



# Birds Australia

# Contact Call

## Birds Australia

## North Queensland Group

March 2000 • Issue: Pink-eared Duck

### TAXONOMIC CHANGES

Dick Schodde and Ian Mason recently published the Directory of Australian Birds: Passerines, in this publication proposed changes to some species are made, as well as describing all the ultrataxa (sub-species to some of us) along with distribution maps.

11 species have been split and five species lumped, many of which affect species our area. The changes are listed below:

#### SPLIT SPECIES

OLD SPECIES	NEW SPECIES	OLD SPECIES	NEW SPECIES
Striated Grasswren	Striated Grasswren <i>Amytornis striata</i> Short-tailed Grasswren <i>Amytornis merrotsi</i>	Western Whipbird	Western Whipbird <i>Psophodes nigrogularis</i> Mallee Whipbird <i>Psophodes leucogaster</i>
Dusky Grasswren	Dusky Grasswren <i>Amytornis purnelli</i> Grey-bellied Grasswren <i>Amytornis ballerae</i>	Crested Shrike-tit	Eastern Shrike-tit <i>Falcunculus frontatus</i> Western Shrike-tit <i>Falcunculus leucogaster</i> Northern Shrike-tit <i>Falcunculus whitei</i>
Little Wattlebird	Western Wattlebird <i>Anthochaera chrysoptera</i> Little Wattlebird <i>Anthochaera lunulata</i>	Rufous Fantail	Rufous Fantail <i>Rhipidura rufifrons</i> Arafura Fantail <i>Rhipidura dryas</i>
Restless Flycatcher	Paperbark Flycatcher <i>Myiagra nana</i> Restless Flycatcher <i>Myiagra inquieta</i>	Friilled Monarch	Friilled Monarch <i>Arses telescopthalmus</i> Frill-necked Monarch <i>Arses lorealis</i>
White-browed Robin	White-browed Robin <i>Poecilodryas superciliosa</i> Buff-sided Robin <i>Poecilodryas cerviniventris</i>	Grey Butcherbird	Grey Butcherbird <i>Cracticus torquatus</i> Silver-backed Butcherbird <i>Cracticus argentus</i>
Scarlet Robin	Scarlet Robin <i>Petroica boodang</i> Pacific Robin <i>Petroica multicolor</i>		

(Continued on page 3)

### INSIDE NEWS

Taxonomic Changes	P1/3
BA-NQG & Atlas Contacts	P2
Membership Information	P2
Trip Reports	P3
Sightings	P4
What Else Has Been Happening?	P5
Cairns Esplanade	P5
Hallorans Hill	P5
Townsville News	P6
Bowen News	P6
Weipa News	P6
Interesting Places - Green Island	P6
Bird ID & Observations	P6
Swallows at Mossman	P6
Repeated Use of Nest Site	P6
Beach Stone-Curlews	P7
Beware of Swift Identification	P7
Mutant Blue-faced Honeyeaters	P7
Mimicry of Spotted Bowerbird	P7
Mt. Isa Sewage Ponds	P7
Patient Parents	P7
Red Goshawks	P7
The Carpentarian Grasswren	P7
Welcome New Members	P8
For Sale, Accommodation, Notices	P8

### EVENTS CALENDAR

**March 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday** Cairns Esplanade wader identification. High tide is at 9.00am - 3.24m so it will probably be at least 1130-1200 before the birds come back so have a lie in and bring your lunch. Meet opposite Tradewinds Hotel - Contact Keith Fisher.

**April 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday** Fancy a walk on the beach? Volunteers urgently needed to take part in a Beach Stone-curlew survey on 1st April. Sites at Wonga Beach, Port Douglas & beaches south to & including Cairns Northern Beaches, Bramston Beach, ETTY Bay, Kurrimine, Mission Beach & Googarra plus others require surveying. For information & allocation of a beach near you, please contact Amanda Freeman. Ph:4091 4262 (Mon/Tues) or 40952148 (evenings) or email [Amanda.Freeman@env.qld.gov.au](mailto:Amanda.Freeman@env.qld.gov.au).

**April Sat 8- Sun 9<sup>th</sup>** - Atlassing in the Charters Towers area - contact Jo Wieneke phone Ph:4771 4707

**April 21<sup>st</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>** Easter Campout at Chillagoe, staying at Chillagoe Caravan Park and explore surrounding areas. Contact Jan England for details Ph 4033 2702

**May 7<sup>th</sup> Sun.** Walk on Hallorans Hill, Atherton. Meet 8am at Playground on Louise St. Contact Ian Sinclair.

**May 13-14<sup>th</sup>** - Atlassing in the Ingham area - contact Jo Wieneke phone 4771 4707

**May 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday-** Ellie Point - 8.30am numbers limited for this trip, please advise if you are coming at least a week beforehand as security passes need to be obtained from the Cairns Port Authority who control the area - Contact Keith Fisher for meeting place.

**June Sat. 10<sup>th</sup> - Mon. 12<sup>th</sup>** Annual General Get-together (Fun Weekend) - Tinaroo Environmental Ed. Centre (Atherton Tableland). Costs are \$16 per person if you have your own tent or you can hire a tent for extra \$8 per night. This gives us use of the grounds, toilets and the kitchen. Canoes are available at \$10 each per day. Talks & walks are being organised. Contact John Clarkson or Ian Sinclair. (This is a non-election year for committee positions so don't be shy in coming along).

**June 25<sup>th</sup> Sun.** - Redden Island Count (Cairns). Meet at 7.30am, Cinderella St, Machins Beach - the entrance before the toilet block - contact Keith Fisher

**July 9<sup>th</sup> Sun.** Petford Area, west of Atherton Tablelands - Contact Ian Sinclair.

**July 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup>** Wallaman Falls campout (Ingham) contact Helen Dawson for details - Ph : 4777 2822

**Aug 13<sup>th</sup> Sun.** Walk up Douglas Track to lookout. Meet 7.30am top of Douglas Track Road, Kamerunga, (Rainforest Estate) Cairns - contact Keith Fisher (Steep climb in places but we go at birding speed!).

**Sept 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>** Windsor Tableland Campout - Contact Ian Sinclair.

**Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> Sun** - Atherton Tableland BOP watch - Contact Ian Sinclair.

**Field Trips may 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  
E-mail [rosegums@internetnorth.com.au](mailto:rosegums@internetnorth.com.au)

**Secretary: Lindsay Fisher** (07) 4039 0972  
E-mail [lkfisher@north.net.au](mailto:lkfisher@north.net.au)

**Treasurer: John Clarkson** (07) 4092 2702  
E-mail [John.clarkson@dnr.qld.gov.au](mailto:John.clarkson@dnr.qld.gov.au)

### Area Representatives:

**Mackay: Marion Crouther** (07) 4958 4613

**Bowen/Ayr: Jon Wren** (07) 4786 2614  
E-mail [maluras5@tpg.com.au](mailto:maluras5@tpg.com.au)

**Townsville: Jo Wieneke** (07) 4771 4707  
E-mail [bowerbird@msm.com.au](mailto:bowerbird@msm.com.au)

**Ingham: Helen Dawson** (07) 4777 2822  
E-mail [dawsonh@dnr.qld.gov.au](mailto:dawsonh@dnr.qld.gov.au)

**Innisfail/Tully: Klaus Uhlenhut** (07) 4065 5181  
E-mail [kirrama@4kz.com.au](mailto:kirrama@4kz.com.au)

**Cairns: Keith Fisher** (07) 4039 0972  
E-mail [lkfisher@north.net.au](mailto:lkfisher@north.net.au)

**Atherton Tableland: Ian Sinclair** (07) 4091 4544  
E-mail [sinclair@dnr.qld.gov.au](mailto:sinclair@dnr.qld.gov.au)

**Mossman/Daintree: Del Richards** (07) 4094 1199

**Cape York Peninsula: Michael Barnett** Wk (07) 4069 8916  
Hm (07) 4069 8182  
E-mail [ssellwood@bigpond.com](mailto:ssellwood@bigpond.com)

**Western Queensland: Peter Britton** (07) 4087 2188

**BA-NQG Conservation Representative & NatureSearch coordinator:**  
**Amanda Freeman** (07) 4095 2148

E-mail [procella@ozemail.com.au](mailto:procella@ozemail.com.au)  
NatureSearch E-mail [Amanda.Freeman@env.qld.gov.au](mailto: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

E-mail [foxi@fastinternet.net.au](mailto:foxi@fastinternet.net.au)

### **Gouldian Finch and Birds at Waterholes Survey**

Klaus Uhlenhut Ph (07) 4065 5181

Email [kirrama@4kz.com.au](mailto:kirrama@4kz.com.au)

### **Redden Island Survey (Cairns) Keith Fisher Ph (07) 4039 0972**

E-mail [lkfisher@north.net.au](mailto:lkfisher@north.net.au)

### **Sarus/Brolga Tableland Crane counts**

Elinor Scambler Ph (07) 4095 3296

E-mail [dacelo@internetnorth.com.au](mailto:dacelo@internetnorth.com.au)

### **Egret & Ibis Counts (Townsville)**

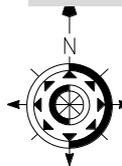
Jo Wieneke Ph (07) 4771 4707

E-mail [bowerbird@msn.com.au](mailto: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: [treeatop@north.net.au](mailto:treeatop@north.net.au)

### **SRO'S: -**

Stephen Garnett (Cairns) ph: 07 4052 3088  
email: [stephen.garnett@env.qld.gov.au](mailto:stephen.garnett@env.qld.gov.au)

Glen Holmes (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4091 4364  
email: [dasyornis@ledanet.com.au](mailto:dasyornis@ledanet.com.au)

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

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

Eric Sticklen (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4091 2300

Keith Fisher (Cairns) ph: 07 4039 0972 email: [lkfisher@north.net.au](mailto: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](mailto:bowerbird@msm.com.au)

### **SRO'S:-**

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

Jon Wren ph: 07 4786 2614 email: [maluras5@tpg.com.au](mailto: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](mailto:birds&bush@ultra.net.au)  
(Townsville)

## BIRDS AUSTRALIA MEMBERSHIP

Subscriptions \$62  
Concession \$46  
Family \$99

This includes four issues of the full-colour bird magazine *Wingspan*, membership of Birds Australia - North Queensland Group and four issues of *Contact Call*.

Membership forms are available from the Secretary or send subscriptions directly to

Birds Australia  
415 Riversdale Road  
Hawthorn East  
VIC 3123

## TAXONOMIC CHANGES (cont. from page 1).

### LUMPED SPECIES

OLD SPECIES	NEW SPECIES	OLD SPECIES	NEW SPECIES
Green Catbird	Green Catbird	Varied Honeyeater	Varied Honeyeater <i>Lichenostomus versicolor</i>
Spotted Catbird		Mangrove Honeyeater	
White-browed Scrubwren	White-browed Scrubwren <i>Sericornis frontalis</i>	Yellow-throated Miner	Yellow-throated Miner <i>Manorina flavigula</i>
Tasmanian Scrubwren		Black-eared Miner	
Large-billed Scrubwren	Large-billed Scrubwren <i>Sericornis magnirostris</i>		
Tropical Scrubwren			

The family Pardalotidae has been split into Pardalotidae and Acanthizida, also the family Passeridae has been split into Passeridae and Estrildidae. The family Cinclosomatidae has changed to Eupetidae. To find out more you will have to purchase the book which at \$180.00 sounds expensive but when you see the work that has gone into it's excellent value.

### TRIP REPORTS

#### REDDEN ISLAND 5/12/99 - Keith Fisher

Once again Redden Island turned up a couple of new species for the list, 20 Topknot Pigeons flew over heading south along the coast. Topknots do come down to the coast around Cairns but not usually at this time of year, it's occasionally seen in the dry season, June-August. The other one was Superb Fruit Dove; we were expecting to see Rose-crowned Fruit Doves but were surprised by seeing the superb. We saw at least 4 - all in woodland, one obligingly perched out in the open, giving everyone excellent views. In all 39 species were seen and this did not include any waders along the beach as the tide was too high. The new sightings brought the species list up to 138. This was increased to 139 with the latest sighting - a Peregrine Falcon flying over from the airport.

#### KINGFISHER PARK BIRDWATCHERS LODGE

##### 22-23/1/ 2000 - Keith & Lindsay Fisher

We arrived at Kingfisher Park on the Friday evening and were up early Saturday to check out the Red-rumped Swallows at the bottom of the Rex Range on the Rex highway where they had been reported. Sure enough they were there, 10 sitting on a powerline to the first house on the left after turning off the Cook Highway. They showed off the red rumps, which were a dull red. From here we went up to Newell Beach where we failed to see the Barn Swallows but did see 2 Beach Stone-curlew opposite the boat ramp, there was 1 adult and an immature adult size bird. On our way back to Kingfisher we looked for the red rumps but it was now 8.45am and they had gone, so if you want to see them get there early.

Everyone else started to arrive around mid-day and after lunch it was decided to go to Mt. Lewis to cool off from the heat down below. Mt. Lewis provided its usual good birding, Blue-faced Parrot Finches were easily seen (8+), a white phase Grey Goshawk flew over, a Pied Monarch was busy foraging up a tree and the Golden Bowerbird was not at home. His bower had no fresh decorations and it looked like he had finished displaying for the season. Fernwrens put on a good display and were new for some people and a Golden Whistler was seen with a band on (at least 11 years old).

The Lesser Sooty Owl put in an appearance after dinner before the evening's entertainment began. We were treated to a quick trip around New Zealand by new Australians Amanda and Alistair Freeman who showed us slides of their work on various wildlife projects on the mainland, Islands and at Sea. An excellent evening finished off by lots of story telling (aided by the red wine!).

Ron had organised a Sunday morning stroll up Mt. Perseverance with Sue Mc Grath, who with her husband Larry, live nearby. The walk up traversed mainly rainforest before arriving at a lookout. The spectacular view from here looks out to the coast taking in Snapper Island, Low Isles, Cape Kimberley and the areas in between. The bait Ron had dangled in front of us to climb up here, a Red Goshawk, did not turn up. On the way down we inspected the remains of an old mining camp where at least 60 people were tin mining in days gone past. Thanks to Sue for taking the time out to lead the way and for explaining some of the tin mining history of the area.

By now it was time to go home for most people after a very enjoyable couple of days.

We would like to thank Ron and Susanne Stannard for their legendary hospitality, including Ron cooking up Saturday night's meal along with various other cooks contributions.

#### REDDEN ISLAND 6/2/00- Keith Fisher

The monsoon rains hit and the few hardy souls who turned up decided to give it a try but not before we had 10 species including four Royal Spoonbills which flew over to add another new bird to the species list. I also had another new bird on the 16<sup>th</sup> February, a Nankeen Kestrel, this brings the species list to 141. The next atlas trip here will be on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June.

#### IRON RANGE 3-13/12/99 - David James

Party: Martin Cohen, Jo Wieneke, John McGlaughlin, Evan Schmidt (a non-birder) and David James.

We flew in to Lockhart River with Sky Trans (\$420 return ex Cairns), stayed at the "Green hut", near the Rangers Station (ie Between Lockhart and Iron Range NP), and rented a local's Landcruiser tray back for 6 days. The weather was excellent, with fairly mild temperatures. 600 mm of rain fell in November but the rain stopped more or less as we arrived. We mostly birded and herped and spotlighted around the Green Hut (rainforest regrowth, where we found most of the areas specialities), the Claudie River Old Cohen Rd/Gordons Ck/Cooks Hut section of Iron Range, Chili Bch and Cape Weymouth. Most nights we spotlighted for about 3 hours. We also went out to Restoration Rock off Cape Weymouth, where Bridled Terns and Common Noddies breed, and made a trip up to the Pascoe River in a tinnie. Shorter trips were made to Tozers Gap, West Claudie River, Portland Roads, etc.

The birding was brilliant, and highlights were nearly countless. Red-bellied Pittas were not calling at first, but we heard one on about day three and then tracked them down on day four, getting brilliant views after a bit of patience and persistence. Likewise Chestnut-breasted Cuckoos were not calling at first but gave sensational views on day 7. Palm Cockatoos, Red-cheeked and Eclectus Parrots flew through the campsite daily. One morning around our camp before (a late) breakfast I saw Red-bellied Pitta, Northern Scrub-Robin, Magnificent Riflebird, Palm Cockatoo, Eclectus Parrot, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Buff-Breasted Paradise Kingfisher, Yellow-billed Kingfisher, Azure Kingfisher, Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo, Yellow-breasted Boatbill, and a host of lesser deities. We watched thousands (or tens of thous) of Metallic Starlings staging on Chili beach at sunset and flying in wheeling flocks to a nearby islet to roost. Quite sensational. Yellow-billed Kingfishers were troublesome, though calling everywhere. We missed Green-backed Honeyeater, but big deal I say! Otherwise we got repeated views of most local specialities.

Rarities were few (read nil) but a couple of short-tailed swifts in a large flock of Fork-tailed Swifts, suggested possible House Swifts. They turned out to be Fork-tails moulting the outer pair of tail-feathers and outer primaries!

Spotlighting was sometimes slow but generally excellent. One night produced 3 species of frogmouth, Masked Owl (heard only) and 2 nightjar species near the campsite. We saw lots of cuscus, about 7 commons (3 by day) and 2 greys.

Frog choruses were great following November's rain, but frog diversity at Iron Range is not spectacular. We didn't find a lot of species of reptiles by some standards, but green python was a serious contender for bird of the trip.

Thanks to Martin Cohen for much of the organising, to Carl the assistant ranger for hospitality and spotlighting and boating trips, and Brian Venebles for showing us around Cape Weymouth, Chili Beach and Restoration Rock. Brian gets the Red-bellied Pitta Award for the most colourful birder on the Cape.

## WONDECLA FIELD TRIP 20/2/99 - Ian Sinclair

Sixteen people braved the weather to meet at the Wondecla Oval (Near Herberston), keen to do some Atasing. We broke up into several groups, and proceeded to the destination, a state forest and reserve known as the Bluff, or the horse Paddock. More importantly, it was also known as a site for Crested Shrike-tits.

The site was chosen because of its wide range of vegetation within a relatively small area, and hopefully a diverse range of birds. It proved to be an interesting site, despite the non-appearance of the Crested Shrike-tits. Birds not seen easily elsewhere in the Wet Tropics such as Little Lorikeets, Fuscous Honeyeater and White-naped Honeyeater were all seen. Total species count was 52, but more importantly five sites were atlased which probably have not been done very often, if at all in this current Atlas.

## NSW, SA & VIC, Nov 99 - Jan 00- Jan

### England

This was to be a preliminary run in my new campervan in preparation for my round Australia trip on retirement in June 2000. I was aiming for Gluepot, the property owned by Birds Australia, which is in South Australia, 42 km north of Waikerie. Here I hoped to take part in the Black-eared Miner project. I left Brisbane on the 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. The first night was planned for Pillaga Scrub, just south of Narrabri in New South Wales, a favourite birding area with many campsites at bores and dams. You need a forestry map of this area as it is full of logging tracks and one could easily get lost.

I arrived at Schwager's Bore, approx. 10 kms in from the main road during the afternoon. It had been raining during the past week but on inquiring at the local service station in Narrabri, they assured me the roads should be okay. Unfortunately it rained heavily during the night and next morning when I went to leave, I drove about 4 feet and sank to the axles on one side. Despite testing out the 4WD transmission, digging out around the wheels (which only filled up with water when it poured half an hour later), I could not budge my new van.

With a HELP notice on my chair out on the road to attract attention, 4 enthusiastic young fellows arrived during the afternoon to offer assistance but to no avail. They promised to notify the NRMA in Narrabri and left me there to my own devices. Later a young couple arrived - her father was a birdo and her husband was looking for study sites for his PhD. After ensuring I had plenty of food and water, they left promising to pass on a message in Baradine to the south.

Night fell and despite the rather obvious lean to one side, I had a good night's sleep. Morning dawned and I woke to a bright sunny day. After breakfast, I went for a walk around the area, realising I would have to stay close to camp in case some help arrived. I had just seen a group of babblers and was trying to get a better look when, I heard a car. Damn - I needed more time to follow up these birds. Hearing my name called (who could know my name); I walked out of the bush to see a policeman and a SES volunteer. How embarrassing! I explained that I had sent a message for the NRMA, not the Police but they explained that the NRMA had neither the vehicle nor equipment to be of assistance. The young couple had pushed a note under the Police Office door explaining my plight and saying that there was no emergency as I had plenty of food and water.

After several attempts to dig me out and winching me sideways, they eventually pulled the van free. I apologised profusely but they were very obliging and said they had nothing better to do on a Sunday morning! So I set off, deciding it was a good idea to leave the area. The most interesting birds seen here were Painted Button-quail, White-eared, Striped and White-plumed HE's, Plum-headed Finch, Red-capped Robin, Speckled Warbler and White-browed Babbler.

I set out for Round Hill Nature Reserve west of Parkes, a site for Red-lored Whistler. Drove in on a track about 1 km south of the railway line to a campsite. It was still damp so I was rather wary of driving too far off the road. Red-capped Robins were nesting and Black Honeyeaters were in abundance but no response to the tape of the Red-lored Whistler. The temperature dropped to 4 degrees overnight. Other birds seen were White-fronted HE, Red-browed Pardalote, Western Gerygone and Splendid Fairy-wren.

Next morning I drove north over the railway line and then east for about 2 1/2 kms. Played the tape again for Red-lored Whistler but no response. Continued north towards Mt. Hope, on an extremely rough gravel road. Next time I will take the tracks along the railway line, as I'm sure they will

come out south of Mt. Hope and eliminate this stretch of road. Headed south towards Goolgowi as I was going to visit Pullentop NR. However, the local service station owner did not know of the Reserve, so after driving 26 km east and not finding any reference to it, I turned around and headed south-west for Hay.

I arrived about 4 pm and enquired at the Visitor Information Centre where they told me about their wonderful FREE hot showers, FABULOUS wetlands and FREE camping beside the Murrumbidgee River. What a bonanza this place turned out to be! The Wetlands were really the sewerage works - but who cares when the birding is great! There is easy access to two large ponds with reeds most of the way around them. I lost count of the number of Baillons Crakes I saw within 10 feet of where I stood.

The birding was so good I decided I would go back again next morning before I left Hay. I saw a total of 60 different species at the Wetlands and added 6 species to their list held at the Visitor Centre. ! Good bird sightings were Black-tailed Native Hen, Hoary-headed Grebe, Australian Shelduck, Spotted, Spotless and Baillon's Crakes and Zebra Finch. The campsite beside the Murrumbidgee River was beautiful with the sun setting over the water right beside the van. If going around Australia was going to be like this, then I was in for something special!

Next stop was Mildura where I stayed at a Caravan Park, my first town campsite with electricity. I thought I was back in Africa when I heard a lion roar, but it was from the zoo next door. After only being back from Africa for about 3 weeks, it felt a bit close for comfort. My van was running very well and I was getting good fuel consumption, up to 9 km/litre sitting on 95-100 kph.

Headed for Waikerie where you get a key for Gluepot from the Shell Service Station for \$10 deposit. This lets you through the various gates along the way. Met some people at the Service Station who were going there to do a malleefowl survey for the weekend. Bought some groceries and headed off to Gluepot. Signed in at the shed where you collect maps and information and then continued to the homestead where I met Duncan McKenzie and Wendy who are both on the Board of Managers of Gluepot (Wendy is Treasurer). Most of the people on the Board volunteer a lot of their time working at Gluepot. Gluepot has no paid staff and only the Rangers get a monthly food allowance. Their services are also voluntary.

Continued out to Babbler campsite where the group doing the Malleefowl survey was camping.

The area is well set up with 2 toilets and individual campsites laid out with logs. The survey was being organised by an orienteering group from Adelaide with the assistance of some members of SAOA (Sth Australian Ornithological Assn.). They were working in 1 km grids across an area in the Restricted Access zone, mapping malleefowl nests. (TO BE CONTINUED NEXT CONTACT CALL).

## SIGHTINGS



Nov 8<sup>th</sup> - **Little Curlew** at Lockhart River, Cape York - **Hillary Thompson**.

Dec 4<sup>th</sup> - 1 **Red-rumped Swallow** perched on fence at Cairns Airport (photographed) - Keith Fisher.

Dec 5<sup>th</sup> - 2 **Sooty Oystercatcher** at Taylor Point north of Cairns - Dawn and Arnold Magarry.

Dec 10<sup>th</sup> **Mangrove Golden Whistler** at the Lockhart River Mouth, Cape York - Brian Venables.

Dec 12<sup>th</sup> - 1 adult **Red Goshawk** at Granite Creek, north of Marlborough - Del Richards (see report page ).

Dec 22<sup>nd</sup> - **Barn Swallow** O'Briens Hill NW of Innisfail - Del Richards.

Dec 27<sup>th</sup> - **Beach Stone-curlew**, Kewarra Beach, Cairns - Ian Cowan.

Dec 27<sup>th</sup> - **Spotted Whistling Duck** - 2 at Point Sewage Treatment Plant (Weipa) - Michael Barnett (See Weipa report page )

Dec 27<sup>th</sup> - While conducting an Atlas count at 18.00 at Kings Beach, Bowen, Qld.(20.00.00S 148.15.45E), Jon Wren found the sky alive with a large feeding flock of **Fork-tailed Swifts** which he estimated was 400+

Jan 1<sup>st</sup> - 1 **Brown Songlark** at Giru (south of Townsville), engaged in song flights - Glenn Holmes

Jan 6<sup>th</sup> - **Beach Stone-curlew**, 11km north of Palm Cove, beach beside Cook Hwy. - Ian Cowan

Jan 7<sup>th</sup> - 21 **Barn Swallows** at Newell Beach, they have been present from mid-October - Keith Fisher ( See Dels report page )

Jan 8<sup>th</sup> - **Asian Dowitcher** Cairns Esplanade, had been here for at least the previous two weeks. Also present was a **Cattle Egret** in partial breeding plumage (very unusual location), it was in company with **Little, Intermediate and Great Egret** which gave a good size comparison, it was also looking a little lost! - Keith and Lindsay Fisher

Jan 8<sup>th</sup> - 1 **Great-billed Heron**, Clifton Beach, Cairns - Ian Cowan.

Jan 12<sup>th</sup> - 1 **Sacred Kingfisher** at Port Douglas - early return - Del Richards. 1<sup>st</sup> one in Cairns seen 18<sup>th</sup> Jan, this bird was very blue and looked almost like a Forest Kingfisher, I had seen one in similar plumage several years ago in sw WA - Keith Fisher.

Jan 18<sup>th</sup> - **Southern + Common Cicadabirds**, Tinaroo Falls alternating territorial calls in response to each other (more proof of specific status) - Glenn Holmes

Jan 19<sup>th</sup> - 3 **White-eared Monarchs** Rex Range, south of Mossman (normally winter) - Del Richards

Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> - 4 **Black Bitterns** at Reed Beds Rd, in the paper bark swamp adjacent to the Cromarty Wetlands to the south of Townsville - Ian Clayton.

Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> - Ian Clayton reports that the pair of **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** that bred successfully near Paluma last year, were seen again by Bob Murphy. The juvenile bird is still with the adults and appears to be a male.

Jan 26<sup>th</sup> - 1 **Barn Swallow** was seen at Toomulla Beach to the north of Townsville. The bird was seen roosting on beach washed tree branches near the creek mouth along with quite a few Welcome Swallows.

Jan 29<sup>th</sup> - 2 **Papuan Frogmouth** with chick, Edge Hill, Cairns suburb - Keith and Lindsay Fisher.

Jan 31<sup>st</sup> - **White-gaped Honeyeater**, Spruce's Crossing nr. Proserpine - Glenn Holmes

Jan 31<sup>st</sup> - **Southern Cicadabird** bottom of range below Paluma, 100m asl (showing virtual total altitudinal overlap with **Common Cicadabird** - Glenn Holmes

Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> - 33+ **Red-rumped Swallow**, perched on powerlines on the Lower Freshwater Road, Cairns, there were 9 present on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 18 there on the 9<sup>th</sup> - Keith Fisher

Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> - Mt Molloy area, 2 active **Black-throated Finch** nests, Nesting **Grey Crowned Babbler** and Juvenile **Rufous Whistler**. At Kingfisher Park, Julatten, Juvenile **Brush-cuckoo** being fed by **Brown-backed Honeyeater**, **Bush-hens** with two chicks, 2 **Red-necked Crake** with chicks also a **Southern Cassowary** approx 7 kms up the Mt Lewis road.- Mr & Mrs Stig Peterson from Sweden via Ron Stannard.

11<sup>th</sup> Feb - An Immature **Dollarbird** constantly calling from the top of a dead tree on Redden Island, Cairns. Very yellow gape and pale colouration - Keith Fisher.

11<sup>th</sup> Feb - 1 **Great-billed Heron** calling from the mangroves on Redden Creek near the road bridge to Redden Island. It sounded like a dog barking with a sore throat! - Keith Fisher

12<sup>th</sup> Feb - Lower Freshwater Road, Cairns, Immature and adult **Crimson Finch** which I've seen regularly here. Also a **Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** which are not so common in Cairns. - Keith Fisher

Feb 14<sup>th</sup> - A daytime road kill of a **Grass Owl** at the Mowbray River south of Port Douglas - Del Richards.

Feb 14<sup>th</sup> - Two **House Swifts** at Oak Beach south of Port Douglas among many **Fork-tailed Swifts**. The base of the coastal range between Cairns and Mossman is good for swifts in the Wet. Other personal **House Swift** records here include Wangetti and Trinity Beach. Records elsewhere include Atherton and Mt Molloy.

They were so low overhead that the blackish underparts, compared to the more greyish scaled appearance of FTS, could be seen clearly.

I find HS usually by prolonged scanning of FTS flocks. The HS is of course smaller to even the naked eye. With optical aids the more robust appearance, especially the relatively heavy tail, should be noted. - Glenn Holmes. (see also David James report page 6).

Feb 16<sup>th</sup> - 2 immature **Pacific Baza** floundering around in the woodland of Redden Island, Cairns. They were having trouble landing and ended upside down on several occasions. Thin weedy breast bands on the edges of the breast with the body and wing feathers heavily fringed light brown. - Keith Fisher.

Feb 19<sup>th</sup> - **Gouldian Finch**, Chillagoe district, behaviour indicated nesting likely - Glenn Holmes.

Feb 20<sup>th</sup> - One **Oriental Cuckoo**, Eureka Ck. West of Dimbulah, heptic morph - Glenn Holmes.

Feb 20<sup>th</sup> - (week of) **Crested Pigeon**, expanding range to Lakes Drive Yungaburra on the Atherton Tableland - Elinor Scambler.

Feb 26<sup>th</sup> - One **Radjah Shelduck** looking lost, standing on the hockey oval at the far northern end of Cairns Esplanade (Lake Street) with 30+ **Masked Lapwings** - uncommon in Cairns - Keith Fisher.

Feb 29<sup>th</sup> - 3 **Bridled**, 2 **Roseate**, 10+ **Crested**, 12 **Lesser Crested** and 1-2 **Little Terns** on Tinaroo Waters after cyclone Steve - Glenn Holmes and Jack Leighton.

Mar 4<sup>th</sup> - At last the Fishers saw a **Red-bellied Pitta**, at the jnc. of Somerset & Pajinka Roads, Cape York. Also of interest were **Pied Imperial Pigeons** on migration - est 800-1200 heading north per minute (30min period). **Dollarbirds & Rainbow Bee-eaters** also migrating.

Mar 5<sup>th</sup> - **Black Bittern & White-gaped Honeyeater**, Gunpowder 130km NW of Mt. Isa, also at this location **Pheasant Coucal & House Sparrow** have expanded their range into this area - Sue & John O'Malley & Bob Forsyth.

Sue & John O'Malley also report a new site for **Dusky Grasswren**, 20km north of Mt. Isa off the Cammoweal rd. on a road to two communication towers.

Mar 6<sup>th</sup> - Ian Cowan picked up a dead **Grey-headed Robin** in Cairns at Upward Street outside Flecker House in the city. He did not reckon it was a cyclone victim, as it looked too fresh, was a bit pongy but he didn't think it was 8 days old.

**Note:** - None of these sightings have been verified please check with the observer before quoting them.

Thanks to all the contributors to the sightings column

## WHAT' ELSE HAS BEEN HAPPENING?

### CAIRNS ESPLANADE NEWS Keith Fisher



An agreement between the Cairns City Council and traditional landholders the Yirrganydji people and the Gimny clan of the Yidinji has cleared another hurdle for the redevelopment of the Esplanade. The federal government has also indicated that it may supply funding for the project, which is \$7million short of the required funding. Tenders for the reclamation works and sand supply are currently being evaluated and a decision on the successful tenderer has been made.

### HALLORANS HILL CONSERVATION PARK

#### Ian Sinclair

A public meeting was held recently in Atherton to discuss the future management of this Conservation Park. Currently this park suffers from serious weed invasion, inappropriate siting of walking tracks and a general lack of care by the surrounding landowners. Atherton Shire Council are aware of the attractions of the park, and are keen to revitalise this park. Several BA members attended, and Glen Holmes and myself are now involved in assisting the ASC to prepare a funding application. The council has also engaged consultants to develop a site management plan, and Glen, other locals, and myself were asked to comment on this plan. The site management plan has been integrated with the activities of the local Wet Tropics Tree Planting crew who have done tree planting in a number of areas of Atherton.

Hallorans Hill Conservation Park is a wonderful spot for some birdwatching (despite the problems), and Glen has recorded over 150 species in the immediate area. It is hoped Council is successful in obtaining funding, to make it a more pleasant area for locals and tourists alike. So if you are on the tablelands look in on this conservation park or join the field trip on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May.

## COUNTS

### CAIRNS WADER COUNTS



The next Cairns wader count time is set out below. If you would like to participate in them please contact Grahame Finnigan: Work ph. 4052 3965, Home ph 4055 6139

Month	Date	Esplanade Time	Boat Time	Airport Time
April	Sun 2 <sup>nd</sup>	0754	0700	0754

For the airport counts contact Keith Fisher.

## TOWNSVILLE NEWS from Jo Wieneke

### INDIAN PEAFOWL IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

In HANZAB Vol 2 (1993) there were no records of Indian Peafowl in North Queensland. Around Townsville and on Magnetic Island there are now feral populations, which have been established for many years. If you know of any other populations on the coast further north or on the Tableland please contact Jo Wieneke. If possible we'd like to know where they are, how long they have been established and how many birds - but any information will be welcome.

### BOWEN NEWS from Jon Wren

We had two Wedge-tailed Eagle strikes at Abbot Point. One with a train (involving me) and the other by a vehicle. I'm in the process of writing a letter to MIM at Abbot Point and asking them if they could regularly clear carcasses from the road as there are numerous wallabies hit along this 15 Km section of road, which in turn attract the eagles.

### WEIPA NEWS from Michael Barnett

#### UNIDENTIFIED RAPTOR

Michael's mystery bird from the last Contact Call has been identified as a Collared Sparrowhawk.

#### SPOTTED WHISTLE-DUCKS ETC.

(Michael and Sue Gould both sent reports on the Spotted Whistle-Ducks around Weipa. Sue alerted Michael to their presence on Trunding Creek. This is Michael's report with extra comments from Sue).

Sue Gould e-mailed me early last week letting me know that while she and Rod Thorn were out on a mountain bike on the weekend of 30-31<sup>st</sup> Jan.) they had come across a small flock of about 10 Spotted Whistling Ducks at the Cool Pool on Trunding Creek. While riding on 5<sup>th</sup> Feb with a group of others (non-birders) we also came across them at the same location. The flock seemed oblivious to us and the calls being made as we splashed through the crossing. I went back this morning with my scope and took some photographs. I later learned that Sue and Rod had been there not long before me doing the same thing. It was much nicer to see the ducks and watch their behaviour in a natural setting rather than on the sewage ponds. They were also a lot less flighty. On the 30<sup>th</sup> January Sue observed eight ducks roosting in branches of a *Melaleuca leucadendron* overhanging the water and another two together in the water. Only 2 of the ducks have been seen regularly on the sewage ponds this year. On a ride with Sue and Rod last wet season we came across 4 ducks in a flooded section of the regeneration orchard.

Mid January, while riding past the spot where we saw a Great-billed Heron, I came across a set of croc tracks across the road. This was near the car park to the boardwalk at the Uningan Nature Reserve. The tracks were heading away from this area. After leaving the bike in the car park I headed off into the mangroves along the boardwalk. After crossing the bridge over the creek in the mangroves, a Great-billed Heron started calling close by and occasionally bill clacking. Even though I know that crocs don't make calls and that Great-billed Heron's are sometimes called croc-birds I still couldn't help feeling nervous. The bird was calling almost continuously while I was there walking the tracks (almost 2 hours).

Closer to home, I've found my first Mistletoebirds nest. I was watching both the male and female birds constructing the nest at the end of January. Less than 20m away along the back of a strip of mangroves I found a newly constructed Striated Herons nest occupied by 2 very young chicks.

As I sit at the computer typing this, it's raining and I can occasionally hear Palm Cockatoos calling from down along the shore. Their numbers seem to be increasing around the town, a flock of 7 was regularly seen around the middle of last year.

## INTERESTING PLACES

### GREEN ISLAND - Keith Fisher

Green Island ( 17° 02' 35"S 145° 30' 56"E - reading taken from end of jetty near resort), is 27km east north east of Cairns and the trip out by boat takes 50mins. James Cook named the island after the astronomer on board the Endeavour, Mr. Charles Green. By the mid 1880's Beche-de-mer fishermen began operations on the island building huts and gradually denuding the island of vegetation for their smokehouses. Today's vegetation is all regrowth since that time in the late 1800's.

Marker posts on the approach to the jetty make good perching spots for Lesser Crested, Crested, Sooty and Black-naped Terns. There is also an Ospreys nest here and when the Ospreys are absent the nest is taken over by terns. I have seen Sooty and Black-naped nesting together in this Ospreys nest both with chicks. As you walk towards the resort to the left of the jetty are marker buoys for the swimming area, look out for Black-naped and Bridled Terns perched here. The casuarina trees at the rear of the beach are sometimes home to Black Noddies if you are lucky. On the right hand side a wooden breaker extends from the beach out to sea and provides perching for various terns as well as the occasional Sooty Oystercatchers. Walk through the resort avoiding the numerous House Sparrows and keep an eye out for Reef Egrets, Whimbrels and Silveryeyes foraging around the adjacent vegetation. Head past Marineland Melanesia and into the section of the island, which is a National Park, and away from most of the people, take one of the paths to the left onto the beach and walk along the beach. At the far end of the island, at low tide, the rocks and old coral are exposed, look here for waders. I've seen Wandering Tattler here as well as Grey-tailed Tattler, Ruddy Turnstone, Lesser Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Lesser and Greater Sandplovers. Both Grey and White phase Reef Egrets are along here and are quite approachable if you want to photograph them. Also a Beach Stone-curlew has been present here during Jan/Feb. this year. Continuing around the point you may see a White-bellied Sea eagle, this nests, in this area. In the summer (wet season), Pied Imperial Pigeons and Rose-crowned Fruit Doves nest in the forest but are more often heard than seen. From here you can continue on around the beach back to the jetty or cut back to the resort via a track on the left through the forest. Some other species I have seen on the island include Greater and Lesser Frigatebirds, Silver Gull, Little Tern, Emerald Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Pheasant Coucal, Sacred Kingfisher, Dollarbird, Dusky Honeyeater, Black-faced Monarch, White-breasted Woodswallow and Yellow-bellied Sunbird. For a small Island (12 hectares) it has a wide variety of sea, shore and bush birds and provides an enjoyable day out.

## BIRD IDENTIFICATION & OBSERVATIONS

### SWALLOWS AT MOSSMAN-Del Richards

Barn Swallows have been more active this year and seem to have a wider distribution with regular sightings over cane fields in local areas not noted before. First arrival was 13<sup>th</sup> October and the main body of birds arrived about a week later with a flock on lines at North Mossman on 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct. of 45 birds. Upon arrival many are in moult, unusual when they have undertaken such a long journey. Many southern observers are very much impressed to see the swallows in top plumage condition looking almost black and white with the dark rusty throat barely discernible and only after viewing for sometime. Much darker than the field guides tell us.

Phil Gregory and I observed the first Red-rumps locally on 18<sup>th</sup> November near Newell Beach. This year they were mostly observed along the Rex Highway south of Mossman with numbers peaking on 26<sup>th</sup> December at 22 birds. Sightings were generally sporadic and I suspect that the major part of the flock moved on to another location with only a few left by mid-February. (may have moved to Cairns, see sightings P5).

### REPEATED USE OF NEST SIGHT-DEL RICHARDS

In a drier area near Saltwater Creek, north of Mossman, Large-billed Gerygones have built their nests around the same tree for at least five years! A small mangrove overhung with a "woody" creeper serves as an ideal location for them. On this creeper there is the evidence of the remains of five previous nests within a space of 2.8m with all the nest remains less than 1.6m off the ground. The gerygones must feel very secure as well as being successful, to use the site so many times.

## **BEACH STONE-CURLEW-Keith Fisher**

The pair of Beach Stone-curlew at the Cairns airport (reported in Dec Contact Call) hatched out a chick on the 19th Dec., after an incubation period of 33 days. The chick has survived and after nine weeks was almost the same size as its parents. The chick has stayed in the general area of the nest, not moving more than 100m away. On 17<sup>th</sup> February there was a total of 11 Beach Stone-curlew at Cairns Airport - not sure where they had all flown in from!

## **BEWARE OF SWIFT IDENTIFICATION**

**David James**

On the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> December 1999 while birding at Cunggulla (mouth of the Haughton River, about 40 km S of Townsville, north Qld), I came across a flock of several thousand Fork-tailed Swifts. It was difficult to be sure how many there were, but a few dense swarms amalgamated and dispersed and from what I could see they were stretched at least 2km long and 1 km wide. I first saw them at about 10:20 and they were still around the same location at 12:50. Maybe 1-2,000 is the best estimate.

Birders seem to be reporting vagrant swifts/swiftlets all over the place these days so I spent well over an hour scrutinising this lot, searching for odd things. And I found a few...

One or two White-throated Needletails stood out as chunkier, short squaretails, grey backs and white vents. Hardly surprising to see them, I've seen a few small groups in this general area lately. But you know it's the first time I've ever seen these 2 species together.

More interesting (to me) was the handful of slim swifts with dark vents and white rumps (like Fork-tailed Swifts) but with short squarish tails.

Candidate House Swifts perhaps? Certainly not! These were fork-tailed swifts in tail moult and wing moult. Quite a few had "moult gaps" (missing feathers) in the outer primaries, and in the secondaries. Some had tails a bit shorter than usual with only a shallow fork, some had tails very short and apparently square (when fanned). This is to be expected in December and January when Fork-tailed swifts are in full moult. The moult changes the flight dynamics just a tad, and the moulting birds flap more and glide less.

Important features, which defined these birds as Fork-taileds, were the scaly grey underbody and underwing coverts, and the clouded demarcation between the white throat and the underbody.

I've seen this situation a few times now, most recently at the Pascoe River on Cape York, 12-12-99.

With the spate of reported House Swifts in recent years, I can't help but wonder how many might be referable to moulting Fork-tails, and how many observers have considered this possibility?

## **MUTANT BLUE-FACED HONEYEATER**

**Del Richards**

Whilst staying at Mt. Louisa, a Townsville suburb recently, I heard a number of Blue-faced Honeyeaters calling loudly as they "mobbed" another species which upon investigation was an immature Dollarbird. Amongst the honeyeaters was one bird whose normal rich above body and tail colour was a very pale yellow/green. I don't believe that it was a young bird - the normal two tone blue on the skin of the facial area was whitish with the overall head colour grey - where black is the normal. I think perhaps it is the first mutant honeyeater that I have observed and it's behaviour was typical with in a flock situation.

## **MIMICRY OF SPOTTED BOWERBIRD - Sue**

**and John O'Malley in Mt. Isa**

Sue was out a week ago walking the dog, and observed a Spotted Bowerbird for about 10 minutes. The bird flew into a tree that I was standing under, just 5 ft above my head. I could see it quite clearly. Within a few seconds it began to give vent to a repertoire of mimicry that completely amazed me. At first I heard a cat miaowing, then a dog barking, running water, the noise of machinery in a work shop, the sweeping of a carpet with a broom, the call of a corella and other bird noises, in particular honey eaters.

I watched in disbelief, looking around me to see firstly if there was a cat nearby then for a dog. I was in the middle of a small park and completely surrounded by trees. The bird was unperturbed at my presence or the presence of my dog. It stood still on the thin branch it clung to and turning

around to get a better view all I could see moving was its throat pouch. After a few minutes it lifted itself up the branches and flew to an adjacent tree in which time the calls ceased but as soon as it gained a perch the mimicry resumed.

I thought this was rather interesting. Has anyone else heard of Spotted Bowerbird doing this?

## **MT. ISA SEWAGE PONDS- Sue and John**

**O'Malley**

At the Isa Sewage ponds recently we saw 7-10 Wood Sandpipers as well as observing three Swinhoe's Snipe which were the main interest.

The ponds at present have abundant numbers of Grey Teal; Pink-eared Ducks; Hardheads (Aust. Pochards), Australasian Grebe, and one lone Hoary-headed Grebe. Several Royal Spoonbills, a few Pelicans, Common Sandpipers, Black-fronted Dotterels, and many other species. Looks like it is going to keep us busy. Reed Warblers are present, as well as Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (can't turn them into Pectorals, I wish). Who knows what will turn up when the Waders head back to Asia and beyond, come March

## **PATIENT PARENTS-Del Richards**

A pair of Wompoo Fruit-Doves has been sitting on the same nest (about seven sticks) above the Rex Highway south of Mossman for at least 35 days. This seems most unusual, normally if the species loses their egg from their scanty nests (which would never pass council building codes!) they immediately abort breeding. When many of the fruit-doves breed I am surprised that most of them are able to even 'change' shifts without dislodging the egg which must often happen

## **RED GOSHAWK-Del Richards**

Whilst travelling the Bruce Highway, north of Marlborough in December, I was able to observe an adult Red Goshawk perched close to the road. The size of the species impressed me, as it had been about 20 years since my last observation. The general area was cleared areas of grassland bounded by typical eucalypt forest, with higher mountain areas to the west. Considering their preference for lorikeets as a food source, the area would have served them well. Nearly everyone who travels this stretch of the Bruce Highway is mostly in a hurry to get to somewhere else (as I am always), so maybe it is one of those areas that has not been given the (scientific) study it deserves.

## **THE CARPENTARIAN GRASSWREN**

**Amytornis dorotheae - John O'Malley**

On Tuesday, the 01/02/2000 Bob Forsyth and myself went to an area (well known by some), 60km north of Mt. Isa off the Camooweal road. We arrived around 0945hrs. With clear blue skies, and high humidity (it felt like a storm was brewing, but it came to nothing later). There was a slight breeze coming in from the NE and the temperature must have been up around the 35C already.

Bob parked the truck carefully, and proceeded to tell me that some folk have camped for days and seen nothing. I said, "that's fine I come with no expectations, it will be good to see the habitat the birds are in". Bob then set off, with me in train, straight up a gully.

We scoured one creek and it's environs to no avail, it was now about 1035hrs. I was still cheerful, if less than cool in the heat. Bob took it all in his stride. After some more "hunting" and lots of valuable information from Bob on the bird's habits, we trudged up another creek going approx. west from the road (roughly N—S).

Still no sign of the bird, but I'm not unduly perturbed, Bob had said that sometimes you never see it. Bob turns at this point and says, "I have a favourite spot, but we will have to wait until near sunset". Can I last til then I wonder?

Suddenly Bob walks out of the creek over a rise, to a high flat area, and takes his backpack off. Just as he sets it down, we hear the high metallic ring of a Grasswren alarm call. I see a bird down in the creek edge, and call out softly, "there it is". Bob responds, "got it, there are at least two". So we quickly follow their progress up the dried out creek bed.

We spent from about 1045hrs. to 1135hrs. following the birds (only two), we checked for sex differences. One had the rufous flanks and one didn't, so we assume we were following a mated pair. The birds would hop or walk, for 10mtrs. or so, then check with each other via a piped single call.

I was fortunate enough to have my DV1 Panasonic digital video camera with me (always try to take it for possible shots). I used to use a 35mm camera but with moving targets, lighting etc. they are relatively useless, and I believe the flashing upsets the birds too much. With the videoing movement is easy and lighting is reasonable, plus the birds don't mind.

Anyway, after following, and videoing the birds for approx. 45min. we decided to give them a rest (and me).

What did we observe?

The birds were very confiding, as long as we were quiet, moved slowly, and gave them a 15-25mtr. space as we followed them. At no time (after the first alarm call), did they seem distressed. Bob was and is very protective of these beautiful birds, and has rocked up much vehicle access areas to help them.

The whole time we followed the birds they stuck to the creek bed. Only occasionally did they venture over land as a short cut (cutting corners), to the creek bed again. Bob says that he has never seen them stay in the creek like this before. Usually he views them about 2mtrs. above the creek bed, hopping or walking between bushes (mainly Spinifex).

They could have been wary of us, but they didn't seem stressed, or upset in any way. Toward the end of our trek up the creek, we noted some interesting behaviour. The male bird moved 2mtrs. or thereabouts up the creek bank, and started searching the bushes, I was lucky enough to video him killing a possible skink, (or whatever), he then grabbed it and fled. His method of killing was to swing the item back and forth to break its back, and probably to tenderise it. All and all it was a wonderful experience, and we hope it will help to enhance our knowledge of a delightful member of a precious family of birds.

Bob's goal now is to obtain a feather so that it can be sent for DNA testing, to determine the possibility of a new Grasswren species.

PS. While we are on the subject of grasswrens the naming of the Isa Dusky (*Amytornis ballarae*), in some journals was done by whom? The Kalkadoon G-w. What a politically perfect name, but so ridiculous. There are actually 4 tribes of Aborigines in the area the bird inhabits. Bob's suggestion is the Selwyn G-w., because it inhabits the Selwyn Range area. A much better alternative I think. I personally would like to see it named for Horton, (the guy who first found it here), Horton's Grasswren.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS FOR OUR REGION

Mr D Grover, Townsville: Ms Carol Honey, Mackay: Ms Judy Kellaway, Townsville: Mr Malcolm McDonald, Cairns: Ms Ceri Pearce, Kuranda: Master Kyle Pearce, Kuranda: Mr Robert Radnell, Cooktown: Mrs Sue Sheppard, Cape York: Ms Rita Sinclair, Atherton: Master Stephen Weight, Oonoonba, Townsville: Mary Yeates, Kuranda:

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

## FOR SALE

If anyone has anything relating to birding they would like to sell, send us your details and we will put it into the for sale column, room permitting. Items such as books, optics, paintings or recording gear come to mind.

## SOUND RECORDING GEAR FOR SALE

Sony Walkman Professional WM-D6C with case, instruction booklet and leads for tape-to-tape - AKG D190E Microphone with case and adaptor for tripod - Headphones - Fisher collapsible parabolic reflector with wind muffler

All items in good condition, about 7 years old but scarcely used for past 5 years due to other commitments. Price - make me an offer, for individual items or the lot.

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: [simon.grove@jcu.edu.au](mailto:simon.grove@jcu.edu.au) Alternative tel. (JCU, CRC laboratory) 4042 1242

## CAR STICKER

Birds Australia North Queensland Group car sticker, featuring a Pied Imperial Pigeon on a tropical green back ground are now available, help promote BA-NQG. They cost \$2.50 each or two for \$4.50 plus postage. They will be available on field trips and from the secretary. We are very grateful to Cathy James, graphic designer with EPA, for her design and also Jo Weineke for organising them.

## ACCOMODATION

### Fern Gully Bird Lodge

Rainforest holiday home - Bird list of 125 species.

Only 12km from Cairns

Phone: (07) 4058 1313

[www.ferngully.net](http://www.ferngully.net)

### Rose Gums Wilderness Retreat

Private self-contained timber chalets with spa, fireplace and spectacular mountain views - Great birdwatching (150+ Species) - Look for specialities such as Blue-faced Parrot-finch, Red-backed Button-quail, Lesser Sooty Owl, Victoria's Riflebird and King Parrot.

Land Road, Butchers Creek, Near Malanda  
on the Atherton Tablelands.

Phone (07) 4096 8360

Web Site: [WWW.rosegums.com.au](http://WWW.rosegums.com.au)

### LOTUS BIRD LODGE

Cape York Peninsula - 250 species of birds,

Lakefield National Park -

Golden-shouldered Parrot area.

Ensuite cottages - verandahs, licensed restaurant, lagoons, walking and 4WD tours by resident naturalists.

Phone: 4059 0773 Fax: 4059 0703

[www.cairns.aust.com/lotusbird](http://www.cairns.aust.com/lotusbird)

## NOTICES

Please send items for Contact Call to the Newsletter editor Keith Fisher at: P O Box 2209, Cairns Qld 4870 or email : [lkfisher@north.net.au](mailto:lkfisher@north.net.au)

Contact Call is available on email let us know if you would like it sent this way and which format eg: Word6, Word97 or RTF.

Views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Birds Australia but are those of the author

## 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.