



Birds Australia
Conservation Through Knowledge

Birds Australia - North Queensland Group

Contact Call

September 2000 • Issue: Australasian Grebe

RED-WHISKERED BULBULS, ARE THEY BREEDING IN MACKAY?

Ian Gynther from QPWS has been attempting to ensure the occurrence of Red-whiskered Bulbuls in Mackay is documented as part of the current Atlas project. Marion Crouther in Mackay has asked to have an article of his on this topic reprinted to convey the message to our members that Red-whiskered Bulbuls are well established and breeding in Mackay. At the time of writing, Ian concluded that there was no definite proof of breeding in his article but this has now come forward in the form of a clear photograph of a bulbul's nest taken in January 1997 in Mackay. (Ian's article follows). 'Apparently the first published reference to the bulbuls being in the Mackay area is a brief article by Marion Crouther in *The Bird Observer* ("Introduced birds - Mackay district, Qld," June 1984, No. 629, p54). This mentions a Red-whiskered Bulbul being seen in early September 1983, with up to five birds being seen in December 1993. The article also states that this group comprised an adult and four young birds, but whether these young were bred in the wild or not is unclear.

Marion (in litt., 2 August 1999) stated, "Doug Schulz who was [QPWS] Ranger here at the time believed about six birds were released from an aviary where he had warned the owner about keeping birds without a permit. When he did his return inspection the birds were no longer there but reports of bulbuls started soon after. They are spread through the southern suburbs [of Mackay] but not on the northern side of the river as far as I know." Doug Schulz (pers. comm., 18 August 1999) told me that the above story wasn't quite right. He remembers visiting a pet shop that had just received 48 bulbuls from Sydney. Only 42 were still at the shop when he visited and Doug seized those on the spot. Of the six that had already been sold, Doug was able to track down another two or three and seize them too. However, three or four birds were

unaccounted for and he suspects may have been released by the people who had bought them. Recent conversations with Marion Crouther (also the Atlas Regional Coordinator for the 20-23 degree S area) and Tess Brickhill (the first reported observer of the species in the wild in Marion's article referred to above) confirms that bulbuls still occur in Mackay to this day. Tess Brickhill (pers. comm., 17 August 1999) said she has seen up to 16 birds in her street at one time (sunning themselves on overhead lines after several days of rain) and regularly has up to five birds using her backyard bird bath. In the meantime, though, breeding of bulbuls in the wild in Mackay can only be presumed given the circumstantial nature of the present evidence.'

Subsequent to this article being written, Michael Overland (QPWS, Mackay) reported that Dorothy Albrecht has observed up to six at a time at her home in South Mackay on an ongoing basis for about two years. She believes they may have bred in her backyard last spring, using a nest (which is no longer present) in her Mock Orange tree. Four of the individuals were suspected to be fledglings and have since moved on. Furthermore, in December 1998, Marj Andrews sighted three juveniles in her Chinese Hat Plant in her front yard in South Mackay. They had no red on their faces, and appeared to have full-length crests, but no colour around their vents. They were calling as adults. She still sees a resident group of two to four birds.

Such observations, combined with the photograph of a nest with two eggs taken in 1997, now offer the much-needed evidence that Red-whiskered Bulbuls have indeed established a self-supporting feral population in Mackay.

Acknowledgments to Dorothy Albrecht, Marj Andrews, Tess Brickhill, Marion Crouther, Michael Overland and Doug Schulz.

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EVENTS CALENDAR

Sept 23rd - 24th Windsor Tableland Campout (north of Mount Carbine) - Contact Ian Sinclair.

Oct 7th Sat Crane Count Meet at Hasties Swamp NP near Atherton at 3.30 PM for BYO afternoon tea. Crane Count/Tally Room and BYO dinner at Jon & Peta Notts afterwards. Contact Elinor Scambler ph: 4095 3296 (**More info page 5**)

Oct 14th-18th Birds Australia Congress in Rockhampton and campout at Byfield National Park, Qld. Details in the Sept Wingspan.

Oct 21st-22nd Survey of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo numbers in the Lakeland Downs farming district. Surveys of cockatoos at roost sites plus general Atlassing. Contact Amanda Freeman ph:4095 2148 ah or Stephen Garnett ph: 4056 1913 ah

Oct 28th - 29th Twitchathon. Start at Cairns Esplanade 12 noon Sat - finish Platypus Park, Atherton 12 noon Sun (**More info page 5**)

Oct 28th - Nov 3rd Campout at Bullaringa National Park Contact Amanda Freeman ph: 4095 2148 ah (**More info page 5**)

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

December - Christmas Party - date and venue to be announced in Dec Contact Call

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

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Convenor: Jon Nott (07) 4096 8230
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BA-NQG Conservation Representative & NatureSearch

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Project Contacts:

Beach Stone Curlew Study

Amanda Freeman (contact number as above).

Northern Gulf Regional Strategy Group

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E-mail foxi@fastinternet.net.au

Gouldian Finch and Birds at Waterholes Survey

Klaus Uhlenhut Ph (07) 4065 5181 Email kirrama@4kz.com.au

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

E-mail lkfisher@north.net.au

Sarus/Brolga Tableland Crane counts

Elinor Scambler Ph (07) 4095 3296

E-mail dacelo@internetnorth.com.au

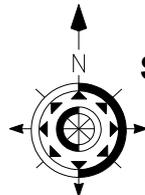
Egret & Ibis Counts (Townsville)

Jo Wieneke Ph (07) 4771 4707 E-mail bowerbird@msn.com.au

or Glenda Jeffries Ph (07) 4773 1802 (Hm)

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

BIRDS AUSTRALIA ATLAS CONTACTS



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

Northern Region (Cardwell North and north of Gulf Development Road, including Cape York)

Regional Organiser: -

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

SRO'S: -

Stephen Garnett (Cairns) ph: 07 4052 3088

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

Glen Holmes (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4091 4364

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Lloyd Nielsen (Northern Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4094 1549

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Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4095 3296

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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:-

Ian Clayton (Townsville) ph: 07 4725 6489

email: birds&bush@ultra.net.au

Margaret Streamer (Townsville/Ingham) ph: 07 4777 5164

email: marstream@bigpond.com

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

AGM & GET TOGETHER 10th-12th June 2000 - Keith Fisher

The 3-day get-together and AGM, held at the Tinaroo Environmental Education Centre on the Atherton Tableland, was very successful reflecting the hard work put in by the organisers and speakers. The AGM started proceedings with our Convenor Jon Nott summarising the past years activities and presenting the results of his recent trip to the Birds Australia AGM and Members Day in Armadale NSW. The local reps gave a summary of issues and field trips in their areas before the only election of the meeting was held for the position of Convenor. Jon Nott was elected unopposed for a second term. Following the AGM Stephen Garnett gave an excellent slide talk on endangered Parrots in Australia. A bird watching break was held before the evenings communal banquet, nobody went hungry with a huge array of food, which was suitably washed down. After dinner Amanda Freeman showed us slides and talked on the endangered species expedition to Cape York late last year. This was a very successful atlassing trip and an important wet season habitat for Star Finches was found. One of the main attractions was the helicopter that was used to access some of the more remote sites. Day 2 saw the early birds out birding before breakfast, the highlight here was sittellas with young. The national president, Graham Harrington, gave us a breakfast talk. The main message was that Birds Australia must be organically linked with Australia - otherwise it will become a fossil. Most people will agree on what Australia will be like in some respects over the next ten - twenty years. We need to make sure we adapt to these certainties. For example, few people would disagree that we have moved from the "White Australia" paradigm to a multi-cultural society and that will remain as a dominant force over the next ten years. The new Australians have a very different attitude to the Australian bush than our traditional culture. These people will be an influential political force for a couple of generations. If we do not imbue them with a love of birds and the bush, our politicians will lose interest too. There are a number of other changes in our society that will influence us as an organisation, which were discussed. After morning tea and some more birding, Jan England gave a talk on a trip she had to South Africa. Jan showed us some of the country and it's wildlife including many bird species. It was then onto lunch, after this I gave a slide/talk on the birds of Cairns Airport and the problems they pose to aircraft. This is a worldwide problem and one that is not easily solved. Elinor Scambler followed this talk with an excellent presentation about community bird surveys in revegetation areas on the Atherton Tableland. Elinor had also set up a visual display (helped by TREAT members) with photos of various before and after shots, both on the ground and from the air. Afternoon tea was followed by a trip to Pelican Point, on Lake Tinaroo, to see a tree planting block and birding. The evening entertainment began with a BBQ before the highlight of the weekend, the world premier of David Attenborough's film about bowerbirds called "The Art of Seduction". Cliff Frith presented the film in which he and Dawn were the scientific advisers, and several other BA-NQG members were involved also. Cliff began by giving us a background to the film and introducing us to a David Attenborough look-alike an inflatable dummy, which caused much amusement to the large crowd present. This was used to familiarise the birds before he arrived in person for the filming. The film contained some excellent footage of bowerbirds both in Australia and New Guinea and presented some previously unknown behaviour of the Golden Bowerbird. A great nights entertainment was had by all. Day 3 dawned and not much action early (too many bottles of red wine the night before!), but after breakfast Amanda Freeman conducted an information session to let people know how the Atlas of Australian Birds was progressing in our region. Afterwards we went for a birdwalk along Black Gully Road from the Education Centre to the Tinaroo Dam

Road. Then back for lunch and to clear up. This was an excellent weekend thanks to the speakers, Stephen Garnett, Amanda Freeman, Graham Harrington, Jan England, Elinor Scambler and Cliff and Dawn Frith. Big thank you to the organisers, John Clarkson, Ian Sinclair, Lindsay Fisher, and everyone else who helped set-up and clean up. Also thanks to Computer Resources Cairns for donating the use of the Data Projector for Sunday night's bowerbird film.

TRIP REPORTS

REDDEN ISLAND - 25/6/2000- Keith Fisher

Redden Island as usual turned up a good number of birds including some special ones. 58 species were seen in 3 hours with a White-eared Monarch being a new species for here, the total species list for this location is now 145. (Since seen Black-necked Stork, now 146 species - KF) This sighting also made the new brochures for Redden Island, which the Cairns Port Authority had just reprinted for us out of date already! Redden Creek put on a five minute spectacle for those that were not botanising, first a Little Kingfisher landed on a dead mangrove branch in front of us, then as we were watching this a Great-billed Heron flew by followed by two Sacred Kingfishers and a Collared Kingfisher all perching out in the open. These sightings along with a small birdwave containing Grey Whistler, White-eared Monarch, Spectacled Monarch, female Shining Flycatcher, and Rufous Fantail made the mangrove areas the most productive. Overall the woodland areas were very quiet, with a good variety of species but low numbers. The morning was finished off with a quick scan of the beach, this revealed a Grey phase Eastern Reef Egret, Bar-tailed Godwits, Whimbrels, a couple of Little Tern, a flock of Crested Tern resting on a sandbar, Pied Oystercatchers and an Osprey. This area close to Cairns City provided another great mornings birding.

DOUGLAS TRACK WALK - 27/8/00 -Keith

Fisher

Only the Fishers attended this field trip, we had an enjoyable stroll up the track to the Kuranda railway collecting a list of 26 species along the way. Lovely-Fairy Wren was seen near the beginning of the track and Superb Fruit-Dove, Noisy Pitta and Black Butcherbird were heard. Metallic Starlings were back in force zooming overhead.

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

(Part 3 of Jan's travels continued from March & June Contact Calls)

Next day I visited a number of sinkholes in the area where scuba diving is very popular. Went on a boat cruise on the Lower Glenelg River then drove up to the Lower Glenelg National Park to camp. Beautiful campsites along the river with Gang-Gang Cockatoos calling everywhere. Very cold morning but at least it didn't rain. Walked part of the Great West Track, which goes from the Flinders Ranges southeast for about 250 kms. Then headed for Mt. Richmond NP, a beautiful site high up overlooking the coast. Great unofficial campsite with lovely small barbecues and wood. The park had 4 great walks; all well signposted with a koala right at the spot marked on the map.

Next day was a TOTAL FIRE BAN day and I knew the Rangers like you out of the parks on these days. Tried to find a few interesting spots along the coast such as Cape Bridgewater. Went for a walk in the Petrified Forest and along the coast for about 5 kms. Decided to head to Mt. Eccles NP as I had heard good reports about it from Chris Smith. \$10 to camp but it had hot showers, toilets and water which was wonderful, as it was a very very hot day. Walked around the bottom of Lake Surprise, a Crater Lake and went for a swim. A change came through during the night and it was rainy and cold next morning. Typical Victorian weather!

I had never seen so many koalas, must have seen 20-30 on my morning walk around the Crater Rim. The Rangers had culled 1000 in

March 1999 and said they would have to cull another 1000 in March 2000. The area is landlocked by wheat. Drove to Port Fairy where it was blowing a gale – typical I was cold and raining so walking around Griffith Island was not much fun. It is a Short-tailed Shearwater rookery area but you are allowed to walk on the paths throughout the island. While I was at Port Fairy, I checked out the Yambuk Lake area 18 kms west of Port Fairy for good bird sites. Drove around the district but the water appeared to be too deep for many waterbirds. Called in to a property bordering the edge of the lake and asked for permission to bird the area. The lady directed me to the owner's house who had no hesitation in taking me down to his paddocks and telling me about the Orange-bellied Parrots, which had been found, on his property this year. He had reported them a few years earlier but no one had believed him. Now he is involved with Landcare in restoring the habitat on his land so that the birds have some feeding areas. He explained that the water level in the lake was so high because the aboriginals who managed the area decided not to get the river mouth dredged. With the rise in water levels, came the death of the shrubs that the OBP's feed on. Hence the planting program on his land.

Stayed at a motel for a couple of days and then drove to Geelong where I was to stay with a friend, Polly, for about a week. We went to Werribee Sewerage Farm, the You Yangs NP, Bellarine Peninsula and Ocean Grove all good birding areas. I had Christmas Day with my friend's family and was then supposed to spend 2 days after Christmas banding waders with Clive Minton but the weather was foul! It was raining and very cold and we had the heater on in the house and the electric blanket on my bed. Why would I go out in the rain to band birds?

There was also severe flooding in the area during this time. However, Clive and his faithful followers had carried on and were seen on TV a couple of nights later. Now I did feel bad for not participating. I had also planned to take part in a banding project at Rushworth, north of Melbourne on the New Year weekend.

As I headed north of Geelong it started to rain. I continued on going into Mt. Macedon where the big bushfires had been a few years earlier. The area was now completely regenerated but was covered in mist instead of smoke.

As I continued north the weather fined up and I arrived at the campsite at Rushworth to be met by a group of trailbike riders. Was I in the wrong place? I eventually discovered that Charles Sandbrink had given me the old address for the banding project. I finally found them further up the road & eventually Polly arrived too.

I had hoped that I would be able to spend New Years Eve in the bush with friends and this was to be it. Who would believe that it would be so cold that we would have a roaring fire blazing and be rugged up in coats to keep warm. We managed to stay up until midnight to toast in the New Year and then retired to bed. Up early next morning to set up nets and start collecting birds. We banded over 60 birds that morning so we were kept very busy. Most were Fuscous, Yellow-tufted, Yellow-plumed & White-plumed, Brown-headed HE's with 1 Black-chinned HE. I enjoyed getting the birds out of the net and Polly was the chief nectar feeder giving the birds a drink after they were banded, measured and weighed.

On the second day, we had a lot less birds – they must have told their friends, we heard Owlet Nightjar and Tawny Frogmouth through that night.

The next day dawned with clear sunny skies – a lovely ending to a great weekend and a great way to start 2000. Decided to head for Echuca to look for Superb Parrots. However, I was told that as they had finished breeding they would probably have moved out of the forest into the open areas to the east towards Yass and Young. However, it was worth a look and with wonderful campsites along the Murray who could resist. Although I didn't find any Parrots, I had a delightful campsite all to myself. Next morning I headed for Canberra where I wanted to meet up with the participants of my recent trip to South Africa with the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG). After going to the Visitor Information Centre, I managed to get in touch with the Secretary of the Field Nats. who gave me a lady's phone number and told me where to find Superb Parrots in northern Canberra. That night I went to the home of one member and we shared our photos. Next morning I went out to Fraser, a northern Canberra suburb and after searching for ¾ hour the parrots flew in right near my car. My third new bird for the trip!

Then drove down to my cousin's place on the southern side of Canberra visiting the Botanical Gardens and Jerrabombra Wetlands on the way. Frustrating city to drive around in as it goes in circles so you drive for miles to go 500 metres – well it seems like that. Only stayed one night and then headed north to skirt around Sydney – hate driving in that city too but for different reasons. Went via a back road through Oberon to Lithgow and then Mudgee. Nice campsite at Abercrombie River but no time to stop as I had spent an extra day in Canberra. Very steep road in places and about 50 kms of gravel. Stayed at Munghorn Gap that night and saw a Superb Lyrebird and Gang Gang Cockatoo. Decided to continue north towards Armidale and do the Barraba area. However the roads in this area are not well signposted and I couldn't find the campsite that I wanted. Ended up doing over 100 kms dirt this day and was not happy by the time I found a campsite beside Emu Creek south of Bundarra. Went into Armidale next day and gave my atlas sheets to Andrew Ley who told me Bill Lane of Coffs Harbour had died the night before. He had cancer for about 18 months. I had planned to call in and see him while I was there as I was also visiting my son in Coffs Harbour.

Called in to Pathche's Beach (Ballina) to have a quick look for the SIPO. Tried the 4WD out in the sand but only for a very short distance, as I had to get to Brisbane that afternoon. Of course, no sign of the SIPO but I didn't have time to walk very far.

Arrived back in Brisbane, that afternoon with 3 days here before returning to Cairns where I had to find a new flat ready to start work in 2 week's time.

PS: Of course, the birds always turn up after you leave a place. A Hudsonian Godwit turned up at Werribee about 2 days after I left Melbourne, a Fiordland Penguin was found moulting at Port Fairy around the same time and a Short-billed Dowitcher turned up at Penrice Saltfields just before Christmas. And to cap it off, the SIPO had turned up at Manly in Brisbane late last year. Just my luck!

NOTE: I apologise for the abbreviated form of this write-up but it was originally written for someone to take down south as notes for their trip - Jan.

(Jan was last heard of in Exmouth WA on her latest travels. - Ed.)

SILVER PLAINS STATION 12th - 26th July 00

John McLennan

At 0700 on July 12th, Terry Learmonth from Narara and myself left Cairns in the mail plane for the two hour ride to Silver Plains, a 700,000 acre property to the east of Coen, on the north-eastern coast of Cape York, with ocean access to Princess Charlotte Bay. The property was bought by the Queensland Govt some years ago and is now destocking, with its future use still undecided. I have been up here every year since 1982, and so know the property well.

After stopping at Laura and Lakefield NP on the way north, we flew close to the shoreline of Princess Charlotte Bay, and counted some sixty Brolgas on the beach in about five minutes of flying. We arrived on the property after a comfortable and interesting two hour flight. An hours walk late in the day in woodland along the track leading to the Breakfast Creek landing gave us Pied Heron, Pale-headed Rosella, Mangrove Kingfisher, Emu, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Forest Kingfisher and Black-backed Butcherbird.

I usually come up here later in the year, and so was surprised at the numbers of Rainbow Bee-eaters, which were in large numbers in all habitats on the property. The nights around the homestead are filled with the mournful cry of the Bush Thick-knee, a sound that most birders are content with. An early morning hour was spent around the homestead where we found Gould's Bronze Cuckoo and Little Bronze Cuckoo eating grubs in the flowering mango trees, and two Palm Cockatoos feeding on some bush nuts. Also seen around the homestead were Brolga, Bustard, Orange-footed Scrub Fowl, Graceful Honeyeater, Leaden Flycatcher, and a pair of Fairy Gerygones building a nest.

On July 13th a trip across woodland into the vine thicket and rainforest edges of the Massey River gave us Golden Headed Cisticola, Red-winged Parrot, Brown Quail, Black-Throated and Masked Finch, Brown Goshawk, Red-backed and Lovely Fairy-wren on the grassland, and along the river we saw Varied Triller, Spectacled Monarch, Large-billed Gerygone, Azure Kingfisher and Shining

Flycatcher. Early on July 15th we left Breakfast Creek and travelled some 20km north by boat to the mouth of the Rocky River where we spent two nights camped on a sandspit. While camped here we were followed on each of our walks along the beach by the resident Pied Oystercatchers, and Beach Stone-curlews followed us relentlessly, calling all the while. At low tide there were usually about 300 waders feeding on the adjacent sand flats. Lots of Great Knots and Curlew Sandpipers, and also present were Red-necked Stints, Bar-tailed Godwits, Large Sand Plover and Lesser Sand Plover. Whimbrels called from the mangroves and on the beach.

An early morning walk into the thousand acre swamp on the Rocky, turned up a male Eclectus Parrot. We had good views as it flew from tree to tree in front of us. We also flushed a Large-tailed Nightjar here, as well as seeing Wandering Whistling-duck and Radjah Shelduck and Palm Cockatoo. We spent a total of six nights camped on the oceanfront. The Beach Stone-curlews were common; each pair of birds taking up a territory of about 3 km of beach. Atlas searches were done each day, with Little Kingfisher being seen three times in the mangroves, and the Red-headed Honeyeaters in their breeding plumage. Rufous-banded and Varied Honeyeaters also present in the mangroves, as were the hard to see Black Butcherbirds in the thickest parts. Great-billed Herons were seen well on two days.

After moving back to the homestead, we spent the next week taking day trips to the Massey and Rocky Rivers as well as visiting the many lagoons, which were all full. The expected rainforest birds on the Rocky River were hard to find, and July is not the best time to be here, we did however see Filled Monarch, Wompoo Pigeon, White-faced Robin and Northern Fantail here, and a walk along the vine-thicket of the Massey River gave us good looks at the Fawn-breasted Bowerbird, while hundreds of White-rumped Swiftlets flew overhead. Our two weeks on the property gave us 128 species and we filled in 31 atlas sheets. Two weeks here last September gave us 150 species.

SIGHTINGS



There were at least two unconfirmed reports of **Long-tailed Cuckoo** in Smithfield, Cairns, during April.

May 22nd **Australian Bustard** at Cairns Airport, stayed around for at least a week, very rare on the coast in Cairns.

One flew over the Cairns Esplanade many years ago - KF

May 27th **Southern Cassowary** - female on the Paluma Dam Road about 6 km in from the turn-off near Birthday Creek Falls. I must stress that this is my first encounter with Cassowaries at Paluma in about 10 years of frequent visits - ICL

June 1st **Glossy Ibis** - 18 at Lake Mitchell. DR

June 17th **Pied Imperial Pigeon** - Whitfield, Cairns, maybe overwintering instead of returning to PNG - SM.

June 18th **Red-winged Parrot** - female, Redden Island. Unusual on the coast in Cairns, 2nd sighting from here over 5 years - KF.

June 21st **Rufous Owl**, Emerald Creek Falls picnic area, along the Mareeba TAFE college road - TJ.

June 22nd **Crimson Finch**, 50+ on Lower Freshwater Road (Cairns) in and along the edge of a cane paddock mixed in with a greater number of **Chestnut-breasted Manikins**-KF.

June 22nd **Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo** Rex Range nr Mossman - DR

June 23rd 3 **Darter** nests at Yorkeys Knob (Cairns suburb) lagoon. Nests have 2,3 and 4 chicks in them about 3-4 weeks old, a pair of **Little Pied Cormorants** was also building a nest. 24 **Green Pygmy Goose** paired up & displaying as well - KF.

June 24th Female **Koel** at Port Douglas - DR

June 25th **White-eared Monarch**, Redden Island, Cairns (new for this site). White-eared Monarchs reported along the coast in May/July - KF

June 30th 120+ **Metallic Starlings** at Mossman - DR

July 3rd **Red-backed Button-quail** at Lower Daintree - DR

July 7th 2 **Barking Owls** at Port Douglas - DR

July 20th **Masked Lapwing** (southern race) at Wonga Beach - DR

July 21st **Pied Monarch** + large numbers of **White-cheeked & Bridled Honeyeaters**, Wongabel, Atherton Tableland - N.Qld Naturalist Club via DM.

July 21st Thousands of **Plumed Whistling-Ducks**, Hasties Swamp - N.Qld Naturalist Club via DM.

July 22nd **Crested Shrike-tits** Scrubby Creek/Carrington Road, Atherton - N.Qld Naturalist Club via DM.

July 23rd **Crested Shrike-tits** & Varied **Sittella** Plath Road - Barron River walk, Atherton - N.Qld Naturalist Club via DM.

July 26th **Black-breasted Buzzard** at Mt Molloy & **Black Bittern** at Port Douglas - DR

July 30th **Bourke's Parrot**, Munro Martin Park Cairns feeding with Peaceful Doves which it looks like at a glance - escapee - KF & LF

Aug 9th **Red-cheded Button-quail**, Station Ck NW of Mt Molloy - DR

Aug 14th First waders returned to the Esplanade. **Curlew Sandpipers** & **Red-necked Stints** followed on the 19th by **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers**. **Greenshanks** arrived on the 22nd - AA

Aug 22nd **Pied Imperial Pigeons** - two seen at Clifton Beach - IC

Aug 26th **Common Koel** calling at Wiepa - MB

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

AA - Andy Anderson, DR - Dell Richards, DM - Dawn Magarry, IC - Ian Cowan, ICL - Ian Clayton, KF - Keith Fisher, MB - Michael Barnett, SM - Stella Martin, TJ - Tony Jorgensen,

UPCOMING EVENT DETAILS

CRANE COUNT - 7th Oct. 2000 - Elinor

Scambler

The Atherton Tableland is one of the most important wintering sites for Australia's Sarus Cranes. How many are there? Are they increasing or declining? Birds Australia NQ Group's annual Tablelands Crane Count is on Saturday, October 7th. Meet at Hasties Swamp N.P. near Atherton at 3.30 pm for afternoon tea (BYO) and birdwatching. Teams then go to various sites to count the cranes as they fly in to roost for the night. Counters and families all welcome to a BYO everything buffet dinner afterwards, to tally results and swap stories at Jon & Peta Nott's. Bring binoculars and sensible shoes.

We are also interested to hear from members and others who may be at other potential Sarus Crane sites in NQ on October 7th - eg Innot Hot Springs, the Gulf, Lakefield etc.

Contact Elinor Scambler 4095 3296 Ian Sinclair 4091 4544 ah

TWITCHATHON - 28th -29TH Oct. 2000

Yes it's that time of the year again - time to raise money for birds by twitching. How about getting a team together for 24 hours of fun as you try to see as many birds as possible? Starting on the Cairns Esplanade at 12pm Saturday (the tide should be just right for waders), finishing at 12pm in Atherton with a BYO BBQ. If you can't join in Twitching, you will be very welcome to the BBQ at the finish and, of course, donations will be very welcome

For those of you going on the Bullaringa campout, there will be a special Twitchathon arranged. **Contact Ian Sinclair for details.**

BULLERINGA NATIONAL PARK- 28th Oct. -

4TH Nov 2000- Amanda Freeman

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has invited BANQ to conduct a bird survey of Bulleringa National Park. The Park isn't normally open to the public so this is a rare opportunity to visit this spectacular area and carry out bird surveys that will help provide information for the Parks' management. Over the course of the field trip we will visit as many different habitat types as possible, completing Atlas surveys as we go. Special attention will, of course, be paid to any likely looking finch spots. Gouldian's perhaps?

Bulleringa is a two-three hour drive from Mt Surprise. The roads are rough, 4WD only, and conditions will be very hot. Participants will need to be self-contained for camping. But don't let a little discomfort put

you off - for those who can come a wealth of excellent birding habitats await exploration.

Don't want to miss out on the Twitchathon? Don't despair - a special "Bulleringa Birding Bonanza" mini-twitch will be held in association with the field trip. Alternatively, join us after the weekends' main Twitchathon festivities.

For further details contact Amanda or Alastair Freeman

Ph: 4091 4262 (wk) or 4095 2148 (hm)

WESTERN QUEENSLAND NEWS John and Sue O'Malley

On the 2nd. of April, 2000 Sue (my wife), and I took an Atlas trip up to Camooweal. Most folk use this boarder town as a refuel/eat stop and keep moving on to the better tick sites north. However, it has a few good spots for great birding. Bob Forsyth even found Freckled Ducks in a local lagoon at this place. Of course there are lots of other good birds too.

After we had basically finished birding around the town and the vicinity, we headed off home to the Isa. Approximately 44.5km. out of Camooweal we decided to do one last area at the Microwave tower on the left of the HWY. We drove in and parked on the right two thirds of the way up the hill (open area of spinifex and Gidgee). We found a party of Variegated (Purple backed Fw's) Fairy-wren's, almost on stepping out of the car. Further in, about 50mtr. we saw a small break-away. On the edge of this we saw a variety of common birds, plus Black-chinned HE (Golden-backed), they looked to be nesting. We also found (out of it's range), a pair of Inland Thornbills (I was able to video them), they appeared to be nesting as well. We didn't have time to follow up the birds and find the nests (we usually do this). After walking some 1.5km. more we headed back to the car and home.

Before leaving though, Sue and I were impressed with some of the terrain, as possible CGw habitat: Mature Spinifex (have sent off to have some analysed as to specie type), broken stony ground with "islands" of Spinifex not close clumped stuff. The CGw's like to run around the "islands" and so need open ground of a stony/clay nature. I have not seen them as yet in green young spinifex; although my experience with the bird is as young and green as said plant. We can only share what we observe, but several patterns are emerging.

On the 18th. of May 2000 we went back to survey the area properly with Bob Forsyth. The area where we first parked was pretty quiet, so we continued on to the possible good looking CGw area. A few common HE's Brown, Grey Fronted's, Grey Headed's, and Variegated Fw's, heaps of Mistletoe Birds, but nothing much else. All three of us were discouraged by this time (an hour or so had elapsed), I suggested we try elsewhere (we have been trying to locate other CGw sites all over the place, without result), Sue was quiet, a little further in a depression some 300mtr's away, Sue and Bob agreed. As we got closer with no fortune, Bob suggested we go so I agreed that if we could do the depression area we could go, Bob said OK, let's go in there and do a circle out. Off we started.

10mtr's on, "tzeet" "Sweeet" Grasswren! We all called, and out flew a bird about 1mtr. off the ground above the spinifex, we all got glasses (3 pair of Swarovski's 10x42), on the bird, and up flew a second. We quickly compared observations, Sue and I saw flashes of white on the upper area of the bird, and Bob saw the rich rufous on the back only. We were pretty convinced that we had found CGw's. But what followed blew our minds. As we quickly followed the birds up as per usual pattern, 6-7mtr's behind the birds, they settled down and gave us better looks as they peered around spinifex clumps at us. They were calling magnificently, long metallic songs. As we got into a dried out depression and followed up for some 150mtr's, we found a gorge like area. In and around this particular area we saw some 8+ birds. One or two singly, while others were in a party of x3. We left them and continued with the first two birds that had moved out into the open spinifex again.

This whole area seems far superior to Lady Loretta Rd. (Bob keeps telling us it's actually McNamara's Rd.), as far as number of CGw's and habitat. However, the story is not finished. Eventually (we put the co-ordinates into our GPS units), we went back to the car, and had a cupper, sandwich, and shared lots of smiles. While we were eating

etc. we heard strange calls up in the hill area, so we scanned the hills and found nothing. Sue, suddenly told us that the sounds were coming from a 0.5mtr.diam. water drain right next to us. We looked up the drain and saw some Martin nests (Fairy we think), we saw no Martins anywhere, but we did see Black Headed Pardalotes going in regularly (can't call them Striated-they have no striations??). It turned out that the Pardalotes were using old Martin nests as their own! We just don't seem to be able to stop learning things.

As we drove away from this area reluctantly, (because of time constraints), we stopped halfway between the gate to the microwave tower and the Hwy., and Bob commenced doing some work on reporting for the Atlas. "Tzweeet" here we go again! grasswrens! We found x3 more CGw's right in the spinifex next to the car. This site is a fair way from where we had just been. We think it wise to keep the former site "unknown" at this stage, but it is safe to hand on the microwave access Rd. site, as it's right on the Hwy. heading to the NT. You don't have to go into Lady Loretta (McNamara's), over stony roads and distance. You can drive only 100mtr's., towards the gate, jump out, and tick off your CGw's and off you go.

TOWNSVILLE NEWS

A media statement from the Qld. Government has been forwarded by Jon Wren and follows; Friday, August 04, 2000 10:30 AM

An important north Queensland feeding and breeding site for rare birds has been declared a nature refuge, Environment and Heritage Minister Rod Welford announced today. The 'Serpentine Nature Refuge' covers 248ha of the Serpentine Lagoon on a grazing property 45km south of Townsville. "The lagoon provides vital habitat for rare waterfowl including the Cotton Pygmy Goose and the Black Swan, which breeds there," Mr Welford said.

"This is one of Queensland's most important freshwater wetlands and contains marshes, billabongs, ponds and significant areas of melaleuca woodland. "Many other animals like the grey kangaroo and the agile wallaby use the area as a feeding and stopover site.

"I'm sure locals will be pleased about this announcement. Last year, local schools, wildlife and Landcare groups, scientists and Sunfish supported a joint effort by the Townsville City Council and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) to rehabilitate the lagoon.

"This gazettal is another significant step in protecting this beautiful area and I'm pleased that further areas from a second property will be added to the nature refuge soon."

Mr Welford said under the Nature Conservation Act, land containing important vegetation or animal communities can be added to the protected estate and gazetted 'nature refuges'. "Private landholders can enter into voluntary conservation agreements to protect part or all of their properties, and guide its future use while providing for existing uses," he said.

"That means the conservation value of the land is protected forever and the property is managed in an ecologically sustainable manner."

Mr Welford congratulated property owners the Arratta family for their commitment to nature conservation. "As part of their conservation agreement the Arratta family has will continue to graze stock as they have done for about 30 years, using practices that maintain the health of the wetland."

Jo Wieneke and members of BA-NQG in Townsville have been conducting regular atlassing trips to Serpentine Lagoon over the last few years and it is good to see the Arratta family recognising this important area. Also congratulations to the Qld. government for its declaration as a Nature Refuge.

WHAT ELSE HAS BEEN HAPPENING?

CAIRNS ESPLANADE NEWS - Keith Fisher



The trucks have been rumbling in carting sand to the southern end of the Esplanade. This fill will be the foundation of the swimming lagoon and beach and has to be allowed to settle before further work

is carried out. As the sand has been put in egrets and gulls have been foraging along the edge, no doubt picking up any small animals displaced from their homes in the mud. Crested Tern, Little Tern and Silver Gull have all been roosting on the new 'sandbank' created by the fill. Waders have been more prominent this winter with Bar-tailed Godwit, 1 Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew (at least 34), Grey-tailed Tattler, Great Knot (up to 176), Red-necked stint (4), Curlew Sandpiper (7), 3 Beach Stone-curlew (seen bathing in the freshwater outlets on the mudflats), Pied Oystercatcher (2), Pacific Golden Plover (4), Red-capped Plover (2), Lesser Sand Plover (3) and Masked Lapwing all present in June/July. Numbers of egrets and herons have been steady with White-faced Heron (8), Little Egret (33), Eastern Reef Egret (1 grey phase), Great Egret (10+), Intermediate Egret (at least 5), and Striated heron (2). A sub-adult Black-necked Stork has also been making regular appearances. The sand filling has been extended to include a previous blank area between the Cairns Cityport development and the esplanade development resulting in a longer period of sand carting. This will take the filling process into November.

BIRD HIDE AT HASTIES SWAMP

Our Convenor Jon Nott, has had the greatest involvement in obtaining funding and negotiations for a bird hide to be built at Hasties Swamp National Park in Atherton on behalf of BA-NQG. The hard work and at times frustrating work is finally coming to an end with construction due to begin shortly on the project. Thanks Jon for all your work and hopefully we will be able to announce the official opening in the not too distant future.

BIRD SURVEYS IN REVEGETATION

SITES Elinor Scambler

Quarterly surveys were conducted at Donaghy's Corridor, Peterson Creek, Prior's Creek, and Pelican Point. At Prior's Creek we recorded a Pied Monarch at the planting site behind the Atherton Golf Course's 18th tee, but the Crested Shrike-tits that were present the previous week didn't turn up on the day.

The next survey round is in late September through to mid-October, if you would like to participate please contact Elinor Scambler.

ATLAS NEWS - Keith Fisher

Wetlands are in need of atlassing, especially those that sustain waders. For example two of the five RAMSAR areas in Queensland, Bowling Green Bay, south of Townsville and Shoalwater Bay, north of Rockhampton have nothing recorded for them. Also a further 117 wetland sites listed as important Wetland Habitats have no figures for them. Many surveys are needed for those normally uninteresting places like cereal crop pastures, lucern pastures, cane fields, and other uniform habitats. Environment Australia is largely paying for this atlas and they want to compare the differences between these uniform habitats and nearby natural habitats.

If you are atlassing a 2ha site regularly it would be good to fill in a habitat form and have the site registered. By doing this you will not have to fill in the location details each time, just the site number. Don't forget your sites should be at least 400m apart. Finally all atlasers should have a list of co ordinators for the various areas, please send your sheets to the appropriate coordinator in the area you were atlassing - this will save having co ordinators on forward sheets to the correct areas and lessen the time these volunteers spend checking sheets - thanks.

INTERESTING BIRDLIST!

Les Thyer in Mackay posted the following birdlist from a central Qld. lake resort to BirdingAus. You can have fun working out the accepted common names, some are correct.

Sea Hawk, Snipe, Sandpiper, Barking Bird, Masked Plover, Spur-Winged Plover, Tern, Sea Gull, White Ibis, Black & White Ibis, White Crane, Blue Crane, Spoonbill, Shag, Teal Duck, Black Duck, Whistling Duck, Wood Duck, Coffee Duck, Pink Eyed Duck, Diver, White Headed Water Hen, Water Hen, Jacky Winter, Banana Bird, Mistletoe

Bird, Bellbird, Happy Family, White Cockatoo, Bullen Bull, Quarion, Blue Mountain Parrot, Swift, Zebra Finch, Sparrow Hawk, Black Swan, Brolga, Swallow, Rainbow Bird, Blue Martin, Mini Martin, Emu, Bustard, Honeyeater, Bower Bird, Top Knot Pigeon, Squatter Pigeon, Bronze Wing Pigeon, Kingfisher, Cuckoo, Robin Red Breast, Tawny Frogmouth, Mopoke, Quail, Wren, Butcher Bird, Magpie, Pie Wit, Crow, Kookaburra, Curlew, Willy Wag Tail, Dollar Bird, Leather Head, Turtle Dove, Woodpecker, Hopping Johnny, Galah, Black Cockatoo, Rosella, Budgerigar, Crimson Wing Parrot, Double Bar Finch, Plum Finch, Pelican, Jabiru, Lark, Chicken Hawk, Kite Hawk, Wedge Tailed Eagle, Blue Jay.

The Mini Martin sounds like a cross between a 1960's car and something James Bond used to drive!

BIRD IDENTIFICATION OBSERVATIONS & NEWS

FUNDING FOR RED GOSHAWK SURVEYS

NHT funding for Red Goshawk surveys has been approved and Greg Czechura from the Queensland Museum has been appointed to the two year project. It will be administrated by QPWS on behalf of BA-NQG.

NESTING SPOTTED PARDALOTE - Del

Richards

A Spotted Pardalote was located nesting in an earthen bank of Station Creek, NW of Mount Molloy, which is unusual for this species. I spoke to Lloyd Nielsen and he said as far as he was aware in the "Wet Tropics" they are only known to nest in knotholes.

Locally these pardalotes are altitudinal migrants, generally inhabiting areas of Flooded Gums at higher altitudes. Only one bird was noticed it was very actively taking nesting material into its tunnel located below a large eucalypt root system, It was a nice surprise.

BUFF-BREASTED

BUTTON-QUAIL-Lloyd

Nielsen

(Lloyd is still on the trail of the Buff-breasted Button-quail and has tendered some thoughts on this species, which follow. He would also still like to hear of any sightings you may have).

"I recently completed a project (report yet to be written) for Queensland Ornithological Society (Birds Queensland) to try to determine its current status. After 15 months, and about 15,000 km travelled from Coen and Iron Range in the north to Georgetown in the south and most places in between, I am not much wiser unfortunately, except to say that it seems numbers are extremely low and that the species is probably in trouble. I found only three pairs (between early December 1998 and early February 1999) - all about Mt Molloy. However, after the initial sighting of each pair, none could be relocated. This does not mean that Mt Molloy is THE area for them - it was simply that being close to home I was able to concentrate on them more often. I was also able to keep the search up through the Wet Season as well - most areas north of here are inaccessible through the Wet.

I still suspect quantity/density of grass has an influence on them. We have had 2 long, very wet Wet Seasons, which has resulted in a huge, dense body of grass. They seem to prefer thinly grassed areas - at least during the breeding season (Wet Season). The three pairs were all found in this habitat.

If travelling as far north as Coen, look in the short grassy areas between the town and the airport (north). This seems ideal habitat at least for breeding. This is also in the same general area where McLennan found them breeding in 1922 (February- April) and collected skins, and found nests.

Following the time and effort put in during the QOS study, I am pretty sure that the size of the remaining population is very small and that the

species is probably in trouble - unless something else is happening which we have not realised as yet.

FINCHES IN OUR REGION- Michael Todd

(Reprinted from BirdingAus)

I've had some queries re how my finch work has been going so I thought I might give a quick review of what I've found so far. I won't go into too much detail and I'm hesitant to draw solid conclusions as I haven't analysed all the data yet, but I can give a general outline.

STAR FINCH

It looks as though there could be three subspecies of Star. Photographs that I've seen of specimens that were collected during the 1800's in NSW look quite different to Star specimens that I have seen and Stars that I have handled from further north. I need to look at more specimens though. This would support Schodde and Masons findings. The differences between the Cape York form and the western Australian are subtler but still appear to be consistent. The question I think is how far the Cape York form stretched across the gulf and south of the cape, and how far north the southern form actually came. My gut feeling is that the Cape York form may have gone a lot further south and the southern form may not have gone as far north as once thought. Once again I need to look at specimens again.

The Stars seem to be heavily reliant on the availability of water. While they are not as sedentary as has been previously suggested they are probably not as nomadic as many other finches may be. In northern Australia this requires that they have enough available surface water to last them through the dry, because there is plenty of water in the wet! They are a late wet season breeder not starting until near the end of the wet. If we assume that the stars, which existed further south, were similar in habits then they would have suffered badly from the effects of cattle and sheep around watersources during dry years. In northern Australia this damage is alleviated each wet by the lush growth that is stimulated by the rains.

CRIMSON FINCH

The black-bellied crimson finch that is distributed in northern Australia from the Kimberley to the Leichardt River in QLD is faring much better than the white-bellied on Cape York and probably the black-bellied eastern QLD (don't have much info on this population). Crimsons particularly like open-forest places with long grass for shelter and this habitat is quite common along drainage systems in northern Australia. In contrast there is a lot less of this type of habitat on Cape York than you would think. So, there were probably a lot less white-bellied than black-bellied in the first place. Crimsons have short rounded wings poorly suited to long distance flight making them unable to cross large areas of unsuitable habitat to get to suitable habitat. The result of this is that local disturbances probably cause local extinctions rather than declines which can later recover. Another interesting difference between the 2 subsp. seems to be the behavioural flexibility of the black-bellied, coming right into towns and nesting in everything from buildings to boats. Boat nesting has a low success rate when the boats are regularly used though!

Overall, I would say that it is the white-bellied Crimson that is most vulnerable because the populations are so small and spread out. The southern star is very close to extinction if not already there. The stars across the north are probably stable because of the constant regeneration of habitat each wet season but they need to be watched. There has probably been a decline through the gulf and certainly there has been the big decline away from the coast.

Sightings of both these species would be welcome by Michael and can be passed on via Stephen Garnett.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS IN OUR REGION

Ms. B. Kehoe - Mount Quincan Crater Retreat, Yungaburra; Barbara Maslen, Mossman; Mr.M. Mclaughlin, Ingham; Ms. Y. Nicoll, Trinity Beach, Cairns; Ms. P.R. Slatery, Cairns; Ms. M. Stirk, Atherton; Mr. R. Swan, Atherton;

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

CAR STICKERS

BA-NQG car stickers, featuring a Pied Imperial Pigeon on a tropical green background are now available, help promote BA-NQG. A donation of \$2.50 each or two for \$4.50 plus postage will secure them for you. They will be available on field trips and from the secretary.

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POSITION VACANT

Newsletter Editor

**Looking to help out? Have fun putting
your creative word processing skills to
good use. It's an important job to keep
our members informed of the birding**

happenings in our region. Plenty of assistance to get you going. Contact Keith Fisher or Jon Nott

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.