



**Birds Australia**

Conservation Through Knowledge

Birds Australia Centenary 1901 - 2001

Celebrating Bird Conservation

**Birds Australia - North Queensland Group**

# Contact Call

March 2001 • Issue: Great Crested Grebe

## **COLLARED IMPERIAL PIGEON- Jo Wieneke, David James and Keith Fisher**

One of the more significant sightings in our region for a while was made by Ken Stockton, an American visitor, who on a fishing trip, saw 3 **Collared Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula muellerii* (Black-collared Fruit-Pigeon in Simpson and Day), on Fantome Island on 28<sup>th</sup> Jan. (Fantome Is. is in the Palm Island group immediately south of Orpheus Island about 22 km off the coast east of Ingham). Ken is also a birdwatcher and had binoculars and a copy of Simpson & Day with him. He originally saw one perched in a dead branch above a fresh water stream entering a bay at the northern tip of the island before two others joined this single bird. When disturbed they flew off heading north.

This fruit-pigeon is usually found in the lowlands of New Guinea. The only previous record of the species in Australian territory was at Boigu I. in Torres Strait in 1980, when a single bird was seen to fly to the island at dawn and leave at dusk, apparently on a foray from mainland New Guinea 7 km to the north. The most recent sighting was reported to Birds Australia and the word spread. Mike Carter from Melbourne, always keen to add yet another bird to his Australian list, organised a boat to the Palm Is. from Taylors Beach (NE Ingham).

On February 2nd six local birders joined three who had flown up from the south on a twitching mission to the islands. With permission from the Palm Island Community Council, we searched the area where the pigeons had been reported from, and a forested area on a nearby island, that locals said was a good place to find pigeons. Late in the afternoon an unfamiliar pigeon call was heard but the storms and rain, which had been threatening for days, made further searching impossible. The presence of Collared Imperial Pigeons was not confirmed. The original record has been sent to the Birds Australia Rarities Committee for appraisal.

The islands visited were not particularly rich in bird life. Single Eastern Reef Egrets were on most beaches, a few crested and Lesser Crested Terns and a Great Frigatebird were seen at sea. Dusky Honeyeaters and Helmeted Friarbirds were the only honeyeaters. Though some trees were fruiting only a few Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves and Pied Imperial Pigeons were seen. Other interesting sightings were a Bush-hen with young, a Southern Boobook and a juvenile Varied Triller. Atlas forms will be submitted for the area. Prospective visitors to the islands are advised that they are an Aboriginal reserve and permission should be sought from the Palm Island Community Council before landing.

The trip was an opportunity to atlas an area not normally visited by birdos, but finding the Collared Imperial Pigeon was always going to be a long shot. Never the less we should all be aware of their presence in our region and keep a look out for them

**The AGM will be held in Cardwell on the Queen's Birthday Weekend  
9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> June. See Page 3 for more details**

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### EVENTS CALENDAR

- March 10<sup>th</sup> Sat.** Wave the Waders Goodbye. Bird ID on the Cairns Esplanade. Meet at info. shelter opposite Tradewinds Hotel 12-12.30pm Bring lunch. Contact Keith Fisher.
  - March 17-18<sup>th</sup>** Bluewater State Forest (north of Townsville), permit required. (see P 3)
  - March 25<sup>th</sup> Sun.** Mystery Atlassing trip, Atherton Tableland. (see P3)
  - April 13-16<sup>th</sup>** Easter campout – St.George/Kimba area west of Laura contact John Clarkson.
  - April 28<sup>th</sup> Sat** Cairns Crocodile Farm – Meet 2.30pm (see P3)
  - May 25-26<sup>th</sup>** Daintree River Trip with Chris Dahlberg. (see P3)
  - June 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>** Queen's Birthday weekend. AGM Cardwell (see P3), more details June CC
  - July 1<sup>st</sup> Sun.** Birds Australia 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday – Big Birthday Birdwatch (see P3)
  - July 15<sup>th</sup> Sun.** Kaban/Ravenshoe area atlassing contact Ian Sinclair
  - Aug 4<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>** Cape York atlassing campout expedition, will be based at the Heathlands Ranger Station. BA-NQG atlas sites will be targeted. Further details June CC. contact John Clarkson.
- Field Trips may change after publication - contact local reps. for the latest info. This allows flexibility, especially weather conditions. Extra events may also be arranged.**

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email [ian.Sinclair@dnr.qld.gov.au](mailto:ian.Sinclair@dnr.qld.gov.au)

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**Project Contacts:**

**Beach Stone Curlew Study**

Amanda Freeman (contact number as above).

**Northern Gulf Regional Strategy Group**

Ian Fox Ph (07) 4091 4193 email [foxi@fastinternet.net.au](mailto:foxi@fastinternet.net.au)

**Gouldian Finch and Birds at Waterholes Survey**

Klaus Uhlenhut (Details for Ingham/Tully Rep.)

**Redden Island Survey** (Cairns)

Keith Fisher (Details for Cairns Rep.)

**Sarus/Brolga Tableland Crane counts**

Elinor Scambler Ph (07) 4095 3296 email [dacelo@austarnet.com.au](mailto:dacelo@austarnet.com.au)

**Egret & Ibis Counts** (Townsville)

Jo Wieneke (details for Townsville Rep.) 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 & north of Gulf Development Road, inc. Cape York

**Regional Organiser: - (North of 18°)**

Graham Harrington ph: 07 4096 5051

email: [treetop@austarnet.com.au](mailto:treetop@austarnet.com.au)

**SRO'S: -**

Stephen Garnett (Cairns) ph: 07 4052 3088

email: [stephen.garnett@env.qld.gov.au](mailto:stephen.garnett@env.qld.gov.au)

Glenn Holmes (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4091 4364

email: [dasyornis@ledanet.com.au](mailto:dasyornis@ledanet.com.au)

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

email: [nielsen@tpgi.com.au](mailto:nielsen@tpgi.com.au)

Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) ph: 07 4095 3296

email: [dacelo@austarnet.com.au](mailto:dacelo@austarnet.com.au)

Keith Fisher (Cairns) ph: 07 4039 0972

email: [lkfisher@austarnet.com.au](mailto:lkfisher@austarnet.com.au)

**Southern Region**

Cardwell south & south of the Gulf Development Road inc. Mt Isa.)

**Regional Organiser:- (South of 18°)**

Jo Wieneke ph: 07 4771 4707 email: [bowerbird@msm.com.au](mailto:bowerbird@msm.com.au)

**SRO'S:-**

Ian Clayton (Townsville) ph: 07 4725 6489

email: [birds&bush@ultra.net.au](mailto:birds&bush@ultra.net.au)

Jon Wren (Bowen/Ayr) ph: 07 4786 2614

email: [maluras5@tpg.com.au](mailto:maluras5@tpg.com.au)

Marion Crouther (Mackay-west inc. Mt. Isa) ph: 07 4958 4613

**BIRDS AUSTRALIA MEMBERSHIP**

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

This includes membership of the national organisation + membership of the regional group, Birds Australia - North Queensland Group (BA-NQG). Four issues of the full-colour bird magazine *Wingspan* + four issues of *Contact Call*, the BA-NQG newsletter.

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

**Birds Australia**  
**415 Riversdale Road**  
**Hawthorn East, Vic 3123**

Birds Australia Home Page - [Http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au)

## A FINAL WORD ON BOWERBIRD COLLECTING - Jon Nott BA-NQG Convenor

I am sure that most people will be aware of the fact that a permit to collect and kill 42 Bower birds comprising of 14 Great Bowerbirds, 7 Golden Bowerbirds, 7 Satin Bowerbirds, 7 Tooth-billed Bowerbirds and 7 Catbirds was issued to Dr Lainy Day late in 2000. BA-NQG took up the issue just prior to Christmas and succeeded in negotiating an agreement with QPWS to review the process that is used to look at applications of this nature. The Queensland Director of EPA, Dr. Ian McPhail agreed that the process was in need of review and that QPWS would look at forming an ethics committee involving the relevant scientific bodies and Birds Australia, that all permit applications of this nature including scientific permits would have to go through. A very good outcome for Birds Australia and the birds. We look forward to working with QPWS in the future to facilitate this outcome.

I was also pleased to see that Birds Australia with the strong support of other groups namely, BOCA and ACF can work together jointly and have an effect on such an important issue as this one. Thank you to all the groups and individuals that backed me up on this issue.

I would also like to point out that this collection of bowerbirds is a mere drop in the ocean to the millions of birds that are being killed through TREE CLEARING!!!!!!

I would urge you all to keep the pressure on our political friends and the bureaucrats to end this unnecessary destruction of our native forests before we lose a whole suite of species.

## FUTURE TRIP DETAILS

### Weekend adventure to Bluewater State Forest Saturday and Sunday 17th and 18th March 2001

Many people may not have visited Bluewater State Forest. It contains the most southern extent of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and probably the most southern extent of a number of north Queensland's species. As access has been restricted over the past years (cyclonic damage to the road), very little research and/or observations have been done in this area. The Department of Natural Resources are therefore interested in gathering information on the area and are opening the State Forest to members of Birds Australia for a weekend campout and bird watch.

Meet 10am Saturday at the locked gate, 13km from highway at Bluewater (Townsville) along Forestry Road 4WD &/or high clearance vehicles preferred RSVP required for permit allocation and organisation of facilities Phone Marty McLaughlin on

(07) 4777 2822email: [marty.mclaughlin@dnr.qld.gov.au](mailto:marty.mclaughlin@dnr.qld.gov.au)

### 25<sup>th</sup> March Sunday Mystery Atlas tour near Atherton.

A very interesting area will be selected covering various habitats. Final route will be decided according to weather conditions. Should be a great day out. Bring lunch; meet at Platypus Park (Herberton Rd out of Atherton) at 7.30am and we can car pool if necessary. Contact Ian Sinclair.

### 28<sup>th</sup> April Cairns Crocodile Farm

Meet 2.30 in the car park, Crossland Road, Edmonton. Turn off the Bruce Hwy south of Edmonton onto the Yarrabah Road & follow the signs to Crocodile Farm. There is an entry fee. See if we can find Little Bitterns, Little Kingfishers, Spotless & White-browed Crakes. Bring hats/sunscreen and/or umbrella. Contact Keith Fisher

### 25<sup>th</sup>- 26<sup>th</sup> May Daintree River.

We have been invited to visit members Peter and Barbara Maslen's property near Daintree on the Saturday afternoon where they have been busy with a wetland and tree planting project. In the evening we will probably have a meal at one of the Daintree Village restaurants and have an early night ready for a 6.30am river trip with Chris Dahlberg.

Chris's river trips are not to be missed and he has offered a special rate of \$30 each for the two hour trip. Please let Lindsay know if you are coming, as there are only 12 seats on Chris's boat. Please make your own overnight accommodation arrangements. There will be an alternative trip on Sunday morning for those of you not going on the boat trip. Contact Lindsay for further details.

### 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> June AGM

You will find a nomination form enclosed with this issue of Contact Call - all the positions will become vacant. The secretary, Lindsay, will not be re-nominating as she has completed her term, having been on the committee since 1994 at the formation of our group. The tableland rep. Ian Sinclair is standing down. All positions are vacant and only financial members can be nominated for a position.

Positions will be as follows, Executive Committee: **Convenor, Convenor elect, Secretary, Treasurer** and non-executive committee members will be a **Conservation Officer** plus the **regional reps**. Remember this is your group and to continue the good work that has gone before we need a strong committee. Our group membership has passed the 200 mark now and is steadily growing. The AGM will be a small part of the weekend, other events have been organised by Alastair Freeman, inc. speakers and atlas field trips to surrounding areas - these will be announced in the June Newsletter. Members attending will have to arrange their own accommodation in Cardwell.

### 1<sup>st</sup> July Big Birthday Birdwatch

Birds Australia celebrates its 100th birthday today and to celebrate in the best way why not have a day out birdwatching? The Atlas team at National Office has suggested a super day of Atlassing. You could survey your normal atlas sites or give yourself a treat by going somewhere new and atlassing new sites and seeing new birds. Atlassers who do the most surveys on the 1<sup>st</sup> July will be in the running for a secondhand Atlas GPS at the end of the project.

## TRIP REPORTS

### CHRISTMAS PARTY - 25/11/2000

Keith & Lindsay Fisher

The November field trip was to the Fishers for the annual Christmas party! A good turn out of people lured on the promise of a spectacular sight of over 100 fig-parrots roosting in trees adjacent to their house. On cue as everyone spilled out onto the driveway, glasses in hand, the fig-parrots arrived - all two of them! For several weeks before we had counted up to 108 birds coming in to roost and surprise surprise they all turned up the following evening! Why did nobody believe us?

The evening then degenerated into a drinking and feeding frenzy to try and forget about promises. Then there was the party games - we were all given an endangered bird name to pin to our hair (the hairless ones had hats) and had to guess what it was by asking one question about it from each person. Eventually having guessed the bird we had to give a 30 sec. talk about it accompanied by its call. This activity confirmed to the neighbors that we are completely mad! It was good fun, the Noisy Scrub Bird got into the spirit by hiding behind the sofa, and being very secretive - we are not so sure about the call though. It was a fun night and lots of good food.

### KINGFISHER PARK CAMPOUT 26-28<sup>TH</sup> /1/2001 Keith &

Lindsay Fisher

The annual field trip to Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge at Julatten (16 35 43S 145 20 27E) was held over the Australia Day weekend. The group split up into smaller parties and headed off in all directions. Mt. Lewis, which is just up the road, provided it's usual good birding with up to 40 Blue-faced Parrot-Finches including a nest 120 ft. up a tree (thanks to John Young for pointing that out). Golden Bowerbirds were seen by some, Tooth-billed Bowerbirds were actively calling and a Cassowary was heard grunting as it took off through the rainforest. Some of the other birds seen here were Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Atherton Scrubwren, Chowchilla, Victoria's Riflebird & Bassian

Thrush. The woodland country out towards Abattoir Swamp (nr. Julatten) and beyond to Lake Mitchell (along the Mareeba Road), provided plenty of birds including Squatter Pigeon, Lovely Fairy-wren, White-browed Robin, Yellow-breasted Boatbill and Northern Fantail. Kingfisher Park had its usual good birding; a pair of Red-necked Crakes had 3 chicks getting under our feet! Buff-Breasted Paradise Kingfishers were feeding young as was a Noisy Pitta and Ron provided his legendary hospitality throughout the weekend – thanks Ron.

Lloyd Nielsen provided evening entertainment on the Friday night with tales of his early days birding in the 50's and 60's - days when birdos were strange people (has that changed!) and the nearest birdo was 200 miles away. Lloyd also showed some excellent slides. Saturday night's entertainment was provided by Elinor Scambler who forced us all to drink large amounts of champagne, from a endless supply out of the back of her car. It was all to do with a special birthday Elinor was celebrating. All up a great weekend with a bird tally of at least 153 species.

### REDDEN ISLAND 11/2/2001- Keith & Lindsay Fisher

The persistent rains of the previous week gave way to brilliant sunshine and blue skies for this Sunday morning atlas stroll around Redden Island. Four of us walked around the island avoiding the flooded areas and managed to see 44 species in just over 1 ½ hours. The birds were in short supply and many species were only seen once. There was a family of Spangled Drongo with at least one juvenile, a Channel-billed Cuckoo was heading north and one Rose-crowned Pigeon was seen flying out of the mangroves. One notable absentee was the Pied Imperial-Pigeon; maybe some have already headed northward on migration. A pleasant morning was had before the rains returned again.

### TOWNSVILLE NEWS – Jo Wieneke

#### Pied Imperial Pigeon Counts

One of the longest ongoing bird studies in Australia must surely be the seasonal count of Pied Imperial Pigeons on North Brook Island (off the coast from Cardwell). In 1966 Margaret and Arthur Thorsbourne thought there seemed to be a lot of pigeons in the area and counted 4,600 birds. The following year numbers were down to 3,000 and it was discovered that one shooting party had killed at least 1,100 birds. Apparently up till fairly recent times this was regarded as a 'sport' and big shooting parties often took place all along the north Queensland coast. Possibly as a result of the shoot, the highest count in the 1968-69 season was only 1,451 birds. When the counters arrived that year they found a shooting party preparing for another massive shoot. As honorary rangers they were able to stop the shooting and confiscate the guns.

Since then, with shooting outlawed, numbers have gradually risen, with some fluctuations, to a peak of 45,134 in Dec. 94. This was an exceptional year with high numbers from October through till February. In the past 00-01 season, numbers peaked in November with 34,196 birds. The 3 northern islands in the group are fully protected all year round with no landing permitted. South Brook I. is Commonwealth property and no landing is allowed there during the pigeon and tern breeding season - Oct-Feb. Special permission to land on the island is given for the counts and surveys of seeds dropped below nests. Rubbish is collected from the beach and tern colonies are monitored. Counts are carried out from mid-afternoon till sunset 4 or 5 times each breeding season by members of QPWS and local residents (and a few ring-ins) from the same sandspit on North Brook I. Watching thousands of pigeons returning to the islands and hearing the build-up of calls from the rainforest is an unforgettable experience. For a more on the pigeons read the chapter 'The Nutmeg Pigeon' in Hinchinbrook Island - the Land Time Forgot by Arthur and Margaret Thorsbourne.

### Notes from other journals

In Corella (Dec 2000) there is a paper on 'The Suburban Bird Community of Townsville Revisited' by Darryl Jones and Jo Wieneke. Townsville members of BA-NQG carried out fieldwork for this paper.

The latest edition of Sunbird, the journal of the Queensland Ornithological Society (now Birds Queensland), has an interesting article by Peter and Hazel Britten on 'The Birds of Charters Towers, North Queensland' which summarises the observations they made during the 17 years they lived there.

### SIGHTINGS



#### September

23<sup>rd</sup> **Southern Cassowary** dung on Mt. Lewis consisted almost entirely of *Aceratium dogrellii* - CI

#### October

- 15<sup>th</sup> **Pied Monarch** - Kingfisher Park, Julatten - CI
- 15<sup>th</sup> **Black Bittern**, Hasties Swamp (Nr. Atherton) - ES
- 15<sup>th</sup> **Pallid Cuckoo & Banded Honeyeater**, Wongabel Siding, Nr. Hasties - ES
- 21<sup>st</sup> **Large-billed Gerygone** feeding **Gould's** or **Little Bronze Cuckoo** in Centenary Lakes, Cairns - BV.
- 21<sup>st</sup> **Little Kingfisher**, Centenary Lakes - BV
- 24<sup>th</sup> Young **Australian Hobby**, Lake Eacham - GH
- 30<sup>th</sup> **Noisy Pitta**, Lake Eacham Ranger Station - AS

#### November

- Black-breasted Buzzard**, Yungaburra - AG
- 7<sup>th</sup> 2 **Wedge-tailed Eagle** feeding a Juvenile at Hasties Swamp - JF
- 14<sup>th</sup> **Great-billed Heron**, a juvenile had taken up residence in the Cairns Botanic Gardens near Centenary Lakes- BV
- 19<sup>th</sup> 5 or 6 **Carpentarian Grass-wren**, 44 km East of Camooweal on access road to Microwave Tower No 4144 - BF
- 21<sup>st</sup> **Victoria's Riflebird**, heard calling in the Barron Gorge NP. (unusual at this time of year close to the coast in Cairns) - KF
- 22<sup>nd</sup> **Buff-breasted Button Quail**, Mareeba Wetlands - TR & PM
- 22<sup>nd</sup> **Lesser Sooty & Barking Owl**, Tolga Scrub (Nr. Atherton) - TR
- 24<sup>th</sup> **Little Kingfisher**, pair nesting in broken log, Lower Daintree- DR
- 26<sup>th</sup> 8 **Broad-billed Sandpiper**, Cairns Esplanade - KF
- 28<sup>th</sup> Newly fledged **Grey-headed Robin**, Yungaburra town - AG
- 28<sup>th</sup> 6 **Sarus Crane**, Hasties Swamp - BC
- 28<sup>th</sup> **Glossy Ibis**, Lakeside, Yungaburra - BC
- 28<sup>th</sup> 150 **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo**, in paddock at Walkamin - BC
- 28<sup>th</sup> **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo**, eating White Beach *Gmelina fasciculiflora* fruit/seeds, Josephine Falls - L. Jackson QPWS.

#### December

- 1<sup>st</sup> 350+ **Fork-tailed Swift** at Muralug Village (10 36 01S 142 12 04E, Prince of Wales Isl. Torres Strait) - JW
- 1<sup>st</sup> **Oriental Cuckoo**, Lake Eacham - PL
- 2<sup>nd</sup> **Trumpet Manucode** heard calling persistently from rainforest beside Alice River, western Cape York Peninsula (15 22 48S 141 01 20E, southern range extension) - ES & KF
- 2<sup>nd</sup> **Intermediate Egret** with tag at Mt. Isa. It was tagged as a nestling at Macquarie Marshes on 02/12/1998 1376 km from Mount Isa. The time between banding & resighting was 2 years 0 months 14 days - BF
- 5<sup>th</sup> Approx. 70 **Maggie Geese** observed from Muralug Village travelling in a southerly direction towards Cape York. It was my contention that the birds were travelling from New Guinea to Australia and possibly heading for the Jardine Swamps and further south - JW
- 6<sup>th</sup> **European Starling** – Pomppuraaw, Western Cape York Peninsula – ES, KF, AF & MT.
- 7<sup>th</sup> **Mangrove Grey Fantail** Kendal River mouth (14 10 16S 141 35 38 E, confirmation of northern range on Western Cape York Peninsula) – ES & KF

14<sup>th</sup> 13 **Spotted Whistling Duck** on the swamp behind Chilli Beach, Portland Roads CYP - DH & DJ

14<sup>th</sup> 1**Torresian Crow**, calling, Kewarra Beach, Cairns (unusual) - SG

17<sup>th</sup> 4 **Spotted Whistling Duck** overflow pond behind the Sewage farm near the Napranum turn off and another 7 at the Awonga Point Sewage Farm. Both sites easily viewable from the fences - DH & DJ

17<sup>th</sup> 1**Torresian Crow**, flying over Sheridan Street, Cairns (unusual in Cairns) - SG.

20<sup>th</sup> **Sacred Kingfisher**(M) Hurricane Rd., west of Mt. Carbine - DR

21<sup>st</sup> **Spotted Catbird**, creek nr. Atherton Van Park, Gillies Hwy. (1<sup>st</sup> in 20 years) - TI

22<sup>nd</sup> 1 **Radjah Shelduck**, Hasties Swamp, Atherton (uncommon here)- PL

27<sup>th</sup> **White-browed Crake** + 4 fluffy black chicks, Giru S of Townsville - JW.i

27<sup>th</sup> 4 young **Black Bittern** either in or perched above a nest in a large melaleuca at Giru - JW.i

28<sup>th</sup> **Buff-banded Rail** in the salt pan at Rowes Bay, with at least 2 black chicks - JW.i

29<sup>th</sup> 5 **Channel-billed Cuckoo** (1 ate 6 gum leaves), Mt. Molloy cemetery - DR

#### January 2001

**Red-necked Crake** breeding at Paluma (North of Townsville) - JW.i

1<sup>st</sup> **Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo**, Mowbray SF nr. Julatten - KF & LF

1<sup>st</sup> Melanistic **Willie Wagtail**, breeding at Tinaroo (mate & young normal) - JL

9<sup>th</sup> **Torresian Crow**, Kamerunga, Cairns (unusual here) - KF & LF.

9<sup>th</sup> 11 **Little Lorikeets**, Julatten - DR.

14<sup>th</sup> **Red-backed Button-Quail**, paddock nr. Lake Barrine - ESc

20<sup>th</sup> **Crested Shrike-tit**, Prior's Ck. Atherton - GH, JH & ESc

22<sup>nd</sup> **Cotton Pygmy-goose** + 10 very small downy young, Pelican Point (L. Tinaroo) - ESc

22<sup>nd</sup> 6 Immature **Sarus Crane**, paddock nr. Kairi (Atherton), (7 seen by JL at same location 2 weeks earlier) - ESc

23<sup>rd</sup> **Rufous Owl**, Wongabel State Forest (nr. Atherton) - ESc

24<sup>th</sup> 2 **Oriental Cuckoo**, Mount Molloy town - KF

24<sup>th</sup> 40+ **Blue-faced Parrot-Finch** on Mt. Lewis - KF

25<sup>th</sup> 4 **Little Bittern**, Cairns Crocodile Farm, Edmonton - DJ & KC

28<sup>th</sup> 3 **Collared Imperial Pigeon** on Fantome Island off the Ingham coast. (see story on front page).

29<sup>th</sup> 1 **Broad-billed Sandpiper**, Cairns Esplanade - KF

30<sup>th</sup> **Oriental Cuckoo**, Hasties Swamp - PL

31<sup>st</sup> **Papuan Frogmouth**, (Female brooding 1 chick Male nearby) Pajinka, tip of Cape York Peninsula - Pajinka staff per ESc

#### February

1<sup>st</sup> **Red-bellied Pitta**, incubating 3 eggs, Pajinka CYP - ESc

2<sup>nd</sup> **Rufous Owl**, Lockerbie Scrub (tip CYP) - ESc

3<sup>rd</sup> 15 **Channel-billed Cuckoo**, Kingfisher Park, Julatten - DR

6<sup>th</sup> 4 **Mountain Thornbill**, in partly vegetated creekline, Nr. Malanda - ESc

7<sup>th</sup> 1 **Common Sandpiper** & 8 **Beach Stone-curlew**, Cairns Airport - KF

12<sup>th</sup> 1 **Common Myna**: Beaconsfield, North Mackay . I understand this is the second record for Mackay and first for North Mackay - DW.

22<sup>nd</sup> **Black-billed Magpie** (*Pica pica ssp sericea*) at the carpark of the Port of Hay Point, South of Mackay (see P6) - LT & DW.

26<sup>th</sup> 1 **Snipe sp.** Cairns Airport - KF

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

Please send sightings to Keith Fisher - post or email OK.

Thanks to these contributors to the sightings column;

AF - Amanda Freeman, AG - Allan Gillanders, AS - Arthur Sellars,

BC - Ben Constable, BF - Bob Forsyth, BV - Brian Venables,

CI - Carol Iles, DH - Dion Hobcroft, DJ - David James,

DR - Del Richards, DW - Desley Williams, ES - Eric Sticklen,

ESc - Elinor Scambler, GH - Glenn Holmes, JF - Judy Fitzsimon,

JH - Jenny Holmes, JL - Jack Leighton, JW - Jon Wren,

JWi - Jo Wieneke, KC - Ken Cross, KF - Keith Fisher, LF - Lindsay

Fisher, MT - Michael Todd, PL - Peter Lloyd, PM - P. McConnell,

SG - Simon Grove, TI - Tony Irvine, TR - Terry Reis.

## IDENTIFICATION, OBSERVATIONS & NEWS

### GENETIC VARIATION OF LITTLE EGRET

#### OBSERVED NEAR MACKAY - Les Thyer

On the third of December 2000, Maureen Cooper and Les Thyer observed an unusual Egret in wetlands south of Sarina. Notes of the bird's description and behaviour were made in the absence of photographic equipment. The area was visited again and several photographs were taken of the bird on the 7-1-2001 and 20 minutes of video on the following day.

Several subsequent visits to the site were unsuccessful in locating the bird, and up to the time of writing (2-2-2001) have not been seen again.

A similar bird was seen in the same area by M Andrews et.al. 3-12-1995 and a sketch by G Davidson bears this out.

#### Description

**Size:** Slightly smaller than a Little Egret or about the top end of the size range of a Pied Heron (43cm - 50cm)

**Colour:** White overall but with slaty-grey back and side of neck, going all the way down the back to tip of tail. Various slaty-grey speckles and markings mostly on the leading edge of the topside of wings. Underside of wings white. White nuchal plumes similar to Little Egret with 2 main feathers but also having smaller finer ones. Bill yellow, legs dark with yellow wash. Feathers of mantle and breast form long lanceolate but lacy plumes.

**Behaviour:** Similar to Little Egret. Flies with neck folded. Slow wingbeat. Assumes the stooped posture of a Heron. Seemed to prefer fishing in shallow flowing stream of water crossing the road causeway. Casually chased from feeding by other egrets (Intermediate & little)

#### Conclusions:

- Possible hybrid between Pied Heron (*Ardea picata*) and Little Egret (*Egretta Garzetta*). This is considered rare amongst non-captive populations.
- Or hybrid between the dark phase (*Egretta Garzetta shistacea*) or even the Western Reef Egret (*Egretta Garzetta gularis*) neither of which occurs in Australia and the Little Egret (*Egretta Garzetta immaculata*). \*
- Most likely conclusion is that the bird is a genetic variation of a dark morph of the Little Egret (*Egretta Garzetta dimorpha*) (although all these morphs are said to have a black bill).\*\* Or a mixed morph of the Indian race (*Egretta Garzetta schistacea*)\*\*

Max Maddock of the Shortlands Wetlands Centre was shown photographs of the bird and was convinced that the bird was a genetic variation of the dark morph of the Little Egret. Although dark morphs of the Little Egret are not known in Australia, they are quite common overseas and the production of a "throw back" dark-coloured genetic variation in the local population is not beyond the bounds of possibility. Apart from being a rare genetic variation in the local population, it is also possible that the bird is a migrant from Asia, possibly via New Guinea. Little Egrets are known to be capable of long migrations.

\*The Hancock and Kushlan (1984) Herons Handbook states that "dark forms are blue grey with variable amounts of white, especially under the chin. Individuals with intermediate plumage are common". Dark forms of the subspecies *E. garzetta gularis* are common in the coastal wetlands of West Africa (pictured in Kushlan and Hafner 2000 Heron Conservation) and dark forms of the sub species *E. garzetta dimorpha* outnumber the white forms by 2:1 along the East African coast (Kushlan and Hafner 2000).

\*\* "Herons and Egrets of the World-a photographic journey" (1999) James Hancock pp. 109-110

## **BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE**

**Desley Williams & Les Thyer**

Observers: Desley Williams and Les Thyer (thyer@mackay.net.au)  
Following reports of an unusual looking black and white bird with long tail in the carpark of the Port of Hay Point Les Thyer and Desley Williams went down at 0630 hours on 22 February to investigate. It only took a couple of minutes before the bird was located in a casuarina beside the change rooms and yes, it was a Magpie (*pica pica sericea*) the sub-species from China and Asia, identifiable by much more of the purple/blue sheen on the back than the nominate race in Europe. Les took several photos of the bird some 30 ft up in the tree, before it was chased away by some irate Willie Wagtails. Les feels it can be safely assumed that since Hay Point is a busy international seaport, that the magpie has either flown ashore of its own free will, or was released by its owner before being spotted by Quarantine Officers. Chinese believe Magpies bring good luck (maybe because their call sounds like a bag of coins being shaken)! As we observed the bird it uttered this call. Reports from the Port's employees indicate that it has been there for about a week and comes into the floodlit workshop at night to gather moths, beetles and insects attracted to the lights. It has also been observed feeding on earthworms in the gardens of the carpark.  
An Unusual Sighting Form has been forwarded to BA Head Office (DW); I understand this may be the 2nd record for Australia.

## **BEACH STONE-CURLEW SIGHTINGS**

**DATABASE - Amanda Freeman**

I must admit to having been rather slow at keeping BA-NQGs Beach Stone-curlew database moving forward. However, the recent publication of the Action Plan for Australian Birds (2000) has spurred me on to redouble efforts at getting some coordinated recording of Beach Stone-curlews happening. The Action Plan recommends maintaining a register of beaches on which Beach Stone-curlews are recorded as a means of monitoring trends, particularly in parts of the range with high human usage. Our database can assist with this.

The original concept for the BA-NQG Beach Stone-curlew database was to record sightings from the entire BA-NQG membership area. However, on asking around, I found that in the southern parts of our area, our database was duplicating databases already established by Queensland Parks and Wildlife staff. In fact, in many instances, records were being sent to both BA-NQG and QPWS. We've now worked out a system that will ensure sightings get recorded closer to where they will be most useful, information can still be combined for a wider perspective and duplication will be minimised.

A new sighting form is enclosed with this issue of Contact Call. You'll see that there are now options where to send your completed forms depending on where your sightings were made. Derek Ball from QPWS, Mackay has taken on records covering the Ayr to Mackay coast and Paul O'Neil from QPWS, Rockhampton is covering the Mackay to Keppel Bay area. Derek and Paul have already been accumulating Beach Stone-curlew sighting data from their stretches of coast for some time. BA-NQG data from these areas has been sent to Derek and Paul for amalgamation into their databases. I will continue collating records for the north from Cape York to Ayr (at least until someone steps forward to relieve me of the Townsville area, which would be most welcome) and will forward these records to QPWS for inclusion in their state-wide WildNet database.

I will also be sending the new record forms out to other organisations, QPWS offices, environmental/interpretation centers etc in an effort to encourage more people to contribute their Beach Stone-curlew records. Thank you to everyone who has sent in records so far. I hope that with these new arrangements our combined records will form a more valuable tool for monitoring trends in Beach Stone-curlew numbers and breeding success.

## **NEST SITE SELECTION - BIRDS v GREEN**

**TREE ANTS -Del Richards**

On a human level we birders all know the discomfort caused by physically meeting up with Green Tree Ants. Because of our capacity to deal with them as a nuisance we probably don't give them much thought.

One of the fascinating aspects of the effects of Cyclone Rhona in 1998 was the sheer number of Green Tree Ants that were blown to the ground. This was well illustrated in watching landholders pick up leaves and branches and in doing so, then having to extricate themselves from the Green Tree Ants after each armful. My thinking is that they are the most common small predators in the rainforest and suitable trees in general.

To follow this realisation, I noted the effort that many birds go to in hoping that their nests will be away from Green Tree Ants.

One species that has reacted to this on a large scale is the Spangled Drongo. In the Mossman/Port Douglas area this breeding season they have slung over 40 nests in the stay wire of power poles, some in adjacent poles.

Another favoured site is amongst the fruit of the Carpentaria Palms, which hold no interest for the Green Tree Ants. This seems to be a common denominator.

In 1999 an engineering company built a large shed in Mossman - what was the first species to build a nest in it. Surprisingly a pair of Helmeted Friarbird high among the roof trusses well within the shed. They used the nest again in 2000.

Other species are also using poles - the Magpie Lark - usually under the cross arms but in some cases on the large square insulators out on the staywires! White-breasted Woodswallows are a familiar site nesting between the transformer structures on the angle iron that is the correct dimensions for their nests.

This past spring at Newell Beach, woodswallows took up residence in both friarbird and Magpie Lark nests on poles.

Here in the wet tropics we are familiar with the sunbirds building around houses, even boats moored in rivers. Large-billed Gerygone, Brown-backed Honeyeater and Little Shrike-thrush will also nest on verandahs. We are delighted that they breed so close to humane activity - or is it just a strategy emanating from the need to find a safe location away from Green Tree Ants? Good question?

## **BIRDS EYE CHILLIES ON THE**

**MENU - Del Richards**

Over the years I have witnessed a number of species eating the small red chillies - something that for us to do would make our eyes water.

Recently a female Figbird visited our garden and devoured 10 chillies *poste haste!* The runner's up in this delight has to be a pair of Varied Triller, which have only taken a couple at a time.

On another occasion I watched a Yellow Oriole and a Common Myna feed on them. The oriole took three and the myna had only one, then it seemed to be uncomfortable after ingesting the Chile - doesn't seem right for a bird native to India does it?

On the other hand it might have helped them all if they had an internal parasitic problem!

Interestingly a guest who lives in Malaysia told me recently that his household cat would kill doves and common myna's but would never eat the mynas. A distasteful bird in more ways than one!

## **Request for Information**

Leo Joseph, who carried out his fieldwork for his Ph.D. in Nth Qld and currently working as an Ornithologist at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, has asked if anyone has encountered sunbird nests being parasitised by bronze cuckoos. If so please contact him at [joseph@acnatsci.org](mailto:joseph@acnatsci.org)

## LAND FOR WILDLIFE GAINING MOMENTUM IN NORTH

### QUEENSLAND – Kay Dorricott



*Land for Wildlife* is a nature conservation program, which provides support, information and encouragement to private landholders that manage some or all of their property as wildlife habitat. The program is voluntary and is not legally binding. Landholders are eligible to join *Land for Wildlife* if their property meets the following criteria:

- Some or all of the land should be managed as wildlife habitat,
- The landholder should be making some attempt to integrate nature conservation with other land uses on the property.

The scheme began in Victoria over 20 years ago, and there are now more than 5000 landholders registered in that State. *Land for Wildlife* started in north Queensland in February 2000, and is managed by North Queensland Afforestation Association with funding from Bushcare.

Delivery of the program is through a cooperative arrangement between the three levels of government, and community and non-government organisations such as Greening Australia. Eleven local authorities are providing support to *Land for Wildlife* in north Queensland — the Shires of Atherton, Cardwell, Cook, Douglas, Eacham, Herberton, Hinchinbrook, Johnstone, Mareeba, Thuringowa City and Townsville City.

Landholders who are registered with *Land for Wildlife* become part of a wider network of the conservation-conscious. Other benefits include free access to information on managing wildlife and its habitat, and recognition in the form of a metal sign for the property and a certificate of registration. Where a property doesn't meet the eligibility requirements, it can be admitted under the category of "Working towards registration" and details will be provided to the landholder outlining what needs to be done to achieve full registration.

As of the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2001, there were 65 properties registered with the scheme in north Queensland. More are on the waiting list for assessment. Registrations, which might interest the birdos, include Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers' Lodge at Julatten, Cassowary House at Kuranda, and Fur 'n' Feathers at Tarzali. These and other properties are providing habitat for a diverse range of native species, such as southern cassowaries, green possums, Mueller's stag-beetles, musky rat-kangaroos, Papuan Frogmouths, taipans, whistling spiders, Bush Stone-curlews and green-eyed treefrogs — as well as thousands of plants and millions of microbes. Planning is under way for the first field day, which will be held in the Kuranda area after the wet season.

The overall response to the program from north Queensland landholders has been very positive. The common purpose uniting those who are applying to join seems to be a strong desire to demonstrate their commitment to nature conservation by displaying the *Land for Wildlife* sign. So look out for those green diamonds. To find out how to get one for yourself, contact the *Land for Wildlife* regional coordinator, Kay Dorricott at North Qld Afforestation on 07 4041 2593.

### ATLAS - Keith Fisher

Birds Australia-North Queensland Group is still targeting remote areas of Cape York to atlas. Because wet (breeding) season conditions are so difficult and most of the area is remote from motorable tracks, the vast majority of Atlas records come from Iron Range and a few water points along the Peninsula Development Rd. To obtain a better coverage both spatially and of the different bird habitats we have generated random spots within each habitat type, within each map sheet. "Red spots" are limited to within 1 km of a mapped road and so are relatively easy to reach. A much better sample is obtained if we

can get to the "Green spots" because they may occur anywhere on the landscape.

Qld. Parks & Wildlife Service in conjunction with Birds Australia-North Queensland Group organised an atlassing trip to Pormpuraaw (Edward River) on the western side of Cape York Peninsula at the beginning of December 2000 for one week. Nine atlassers went on this trip, which was funded by Cape York NHT and included a helicopter to access the remote green dot sites. The wet weather upset some of our plans but with the help of the traditional owners of the Edward River area we managed to atlas many remote sites.

Highlights were, Mangrove Grey Fantail at Holroyd River (northern extension), Trumpet Manucode on the Alice River (extension south), Tawny-breasted Honeyeater at Pormpuraaw (fills in a big gap in distribution), western extension of White-streaked Honeyeater to upper Holroyd River and a Common Starling in Pormpuraaw (lowlight!).

Pormpuraaw, must be the finch capital of Australia, we saw House Sparrow, Double-barred, Black-throated, Masked, Crimson (white-bellied form), Star, and Red-browed Finches along with Chestnut-breasted Mannikin.

We managed to Atlas in country at an "impossible" time of year and have thus really improved the knowledge on bird distribution in the wet season. We had 2362 records from 144 atlas sheets at 142 sites with a total trip list of 213 species.

### CAIRNS ESPLANADE – Keith Fisher

Wader numbers on the Cairns Esplanade have been fluctuating over the last few months. Up to 12 Broad-billed Sandpipers were present before Christmas and I've only seen one since on 29<sup>th</sup> Jan. Good numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits, Great Knot and Terek Sandpipers have been present throughout but Sharp-tailed Sandpiper numbers have dropped since the beginning of January with less than 10 at any one time. On 29<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2 Magpie Geese flew over and 30+ Little Tern were present.

Trucks are almost finished depositing sand at the southern end of the Esplanade filling in space between the developments of the Esplanade and Cityport, along the wharf. The previously filled area is grassed and waiting to settle before work starts on the swimming lagoon. Our mayor, Kevin Byrne, has gone on record as saying "The normal tidal action, and existing bird habitats along the mudflats, will not be affected in anyway by these works." We will keep watching.

Congratulations to the Cairns City Council for revamping their display for the new Esplanade Bird posters, we had complained of the poor condition of the previous one, and they acted quickly to rectify the problem.

### INTERESTING PLACES

#### ST. LAWRENCE WETLANDS Keith & Lindsay

Fisher

A good place to break your journey along the long section of road north of Rockhampton between Marlborough and Sarina is the St. Lawrence wetlands. Approaching from the south, turn right to St. Lawrence, which is approximately 6km off the Bruce Highway. Just before the railway and township there is a camping reserve and a road, both on the left. This road takes you past mangroves on the right, look for Mangrove Honeyeaters here and the wetlands on your left (22° 20' 48" S 149° 30' 57" E). This road is approximately 7 km and leads back onto the Bruce Highway further north. The wetlands extend for at least 1 km alongside the road and good views of many waterbirds can be had. The camping reserve, situated at the southern end of the wetlands, is a good place to stop overnight as there is a new shower block with hot showers available. We visited last October and saw 30 species in just under an hour. Thanks to Ian Cowan for alerting us to the area

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS IN OUR REGION

Brian Baker, Dianne Brookes, William Brookes, Victor Collins, Marjory Cook, Sieglinde Edwards, Paul Evans, Chris Ezzy, Len Ezzy, Leone Gregory, Marilyn Johnson, Colin Perkins, Jan Perkins, Darcy Stirrup, Marrie Stirrup, Cathryn Tarlinton, Rod Thorn, Roy Townson, Debra Tracey.  
We look forward to seeing you all on some of our many activities.

## ACCOMMODATION

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## NOTICE BOARD

### 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.

## Nature Tour

Due to missing the *Wingspan* deadline we have been asked to insert the following information on up coming nature tours. **Destination Management** in Brisbane runs these tours.

**Samoa** – departs 15<sup>th</sup> August and **Japan** – departs 9<sup>th</sup> October. Both tours are lead by local experts with Australian tour escorts and are limited to 8-12 persons. For a brochure and more information Ph. Toll free 1300 307 317 or log onto the web site at:

<http://www.powerup.com.au/~travel/nature.htm>

## FOR SALE

### BIRD CALL CD's

#### Bird Calls of North Eastern Queensland (Bushbirds)

CD 1 Scrubfowl, Pigeons, Parrots, Kingfishers, Robins, Flycatchers, Riflebird, Fairy-wrens & Scrubwrens. (emphasis on Iron Range species).

CD2 Gerygones, Thornbills, Honeyeaters, Whistlers & Cuckoo-shrikes.

CD3 Nightbirds, Kingfishers, Parrots, Cuckoos & Raptors.

#### Bird Calls of The Northern Territory (Bushbirds)

CD 1 Nightbirds, Cuckoos, Kingfishers, Robins, Wedgebills, Whistlers, Shrike-thrushes & Butcherbirds.

CD 2 Flycatchers, Babblers, Fairy-wrens, Gerygones, Thornbills, Pardalotes & Bowerbirds.

Available from : **Fred Van Gessel,**

64 Dorothy Ave. Woy Woy, NSW 2256

Ph 02 4343 1283 email: [fredvg@trentvale.com.au](mailto:fredvg@trentvale.com.au)

CD's are \$15.00 each plus GST \$1.50 + P&P \$3.00 for two.

## Position Vacant

### Newsletter Editor

After 3½ years of editing Contact Call this will be my last issue. I would like to thank all the people who have given me support and those that have contributed to make my job easier. There is still a vacancy for anyone willing to take over the newsletter, in its entirety, as editor. In the meantime you can keep sending contributions to me and I'll onforward them to who ever takes over, thank you all – Keith Fisher.

Please send items for Contact Call to  
P O Box 2209, Cairns Qld 4870 or  
email: [lkfisher@austarnet.com.au](mailto:lkfisher@austarnet.com.au)

Contact Call is available by email in Word6 and Word97 formats.

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.