Parks in the future. Although most of our activities have centred on Cairns and the Tableland, we hope in the future to encourage members in other areas to become more active especially with the upcoming Atlas. We also appointed Amanda Freeman as our new conservation officer who will deal with nationally important issues in our area

After the formalities of the AGM were completed, we continued with a discussion on the Atlas. Part of our group's atlas activities will be a focus on Cape York with help from the many experts within our group. (See atlas project report further on).

We re-grouped in the evening for a delicious meal put on for us by the C4 chefs. We had great fun presenting Graham H. with a Presidents pack. A mobile phone was first on the list (unfortunately the \$2.50 model didn't work very well, it was probably the GetReady brand of batteries that caused problems!). Business cards so he could remember who he was and a pair of scissors to keep that beard in trim. Also included was a copy of "The Complete Dummies book of MS President" which went with a copy of the new programme, hot off the press from Bill Gates and Bill Clinton. We finished with the mandatory bottle of Champagne, a cake with sparklers and thanking him for the wonderful job he has done starting and keeping the group together. A fun evening was had by all.

The following morning we met at Lacey Creek forestry walk and we were pleased to have another cassowary, this time with a chick, join us. We had an enjoyable walk through the rainforest before an early lunch and farewell. Another AGM over - now next year, maybe we'll find another pub.

Lindsay Fisher

OFFICE BEARERS

Convenor: Jon Nott (07) 4096 8230

Secretary: Lindsay Fisher
(07) 4058 1164 Fax (AH) (07) 4058 0337

Treasurer: Elinor Scambler (07) 4095 3296

Area Representatives:

Mackay: Marion Crouther (07) 4958 4613

Bowen/Ayr: Jon Wren (07) 4786 2614

Townsville: Jo Wieneke (07) 4771 4707

Innisfail/Tully: Klaus Uhlenhut (07) 4065 5181

Cairns: Keith Fisher (07) 4058 1164

Atherton Tableland: Ian Sinclair (07) 4091 4544

Mossman/Daintree: Del Richards (07) 4098 3103

Cape York Peninsula: Michael Barnett (07) 4069 8365

Torres Strait: Denise Fowler (07) 4069 1162

Western Queensland: Peter Britton (07) 4087 2188

Conservation Representative: Amanda Freeman
(07) 4095 2148

PROJECT CONTACTS

Lake Tinaroo Faecal Coliform Study and Bush Stone Curlew Study -

Gary Wilson Ph Wk (07) 4092 8444

E-mail wilsongw@prose.dpi.qld.gov.au

Northern Gulf Regional Strategy Group

Ian Fox Ph (07) 4091 4193

E-mail foxi@fastinternet.net.au

Gouldian Finch and Birds at Waterholes Survey

Klaus Uhlenhut Ph (07) 4065 5181

E-mail kirrama@4kz.com.au

Redden Island Survey (Cairns)

Keith Fisher Ph (07) 4058 1164

E-mail lkfisher@north.net.au

Sarus/Brolga Tableland Crane counts

Elinor Scambler Ph (07) 4095 3296

E-mail dacelo@internetnorth.com.au

Egret & Ibis Counts (Townsville)

Jo Wieneke Ph (07) 4771 4707

E-mail bowerbird@msm.com

or Tania Korn RIVER coordinator (07) 4721 4077

Counts are at Ross River every Thursday afternoon in conjunction with the RIVER group. Phone Jo if you'd like to help. We are hoping to get funding to help track the Cattle Egrets after they leave the colony.

MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

You will receive Wingspan, the membership magazine which contains articles of broad birdwatching interest and the local newsletter Contact Call quarterly. The scientific journal *Emu* is also published quarterly.

Membership Fees are currently:

Individual \$49.00 plus *Emu* \$90.00

Concession \$36.00 plus *Emu* \$64.00

Family \$78.00 plus *Emu* \$115.00

Contact the secretary or head office for a membership form.

Head Office: 415 Riversdale Road, Hawthorne East, Vic 3123

Email: raou@raou.com.au

Birds Australia Home Page: <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~birdsau>

COMMITTEE NEWS



As can be seen in the list of office bearers we now have a few new faces on the committee. We welcome, Marion Crouther, Ian Sinclair, Denise Fowler, also Jon Nott to his new position of Convenor and Amanda Freeman as our new Conservation Officer.

TRIP & MEETING REPORTS

REDDEN ISLAND 26/7/98

We had 10 adults + 3 little Notts attend the Redden Island trip, the showers quickly gave way to sunshine and we managed to see 48 species.

We visited the woodlands, Mangroves and Barron River mouth as part of the BA-NQG regular surveys of the area. Interesting sightings included a Laughing Kookaburra excavating a nest site in a termite mound in the fork of a tree, whilst it's mate was perched nearby. A Papuan Frogmouth, which was found dead at the beginning of the month, still had its remains in the same place beside Redden Creek. A Collared Kingfisher was perched on a dead tree beside the Barron River calling and giving excellent views. Several Cicadabirds and Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves were seen. Two Brahminy Kites flew over, an adult with an immature brown bird in tow and a Brown Goshawk flew over the Barron River before it landed and perched for us to get good views. There were a few birds on a sandbar offshore from Casuarina Point on the opposite bank of the Barron River. These included a Pelican and a Pied Oystercatcher along with several tern species. A species list for the trip is available if required. The total species seen on Redden Island is now 120.



Keith Fisher

MURRAY FALLS 7-9/8/98

The weather was perfect and the 9 people who came on this trip enjoyed a laid back birding weekend. We discussed the Atlas and put into practice the instructions, atlassing in the rainforest and along the road in the eucalypt woodland.

Many birds were breeding with two Pale Yellow Robins on nests, one recently fledged Robin being fed, a Wompoo Pigeon sitting on a nest which was built on three vines strung between two trees and a Yellow-breasted Boatbill was observed building a nest. Several Noisy Pittas were also seen along the rainforest path.

The only raptors seen were a Little Eagle soaring high over the road and a Pacific Baza. A Lesser Sooty Owl called on the Saturday evening down by the river but we were unable to locate it. A total of 65 species were seen in and around the forestry camping area.

Keith Fisher

KIWI NIGHT

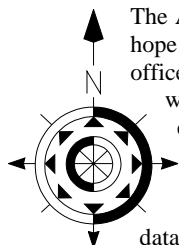
John Kendrick and his daughter Karen Baird were visiting Cairns and the Tableland from New Zealand and offered to give our group a talk. John and Karen run wildlife tours throughout New Zealand specialising in birds. John is an audio and visual expert having spent many years working for the New Zealand wildlife authorities and Karen has also been working in conservation for the last 12 years.

Jon Nott organised for a night at CSIRO in Atherton on 25th June and about 50 people turned up. John talked and showed some excellent slides of the Kakapo, a critically endangered ground parrot with which he spent much of his time photographing and recording their calls. Introduces species such as the Stoat, Black Rat and Feral Cat took their toll on the birds. A relocation program has seen birds moved to the predator

free islands of Codfish Maud and Manu (they failed to establish here). By 1997 there was a minimum of 50 birds, 19 females (only 8 were breeders) and 31 males. In 1997 4 chicks hatched on Codfish Island, the first anywhere since 1993. These birds certainly live in some spectacular areas of New Zealand as the slides showed.

Karen then talked, mainly about her work with Spotted Kiwis and showed slides. We were amazed at the size of the eggs, which are four times the size that would be expected from a bird the size of a Kiwi. A brief advert break for their tours ended an enjoyable evening. Thanks to Jon Nott for organising the evening and taking care of our visitors. Also thanks to David Westcott, events organiser, from CSIRO for making the introductions, organising the tea and the venue.

ATLAS PROJECT



The Atlas project officially commenced on 1st August and we hope you have all registered with the atlas coordinator at head office, those that have should receive their kits sometime this week (31Aug - 4 Sep) at the latest. Those people with email will be encouraged to submit their forms electronically; this will save work for the regional officer and sub regional officers as well as save 20c per sheet, which is the cost of scanning them into the database. The atlas team can be contacted on email at: - atlas@raou.com.au or at head office.

The executive committee, as well as local Tableland and Cairns people, who had expressed a wish to be involved in helping run the atlas at a local level, held a meeting on August 1st. The aim of this meeting was to work out strategy regarding the atlas and to appoint a Regional Organiser (RO) and Sub-regional Organisers (SRO).

As BA-NQG covers a huge area it was suggested that the region be divided into two sections:

1. North of Cardwell across to Normanton.
2. Cardwell south to Mackay and across to the Northern Territory border.

Graham Harrington offered to be northern RO and the following people have volunteered to be northern SRO's. Glen Holmes, Eric Sticklen, Lloyd Nielsen, Elinor Scambler, Keith Fisher and Stephen Garnett.

Jo Wieneke has offered to be southern RO and the following people SRO's.

Marion Crouther, Margaret Streamer, Ian Clayton.

These people will be asked to look at all sheets submitted for our region and check for any obvious errors and unusual sightings before they are sent to Head Office. In the event that a record could be a mistake or an unusual one the person submitting the sheet will be contacted for conformation.

This will allow local people with the knowledge of their area to be appointed as RO's or SRO's.

If you would like to be involved as a SRO for any of the regions and have the necessary expertise please contact Graham Harrington Ph 4096 5051

It was decided that the northern region of BA-NQG concentrates its efforts on Cape York Peninsula, approx north of 16° latitude. John Clarkson who has extensive knowledge of Cape York explained that approximately 50 1:100 000 maps cover the Cape (see next item) and that there is 201 vegetation types that can be divided up into 30 groups. By combining the maps and the vegetation, we can aim to target five random sites on each map, this will mean people are collecting data from areas other than comfortable road-side stops at creek crossings and other interesting looking bird sites. Many of the random sites will be inaccessible to all but the most intrepid birder, so it was proposed that we also have five constrained sites within 500m of a road or track on each map. Another strategy could be to ask people to stop every 5km along a road over a set distance, again to give a random count. As atlasing this area is beyond our resources we decided to encourage visitors to the cape to help us out. We will prepare an information brochure to help people plan their trip and in return we hope that people will agree to Atlas the sites on the maps we will prepared. John

is willing to be coordinator for this part of the project and to keep records of atlased sites.

We will have to try an access sites both in the dry season and also the wet season. It looks like we will be having exciting times ahead.

CAPE YORK ATLAS CHALLENGE - THE MAPS!

(Please check your bottom drawer...)

To back up the intensive Atlasing of Cape York we need a full set of 1:100,000 topo maps N of 16° latitude, which will be suitably packaged and available for loan or hire to members and others who are on their intrepid way to Atlas the Cape.

This means about 50 maps at \$7.50 each. Our group does have some money, but as always it's scarce. So how about offering those unloved, bottom drawer, GOOD quality hoarded maps you definitely won't need? Already we have 4 donated. Once people have donated what they can, we will buy the rest. Please contact **Elinor** on 4095-3296 for details.

TOWNSVILLE ATLAS NEWS

Serpentine Lagoon

It is proposed that Townsville members to do quarterly Atlas surveys in different habitats at Serpentine Lagoon. The first one, when we'll also be selecting the sites, will be on Saturday October 31st. Phone 4771 4707 for details.

Jo Wieneke

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

CONSERVATION ISSUES

Birds Australia is intending to set up a network of members in the regions to act as contacts for nationally important issues concerning bird conservation. We haven't received any details of this new network yet but Amanda Freeman has offered to act as "conservation rep" for our region. If you wish to bring any issues to the attention of Birds Australia head office, Amanda will be the contact point.

Amanda can be contacted after hours on Ph: (07) 40952148. Email coming soon.

ESPLANADE UPDATE

Graham Harrington and Keith Fisher had another meeting with Cairns City Council representatives at the end of July to discuss further the joint funding application we had proposed, which was to put a bird interpretive centre on the Cairns Esplanade. The main purpose was to ensure that Cairns City Council included the waders as a part of the attraction in any development of the Esplanade. Now three design concepts, for the esplanade, have been released. All three have included various ideas to incorporate the birds and one has a Trinity Bay interpretive centre on their plan. In view of this it was decided not to apply for separate funding at this time but to work with the consultants to ensure the accepted design includes an interpretive center and doesn't dislodge the birds from their present feeding and roosting areas. Meanwhile the council has the funding and has a preliminary design to upgrade the existing interpretive shelter on the Esplanade. They asked us to have input into this process. The grand redevelopment plans for the Esplanade will probably take many years to complete. In the mean time an upgrade of the existing interpretive material will be of great benefit to help people understand the ecology of Trinity Inlet.

Graham Harrington & Keith Fisher

Members of both BA-NQG and Cairns BOCA have had meetings with the consultants to discuss the three development options and put forward their ideas for the esplanade, suggesting improvements in all the plans, to maintain the birds existing habitat. We will have to await the outcome of this the second stage of the consultancy process to see what that brings.

BEACH STONE-CURLEW SURVEY

The response to my last call for information on this species has been splendid and records are rolling in with fourteen respondents submitting 124 records. Keith Fisher responded with a massive data set compiled over three years of regular surveys of the Cairns Airport. A network of observers spanning the state from Sarina to the Torres Strait has been established and I am expecting further exciting records to eventuate. Most records submitted so far are from mainland locations and this nicely compliments the island bias of data collected by DEH officers as they work in the Northern and Far North Sections of the Great Barrier Reef Marine National Park.

It is early days in the study but the sheets thus far submitted provide details of 1 bird on 49 occasions, 2 on 41, 3 on 18 and 4 on 3. The three records of four birds are from the same location and include one of two adult birds with two young – no records of birds on eggs or with dependent young have been submitted. The sheets indicate that pairs of birds were most frequently observed in June and July and of three or four birds in July and September. A number of useful records of the species have been submitted for the Cairns foreshore with single and groups of 2 and 3 birds sighted; one observer submitted a minute by minute for two hours activity log for a single bird!

Unfortunately we have had our first record of birds being disturbed/displaced by human activities; Jon Wren of Bowen reports that two birds previously resident on a northern beach have not been seen since the use of 4WD vehicles on the beach. The matter and the status of the species have been brought to the attention of local authorities. I am delighted by the response to the survey and thank all those whom have submitted reports, particularly those whom have delved into their records to extract data. I also thank Stella Martin of DEH for providing publicity about the project.

Gary Wilson Coordinator

MACKAY NEWS

Rob Farnes reported a Rose Robin in Crediton State Forest, which has subsequently been seen by other birders during August. (Unusual this far north). Also in the same eucalypt woodland at around 650m there are dozens of Eungella Honeyeaters. They have been here for at least a month and are usually difficult to find in their normal rainforest habitat where they skulk around. I have never recorded them here on previous visits. They are feeding on nectar, insects and lerps and coming down almost to the ground in lantana.

Les Thyer and Marj Andrews saw 6 Bustards in a ploughed market garden paddock on the edge of town. They were feeding, chasing off Black Kites and displaying their neck ruffs and spreading their wings.

Graham Chapman who was visiting the area recently had seen the local Southern Boobook owl and he believed it was the Atherton Tableland subspecies *lurida*. If anyone is visiting who is familiar with this subspecies I would like to know his or her opinions.

Marion Crouther

WHAT HAVE THE BIRDS BEEN DOING?

Les Thyer from Mackay posted this article to BirdingAus: I had an interesting sighting on 11/7/98 of two Pied Imperial-Pigeons sitting out in the rain and cold on the power lines, (it was a miserable day). They were preening and opening their wings up to catch the rain drops and presenting different parts of their bodies to the rain to be washed. One bird had substantial barring on the undertail coverts and all underparts were buff colour. The other bird had very little barring and was a clean white underneath. It's unusual to see these Pied Imperial-Pigeons here before early September, so I am assuming they are wintering over. Has anyone any thoughts? thyer@mackay.net.au



Jon Wren has recently been on Muralag (Prince of Wales Island) and Thursday Island in the Torres Strait and reports the following sightings; **Lemon bellied Flycatchers** up near the Homestead Waterhole which are almost canary coloured on the underparts and look totally different to those further south. Three **Papuan Frogmouths** are living twenty metres from the house and **Barking Owls** are common on Thursday Is and Muralag.

Mike Trenerry of the Queensland Dept of Environment saw a Red-bellied Kookaburra (*Dacelo gaudichaud*) on Saibai Island while doing a fauna survey there recently. This would be a new one for the Australian list if accepted. Mike had very good views of it from about 10m at the Saibai dump and recognised it immediately having just boned up on the 'Birds of New Guinea', but could not find it again later.

Gary Wilson had the following observations **Black-breasted Buzzard** quartering low over Peters Street in Mareeba at 1700 on Thursday June 11. Excellent views were had of the bird with the late afternoon sun emphasising the rich coloration of the plumage. This species is now being seen irregularly but not infrequently about Mareeba. Eleven **Wedge-tail Eagles** about a road kill kangaroo on the Abbot Point Road northwest of Bowen on Monday April 20th. Bopping in the area later in the week yielded 45 birds of 10 species in 128 kms.

July. Diamantina Lakes NP. 2 **Black Falcons** + lots of **Gibberbirds**, **Inland Dotterels** & 10 **Freckled Ducks** - Graham Harrington & KF.

2nd Aug. 1 **Common Sandpiper** on Daintree River-Del Richards & on 13th Aug. first **Common Sandpiper** of the season turned up at Cairns Airport. KF.

9th Aug **Gould's Bronze Cuckoo** (1) Lavarack Barracks revegetation site (a new bird for the Lavarack list) Alexandra Appleman

9th Aug **Brown Booby** (> 40) on pylons in the sea channel, visible from the Port. Alexandra Appleman.

10th Aug Alexandra Appleman saw the following at Toonpan Lagoon, which lies to the west of the old Townsville-Charters road, south of the city and is under the control of the Townsville-Thuringowa waterboard. . Access is restricted with a locked gate at either end, but the Townsville BOCA has negotiated a key with the Ranger.

Black Swan (> 1000) , **Pink-eared Ducks** (7), **Great Crested Grebes** (2),

Plum-headed finches (c 12), **Diamond Doves** (4)

18th Aug. 2 **Radjah Shelduck** at the southern treatment works, Cairns. The odd one or two turn up each year. Dawn Magarry.

23rd Aug. 2 **Galah** , 2 **Torresian Crow** and a **Darters** nest with three chicks at Yorkeys Knob Lagoon, (see article below). Keith & Lindsay.

23rd Aug. Waders returning to Cairns Esplanade included: **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Whimbrel**, **Eastern Curlew**, **Grey-tailed Tattler**, **Great Knot**, **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** and **Curlew Sandpiper**, many still in partial breeding plumage. Keith & Lindsay.

23rd Aug. **Great-billed Heron**, junction of Barron River and northern treatment works creek, Cairns. Has been seen here at least four times. Keith.

25th Aug. **Torresian-Imperial Pigeons** returning to Cairns and on 26th Aug. A **Wood Sandpiper** was on the Cairns Esplanade- John Crowhurst.

INTERESTING SITES

John & Sue O'Malley report about an area on Tarakan Rd. just opposite the Abergowrie College gates (near Ingham).

Sue and I found it much better than Broadwater State Forest. The area is set among canefields at the foot of some pretty big hills; there is a rich area of lowland rainforest/eucalypt mix, which gives a variety of little eco systems. The bird life is extremely rich. On Sat. 8/8 we saw a long list of species, as well as rails in a small swamp in a farmers front yard?

There were White-browed Robins; Eastern Yellow Robins; Crimson Finches; Red-browed Finches; Pacific Bazas x3; Brown Goshawks x5; The highlight was a single Square-tailed Kite which swooped down

over our heads, a magnificent bird (and not too common anywhere), the only other time we saw this bird so close was in SW WA. There was an Azure Kingfisher on a small creek (and a Platypus), just before you hit the main rainforest. Trillers, Honeyeaters galore; Cuckoos; Cuckoo Shrikes; Whistlers; the list goes on and on... We have been there 5 times now, and it has become a favourite spot. We will now proceed to do a survey on the area and keep tabs on it over a year. It would be a good Atlas spot.

John and Sue O'Malley

YORKEYS KNOB LAGOON

Situated beside Half Moon Bay golf club at the end of Wattle Street in Yorkeys Knob, Cairns, is a small lagoon containing a stand of Melaleucas on an island in the middle. The now closed rubbish tip, adjacent to the lagoon, was responsible for degrading it in years gone past. However the council fixed up leaching problems and the lagoon has recovered over the past five years. Our species list for here now stands at 79. A visit here on 23/8/98 had the following observations: 2 Galahs who were not approachable and may have been escapees, also 2 Torresian Crows were being chased off by 2 Masked Lapwing, again an uncommon species around Cairns. The Island in the middle also had a Darters nest with 3 chicks about ¾ grown being fed. There were 6 Green Pygmy Geese, 1 Hardhead, 21 Pacific Black Duck, 3 Australasian Grebe and 2 grey teal on the water. Some of the other species seen were Brown-backed Honeyeater building a nest, 1 Black Butcherbird, 6 Little Black Cormorant and 13 Magpie Geese roosting in the melaleucas on the island. A 20-minute count revealed a total of 35 species. A proposed expansion of the golf course onto the old tip site should include in their plans retaining the lagoon and we shall keep a watch to make sure it does.

Keith and Lindsay Fisher

BUFF-BREASTED BUTTON-QUAIL

Lloyd Neilsen has submitted the following account of a research project he is undertaking. We should all help him where possible, yes we know Button-quail are a difficult species to identify correctly but Lloyd's descriptions below should help.

The Buff-breasted Button-quail is the least known of Australia's land birds. It has never been photographed and was the only Australian endemic species not recorded during the atlas survey of 1977-81 (apart from the probably extinct Paradise Parrot). Its downy young and juvenile plumage has never been described. The population appears to be extremely small and it is highly likely that the species is endangered. Indeed it has recently been added to the Federal Endangered Species list.

In the 100 years since its discovery, it has been recorded from only 8 sites between Iron Range in the north to the Mareeba district in the south on the eastern side of Cape York Peninsula. There are a couple of probable sightings outside this area too as far south as the dry country west of Ingham.

The first skin collected was taken near Cooktown in 1894 by E.A.C.Olive. In 1922 W. McLennan, a field collector for H.L. White found a small population about Coen, south of Iron Range, collecting 6 skins and several clutches of eggs during a stay of several months (*Emu* 22:99-116). In the early 1970s John Young found a nest near Mareeba and later found them breeding at Iron Range. John Squire (*Australian Bird Watcher* 13:149-52) found several birds about Davies Creek near Mareeba in 1985. In early 1992 I located a small population about Mt. Molloy, which was breeding at the time. Since then I have endeavoured to keep track of the species but the population appears to have dwindled considerably since then - I only had 2 sightings in 1998.

The Buff-breasted Button-quail can be confused easily with the Painted Button-quail. When flushed, the Buff-breasted appears as a large plain **greyish-brown** quail with **primaries distinctly darker than the rest of the wings**. It rises to a metre, usually less and flies away on a fairly straight path. The Painted appears similar but is fairly evenly coloured without the contrast between the primaries and the rest of the wings.

Sometimes the chestnut across the shoulders of the Painted can be seen if a bird is flushed at close range, and can sometimes be seen with binoculars as it flies away. The Painted rises to about the same height as the Buff-breasted. If seen on the ground at close quarters, the Buff-breasted is fairly plain about the head with a **yellow** eye, an obvious **large, thick bill** and a plain dull buff breast and belly. The Painted is spotted white about the face, which continues onto the breast and the belly. It has a **red** eye. Both are silent when they are flushed. The Brown Quail is quite **warm brown**, usually rising higher in a distinctive arcing fashion to 1-2 meters and often uttering cheeping notes. A button-quail flushed from **dense** grass is unlikely to be a Buff-breasted, but most likely a Painted, Brown or one of the smaller button-quail such as Red-backed. The Buff-breasted is essentially a bird of drier tropical woodland.

Both species - Buff-breasted and Painted Button-quail - occur in the tropical woodland about Mt. Molloy and Mareeba - the Buff-breasted preferring a much sparser growth of grass than the painted. So far I have found the Buff-breasted only in a very distinct habitat - patches of lightly grassed woodland occurring as scattered 'islands' within the dry tropical woodland, mostly at the base of hills and vegetated with eucalyptus species and small broad-leaved melaleucas. On the other hand, the painted occurs widely throughout the more densely grassed woodland of the ridges. However, it appears that when the sparse grass of the Buff-breasted habitat thickens eg. At the start of a normal wet season, it vacates it and the Painted moves in from the surrounding tropical woodland.

The Queensland Ornithological Society has generously made available a grant to determine the present status of the Button-quail throughout its known range. Part of the project will be the plotting of the distinctive habitat in which it has been found. I will be undertaking the survey which will run for 12 months and which should commence about mid July 1998.

I would be grateful to hear of any probable sightings even if well outside the known range. If you have fairly positive sightings of the Buff-breasted (apart from the Mt. Molloy area), either recent or from the last few years I would be pleased to hear about it. The exact locality would be important. My home phone number is 07 4094 1549 or alternatively, fax or leave a message on 07 4094 1372. You can also write to me at PO Box 55, Mt. Molloy Qld 4871 or email: neilsenl@tpgi.com.au

Lloyd Nielsen

INFORMATION LEAFLETS

BA-NQG are producing information leaflets, so far we have in preparation No 1 Redden Island, Machans Beach, Cairns which has been funded and help provided by the Cairns Port Authority who own 68ha of the island the leaflet describes. We thank them for their assistance. No 2 Birds of Cairns Gardens is an update of one we prepared for the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland several years ago. We are working on No 3 Binoculars & Telescopes and another is planned about Cape York information. If anyone has ideas for more - areas in other regions for instance let us know, we don't want to duplicate other available brochures. We can highlight local areas of importance as well as promoting BA-NQG. You can send us the text and we can put it together. Ideas for funding these would also be welcome.

Keith and Lindsay Fisher

LAKE BARRINE BIRD LIST

Amanda and Alastair Freeman along with Elinor Scambler are compiling a bird list for the Lake Barrine section of Crater Lakes National Park. Working with the Department of Environment and Heritage they intend to produce a bird list which will be available for visitors to the park.

It would be greatly appreciated if members would scour their notebooks for Lake Barrine records and send these to Amanda at Lake Barrine, Gillies Highway, Yungaburra, Qld 4872.

SLIDE LIBRARY

There was a suggestion at the AGM that BA-NQG set up a slide library but in view of head office setting up a library it was decided to support them and not duplicate the workload. The following article is reproduced from *GALAH*, Birds Australia's in-house magazine.

IMAGE LIBRARY SET UP

It is amazing to think that, until about a year ago, Birds Australia National Office had no proper slide library on which to draw for images of birds and bird habitats to illustrate articles in *Wingspan* and other publications. There were certainly some boxes of largely unlabelled and uncatalogued slides in cupboards which, along with a few packets of photographic prints and a couple of scrapbooks, formed our image archive. Confronted by the realisation of the inadequacies of this small and motley collection, since the middle of 1997 first **Kate Fitzherbert** and now **David Plant** have been engaged in sorting and cataloguing our existing slides and seeking others to build up a high quality and comprehensive archive.

We are still very far from having what we would consider to be an adequate collection. We do have slides of about half of the bird species listed in Christidis & Boles, but many of these are not of the best quality. **There is no bird species for which we would claim to have sufficient high-quality images for all our needs.** Now that we have catalogued what we have, we are seeking more slides to:

1. Fill the many gaps of species or subspecies for which we have nothing, including most non-Australian birds.
2. Improve coverage of particular species to show sexual and age variation, different plumages and behaviours, and different aspects of their biology, their habitats and the threats confronting them.
3. Show other aspects of Birds Australia activities, such as those illustrating our history, observatories, membership events and our research and conservation work.

Images sought are not limited to the aesthetic compositions suitable for the classic bird calendar; any picture that informs us about a bird's biology and environment may be useful. An oiled or hooked seabird, the remains of a foxes meal, the victim of a collision with a glass window - all these may serve to illustrate threats and to provide emphasis to addressing them when published in promotional literature. Good duplicates are acceptable when originals are unavailable.

A few examples of birds for which we have NO slides at all:

All quail species	White-browed Treecreeper
Chestnut Teal	Red-browed Pardalote
Almost all petrels	All scrubwrens
Glossy Ibis	All heathwrens
Swamp Harrier	All gerygones
All snipe species	All whitefaces
Lesser Crested Tern	Singing Honeyeater
Laughing Turtle-Dove	Varied Sittella
Long-billed Corella	All monarchs
Western Corella	All riflebirds
Blue-winged Parrot	Great Bowerbird
Varied and Little Lorikeets	Skylark
Channel-billed Cuckoo	Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Powerful Owl	Tawny Grassbird
All swifts	Brown Songlark
Dollarbird	Russet-tailed Thrush

Oh, yes - we would like a good slide of a live Night Parrot too.

The curation and management of our photographic images has been somewhat haphazard in the past. This time we are determined to do it properly. People who donate or lend us slides need to be assured that they will be looked after and used in accordance with agreed conditions.

These conditions may fall into the following categories:

- A) **Restricted Reference** - where the slides may be used for Birds Australia internal reference purposes (eg. by the Plumages Section

of the HANZAB project) but may not be published anywhere without the express approval of the photographer.

- B) **Restricted Inhouse** - where the slides may be used for Birds Australia publications, such as *Wingspan*, group newsletters and the BA website, but may not be used by third parties without the approval of the photographer. Any use for BA publications must credit the photographer.

- C) **BA Copyright** - where we already have copyright (as in the case of photographs taken in the course of a BA project), or acquire it through donation or bequest. Where used in publications the photographer should be credited (if known).

Additional conditions may apply in the case of publication fees or to reproduction by digital scanning.

If you think you may be able to help, please call or write to **David Plant** at the BA National Office.

GOOD NEWS

Klerat, the second-generation anticoagulant rodenticide that devastated raptor and owl populations in the Ingham district, and probably wherever else it was used, has been removed from the market. However, its active ingredient brodifacoum is still marketed in the household ratbait Talon G. We have the work of John Young to thank for this outcome.

Jo Wieneke

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the following new members:

Martin Cachard, Elva Castino, Felicity Chapman, Craig Doolan Stan Emmerson, Alan Gillanders, Simon Grove, Elna Kerswell, Marnie McCullough, Jonathan Munro, Mark Newton, Lisan Rutten, Peter Pal, Rosemary Payet, Lesley Stewart, Helen Myles and John Winter.

E-MAIL

We now have 50 members on e-mail, which is great, as we can put out reminders and announcements for any last minute changes. We would, however like members receiving any changes to try and pass them on to any members you know who are not on email, we don't want to have them missing out. Cyber Contact Call (CCC) now goes out and some members have said they are happy to receive CC this way and we save on postage! If you would like CCC please indicate whether you can receive word 6 or word 97 or any other preference you may have

Keith and Lindsay lkfisher@north.net.au

Send correspondence to secretary

at:

P O Box 2209, Cairns Qld 4870

email : lkfisher@north.net.au

Send newsletter reports to:

Jo Wieneke, 22 Bishop Street

Townsville Qld 4810

email: bowerbird@msm.com

THANKS

Birds Australia North Queensland Group is very grateful for the support given by the office of the Member for Leichhardt **Warren Entsch**, who is himself a keen birdwatcher.

Also thanks to all the contributors for making this even bigger than the last Contact Call - Keith and Lindsay Fisher editors for this issue.