

Birds Australia

Contact Call

Birds Australia

North Queensland Group

December 1998 • Issue: Pacific Black Duck

CALENDAR

Nov 29th Sun - Lamb Range transects count. This will include Atlas and GPS training. Meet at Platypus Park, **Atherton** at 7.30am or 7.45am at Henry Hannam Drive on the Mareeba-Atherton Rd. Contact Jon Nott

December 6th Sun Cairns Wader Study Group monthly counts in Trinity Inlet (see note on page 4) Keith Fisher

Dec 12/13th Sat-Sun Tablelands/Cairns Christmas Party. (Cairns/Tableland members see insert that was with the September newsletter, directions below) Don't forget the book faire on the Sunday, meet at Mikes place at 1015. **Directions for Christmas Party.** Turn left off the Lake Eacham to Malanda Road (6.3Km from Gillies Hwy.) into Topaz Road (signposted Butchers Creek). Follow this road for 10.9Km passing the school and tea plantation. Turn right into Glen Allyn Road (signposted Malanda), then follow for 800 metres and turn left into Pei road. Continue down here for 3.5Km when you should see some gates, take the left hand one (**NOT** the one directly in front which has a No Access sign on it). The camping area is in front of the low set house on grassed area or near the dairy. Those who have booked for the dairy, continue on past the next house to the dairy at the end. Please book accomodation with the secretary.

January 17th Sun - Redden Island Count, **Cairns**. Meet at 8.30am on Cinderella St, Machins Beach at the entrance before the toilet block. Contact Keith Fisher.

Jan 24th 25th Sat-Sun Tableland/Cairns Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten. Camp sites, bunk accommodation and units are available, please book with Ron Ph 4094-1263 or email stannard@tpgi.com.au . Ian Sinclair has offered to show his African Slides on the Saturday night.

February 6th Sat Townsville - Serpentine Lagoon Atlassing. Contact Jo Wieneke for details.

February 20th /21st Sat-Sun Atlas survey at Rosegums, Jon & Peta Notts property on Land Road, Malanda. Please phone Jon for instructions of how to get to his property on (07) 4096 8230. Lots of good habitats and birds.

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The following is an interim list of proposed outings, details will be published in future Contact Calls.

March (?) Wave The Waders Goodbye- the Cairns Esplanade, your chance to learn those little brown jobs & find out how you can participate in regular surveys of Trinity Inlet.

April 2nd-5th Tableland/Cairns Easter campout & atlassing in the Laura area

April 2nd-5th Townsville Easter - proposed atlassing camp at White Mts NP. Contact Jo Wieneke for details.

May 16th Sun Tableland/Cairns Herbertonshire atlassing trip

June 12th -14th Queens Birthday AGM to be held in Townsville

June 26th - July 11th Atlas campout at Rutland Plains on Cape York Peninsula.

August Cairns / Tableland BOP watch.

September Atlas campout at Bathurst Heads - Cape Melville on Cape York Peninsula

September (?) Birds Australia National campout in South Australia (probably Gluepot Station).

October 9th Sat Tableland Crane Count

Oct 30th-31st Twitchathon

November Tablelands/Cairns Plath Road, off Atherton-Ravenshoe Rd.

December Christmas Party

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

COUNTS & SURVEYS

ATHERTON TABLELAND CATTLE

EGRET COUNT



The Cattle Egret survey conducted on Saturday 5th September, 1998 proved to be very successful with a total sighting of nearly 1,500 birds. We met at Hasties Swamp for lunch and a discussion on various topics including the Atlas, Hasties Swamp Bird Hide, Bromfield Swamp and the diving habits of blue Toyota utilities. At 2:00 p.m. there was a quick run down on Cattle Egrets and then everyone was off to the eight sections. The format was to drive a given route and count all the egrets seen and return to Land Road, Butchers Creek for the tally. The largest concentration was in the Yungaburra area as expected and then Butchers Creek. No Cattle Egrets were counted south of Jaggan (near Tarzali) except for one isolated flock just before Milla Milla. We completed the day with a BYO buffet dinner at our place.

Some interesting notes:

The first recorded sighting of Cattle Egrets in Australia was in 1948 at Oenpelli, Northern Territory. The first sighting in Queensland was at Rolling Downs near Mt Isa in 1952. They were next seen in 1961 at Innisfail. The first Atherton sighting by Bravery at Hasties Swamp was two birds in July 1962.

There are four known roosts on the Atherton Tablelands-Genazzano (300 plus birds); Wrights Creek (300 plus birds); Kingcombe Road (200 plus birds); Hinker Road (120 plus birds). It appears that there is another breeding colony on the South Johnstone River near Innisfail. We would like to hear from anyone if they know of other roosting sites or breeding colonies.

The data collected will be put onto a computer data base and a distribution map will be made so that over the next few years we will be able to build up a picture of what is happening with the Cattle Egret expansion. Thanks to everyone who participated. It was a great effort and certainly worthwhile. Thank you to John Clarkson for the time he spent putting the maps together. Well done everyone.

Jon Nott

TOWNSVILLE CATTLE EGRET

COUNTS

Cattle Egrets are back in larger numbers than ever at the breeding colony at Ross River, Townsville. A small flock appeared at the beginning of October and numbers have built up to the most recent count on October 29th of 1860 birds. This compares with counts at the end of October of 625 in 1996 and 1020 in 1997. Smaller numbers of Little, Intermediate and Great Egrets also in breeding plumage were coming in to the colony at the same time. Counts continue every Thursday evening and new observers are always welcome. Phone Tania Korn (07)4721 4077 if you'd like to help.

Chris Dahlberg reported 20 birds still present on the Daintree, one carrying nest material so perhaps another colony is starting up there. **Jo Wieneke**

OFFICE BEARERS

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Atherton Tableland: Ian Sinclair (07) 4091 4544
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Mossman/Daintree: Del Richards (07) 4094 1199

Cape York Peninsula: Michael Barnett (07) 4069 8365

Torres Strait: Denise Fowler (07) 4069 1162
E-mail denisebruce@uq.net.au

Western Queensland: Peter Britton (07) 4087 2188

Conservation Representative: Amanda Freeman (07) 4095 2148
E-mail procella@ozemail.com.au

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.

1998 CRANE COUNT 10/10/98

The Atherton Tableland is considered a very important dry season site for Sarus Cranes (rare but increasing?? in Australia) but actual data is few. In 1997 our group started the annual crane survey to gain baseline information, especially now the agricultural habitat they (and Brolgas) use is changing, with sugar rapidly replacing other crops and cattle. Proposals to raise the level of Tinaroo Dam could also affect many roost sites.



Over 40 members, families, friends and local residents gathered at Hasties Swamp N.P. on October 10th for briefings (and birdwatching) before the second annual crane count. At least one new scope was tested out on the hundreds of whistling-ducks and Magpie Geese as local rep. Ian Sinclair allocated teams and route maps. By 1700h everyone had left for their (10) roost sites on the wetter southern Tablelands. Cairns BOCA members kindly counted our "control" site on the drier northern Tablelands (Mareeba Wetlands).

On arriving, teams counted all the cranes present, landing or flying over their site, and if possible, identified species. Some interesting helpers encountered were a visiting German ornithologist, a barra fisherperson, plus even more American students from the School for Field Studies (one contingent was already counting Site 9).

In all, 1844 cranes were tallied of which 1772 landed. The flyover's counted (72) were only those from our most easterly site on Lake Tinaroo (there is still another roost somewhere there undiscovered, a boat trip with GPS is needed before next year...) On several sites, many more cranes were flying in and landing after dark but could not be counted or identified. Other interesting sightings included 53 Cotton Pygmy-Geese.

Of the 1844, 506 (28.56%) were definitely Sarus, and 139 (7.84%) Brolgas. While total numbers were much the same as the first annual count in 1997, definite identifications were much fewer. Nevertheless once again most Brolgas were in Mareeba, and most Sarus in the southern Tablelands. Many more interesting questions can be raised; eg do Brolgas predominate in all areas earlier in the year, being later displaced by Sarus? And where do Tablelands Sarus go to breed?

The Crane Newsletter #2 will be out in December for participants and other interested people please let me know if you would like one sent.

Thanks to Jon & Peta Nott for having the post-count dinner and National Crane Tallyroom at their home; to Ian Sinclair for taking over much of the organisation while I was away or otherwise occupied; and to John Nott who fielded crane questions from ABC reporters while having his hair cut!

Elinor Scambler

REDDEN ISLAND 18/10/98

The three members who attended this field trip were greeted with overcast skies and light showers to begin with but this didn't develop any further and we only got wet once. We visited the woodland, mangroves and Barron River mouth as part of the BA-NQG regular surveys of this area. A Fork-tailed Swift was the first sighting for the season for me and there were at least five Rose-crowned Fruit Doves foraging in the woodland. A Mistletoebird was mimicking other birdcalls including Large-billed Gerygone, Collared Kingfisher and Yellow-spotted Honeyeater. Wading birds were on a sandbar at Casuarina Point with people landing here and disturbing the roosting birds. A few of these disturbed birds landed on another sandbar on the Redden Island side of the Barron River about 30m away. The scope focussed on one bird, which was immediately identified as being different to the usual birds seen in the Cairns area. It was identified as a juvenile Ruff (which is the male, the Reeve is the female), before it flew off inland towards Smithfield. It's considered a rare but regular visitor each year in Australia, with one unconfirmed record in Cairns on 12/11/87. This was definitely the highlight of the morning and just goes to prove you never know what to expect when birdwatching.



Keith Fisher

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

ESPLANADE UPDATE



At the beginning of October I attended a workshop with the designers and the consultants for the Esplanade redevelopment, this also involved other organisations with environmental interests. Those in attendance were representatives from DEH (interpretive officer), DPI, Wet Tropics Management Authority, CAFNEC, an

Aboriginal representative and the landscape architects. Out of all these people and their various concerns, I must say that the bird side of the development had a very high profile. There was a genuine concern that the bird habitats were preserved with the least impact to them.

One design has been chosen, linking Green with Blue, as a basis for the next stage. DEH and Wet Tropics were mainly concerned with providing the right interpretive material but also retaining a habitat, which still has something to put up signs for. In the chosen design the three pods jutting out into the mudflats are not quite as big as portrayed. I was told that they were drawn larger than to scale, so as to emphasise them and that they jut out no more than 6m. The existing sea wall is in need of repair and the current idea is to put rocks in front of it and build a boardwalk over the top of it. The design put out to the public is not set in stone and there will be many changes. The general feeling at the meeting was that we can do without the pool and that it would be a good place to put the interpretive centre instead - however the council and the local paper are pushing for the pool.

As far as the birds are concerned the designers were trying to keep the grassed areas on the mudflats (which have formed as a result of stormwater running onto the mudflats from drains) as they thought this was an important habitat. It was pointed out that this was of little importance as very few birds used it but it is a great hideout for feral cats and rats! It's the existing mud that is important. It was also pointed out that any work to be conducted within the immediate mudflat area be carried out in the off season (April to End of August) to lessen any impacts on the birds. There will be ongoing consultation with the interested parties, we are told, so we can keep monitoring the progress.

Keith Fisher

WHAT HAVE THE BIRDS BEEN DOING?

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

29th August **Radjah Shelduck** 10 on Lake Mitchell (Between Mossman and Mt. Molloy. Del Richards.

2nd September **Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo** - Rex Range Mossman - Del Richards.

22nd Sept. **Common Starling** 1 present Mossman. (lets hope there are no more) Del Richards.

27th Sept. **Barn Swallow** 5 Birds again Near Mossman, first return, apparently a lot earlier than usual. Del Richards.

9th Sept. **White-throated Needletail** near Mossman. Del Richards.

19th Sept. Tim Reid and David James had fleeting views of what appeared to be a male **Blackbird** in Edmonton, just South of Cairns. (Checked out the site twice since, no sign of bird - Keith Fisher)

13th October **Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher** 1 bird at Silky Oaks Lodge, Near Mossman, early return. Del Richards.

18th Oct. **Ruff**, juvenile at the mouth of the Barron River which was seen on the Redden Island count. Possibly the same bird was seen by Eleanor Duignan on the Cairns Esplanade the same day as her description matched my field notes. Keith Fisher

23rd Oct. **Eurasian Curlew**, this is a major rarity and was sighted by Del Richards on the Lower Daintree River near Mossman. If accepted this would be the first confirmed sighting in Australia.

25th Oct. **Rufous Fantail** in rainforest at Malanda - first return this season for this site. Graham Harrington.

28th Oct. **Plum-headed Finches** - along the old Toonpan Rd-Townsville. Jo Wieneke.

31st Oct. **Black-throated Finches** - Serpentine Lagoon. Jo Wieneke.

Oct. **Metallic Starlings** - breeding colony near Pangola Park, between Giru and Major's Creek south of Townsville. Jo Wieneke.

7th November **White-browed Crake, Spotless Crake, Little Bittern, Black Bittern and Buff-banded Rail** at Cairns Crocodile Farm. Dr Richard Nowotny, Melbourne.

12th Nov. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** - 9 on Cairns Esplanade. Keith Fisher

13th Nov. **Barn Swallow**, 22 in the Mossman area. Del Richards.

14th Nov. **Whiskered Tern**, 13 on Cairns Esplanade - a group of us were watching waders when John Crowhurst saw some different terns with red legs, red bills and all black caps amongst the Little Terns. These were 8 adults in breeding plumage with slightly black underbellies. The other 5 were adults in non-breeding plumage - dull legs, bills and streaky black head caps. These are quite unusual on the Esplanade. Keith Fisher.

INTERESTING BEHAVIOUR

Great Bowerbird:

On 23-10-98 a bower at Mt Surprise (woodland southwest of Cairns) was decorated with one snow-white and very fresh egg, which was just off to one side, separate from the other decorations. The egg was about 4 cm long, and I can only imagine it belonging to a pigeon. The egg was damaged, cracked one side, and the opposite site having a hole surely made by the beak. The egg was very fresh, judging by the interior (looking at the hole). Has that been observed before, that the Great Bowerbird goes over dead bodies to get decorations?

Also, Great Bowerbirds at Lawn Hill (Western Qld) have been heard to give weak calls of Whistling Kites, and in one case giving perfect imitations of the sound of rustling pandanus leaves. Klaus Uhlenhut

Golden Bowerbird:

On the 10-11-98 on Mt Lewis near Julatten a male Golden Bowerbird was observed feeding on the ground, about 15 meters away from its bower. The bird fed on figs, and it carried a half-eaten fig, size about 2 cm., to a sapling. At about 2.25m height it jammed the half-fig into a depression on the sapling, and then moved on. It soon called from another branch, but paid no more attention to the fig. Is he storing in case of shortage of food? (Food shortage in the rainforest!?!). Klaus Uhlenhut

On the 23-10-98 I saw a flock of 22 **Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo** including one bird that at first glance looked like a Sulphur-crested until I realised the jizz was wrong and it had orange in the tail feathers! A strange looking bird with dirty white/grey plumage apart from the tail feathers. I had really good looks at it - from about 15m and it flew right overhead a couple of times with the others. It was noticeable that a Black Kite was hassling it and not the others. I wondered if leucitic Red-tailed Blacks had been recorded before?

Red-tailed Black Cockatoos have been permanent residents of Townsville since the drought a few years ago. We've had good rains in the past year but they have stayed on and can often be found feeding under trees, on the ground by the beach near Pallarenda and in Anzac Park near the city, obviously appreciating the seeds of the Sea Almonds *Terminalia catappa*.

Jo Wieneke

Yellow-bellied Sunbird On 1/11/98, near Malanda, a female sunbird was lining a nest which was being built at the entrance to a house on a hanging basket, the male was flitting around some 8m away. When the female approached he started to display, throwing out his chest and showing some feathers on either side of his breast, these were sticking out at right angles to his body and appeared to form a triangle. When he had finished displaying, the feathers were neatly tucked back under the front of the wing.

Keith Fisher

Golden Bowerbird. Whilst observing an immature male at a bower near Atherton and listening to it sending forth its usual female attracting croaks, rasping noises and screeches from a branch during light rain, it suddenly started mimicking other birds. All the calls were exact and I could recognise Pied Currawong, Grey-Headed Robin (alarm call) and Yellow-Throated Scrubwren scolding. It seemed to favour the Currawongs call more than others do before swiftly flying deeper into the rainforest to remain silent. The **Satin Bowerbirds** are also refurbishing their bowers

with blue spent shotgun cartridges and plenty of bleached rat & mice skulls.

Stan Emmerson

Sad News: John and Sue O'Malley reported two road kill sightings. Both Grass Owls, 1 lighter bird (small), and a bigger darker bird. They were found about 5km Townsville side of Ayr.

INTERESTING SITE

EDMONTON BOAT RAMP

Edmonton Boat Ramp at the end of Thompson Road gives excellent access to the mangroves. From Cairns, heading south, turn left at the main traffic lights in Edmonton, which is Thompson Road (Mill road is on the right), and follow it down to the end past the speedway. Birds can be seen from around the ramp otherwise you can go back toward the speedway about 100m and a small path leads off to the right at the edge of the mangroves. This path follows a creek, (the Edmonton Fishing Clubs buildings are on the opposite bank), back to the main channel. It's a good spot for Mangrove Robin, Large-billed Gerygone and Shining Flycatcher, often heard but not always seen. Other species here include Bar-shouldered Dove, Gould's Bronze-Cuckoo, Fairy Gerygone, Graceful, Yellow-spotted and Brown-backed Honeyeater. Look for Great-billed Heron in the main channel and Little Kingfishers around the edge of the mangroves, they are uncommon but have been seen here in the past. Don't forget your insect repellent as the mossies and the sandflies are very enthusiastic here. You should be able to see at least 20 species here in a 20 minute count.

Keith and Lindsay Fisher

INFORMATION LEAFLETS

BA-NQG are producing information leaflets, so far we have 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 and helps in identifying and attracting birds to your garden. No 3 *Binoculars & Telescopes* gives assistance with help in selecting suitable birdwatching optics but does not recommend any brands. Another is planned for Cape York information. If anyone has ideas for more - areas in other regions for instance let us know but we don't want to duplicate any other available brochures (from DOE or Forestry for example). 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 or email procella@ozemail.com.au. You can also email your records to Elinor at: dacelo@internetnorth.com.au. Some records have already been sent in and these are much appreciated.

Amanda Freeman

WADER COUNT NEWS



For a number of years a dedicated group of people have been counting the migratory waders in the Trinity Inlet on a monthly basis. The areas involved have been Casuarina Point at the mouth of the Barron River and around the coastline to include the Cairns Esplanade and surrounds. Also being counted are the Cairns airport wetlands. More volunteers are required to help out with

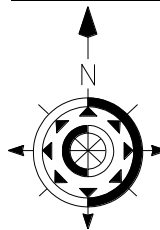
collecting this valuable data. It is important that we have a comprehensive picture of the number of birds and their movements so we can speak with some authority if and when these habitats are threatened. The Casuarina

Point counts are conducted from a boat kindly donated by DOE and manned by them. So far mainly Cairns BOCA members have been involved but we would like more Birds Australia members to join in and help. We can conduct identification sessions if required but experts will help you learn very quickly on the counts! The next count is on the 6th December and will be on the Esplanade at 9.00am, details of the other locations can be obtained from Graham Finnigan on 4052 3965 or me on 4058 1164

Keith Fisher.

ATLAS PROJECT

ATLAS CONTACTS



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Send atlas sheets to:- PO Box 776, Malanda QLD 4885 or hand them to the following RO's/SRO's

Northern Region (Cardwell North and north of Gulf Development Road) **Northern Regional Organiser:-** Graham Harrington ph: 07 4096

email: treetop@north.net.au

SRO'S:-

Stephen Garnett ph: 07 4052 3088 (Cairns)

email: stephen.garnett@env.qld.gov.au

Glen Holmes ph: 07 4091 4364 (Atherton Tableland)

Lloyd Nielsen ph: 07 4094 1549 email: nielsenl@tpgi.com.au
(Northern Atherton Tableland)

Elinor Scambler ph: 07 4095 3296 (Atherton Tableland)

email: dacelo@internetnorth.com.au

Eric Sticklen ph: 07 4091 2300 (Atherton Tableland)

Keith Fisher ph: 07 4058 1164 email: lkfisher@north.net.au

(Cairns)

Southern Region

(Comprising of Cardwell south and south of the Gulf Development Road including Mount Isa.) **Southern Regional Organiser:-**

Jo Wieneke ph: 07 4771 4707

email: bowerbird@email.msn.com

SRO'S:-

Margaret Streamer ph: 07 4777 5164 email: marstream@bigpond.com
(Townsville/Ingham)

Jon Wren ph: 07 4786 2614 email: jonwren@hotmail.com
(Bowen/Ayr)

Marion Crouther ph: 07 4958 4613 (Mackay)

Andre Griffin ph: 07 4770 8521 (Townsville/Paluma)

Ian Clayton ph: 07 4725 6489 email: birds&bush@ultra.net.au
(Townsville)

The Atlas project is starting to pick up momentum in our region and next year should be an exciting one with many atlassing field trips planned in all areas

INNISFAIL/TULLY ATLAS NEWS

Klaus Uhlenhut has offered the following assistance:

Atlassing without GPS coordinates? If anyone is atlassing in the Innisfail/Tully area and needs the coordinates for their 2 ha block (repeated visits throughout the year) or an area search please give me a call and I'll come around and give you the exact location coordinates. Please ring 4065 5181 or email: kirrama@4kz.com.au

MACKAY ATLAS NEWS

Neil Cliffe in Mackay has a site organised and writes: My wife and I have begun atlas monitoring just south of Sarina off the Bruce Highway on my parents and uncles property. Interest to date is centred on a colony of Metallic starlings nesting in a cabbage gum about 40 metres from the highway, about 6 nests with 10 - 15 birds. We also have Helmeted Friarbirds nesting in a silky oak in our backyard in Mackay and I am trying to keep details for the nest record scheme.

TOWNSVILLE ATLAS NEWS

Serpentine Lagoon

Serpentine Lagoon is recognised as one of the most significant wetlands in the greater Townsville region and provides a refuge for wildlife in times of drought. The area supports a large number of woodland birds as well as waterbirds. As part of a grazing property owned by the Arratta family, permission is needed to enter. Recently the Townsville City Council sought funding from the NHT to assist in rehabilitation works with a view to developing the area for 'ecotourism'.

On October 31st members met at Serpentine lagoon to select sites for regular seasonal monitoring for the Atlas. We surveyed two chosen sites - a woodland site with dense understorey and an open grazed area with Chinese Apple and a few mature eucalypts. It proved a useful exercise in determining just how big 2ha actually was, mastering the intricacies of a GPS (Thanks Margaret!) and then filling in the Habitat Forms for each site. We also kept a count of all species seen that morning which will go in as a 5km radius Area Search. **Jo Wieneke**

THE RUSH IS ON

Geoff Barrett

The following information has been reproduced from the November *Galah*, the inhouse newsletter of Birds Australia.

The peace and tranquillity that is Birds Australia has been shattered by the constant ringing of telephones and requests for Atlas kits. This ringing of telephones is of course good news for the new Atlas project, which has leapt into action. Over 5,000 Atlas kits have been requested and over 600 people have registered. We have already received over 700 Atlas Record forms containing over 14,000 bird sightings. I am very pleased to see that many people are filling out the Habitat Forms for their 2-ha Search Areas (we have received over 100 so far).

Some frequently asked questions:

1) How do I find out the latitude and longitude for the site where I do my bird list if I do not have a GPS unit?

Latitudes and longitudes can be read from most maps, which can be purchased from your local Department of Environment Offices or from the Bird Shop. If you have difficulty with this, you can simply describe the position. For example, 'the site is 15 km SE of Kununurra in WA'.

2) How often do I have to survey?

You can do your surveys as many times as you wish; one survey only or repeated surveys each season. If you want to survey a site continually, then you can do monthly lists.

3) How big an area should I survey?

For the *Area Searches*, you can search any area within a 500 metre radius or any area within a 5 kilometre radius.

4) What map datum should I record?

In most cases the maps you use will be based on the Australian grid system (Aus 66/84). New maps are being produced using the World Global System (WGS). If you cannot find this information, leave the question blank.

5) When will electronic data return be possible and how will it work?

Atlas Record Forms will be available electronically before the end of the year and will operate on any version of Windows. At this time, you will be able to download the software from our web site.

More about Electronic Data

Birds Australia is currently working on two applications for electronic entry of atlas data - one for Windows (all flavours) and the other for Macintosh (OS 7 or 8).

The Windows application is being written by students from North-eastern TAFE and will be a stand alone application available for download from the Atlas web site

<http://www.vicnet.net.au/~birdsau/atlas>

The Macintosh version will initially be a template for versions 3 and 4 of Filemaker Pro. However, we may also be able to supply the Macintosh version as a stand alone application depending on demand (please let me know!)*.

We will soon be requiring beta testers for both of these applications. The windows version is still a few weeks away, while the Macintosh version is almost finished. If you are interested, please reply to me camw@mira.net specifying which version you are interested in.

*Additional Macintosh note...

To convert the Filemaker template to a stand alone application requires access to the FilemakerPro Developers Kit.

Cameron Williams AHC Research Officer BA (11-11-98)

ATLASSING ON THE TABLELAND WITH TREAT AND LANDCARE

Birds Australia and Bushcare are working closely to co-ordinate the Atlas with revegetation projects. TREAT and Atherton landcare have asked for our help with regular (probably quarterly) Atlas visits to two interesting project sites - Peterson Creek, Yungaburra and Mazlin Creek, Atherton/Tolga. Visits would take one morning per quarter (for each site). All Atlasers and members are welcome to take part (you could "adopt" one or both projects as a regular part of your birding calendar).

The sites include interesting fragments of rare 5b rainforest as well as farm tree plantings and the occasions would be social as well as birding. Interested people will be meeting in early December, please contact Ian Sinclair on 4091 4544 AH (email Sinclair@dnr.qld.gov.au).

The Malanda water supply is drawn from the creek that runs from Bromfield Swamp to Malanda. Mostly heavily cleared, the creek line is now being revegetated by the Malanda and Upper Johnstone Landcare Association. Some of the plantation is nine years old with plantings every year since. Two ha. areas have been selected for quarterly monitoring. Contact Graham Harrington (see above)

CAPE YORK ATLAS CHALLENGE THE MAPS!

A big thanks you to **Anne David** from Carmila for her donation to the Cape York map fund, much appreciated.

More donations of maps or money is still needed, so if you have either to spare please contact **Elinor** on 4095-3296 where she is waiting for your contributions! It's a big place and we don't want to get lost.

OVERSEAS TRIP REPORT

UGANDA AND TANZANIA

Something a little bit different from our roving reporter Ian Sinclair.

Recently Rita and I traveled to Uganda and Tanzania for a two month holiday. We had a great time; it was the best holiday of our lives. It is difficult to write an article describing what we experienced, - I don't have the talent or the space!

We had many highlights/memorable experiences. Having to change our travel arrangements the day before we were due to leave, can't be called a highlight, but it was memorable!

In our first week of arriving in Uganda we visited the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park in the SW of Uganda. The purpose of this was to view the gorillas. We'd booked months in advance for our permit - it costs \$150 US to see the gorillas for one hour. You are in a party of 6 fellow travelers and a number of trackers and guides - the guides do the machete work so the walking is relatively easy!. We gathered at the Parks office at 8am, presented our permit and tried hard not to sneeze or sniffle - any sign of a cold or other diseases and you are not allowed to see the gorillas as you are a health risk to them (Apparently we are 97% related to the gorillas so they are vulnerable to our diseases!).

Sniff and sneezes were successfully repressed so off we headed. We'd heard stories of 7 hour hikes up steep hills and through thick rainforest, so we were carrying our lunches. It was a little embarrassing when it only took us about 15 minutes to reach the gorillas!! Our trackers were grunting to the gorillas to reassure them; at any one moment only 2 - 3 were easily visible; the rest would be hidden by thick vegetation. We had great views of the silverback, at one stage almost too great!! We were crouching on the side of the hill watching the silverback when our guides said move back in a rather urgent fashion. We quickly did so, and watched in delight as the silverback escorted a your gorilla past us to the rest of the group at a distance of only 2 metres. The silverback decided to put on a show then - it stopped turned to faced us, did a bit of chest thumping and bared it's

fangs!! After that it turned and walked in to the bush. We were all a bit shaken, but everyone had a good laugh afterwards!

We had another excellent viewing shortly afterwards – a young gorilla decided to put on a show for us. It came quite close about 2 metres and played in a bush! Our one hour viewing was up all too quickly, but we had a final treat I store. As we were walking back to the office we heard the gorillas again. We stopped and watched as they walked past us, one female had two young on her back.

We spent another night at Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park, and then traveled to Lake Bunyoni which is a crater lake. We camped there one night, and then drove up to Queen Elisabeth National Park. The highlight of this was the cruise on the Kazanga Channel, which flows, between

Lakes Edward and George. From the boat we had excellent views of a wide range of wildlife, including hippo (very photogenic), buffalo, Kob (a type of antelope endemic to Uganda), elephant, and a wide array of birds including Pied, Malachite and Pygmy Kingfishers, and Yellow billed Stork.



At Queen Elizabeth NP we stayed in a dormitory which was cheap and hippo proof! At night the hippos emerge from the channel and walk up to graze on the grass in the lodge area. They are quite harmless provided you stay away from them, which can be difficult if they are between you and the toilet! The night time visits to the toilets were very quick at Queen Elizabeth NP!! Another lovely feature of QENP was the continuous presence of warthogs around the lodge area. They were present even during the day, and were quite comical to watch as they grazed on the grass, sometimes gracefully (if a warthog could be described as graceful!) getting down on their front knees to eat the grass. Warthogs have their own particular charm. Walking between our dorm and the canteen where we bought our meals was always interesting – we had to detour around the warthogs! At night we were not allowed to walk to the canteen, due to the hippos.

We also did several game drives in QENP and were lucky enough to see a large pride of lions. There were 4 cubs in the pride, which were very cute. It was interesting to observe the behavior of the lions such as washing and scratching is the same with domestic cats. But we did not get the urge to give them a pat. We watched the lions that watched the Kob, who in turn watched the lions!

After QENP we traveled independently, using public transport and hitching lifts on the back of trucks. It was a great experience travelling with the locals. There are a number of rules on public transport in Uganda – 1) they never leave on time 2) there is always room for two more people! 3) There is always at least one chicken on board!!

We spent about 5 weeks in Uganda and enjoyed it immensely. We found the people very friendly and always ready to help and share a joke. One characteristic we found endearing was their polite nature – business never occurred until inquiries had been made about your health etc.

A highlight in a literal sense was the 5 days we spent hiking in Mt Elgin NP in the NE area of Uganda. For this we hired a guide and porters to take our backpacks, so we did not have very big loads. Which was just as well, seeing we reached a height of over 4000 metres and found breathing difficult when climbing up steep hills. The views were superb, while the Afro Alpine vegetation is fascinating.

Another highlight was the three nights we spent in Murchison Falls NP in the north of Uganda. After a 3 hour lift in the back of a National Park truck filled with food and drink with us sitting on top (I'm sure we still have the imprints from the soda bottles on certain parts of our anatomy!) we arrived and set up our tent at the "camp site". The spot did not look too bad, although we were away from the bandas (huts) where the other guests stayed by about 200 metres. No problem; we knew about hippos and warthogs. The first night sleep was fine apart from the bruising caused by the soda bottles. The next night was somewhat more exciting. Rita returned from a nocturnal visit to the toilets, carefully scanning for hippo and warthog. Back in the tent she was about to go back to sleep when she glanced out of the tent to see a large shape just outside. The shape turned it's head to look at her, and she realised she was looking at a lion!! Naturally she didn't do the sensible thing which was to let me sleep in blissful ignorance. Instead she woke me up by squeezing my arm very tightly (she did not want to talk in case the lion heard!). After succeeding in waking me, we both lay very still in the tent. I'd



missed the lion, but we could hear all sorts of noises around. Warthog I said, and even when the tent started shaking I still said warthog, although in a less convincing tone (but still a brave tone!). We then heard he scamper of feet as something moved away. We eventually feel asleep – Rita first!

In the morning (what a relief to see daylight!) Rita was out first. She found our water bottle about 10 meters away – it had large puncture holes in it! Then a person called her over – is this your raincoat? It was mine, but with several chunks out of it! A Spotted Hyena, a regular visitor to the area, did the damage. Lions are also regular visitors to the area! They'd forgotten to tell us this before hand! The next night we slept in a banda.

We spent the last two and a half weeks of our holiday in Tanzania. We did a 7 day tour of the Serengeti, Ngorongoro Crater, Lake Munyara and Tangire National Parks. The company we traveled with was called Hoopoe Adventure Tours and they were excellent. They were not cheap, but the guide and cook were superb, the vehicle reliable and comfortable, and the accommodation at times verged on the decadent. It was a camping safari, if you call camping sleeping in a large permanent tent with power, hot and cold water and a toilet (flushing!) but we deserved it, after squatting all over Uganda! It was nice to have hot water placed outside our tent each morning to wash our faces and hands in. Other nice touches were the delicious soups that our cook made over the campfire. We would have our dinner whilst watching the buffalo and impala grazing nearby.

For me the Serengeti was amazing – wildlife everywhere. It was like being in the middle of a gigantic zoo, except everything was so wild. We camped for three nights in the Serengeti, and each night we heard lions. The third night one came quite close and we could see the lion. You get a different appreciation of their size when there is only a thin piece of canvas between you and them!! We managed to see just about all the game, except rhino, but that merely gives us an excuse to return.

The final five nights we spent on Zanzibar, which is a large island off the coast of Tanzania. It is quite touristy, with many lovely restaurants. We stayed in Stone Town, which is a fascinating town full of old, buildings and narrow alleys. Very exotic. Life was very comfortable we thought as we sipped our Safari Lager beer or Baileys on the roof top bar, overlooking the town as the sun slowly set shining on the minarets from the mosques above the town and dhows sailing past!

We are still coming to terms with being back home; we no longer take our Lariam (malaria tablets), and are now used to going to work again. We were never felt threatened on our trip, and found the people very friendly, especially in Uganda. We would go back tomorrow if we could.

Ian Sinclair

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the following new members: Kenny Bedford (Thursday Island), Helen Dawson (Ingham), Wayne Douglass (North Mackay), Marnie McCullough (Bowen) and Sandra Walker (Malanda).

Send correspondence and
Newsletter reports to secretary
at:
P O Box 2209, Cairns Qld 4870
email : lkfisher@north.net.au

THANKS

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