



Birds Australia

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Contact Call

Birds Australia—North Queensland Group

December 2002 Issue: *Black-shouldered Kite*



Photo courtesy Ian Montgomery

A change in climate...

Well, the big dry continues. A recent article in the Cairns Post observed that for the month of October there was officially zero rainfall in Cairns. What impact such a one off weather event has on bird populations is largely unknown. One of the more obvious effects of such an event is the appearance of bird species that are normally associated with dry environments in wetter areas (see Amanda's article on Upper Peterson Ck this newsletter and the interesting sightings table).

The problem is that such events may become more common. Predictions associated with global warming suggest that extreme weather events are going to become more regular and widespread in Australia in the coming century. What impact this will have on different bird populations can only be guessed at without adequate information on bird distribution and abundance. This is why the Birds Australia Atlas project is so important. The Atlas information that is gathered by BA members is an important source of data which can be used to assess changes that may be happening to bird populations as a result of global warming (and other threats). It is only with this knowledge that we can even consider how we are going to manage bird populations for their long term conservation. A number of "Atlasing" fieldtrips are coming up over the next year and I would urge members to take advantage of these opportunities to do something practical for bird conservation in our region.

This year BA-NQG will be having their Christmas party in the cool surrounds of Paluma, Hidden Valley and Mt Zero station, recently purchased by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. I encourage all members to join in for a fun weekend of birding in the tropics.



Alastair Freeman, Convenor

North Queensland Group—Events Calendar Dec02—March03

December 2002

*** Christmas Party ***

Saturday 7th & Sunday 8th

All welcome. Meet at Hidden Valley Cabins Saturday 12pm for afternoon surveys around Paluma, Hidden Valley and Mt Zero. Christmas dinner celebrations at Hidden Valley Cabins Saturday night (\$25pp). Further explorations are planned for Sunday. Bookings needed by **22nd November** to Helen McLaughlin on 4771 3239.

January 2003

New Year Celebration - Toonpan (Townsville) Wednesday 1st

Joint trip with Townsville Region BOCA to celebrate the new year. Contact Marleen Acton for details. Phone 4725 7545.

Australia Day Weekend - Kingfisher Park

Saturday 25th to Monday 27th

Guest speakers—Graham Harrington's account of the Canning Stock Route with Jo Wieneke's illustrated talk on Bowerbirds. Camping, bunk house or self contained rooms. Book accommodation directly with Ron (ph 4094 1263) or email sootyowl@bigpond.com.

February 2003

Redden Island - Sunday 16th

Redden Island Count with Keith Fisher. Meet at 8am. Contact Keith for more details.



March 2003

Cairns Esplanade - Sunday 16th

Cairns Esplanade. Meet opposite the Tradewinds Hotel at 11am. Contact Keith for further details.

April 2003

Easter campout Mt Zero

Friday 18th to Monday 21st

Four days of exploring the wet sclerophyll forest of the wet tropics. Contact Jo Wieneke for further details. RSVP's needed

Anzac Day Weekend - Blackbraes NP

Saturday 25th to Sunday 27th

Venture to North Qld's newest National Park. To be confirmed in the March newsletter.

May - June AGM 2003

Saturday 31st May & Sunday 1st June.

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of the RAOU campout at Lake Barrine. Further details will be provided in March 2003 newsletter.

June 2003

Beginners day on the Tablelands

Saturday 28th

Bird watching for beginners at Emerald Creek Falls. Contact Graham Harrington for further details

Field Trips may change after publication. Contact local reps. for the latest information and weather details. Additional events may also be arranged.

Inside this issue:

- **Annual Reports -** Peterson Creek, Beach Stone-curlews, Crane Count, Cairns Esplanade, Redden Is.
- **Congress & Campout**
- **Trip Reports - Waders, Bowling Green Bay, Painted Snipe**
- **Blackbraes National Pk**
- **Around the Region -** Charters Towers, Cape York, Mossman
- **Interesting Sightings**
- **Stuart Leslie Bird Research Award**
- **Lake Paluma**

Watch this space for 2003 atlasing trips to Cedar Bay National Park and the South-west Gulf of Carpentaria. See future newsletters for details.



As the name suggests, the **Black-shouldered Kite** is conspicuously perching on utility poles. They are ground. Although similar to the Letter-winged the underwing and facial patterns, as well as style of flight. Most of a Letter-winged Kite, whereas the Black-shouldered Kite has a white body with just a black patch on the upper wings and a black carpal spot on the underwings. The **Black-shouldered Kite** is a solitary hawk of open woodland and grassland, across most of Australia. Eating mostly rodents, the these kites will also take small birds, lizards and insects. Generally diurnal, they have been occasionally observed hunting on moonlight nights. Although these kites roost communally, they nest solitarily building a new nest each year. In courtship a pair will soar and flutter together. The laying season varies, extending throughout most of the year and peaking in autumn and spring. Some pairs may have two broods during the year. Clutch size is usually three or four eggs, ranging from two to five. With incubation at only 30 days (by the female), the male hunts for food. The female passes food to their young for about two weeks. Maturing fast, the juveniles remain dependent on their parents for about a month, then disperse widely, reaching sexual maturity when only a year old. The **Black-shouldered Kite** is not nationally threatened, being common across most of Australia and even increasing in numbers in response to the creation of suitable habitat and introduction of suitable prey (eg house mouse). Locally secondary poisoning might occur when rodenticides are used during mouse plagues or pesticides are used during locust plagues. *Information sourced by "The Birds of Prey of Australia" by Stephen Debus & the Reader's Digest "Complete Book of Australian Birds". Photo courtesy of Ian Montgomery, Townsville. Check out Ian's web site at www.users.bigpond.com/ian.montgomery/.*

Black-shouldered Kite

often recognised by their hovering over open grassland, or also known to still-hunt from a perch, dropping on to prey on the Kite in general appearance, they have some obvious differences in obvious though is the black M or W marking across the underwings

Atlas 2 contacts

Please continue to send your Atlas forms to the following coordinators:

Northern Region (Cardwell north incl. Cape York) Regional Organiser—Graham Harrington 4096 5051

- PO Box 680, Malanda Q4885
- Keith Fisher (Cairns) (07) 4039 0972
PO Box 2209, Cairns Q4870
- Glenn Holmes (Atherton Tableland) (07) 4091 4364
PO Box 1246, Atherton Q4883
- Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) (07) 40953296
MS1318 Gadgarra Road, Yungaburra Q4872

Southern Region (Cardwell to Bowen)

Regional Organiser—Jo Wieneke 4771 4707
22 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens, Q4810

- Jon Wren (Bowen/Ayr) (07) 4786 2614
PO Box 868 Bowen Q4805



Southern Region (Bowen to Mackay, including Mt Isa)

Regional Organiser- Marion Crouther 4958 4613
PO Box 1, Dalrymple Heights Q4757

2002-2003 BA-NQG Management Committee

Executive Committee

- Convener**—Alastair Freeman Ph: 4095 2655
Email: procella@ozemail.com.au
- Convener Elect**—Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707
Email: bowerbird14@bigpond.com
- Secretary**—Keith Fisher Ph: 4039 0972
Email: lkfisher@austarnet.com.au
- Treasurer**—Amanda Freeman Ph: 4095 2655
Email: procella@ozemail.com.au
- Conservation Officer**—Graham Harrington Ph: 4096 5051
Email: treetop@austarnet.com.au

Project Contacts

- Beach Stone Curlew Survey** Amanda Freeman (Ingham north) 4095 2655 and Paul O'Neill of QPWS Rockhampton (Ingham to Bowen) 4936 0547.
- Redden Island Survey** Keith Fisher 4039 0972
- Tableland Crane Count** Elinor Scambler 4095 3296
Email: dacelo@austarnet.com.au
- Townsville Egret & Ibis Count** Jo Wieneke 4771 4707 or
Glenda Jeffries 4773 1802.

Cape York Atlas Surveys Graham Harrington 4096 5051
Area Representatives

- Mackay:** Marion Crowther Ph: 4958 4613
- Bowen / Ayr:** Jon Wren Ph: 4786 2614
Email: maluras5@tpg.com.au
- Townsville:** Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707 and Helen McLaughlin Ph: 4771 3239
- Charters Towers:** Elna Kerswell Ph: 4787 7718
Email: elnakers@httech.com.au
- Ingham / Cardwell:** vacant
- Innisfail / Tully:** Tony Jurgensen 0408 190 605 (>6pm)
Email: raj@naturelover.com.au
- Cairns:** Keith Fisher Ph: 4039 0972
- Atherton Tableland:** Ian Sinclair Ph: 4096 6690
Email: ian.sinclair@nrm.qld.gov.au
- Mossman / Daintree:** Del Richards Ph: 4094 1199
- Cape York:** Sue Gould Ph: 4069 8415 (wk)
Email: susanfgould@yahoo.com
- Mount Isa:** Bob Forsyth Ph: 4743 3210
Email: 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 our 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

You can now join directly through our web site: www.birdsaustralia.com.au

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.



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Monitoring re-colonisation of birds along Peterson Creek, Yungaburra

Quarterly monitoring of birds along Peterson Creek has continued this year. Peterson Creek on the Atherton Tablelands arises near Lake Eacham and runs through farmland to the Curtain Fig, on through Yungaburra, and out to Lake Tinaroo. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands (TREAT) and other organisations have been working over several years to create 'stepping stones' of habitat along Peterson Creek. Since July 1999, bird surveys have been carried out along the creek to monitor bird re-colonisation of the restoration sites. Birds Australia members Amanda and Alastair Freeman organise the quarterly surveys on behalf of BANQG and TREAT and are regularly joined by TREAT volunteer Simon Burchill when carrying out the counts. Several other members and friends have taken part from time to time.

The oldest plantings that we monitor, a 1998 planting on the property of Bill and Laura Palumbo, now boasts **Lewin's Honeyeater, Silvereye, Spectacled Monarch, Little Shrike-thrush, Grey Fantail, Figbird, Fairy and Brown Gerygone, Golden Whistlers and Brown Cuckoo-Doves** on a regular basis. The youngest planting, just planted early this year, is still a haven for **Richard's Pipit** and **Masked Lapwing**. As we continue monitoring, we will be able to see whether bird species colonise these younger plantings at about the same stage of development. Of particular interest this year have been the 'dry country' birds that have turned up along Peterson Creek. At various times we have seen **Crested Pigeons, Pale-headed Rosella** and a **Red-backed Kingfisher!** It's dry out there. BANQG thanks the Palumbos, Byrnes and Burchills for access to their properties and, in earlier years of the monitoring, the late Doug Hunt for access to remnant vegetation on his section of Peterson Creek.

Amanda Freeman

Redden Island Surveys

Due to other priorities the Redden Island Surveys have taken a back seat this year with only six surveys completed so far. A recent survey found the area to be very dry and little birdlife, the **Lovely Fairy-wrens** normally found in the woodland area had moved into the Mangroves and the **Collared Kingfishers** were back hanging around their old nest site. The termite nest they were using had partially collapsed and appears to be unsuitable now. The mouth of the Barron River has good numbers of waders especially the **Lesser and Greater Sandplovers** which appear here in greater abundance than the Esplanade. However the birds here are subject to greater disturbance, mainly dogs and fishermen, but they usually manage to escape to a few offshore sandbars before the tide covers them. Hopefully time will permit a few more visits in 2003 to build on the data collected so far.

Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns

Crane Count 5 October 2002

Thankyou all once again for another great effort, in tough drought conditions.

Here are preliminary totals. The 'landed' are actual but please note the species totals are actual PLUS an allocated estimate of the 'unknowns' at each site. No flyovers are included. Innot Hot Springs was almost dry yet still had 485 birds with a very similar proportion of species to Mareeba Wetlands, who



had around usual numbers. Several sites recorded much transit activity, and some Lake Tinaroo areas had many small parties of birds disappearing among trees – very frustrating! Thanks Jack Leighton who found 50 of them (all **Sarus**) on a small island very early on the Sunday morning. Harper Avenue near Yungaburra 'stole' all the Lakeside cranes and Quincan returned to life. The party at 'Rose Gums' was once again a great success, thanks very much Jon & Peta Nott.

Special thanks also to the 'southerners' – Helen McLaughlin, Rosemary Payet, QPWS and all the teams – with excellent numbers of **Brolgas** at Allingham Swamp (Forrest Beach, Ingham) and early evening counts at two traditional **Brolga** roosts – Townsville Town Common & Cromarty wetlands. *We have recently had a report that 275 brolgas were seen roosting at Toonpan (Townsville). Ed.*

Many people had other good birds besides the cranes, possibly the best was 14 **Red-necked Avocets** at Reisen's (not seen since).

The full details will be in next year's Crane Newsletter, anyone who'd like a copy of this year's news (October 2002) please let me know.

Elinor Scambler

SITE	ACTUAL LANDED	SARUS	BROLGA
Inner Tablelands			
Bromfield Swamp	706	563	143
Hasties	93	563	0
Quincan	118	93	0
Tobacco Hill	23	118	0
DPI Kairi (1)	5	23	0
DPI Kairi (2)	53	5	0
Pelican Point	9	53	0
Reisen (1)	93	9	0
Reisen (2)	139	93	2
Lakeside	0	137	0
Wilson / Brady Creek	121	0	0
Godfrey	121	121	0
Holland Farm	118	121	0
Harper Avenue	108	118	0
Black Gully (Sunday 6am)	50	108	0
Total	1757	1612	145
Outer Tablelands			
Mareeba Wetlands	413	117	296
Innot Hot Springs	485	133	349
Total	898	250	645
Ingham / Townsville			
Allingham swamp	437	0	437
TVL Town Common	10	0	10
Cromarty	10	0	10
Total	457	0	457
Grand Total	3112	1862	1247



Cairns Esplanade Update



The swimming lagoon is progressing at the southern end and is due for completion in January 2003. So far it has not had any noticeable impact on the birds. We have put in a submission on behalf of BA-NQG for the recent Esplanade Draft Management Plan put out by the Cairns City Council for comment. The plan did not contain a great deal regarding the bird habitat but it did state in one of the key outcomes that the protection of bird habitat and the maintenance of the natural atmosphere was paramount. There was also reference to a Foreshore Nature Park, but it did not state the area concerned or if such a park had been declared. The plan recognised the area as a place of international significance but also stated that it was a RAMSAR site which it is not - though it does fulfil some of the criteria required. An attempt was made several years ago to declare it a RAMSAR site by Cairns BOCA but this was not accepted. It should seriously be looked at again. As we stated in our submission we need to cultivate local pride in having such a valuable asset in the heart of the city and emphasised the monetary benefit of recreational bird watching to this area - this is the only language understood by our "leaders" and the only way we will get areas of conservation value retained.

Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns

Beach Stone-curlews

Thank you, members, for the **Beach Stone-curlew** records that continue to trickle in. The BANQ database of observations for the Wet Tropics beaches stands at around 150. In addition, I am sifting through the 'new' and 'old' Atlas records to see what, if anything, those plus our additional records can tell us about any changes in the distribution of **Beach Stone-curlews** along the coast. It's on the back-burner at the moment - a task for the Christmas holidays. Please do continue to send me your **Beach Stone-curlew** records for the region Cape York to Ingham, especially for areas that don't get visited very often. I am frightfully rude at not getting back to contributors to thank them individually but you can be assured the data does get safely filed away and added to the database. I also copy the records to QPWS. Records outside of the Cape York to Ingham area I can also pass on to QPWS. Thank you everyone for your **Beach Stone-curlew** contributions.

Amanda Freeman

Birds Australia Congress & Campout 17th-18th August

BA-NQG was well represented at this year's congress and campout in Alice Springs and Newhaven Reserve. The congress held at the Convention Centre in Alice Springs over two days, had the theme of Outback Birds: Past, Present, Future. Some of the many topics covered were, the outback from an avian perspective, Origins and evolution of Australia outback birds, Atlassing expectations and outcomes, Bird communities in NSW, Wetlands in the deserts, changes in bird populations in Australia's arid zone over 25 years and the potential impact on outback birds through climate change. All the topics were very interesting and presented by experts in their field. The Sunday morning of the congress was spent wandering around the Desert Park before we went back to the Convention Centre for more talks. The Desert Park is set in the foothills of the MacDonnell Ranges 10 minutes from town. It has been set up with varying habitats, Desert Rivers, Sand Country and Woodland which you can wander through along the 2km of paths.



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Along the way are glass fronted aviaries with birds from the various areas and a couple of walk in aviaries with top class interpretive signage. This is an ideal opportunity to see some of the more elusive birds such as **Grasswrens**, and **Quail-thrushes** alongside a variety of other desert species. You can see them up close and opportunities are there to photograph them if you don't mind your birds wearing coloured/aluminium bands! The Bird of Prey display is very professionally presented and gives both the experience birder and the general public an appreciation of these birds. There is a nocturnal house with mammal and reptiles, many of which are difficult to see in the wild. Other presentations such as bush tucker and the ecology of the area allow an appreciation of the country. All up, a world class facility. The park is open from 0730-1800 and 4hrs is the recommended time to appreciate all that is on offer. There is an entrance fee.

The campout was at Newhaven Reserve 340km NW of Alice Springs. If you intend to visit, the Newhaven Reserve brochure is a must, and can be downloaded from the Birds Australia web site www.birdsaustralia.com.au (follow the directions to the Newhaven page). It contains all the relevant information and a map of the reserve. The reserve is 262,000ha (5 times larger than Birds Australia's other reserve in South Australia, Gluepot) and is home to at least 15 nationally threatened species. Its low stocking rates and areas that have been fenced off have lead to suitable habitat for the **Night Parrot**, which has been recorded here. Alex Coppock (previous owner) and his family only arrived in 1958 to take up the property, which has been sensitively managed. There is a wide range of landforms: parallel dune systems in the south (much of which has never been or has been lightly stocked), salt lakes, claypans, plains country and rocky outcrops. There are grasslands, open scrublands and open woodland including mulga/acacia stands in which **Grey Honeyeaters** are found. In all at least ten major vegetation communities are present. These communities are either not present or only poorly represented in other Northern Territory reserves. This diversity and variability is due to Newhaven's location at the junction of three bioregions: the Great Sandy Desert, MacDonnell Ranges and Burt Plain. Other threatened bird species found here are **Princess Parrot**, **Grey Falcon** and **Striated Grasswren**. In addition to the birds there are mammals such as Mulgara and Black-footed Rock-wallaby. We spent the week learning about the flora and fauna and surveying with people such as Jurgen and Birgit, a couple of German researchers who have been studying the biology and social habits of a group of camels at Newhaven Station since 1984. Their study paddock is 20 000ha and as well as knowing all there is to know about camels. Jurgen and Alex became celebrities in the bird world when they sighted the **Night Parrot** at Camel Bore. Jurgen told us the story and we were left in no doubt that they had actually seen the **Night Parrot**. The dryness of the countryside did not help in finding birds but we did find birds such as **Inland Dotterel**, **Orange Chat**, **White-browed Woodswallow**, lots of **Hooded Robins**, **Rufous-crowned Emu-wren** and **Banded Whitefaces**. The **Grey Honeyeaters** were nowhere to be found although others had seen a few around the camping area. Mid-week we attended the opening ceremony for the reserve by our national president Henry Nix. It is a great place, the scenery is stunning and the birdlife diverse and it was well worth the effort to get to Newhaven. A diary/report for our total trip is available.

Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns

Welcome back the Waders – 8th September 2002

Members were joined by several visiting overseas birders who were grateful for the local knowledge at the wader identification session on the Cairns Esplanade. We were not disappointed by the migratory waders present, 13 species all up including one **Red-necked Stint** still in breeding plumage. Most numerous were **Whimbrel**, **Great Knot** and **Red-necked Stints**. There was only a few **Grey-tailed Tattlers** as well as **Lesser & Greater Sand-Plovers** allowing the finer points of separating these two species to be made on individuals. The main and surprising highlight of the session was a glide by of 80+ **Frigatebirds**, mainly **Little** with at least two **Greater** amongst them. We can only recall seeing them over Cairns in cyclonic conditions previously - did they know something we didn't! Also 4 **Glossy Ibis** flew past heading for Cairns Airport and in the trees behind the Esplanade were at least 4 **Nankeen Night Heron**. A couple of **Pied Imperial-Pigeons** were getting ready to nest in the mango tree they had occupied for the last few years (at least 8 nests last year). Lindsay handed out brochures and information to passers by who wanted to know what we were up to. Many of them expressed an interest in birds and we need to tap into this. The morning produced a total of 42 species and was a great promotion for the Esplanade.

Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns

Lake Paluma—NQ Water's Jewel - September 2002

Imagine awakening to the deafening sound of a family of **Chowchillas** resinating through the forest. Suddenly you tune into the male **Tooth-billed Bowerbird**. You now realise that you should be out of the tent with binoculars in hand as **Satin Bowerbirds**, **White-browed Robins**, **Grey Fantail** and **Wompoo Pigeons** are only metres away!! They were the sounds we heard at the officially opening of Lake Paluma. As we meandered around the new facilities we also saw numerous **Topknot Pigeons** flying over the rainforest canopy, **Pied** and **Spectacled Monarch**s, **Golden Whistlers** and **Brown Pigeons**. However the highlight of the day must have been the two **Peregrine Falcon** chicks sitting in their nest high in a dead tree in the middle of the dam. NQ Water should be congratulated on their new camping facilities at Lake Paluma, including two toilet blocks, gas BBQ's, picnic tables and a new boat ramp. Bookings for your camping can be done either by phone or from their web site. Bird lists will be available from NQ Water's website. Members are encouraged to advise NQ Water if any unusual birds are seen.

Helen McLaughlin

Bowling Green Bay October 2002

As part of the annual Crane Count, Townsville birders decided to search around Cromarty (south of Townsville). The trip proved very rewarding with good views of a wetland with numerous **Glossy Ibis**, **Royal** and **Yellow-billed Spoonbills**, **Black-winged Stilts**, **Whistling Kites**, **Pelicans**, **Hardheads**, **Swans**, **Cotton Pygmy Geese**, **Gull-billed Terns**, **Sacred Kingfishers**, while **Pied Imperial Pigeons** headed to the islands for the night. At a nearby creek we got good views of a **White-browed Robin**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Yellow Honeyeater**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **Varied Triller**, **Rufous Shrike-thrush** and **Brush Cuckoo**. Unfortunately we also found a dead **Rufous Owl** by the road. The creek was also home to **Black-necked Storks** and **White-bellied Sea-eagles** whose nests could be seen along the creek. As the sun went down we recorded 10 **Brolgas**, **Bustards** and a **Large-tailed Nightjar**. Whilst travelling back to camp we also came across a Water Python on his way to the wetland! That night we decided to spotlight the forest around Alligator Creek Falls finding Swamp and Carpet Pythons, a **Barn Owl**, Sugar and Brushtail Possums (with juveniles) and a **Bush Thick-knee**, while Agile and Unadorned wallabies took over the campground.

On Sunday we went east to Coco Creek (Cungalla) and were lucky enough to see the recently arrived **Large and Mongolian Sand-Plovers** on the mud flats along with **Whimbrels**, **Red-capped Dotterels**, **Caspian Terns** and **White-faced Herons**. Amongst the mangroves we also noted **Osprey**, **Little Egret**, **White-bellied Sea-eagle**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **Red-backed Button-Quail** and **Pied Imperial Pigeons**. A quick trip down to Chunda Bay also revealed **Varied Trillers**, **Great Bowerbird** and **Forest Kingfisher**. The river mouth were home to **Curlews**, **Whimbrels**, **Little Black** and **Great Cormorants**, **Silver Gulls** and a pair of **White-bellied Sea-eagles**.

Helen McLaughlin, Townsville

National Painted Snipe Survey 3rd November

The Australian-wide Painted Snipe Survey was combined with a (very) dry season Atlas survey of Serpentine Lagoon. After the sighting of a male **Painted Snipe** at Fletcher's Creek the previous weekend we were optimistic, but heavy grazing had left little vegetation near the water and the only snipe recorded was a single **Latham's Snipe**. The 80 species recorded for the morning included **Cockatiels**, **Black-throated Finches** and, most surprisingly, a **Rufous Fantail** probably on migration. Reports of other surveys in the March newsletter.

Jo Weineke, Townsville

Blackbraes National Park—North Qld's newest reserve

The official opening of Blackbraes National Park was held on Saturday 28th September with an afternoon tea and BBQ dinner with neighbours to celebrate. With the assistance of Hughenden QPWS staff, Steve Christie, the new Ranger in Charge, has been busy renovating one of the old buildings into a new office. They have also been able to slash the many tracks around the property, including one to Emu Swamp, which is home to hundreds of birds. Although only a short visit for the opening we were able to see many birds within a stone's throw of the homestead such as **Squatter** and **Crested Pigeons**, **Pale-headed Rosella**, **Pied Currawong**, **Apostlebird**, **Spotted Harrier**, **Blue faced Honeyeater** and **Double-barred Finch**. That night we decided to spotlight some of the well-known **Greater Gliders**, also seeing **Rufous Bettong**, a **Barn Owl** and **Owlet Nightjar**. On Sunday we drove out to the Emu Swamp Dam and were amazed by the



Cotton Pygmy Geese, **Black Swans** (with signets), **Great Crested Grebes** (20), **Pelicans** (30), **Brolgas**, **Straw-necked**, **White** and **Glossy Ibis**, **Black winged Stilts**, **Common Bronzewing**, **Red-backed Fairy-wren** and a **Brown Songlark** at the dam wall. After reading Graham Harrington and Keith Fisher's report from their visit in Easter 2002, and the ease at which we saw these birds, we are inspired to organise a bird watchers campout next year to do more survey work, and to find the elusive **Yellow Chat**!!

Marty McLaughlin, Townsville



Charters Towers is very dry and the birds seem to have dispersed to other more favourable areas, though the **Rainbow Lorikeets** are in noisy profusion. There is still a variety of waterbirds on the small dam behind the Catholic School. Up to 60 **Plumed Whistling-ducks**, similar numbers of **Wood Ducks**, a handful of **Grebes**, 4 **Stilts**, a couple of **Double-banded Plovers**, the stray **Cormorant** and **Darter**, some **Grey Teal**, **Black Ducks**, and a small population of **Dusky Moorhens** seem to be fairly stable over the past 6 months. The **Zebra Finches** and **Chestnut-breasted Mannikins** have dispersed and the twice-spotted flock of **Plum-headed Finches** has not been seen for a couple of months. I haven't seen the 7 **Bustards** for a few weeks, but they may have moved into a more remote patch of thick grass. I am hopeful that the Charters Towers Council will preserve this whole area as a Fauna Sanctuary. I'll keep trying (if there is any bush left after they slash-burn, bulldoze and destroy a valuable patch of local bush and long grass), but feel I'm running out of time, as I try to fit that campaign in between my other commitments. In September, I camped beside Toomba Creek (Toomba Station) with a group of friends and we had two exciting nights of continuous squawks, clucks, honks, chirps and squeals from the resident **coots, moorhens, swans, grebes, swamp hens** and **cisticolas, kookaburras** and some distant **brolgas**. Pure joy for me, anyway. The fact that at least 50 **Nankeen Night Herons** were roosting in a couple of huge eucalypts near the homestead was another great thrill. The Bassingthwaights told me that sometimes there are 200 to 300 there during the winter. Wow!! Toomba Lake also provided rich pickings of water birds and small bush birds, including large numbers of **Willy Wagtails, Brown Honeyeaters** and **Friarbirds**. The resident **White-bellied Sea-Eagles** flew over to check us out, too. On Sunday, 27th October, I joined the Ezzys and their friend Janet Robino at Reeves Lake and we managed 57 species during the 3 hour visit. Sea eagles and their nest, **Whistling Kites** with one visible youngster in its nest, a **Hobby** and a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** were highlights, while **Whiskered** and **Caspian Terns, grebes, coots, swans** and a multitude of **Comb-crested Jacanas** swam, dived and danced across, under and around the waterlily pads. One bird of great interest was a very black-bellied tern, which dive-bombed frequently and flew around with many white and grey-bellied **Whiskered Terns**. It had us puzzled. Nothing in the books says that they go completely black on the belly when breeding. What else could it be? A very rewarding morning's sightings, in spite of the 40degree heat and the glare blazing up from the bare, white clay around the lake's edge. This lake still has a good quantity of fresh water and the Fletcher Creek is flowing well. See you at the Christmas Dinner weekend at Hidden Valley. Good birding.



Cape York Peninsula...new representative Sue Gould

Mike Barnett has recently moved from Weipa and therefore BA-NQG have a new representative for Cape York. Welcome to Sue Gould, who is the local catchment coordinator for Weipa and has also had a keen interest in birds. Thank you to Mike for his assistance in the Cape and reporting on events of northern Queensland and good luck with the move.

Mossman / Daintree...Del Richards

The **Black Butcherbird** are opportunistic hunters, their food resource variable. We all know that they are capable of robbing nests, verandas no obstacle. I have noted butcher birds after small crabs in mud on the edge of the Daintree River. A friend in the Wyanbul Valley north of Mossman told me that an adult butcherbird had attacked a **Russet-tailed Thrush** on his porch. About two years ago an **Emerald Dove** hit a window and a butcherbird was there within a couple of minutes attracted by the commotion. Recently in Port Douglas an adult was collecting insects under lights at seven o'clock in the evening. They are an adaptive, intelligent bird.



Bowen's Wedge-tailed Eagles...Jon Wren

On the 28/8/02 I was returning from Newlands Mine on a train and came across a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** feeding on a wallaby carcass between the track. It was 1850 and relatively dark with the moon in the last quarter. This is the first time I have observed an eagle feeding at night. HANZAB states 'observed to feed on carcass of kangaroo on moonlit night'. As we approached the bird flew and perched in a dead tree close by to the carcass, possibly to return and resume its feeding after we had passed. I must also comment on the high concentration of eagles on the Abbot Point Road just north of Bowen. This road is some 15km long and provides much carrion for the current population. I am aware of three bird strikes involving **Wedge-tailed Eagles** with locomotives so far this year. The main problem seems to be when a group of eagles feed on carrion, the last remaining bird seems to be dominant refusing to release the prey regardless of the oncoming train.

Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher... Stella Martin (QPWS Cairns)



Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfishers come to Australia every summer from New Guinea to breed in our rainforests, nesting in ground-level termite mounds in lowland forests. Researchers are trying to determine why most other species of migratory birds have feather adaptations to reduce the energetic costs of flying. However, the long tails of **Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfishers** create an aerodynamic handicap, making the journey harder. Sarah Legge, from the Australian National University, is trying to unravel the mystery by studying their migration patterns. Sarah has noted that they usually arrive during the last week in October but one has been heard calling as early as October

18 in Kamerunga. Strangely, it seems that the first wave flies over suitable habitat at Iron Range and keeps going until the birds reach the Cairns area. A week or two later, birds appear at Iron Range and those heading for Mackay and the tip of the Cape York Peninsula usually arrive last. Sarah has also discovered that the birds flying to Mackay are heavier and larger, but their tails shorter, than those elsewhere. Much remains to be known about these birds and your assistance would certainly be appreciated. Please make a note of the date and the location and contact Sarah at King Park CMB 52, Cairns MC, Q4871, or email: Sarah.Legge@anu.edu.au

Interesting sightings

SPECIES	DATE	LOCATION	OBSERVER	COMMENTS
Spotted Whistling-Duck	1/06/2002	Awonga Pt Sewage Treatment Pl, Weipa	Michael Barnett	2 adults with 4 imm & 2 adults with 11 imm
Little Eagle	10/08/2002	Cumberland Dam, Georgetown	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	Few sightings in area
Ground Cuckoo-shrike	10/08/2002	Newcastle Range, Georgetown	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	4 birds
Wood Sandpiper	12/08/2002	Mt. Isa Treatment Works	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	2 birds
Frigatebird sp.	22/08/2002	Lake Mitchell	Carrol Iles	pale-headed immature bird very unusual inland
Magpie Lark	26/08/2002	Willis Is Weather St. 500km ENE Cairns	Godfrey McVicar	1 bird
Red-rumped Swallow	27/08/2002	Daintree River, Daintree	L.Lafferty & B.Maslen	1 bird
Black Falcon	2/09/2002	Lake Mitchell	Del Richards	Unusual in region
Grey Falcon	10/09/2002	Clem Walton Park	Ian Clayton	Nr. Mt. Isa - unusual in area
Blue-faced Parrot Finch	11/09/2002	Mt. Lewis	Carol Iles	Unusual at this time of year
Black-faced Monarch	20/09/2002	Kamerunga, Cairns	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	1st for season here
Pied Honeyeater	21/09/2002	Townsville Town Common	via Jo Wieneke	1st record for the Town Common
Pied Heron	21/09/2002	Cairns Crocodile Farm	Steve Bunn	Uncommon
Channel-billed Cuckoo	21/09/2002	Greenswamp Road, Bowen	Jon Wren	1st for season here
Black-tailed Native Hen	21-22/9/02	Tinaroo Creek Road, Mareeba	Carol & Andrew Iles	Unusual, north of normal distribution range
Dollarbird	22/09/2002	Kings Beach Ck., Bowen	Jon Wren	1st for season here
Common Koel	24/09/2002	Saltwater Creek, North of Mossman	Del Richards	1st for season here
Torresian Crow	24/09/2002	Clifton Beach	Ian Cowan	Seem to be increasing along the Cairns coast
Red Knot	26/09/2002	Lake Mitchell	Del Richards	Unusual inland record in region
Great-crested Grebe	29/07/2002	Mt. Carbine Dam	Carrol Iles	4 birds - 2 on 12/8 & 1 on 22/8 uncommon here
Banded Honeyeater	27/09/2002	Kuranda	Glenn Holmes	4-5 birds eastern distribution record
Black Falcon	30/09/2002	Lake Mitchell	Del Richards	Unusual in Region
Freckled Duck	2/10/2002	Forsayth	Glenn Holmes	1 bird
Orange Chat	2/10/2002	Georgetown	Glenn Holmes	2 birds, northern edge of range
Blue-faced Honeyeater	3/10/2002	Whitfield, Cairns	Brian Venables	Unusal in Cairns
Freckled Duck	5/10/2002	Lake Moondarra, Mt. Isa	Bob Forsyth	18+ birds unusual
Red-necked Avocet	5/10/2002	Lake Tinaroo	John Grant	14 birds seen whilst crane counting
Long-toed Stint	7/10/2002	Wide Bay, Lake Moondarra, Mt. Isa	Bob Forsyth	1 bird with Red-necked Stint-photo confirmation
Satin Flycatcher	8-20/10/02	Mt. Lewis, Julatten	Carrol Iles	Passage Migrants
Freckled Duck	10/10/2002	Mt. Isa Treatment Works	Bob Forsyth	Unusual
Curlew Sandpiper	10/10/2002	Mt. Isa Treatment Works	Bob Forsyth	1st here for observer
Little Curlew	11/10/2002	Cairns Esplanade	Keith Fisher	2 birds on mudflats. Very unusual here
Grass Owl	12/10/2002	Tyto Wetlands, Ingham	Ian Montgomery	3+ birds
Barn Swallow	13/10/2002	Newall Beach, N of Mossman	Del Richards	5 birds
Oriental Plover	13/10/2002	Wide Bay, Lake Moondarra, Mt. Isa	Bob Forsyth, Ian Clayton	100 birds
Red-necked Avocet	13/10/2002	Mt. Carbine Dam	Andrew Iles	2 birds, unusual
Satin Flycacher	13/10/2002	Kuranda, Cassowary House	Phil Gregory (via guest)	Migrating through
Banded Lapwing	14/10/2002	Nr Woodstock, south of Townsville	Bill Holmes	2 + 4 half grown chicks
Spotted Turtle-dove	17/10/2002	Mt. Carbine Dam	Carrol Iles	Range extension, 1st at this location
Red-backed Button-quail	18/10/2002	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	R. Stannard & A. Iles	Walked into reception during nearby cane cutting.
Oriental Plover	19/10/2002	Marks Lane, Atherton	Phil Gregory	22 in ploughed field
Black Honeyeater	21/10/2002	Townsville Town Common	via Jo Wieneke	1st record for the Common
Freckled Duck	20/02/2002	Mareeba Wetlands, Mareeba	Phil Gregory (via guest)	4 birds
Red-necked Avocet	21/10/2002	Nr. Port Douglas	Del Richards	4 birds, a day after 4 seen on Cairns esplanade
Buff-breasted P.K/fincher	21/10/2002	Port Douglas	via Sarah Legge	1st for season here
Painted Snipe	24/10/2002	Fletcher Creek, Townsville	L&C Ezyy & Janet Robino	Seen upstream of campground along stream bank
Red Goshawk	27/10/2002	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Andrew Iles	Rare sighting
White-gaped Honeyeater	28/10/2002	McLeod River, north of Mt. Carbine	Del Richards	2 birds, unusual-4 years since last sighting here
Black Falcon	Oct./Nov.	Lk Mitchell, Mareeba, Ath. and Yburra	Glenn Holmes	Unusual in these locations
Grey Plover	2/11/2002	Mouth of Barron River, Cairns	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	2 birds - 1st for season here by us

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

Welcome to new members...

U Mr & Mrs D Fowkes, DAINTREE;

U Mr M Price, MACHANS BEACH;

Thank you to those members who renewed their membership during the last two months.

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

Mareeba Wetlands: www.mareebawetlands.com.au

Cooper Ornithological Society: www.cooper.org

NQ Water: www.nqwater.com.au

Post-graduate ornithological research continues with Stuart Leslie Bird Research Award



The Award is now in its fifth year and continues to attract applications from all over Australia. Most applications have been from students associated with tertiary institutions; however, the Award is open to applicants conducting research that is not directly associated with a tertiary institution. In 2002 38 applications, comprising 14 renewal research, 22 new research and two conference applications, were received. A total of \$ 30,000 was awarded to students studying a wide variety of subjects. The successful applicants received up to \$ 500 for conference attendance, and up to \$ 3,000 for research projects. This year 5 Queensland applicants were successful, with all students receiving funding for ongoing research.

Queensland Award recipients: **Liana Joseph**, Ph.D., University of Queensland, Effective monitoring and management of rare and threatened birds of Australian tropical and sub-tropical forests. **Tara Martin**, Ph.D., University of Queensland, An examination of avian diversity in a grazed landscape: a search for ecologically sustainable design principles. **Dianna Mudie**, Ph.D., University of the Southern Cross, The dispersal and population genetics of the Ground Parrot *Pezoporus wallicus wallicus*. **David Putland**, Ph.D., University of Queensland, The dispersal strategies of Albert's lyrebirds, a rainforest specialist in a fragmented landscape. **Leonie Valentine**, M.Sc., James Cook University, The impact of fire regimes on bird assemblages in tropical savannas of northern Queensland.

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

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

Notice Board

102 YEARS OF THE CONDOR

The first 102 years of *The Condor*, vol. 1-102, 1899-2000, have been scanned and are available free to anyone interested in the biology of birds and who has access to the web. The web site for the Cooper Ornithological Society is www.cooper.org, where you will find the link to the Condor archive. Individual articles can be downloaded as files at no charge.

QUICK FIND INDEXES—BOB FORSYTH (MT ISA)

For those wanting an easy way to quickly find the right page in their field guide, Bob has created quick indexes for Morcombe, Pizzey & Knight and Simpson & Day. Bob has also produced quick references for Debus (Birds of Prey), Qld Corvids, Qld Terns and the differences between a Collared Sparrowhawk and a Brown Goshawk. Copies of these have been sent to area representatives. Additional copies are available from Bob Forsyth. Contact details on page 2.



4th CASSOWARY AWARDS - NQ BIRDOS REWARDED

Well known rainforest researchers, conservationists and Rainforest Aboriginal people were presented with awards. Congratulations to: **André Griffin** for pioneering work recording the birdcalls of the Wet Tropics, allowing countless others to share the passion for the natural environment; **John Winter** for scientific contribution to our understanding of rainforest animals, dedication to community conservation initiatives, and leading by example as an ideal World Heritage landholder; **Graham Harrington** for generosity in sharing knowledge and for passionate involvement with a range of community conservation groups; **Tony Irvine** for lifelong devotion to the study of wet tropics flora and generously sharing expertise with the wider community; **Annabelle Olsson** for compassion in treating injured native animals and for inspiring countless other wildlife carers. **John Courtenay**, **Davey Lawrence (Girramay)** and **Ernie Raymont (Ngadjon-jii)** were also awarded for their dedication to nature-based tourism in the WHA.

Please send items for March 2003 Contact Call by Mid February to: Helen McLaughlin, 44 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens 4810 or Email Helen on helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au.