



# Contact Call

## Birds Australia

Conservation Through Knowledge

Birds Australia Centenary 1901-2001

*Celebrating Bird Conservation*

## Birds Australia—North Queensland Group

June 2002 Issue: *Osprey*



## Annual General Meeting at the beach... ALL WELCOME

This years' Annual General Meeting is being held in the heart of Cassowary country. Etty Bay, is an Environmental Reserve, where two World Heritage Areas meet. The area is known for its local cassowary population and idyllic location. There are several local events planned, including a tour of a local revegetation and bird hide project, trip to Warrina Lakes rainforest, boat trip into Mourilyan Harbour, and visit to local hot spot for cassowaries. **A L L W E L C O M E**

### P R O G R A M O F E V E N T S

#### **Friday 14th June**

7:30pm MenamKhong Lao-Thai Restaurant. Rankin Street, Innisfail. A highly recommended Thai smorgasbord for either \$20.00 (entrée/soup, choice of three mains, desert and tea/coffee) or \$25.00 (mixed entrée, choice of five mains, desert and tea/coffee). BYO. Bookings essential. Phone Graham on 4096 5051 or email [treetop@austarnet.com.au](mailto:treetop@austarnet.com.au).

#### **Saturday 15th June**

Early morning swim followed by birding around Etty Bay

8:30am Meet at Bulguru revegetation and bird hide project led by Tony Jurgensen. Etty Bay Road. Lookout for cars on the eastern side of the road. If you arrive late, take the Mourilyan Harbour road and look out for the signs and driveway on your left.

11:30am Birding and lunch around Warrina Lakes. Take the Charles Street turnoff from the Bruce Highway at the King George Park and follow the signs.

2:30pm AGM and General Meeting including guest speaker at the Australian Sugar Museum, Bruce Highway, Mourilyan. Helen McLaughlin will explain the workings of the current vegetation management committees and how they will influence the conservation of birds, with particular reference to the wet tropics and Cassowary conservation. Members of BA are currently involved in the Gulf, Einasleigh Uplands and Wet Tropics committees. These committees are an important opportunity to influence the future of our wildlife habitats.

7:00pm BBQ on the beach at Etty Bay.

#### **Sunday 16th June**

7:30am Boat trip into the mangroves at Mourilyan Harbour. Boat will cost \$10-15 per person depending on numbers. *Bookings essential.* Phone Graham on 4096 5051 or email [treetop@austarnet.com.au](mailto:treetop@austarnet.com.au).

11:00am Visit Coquette Point in search of Cassowaries

*Camping and onsite vans are available at the Etty Bay Van Park and Kiosk. The camping area is pleasant and right on the beach. It has a café and shop. Contact Lila on 40632314 during the week, but be quick as this is peak tourism season. Turnoff at Mourilyan on the Bruce Highway 8km south of Innisfail. Etty Bay is 13km from the highway. Camping for two adults is available at \$15 for a powered site and \$14 for an unpowered site (\$2 extra for kids and \$4 extra for adults). On site vans may also be available. Bookings are essential. As an alternative, there are many motels in Innisfail.*



## Birds North Queensland Group—Events Calendar

### **Annual General Meeting - June 2002**

**15th - 2:30pm Australian Sugar Museum, Mourilyan.** Full weekend program above.

**A L L W E L C O M E**

#### **June 2002**

**30th - Redden Island Count** (Cairns). Meet at 8am, Cinderella Street, Machins Beach—the entrance before the toilet block. Contact Keith Fisher.

#### **July 2002**

**7th - Serpentine Lagoon.** Meet at the Mobil service station on highway at 7am for a morning's adventure. Contact Jo Wieneke for details.

**14th - Mystery wetlands trip** (Cairns). Meet opposite Caravonica Primary School on the Brinsmead-Kamerunga Road at 8am. We will visit at least 3 wetlands in the area. Contact Keith Fisher.

#### **27th & 28th - Year of the Outback**

**Twitchathon.** Register with BA before 21st July on (02) 9436 0388. See last page for details.

**28th - Klaproth's Scrub.** Meet at the Rita and Ian's at 8am for another attempt of Atlasing in Type 5b scrub.

#### **August 2002**

**16-18th Birds Australia Congress** followed by the campout at Newhaven Station. Contact BA CHQ.

#### **October 2002**

**15th - 6th Annual Crane Count.** All Welcome. Tablelanders-Meet at 3:30pm Hasties Swamp, Atherton. Possibly a western crane count at Innot Hot Springs? Other regions-counters very welcome anywhere! This is a roost count—therefore meet late in the afternoon and count till dark. Contact Elinor Scambler on 4095 3296 or [dacelo@austarnet.com.au](mailto:dacelo@austarnet.com.au).

#### **September 2002**

**8th - Cairns Esplanade.** Welcome the Waders back. Meet opposite the Tradewinds Hotel at 11am. Great chance to brush up on your ID skills.

*Field Trips may change after publication. Contact local reps. for the latest information. This will allow for more flexibility, especially concerning weather conditions. Additional events may also be arranged.*

### **Inside this issue:**

- *AGM and Events Calendar 2002*
- *Trip Reports - Brackbraes NP, Barron Gorge, Moorinya NP, breakfast at Emerald Ck, Lawn Hill NP*
- *Around the Region - Tableland Owls, Crane Count 2001, Bowen and Charters Towers news*
- *Bird News - Mt Zero, Legend birder remembered, Gouldians in Mareeba*
- *Unusual Sightings*
- *Notice Board - Year of the Outback, BA Congress in NT*



The **Osprey** is a powerful fishing hawk, easily recognised by a dark line through the eye on an otherwise white head. dark grey barring on the tail and

## Osprey

hawk, easily recognised by a dark line through the eye on an otherwise white head. The underparts are also white except for the flight feathers. The upperparts are all dark grey.

It flies with swift, economical beats of its angular wings. The most exciting part of the Osprey's behaviour is to watch it fish. The bird plunges into the sea, at the last moment throwing its feet forward to grasp basking fish with its long curved talons. A 2kg fish is heavy for a bird only 2/3 that weight, but nevertheless the Osprey, its leg joints locking, will haul it from the water and carry it away for dismembering on a nearby perch.

The **Osprey** is an unusual visitor to Mt Isa, seen several times in 2001 and on one occasion was photographed sitting on a street light in a suburban street 1/2km from the Leichhardt River. It was also sighting fishing next to the Moondarra Van Park in 2000.

*Reprinted from "Birds of the Townsville Town Common" by S.Garnett and Thanks to Bob Forsyth for some local information.*

## Atlas 2 contacts

Send your Atlas forms to the following coordinators:

### Northern Region (Cardwell north incl. Cape York)

#### Regional Organiser—Graham Harrington 4096 5051

- Stephen Garnett (Cairns) (07) 4052 3088  
Email: [stephen.garnet@epa.qld.gov.au](mailto:stephen.garnet@epa.qld.gov.au)
- Glenn Holmes (Atherton Tableland) (07) 4091 4364  
Email: [dasyornis@ledanet.com.au](mailto:dasyornis@ledanet.com.au)
- Lloyd Nielsen (Nth Atherton Tableland) (07) 40941549  
Email: [nielsenl@tpg.com.au](mailto:nielsenl@tpg.com.au)
- Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) (07) 4095 3296  
Email: [dacelo@austarnet.com.au](mailto:dacelo@austarnet.com.au)

### South Region (Cardwell to Bowen)

#### Regional Organiser—Jo Wieneke 4771 4707

- Ian Clayton (Townsville) (07) 4725 6489  
Email: [birds&bush@ultra.net.au](mailto:birds&bush@ultra.net.au)
- Jon Wren (Bowen/Ayr) (07) 4786 2614  
Email: [maluras5@tpg.com.au](mailto:maluras5@tpg.com.au)

### Southern Region (Bowen to Mackay, including Mt Isa)

#### Regional Organiser- Marion Crouther 4958 4613



## 2001-2002 BA-NQG Management Committee

### Office Bearers

- Convener**—Jon Nott (07) 4096 8230  
Email: [nott@austarnet.com.au](mailto:nott@austarnet.com.au)
- Secretary**—Bill Bray (07) 4032 2698  
Email: [b.bray@cairns.qld.gov.au](mailto:b.bray@cairns.qld.gov.au)
- Treasurer**—John Clarkson (07) 4092 2702  
Email: [john.clarkson@dnr.qld.gov.au](mailto:john.clarkson@dnr.qld.gov.au)
- Conservation Officer**—Graham Harrington (07)40965051  
Email: [treetop@austarnet.com.au](mailto:treetop@austarnet.com.au)

### Project Contacts

- Beach Stone Curlew Study**  
Amanda Freeman (07) 4095 2148 (w/ends)  
[procella@ozemail.com.au](mailto:procella@ozemail.com.au)
- Gouldian Finch and Birds at Waterholes Survey**  
Klaus Uhlenhut (07) 4065 5181
- Redden Island Survey** Keith Fisher (07) 4039 0972
- Sarus / Brolga Tableland Crane counts**  
Elinor Scambler (07) 4095 3296 [dacelo@austarnet.com.au](mailto:dacelo@austarnet.com.au)
- Townsville Egret & Ibis Counts**  
Jo Wieneke or Glenda Jeffries (07) 4773 1802.

### Area Representatives

- Mackay:** Marion Crowther (07) 4958 4613
- Bowen / Ayr:** Jon Wren (07) 4786 2614  
Email: [maluras5@tpg.com.au](mailto:maluras5@tpg.com.au)
- Townsville:** Jo Wieneke (07) 4771 4707  
Email: [bowerbird@msm.com.au](mailto:bowerbird@msm.com.au)
- Innisfail / Tully:** Klaus Uhlenhut (07) 4065 5181  
Email: [kirrama@4kz.com.au](mailto:kirrama@4kz.com.au)
- Cairns:** Keith Fisher (07) 4039 0972  
Email: [lkfisher@austarnet.com.au](mailto:lkfisher@austarnet.com.au)
- Atherton Tableland:** Marion Buchanan (07) 4092 2702
- Mossman / Daintree:** Del Richards (07) 4094 1199
- Cape York Peninsula:** Michael Barnett (07) 4069 8916  
Email: [mike.barnett@bigpond.com](mailto:mike.barnett@bigpond.com)
- Charters Towers:** Elna Kerswell (07) 4787 7718  
Email: [elnakers@httech.com.au](mailto:elnakers@httech.com.au)
- Mount Isa:** Bob Forsyth (07) 4743 3210  
Email: [isabirdo@austarnet.com.au](mailto:isabirdo@austarnet.com.au)

## Birds Australia Membership

Subscriptions: \$68 Single \$108 Family \$50 Single Concession \$87 Family Concession

This includes membership of the national organisation plus membership of the regional group, Birds Australia—North Queensland Group.

Members also receive four issues of the full-colour bird magazine *Wingspan* and 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, Victoria 3123

[www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au)



Birds Australia

BA-NQG car stickers, featuring a Pied Imperial Pigeon on a tropical green background are still available. 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.



Birds Australia

## Trip Reports

### Blackbraes National Park 29th March- 1st April 2002

Blackbraes, located off the Kennedy Development Road south of the Lynd Junction and 2 hours north of Hughenden, was the venue for this year's Easter Campout. The park is not open to the public at the moment as there are no facilities but we were allowed to visit on the understanding that we did some fauna surveys! How could we miss the opportunity to visit a new destination?

Over the four days we explored the homestead, west towards Gorge Creek Station and north to the Copperfield River and Emu Swamp, traversing some interesting country. We managed 20 surveys in as many different vegetation types as we could reach, using standard Birds Australia Atlas methods, as we had done on previous surveys for QPWS at Princess Hills and Heathlands National Parks.

A total of 88 species were recorded with several sightings of significance. This relatively low number was due to the paucity of honeyeaters, in the absence of Eucalyptus blossom and very few Grevilleas etc. One **Cotton Pygmy-goose** was seen at Emu Swamp Dam, which is on the extreme western edge of its distribution. Several **Red-backed Button-quail** were seen at what is regarded as the extreme edge of their recorded distribution in this region. The quail's status is regarded as uncommon, however this may be partly due to difficulty in identification and lack of surveys in remote areas such as Blackbraes. The site adjacent to the Copperfield River where the quail were seen is at a height of approximately 840m and only 60m below the maximum height they have been recorded at. The two **Yellow Chat** seen at the Emu Swamp Dam were unexpected. Their distribution is quite patchy over northern Australia and they are thought to be nomadic. Little is known of their movements. The closest record to this location was on Cameron Downs, south of Hughenden in June 1980. This record is significant and will be submitted to the Birds Australia rarities committee for appraisal. We went spotlighting and found five **Greater Glider** in approximately 2 ha of tall Narrow-leaved Ironbark/Lemon-scented Gum on granite overlying basalt. This is at the far western end of the distribution of this species. We also

observed one **Common Brushtail Possum** in a pure stand of Narrow-leaved Ironbark on stony basalt. Other mammals seen were **Rufous Bettong**, **Eastern Grey Kangaroo** and **Wallaroo**.

Blackbraes is a great location with many diverse habitat types supporting a good range of birds and well worth visiting again at a different time of year. A report has been forwarded to Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). We would like to thank QPWS - in particular Marty McLaughlin for giving support to the visit and supplying vegetation maps, also Grant Anchem, the very helpful Ranger at Blackbraes for briefing us on suitable areas to survey. We look forward to returning in the future to conduct additional surveys.

*Keith and Lindsay Fisher, Cairns*

### Barron Gorge National Park, Cairns 14th April

Members gathered in Kamerunga to walk one of the National Park tracks, eventually starting after 20 mins of birdwatching on the road. Many species were flitting around including a female **Cicadabird**, **Grey Whistler** and a **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** soaring overhead. Along the track in the rainforest other sightings

included **Rufous Fantail**, only recently returned to the area, **Fairy Gerygone**, **Large-billed Scrubwren** and a **Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher**, which flew across the track. The kingfisher was a late stayer with most having disappeared several weeks before in this area. The morning was finished off socially with coffee at the Fishers. This area close to Cairns is always interesting in having a good variety of lowland rainforest birds.

*Keith and Lindsay Fisher, Cairns*

### Cumberland Dam - Easter 2002

On a recent birding trip (29-31/3/02) I spent 40 hours at Cumberland Dam (20km west of Georgetown) and recorded 83 bird species within a 1km<sup>2</sup> area—which I thought was fairly successful given some of the birds recorded. Arriving at around 4pm Good Friday, I camped beside the creek on the south-western end of the dam wall—a very lovely shady spot which proved a better alternative given some of the curious birds investigating my camp area.

The lake was busy with: **Magpie Goose** (60+), **Plumed Whistling Duck** (150+), **Wandering Whistling Duck** (30+), **Green Pygmy Goose** (10+), **Pacific Black Duck** (10+), **Grey Teal** (15+), **Hardhead** (25+), **Australian Grebe** (15+ and breeding) **Darter**, **Pied Cormorant**, **Little Black Cormorant** (10+), **Black Cormorant** (20+), **White-faced Heron**, **White-necked Heron**, **Great Egret** (2), **Intermediate Egret** (10+), **Nankeen Night Heron**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Straw-necked Ibis** (15+), **Royal Spoonbill** (7), **Brolga**, **Purple Swamphen**, **Comb-crested Jacana** (30+ and breeding), **Masked lapwing** (15+). Whilst walking around the lake edge I also observed: **Black Kite** (25+), **Whistling Kite** (4 and breeding), **Collared Sparrowhawk**, **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, and **Australian Bustard** (5+), **Crested Pigeon** (20+), **Diamond Dove** (5+), **Peaceful Dove** (30+), **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo** (30+), **Galah** (50+), **Cockatiel**, **Pale-headed Rosella**, **Black-eared Cuckoo**, **Forest**, **Sacred** and **Red-backed Kingfishers**, **Dollarbird** (breeding), **Striated Pardalote** (25+ and breeding), **Blue-faced**, **Yellow**, **Yellow-tinted** and **Rufous-throated honeyeaters**, **Grey-crowned Babbler** (10+), **Black-faced** and **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike**, **White-winged triller**, **Apostlebird** (30+ and breeding), **Great Bowerbirds**, **Singing Bushlark** and **Rufous Songlark**.

A 5 hour walk from dawn til midday yielded the additional species: **Painted Snipe**, **Zebra**, **Double-barred**, **Black-throated** (breeding) and **Masked Finches** and **Pictorella Manikin**. Flushed within 20m of my camp was a **Spotted Nightjar**. Also seen from the camp were **Tawny Frogmouth** and **Owlet Nightjar**.

New "life" birds for me were the pair of **Painted snipes** (seen within 10m in the open) and the two individual **Pictorella Manikins**, possibly on the eastern edge of their range? Of special note were the extremely unwary **Black-throated** and **Masked Finches** approaching my campsite to within 1m from where I was seated. The **Black-throats** were collecting nesting material for a site in a nearby Red gum hollow. The **Masked Finch** was busy working through cold ash in my campfire at my feet! One of Manikins was drinking from the creek adjacent to my camp only 10m away. Pretty rich finch area—all I needed was a flock of **Gouldian Finches** to come down and say hello.....but that would be wishful thinking. *Martin Cachard, Freshwater*





**Moorinya National Park - April 2002**

Situated 70km south of Torrens Creek, Moorinya NP (or 'Shirley' to the locals) was the meeting point for the May Day weekend camping adventure. 'Shirley' was bought by the Qld Parks and Wildlife Service in 1995 who have been actively managing the park for conservation of both its natural and heritage values. Rangers Dean and Kim Brook have taken a keen interest in restoring the property's shearing shed, accommodation quarters and stock yards. Last year they liked it so much, they decided to get married there!

Saturday afternoon saw the group split up and investigate the shearing shed and nearby Bullock Creek, finding a the **Spotted Bowerbird**, **Crested bellbird**, **Rufous Songlark**, **Horsfield's Brush Cuckoo**, and **Double-barred Finches**. After a feast in the kitchen, some of the group decided a short night walk was needed, and we found grey kangaroos, and a Fat-tailed Gecko!

The whole group set off Sunday morning for a drive around the park. Of articular interest were the **Peregrine Falcon**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Brown Treecreeper**, **Jacky Winter**, **Black-eared Cuckoo**, **Brown Tree-creeper**. We stopped at the intriguing Bell's outstation where we saw **Bustards**, **Budgerigars**, **Variiegated Fairy-wren**, **Singing Honeyeater** and a classic old steam powered tractor along side the windmill. A great site for morning tea was Alice Dam where there were **Cockatiels**, **Budgerigars**, a **Pied Cormorant**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Brolgas**, **Squatter Pigeons**, **Spiny-cheeked & Striped Honeyeater**.

During the afternoon, some of the more energetic explored the Dardanelle's - a basalt formation and home for **Wedge-tailed eagles**, **Red-winged parrot**, **White-plumed honeyeater** and **Striated Pardalote**. Another feast was cooked for the campers and some decided to venture onto the Mitchell grass downs in search of some nocturnal activity. Apart from a few Red Kangaroos, a Euro, **Tawny Frogmouth** and possibly some **Plains Wanderers**, flushed by the vehicles and lights across the grasslands. Hopefully they can be confirmed later by the experts.

Thanks to Dean and Kim Brook and QPWS for their hospitality at Moorinya and to Kevin and Daphne Herrod for the ability to see Lake Buchanan and Causingburra Swamp on the way home. *Helen McLaughlin, Townsville*

**Emerald Creek Falls, Mareeba 19<sup>th</sup> May**

It certainly was breakfast with the birds as we had our coffee and toast to the sound of noisy chatter. The eucalypts in the area were in flower attracting nine species of honeyeater with the **Scarlet** the most prolific and the **Bridled** the most unexpected being out in the woodland. Other birds in the picnic area included **Rainbow** and **Scaly-breasted Lorikeets**, **Laughing Kookaburras** waiting for handouts they never got, **Weebill**, **Lemon-bellied Flycatcher**, **Olive-backed Oriole** and **Double-barred Finch**. A walk up to the falls added several more birds including great views of **Striated Pardalotes**, **Varied Sittella**, **Grey Shrike-thrush** and **Northern Fantail**. The vegetation along the creek produced **Fairy Gerygone**, **White-browed Robin** and **Little Shrike-thrush** amongst others. Back out in the open of the picnic area we were treated to a **Square-tailed Kite** soaring in circles at treetop level overhead and a **Brush Cuckoo** being harassed by the honeyeaters and **Silvereyes**. We ended up with a total of 38 species in an area that never fails to impress. *Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns*

**Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park - May 2002**

Earlier this month, my Daintree neighbour Barbara Maslen and Rupert & Juliana Russell and I were lucky enough to spend a week at Boodjamulla. We spent the first night at Langlo Lake, although the new owners told us they're not "officially" allowing visitors until they rejuvenate the camping area. Arriving just on dusk, we enjoyed watching a **Hobby** melting in and out of the gloom as he hunted in long swoops near the water's edge. Morning revealed the usual huge numbers of birds on the lake, with breakfast highlights being a **Spotted Harrier**, **Spinifex Pigeons**, **Red-backed Kingfishers**, **Yellow-throated Miners** and **Pictorella Mannikins**. We arrived at the Gorge on the afternoon of the third day via Normanton, Burke & Wills Roadhouse & Gregory Downs. The roads were good - dry, very few corrugations, minimal traffic (apart from road-trains) and plenty of birds along the way. What a delight to see huge flocks of **Budgerigars**, **Cockatiels** and **Corellas**. The Gorge is a truly beautiful place, with it's permanent water supply, tufa walls and towering sandstone cliffs. The dense sections of Melaleucas, Leichhardt's, figs and Livistonia palms along the watercourses contrast starkly with the surrounding open, grassy, Eucalypt woodlands. Regulars around the campground were **Yellow-tinted** and **White-gaped Honeyeaters**, **White-browed Robins**, **Grey Shrike-thrushes**, **Restless Flycatchers**, **Grey-crowned Babblers** and **Rufous Whistlers**, with **Great Bower-birds** everywhere - bathing in the sprinklers. The **Barking Owl** chorus started promptly each evening at 5.30pm and continued until just before dawn, with **Boobooks** chiming in occasionally for good measure. Strangely enough, although we also saw **Tawny Frogmouths** at night, we didn't see or hear any **Nightjars**. The sun would spread across the red cliffs each morning, lighting up **Sandstone Shrike-thrushes** fossicking amongst the rocks; one morning I watched a **Collared Sparrow-hawk** chasing small insectivorous bats as they returned to their hideaway in the rock face. In the woodlands were **Northern Rosellas** quietly feeding on grass-heads, **White-winged Trillers**, **Long-tailed**, **Double-barred & Zebra Finches**, **Rainbow Bee-eaters**, **Weebills** and **Striated Pardalotes**. Up on top of the flat-topped bluffs, small families of **Variiegated Fairy Wrens** in low Grevilleas and groups of **Black-faced** and **Little Woodswallows** sharing dead trees with **Fairy Martins** for a morning sunbath before hunting up & down the Gorge. (The **Fairy Martins** had built their bottle nests in nooks & crannies all through the Gorge and best of all, had decorated the roof of the Interpretive Centre at Riversleigh with them - I thought they added a great touch to the man-made cave!). With a **White-bellied Sea Eagle** high in the sky, we canoed along the Gorge, gliding quietly past **Darters** and **Cormorants**, with **Crimson Finches** and **Purple-crowned Fairy Wrens** in the Pandanus scrub along the edge. After a week, we packed up, already thinking of further visits & headed home via Burketown, where **Bustards** stalked the open plains. Driving home, the usual contingent of open country raptors, as well as many flocks of finches and good numbers of **Oz Pratincoles**.

Unfortunately we saw feral cats one morning, but were cheered up by a good look at a **Ground Cuckoo-Shrike** and large flocks of **Cranes**, both **Sarus** & **Brolgas** at small waterholes along the way - perhaps en route to the Tablelands for winter!  
*Ellen Terrell, Daintree*



### Owls on the Tablelands ... Ian Fox

On 20th February 2002 I attended the 2nd meeting to discuss a project aimed at building and installing owl nesting-boxes on the Atherton Tablelands. With the Barron River Integrated Catchment Management Association (BRICMA) as the likely coordinator of the project, attendees also included NR&M, Bureau of Sugar Experimental Stations, and a number of land holders. The BSES representative presented some interesting information at the meeting. In the NQ region a number of programs to install nesting boxes on farms have commenced. In summary and as best as my notes recount:

- At Ingham 75 boxes were installed a few year ago. After 2 years none were in use by owls. However during recent monitoring 12% of the boxes had pairs of owls in residence. Other boxes were being used by Brush-tailed possums, brown tree snakes and even Mahogany Gliders!
- Mossman and Julatten have installed 50 and 5 boxes respectively. Monitoring there is about to commence.

- Tully has had 18 boxes installed.

One of the landholders at the meeting reported that she installed 5 boxes on her sugarcane farm and that it was 2 years before owls took up residence. Another landholder report that after 5 months he still had no owls. A cropping farmer from the Kairi area reported that a large hollow log he installed a couple of years ago was being used by kestrels.

Jim also reported on the good success in breeding **Barn owls** at Kairi Research Station in an artificial nesting box. The clutches of chicks were reared in Nov 2000 (at least 2?) and another in May-June 2001 (6 owlets). Unfortunately the male parent died (currently with QPWS for an autopsy). No further activity has been recorded for 10 months. Scott Burnett (QPWS Atherton) has collected a larger number of pellets from this pair and is currently examining the prey species.

For further information please contact Jim Gunton or Mark Heating at NR&M on (07) 4048 4600.



### Crane Count 2002 ... Elinor Scambler

Nearly 40 people gathered at Malanda Hotel on the Saturday night, for Matt Herring's excellent illustrated talk on **Brolgas**, their breeding ecology, and national conservation. Latest Atlas figures show **Brolgas** in decline right across Australia, not just in their threatened southern habitats. Peter Merritt followed up with his superb photographs of wetland birds, his amazing sequence of a **Brolga** destroying **Black Swan** eggs & nest was only one highlight. Matt contributed a very interesting summary report to last year's BANQG Crane News (available by email). Thanks Matt, Peter & Tom English & the Malanda Hotel staff. Thanks also to the intrepid travellers from Townsville who made up around half the visitors! Sunday was very wet but still an early Townsville-ite recorded 6 **Brolgas** taking off from Bromfield Swamp around 7am. Most of the "Southerners" then ran northwards for the sun (& mangoes??) but those of us who joined Glenn Holmes for the tour of Quincan Swamp were rewarded with 34 species, including a very speedy **Baillon's Crane** & a very sluggish Carpet Python - thanks Glenn. Hasties Swamp hide (with new display) was perfect for morning tea, birdwatching & birdchat with extra local & interstate visitors who enjoyed telescope views of **Pink-eared Ducks** & **Great Crested Grebes** (the **Hoary-headed** was in hiding).

**Breaking news:** Still very small numbers of cranes on the Tablelands, mainly **Brolgas**, but Matt phoned to say he & Peter travelled west after the Field Trip & were stoked to be able to count several hundred cranes around Normanton, about 2/3 **Brolgas**, most still in separate small family groups - many with twins, some still unfledged.

### Bowen / Ayr ... Jon Wren

The Bowen Shire Council has become very proactive in providing support and assistance to the Queens Beach Action Group, & was successful in gaining a CoastCare grant to assist with beach and dune regeneration. This group of hard working individuals have managed to transform a neglected site overgrown with noxious and introduced weeds to the original primary and secondary dune vegetation types. With this in mind I have been monitoring the birdlife of the site for the last 6 months to identify any new species to the area. It is only early days but a worthwhile project for all. Congratulations also go to the BSC for finally winning the war with 4WD vehicles accessing the Kings Beach area. All



old tracks are now blocked and the Council workers immediately act on any new tracks made. This area is an important breeding site for **Beach Stone-curlew**, at least now they will have some peace. Atlas and Wader counts are continuing at the Bowen Saltworks and Dalrymple Point to Doherty Creek. We have had an influx of **Brown Falcons** over the last month to the Merinda Pring area. With farms busy preparing fields, locusts have been in plentiful supply for the Falcons who may be escaping the drier conditions out West. **Black Falcon** sighted at Greenswamp Road Merinda early May provided some excitement during an Atlas count.

### Charters Towers... Elna Kerswell

The Towers is still proving to be a great birding spot. In April, Reeves Lake yielded the usual waders as well as **Great crested grebe, Wood, Black and Pink-eared duck, Ibis (straw necked), Jacana, Black-fronted dotterel, Coot, Caspian tern, Hardhead and Whistling kite**. Along the road paralleling the Basalt Wall, we also saw a flock of about 15 **Budgerigars**, and a smaller flock of **White-browed Wood-swallows** hanging onto the sides of trees and diving into the long grass. Saw three different groups of **Bustards** (totalling 14), a flock of **Double-barred finches**, and one of **Zebras**. Red Falls, in a sorry state after the huge and powerful flood that swept through there in late

February, is worth visiting just to see the devastation that flood water can wreak. There, we saw **Kookaburras, 14 Red-tailed black cockatoos, White-naped honeyeaters**, a few **Sulfur-crested Cockatoos, Striated pardalotes, Wedge-tailed eagle, Black kites** and a **Whistling kite**.

On the way home later in the afternoon, we saw **Quarions, Kestrels, Yellow-throated miners, Magpies, Magpie larks, Pied butcherbirds and Apostle birds**.

Even the weir at the Charters Towers proved a good spot with **Pelicans, Caspian terns, a Whistling kite** and 2 **Nankeen night herons**.



### Mt Zero—A new wildlife Reserve

Non government sanctuaries have been long established overseas with, for example, Nature Conservancy in the US and National Trust in the UK, which own and manage large areas of land for wildlife protection. Birds Australia, Australian Bush Heritage and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy are now doing the same in Australia.

North Queensland will soon have a large private wildlife sanctuary approximately 65 km north of Townsville. The **Australian Wildlife Conservancy**, a non-profit organisation, is buying Mt Zero, a cattle and timber property only 8km west of Paluma. This organisation already owns and manages five sanctuaries in WA and recently signed up to buy four of the Earth Sanctuary properties. Mt Zero, their first acquisition in Queensland impressed the board members with its remarkable range of habitats, covering the full range of vegetation zones from Wet Tropics rainforest to spinifex-covered hills and dry inland plains. It includes large areas of Wet Sclerophyll, stronghold of the endangered Northern Bettong and in the drier country are Pebble Mound Mice and Rufous Bettongs.



On a recent survey 11 **Glossy Black Cockatoos** were found feeding in casuarinas in Wet Sclerophyll forest on Mt Zero, a few kilometers from the site where they were found breeding a few years ago. It is possible that the population has been there for many years and numbers have built up and they are expanding their range.

Mt Zero property which covers nearly 40,000 hectares is situated from the Taravale Rd turnoff, through to Laroona Station. It includes some spectacular gorges along Running River and its tributaries, as well as some rare Hoop Pine forest. Once the sale is finalised the property will be managed primarily for the protection of wildlife but, as with most of their other sanctuaries, will be open to the public. BANQ has been invited to participate in monitoring surveys.

*Jo Wieneke, Townsville*



### A legend birder remembered

Most of us have read the words "Bourke and Austin" as they appear after the instance of the first recorded sighting of **Blue-faced parrot finches** at Ravenshoe School in the early 1940's. Pat Bourke was a school teacher by profession in NSW and made a contribution both as an author and as a leader in the Gould League of bird lovers. I count myself fortunate in having Pat as a personal friend and we talked a great deal in the decade of the 1970's. He was always happy to relate his vast experiences.

Pat enlisted during WWII and spent some time on the Atherton Tableland before being sent to Papua New Guinea. I remember specially asking Pat one time where he had first observed the **Yellow-billed Kingfisher**? The one word reply - Mossman. We long-time birders will remember that in "What bird is that?" the distribution for the species was Cape York to Cairns.

Pat was in a company of soldiers assigned shortly after to do a reconnaissance of the coastal inlets for Japanese presence between Cairns and Darwin. I daresay he enjoyed the trip as the only species that he missed seeing was the **Green-backed Gerygone** (Warbler in those days). The exceptional species that he observed on that trip was the **Nicobar pigeon** in monsoon forests of Arnhem Land (I think) a bird since not seen in Australia!

*Continued ....?*

### Gouldian Finches back in Mareeba

One of the most spectacular Australian small birds is again flying the skies of North Queensland after more than 30 years of absence, thanks to a world-first breed-and-release programme.



Federal Member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch released 20 of the spectacular **Gouldian finches** into the wild from the *Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetlands Reserve* on March 16. It marked the first phase in an ongoing re-introduction programme, one of the premier conservation projects undertaken by the *Mareeba Wetlands Foundation*.

Mr Entsch, who used to trap wild **Gouldian finches** at the Mareeba Racecourse when he was a youngster, has played an integral part on the project since he raised the concept more than five years ago.

Mr Entsch and fellow programme organiser Dr Tim Nevard have declared the release a huge success. Two weeks after the birds were set free, all but one of the **Gouldian finches** had been accounted for.

Those involved with the programme are confident that the **Gouldian finches** will be able to avoid most wild perils. Despite being the product of more than 20 generations of captive breeding, the released finches' instincts are strong. The birds are showing increasing signs of predator alertness while feeding and they are actively defending their eggs.

As importantly, the finches have commenced breeding. They have been observed searching for suitable nesting sites around the reserve's Visitor Centre and collecting nesting material. The birds have been seen displaying courtship behaviour and several pairs have even been caught mating.

Mr Entsch said he is confident that bird lovers visiting the *Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetlands Reserve* will see the flitter-flutter of tiny Gouldian wings.

Most of the finches have remained close to the aviary, although some are venturing as far as one kilometre on foraging trips and most have been observed eating native foods. A few weeks after the release, about half of the birds were still coming back to the security of the aviary to roost at night. The aviary is equipped with a wire mesh doorway big enough to let the finches come and go but small enough to keep predators out.

The **Gouldian finch** re-introduction programme is of international importance. There are less than 2,500 surviving in the wild, fewer than the world's wild tiger population. There are tens of thousands of Gouldian finches in captivity around the world, but the captive populations are suffering the effects of the inevitable 'genetic drift' that occurs when species are bred for captive conditions.

The breeding stock for the re-introduction programme was donated by avid bird breeder **Bob Buckley** of Herberton, whose birds are of the genetically-true Far North Queensland subspecies. Funding to build the aviary was donated by **George Chapman** and **Australian Geographic**. The *Mareeba Wetlands Foundation* will continue to release more of the Gouldian finches and monitor their progress in the wild.

*Supplied by Warren Entsch*



? ...Continued. Pat saw action in PNG and sadly it was there that his birding friend and comrade Austin was killed by a Japanese sniper's bullet. Pat Bourke D.A.M. passed away in the early 1980's in Maitland NSW.

*Del Richards, Mossman*

## Interesting sightings .....

SPECIES	DATE	LOCATION	OBSERVER	COMMENTS
Cassowary and 4 small chicks	10/1/02	Half way up Mt Lewis Road	Pete & Dorothy Stephens	
Beach Stone-curlew & Red-backed Button-quail	Feb-March 02	Southern end of Tingari Street, Portsmith Cairns	Martin Cachard, Freshwater Cairns	Uncommon in this area
Letter-winged Kite	10/3/02	Walkamin Research Station	Ron Stannard	Flying over the station
Chestnut-breasted Cuckoos	27/3/02	Mt Lewis Road	Carol Iles	3 see and heard
Dusky Grasswren	29/03/2002	19 57 30 / 139 59 18 This is 9.5 air km NW of Kajabbi & 98 air km NE of Mount Isa	Bob Forsyth	Horton's form Dusky Grasswren (race Ballarae). A substantial extension of their known territory.
Painted Snipe (2), Masked Finch (5) & Pictorella Manikin (2)	29-31/3/02	Cumberland Dam (20km west of Georgetown)	Martin Cachard, Freshwater Cairns	Pictorella Manikin—range extension?
Budgerigars (2 flocks) & Cockatiels	29-31/3/02	Clemant State Forest, Nth of Townsville	Jeanette Kemp & Alex Kutt	Unusual in area
Cotton Pygmy-geese	31/03/2002	Blackbraes NP, 2 hrs north of Hughenden	G. Harrington, V. Simmons, K. & L. Fisher	Extreme western edge of its distribution
Red-chested Button-quail	31/03/2002	Blackbraes NP, 2 hrs north of Hughenden	G. Harrington, V. Simmons, K. & L. Fisher	Extreme edge of distribution & at 840m only 60m below the maximum height they have been recorded at.
Yellow Chat	31/03/2002	Blackbraes NP, 2 hrs north of Hughenden	G. Harrington, V. Simmons, K. & L. Fisher	2 birds M & F closest published record to this location was on Cameron Downs, south of Hughenden in June 1980.
Tooth-billed Bowerbird	10/04/2002	Bayview Heights, Cairns	Grant Phillips	Collision with glass wall, killed itself. ID has been confirmed. Very low altitude record of significance.
Cotton Pygmy-geese	11/04/2002	Lake Moondarra, Mt. Isa	Bob & June Gleeson	Visitors from Hervey Bay, via Bob Forsyth. 2nd sighting at this location.
Singing Bushlark	16/04/2002	Cairns Airport	Keith Fisher	Uncommon on the coast in the area.
Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher	18/4/02	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Andrew Iles	Last sight of adult bird (late); last imm. Seen 13/4/02
Channel-billed Cuckoo	21/04/2002	Yule Point, north of Cairns	Ian Cowan	Late straggler
Satin Flycatcher	24/4/02	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Andrew Iles	
Tawny Grassbird	24/4/02	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Andrew Iles	First for Kingfisher Park
Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher	28-9/4/2002	Kamerunga, Cairns	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	Late straggler
Black-chinned Honeyeater	4/5/02	Abattoir Swamp	Andrew & Carol Iles	At least 3 birds feeding with White-throated Honeyeater
Cotton Pygmy Goose	4/5/02	Lake Mitchell	Andrew & Carol Iles	Single male with Australian grebes. No other ducks/geese on whole lake. 3 male and 3 females seen 11/5/02
Budgerigars (50) & Cockatiels (7) & Australian Shovelers (8M + 3F)	12/5/02	Toonpan, Townsville	Chris and Len Ezzy	Unusual western birds now seen in Townsville due to dry inland conditions
Cattle Egret	12/05/2002	Cairns Southern Treatment Works	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	100+ foraging in & around tanks - numbers on the increase
Brown Falcon	13/05/2002	Cairns Esplanade	Keith Fisher	Uncommon on the Esplanade.
Black-tailed Native Hens (6)	19/5/02	Toonpan, Townsville	Jock and Rosemary Payet	New recording for Toonpan
Beach thicknee (2 Adults, 1 juvenile)	19/05/02	Rowes Bay, Townsville	Jo Wieneke	Unusual to see three together in this location
Square-tailed Kite	20/5/02	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Carol Iles	One bird seen in area over last 6 weeks

\* The Editor apologises for any sightings which have not been published in this issue. Unusual sightings are always welcomed & depending on space will be published.

**Additional Notes:** Brian Venables reported several interesting sightings north of Lockhart River recently – **Roseate Terns** in breeding plumage, 2 **Tahiti Petrels** and an exhausted **Short-tailed Shearwater** picked up on Chilli Beach, which unfortunately failed to survive and is now a museum specimen. He also said he had seen **Rufous Fantails** 12 km out to sea skipping across the waves heading south.

The resident **Lesser Sooty Owls** appeared distinctly peeved on 31/3/02 to find **Barn Owls** had claimed their nest-site of the last 2 years. Fortunately they found a hollow in time (albeit an inconvenient tight squeeze) and the female appears to be on eggs.

Keith & Lindsay Fisher

Andrew & Carol Iles & Ron Stannard

## Welcome to new members.....

Ms Desley Williams, MACKAY;  
Ms R Eastment, PORT DOUGLAS;  
Clare & Jim Fitzgerald, THURSDAY ISLAND;  
Dr J.D. Grant, CAIRNS;  
Mr D. Latham, YUNGABURRA;  
Mr I. Williams, BOWEN;  
Mr S Wiltshire, MISSION BEACH  
Mr W Goulding, MAREEBA  
Ms I Stanthope, NORTH CAIRNS

**We look forward to seeing you on some of our many activities  
or drop us a line about your recent birding adventures.**

*Check out these websites*

Year of the Outback - [www.outback2002.com](http://www.outback2002.com)

Australian Wildlife Conservancy - [www.australianwildlife.org](http://www.australianwildlife.org)

Global Wildlife - [www.globalwildlife.net](http://www.globalwildlife.net)

## Classifieds.....

**Padaminka Wildlife Reserve**—184 acres of bushland under a conservation agreement with QPWS. 155 bird species for the year. Camping and bush kitchen, caravan sites, Free BBQ, Self-contained cottages, single rooms with wheelchair access. Affordable rates. Tag-along-tours welcome. Only 15 minutes from Mackay, easy drive to Eungella and Kinchant Dam.



**Contact Maureen Cooper**  
**P.O. Box 113, Walkerston, 4751.**  
**Phone (07)4959 3770.**  
**Email: [padaminka@mrbean.net.au](mailto:padaminka@mrbean.net.au)**

### Rose Gums Wilderness Retreat

Private self-contained timber chalets with spa, fireplace and spectacular mountain views—great bird watching (150+ species). Look for specialties such as Blue-faced Parrot-finch, Red-backed Button-quail, Lesser Sooty Owl, Victoria's Rifle Bird and King Parrot.

**Land Road, Butchers Creek, Malanda**  
**Atherton Tablelands**  
**Phone Jon and Peta Nott (07) 4096 8360**  
**[www.rosegums.com](http://www.rosegums.com)**



## Year of the Outback 2002 Twitchathon



**What is it?** It is a competition to see which teams see the most species of birds in arid Australia in any 36 hour period between 6am 27th July and 6pm 18th August 2002 (NB: BA preference is for 36 hours between 6am 27th July and 6pm 28th July). It's your opportunity to show how much you care about the birds. All you have to do is form a team with at least one other person and go bird watching anywhere in arid Australia. Before you go, encourage your family, friends, colleagues and corporations to sponsor your team a few cents or dollars per species see or heard by your team during that period.

**What are the funds raised for?** Birds Australia recently purchased an outback property Newhaven Station, 335km NW of Alice Springs. It is home to at least 15 nationally threatened species of animals and plants. Newhaven boasts to have five species of birds nationally threatened and 19 species which are threatened in one or more mainland States. Regionally threatened birds on the property include Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, Black-breasted Buzzard, Australian Bustard, Bush Stone-Curlew and Grey-crowned Babbler. Contact Frances Czwalinna on [secretarybird@bigpond.com](mailto:secretarybird@bigpond.com) to register NOW!

## Notice Board

The country around **Newhaven Station** again has a terrific amount of growth, after 130 mm of rain in late February. Alex Coppock is gearing up for as much fire management work as possible over winter. The management plan for Newhaven is now well on the way, with the final draft due in June. We are planning to open Newhaven to the public on July 1. Camping accommodation with basic facilities (pit toilets but no showers or washing facilities) will be available. Please book with Elaine Sheridan: Phone (08) 8952 0190 or Email [gremms@telstra.easymail.com.au](mailto:gremms@telstra.easymail.com.au), with information about numbers of campers and preferred dates. A visitors information pamphlet will be available soon – we will send this out on the supporters network

and load it on the Birds Australia web site. The official opening of Newhaven is scheduled for mid-August, either just before or after the Birds Australia Congress. People interested in volunteering at Newhaven should also register with Elaine. More volunteers are needed from the beginning of May. People with experience in welding, survey mapping (theodolite or detailed GPS), firebreak or bush grader work would be particularly useful, but all are welcome.

**BA CONGRESS 2002 - August 17-18th 2002**  
**Alice Springs Convention Centre, Northern Territory**  
**"Outback birds: Past; Present; Future?"**  
**Abstracts due June 30th to Prof. Henry Nix, CRES, ANU**  
**Canberra or Email: [hanix@cres.anu.edu.au](mailto:hanix@cres.anu.edu.au)**

Please send items for September 2002 Contact Call by Mid August to: Helen McLaughlin, 44 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens 4810 or Email either Helen or Ian on [helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au](mailto:helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au) or [ian.sinclair@nrm.qld.gov.au](mailto:ian.sinclair@nrm.qld.gov.au).