



Birds Australia

Contact Call

Birds Australia

North Queensland Group

June 2000 • Issue: Hardhead

BEACH STONE-CURLEW SURVEY 1/4/ 2000 - Amanda Freeman

The Beach Stone-curlew survey on April 1st was tremendously successful. Eighty-five volunteers including NatureSearchers, Birds Australia and other bird group members, local residents and thirty-five students and staff from the School for Field Studies Centre for Rainforest Studies in Yungaburra turned out to survey sections of coast. In total 180km of coastline between the Daintree River and the Tully River were surveyed. Additional areas were also surveyed at Weary Bay and on beaches near Ingham.

Thirty-eight Beach Stone-curlews were recorded on the day. This is not a large number and reflects the low densities at which the species occurs. The number compares favourably, however, with other counts that have been made (eg 67 Beach Stone-curlews sighted during helicopter surveys of the much longer Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York Peninsula coastlines) and confirms the importance of the Wet Tropics beaches for Beach Stone-curlew in Queensland. The data collected on April 1st concerning the number of Beach Stone-curlews and the beaches that they occur on forms a baseline against which we can monitor Beach Stone-curlew numbers and distribution in future years.

Two students from the School for Field Studies are constructing a GIS (Geographic Information System) of the April 1st Beach Stone-curlew survey that will be used to map the bird's distribution and relate it to factors such as habitat and disturbance levels. Ongoing records of Beach Stone-curlews can also be added to the GIS so we have a continually updated system that stores, displays and with which we can analyse Beach Stone-curlew information for the Wet Tropics.

Thanks to everyone who took part on April 1st

(Please keep sending in your sightings of BSC to help us with this ongoing project - thanks)

STOP PRESS: A new breeding record for Australia? - see Weipa News page 6

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EVENTS CALENDAR

June Sat. 10th - Mon. 12th Annual General Get-together (Fun Weekend) - Tinaroo Environmental Ed. Centre (Atherton Tableland). Costs are \$6 a person per night if you have your own tent or you can hire a tent for extra \$10 per night (let John Clarkson know a week in advance). Day visitors \$4 per person. This gives us use of the grounds, toilets, and the kitchen. Canoes are available at \$10 each per day. Talks & walks are being organised - see enclosed flyer. Contact John Clarkson or Ian Sinclair. (This is a non-election year for committee positions so don't be shy in coming along).

June 25th Sun. - Redden Island Count (Cairns). Meet at 8am, Cinderella St, Machins Beach - the entrance before the toilet block - contact Keith Fisher

July 9th Sun. Dimbulah, Petford & Irvinebank circuit, west of Atherton Tablelands. Meet at the Information Centre car park at Mareeba at 7.30. There will be a car pool. This is a full days outing so bring lunch. - Contact Ian Sinclair.

July 22nd Sat. Mount Baldy, near Atherton - combined field trip with the Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group - see page 5 for details.

August 12th -13th Wallaman Falls campout (Ingham) contact Helen Dawson for details - Ph : 4777 2822

Aug 27th 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 9th-10th Windsor Tableland Campout - Contact Ian Sinclair.

Oct 7th Sat Crane Count on Atherton Tablelands - further details in Sept. CC

Oct 14th-18th Birds Australia Congress and campout Rockhampton Qld. More details in the June Wingspan.

Nov. 5th Sun - Atherton Tableland BOP watch - Contact Ian Sinclair.

December - Christmas Party

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

ANNUAL GENERAL GET-TOGETHER and AGM 10th - 12th JUNE SEE ENCLOSED FLYER

OFFICE BEARERS

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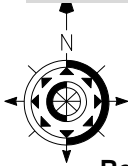
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PROJECT CONTACTS

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Gouldian Finch and Birds at Waterholes Survey
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Redden Island Survey (Cairns) Keith Fisher Ph (07) 4039 0972
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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
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Glen Holmes (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4091 4364
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Eric Sticklen (Atherton Tableland/Cape York) 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:-

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Jon Wren (Bowen/Ayr) ph: 07 4786 2614
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Marion Crouther (Mackay-west inc. Mt. Isa) ph: 07 4958 4613

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

TRIP REPORTS

CAIRNS ESPLANADE 19/3/00 - Keith Fisher

Wave the waders goodbye attracted 16 people, and provided an ideal opportunity for those not familiar with these migratory birds to learn identification features. A good variety of birds obligingly turned up as the tide receded; most evident was the large number of Grey-tailed Tattlers and Great Knot. Others present included, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew, Terek Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover, Lesser and Greater Sandplover, and Masked Lapwing. This gave those present the opportunity to compare and identify the many birds present before the majority headed north to the summer breeding grounds in northern China and Siberia. Once again the Cairns Esplanade provided great close up viewing of the waders.

CHILLAGOE -EASTER 2000 - Jan England

A small group of 6 members travelled to Chillagoe for the Easter holiday break. We had permission to camp on Chillagoe Station and this proved to be a great site with a beautiful flowing stream right on our doorstep (well Amanda & Alistair's' doorstep) and we were not subjected to the crowds which filled places like the Walsh River.

During the first afternoon we walked out around the back of the smelters where we saw **Bustard, Pied Currawong, Black-faced Woodswallow** and **Great Bowerbird**. **Blue-faced Honeyeaters** were very abundant in the area and at any other site we visited over the weekend.

On Saturday, we headed for the Muldiva Creek area hoping to see the elusive Gouldian Finch. While we saw a nice selection of birds including **Grey-crowned Babbler** and our only waterbird for the trip, a **White-faced Heron**, no finches other than **Double-bars** were sighted. However not far from the creek, we found a flowering bloodwood with **Bar-breasted** and **Banded Honeyeaters** in a feeding frenzy. It was interesting that all other bloodwoods sighted were still 1 -2 weeks away from flowering with buds ready to burst open. As the weather was very hot and dry, we couldn't wait to get back to our campsite to cool off in our wonderful swimming hole.

Late in the afternoon, we drove out to Royal Arch Cave to look for the Chillagoensis subspecies of **White-rumped Swiftlet**. When we arrived, the Swiftlets were circling and calling loudly and gradually descending closer to the rock. As we lay on the path (easier on our necks), we watched them disappear down through the top of the cave. While walking back to the car, **Brown Quail** were calling to one another from each side of the path.

Sunday was to be our tourist day visiting the caves. First we went to Trezkin; a well lit self-guiding cave set up in 1976. A National Park Ranger was there to point out the rules, collect our tickets, and answer questions. In the afternoon, the group visited Royal Arch cave. This cave had interesting daylight chambers connected by tunnels and a number of bats clinging to the ceiling. Later that afternoon, a few of us went on the 1 km walk to Balancing Rock. Two **Nankeen Kestrels** were perched high on the limestone escarpment calling to one another.

On Monday, we went to Nolans Creek, north of the Walsh River. As we crossed the Walsh and saw the large number of people camped along the river, out in the blazing sun, we were very thankful for our wonderful spot with its shade, cool breeze and swimming hole. At Nolans Creek, we searched for Gouldian's Finches as we walked upstream but without success.

On the way home, we took the road halfway into Nychum station and had lunch beside Dinner Creek. As we drove in, we saw a flock of 50+ **Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** roosting beside the road. A **Wedge-tailed Eagle** was sighted high in the sky on the way home.

While Ceri, Gloria and Kyle had gone home in the morning, her brother Lance and his family turned up in the afternoon and more than doubled our numbers. Late in the afternoon, Amanda and I again walked the track to Balancing Rock, leaving Alistair to hunt for reptiles. The two kestrels were still standing guard over their rock. Obviously no Peregrine Falcon was game to encroach on their territory! Around town, we made a special effort to check out the **Galahs** and found birds with both grey and pink eyerings. Hybrid birds occur in this area of Queensland. The Galahs were having a wonderful time cartwheeling around the power lines.

A special thanks is extended to Stephen Crossland who gave his permission for us to camp on Chillagoe Station. This campsite was voted the top spot in the district. Special thanks also to Amanda and Alistair who used their vehicle to transport us around the area. A total of 68 species were seen over the Easter period.

After the hot dry weather we had experienced at Chillagoe, it was rather a shock (or was it!) to get back to Cairns with its drenching rain. We had seen lightning in the south but had no idea that 4 inches of rain had fallen around Forsayth and that the Einasleigh River was raging below the bridge (reported by the Field Nats. who went to Georgetown).

HALLORANS HILL CONSERVATION PARK -

7/5/00 - Keith Fisher

Hallorans Hill is situated in the middle of Atherton and is accessed via a walking track starting in the picnic ground at the junction of Louise & Cook Street, next to the Atherton hospital. If anyone is visiting Atherton it's well worth spending a few hours walking to the top of the hill.

The walking track traverses rainforest and woodland. The vegetation along the first section of track has a problem with weeds, many of which looked like they had escaped out of nearby gardens. It's not all bad news though as a working group has been formed to address the problem of the weeds.

Interesting birds on the walk up, were White-throated Treecreeper, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey-headed Robin, and Varied Sittella. Raptors were most notable from the top of the hill with Square-tailed Kite, Spotted Harrier, and Black Kite in the bins at the same time! 2 Wedge-tailed Eagles also cruised by, as did a Brown Goshawk. All this and Elinor's excellent yummy muffins-too much! The total list was almost 50 species, which is not bad for the middle of Atherton. Thanks to Ian Sinclair for organising the morning.

ELLIE POINT, CAIRNS 14/5/2000 - Keith

Fisher

The Cairns Port Authority had given us permission to visit Ellie Point, which is situated on the coast in the wetlands around the Cairns Airport. 12 members and visitors came along and although the birdlife was not prolific we had some quality birds. The road out to Ellie Point traverses mixed mangrove and sand ridge communities - this is a remnant community within the Trinity Inlet.

Whilst looking out for birds, we diversified into plant and insect watching (especially sandflies!), ending up with 35 species of birds along the road and on the beach, for the morning. The highlights were, a sub-adult White-bellied Sea-Eagle gliding by at tree top level, 3 Beach Stone-curlews resting on Ellie Point at the back of the beach, another flew off the beach at the end of the road and a Grey Goshawk, which soared over heading north towards Redden Island. The Grey Goshawk was a new species for this location.

We enjoyed the opportunity to go to an area not normally accessible to the public and thank the Cairns Port Authority for allowing us to visit the area.

(Part 2 continued from March Contact Call, where we left Jan at Babbler campsite on Gluepot Station)

It was here that we saw the Red-lored Whistler. There were about 15 people camped at Babbler taking part in the weekend survey. We only found 1 active nest and quite a number of unused mounds.

After a lovely weekend, they all departed and I had the campsite to myself but promised to meet them all again at the SAOA Christmas party. At this campsite, I saw Chestnut Quail-thrush, Yellow-plumed, White-fronted and Spiny-cheeked HE, Inland Thornbill, White-browed Babbler and Splendid Wren and Sthn. Scrub Robin. Crested Bellbirds were calling all around the camping area.

Unfortunately Rebecca Bolton who was in charge of the Black-eared Miner Project was away working on the project elsewhere and would not be back for at least a week. Very disappointing. However, I decided to stay around and help Duncan and the Rangers with some concreting and building a tank during the next two days. After 4 nights at Babbler, I decided to move to Sittella Campsite to the north of the homestead where the Black-eared Miner was to be found. After only half an hour there, the Miners came into the campsite to feed on the eremophila flowers. Boy, I wish all birding was as easy as this! Out of the 3 species I had hoped to find at Gluepot, I already had two. Only the Scarlet-chested Parrot to go. However, the chances of finding this bird at Gluepot were very slim. Best birds seen near Sittella were Black-eared Miner, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Brown and White-browed Treecreepers, White-browed Babblers and Red-backed Kingfisher. I believe I also saw Grey Falcon, but only having seen it once before at a long distance, I was not sure. However, there have been other unconfirmed reports of this bird in this area.

After 3 nights at Sittella and a week in this wonderful mallee habitat, I decided it was time to move on towards Adelaide and spend more time on the Murray River. After spending a night in Waikerie, I decided to visit Eremophila Park, a private property 17 kms east of Waikerie, where the owner Stella Mack has been regularly feeding malleefowl for 25 years. One bird came in to the camping area while I was there and the male was in attendance every time I went to the mound over the next 2 days. Chestnut Quail-thrush was regularly sighted here as well as the white form of the Varied Sittella. Hooded and Red-capped Robins, Grey Currawong, Singing HE, Yellow-throated Miners (which hybridise with the Black-eared Miners) and 3 species of nightbirds – Owlet Nightjar, Southern Boobook and Tawny Frogmouth were all regular visitors.

Another pleasant stop was at Banrock Station, a vineyard, and winery also east of Waikerie where I had wattleseed scones with quandong jam. This is only a new vineyard having been set up within the last 5 years. It overlooks a beautiful wetland, which they are re-establishing to its previous condition by allowing the Murray River to regularly flood the site. It is intended to develop boardwalks and a hide throughout this area. The restaurant and information centre had been designed to maximise the use of solar energy to reduce operating costs as well as providing a wonderful setting overlooking the wetlands. This place should be well worth visiting in a few years as the bird numbers build up

I tried to visit Yookamurra Wildlife Sanctuary near Swan Reach owned by John Walmsley where endangered species of animals are bred, only to find admittance is by prior arrangement only. For the next couple of days, I camped along the banks of the Murray River. There are many free campsites along the Murray throughout South Australia where you can fish or just laze around. It is such a majestic river but has lost some of its former glory due to controlling the flow for irrigation.

Then I headed for the Barossa Valley and the wineries. Which one do you visit – there are so many? The roses planted beside

the main road throughout the vineyard area were out in full bloom and looked wonderful. My sister's husband's family have a vineyard Glenara Wineries in the Adelaide Hills and I felt an obligation to visit theirs. All their grapes are organically grown since Glen's brother became seriously ill through the use of chemicals in the early nineties. With the extensive increase in grape growing seen all along the Murray from NSW to Adelaide on this trip, I wondered how the growers would survive. Glenara Winery believes that people will turn to organically grown grapes as a preference and it is these wineries which will prosper.

I visited Mt. Crawford Forestry Reserve in the Adelaide Hills where I saw Adelaide Rosella, Crescent HE, European Goldfinch, Scarlet Robin, and Purple-crowned Lorikeet. I had a lovely campsite beside the South Para River for a couple of days mostly to myself surrounded by the wildflower Paterson's Curse. Then headed for Adelaide to a caravan park to wait for Tony Russell who was going to take me to Penrice Saltfields. Went to the SAOA Christmas party where I met up with some of the participants of the malleefowl survey. It is very easy to find your way around in Adelaide as it is laid out in squares with ring roads around the perimeter.

On the Saturday, Margery Grant, the hostess with SAOA took me to Barker Inlet Wetlands. This is an area that has been set aside by a large corporation to protect the wetlands. We saw many mallards X's particularly in the city area and lots of waterbirds during our day out but nothing very unusual at the wetlands.

As I had to wait for 4 days for Tony, I decided to drive down Fleurieu Peninsula to Victor Harbour. On the way I visited Mt. Compass boardwalk, where with luck Southern Emu-wren can be seen. As it is a very shy bird, I walked around very quietly listening for their tiny calls. Then in the south-east corner of the area, I heard them twittering and just stood and waited until they appeared. I was rewarded with good views of 2 birds, male and female.

I continued down the Peninsula stopping at Scott Conservation Park where I saw Musk and Purple-crowned Lorikeet Lorikeet and then went to Newland Head CP on the coast west of Victor Harbour. Plenty of Singing HE's here.

Returned to Adelaide and met up with Tony Russell north of Adelaide on road to Penrice. We both got very excited at a bird we saw up close, which appeared "different," but after much debate decided it was only a Curlew Sandpiper. Had a good morning here with over 40 species including Spotted Crake, Avocet, Black-tailed Native-hen, and White-winged Fairy-wren. After lunch I drove south east to Murray Bridge where I rang Trevor Hampel after trying 4 out-of-order phones. Then up to Mannum along the Murray River. Drove through a horrendous storm with sheets of lightning and inches of rain.

Had a lovely evening on the Murray before heading for my sister's place at Tailern Bend where I stayed for 5 days. Then continued south along the Coorong. Stayed the first night at Salt Creek, after visiting the Pelican Observatory where you can look out towards an island where the pelicans breed. Didn't know their pouches turned bright pink when they are breeding! Rufous Bristlebirds were easy to see at Salt Creek and a Malleefowl was seen here by another birdo.

Continued along the coast where it was extremely blowy and wet so decided to head inland to Bool Lagoon. What a disappointment as there was no water. Met Chris Smith and his wife from the Sunshine Coast who had driven up from Mt. Gambier for the day. Neither of us was impressed as it is advertised as an excellent waterbird habitat. No mention that it can dry up but it had been dry for the last 3 years. Saw a sign to Bourne's Bird Museum 10 km further on so I headed there. Here you can see a collection of birds and eggs, which Mr. Bourne, a sheep farmer who is a self-taught taxidermist started collecting 25 years before. The collection is now housed in a separate building, which was opened by the Environment Minister in 1995. Spent 3 hours there all for \$5 entrance fee.

Pat Bourne directed me to Mary Seymour Con Park further down the road as a good place to camp for the night. It was a great spot with lots of old red gums and good tracks. It was here that

something run off with my thong during the night and left big teeth marks in it – a wombat I presume! Excellent birding with White-eared, White-plumed, White-naped, New Holland and Spiny-cheeked HE's and Peregrine Falcon.

Headed for Penola a tourist town where I went through the Mary McKillop Information Centre and picked some wonderful blood plums from a tree behind an old house. Of course I ate too many and had the runs the next day. Headed back towards the coast but as the rain got heavier I turned and headed south for Mt. Gambier. Mt. Gambier is a beautiful city with a very lake crater lake which changes colour overnight depending on the season and becomes very blue in summer. I stayed at Blue Lake Caravan Park within walking distance of the lake where I met up again with Glen & Chris Smith.

Had a look around Mt. Gambier and then set out south for Dingley Dell, where the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon lived. The caretaker who reels off the poetry like he was born reciting it overwhelmed me. Couldn't get away and was there over 1 hour. Suddenly remembered I had not switched the fridge over to gas, not expecting to be so long. Luckily a dual battery system prevents the car battery from going flat. It was too late to find a bush camp so booked into a caravan park which turned out to be owned by the caretaker's brother. Thank goodness he didn't talk as much!

[Final Part (3) of Jan's travels in the Sept. Contact Call]

UPCOMING FIELD TRIP WITH TREE KANGAROO AND MAMMAL GROUP - Graham Harrington

BA-NQG is invited to join forces with the TKMG and record the number of Yellow-bellied Gliders on Mount Baldy, (between Atherton and Herberton). Matt Bradford and I recorded the position of every active feed tree on Mount Baldy last year. These results have been published. We want to turn this into an estimate of the number of gliders in the area. This will establish a benchmark against which any future changes in the population can be assessed. We will also record other mammals seen and, the birds seen feeding on the Glider scars and any night birds seen and heard.

We will gather on the mountain at 11.30 am for lunch and instructions. Each group will then be assigned a tree, which will be reached by walking from a road using a GPS. It will be necessary to stay at the tree for only 90 minutes after sunset. By then we will have recorded all the Gliders. We can spotlight on the way out and gather somewhere for a debriefing and refuelling.

Please tell Keith Fisher if you are intending to participate, as we need names and car rego numbers for the permit. We also need to tell you where to meet. Rupert Russell will be our expert leader.

SIGHTINGS



March 7th - **Oriental Cuckoo**, Mt. Carbine tailings dam - Del Richards.

March 10th -- **Wandering Tattler**, Rocky Point north of Mossman - Del Richards.

March 25th - **Broad-billed Flycatcher** (6), including 1 immature in mangroves at Port Douglas - Del Richards.

March 29th - **Shinning Bronze-Cuckoo**, Upollu Cay, Great Barrier Reef (out from Cairns) - Mandy Soymonoff.

April 5th - **Pictorella Mannikin**, breeding record (3 adult birds, nest with 4 eggs) at Viola, about 70km NW of Julia Ck - Richard Johnson

April 6th - **Great-billed Heron**, McCready's Creek, Blacks Beach (15k north east of Mackay) - Desley Williams.

April 6th - **Pied Imperial Pigeons** 80+, in forest near Daintree Eco Lodge (just before Daintree Village) as Cyclone Vaughan approached - Del Richards.

April 10th - **Noisy Miner** (2) first for my garden at Rangeview, Tolga (Atherton Tableland), harassing **Common Myna** which looked on the point of exhaustion. The furthest east I have previously seen Noisy Miners is a few years ago next to the Ravenshoe service station on the way out west - Paul Cruickshank.

April 13th - **Channel-billed Cuckoo** at Marion Downs, about 65km South of Boulia -Richard Johnson.

April 17th - **Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo**, Rex Range south of Mossman - Del Richards.

April 21st - **Sarus Crane**, Cumberland Dam, 20km west of Georgetown (Gulf) - North Qld. Nats. Club via Dawn Magarry.

April 21st - **Pictorella Mannikin**, Georgetown racecourse - North Qld. Nats. Club via Dawn Magarry.

April 22nd - **Beach Stone-curlew** 2km south of Mission Beach at Porter Creek - Ian Cowan.

April 23rd - 4 **Lesser Sooty Owls**, Geraghty Park, Julatten - Trevor Qusted & Keith Fisher.

April 23rd - **Black-breasted Buzzard**, **Red-backed Kingfisher** and **Black-throated Finch**, Somerset Dam, 30km NW of Georgetown (Gulf) - North Qld. Nats. Club via Dawn Magarry.

April 23rd - **Spangled Drongo**, Toomulla Beach, north of Townsville, a continuous stream flying north, counted c80 in a five minute period and they kept coming. Also spotted a pair of **White-browed Woodswallows** one juv. & one adult, this is my first sighting of this species east of the Great Divide - Ian Clayton

April 24th - **White-eared Monarch**, **Pied Monarch** and **Blue-faced Parrot Finch** (2), 1km up the Mt. Lewis road, Julatten - Trevor Qusted and Keith Fisher.

April 29th - 30 **Lesser Frigatebirds** with **Crested Terns** & **Brown Boobies** around a trawler seen from the highway between Port Douglas and Cairns - Carol & Andrew Iles.

April 29th - **Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher**, this was the last sighting of a juvenile bird who had been a regular at Kingfisher Park, Julatten - Carol & Andrew Iles.

May 1st - **Channel-billed Kingfisher** (2) Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten - Carol & Andrew Iles.

May 1st - 50+ **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo's** at Mt Carbine, 3 **Barn Owls** at Geraghty Park, Julatten - Geoff Walker [guest at Kingfisher Park].

May 2nd - **White-necked Heron** foraging in a flooded cane paddock beside the Redlynch bypass in Cairns (uncommon in the area) - Keith Fisher.

May 4th - **Crested Pigeon**, Mareeba saleyards - Del Richards.

May 5th - **Northern Fantail**, day sighting of Green Ring-tailed Possum. Geraghty Park, Julatten - Carol & Andrew Iles.

May 6th - **Noisy Pitta**, still calling at Kamerunga, Cairns - Lindsay Fisher.

May 6th - **Large-tailed Nightjar**, a juvenile bird was flushed on Redden Island, a new species for this area - Keith Fisher.

May 6th - **Pied Imperial Pigeon** - Clifton Beach north of Cairns - Ian Cowan.

May 7th - **Satin Flycatcher** - Redden Island, another new bird for here - Arnold Magarry

May 8th - **Pied Heron** - juvenile bird at Cairns Airport (possibly the same one which I heard was on the Cairns Esplanade the previous week) - Keith Fisher

May 8th - **Great Bowerbird**, Newell Beach, near Mossman

May 8th - **Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher**, Immature at Julatten - Del Richards.

May 11th - **Spotted Whistling-Duck**, a small flock roosting in a mangrove creek at Weipa - Sue Gould via Michael Barnett.

May 14th - **Grey Goshawk**, seen at Ellie Point before heading out over Redden Island, Cairns (144 for here now).

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



It has now been decided to source the sand for the "beach" from a sand pit at Yorkeys Knob and truck it to the site, which is 3ha in area at the southern end of the Esplanade. This is due to start on the 26th May with up to 160 trucks a day until at least August.

The decision is good news for the wader roost at the mouth of the Barron River, as this was going to be the area of sand extraction if it was to be pumped to the Esplanade. Our group and Cairns BOCA were both concerned at the potential to destroy the wader roost and these concerns were made known to the consultants.

The pair of Beach Stone-curlews who bred at the Cairns airport in December 99 are now commuting, with the youngster, to the Esplanade where they have been seen lately

TOWNSVILLE NEWS from Jo Wieneke

At present, birders in Townsville are enjoying a wide diversity of bird species. With a very extended wet season waterbirds abound, the winter migrants, monarchs, fantails and flycatchers, are passing through or have arrived to stay for a few months and a few summer stragglers such as Channel-bills and Pied Imperial Pigeons are still here. Cyclone Tessi has had little effect on the birdlife and numbers on our weekly Atlas neighbourhood list have been over 80 lately. The list peaked at 92 during cyclone week with seabirds, waders, and terns flying south away from the centre.

In early May, Ian Clayton counted 80 Spangled Drongos passing through a patch of bushland at Toomulla Beach in only 5 minutes. This was just a fraction of the total number that had been streaming through before and after the 5 minute period. Sacred Kingfishers and Willy Wagtails have also been moving through in good numbers.

Bar-breasted Honeyeaters are sometimes found in the drier outskirts of Townsville. In March a pair built a nest in a Chinesee Apple, about 2 metres above flooded grassland at Toonpan, at the back of Ross River Dam. After cyclone Tessi, the completed nest had gone and they had started on another but this was never completed.

Ever year White-throated Nightjars, presumably on migration, appear in the Townsville railway sheds and roost there. Many of these are found dead and it was wondered if parasites or any chemical poisoning had been the cause. Recently one such bird was found to be a juvenile and very emaciated. When autopsied, no parasites were found and all the organs seemed healthy. It is likely that these young birds have not yet developed feeding skill that would enable them to survive the migration.

ATLASSING THE ORIENT

No, this was not a trip to Malaysia or China. The Orient is a cattle property south of Ingham, which we had visited late last year to visit a 10 minute block that had not then been atlased. It had proved an excellent spot with waterbirds and waders on the wetlands, grasslands with displaying Zitting Cisticolas and, closer to the coast some bird-rich melaleuca woodland.

On Saturday a group of atlasers from Ingham, Paluma, and Townsville paid a second visit stopping at the same sites as before. The cisticolas were unobtrusive, there were fewer

Crimson Finches, but waterbird numbers were still high, with White-browed Crakes, Jacanas, Green Pygmy-geese, cormorants, egrets, and ibis. The tracks through the melaleucas were still waterlogged and once again we could not get through to the beach. However the woodland produced Spectacled and Black-faced Monarchs, Silvereyes, Lovely Fairy-wrens and Rufous Whistlers as well as the ubiquitous Brown Honeyeaters.

It was good to have Andree Griffin with us for the outing after her long enforced stay in England. Welcome back. Another visit is planned for later in the year when hopefully, if this wet season ever stops, we will be able to reach the mangroves and beach.

WEIPA NEWS from Michael Barnett

NEW BREEDING RECORD FOR AUSTRALIA?

On Saturday 13th May 15:30 I set off on a approximate 20k round trip mountain bike ride to the main picnic area of the Uningan Nature Reserve. I rode out to the Mission River bridge carried the bike down the stairs and started to double back on the other side of the railway line past the Awonga Point Sewage Ponds. There have been some major modifications to the ponds over the last 12 months. The main one being the additions of baffles. These are corrugated sheeting attached to galvanised fencing frames. A large number of species use the top edge of the sheeting and the posts as roosts including Striated Heron, Pied Heron, Tree Martin, Welcome Swallows, Pacific Swallow?, Radjah Shelduck and Spotted Whistling- Duck. I've been trying to keep track of the swallows at the ponds. I was surprised to find ducks other than Radjah Shelduck on the ponds. I was travelling light without my scope and just my binoculars, water, and bike gear in my backpack. These "other" ducks turned out to be two Spotted Whistling-Duck *dendrocygna guttata* with eight Wandering Whistling- Ducks *dendrocygna arcuata*. I've seen the Spotted Whistling-Duck each year since 1996 and as a generalisation they turn up with the first solid bit of monsoonal rain and then disappear around Easter. So I was surprised to see them still here. On the return part of the ride I came back past a wetland edging onto the town that Sue Gould has been running a rehabilitation project on. Sue, Rod Thorn and I had seen the Spotted Whistling-Duck in this area on a number of occasions this wet.

On Sunday 14th May 11:00 while driving back from a birding outing I checked the sewage ponds with no luck then detoured back past the wetland and saw the mixed flock of whistling ducks again this time in the wetland. I tried to get some photos but they quickly disappeared when I got out of the vehicle. At 17:00 I drove back out to the sewage ponds to try and photograph the mixed flock. I observed the whistling ducks for a while before trying to photograph them. This time there were four Spotted Whistling-Duck and eight Wandering Whistling-Duck. Some were on one of the ponds but most were on an earthen wall between two of the ponds. As I moved around most of the birds spooked and flew off to stand on the baffles and support structure. Two of the Spotted Whistling-Duck remained on the first pond. One was standing on a baffle in the middle of the pond and the other was on the opposite side of the pond. The bird on the baffle was calling continuously. I watched these two for a while then took a few photos of the mixed flock. After about another 5 minutes I walked around the fence to the other side of the ponds to try and take some photos from a closer range.

There are actually five ponds in a row in a north - south orientation. The southern pond is the original pond that was decommissioned in 1994/5 when the four new ponds were constructed and the Spotted Whistling-Duck were first observed by David Niland. The Spotted Whistling-Duck is usually seen on the southern most of these four new ponds. The fence line on the ponds is close to the edge of the ponds on the western side. The fence line is similar on the eastern side but widens out halfway along the southernmost new pond to meet up with the original

fence line. When I reached the eastern side I took a photo of the mixed flock and decided to try a photo of a family of Australasian Grebe (two adults and four juveniles) I had seen on the southern pond. They weren't to be seen but I was surprised to find the other two Spotted Whistling-Duck moving away from me with four ducklings on the water between them. I took one photo but was shooting into the light so I am not sure how it will turn out. After watching them for a minute or two I moved back around to the western side to try for a better view. When I got there the family were back over the other side of the pond, where they exited at the corner of the new and old fence line.

I went back in the afternoon of Monday 15th May 18:00 to look for them again. There is an elevated railway embankment between the road and the sewage ponds. Being 2m tall I can usually see over the embankment by standing on the running boards or the rear bumper. As for the past several days I climbed onto the roofrack of my Landcruiser wagon to watch both the mixed flock and family of Spotted Whistling-Duck. The family did the same thing as yesterday and climbed out of the water.

One thing I found confusing was the size of Spotted Whistling-Duck in comparison with the Wandering Whistling-Duck. The following books give these sizes:

The Birds of Papua New Guinea - Coates

Wandering whistling ducks - 48cm

Spotted whistling ducks - 43cm

Birds of New Guinea - Beehler, Pratt and Zimmerman

Wandering whistling ducks - 58cm

Spotted whistling ducks - 43cm

A guide to the Birds of Wallacea - Coates and Bishop

Wandering whistling ducks - 43-60cm

Spotted whistling ducks - 43-50cm

In the mixed flock that I saw the Spotted Whistling-Duck were slighter larger than the Wandering Whistling-Duck.

INTERESTING PLACES

LOWER FRESH WATER ROAD, CAIRNS -

Keith Fisher

Situated between the Kamerunga Road (turn off by Freshwater Station) and the Brinsmead/Kamerunga Road (turn off by Peace Lutheran College), the Lower Freshwater Road crosses Freshwater Creek. Between the creek and the college is the best area for birds. Around the creek are Black Butcherbirds and Yellow Oriole, in the paddocks on the Barron River side of the road/creek is a good spot for Tawny Grassbird, Chestnut-breasted Manikins and Crimson Finches which fly over the road into the cane paddocks opposite. The powerlines are a good place to look in the wet season (Dec-March) as Red-rumped Swallows have been seen here for the past two years, along with Welcome Swallows, Fairy, and Tree Martins. Bushens have been seen in the cane paddocks and a juvenile Black Bittern was picked up dead off the road on 6th May. Two adults had been seen along Freshwater Creek near the bridge several years ago.

BIRD IDENTIFICATION & OBSERVATIONS

MIMICRY BY SPOTTED BOWERBIRD - Cliff

Frith

Cliff replies to John and Sue O'Malley's question posed in the last Contact Call in reference to mimicry by a Spotted Bowerbird (not of a Spotted Bowerbird as was printed in error).

As Sue and John pose the question at the end of their note "Has anyone else heard of Spotted Bowerbirds doing this?" I feel

obliged to respond, having the answer to hand. The answer is that very numerous bird watchers have heard Spotted Bowerbirds giving all kinds of vocal avian, and other, mimicry. This kind of vocalization is also very well known, and reported about, for the Regent, Satin, Lauterbach's, Fawn-breasted, Western, Great, Tooth-billed, Macgregor's, Streaked, Vogelkop, Golden and Archbold's Bowerbirds and is very probably also performed by the remaining four polygynously (ie.non pair-bonding or monogamous) reproducing bowerbird species. There is probably more literature, much of it anecdotal, about vocal mimicry by Spotted Bowerbirds than any other bowerbird and almost any book with a reasonable text about the species will include mention of it. Finally I would point out that a bird perching and appearing to be "unperturbed" can not be taken to me that was the bird's state of mind. Spotted Bowerbirds, and other members of the genus *Chlamydera*, are particularly well known for performing vocal mimicry of potential predators as they are approached (usually at a bower or nest site) BY a potential predator. Thus I would suggest that the bird Sue and John "confronted" was indeed perturbed by their presence which is what stimulated the mimicry of cat, dog and other sounds.

(Cliff is well qualified to comment on this bowerbird behaviour as he and his wife Dawn have spent many years studying, photographing and producing many scientific papers on the bowerbird family - Ed).

KINGFISHER ANTING - John & Sue O'Malley

In early March 2000, Sue, Bob Forsyth, and myself were birding/atlasing around the Gunpowder area of NWQ. We saw about 68 species of birds, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It was good to meet the Managers of the resort there, Pru and her husband. Both of whom are birders, keeping good records.

While returning from the Sewage Ponds (fantastic spot), we noticed a Blue-winged Kingfisher, behaving strangely. At first we thought it was putting on a broken wing act, but discovered after 10 minutes observation (at close range), that it was actually anting. Sue and I thought OK; we've seen other birds do this, no big deal. But Bob, as always, records, jots notes, and reports to anyone willing to listen via the Internet. Bob emailed a Kingfisher 'expert' (Dr. Peter Woodall) and he confirmed that anting in kingfishers had never been verified anywhere, worldwide. Peter also said that he would like it written up so that he can quote it in an upcoming world book on Kingfishers. So, it just goes to show how important reporting stuff can be. Has anyone else seen this behaviour in Kingfishers?

ROOSTING METALLIC STARLINGS - Del

Richards

A huge flock of Metallic Starlings, in excess of 2000 individuals, has been roosting in trees and lining powerlines in the main street of Mossman. They first gathered there in early March and the numbers had not dwindled by mid-April. Unusually by day there did not appear to be large numbers in the district.

There are a few published records of such occurrences. In 1997 a cane farmer in Miallo, north of Mossman, asked me to identify the birds that were trampling a patch of his sugar cane. Investigation at night located about 700 Metallic Starlings.

I published an account in the BOCA newsletter *Frogmouth* that bought forward a similar situation at Fishery Falls near Babinda.

Stephen Garnett related a similar event to me (reported in *Contact Call* March 1999).

I believe that the species flies in larger flocks in March in preparation for conditioning on their return flight to points north. In Papua/New Guinea they are known to the natives as "Whirlwind" birds

In September 1999 I noted a pair of adults with two immatures. I don't think these would have come from PNG, as I would doubt

that they would breed here in our winter. Any thoughts or other records known?

(I've seen Metallic Starlings building nests in Cairns at the end of July but could not say if they bred that early - Keith Fisher).

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HEATHLANDS -CAPE YORK - Stephen

Garnett

My own interesting sighting for the month was a Spotted Harrier at Heathlands, which Gay (Stephens's wife) insists she saw first. I think this is the most northerly record for the species. Interestingly the ranger at Heathlands, Ross Perry, assured us the birds had been present for at least a year, suggesting residence. Also present in the area were several flocks of Black-faced Woodswallows. These are declining in abundance in the centre of the Peninsula so it was interesting to find them so far north. This may also be a northward extension of range.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS IN OUR

REGION

Ms D Cesari, Normanton: Mrs B McKenzie, Laura: Mrs I Robichaud, Yungaburra: Mrs C M Shepherd, Cloncurry: Stephanie Herbert, Mareeba: Anna Lasco, Douglas:

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.

BOOK

One 1932 third Edition, *What Bird Is That*, by Neville Cayley, the book is in good condition and has a dust cover.[Offers] - Ron Stannard, Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten Ph (07) 4094 1263

CAR STICKERS

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.

BIRDS AUSTRALIA POLO SHIRTS

We have a few Birds Australia polo shirts, 100% cotton - Navy. Sizes M, L, and XL. Promote Birds Australia for only \$25.00. Available from the secretary.

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NOTICES

NEPAL BIRDING TRIP

Ken Cross from Townsville will be leading a trip to Nepal in March - April 2001 for North Queensland birders. Two itineraries are available, one a fully guided 16 day trip visiting Nepal and Singapore on the way over, the other as trip one plus an 11 day trek in the Annapurna area. With over 850 species recorded in Nepal you could expect see at least 300+. For itineraries and further details contact. Ken Cross:

Email southcrossnaturetour@bigpond.com

or C/O Jo Wieneke, 22 Bishop Street, Townsville QLD 4810

**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**

**Contact Call is available on email let us know
if you would like it sent this way and which
format e.g.: 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.