



Birds Australia

Conservation Through Knowledge

Looking after Australia's native birds since 1901

Contact Call

Birds Australia—North Queensland Group



Photo © Ian Montgomery

June 2004: Brahminy Kite

2004-05 Coordinators Chord

Take a look at the names on the new Committee elected at the recent AGM. It has an encouraging mix of old and new faces. As the new Coordinator I am looking forward to the new viewpoints and new ideas that will be brought to bear on our activities in 2004. Please feel free to contact any member of the Committee if you want BANQG to do something, whether it be a new policy, a new project, to take action on some bird conservation problem in the region or more field trips. The new Committee has not yet had time to deeply consider where BANQG should place its priorities, not least because two members were unavoidably absent from the first Committee meeting after the AGM. However we did discuss what function a Birds Australia Regional Group should or could perform. There appear to be four main dimensions:-

- Providing far-flung members with a more personal contact with the organisation than the national body can hope to do if only through the medium of "Contact Call";
- Offering opportunities for members to meet and/or engage in field activities together. Our annual Crane Count is one such activity that offers both social and scientific value;
- Identifying and acting on local bird conservation issues that would not attract national action, such as the new Townsville-based Black-throated Finch project;
- Local organisation of national campaigns, such as the Atlas and "Important Bird Areas program (IBAs).

The Committee meets on August 1st in Cardwell to build a new program and sort out priorities, based on those functions. Members of Birds Australia have a variety of interests and the Committee will strive to serve them. There is no expectation that all members will wish to be actively involved in the Regional Group but we do hope that having a Regional Group will enhance your membership of the national body.

Graham Harrington, President

BA North Queensland Group—Events Calendar June-Sept. 2004

June 2004

Saturday 5th June

World Environment Day - Seas and Oceans

Padaminka Nature Refuge, 161 Kellys Road, Walkerston comes alive on the 5th with a great day's line up of kids activities and guest speakers. Starting at 9am with a morning of kids games and face painting, lunch available (sausage sizzle) or byo. Afternoon speakers on the reef and marine biologist on hand to answer questions. Cost \$2 per head (kids under 5 free). Smokos provided. RSVP Maureen Cooper on ph: (07) 4959 3770. Program available on request.

Saturday & Sunday 5th & 6th June Crane Celebration, Malanda Hotel

Buffet dinner @ 6pm. Bookings required with Malanda Hotel Ph 40965488. Presentation @ 7:30pm
Information on Crane history, conservation issues, a little humour and some cool charts with Crane Count results 1997-2003. Field trips planned for Sunday, meeting at Bromfield Swamp and finishing for lunch at Hasties Swamp, Atherton. TBC Saturday night. Contact Elinor Scambler on Ph (07) 40953 296 for more details.

Sunday 6th June

Bird Awareness Day @ Townsville's Ecofiesta 12pm-5pm

In conjunction with Conservation Volunteers Australia, BANQG will have a stall at the Townsville Ecofiesta. Contact Jo Wieneke for details. All welcome.

Sunday 20th June

Copperlode brochure launch

Meet at Copperlode Dam from 8am onwards. From the Brinsmead-Kamerunga road take the road to Lake Morris, which is 16km. Bring breakfast, BBQs are available. Leisurely breakfast overlooking the dam before a walk into the rainforest. We will also launch the BA-NQG Lake Morris/Copperlode Dam brochure and finish off with smoko at the kiosk. Contact Keith Fisher on Ph: (07) 4039 0972.

July 2004

Sunday 11th July— Serpentine Lagoon

Usual Atlas at the lagoon and to search for the Black-throated Finch. Meet at the Wulguru Service Station @ 7am for a great morning.



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Birds Australia 2003.

Saturday 24th July—Yungaburra markets

Join us again for a winter market at Yungaburra from 6am till 12pm. Donations (plants, books etc) and volunteers on the day are very welcome. Please contact Keith Fisher or Virginia 40958302.

August 2004

Saturday 21st August

Tourism information night, Malanda Hotel

Graham Harrington to show his "Cairns: gateway to tropical birding in Australia" presented at the World Bird Conservation Conference in Durbin, South Africa early March. Contact Graham ph: (07) 4096 5051.

Inside this issue:

- AGM Murray Falls
- Easter Campout - Taravale and Mt Zero PROPERTIES
- Southern Gulf, Birds and Wetlands Forum, Karumba
- Black-tailed Gull sighting
- Trip Reports - Wave the Waders, Bowerbird Book Launch, Leslie Creek, Serpentine lagoon.
- Cotton Pygmy-Goose survey
- BA Southern Queensland- up and running
- Research - Fire, ferals and feathered friends
- 6 days at Karumba
- Interesting Sightings
- Snippets

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.

A common and widespread bird in north Queensland, the adult **Brahminy Kite** is distinguished by a mostly rich chestnut body with a white head, breast and tip to the tail, with black outer primaries. Its voice is an unmistakable stuttered 'peeah-h-h' with peevish trills, news and squeals. The **Brahminy Kite** is a solitary or gregarious kite of inshore coastal and estuarine waters and adjacent terrestrial habitats, sometimes occurring over forest or inland along rivers in the tropics and subtropics. Breeding takes place in the dry season in the tropics and later winter to spring in the subtropics. Pairs nest solitarily, with the nest being a platform of sticks and other flotsam lined with leaves and other soft material. The clutch is usually one to two eggs but ranges from one to four. Incubation takes about 35 days and the nestling period is 50-56 days. It is a few months before the fledglings are dependent. Its range is contracting northwards in eastern Australia where the thickness of its eggshells was reduced by DDT use and its population is affected by habitat disturbance.

Brahminy Kite

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This information sourced from The Birds of Prey of Australia by Stephen Debus.



Debbie Sullivan
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Atlas 2—Continuing the Research

To assist with filling in your Atlas sheets, Jo Wieneke has assigned a habitat number to the most popular Atlassed places around Townsville: e.g. Paluma, Serpentine Lagoon and Townsville's Town Common. If you do sites regularly enquire about getting a site number for your favourite spot. Please continue to send your Atlas forms to the coordinators:

Southern Region (Bowen to Cardwell)

Regional Organiser—Jo Wieneke 4771 4707

22 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens Q4810



Northern Region (Cardwell to 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; or
- Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) (07) 4095 3296
MS1318 Gadgarra Road, Yungaburra Q4872.

2004-2005 New look BANQG Committee

Executive Committee *

Convenor—Graham Harrington Ph: (07) 4096 5051

Email: riflebird@austarnet.com.au

Deputy Convenor—Keith Fisher Ph: (07) 4039 0972

Email: lkfisher@optusnet.com.au

Secretary—Jo Wieneke Ph: (07) 4771 4707

Email: howerbird14@bigpond.com

Treasurer—Harry Cassidy Ph: (07) 4059 1058

Email: harrycass40@hotmail.com

Committee members

Tony Grice (Townsville) Cliff Frith (Malanda)
Bill Holmes (Townsville) Helen McLaughlin (Townsville)
Ian Northcott (Cairns) Elna Kerswell (Townsville)

Committee-elected Positions

Conservation Officer—Graham Harrington (northern) & Jo Wieneke (southern)

Newsletter Editor—Helen McLaughlin

Publicity Officer—Cliff Frith

IBA Coordinator—Alastair Freeman & Graham Harrington



Project Contacts

Beach Stone Curlew Survey Amanda Freeman (Ingham north) 4095 2655 and Paul O'Neill 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

Townsville: Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707

Cairns: Keith Fisher Ph: 4039 0972

Atherton Tableland: Mark Newton Ph: 40484747 (wk)

Mossman / Daintree: Del Richards Ph: 4094 1199

Cape York: Sue Gould 4069 8415 (wk)

Email: susanfgould@yahoo.com

Mount Isa: Bob Forsyth Ph: 4743 3210

Email: isabirdo@austarnet.com.au

* A summary of the new Committee members will be included in the September edition of Contact Call

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



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.



Annual General Meeting ~ Murray Falls State Forest ~ 22 May 2004

This year we celebrated 10 years of BA-NQG accomplishments at this year's AGM. Thank you to Lindsay Fisher who did a great job of capturing 10 years of bird conservation activities through a photographic tribute. Last years work was recognised through the Convenor's report, Treasurers report and Conservation Officers report

- The Convenor thanked the contribution of Bill Cooper with the successful sale of the **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo** prints, raising money for both BANQG and the HANZAB project. The completion of the Cape York **Red Goshawk** project was also of note with funding coming in on target and a report being submitted to government. Major expenses for the year include the Spyder Display Boards (which have had plenty of use at field days, markets and meetings), two pairs of binoculars and the work at Hasties Swamp.
- The Conservation Officer recognised the efforts of the three Recovery Teams BANQG are involved with: **Golden-shouldered Parrot**, **Gouldian Finch** and **Black-throated Finch**. The group have been heavily involved with the **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** at Tolga who continue to be a concern for the scrub. There has also been international efforts to encourage Bird Tourism to North Queensland and these efforts are continuing through the region.
- The Treasurers Report was tabled and accepted.

Areas representatives present (Cairns and Townsville) provided a summary of their issues and activities for the year. The Convenor thanked them for their time and effort.

The new Committee was then elected, contact details are provided on page 2. We shall have all the members provide details about them and their positions in the September edition of Contact Call. It was promising to see new and eager faces who could assist the group.

Our guest speakers Justine Douglas and Cameron Watt gave an informative update on the **Pied Imperial Pigeon** work, both at a management and research level. It was pleasing to hear QPWS Cardwell office have made the PIP surveys a part of their annual work program, incorporating other important survey efforts such as coral monitoring, seabird monitoring and general national park maintenance on the Brook Islands. Cameron Watt, a 4th year ecology student with James Cook University Townsville briefly explained his research comparing population trends with rainfall data with sites at both the Brook Islands and Port Moresby. Cameron has found that there is a definite spike in population following a good wet season. A full summary of Cameron's work will be in the September newsletter. It was also lovely to see Margaret Thorsborne at the meeting, who has been instrumental in protecting the pigeon and monitoring their recovery since the 1960's. The evening lived up to the usual reputation of good food, good wine and great company, most hitting the swag not long after the **Sooty Owl**. It was interesting though to see that Sunday morning brought on all the rainforest favourites. See Sept. newsletter for a 10 year comparison of bird lists.



Photo courtesy of Tanya Scheut

BA-NQG and Townsville BOCA - Easter Campout 9th-12th April 2004

The **Australian Wildlife Conservancy** once again invited BA-NQG members to visit their Mt. Zero and Taravale properties to conduct bird surveys during the Easter weekend. This year BA-NQG members were joined by the Townsville Region Bird Observers Club (TRBOC), swelling the numbers present to 25. We jointly conducted surveys on these two properties, as well as some regular sites within the Paluma State Forest.



The Australia Wildlife Conservancy purchased the properties having identified the need to protect the threatened ecosystems and endangered Northern Bettong. Of the 23 ecosystems identified on the nearly 40,000 hectares of Mt. Zero, 13 of these are regionally threatened. On Taravale, there are at least 21 different ecosystems of which 11 are listed as threatened. The properties are situated within the ecotone area between the Wet Tropics and Einasleigh Uplands bioregions, leading to an extraordinary range of habitats. Mt. Zero alone contains over 65 mountain peaks, eucalypt and acacia woodlands, rainforest remnants, spinifex covered hills and plains, deep rocky gorges – some containing Hoop Pine *Araucaria cunninghamii* and several rivers and creeks. Taravale's fauna is particularly rich in rare and threatened species with over 70 mammal species, 70 frogs and reptiles as well as over 180 bird species. The endangered Sharman's Rock Wallaby *Petrogale sharmani* has been discovered in a new location on the properties and further surveys are planned to ascertain the size and distribution of the resident population. A detailed geological map of Mt. Zero and Taravale has been prepared; this will help form a basis of detailed habitat mapping and aid the design of future biological surveys. Different fire management regimes are being examined to help retain wet sclerophyll ecosystems, some of which were being invaded by rainforest. We revisited some sites we had atlased on Mt. Zero last Easter and visited new sites on Taravale, conducting 28 surveys. 93 species were recorded reflecting the diverse habitats we visited. Birds of note were two **Square-tailed Kite** which were seen in the Mt. Zero Boulder Creek area, 33.8km SW Paluma, **Common Bronzewing** on Taravale property and are quite likely more common than has been recorded previously as there is plenty of suitable habitat, a **Glossy Black-Cockatoo** was recorded from the Taravale-Paluma Road junction area on two occasions; at least two sightings of **Noisy Pitta** in the rainforest-wet sclerophyll ecotone, one adult bird was seen in the company of a juvenile bird foraging amongst fallen logs and several sightings of juvenile **Black-faced Monarch** lacking the distinct black facial markings. We also conducted spotlighting trips on two evenings finding Common Brushtail Possum, Sugar Glider, Greater Glider and Common Ringtail Possum. Several birds including **Grey Goshawk** and **Grey Whistler** were also seen at night.

Thanks to the members of BA-NQG and TRBOC who conducted the surveys and provided good company despite the drizzly weather; Helen and Marty McLaughlin and Len and Chris Ezzy for organising the very successful four days. The Mt. Zero/Taravale property manager, Peter Hensler and his wife Pam, who made us very welcome and explained some of the aims that the Australian Wildlife Conservancy have for the properties, Andrée Griffin for her local bird knowledge and Russell Cummings who once again freely shared his knowledge of the local flora with us all and gave us a greater understanding of the ecosystems present. A more detailed trip report is available, which I can email to anyone who is interested.

Keith Fisher, Cairns.

Southern Gulf Birds and Wetlands Forum, Karumba 5-6th May 2004

This forum organised by WWF in collaboration with the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group and Southern Gulf Catchments Ltd. was held on the 5th & 6th May in Karumba and BA-NQG was well represented by eight members. The forum aim was to raise awareness and open discussion to help the Gulf community develop regional strategic plans for the areas wetlands. Those participating included graziers and traditional owners, who are the primary land managers for most of the Gulf Region, and other community groups with an interest in the area.

The southern Gulf of Carpentaria contains over 10,000 km² of nationally important wetlands. Its catchments include a vast savanna and open woodland, with numerous wild rivers and associated wetlands that support a large range of plants and animals. The area supports over 300,000 water birds, including 36 species protected under international agreements with China and Japan. It is one of the three most important sites in Australia for international migratory shorebirds.

Big issues for this area include weeds, such as parkinsonia and rubber vine, which have the potential to devastate the wetlands and the bird and other species' habitats they provide. The extent of the rubber vine was surprising to us as we flew over vast areas of it in the coastal dune and woodland areas. Some of the other issues are irrigated agriculture and aquaculture developments with associated land clearing and water extraction, and intensification of the pastoral industry.

Mayor Ashley Gallagher from the Carpentaria Shire Council, opened and chaired the first day's sessions. The sessions included speakers whose topics included: southern Gulf birds & wetlands in an international context; southern Gulf waterbirds; the origin of the wetlands; grazing and wetlands in the southern Gulf; management challenges; weed threats & management; managing feral pigs; conservation issues; cooperative conservation management agreements & the interests of the landholder; local council perspectives and grazing management. After this day of information, we had time to do some birdwatching before the evening dinner and a presentation "East Asian-Australasian Flyway for Migratory Birds". This proved a very productive break as we found a party of three adult and about 12 juvenile **Star Finch**.

The following day we were entertained by another group of speakers talking about water resource management, fire management in Kakadu's wetlands, climate change, traditional owners and the pastoral industry, managing Kowanyama's wetlands, engaging wetland managers and the community in Northern Territory projects. The session was finished off with a workshop. The afternoon saw us just north of Normanton looking at a wetland before we headed back to Karumba and an evening barbeque put on by the Kurtjar people (who are involved in running Delta Downs Station on their traditional lands).

I was amazed at the extent of weeds, especially the rubber vine along with the difficulties in accessing the country. Shorebird counts are virtually impossible on foot, although Stephen Garnett said it could be done, if like him you were prepared to wade through thigh deep mud! Peter Driscoll had a better idea and had conducted surveys from his ultralight aircraft.

The forum was very informative with excellent speakers and hopefully everyone came away with an understanding of the issues involved in trying to preserve a huge area of wetlands as well as taking into account all the stakeholders interests. It is hoped that this forum highlighted the importance of this area and that there will be a cooperative approach to protecting the wetlands into the future.

Keith Fisher, Cairns



Rare Black-tailed Gull visits Townsville

The **Black-tailed Gull** *Larus crassirostris* are, as their alternate name Japanese Gull suggests, usually found in the North-west Pacific region, breeding on the islands and coasts of the Sea of Japan including Japan, China, Korea and Siberia. There had only been three reported sightings of this bird in Australia previously and only one was a confirmed sighting, so the discovery of a **Black-tailed Gull** at the mouth of the Ross River on April 2nd attracted plenty of interest both locally and interstate.

The bird, an adult showing signs of moult, was seen for the next two weeks, usually near the mouth of Ross River and the fishing wharf. As it was often close to **Silver Gull** comparison between the two could easily be made. It was slightly larger and darker grey than the **Silver Gull** and with a prominent black band across the tail. The bill was yellow with a black band and red tip. Its legs were also yellow. A detailed description of the gull and photos of it both flying and standing on the beach has been sent to the Birds Australia Records Committee.

Jo Wieneke, Townsville



Photo © Ian Montgomery



Photo © Carol Erwin

~ TIP OF THE WEEK ~

Ongoing Atlassing Made Easier

In case you missed hearing about it, the Atlas Project has entered a new phase – The Ongoing Atlas. Previously only the 2 hectare 20 minute search sites could be registered and given a number. Now any regularly atlassed site can be registered and receive a number, thus making it much easier to fill out forms. For example, if you make a weekly or monthly list for an area around your home or if you often visit a favourite spot you can register these sites. They can be 2 hectare, 500m or 5km radius. So keep putting those observations to good use and carry on atlassing.

To register a new site or for any other queries about the atlas contact Andrew Silcocks, the Ongoing Atlas Project Coordinator by email: a.silcocks@birdsaustralia.com.au



Wave the Waders Goodbye 20th March 2004

Unfortunately, the waders waved us goodbye! Due to the low off the coast, Cairns was isolated by road preventing all but the locals attending. A few brave souls ventured out as the rain turned into showers and a few waders were seen. The display boards could not be put out, but we did manage to explain the migration patterns to a couple of visiting Japanese birders. Some of the birds such as **Bar-tailed Godwits, Pacific Golden Plover, Great Knot, Grey-tailed Tattler** and **Red-necked Stints** were in breeding plumage. Eventually the half dozen rain soaked members gave up and went home to dry out. It was disappointing the weather was against us; however, those that did make it were rewarded with good views of the waders in their breeding colours. **Keith Fisher, Cairns**

The Bowerbirds Book Launch 27th March 2004

A good crowd turned up at Cliff and Dawn Frith's property to enjoy an afternoon of drinking and eating - oh and not to forget to help launch their latest book *The Bowerbirds*. Stephen Garnett ably launched the book comparing Cliff and Dawn to a pair of bowerbirds much to everyone's amusement. The book is a fine tribute to the work and dedication that Cliff and Dawn have put into producing it and if you have not yet bought a copy rush out and get one. The book sale of other ornithological titles attracted plenty of interest and people were seen sneaking out books in plain brown paper bags. Seriously, we wish Cliff and Dawn all the best with their latest venture and thank them on behalf of all the BA-NQG members for the invitation to attend the launch of such a prestigious book.

© Jim Cox



**Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns
Leslie Creek Happenings 18th April 2004**

Two more atlasing events in Klaproth Scrub and Leslie Creek revegetation area took place in April. The highlight was the recording of a **Pale Yellow Robin** in 8 year old plantings. This was the first recorded sighting of this species to my knowledge in this area - it has been regularly recorded in Klaproth Scrub further along and in

the nearby (but separate) Yungaburra Forest Reserve but not elsewhere. Compounding the issue is Yellow Robins have been regularly recorded on properties towards the ridge that bears Ball Road, but not in the wetter revegetation areas at the back of these properties. It is hoped that as tree plantings become older, **Pale Yellow** and **Grey-headed Robins** as well as **Yellow Robins** become commonplace along Ball Road. The recent approval of an Envirofund application to continue the revegetation work along Leslie Creek and tributary will hurry this process along. Anyone free in September for some tree planting?

Ian Sinclair, Malanda

Serpentine Lagoon 18th April 2004

This BANQG and Townville Region BOCA survey took place in ideal post wet-season conditions, not too hot and with good numbers of water birds and the first of the winter migrants present. The first 100m of the walk were the most productive with **Brush, Fan-tailed, Little Bronze and Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoos**, numerous honeyeaters and flycatchers. Two **Barking Owls** were also flushed from the large trees, probably their regular roosting place. After the prolonged drought it was good to see water in the swamp at the end again with plenty of water birds including **Cotton Pygmy-goose** and **Comb-crested Jacanas** among the lilies. **Great-crested Grebe** appear to be resident in our area since the drought. Some great views of the **Plum-headed Finch** were also seen by the group gathering feathers and appearing very productive. **Forest Kingfishers** certainly are prolific in these paddocks.



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Birds Australia 2003.

Unfortunately when the Chinese Apple was bulldozed most of the dead trees were also felled so valuable roosting and nesting holes have been lost. Chinese Apple, although a weed species, used to provide cover for finches and other small birds. Continued surveys will tell if this has any long term effect on the birds. Our thanks go to the Jones family who now own the property and who allow access to this great birding spot. Total species for the day - 82.

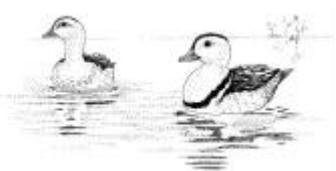
Jo Wieneke, Townsville

Cotton Pygmy-Goose survey...

Sunday 12th September 2004

Inaugural NQ Cotton Pygmy-Goose survey

The *Action Plan for Australian Birds* notes that the population of this subspecies seems small, and appears to have declined in density over at least the southern half of its historical range (therefore conservation status=near threatened). It is estimated that there are 5,000 breeding pairs in Australia although there are no recent estimates of total population size. Due to this limited information, BANQG have offered to conduct a survey of the population in north Queensland to assist in this data collection. Possible sites include Lake Tinaroo, Lake Mitchell, Valley of Lagoons, Ross River Dam, Serpentine Lagoon, or Burdekin River. If anyone has access to small boats or even light aircraft, they are very welcome. Please contact Alastair Freeman phone (07) 4095 2655 or by email: procella@ozemail.com.au as soon as possible to organise a site near you.



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Birds Australia 2003.

...BA Southern Queensland

BASQ held their inaugural meeting on 14th March 2004 at Camp Constable with about 46 people in attendance. Congratulations to the newly elected Committee:

- *Convenor: Nicci Thompson*
- *Secretary: Grahame Rogers*
- *Treasurer: Clare Staines*

The Committee has eight positions:

- *Chris Armstrong (Committee)*
- *Jill Chamberlain (Committee)*
- *Greg Czechura (IBA Officer)*
- *Greg Ford (Liaison Officer)*
- *Tina Manners (Newsletter Editor)*
- *Chris Sanderson (Website Coordinator)*
- *Justin Watson (Conservation Officer)*



It was agreed that their logo will be the Pale-headed Rosella and their region includes the towns with postcodes between 4000 to 4805. The newly formed Capricornia group will become a subgroup of the BASQ region. Their first newsletter Rosella Ramblings was sent to SQ members with the June edition of wingspan. Check out their web site: www.users.bigpond.com/basqld for more details.



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Birds Australia 2003.

My PhD project "*Seasonal weed management burning in open woodlands*" is looking at how fire management regimes, used to control introduced Rubber Vine along creek lines, impact bird assemblages. One aspect of the project examines the impacts of seasonal burning, by comparing bird abundance and diversity in dry season burnt plots, wet season burnt plots and unburnt controls at different times since fire. Dry season burning was conducted during August 2000 when moisture content in the fuel was low, leading to fairly complete moderate intensity burn. In contrast, wet season burning was conducted in December 1999, following the first rain resulting in high moisture content of fuel and a patchy low-moderate intensity burn. So far, the results indicate that in the short-term (6-12 months following a fire) bird abundance is higher in the dry burnt areas compared to the unburnt areas. This is caused by higher numbers of insectivorous birds in the burnt treatments. Specific species that had higher abundances in the dry burnt treatment include the **Striated Pardalote**, **Pale-headed Rosella** and the **Yellow-throated Miner**. However, the medium-term sampling (2.5 years following fire) recorded

Fire, ferals and feathered friends

lower bird abundance in the dry burnt treatment compared to the unburnt areas, with the **White-throated Honeyeater** identified as a potential fire-sensitive species. The final sampling period conducted earlier this year (3.5 years following fire) found no significant difference between the treatments. So at this stage, a few preliminary explanations can be drawn, broken into short-term and medium-term responses of birds. Initially following fire, there is often a short-term flush of vegetative growth that attracts insects to an area. The higher number of birds observed shortly following the fire were probably insectivores, responding to increased prey availability. However, as vegetative growth slows over the years following fire, fewer insects are attracted to the area, and birds then probably respond to reduced habitat complexity. One important observation from this study, is that bird abundance in the wet season burnt plots, did not suffer in the medium-term compared to the controls, and may represent a cautionary fire management tool. Parts of this study have been kindly funded by the Stuart Leslie Bird Research Award from Birds Australia (2002 & 2003). For more information on this study, please feel free to email me on Leonie.Valentine@jcu.edu.au.
Leonie Valentine, James Cook University

Around the Region...

Six days at Karumba, May 2004

We travelled 50km up the coast to view Pelican Island which was resident to many Pelicans and 1000's of waders (including presumably **Great Knots**) and 20km to the west past the Bynoe River. We returned over wetlands hosting several egret colonies. The spread of the dreaded rubber vine is horrific. I stayed on a few extra days, revisiting the: sand & gravel pits; cemetery; beach adjacent the airstrip where I was surprised to see 4 **Radjah Shelduck**; mangroves upstream from the boat ramp at Karumba Point; & rubbish tip to check out the corvids. I made several visits to the junction of the Karumba Road & Karumba Point Road. In a heavily wooded area to the NW, I was lucky to record a **Yellow Honeyeater**. And on my last night (9/5/04), from 4.15-5.45pm, standing at the Ferryman's Sign on the SE side of the junction, I was lucky enough to observe about 300 **Star Finch** either feeding on the grasses or absorbing the late afternoon sun. At no time did they appear to drink at a nearby pool. 10% only were in adult plumage. Karumba is the outer limit for both the **Yellow Honeyeater** & **Star Finch** and were both lifers for me. New areas I visited were: the area upstream from the end of Riverside Avenue, which continues on from Yappar St. This was 4WD territory and only then in the dry; along the rivers edge behind Karumba Lodge Hotel, Sunderland Park, Norman Street to Shelley Beach the hill overlooking the ponds alongside Clarina St. The ponds were hosting 100's of **Plumed** and **Wandering Whistling-ducks**. Several pairs of **Wandering Whistling-duck** were shepherding up to 14 ducklings each. Because of the high tide at the time, I was unable to explore the remains of the old tracks leading north from the end of Carron Street towards Karumba Point. This is **Zitting Cisticola** territory. The mangroves in the area looked encouraging. I took the opportunity of taking another cruise with The Ferryman, Russell Holt. His



ability to locate & identify the mangrove birds is phenomenal. He can run his 30 passenger craft onto the mud shore if needed. At the front is a ramp that can be dropped to allow a lucky passenger to get even closer the target bird. A month previously I also went on his boat "we travelled slowly alongside the mangroves, the odd remaining visiting wader was flushed and Russell had no difficulty identifying them on the wing. Seeing 30 odd **Terek Sandpipers** taking off at close quarters was memorable". Unfortunately the **Great-billed Heron** and male **Mangrove Whistler** still escape me. Russell told me he saw 3 males the following day. But we did see the crocodile QPWS were trying to trap. It was making short work of an Egret that had ignored its presence. A pair of **Ospreys** were nesting on a channel marker light. This time I saw about 20 **Brolga** and 9 **Sarus Crane** including a pair with a 3/4 grown immature. It had a light orangey/buff coloured neck .. similar to that of a breeding **Cattle Egret**. **Australian Pratincoles** have returned to the plains on the way at Normanton. And the lagoons near the Norman River bridge was occupied by 100s of **Magpie Goose**. And I was able to photograph a pair of **Sarus Crane** flying overhead. I will time my next visit later in the year after the Waders return. It will coincide with a morning low tide (one tide a day in the Gulf) when I will use a small boat to get out to the sandbanks including those opposite "The Oaks" where the waders congregate. Karumba has a variety of birding habitats that provide shelter to a surprising number of birds .. but numbers can vary tremendously during the year. In spite of the lack of waders I observed 105 species. I have available on request a 213 species bird lists for Normanton to Karumba. I hope the above give first time visitors to Karumba a clue to some of the various birding locations available in this area.

Bob Forsyth, Mount Isa

Part II will be printed in the September edition of Contact Call.

Interesting sightings

| Species | Date | Location | Observer | Comment |
|----------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Red-rumped Swallow | 17/02/2004 | 8km South of Mossman | Del Richards | feeding around sheds |
| Beach Stone-curlew | 04/03/2004 | Cairns Airport | Keith Fisher | 2 adults + 1 immature, bathing in fresh water ponding |
| Yellow Wagtail | 14/03/2004 | Miallo north of Mossman | Del Richards | |
| Satin Flycatcher | 17/03/2004 | Julatten | Del Richards | 1 male, 2 females |
| Southern Cassowary | 28/03/2004 | Paluma National Park | Carol Erwin, Rolf Jenson, John and Carol Maddy | At least one bird in the area is a regular visitor to the Paluma township. |
| Yellow-breasted Boatbill | 01/04/2004 | Stewart Crk Rd, Daintree | Trish & Andrew Forsyth | Uncommon this time of year |
| Beach Stone-curlew | 01/04/2004 | Cairns Airport | Keith Fisher | 2 adults + 1 immature |
| Little Corella | 03/04/2004 | Mulgrave Rd. Cairns | Keith Fisher | 3 birds drinking from a puddle, side of the road |
| Black Bittern | 09/04/2004 | Cumberland Dam | Dawn & Arnold Magarry | Few records in this area |
| Spotted Whistling Duck | 16/04/2004 | Weipa district | M.Barnett, S.Gould, R.Thorn | 4 separate family groups at different ages. Group sizes 2ad+12, 2ad+12, 2ad+9, 2ad+2. Two groups seem to be only a week or so old. All ducklings still downy with strongly two toned markings. Other adult spotted whistling ducks also present |
| Little Corella | 17/04/2004 | Freshwater, Cairns | Martin Cachard | 32 birds - Increasing numbers in Cairns |
| King Parrot | 18/04/2004 | Eubanagee Swamp | Martin Cachard | 2nd report from here, uncommon on the coast |
| Black-tailed Gull | 22/04/2004 | Ross River, Townsville | Col Meyers | A real rarity in Australia, this bird was adult/3rd year. Record submitted to BARC. |
| Red backed Kingfisher | 22/04/2004 | Whyanbeel | Del Richards | 20km north of Mossman |
| Pied Imperial Pigeon | 22/04/2004 | Wonga Beach | Del Richards | 6 birds - Late record. |
| Square-tailed Kite | 23/04/2004 | Hoare Street, Cairns | Keith Fisher | Seen in this area 1 year ago |
| Spotted Nightjar | 24/04/2004 | Laudham Park | Bill Holmes | Also seen at Lansdown on 9/5, 14/5 and 19/5. |
| Australian Pratincole | Early May | Cairns Airport | Gary Clarke | Exact date unknown |
| Australian Bustard | Early May | Cairns Airport | Gary Clarke | 1 bird with a damaged leg turned up here over a 3 year period prior to 2000. Not known if this is the same bird |
| Cotton Pygmy Goose | 03/05/2004 | Cumberland Dam | Graham Harrington, Harry Cassidy, Keith Fisher | 1 female |
| Plumed Whistling-Duck | 03/05/2004 | Cumberland Dam | Graham Harrington, Harry Cassidy, Keith Fisher | 2 adults with 17 chicks. |
| Rufous-throated Honeyeater | 03/05/2004 | Cumberland Dam | Graham Harrington, Harry Cassidy, Keith Fisher | Mainly all immature birds. Some feeding on the water lilies. |
| Gull-billed Tern | 04/05/2004 | Near Karumba | Graham Harrington, Harry Cassidy, Keith Fisher | Adults feeding immature birds. |
| Australian Brush-turkey | 07/05/2004 | Karumba | Bob Forsyth | End of western range, been there four years now, may have followed with rubber vine encroachment |
| Yellow Honeyeater | 07/05/2004 | Karumba | Bob Forsyth | End of western range |
| White-throated Nightjar | 08/05/2004 | Old Flinders Highway, Woodstock | Bill Holmes | |
| Star Finch | 09/05/2004 | Karumba | Bob Forsyth | 300+ birds 10% adults, certainly upstaged the 3 adults + 12 immatures we (Graham Harrington, Harry Cassidy, Keith Fisher & Stephen Garnett) saw nearby a few days earlier. A very significant record |
| Lewins Honeyeater | 16/05/2004 | Redden Island, Cairns | Keith & Lindsay Fisher | Seen & heard, very unusual in Cairns. First we've seen in 17 years. |
| Dollarbird | 16/05/2004 | Lower Daintree | Del Richards | Late record |



Photo © Ian Montgomery

NOTE: Please check with observers before quoting any of these sightings. Please send any sightings to Keith Fisher - post or e-mail OK. Thanks to the contributors to this sightings column, plenty of interesting birds over the last few months. *Editor*

Padaminka Wildlife Reserve

184 acres of bushland under a conservation agreement with QPWS. 155 bird species for the year (including the Bush-hen).

Five camp sites on creek, 2 campervan sites, free BBQ, Fully self-contained cottages, single rooms. Small workshops and seminars catered. Affordable rates. Tag-along-tours welcome. Only 15 minutes from Mackay, easy drive to Eungella and Kinchant Dams.



Contact Maureen Cooper
P.O. Box 113, Walkerston, 4751.
Phone (07)4959 3770.
Email: padaminka@bigpond.com.

The **Congress** theme is **"Birds, Brigalow and Biodiversity"**. At Highfields Cultural Centre (10km north of Toowoomba) **10 - 12 September**. One theme will be conservation of woodland birds, with 3 sub-sections: *research* studies; good *practice* by landholders; *support* available (Bushcare, Land for Wildlife, Birds on Farms program, Envirofund etc). David Lindenmayer is to be a keynote speaker for this section. Other sections will include reports on current BA projects and research, including Important Bird Areas. The possibility of a segment on bird books, photography, sounds, and art is being considered. Papers on current research and observations of bird life and behaviour will be sought from professional and amateur ornithologists. The **Campout** will be based in the Crows Nest (Qld) Caravan Park 13 - 17 September. All day bus trip to look at on-ground conservation projects; boat trip on Lake Cressbrook for water birds; small group visits to areas of good birding on private property will be included. It is hoped to incorporate some purposeful birding such as IBA surveys. Contact Nicci Thompson and Grahame Rogers or their web site: <http://www.users.bigpond.com/basqld/> for details.

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Limited Edition BA-NQG T-Shirts

As a tribute to the groups' 10 years, the Committee have agreed to reprint a T-Shirt with the PIP logo. Available Xmas. More details and design in the September newsletter.

Ideas on design are welcome.

Contact Call is now produced on recycled paper: 50% recycled fibre and 50% plantation fibre !!

Welcome new members

- U Dr RM Carter, TOWNSVILLE
- U Mareeba Shire Library, MAREEBA;
- U Johnstone Shire Library, INNISFAIL;
- U Djarragun College, GORDONVALE;
- U Mrs KJ & B Hinchley, CARDWELL;
- U Ms Julie Deleyev, Mareeba Wetlands, MAREEBA.

Daintree Village North Queensland



Convenient location for bird watching in the Daintree area. Close to the Daintree River, specialist bird and wildlife tours and to Daintree National Park.

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 Ph/Fax: 07 4098 6233
 Email: redmill@austarnet.com.au
 Website: www.redmillhouse.com.au

~ Diary Note ~
Saturday 2nd October - North Queensland Crane Count



Count Brolgas and Sarus Crane as they fly in to roost for the night, then add up the numbers (and celebrate) at the National tally Room party afterwards. Meet at 3:30pm at Hasties Swamp, for local Atherton Tableland sites. Townsville members will be surveying the Serpentine/ Ross River Dam area on the same day. Other NQ sites very welcome—Gulf, Ingham, Cape York. Contact Elinor Scambler, 40953296 or dacelo@austarnet.com.au.

Black-throated Finch Recovery Team update

The Recovery Team previewed the revised **Black-throated Finch Recovery Plan** assisted by QPWS officers Stephen Garnett, Brett Galloway and Sue Gardiner. This revised plan incorporates both NSW and Qld plans for the finch. Funding for the project has been forthcoming from Environment Australia and has been directed to the EPA for administrative purposes. The EPA have also developed a database of Qld finch sightings, which will be maintained by the Recovery Team. Thanks also to QPWS for the use of a GPS to record accurate location data of the sightings. For more information please contact the Coordinator for the Recovery Team Bernie Davies on (07) 4788 9904 or email: bushlandbeach@bigpond.com.

Please send items for September 2004 Contact Call by Mid August to: Keith Fisher, PO Box 2209 Cairns Q4870 or Email Keith on lkfisher@optusnet.com.au. (This is a temporary arrangement for the September edition only)