



Birds Australia

Contact Call

Birds Australia

North Queensland Group

December 1999 • Issue: Gargany

COMMUNITY BASED CONSERVATION -THE POWER OF MANY

A NEW BA WOODLANDS PROJECT IN QUEENSLAND

(Birds Australia Media Release – 12 October 1999)

The members of Australia's oldest national conservation group, Birds Australia, have dug deep in an attempt to halt one of the country's most alarming wildlife and habitat losses. Almost \$50,000 has been raised by members of the group and a further \$20,000 contributed by the Queensland Government to establish a program to halt the decline of woodlands and forest in the Brigalow region, critical habitat for Australian native birds.

Project Coordinator Mr Mick Fendley said the fundraising effort by members and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service came in response to the development of a program which brings together government, land owners, community groups and volunteers to address the problem.

'Of the six million hectares of Brigalow woodlands which existed in Queensland and northern New South Wales before European settlement, less than 1 per cent is now protected in national parks or reserves' said Mr Fendley. 'By working with land owners, government agencies and environmental groups we can prevent the disastrous loss of habitat which has taken place in southern Australia.'

Australia's woodlands occur in a belt that stretches from the inland slopes and plains of the Great Dividing Range to the southern Flinders Ranges of South Australia and the south west of Western Australia. Today 80-90% of the woodland region has been cleared and according to Birds Australia over thirty endangered and vulnerable species rely on habitats in the woodland region. These include the Glossy Black-Cockatoo, Bush Stone Curlew, Diamond Firetail and southern races of the Squatter Pigeon and Black-throated Finch and eastern race of the Star Finch. The woodlands were once the stronghold of the now presumed extinct Paradise Parrot and home to several regionally extinct species of rare mammals including the Bilby, Northern Bettong and Plains Rat.

The innovative project will be launched in Queensland with a particular emphasis on demonstrating the importance of wildlife conservation as part of sustainable pastoral production to farmers and graziers.

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EVENTS CALENDAR

Dec 5th Sun. Redden Island Count (Cairns). Meet at 7.30am on Cinderella St, Machins Beach at the entrance before the toilet block - contact Keith Fisher.

January Sat 22nd - Sun 23rd Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten. Please organise accomodation or camping with Ron directly, ph 4094-1263 (see page 2 for the weekends programme).

February 6th Redden Island Count (Cairns). Meet at 7.30am on Cinderella St, Machins Beach at the entrance before the toilet block - contact Keith Fisher.

February Sun. 20th Wondecla area Contact Ian Sinclair.

March 19th Cairns Esplanade wader identification. High tide is at 9.00am of 3.24m so it will probably be at least 1030-1100 before the birds come back so have a lie in and bring your lunch . Contact Keith Fisher.

April 1st Beach Stone Curlew survey. Contact Amanda Freeman for details and allocation of a beach near you.

April Fri. 21st - Tues 25th Easter camp out Kimba Plateau, west of Laura (Alternative venue in event of bad weather Chillagoe). Contact John Clarkson. Note: Easter next year is immediately followed by Anzac Day.

May 14th Cairns Airport wetlands at Ellie Point - contact Keith Fisher.

June Sat. 10th - Mon. 12th AGM - Tinaroo Environmental Education Centre (Atherton Tableland) Contact John Clarkson or Ian Sinclair.

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

OFFICE BEARERS

Convenor: Jon Nott (07) 4096 8230
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Secretary: Lindsay Fisher (07) 4039 0972
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Treasurer: John Clarkson (07) 4092 2702
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Western Queensland: Peter Britton (07) 4087 2188

BA-NQG Conservation Representative & NatureSearch coordinator:
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NatureSearch E-mail Amanda.Freeman@env.qld.gov.au

PROJECT CONTACTS

Beach Stone Curlew Study
Amanda Freeman (contact number as above).

Northern Gulf Regional Strategy Group
Ian Fox Ph (07) 4091 4193
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Gouldian Finch and Birds at Waterholes Survey
Klaus Uhlenhut Ph (07) 4065 5181
Email kirrama@4kz.com.au

Redden Island Survey (Cairns) Keith Fisher Ph (07) 4039 0972
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@msn.com.au
or Glenda Jeffries Ph (07) 4773 1802 (Hm)

Counts are at Ross River every Thursday afternoon in conjunction with the RIVER group. Phone Jo if you'd like to help.

BIRDS AUSTRALIA ATLAS CONTACTS

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, including Cape York)



Regional Organiser: - Graham Harrington ph: 07 4096 5051
email: treetop@north.net.au

SRO'S: -

Stephen Garnett (Cairns) ph: 07 4052 3088
email: stephen.garnett@env.qld.gov.au
Glen Holmes (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4091 4364
email: dasyornis@ledanet.com.au
Lloyd Nielsen (Northern Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4094 1549
email: nielsen@tpgi.com.au

Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4095 3296
email: dacelo@internetnorth.com.au

Eric Sticklen (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4091 2300

Keith Fisher (Cairns) ph: 07 4039 0972
email: lkfisher@north.net.au

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@msm.com.au

SRO'S:-

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

Jon Wren ph: 07 4786 2614 email: maluras5@tpg.com.au
(Bowen/Ayr)

Marion Crouther ph: 07 4958 4613 (Mackay)

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

COUNTS, SURVEYS and TRIPS

TRIP INFORMATION

Kinfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge

22nd -23rd January 2000

Proposed Programme of Events

People should aim to arrive at lunch time (12.00).

Saturday afternoon One group visit to Mt Molloy area : Raptors, Squatter Pigeons, Apostlebirds, Great Bowerbird bower at the primary school! Then Big Mitchell Creek for White-browed Robin, Black-throated Finches, and also Lake Mitchell viewed from the causeway for a great array of

waterbirds. Another group to visit Mt Carbine area, looking for a range of birds eg Common Bronzewing, Australian Practincoles and Bustards.

Saturday Evening Communal smorgasboard + possible spotlighting trip, socialising or a speaker.

Sunday Morning Trips to Mt. Lewis and Mt. Perseverance.

An introduction to mist netting, methods and bird ID will be conducted.. Look out for Blue-faced Parrot-Finch, Golden Bowerbird and Atherton Scrubwrens amongst others.

Mt Perseverance lookout - good spot to look for Red Goshawk. and for a wide range of pigeons etc

Bring wet weather gear and repellants and don't forget to organise accomodation or camping with Ron directly, ph 4094-1263.

TRIP REPORTS

Redden Island 31/8/99

Keith Fisher

The weather was fine and dry. Publicity in the Machins Beach newsletter bought out some of the locals and the notice in the Cairns Post attracted a few more people. Some interstate visitors also swelled the numbers making a total of around 35 attending. Due to the large number we split into two groups and wandered around in opposite directions. Keen eyes and ears from the experts pointed out many birds to the newcomers who seemed to be very impressed as we headed to a total of 51 species for the morning. This was a good number, particularly as all these sightings were within the woodland/mangrove and river edge areas. The high tide excluded us going to see any waders at the mouth of the Barron River. One of the highlights was a pair of Collared Kingfishers perched in the open and flying to their nest, which they were building in a termite nest. Two new species for the island were seen, a Darter fishing in Redden Creek and five Little Pied Cormorants flying over. These sightings brought the Redden Island list up to 132 but subsequent sightings now have the list at 136. Some of us took up Greg Bates offer of morning coffee at his guest-house, in the rainforest at Brinsmead. Here Noisy Pittas and a Boat-billed Flycatcher were calling along with a Grey Goshawk who sat up high in a tree peering down at us.

The next atlas trip here will be on Sunday 5th December

CRANE COUNT 9/10/99 - Elinor Scambler

Over 40 people participated in our third annual Crane Count at 14 sites, including new ones at West Barron Storage and Innot Hot Springs (over 500 Brolgas!). General indications are that numbers on the Tablelands are down, with Sarus especially more widely dispersed than last year. COULD a few people still treasuring their data sheets please contact me very soon so I can compile the results! Thank you to everyone who helped - we were happy to have some overseas visitors as well as members and local residents. Thanks also especially to Jon & Peta Nott for again hosting a very pleasant dinner.

SURVEYS and COUNTS

TINAROO FALLS DAM CATCHMENT FAECAL CONTAMINATION STUDY -

RESULTS

Gary Wilson

The report of this study by Rhys Leeming of CSIRO Marine Research has been submitted and we can now clarify and quantify the role that avifauna in the catchment has on the faecal contamination of it. The results indicate that faecal coliform input by birds into the lake and river is very low and constitutes a small fraction of the total present.

The sampling regime included three sites in the eastern arm of the dam where substantial numbers of birds congregate and some nest; these sites were so located to determine the direct input of the birds. The author states 'Direct inputs of bird faecal material from nesting sites were assessed (Sites 16-18), but appear to make little impact on bacterial indicator levels presumably because of dilution effects'. Faecal coliform levels were elevated at only one of the sites and sterol analysis determined that even here the primary source was from herbivorous species.

The results described in this report put paid to suggestions that birds are the primary source of faecal contamination in Lake Tinaroo and the Barron River and are a triumph for the considered examination of the facts and a critical analysis of the data. *Birds Australia* was the only group to lodge a written submission when calls were made for public input to the Barron River ICM process and it appears as though we have been vindicated in doing so. I suggest that our involvement in this matter is now ended.

The committee would like to thank Gary for his work on this project and the successful outcome achieved.

BIRD MONITORING IN REVEGETATION

PROJECTS ON THE ATHERTON TABLELAND

Elinor Scambler

Quarterly monitoring surveys were conducted at Donaghy's Corridor and Prior's Creek, Atherton during Oct/Nov. Next issue of the new Australian journal Ecological Management and Restoration will include a research note announcing the various aspects (and aims) of monitoring at Donaghy's, including our group's ongoing bird surveys. Results will be published periodically in the future.



CAIRNS WADER COUNTS

The next Cairns wader count times for December are set out below. If you would like to participate in them please contact Graham Finnigan: Work ph. 4052 3965, Home ph 4055 6139

Month	Date	Esplanade Time	Boat Time	Airport Time
Dec	Sun 19 th	0700	0615	0644

For the airport counts contact Keith Fisher.

BIRD SURVEY TRAINING --Elinor Scambler

A shortage of bird counters is still a serious restraint on the vital ongoing monitoring of birds in NQ reveg projects. Recently several interested TREAT members attended an evening of bird training I presented for the Lake Eacham wet tropics volunteer group, and hopefully will join Amanda & myself soon, for field training in survey methods - this should help bring the Peterson Creek and Donaghy's teams to a reasonable "pool" to allow for 4-5 people at every count. Graham Wardle is looking at applying the same methods to his regular reveg surveys at Ravenshoe and Yungaburra (thank you Graham).

If you'd like some interesting bird work once every 3 months, plus yummy morning teas, contact Amanda Freeman or myself (ph: 07 4095 3296 email: dacelo@internetnorth.com.au)

1999 TWITCHATHON

Another Twitchathon - another great result! Two teams took part, from Townsville and the Atherton Tableland, well done to both teams - next year we will have more competition for you.

Birds and Bush Birders: 234 species - from Townsville - David James, Ian Clayton, Ken Cross and Malcolm Turner. Their best birds were Zitting Cisticola, Grass Owl and Australian Pratincole. Worst dip: Welcome Swallow. A fantastic effort guys.

Rose Between Two Thornbills: 180 species - from the Atherton Tableland - Ian Sinclair, Mark Newton and Amanda "Rose" Freeman. Best bird: a Black-breasted Buzzard at Abattoir Swamp, Julatten. Worst dip: Bridled Honeyeater. Another great effort.

Both teams raised lots of funds for publicity material, thanks to all those who supported them.

SIGHTINGS

23rd July **Double-banded Plover** at Wonga Beach, north of Mossman was reported by Ted Post a visiting Dutch birder who also photographed it.



Late August - **Metallic Starlings** began congregating around Ingham with their regular roosts getting more active -Helen Dawson.

5th Sept - **Beach Stone-Curlew** at the Kurrimine Beach Boat ramp - Helen Dawson.

10th Sept - Two **Yellow Billed Spoonbills** at Forrest Beach wetland, Ingham -Helen Dawson

15th Sept - A pair of **Black Swans** with cygnets on Lake Mitchell (Quaids Lake between Mareeba and Mt. Molloy). - Del Richards

19th Sept - First **Channel-billed Cuckoo** of the season at Green Swamp Road, Bowen - Jon Wren.

25th Sept - First **Dollarbird** of the season at Daintree - Chris Dahlberg.

30th Sept - 2 **Pied Oystercatchers** at Port Douglas (2nd record in 4 years) - Del Richards.

4th Oct - **Satin Flycatcher** at Mooroolbool, Cairn - Hillary Thompson.

7th Oct - 2 **White-throated Needleetails** at Kuranda - Phil Gregory.

5th Oct - **Common Koel** was heard at Kuranda, 1st for the season - Phil Gregory.

13th Oct - **Little Kingfisher**, Hunters Creek nr. Mt. Molloy - Del Richards.

13-18th & 22nd Oct - 1st **Barn Swallow** nr. Mossman - Del Richards.

19th Oct - 2 male **Satin Flycatchers**, Moosman / Daintree - Del Richards.

19th Oct - **Square-tailed Kite** over Birthday Creek Falls (Paluma) - Ian Clayton.

20th Oct - 1 **Clamorous Reed Warbler** and 1 **Dusky Moorhen**, Mt. Carbine - Del Richards.

20th Oct **Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher** 1st for the season on the Paluma Range Road - Ian Clayton

24th Oct **Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfishers** arrived at Kingfisher Lodge Birdwatchers Park - Ron Stannard.

3rd Nov - 4 **Great-billed Heron** perched on the Cairns airport footbridge over the Barron River roosting at night - Keith Fisher.

4th Nov - 1 **Common Starling** sitting on fence post 30 km along Hopevale Road North of Cooktown (15/23/35 145/02/07) Lost it for a few minutes and then relocated it (presume same bird) flying near cattle. Dropped down to ground near cattle didn't have my shotgun with me but because I stopped for it I found **Oriental Plovers** at the same site - Ian Cowan

9th Nov - 2 **Roseate Terns** and 2 **Whiskered Terns** on the Cairns Esplanade - Fred Van Gessel and Brian Chaffey.

10th Nov - 3 new birds for Redden Island, **Azure Kingfisher**, **Torresian Crow** and the biggest surprise a **Great Bowerbird**. Also here was a **Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher** in the mangroves of Redden Creek. - Fred Van Gessel, Brian Chaffey and Keith Fisher.

17th Nov - 1 **Grey Plover**, Cairns Esplanade - Keith Fisher (also reported by Margot Warnett).

18th Nov - 3 **Red-rumped Swallows** and 1 **Barn Swallow** on Newell Beach road north of Mossman - Ken Spriggs, Del Richards and Phil Gregory (23 **Barn Swallows** present on 21st Nov-K and L Fisher). Phil also reported 30 **Fork-tailed Swifts** and a couple of **White-throated Needleetails**.

20th Nov - **Great Bowerbird** still present on Redden Island as was 8 **White-throated Needleetails**, a new species for the island. There was also 30+ **White-throated Needleetails** and 1 **Fork-tail Swift** at Yorkeys Knob. - Dee Mckean and Keith Fisher.

21st Nov - **Grey-tailed Tattler** with single blue leg flag on left tibia at Cairns Airport. This bird was flagged in Japan at Furen Lake, Nemuro City, Hokkaido and had travelled a distance of at least 6687 km. - Keith Fisher.

25th Nov - 6 **Swinhoe's Snipe** in flooded cane paddock near Miallo north of Mossman - Fred Van Gessel, Brian Chaffy and Keith Fisher.

25th Nov - **Large-tailed Nightjar** with 2 juveniles who were hopping along on the ground with both wings stretched out pointing to the sky, nr. Julatten Fred Van Gessel, Brian Chaffy and Keith Fisher.

Phil Gregory reported seeing **Ballions Crake** at the boat ramp on Lake Tinaroo (Yungaburra) mid October. There has been reports from here over past years.

Early November 4 **Red Whiskered Bulbuls** were reported at Mackay by Mark Clayton (any Mackay members like to comment on this sighting?).

Ron Stannard sent the following report from Greg Czechura's notes in his Bird sightings book 21.10.99, to 28.10.99.....96 species recorded in Kingfisher Park and surrounds. Mt Molloy and Maryfarms area. **Red Goshawk**, **Square-Tailed Kite**, **Brown Goshawk** [a pair + 3 fledglings], **Collared Sparrowhawk**, **Black Bittern** [Rifle Creek], **Red necked Rail**

and **Bush-hen** [Kingfisher Park], Chameleon Gecko at night in orchard, Water Rat in creek near orchard, White-tailed Rats near office block, **Northern Fantails** with fledglings at entrance to Kuranda State Forest, plus **Pied Monarch**, **Banded Honeyeaters** in large numbers along creek lines around Maryfarms, **Lemon-Bellied Flycatchers** nesting there as well. Northern Quoll road kill North of Mt Molloy, Julatten road T Intersection, Striped Possum very active around Kingfisher Park, Major Skint in logs near Crake Hide, **Water Whistling Duck** and **Green Pygmy-geese** at Abattoir Swamp, **Brown-backed Honeyeaters** nesting there as well, **Australian Hobby** active over K.P.B.W.L. and Geraghty Park, **Tawny Frogmouth** calling in orchard late evening.

WHAT' ELSE HAS BEEN HAPPENING?

ACTION PLAN FOR AUSTRALIAN BIRDS --

Dr Gabriel Crowley and Dr Stephen Garnett

As part of the review of the Action Plan for Australian Birds, first drafts of recovery outlines have been prepared for all taxa we consider threatened in Australia. These texts are now up on the web at the site listed below. We would much appreciate any comments either through the site or emailed directly to us. Should a taxon in which a listmember has a passionate interest be missing or in some way inaccessible, we are also happy to email texts directly from here as well as more recent versions we have prepared after consultation with State and Territory authorities. We look forward to comments.

For the revised Action Plan for Australian Birds visit
<http://www.tasweb.com.au/recovery/index.htm>

or contact:- Dr Stephen Garnett, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
P.O.Box 2066, Cairns, Qld 4870

email: sgarnett@north.net.au or stephen.garnett@env.qld.gov.au

Tel.: 4056 1913 Tel. 4052 8736 Fax. 4052 3080

CAIRNS ESPLANADE NEWS-Keith Fisher



The EIA has been released for the development and whilst I have not read it all, I've looked at the sections on birds. The report tries to address the many problems associated with the disturbance and disruption to the waders during and after construction. It concentrates on how important the area is for roosting birds but it is the feeding habitats of the birds on the mudflats which is of greater importance. The report does stress the opportunities available for birdwatching and that overall it should have a strong environmental theme. The proposed boardwalk from the swimming lagoon to the playground at Minnie Street is 6m wide and will extend out from the existing wall covering some of the mudflats. No further reclamation of the mudflats is proposed north of the swimming lagoon at the southern end - this will leave the existing important feeding areas intact. It is also stated that the Esplanade is the best wader viewing area in Queensland, it is probably the easiest place in the world to view them. Errors from previous reports have been carried over despite these being pointed out in the past. White-breasted Whistler, Mangrove Golden Whistler and Mangrove Honeyeater are all stated to occur in the inlet, if only this was true! Also suggested is that "Council, in consultation with local bird survey groups to conduct long term monitoring programmes (pre, during and post construction) of wader populations in the areas of proposed works with particular focus on feeding and roosting habitats, particularly adjacent to the Esplanade for purposes of comparison and reference, the results should be compared to data from other relevant regional sites". The Esplanade is the only relevant site in the area and that is the main reason to preserve the habitat. A meeting with the consultants on the 24th Nov. allowed us to air our concerns regarding the habitat changes. The emphasis at this meeting was on the southern end of the esplanade where the swimming pool is going as this is the only part of the project which has funding so far.

OLD POST OFFICE GALLERY IN ATHERTON

Here is an opportunity to get involved with this project which Elinor Scambler has been organising and working hard on. Now all the hard work has been done on setting up the display we would like a volunteer to take over the ongoing maintenance and updating of the display periodically. Also involved will be applying for funding (with the

committees help) to pay for any costs involved. Please let Lindsay know if you are interested - it will probably involve a few hours a month.

TABLELANDS CHRISTMAS PARTY

Thanks to Graham and Gill Harrington for hosting the Tablelands christmas party on the 28th Nov. Graham organised one of his now famous quizzes and had people running around all over the house looking for clues and finishing up with everyone drawing their favourite bird. Budding artistes caused many laughs with their new to science birds, some of which looked like they had been foraging at a nuclear waste dump! However there were a few good ones - at least they were recognisable! It was all good fun and tested our birding skills. Oh yes the food and wine was excellent

INNISFAIL/TULLY NEWS from Klaus Uhlenhut

THE CASSOWARY SAGA AT MISSION

BEACH

Last Contact Call I mentioned the problem of tourists feeding the Cassowaries in spite of the signs. Since then I have heard that as expected some Cassowaries got very pushy (almost aggressive) and relocation was talked about. After talking to the Ranger at Mission Beach, Mark Gayle recently, he said that another solution was found: Mark, has been working with Cassowaries for quite a few years now and with the help of locals created feeding stations within the territories of the Cassowaries at Lacey Creek and Licuala State Forest. It had immediate success and kept the birds away from the roads and tourists. The scaling-down of supplementary feeding is starting now, but as it was a lean winter for Cassowaries in regards to native food the feeding stations will be used again next year. No relocation of Cassowaries was necessary.

DUNK ISLAND

A weekend on Dunk Island was most enjoyable and interesting. Noisy Pittas are still just as common as they used to be years before (I think it's one of the best places to see these birds), the calls of Koels could be heard throughout the days, as were Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves and Pied Imperial Pigeons. A male Cicadabird was seen near the farm. Every evening the Red-necked Crakes were calling from several locations, and the resident Osprey raised one chick this year. Anyone interested in Dunk: we stayed in a unit in the rainforest near the artist colony. It's solar powered and has hot water showers and a gas fridge. Basic, but absolutely sufficient. You might have seen their ad in 'Wingspan'. It's \$ 60.00 per unit per night, sleeps between 4 and 6 guests. If you want any further info please check: <http://www.mctagartco.com/dunk/>

TOWNSVILLE NEWS from Jo Wieneke and Rosemary Payet

ROSS RIVER COLONY NEWS

The Australian White Ibis which abandoned the colony last June for the first time in three years have returned and are starting to nest again. During their absence, smaller groups of several hundred were found at the Dump, the Pony Club wetland and CSIRO grounds at Oonoomba. This year, for the first time, about 30-40 Cattle Egrets remained in Townsville throughout the 'winter'. Over the past month they have been joined by 1,000 more at the colony. During the breeding season we can always do with extra helpers. Anyone interested in helping with counts on Thursday afternoons please contact Glenda Jefferies 4773 1802 (H).

A group from Townsville went out to Michaelmas Cay on October 23. Apart from the expected Silver Gulls and Ruddy Turnstone they saw a single Wedge-tailed Shearwater on the way over, Great Frigatebirds including 6 immature females, and the sighting of the day a pair of Roseate Terns. Some Common Noddies were nesting, adult & immature Sooty Terns were present, black-naped, bridles, Crested and Lesser-Crested Terns

were also recorded. I should also add that regulation boat numbers at the Cay were not being observed, nor accessing the protected area.

Cape Bowling Green on October 19th was more exciting for the 3 species of Dolphin and mating Green Turtles present. The wader numbers were way down (fitting in with other observations on the East Coast Flyway), but we have at last confirmed the Cape as a nesting site for Little Terns- if only for one pair at present who were trying to distract us and an Osprey away from 2 newly hatched chicks.

Barramundi Creek was surveyed on Saturday. 23rd, one of the 3 Coastcare sites leading into Bowling Green Bay, and 52 P.I.P.s recorded, the largest number over 3 years. The salt pans and marsh area at the back of the mangrove belt is an important Whimbrel roost, 45 seen on this occasion. A few waders: Great Knots 26, and 2 of each of these species, Great and lesser Sand Plover, Pacific Golden Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, and Grey-tailed Tattler.

A group from Townsville BOCA on a Coastcare survey had some birders twitching after sighting a Dunlin. However when a small group, including two who had flown up from interstate, chartered a boat to return to the Cape neither the Dunlin nor the large flock of Curlew Sandpipers with which it had been roosting, were there. However later that day at Cungulla, two Square-tailed Kites were seen, one of which crash-landed in the canopy of a tree and emerged with a nestling. A Black Falcon was another good sighting the same day.

BOWEN NEWS from Jon Wren

My wife, Laura was quite excited when I returned home from work this morning. Only minutes before she had been speaking to Anne Donnan from Queens Beach who had reported an injured bird in the next door neighbours yard. She believed it was a Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher but needed confirmation. We all set off for Anne's place and ended up in Valda Wakes yard looking at an adult female BbPK perched in a mango tree not 5m from where we stood. Earlier, Valda had heard a "thud" and on investigation found this glorious bird of a type that she had never seen before. Luckily the bird was not badly injured and took to the wing flying about 10m and perching in the mango tree. Checking the bird through my glasses, I could not observe any real injuries to the bird. I suggested that it would be best to leave the bird and let it recuperate by itself and hopefully it will be fit enough to continue. This is the second report of this species in the Bowen area the other was in March of this year. An injured bird was located at Dalrymple Point but eventually died. Bowen experienced some rain and stormy weather from what I can gather, as I was away at Newlands, this may have caused the BbPK to visit Bowen for a short stopover.

Tess Brickhill and Marj Andrews have conducted detailed research into the nesting of this species in the Mackay region where the habitat is totally different to that of the dry tropics of Bowen. I believe the bird would have been travelling through in a southerly direction and sought shelter from the storm. The only possible nesting site I believe could exist in the Bowen area would be Mt. Aberdeen NP where some of the gullies would provide suitable habitat. Alas, I have only lived here for 16 years and haven't explored this area as yet.

WEIPA NEWS from Michael Barnett

UNIDENTIFIED RAPTOR

On Friday afternoon 27 August I was walking between buildings at Lorim Point. After crossing a driveway and looking up I noticed a bird flying towards me at head height (2m). I initially thought it was a cuckoo-shrike. Both White-bellied and Black-faced are common in the area. The bird was very pale underneath with dark leading primaries. I turned and went back to the tree that it landed in. The feature that struck me the immediately were the eyes. They reminded me of a brown goshawk or collared sparrowhawk, again both are seen around the area at times. The irises were yellow showing a lot of black showing around the iris. The bird moved position in the tree and hid its head from me. The bird was very similar in build to a goshawk but only about the size of a kestrel. The upper surfaces, head, face and throat were pale grey in colour. The bird then flew into a nearby large lychee tree, where I had a better look at it, but again it moved and hid its

head hidden from me. The bill was dark tipped. The chest had narrow pale grey horizontal stripes broadly spaced that faded away lower down. The underside of the tail had narrow pale bars with a broad dark stripe near the tip. The legs were long, slender and yellow. Unfortunately I didn't have binoculars with me and but I could approach to within about 6m. I viewed the bird for about a minute and a half in total, before it flew off.

INTERESTING PLACES

SEA RANCH PRAWN FARM -Del Richards

With a small group of local keen birders, I arranged a visit to the Sea Ranch Prawn Farm, which is situated half-way between Port Douglas and Mossman, on 6th November.

Very often poor numbers of waders ect. are encountered in the area, however it appears that the farm is an important attraction for many species.

We only spent about 90 minutes (due to heavy rain) in the area and estimated over 1000 birds were present.

Birds take a lot of prawns and are a headache for the operators.

The following species were observed: Silver Gull (140+), Caspian Tern (70+), Gull-billed Tern (40+), Little Tern (50+), Crested Tern (3), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (200+), Greater Sandplover (60+), Lesser Sandplover (5), Grey-tailed Tattler (5), with small numbers of Whimbrel, Eastern Curle, Common Greenshanks, Red-capped Plover and Black-winged Stilts. Most notable was a single Ruddy Turnstone and many hundreds of Red-necked Stilts!

This is a prime area for waders, however at this point access is very restricted. In the future it is hoped that it will be possible to visit again when the weather is fine.

SOME ATLAS STATISTICS by Andrew Silcocks

The project is gathering momentum judging from the number of Atlas Record Forms that are arriving in the office. We have been averaging over 1000 forms per week for the past month. The total number of surveys on the database currently stands at 39,960. The spread of surveys has changed over the last 6 months, as can be seen from the table, with West Australia and Queensland in particular increasing their share, mainly at the expense of Victoria.

State	No of surveys 11/5/99	% by state 11/5/99	RATIO surveys / regos 11/5/99	No of surveys 3/11/99	% by state 3/11/99	RATIO surveys / regos 3/11/99
ACT	307	2.2	2.8	436	1.1	3.4
NSW	2449	17.2	4.4	6677	16.7	9.3
VIC	4114	28.9	4.6	9140	22.9	8.7
QLD	1737	12.2	4.2	6945	17.4	13.0
SA	2216	15.6	6.8	6182	15.5	15.6
WA	2014	14.2	6.5	7723	19.3	18.4
TAS	704	5.0	4.7	1550	3.9	8.9
NT	550	3.9	6.3	1307	3.3	13.2
Total	14091			39960		

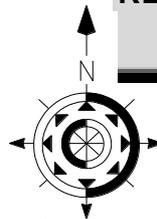
Over the last six months the number of 2-ha Searches has increased slightly from 33% of the total to the current level of 36%. Area Searches within 500m of a central point are, by a long way, the most commonly used method making up 40% of the surveys, while the numbers of incidental surveys are up from 5% to 8% over the six month period.

The location of 63% of the surveys has been calculated by a GPS unit.

The most prolific Atlasser, Rhidian Harrington, is four short of submitting 1000 forms, though third in the total number of birds recorded by an Atlasser. That accolade belonging to Alan Morris with 11,687 birds reported. A total of 74 Atlassers have sent in 100 forms or more. Breeding records are well down on the last Atlas, currently standing at 2.6% of all records; this figure was 4.5% for the first Atlas. This is due in part to the definitions of breeding being tightened up, so is not a problem. The number of breeding records is expected to pick up when the spring surveys start arriving in the office.

126 grid squares of the 820 that cover mainland Australia are still unatlassed; 47 of these are in West Australia and the Northern Territory, 17 in South Australia and 15 in Queensland. In addition to those which have not been visited, 220 squares still have fewer than 10 surveys conducted within them. The aim of the Remote Atlassing Committee (*see following item*) is to assist Atlassers to access these squares, and so to fill the gaps.

REMOTE ATLASSING COMMITTEE BY Ken Harris



Prior to a trip to WA in July-August this year, I was doing some homework to see how many unatlassed squares I might pick up *en route*. It struck me that there was still a large number of squares up for grabs, and most of these were in very remote country. I discussed this with Geoff Barrett and we agreed that we needed to do some planning. The Regional Coordinators are doing great work encouraging atlassers to get into some of these remote areas, but there was still a need for some central coordination and long-range planning. On my return from WA I put together a draft document detailing each unatlassed square, with information on access, the need for permits and any known plans. I also marked up a series of maps showing the location of these squares. This initial work really brought home the magnitude of the task ahead of us. To oversee the planning and control of this work a Remote Atlassing Committee (RAC) has been formed with representatives from each state. The Committee members are:

- **Coordinators:** Andrew Silcocks and Ken Harris.
- **State Representatives:** Cheryl Gole (WA), Peter Nichols (QLD), Tony Russell (SA), Aimee Hutchinson (NSW), Greg Beresford (NT), Alan Fletcher (TAS).
- **Richard Jordan** will also assist, because of his extensive knowledge of remote areas.

The aims of the Committee are to gather knowledge on unatlassed squares, including:

- Access roads or routes.
- Contact persons for permits.
- Other contacts, such as station owners.
- Geographical features which may influence how the square is atlassed.
- Known or tentative plans for coverage of the square.

I will maintain this information in a single document to be distributed to RAC members whenever a significant update occurs. This approach will ensure we are all on the same wavelength. Anyone planning a trip to any of the remote parts of Australia can find unatlassed squares by examining the latest version of the coverage map on the Atlas website at www.birdsaustralia.com.au/atlas. They should then discuss their plans with their state representative on the RAC.

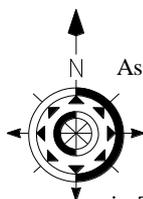
Adequate cover for a 1° square is considered to be at least 10 surveys with a reasonable spread throughout the square. In addition to the unatlassed squares there are many others that need further coverage to satisfy this requirement. In due course the RAC will try to address these squares as well.

(Atlas articles re-printed from November Galah, the inhouse newsletter of Birds Australia).

Contact the Atlas Project at the BA National Office or email:

atlas@raou.com.au

LOCAL ATLASSING



As can be seen by the preceding article there is many unatlassed 10-minute grid squares, many of which are in our region, if you cannot access the atlas site and download the information on these squares we have a few maps which we can send out. Keith in Cairns has maps for Ingham to north of Cairns and Jo in Townsville has the area from Hinchinbrook Island to Mackay

map (contact details on page 2) Next year we'll be making an effort to visit some of those areas that have not yet been visited.

BIRD IDENTIFICATION & OBSERVATIONS

IRON RANGE - Phil Gregory

Keith and Doug Cowton and I made a 4 night stay at Iron Range from October 16-19. We were very lucky with the weather which was dry, windy, overcast and relatively cool, and we had a good time tracking down the birds.

Based on my New Guinea experiences, it was interesting to note the distinct aussie accents many of the birds possessed. Yellow-billed Kingfisher sounds much the same, but Eclectus Parrot, Palm Cockatoo and Red-cheeked Parrots all sound quite different.

I was particularly interested in the Frilled Monarch here, as the sexes are almost identical, quite unlike the New Guinea birds, and I note that Slater lists it as *Arses lorealis*, a different species to the NG birds (and thanks to John Liddy for pointing this out to me). Given the speciation patterns in Pied-type monarchs in the region generally, this seems perhaps very plausible. The vocalizations I heard sounded very much like Frilled, but sonagram comparison would be nice.

I was also amazed at how distinct the Magnificent Riflebird is here, the calls are quite unlike any I know from New Guinea. I had expected it to be similar to the wolf whistles of the western form, but it was very different. We also noted a very curious display of this species, with a male bird flying like a great moth with very slow wing beats about 2m above the forest floor, watched by another male and a female plumaged bird. You could still here the taffeta-like rustling, but the flight was unlike anything I'd seen before, reminding me of a Woodcock roding!

I also thought the males had a distinct tuft at the base of the bill, again unlike New Guinea birds. I am now eager to hear the calls of the populations to north and south of Iron Range, which differ again.

Trumpet Manucode were not very vocal, but the calls I did hear were again distinct to NG ones. We had nice views of some at a fruiting tree at Gordon Creek. Spotted Catbird were not calling, and I only heard the quiet "zic" contact call throughout our stay, they seem as shy here as the New Guinea ones. Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo were also silent at this time, another surprise.

The biggest single shock was however the Northern Scrub-robin, I found it hard to believe I was looking at the same species as in New Guinea. In NG it is a very shy forest floor skulker, with very distinctive slow mournful whistled calls. The birds here were calling totally unlike the New Guinea ones and showed no interest in playback of those calls. When I eventually got onto one it was perched up in mid stratum about 8m off the ground, and was much more colourful than the northern birds, with a far more distinct face pattern and wing spotting. I have to wonder whether this is a different species, it seemed about as different from the NG ones as is the Southern Scrub-robin. Has anyone looked at and compared these populations recently?

The only Iron Range special we did not see was the Red-bellied Pitta, a few overwintered this year but none were calling at this time. A single Black-winged Monarch at Gordon Creek was a nice find as we'd expected this to be still away.

Palm Cockatoos were in dry forest here, not rainforest as in PNG, and the dump at Portland Roads was a good site for them. We found Red-cheeked Parrots curiously scarce, in NG this is a common and noisy lowland forest bird but here we only had flyovers at a few sites. Eclectus were also sparse compared to some parts of PNG.

We found Green-backed Honeyeater at Claudie River, easily overlooked as a Fairy Gerygone on a brief view, and a pair of Yellow-legged Flycatcher had a youngster with them along the Coen Road. Marbled Frogmouths were noisy at night in the vine thickets, sounding very much like the plumed birds around Lamington, and we had great views of both this and Papuan

Frogmouth one night. We picked up Fawn-breasted Bowerbird at Portland Roads, and Black-backed Butcherbird outside the park on the way to the highway south.

White-streaked Honeyeater were feeding at red flowered trees by Claudie River, and gave very nice views. Tawny-breasted Honeyeaters were quite common, as were White-faced Robins, and I was impressed by the long pink legs of the Tropical Scrubwrens, a smart little bird that was much nicer looking and more distinctive than I'd anticipated.

The ponds at Weipa remain free of Spotted Whistling Duck, but a couple of Chestnut Teal were a surprise, as were a flock of Pink-eared Ducks. Another nice bonus was a Wandering Tattler with a flock of Grey-tailed at Chili Beach.

UNUSUAL EGRET BEHAVIOUR-Del Richards

During many years of observing little egrets I have often watched them disturbing prey by showing the yellow soles of their feet as they move along the edges of waterways and marshes.

Recently at Lake Mitchell I observed a Little Egret in water to the point of appearing to be floating. It seemed so unusual that we observed it through the telescope.

It remained motionless for a long time except for the fact that it was "dabbling" on the water surface (as ducks do) and in the process was creating a ripple effect to attract small fish. As we watched it thrust its bill into the water in hunting mode then returned to the previous procedure. It must have been rather successful as we saw the egret doing the same thing five times over the next two weeks!

DEATH ON THE DAINTREE-Del Richards

We all mean to develop a sixth sense with regard to estuarine crocodiles whilst moving around their habitat. Over a period of 8 weeks at least one Orange-footed Scrubfowl, a female Darter and sadly a Great-billed Heron fell victim to crocodiles along the Daintree River.

We noted the Great-billed Heron near Half Way Island early one morning hunting around trees blown down by cyclone Rhona. It was found shortly after with a number of puncture wounds to the body, typical of a small crocodile attack. Don't take them for granted.

BEACH STONE-CURLEW - Keith Fisher

A pair of Beach Stone-Curlew at the Cairns airport hatched out a chick on the 15th Oct., that was 22 days since I first saw it on the nest (which is situated at least 2km from the nearest beach). As I was away for 10 days I missed the exact time they started sitting so I am unable to give an incubation period. They were sitting before I went away but I was unable to see any egg. The chick and parents were still within 10m of the nest on 21st Oct., this was the last I saw of the chick which was presumed to have been predated. Interestingly a Masked Lapwing was sitting on 4 eggs about 30m away in the same area and hatched out 3 chicks. A pair of Bush Stone-Curlews also have a nest (if you can call it that, a slight depression on some gravel) and were sitting on 2 eggs 40m from the original Beach Stone-Curlew nest site, they now have a single chick. The pair of Beach Stone-Curlew hung around the area and laid another egg on 16th November 26 days after the chick disappeared and 5m from the original nest. Monitoring will continue.

LAUGHING GULLS - Keith Fisher

For those of you who were around 10 years ago when the first of two Laughing Gulls turned up you may be interested to know that the rarities committee has finally recognized the records - the delay was due to nobody submitting an official sighting record, the second Laughing Gull record in Cairns has also been accepted. This record was for the first sighting of this species in Australia. The result of the submission of the first gull record is set out below.

Submission No 265: Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*, Cairns, North QLD 11th December 1987 to 19th November 1989.

This case concerns a published account (*Aust. Birdwatcher* 1989) of one of Australia's most famous and well watched rarities, that of a Laughing gull *Larus atricilla* first located on the Cairns esplanade in North Queensland on the 11th December 1987, which then stayed until at least the 19th

November 1989 (almost 2 years). During its stay this bird was joined by a second individual (Case 266) which arrived in April 1988 and stayed until at least October 1989. Throughout this period both birds were seen by many observers as they fed and roosted with the resident Silver Gulls.

Although the published description is brief for such a major rarity, the accompanying photographs in the *Aust. Birdwatcher* (and another in *Aust. Birding* 1995) readily confirm the identification. There remains only the question of ageing.

Comparing the published description and photos with those of Laughing Gull in Grant (1982), it is clear that the bird was in either second-winter or adult-winter plumage when initially sighted in December 1987. The combination of a black bill with orange tip, wholly white tail and underbody, and (from photo) a tiny white apical spot (on c.P6) visible just beyond the tertials on the folded wing, all suggests an adult in winter plumage as concluded by the finders; a second-winter bird would show an all-dark (blackish) bill and an obvious pale-grey wash to the flanks and sides of breast. Ageing as an adult was confirmed by David James, an experienced gull specialist, who critically examined the bird for ageing and moult during October 1989. From his study of the description and photos and his direct observations of the bird, James concluded that by this date, the bird had apparently adjusted its moult cycle from a boreal one into a sequence consistent with that of the austral seasons (HANZAB Vol 3: 564).

The committee has no hesitation in unanimously accepting this bird as an adult winter Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* subsequently moulting into breeding plumage. Although apparently the first Laughing Gull to be sighted in Australia this is the 4th record of this species to be accepted by the committee. **Accepted 3 November, 1999**

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS FOR OUR REGION

Mr. S. Gallivan - Edmonton, Hillary Thompson - Cairns, Mrs. J. Cobb - Mossman, David Armbrust - Julatten, Mr. C. Giffard - Cooktown, Ms S. Laurie, Ms. M. Alewijnse - Cairns, D and G. Gane - Cairns. Mr. M. Gregory - Townsville. C. Pearce - Atherton. Barbara Waterhouse - Mareeba. Mrs. H. Adams - Atherton. Mr. R. Leinster. Mr. JS Allen - Mareeba. Mrs. N. Larsson - Mackay.

We look forward to seeing you all on some of our many activities.

NOTICES

QUIZ-Test your Powers of Observation!

The quiz last issue was to test your powers of observation. We only had two replies one correct and one not, we will not embarrass the people concerned but they will both be receiving a pack of envelopes from Australia Post. Australia Post had the picture of a Superb Fairy-Wren on the front and the text of the Splendid Fairy-Wren on the reverse of one of the envelopes in the set. However despite this glitch we thank Australia Post for their kind donation and continued depiction of Australia's wildlife on their stamps and stationery.

NEW BIRDS AUSTRALIA EMAIL ADDRESSES

To contact the National Office staff member of your choice simply follow the pattern as follows: initial . surname @ birdsaustralia . com . au (no space between words and all letters are lower case). For example b.salinger@birdsaustralia.com.au

and Hugo Phillipps' new email address is:

h.phillipps@birdsaustralia.com.au

If you don't know whom you need to contact or can't remember how to spell the surname, send your email to the general email address: mail@birdsaustralia.com.au - and it will be passed on. Projects and departments with email accounts are:

Atlas Project	atlas@birdsaustralia.com.au
BA Rarities Committee	barc@birdsaustralia.com.au
BOP Watch	bopwatch@birdsaustralia.com.au
Conservation	conservation@birdsaustralia.com.au

General email	mail@birdsaustralia.com.au
HANZAB	hanzab@birdsaustralia.com.au
HL White Library	library@birdsaustralia.com.au
Membership Services	membership@birdsaustralia.com.au
Research	research@birdsaustralia.com.au
TBN	tbn@birdsaustralia.com.au
The Birding Shop	sales@birdsaustralia.com.au
Volunteering	volunteering@birdsaustralia.com.au
Wingspan	wingspan@birdsaustralia.com.au

So, once again, mail for Birds Australia's National Office staff follows the pattern:

initial dot surname @ birdsaustralia dot com dot au
(never any spaces – never uppercases)

Email sent to current addresses will be redirected, but please begin using these new addresses. If you want a complete list of new email addresses (including correct spelling of the toughies – this means you, Dr Khalid Al-Dabbagh!) email b.salinger@birdsaustralia.com.au and receive the list via an attached file.

CAR STICKERS

Our Birds Australia North Queensland Group Car sticker featuring a Pied Imperial Pigeon on a tropical green back ground will be available early next year. We are very grateful to Cathy James, graphic designer with EPA, for her striking design.

BOOKS FOR SALE

Simon Grove has a couple of books for sale if anyone is interested
A Handbook to the Swallows and Martins of the World, by Angela Turner and Chris Rose. Helm 1994. Bought for £22.99 in the UK (roughly \$57). Offers around \$35.

Kingfishers of the World, by Leslie J. Knowles and James W. Nitchen. Times Editions 1995. Bought for £13.50 in the UK (roughly \$40). Offers around \$25.

Simon Grove, Rainforest CRC, James Cook University, PO Box 6811, Cairns, Qld 4870. Tel. & leaving messages (JCU, office): 4042 1441
Fax (CRC-TREM, attn. Simon Grove): 4042 1247
Email: mailto:simon.grove@jcu.edu.au
Alternative tel. (JCU, CRC laboratory) 4042 1242

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P O Box 2209, Cairns Qld 4870
or 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.