



# ConTact Call

Birds Australia—North Queensland Group



© Ian Montgomery

September 2004: White-bellied Sea-Eagle

## Convenors Message

Your Committee has been trying to sort out priorities for action this year. What we are looking for is to maximise returns for effort. For example a few stalwarts have attended two markets with our display boards at Mission Beach and Yungaburra recently, and quite frankly little was achieved. Few people showed interest in the stall and we doubt if we recruited a single new member. However, we believe that we would be far more effective if we attended agricultural field days and advertised the results of the national Birds on Farms and the Atlas projects because we would be helping to improve relations with primary producers. Farmers and graziers manage a huge chunk of Australia and the way they do it has a critical impact on biodiversity. Most landholders are basically sympathetic to nature values but they do have to earn their living. We can assist by forming working relationships with them and explaining what aspects of their management can promote bird populations. For instance a simple measure such as refraining from cleaning up fallen tree logs and branches greatly increases the number of bird and reptile species.

We have decided to have a go at promoting bird tourism in NQ. It is not necessarily priority for Birds Australia to provide services to bird watchers but we hope that by contributing a service to the local economy we will establish ourselves as an authority on bird and bird habitat management in the eyes of local government. We see this as a way to achieve the Birds Australia objective of conserving bird populations into the future. At the last count 24 million people in the USA went birding at least once in a single year and the "bird industry" was calculated to be worth 31 billion US\$ whilst over a million Brits belong to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Surely we can attract more of this interest into NQ than we are doing at the moment.

We hope also to get the tourism industry or government to pay for the production and distribution of our bird information brochures. Some members have suggested that we should ensure that they are freely available at tourist outlets. Unfortunately we have found the brochures are taken away in large numbers and both the cost and effort of keeping them available is beyond our resources. We are also aware that most brochures end up in the wastepaper basket the same day. If anyone can suggest a solution to this problem we would be keen to hear from you.

An essential Birds Australia objective is to promote the study of birds. BA-NQG is cooperating with the Black-throated Finch recovery project out of Townsville, and running the annual Crane Count from the Atherton Tableland. The latter has been running long enough to be giving us useful data and is raising some fascinating questions about if and why the population of Sarus Cranes appears to be increasing, (at least, the wintering population on the Atherton Tableland seems to be increasing). We also intend to maintain our Atlasing on Cape York, database of Beach Stone-curlew sightings and the ibis and egret counts in Townsville. We are prepared to assist any member who wishes to undertake serious scientific studies of birds.

We don't get many suggestions from our members of what BA-NQG could and should do. I wonder why not?

**Graham Harrington, Convenor**

Graham's convenors message was written before his Tourism Information Night talk at Malanda. See page 5 for a report- ed

### STOP PRESS

BA-NQG have been chosen to host the 2005 BA Members Day and AGM on MAY 28th. This will give us an opportunity to promote our region as the premier birdwatching destination in Australia. We will be asking for volunteers to help out on the day. Look out for more details in future newsletters

### Inside this issue:

- BA 2004 Members Day and AGM
- Regional Group Meeting
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- International Crane Links
- Activity Reports: Townsville Ecofiesta, Copperlode Dam, Serpentine Lagoon, Yungaburra Markets, Cairns Esplanade Wader Count, Tourism Information Night
- Around the Region
- Black-throated Finch Surveys
- Tyto Wetlands
- Nightjar Observations - Townsville
- Fruiting Supermarket
- Musgrave-Marina Plains
- Mt. Mulligan
- Interesting Sightings
- Cotton-Pygmy-goose Survey, coordinator wanted
- BA-NQG Logo
- Notice Board

## BA North Queensland Group—Events Calendar Sept.-Dec. 2004

September 2004

### Saturday 4th September Birding for Beginners

Join the QPWS volunteers for a morning of birding, learn new skills from the experts and meet new people. Always a popular event. Meet at the Lake Eacham National Park car park at 7:30am. All welcome. Led by Graham Harrington.

### BA North Queensland Group—Events Calendar Sept.-Dec. 2004, Cont. P 3

Birds Australia now have a "Calendar of Events" link on their web site. Check it out at:

[www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au). BA-NQG will endeavor to keep this site updated with regional events.

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.

Found in New Guinea, Indonesia, China, are solitary birds inhabiting the coast all and on inland lakes. Sometimes far from the Old Cork Station, 135km SW of Winton, well over 1000km

## White Bellied Sea-Eagle

south-east Asia, India as well as Australia. They around Australia and extend inland along rivers coast, I've seen a pair on the Diamantina River at from the coast. Unmistakable bird in adult plumage of white and grey with black wing tips. Its broad upswept wings and short white tail with a dark base stand out as it soars around in circles. The dark brown immature birds can be confused with the Wedge-tailed Eagle, which has a diamond shaped black tail and overall is a darker blackish bird with no white in the wing pit. Clutch size 1-2 rarely 3 eggs, incubation undetermined but probably 35-40 days. The male never incubates at night. Fledging period 65-70 days, seldom fledge 2 young. The young are fed for about 3 months after fledging and have been recorded being driven out of the territory by the adults after 4 months. Like much of the birds breeding cycle little is know about when they obtain adult plumage. Captive birds have attained adult plumage at 3.5, 7 and at least 10 years but in the wild it is not known with any certainty.

Info. from HANZAB vol 2.

Keith Fisher

## Atlas 2—Continuing the Research

To assist with filling in your Atlas sheets, Jo Wieneke has assigned a habitat number to the most popular Atlased 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**

PO Box 37, 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 BA-NQG Committee

### Executive Committee

**Convenor—Graham Harrington Ph: (07) 4096 5051**

Email: [riflebird@austarnet.com.au](mailto:riflebird@austarnet.com.au)

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

Email: [lkfisher@optusnet.com.au](mailto:lkfisher@optusnet.com.au)

**Secretary—Jo Wieneke, PO Box 37, Belgian Gardens Q4810**

Ph: (07) 4771 4707

Email: [bowerbird14@bigpond.com](mailto:bowerbird14@bigpond.com)

**Treasurer—Harry Cassidy Ph: (07) 4059 1058**

Email: [harrycass40@hotmail.com](mailto:harrycass40@hotmail.com)

### Committee members

Tony Grice (Townsville) Cliff Frith (Malanda)

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 Coordinators—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](mailto: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](mailto:susanfgould@yahoo.com)

**Mount Isa:** Bob Forsyth Ph: 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 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



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

**October 2004**

**Crane Count Saturday 2nd October 3.30 pm  
Crane Tally room Malanda Hotel from 7 pm**

8th Annual BA-NQG Crane Count - survey Brolgas and Sarus Cranes flying in to roost for the night. Wear sensible shoes and clothing - surveys go till darkness falls! Then celebrate with dinner at the Malanda Hotel tally room - they have kindly offered to extend their excellent and reasonably priced buffet beyond 8 pm to cater for distant counters.

**Local/Tableland** Meet Hasties Swamp bird hide near Atherton at 3.30 pm, before travelling to roost

site.

**Outer areas** Innot Hot Springs, Kaban, Mareeba, Cape York - phone or email Elinor, who will put you in touch with a team leader for your area.

**Townsville/Ingham** Contact Jo Wieneke 4771 4707

**COUNT ENQUIRIES** Elinor 4095 3296 before 8 pm or dacelo@austarnet.com.au

**BUFFET DINNER BOOKINGS**

Malanda Hotel Restaurant, 4096 5488

**Saturday 16th October**

**Cairns Esplanade Wader Count 9.am opposite Tradewinds Hotel**

Confirm time nearer date with Keith Fisher Ph 4039 0972



**BA 2004 Members Day and AGM**

The BA 2004 Members Day & Annual General Meeting was held on the 29th May at the University of Newcastle. The day began with a couple of welcome speeches, one from Professor Ian Hume the chair of BASNA (BA Southern NSW & ACT - ex. SNAG) and the other from the BA National President Professor Henry Nix. The session before morning tea was devoted to conservation issues in the Hunter Valley region, which were, Achievements & Challenges in Managing Migratory Shorebirds in the Lower Hunter Region, Status of Hunter Estuary Waders-Past & Present, Stockton Sandspit Rehabilitation and the importance of Ash Island Saltmarsh for Migratory Waders. After the break the topics expanded to other parts of NSW. These were Breeding Behaviour of Black-necked Stork in Coastal NSW, Rubbish to Restoration-Managing Habitats for Shorebirds at Sydney Olympic Park and Pelagic Seabirds of the Hunter Region.

After lunch it was the turn of National Office speakers to explain about some of the projects being undertaken by BA. This session was started by Dr. Michael Weston who gave an overview of The State of Australia's Birds, Jim Downey was next to explain BA's Current and Future Initiatives, expanding on the information in the Annual Report. Peter Higgins gave a history of The Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds and informed us that the next volume was on track to be released mid-2005. The final speaker was Holly Parsons a student from the University of Woolongong who spoke of her Studies with Superb Fairy Wrens - A Birds in Backyards Project. All the speakers presented excellent talks and certainly gave me a greater insight into the Hunter Region and it's importance for birds.

The AGM wound up the day and was brief and to the point, Henry Nix was elected as BA President for another Year and the following were elected onto the BA council: Dr. Jack Baker, Dr. Mike Newman, Nicci Thompson, Andrew Ley, Dr. Denis Saunders and Dr. Phil Moors. The John Hobbs medal was then presented to this years recipient, Graeme Chapman, who you will all know from his wonderful bird photography, which regularly appears in *Wingspan*.

Finally the raffle was drawn and I embarrassingly won 1st prize! A copy of *The New Atlas of Australian Birds* plus two original vignettes from the book- I chose the Scrubfowl and Macleay's Honeyeater. As I already have the atlas book I'll be donating it to BA-NQG for fund raising. So ended a very interesting and informative day. A dinner in the evening gave everyone the opportunity to catch up on all the gossip and old friends. Three days of field trips followed visiting surrounding birding areas.

As you would have rseen on the front page BA-NQG are privileged to be hosting next year Members Day & AGM on 28th May this is a great opportunity to promote BA and particularly BA-NQG along with issues relating to a future for our birds in this special area of Australia. We hope we can do as good a job as the Hunter Bird Observers and BASNA and with your help we certainly will.

**Keith Fisher**

**Saturday 23rd October**

**Yungaburra Market Stall Display 6am-12pm**The big market before Christmas. If you have anything for sale you would like to donate or would like to help out let the Fishers know Ph 4039 0972 or Virginia 4095 8302

**November 2004**

**Sat 6th - Sun 7th November**

**Overnight camp at Mt. Mulligan.**

Meet at Dimbulah, west of Mareeba (on the Chillagoe Road) at 8.30am. Ph. Fishers 4039 0972.

**Saturday 13th November**

**Cairns Esplanade Wader Count 7.30am opposite Tradewinds Hotel**

Confirm time nearer date with Keith Fisher Ph 4039 0972



**Please contact Jo Wieneke for details of this months Townsville Field Trip.**

**December 2004**

**Sunday 12th December 2.00pm**

**Christmas get-together**

Virginia & Peter have kindly invited us to their place beside Lake Tinaroo at Kairi for the annual get-together.

**Directions:** From Kairi follow the road towards the dam and look out for Xhafer Road on right (signposted Tinaroo Tropical Houseboats). Turn down here and follow road until end of bitumen, then turn left into Chinn Road. Follow signs to Virginia & Peters place. Bring drinks and a plate.

## Regional Group Meeting



The Regional Group Meeting was held in Newcastle on the 28<sup>th</sup> May, I attended as the BA-NQG representative. The following is a summary of the meeting.

### Important Bird Area's (IBA's)

Jim Downey the CEO, expressed National Office (NO) desire to support the IBA's and congratulated BA-NQG for completing theirs (well done those members who participated), BASQ (BA Southern Queensland) have started the process and other groups are awaiting Stephen Garnett's visit to get them started. As far as the processes (such as ongoing monitoring) are concerned, the BA Research and Conservation Committee will oversee the project.

### Future Funding for Regional Groups

The current rebate that Regional Groups (RG's) receive is 7.5% of membership fees paid to NO. This rebate was reduced from 15% as a temporary measure two years ago, in order to cure a cash flow problem. Council have now decided to eliminate rebates of membership fees to RGs. but will provide funding, up to a maximum of 7.5% of the membership fee for approved activities. Currently we have no indication of what activities are acceptable.

### General Business

BASNA (BA Southern NSW & ACT - ex. SNAG) spoke about the birds in backyards project, which has been very successful in NSW. They suggested that it go nationwide and everyone agreed this would be a good idea. BASNA are to supply information kits to the RG's.

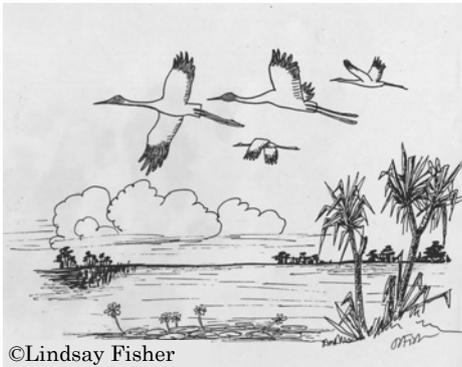
The CEO outlined the future of Barren Grounds. In short, it has been returned to NSW National Parks to run. There were many issues, which would have cost BA nearly \$250,000 to put right. The lease had run out 4 years ago and there was a big increase in future lease fees, safety and health issues such as unfiltered water, food preparation areas upgrade, public liability and increasing ranger's salaries all combined to make it unviable for BA to run. Concern was expressed about the \$40,000 raised in the art auction for Barren Grounds but legal advice had been obtained to the effect that these monies could be redirected to another project provided the people who put money in were informed. There was also a bequest of \$10,000 for Barren Grounds but there was a stipulation that it could be used for a similar project so this was also no problem.

The WA group advised that they had now taken over responsibility for the running of the Eyre bird observatory.

BA is developing a website for people to put on their observations and atlas data. Anyone will be able to access this bird data for any area such as local or National Park bird lists (how the access will work has not been finalised yet). It is in its early stage of development and will cost around \$50,000, which has been donated by sponsors.

There was a lot of in house business, which I will not bore you with but if you are interested I can e-mail out the meeting minutes.

*Keith Fisher*



## Traveling Crane Show

The Crane PowerPoint Show recently featured in two successful dinner-info nights – June (Malanda) and August (Innot Hot Springs). Both nights attracted about 45 people to celebrate the science and culture of cranes.

In June, the excellent Malanda Hotel buffet and log fire gave a relaxed atmosphere for many crane counters to relive highlights of past counts and see the emerging results of all their hard work. We are collecting some good data on Sarus Cranes and Brolgas on the Tablelands, which will be further developed using GIS techniques with help from the software people ESRI. I really appreciated the feedback from experienced counters as well as comments from landowners/ managers and visitors new to the crane project,

thank you all. It was also great to welcome a team from Conservation Volunteers Australia who hope to join future counts. They (with a number of others) confronted rainy conditions the following day to look for cranes at Bromfield. Alas, none there so we spent an enjoyable morning viewing other birds from the protection of the Hasties hide.

The August night – hosted by the Herbert River Catchment Committee – was preceded by the legendary roast dinner of the Hot Springs Hotel, who allowed us to take over their entire dining room. To avoid local timetable clashes this took place on a Monday, and it was tremendous to meet so many people prepared to come along at the end of a busy working day. These included the Catchment Committee Secretary (a grazier), the complete Green Corps team with their leader, Amanda Kaiwi from the Millstream Times and other local residents. Photo-journalist Mitch Reardon who is writing a book on Brolgas drove in from Woodleigh Station (our Innot Hot Springs crane count site) and Jan O'Sullivan travelled from Cairns to represent the Count team. The presentation included a new slide with Woodleigh data – our biggest site totalling up to 1600 landed birds, mainly Brolgas but with interesting Sarus 'blips'. A number of people wish to join future counts or keep in touch on cranes generally. Thanks to Alison Wilson (Catchment Co-ordinator) and Jane Blackwood (EPA) for all their work organising the night.

Equipment was lent by EPA and SFS, with glitch less technical operation from Alastair Freeman (June) and Jane (August). Thanks also to the Millstream Times, ABC Radio and the Tablelander.

*Elinor Scambler*

## International Crane Links

There are exciting new initiatives to link crane workers internationally, to share and further their work.

Firstly, a new web journal called the "International Crane Newsletter" will appear twice yearly on selected web sites. It will feature peer-reviewed articles and also present news about crane research and conservation in Europe, Asia including the sub-continent, Africa and Australasia (Australia & New Guinea).

The venture is lucky to be led by K.S. Gopi Sundar, Principal Coordinator of the Indian Cranes and Wetlands Working Group (International Crane Foundation) and the Wildlife Protection Society of India. Gopi has researched and written extensively on the Indian sub-species of Sarus Crane and has led related wetland conservation projects including the all-India Sarus Crane Count.

I've accepted Birds Australia's nomination to be one of two Australian representatives for the journal - people doing Brolga research and conservation in southern Australia will provide another rep and the two of us will work together to bring Australian crane issues to many venues including the new journal and of course, Contact Call.

Secondly, Gopi is facilitating linkages beyond the journal itself, between relevant researchers and this will soon include a special interest group on Sarus to link everyone working on *Grus antigone* worldwide (including captive breeders and land managers trying to conserve Sarus). If you have a special interest in Sarus Cranes and would like to contribute to this discussion/info exchange group please let me know [dacelo@austarnet.com.au](mailto:dacelo@austarnet.com.au) **Elinor Scambler**

## Activities Report

### Townsville Eco Fiesta, National Bird Awareness Day 6th June 2004

The information stall held in conjunction with Conservation Volunteers Australia attracted plenty of attention at the annual Eco Fiesta held in Queens Gardens, Townsville on June 6<sup>th</sup>, which was also National Bird Awareness Day. We spent a busy but pleasant afternoon talking about BA-NQG, answering enquiries about birds, selling items, handing out information and made \$50 in the process. I'm still bemused by one visitor who reported the Little Green Hill Parrots and the Brent Geese that he sees near Ross River. Many thanks to Helen and Marty McLaughlin for setting up, Ian Montgomery for giving us a generous percentage from the sale of his photos and Jo Boyd and Elna Kerswell who came along and helped.

*Jo Wieneke, Townsville*

### Copperlode Dam—Sunday 20th June 2004

A Leisurely start to the day with breakfast overlooking Lake Morris was followed by a walk into the rainforest. It was also a slow start for the birds but eventually we hit a bird wave, **Yellow-spotted, Graceful and Dusky Honeyeater, Golden Whistler, Bower's Shrike-thrush, Yellow-breasted Boatbill** and a **Pied Monarch**. Back at the Kiosk we launched the Copperlode Dam brochure before morning smoko. Some of us continued for a walk along the lakes edge turning up a pair of **Brahminy Kite, Little-Bronze-Cuckoo, Grey Whistler, Rufous and Grey Fantail** amongst others. It was a pleasant morning, totalling 25 species.

*Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns*

### Serpentine Lagoon - 11th July 2004

The winter survey at Serpentine Lagoon was held on July 11<sup>th</sup> in perfect winter weather. The area was much drier than on our last visit. About 10 members and friends recorded about 80 species for the morning. As the eucalypts and melaleucas near the gate were not flowering, there were not the usual numbers of honeyeaters but waterbirds were prolific in the lagoon and the far wetland. There were 1000s of Plumed Whistling Ducks as well as lower numbers of Wandering Whistling Duck, Grey Teal, Cotton Pygmy Geese, Black Duck and Australian Wood Duck. With much of the Chinese Apple cleared there seemed to be fewer passerine species than formerly. We made a point of searching for Black-throated Finches but only found Double-barred and Zebra finches.

Our thanks go to the Jones family for allowing us access to their property.

*Jo Wieneke, Townsville*

### Yungaburra Markets - 24th July 2004

It was still dark at 6.00am as we set up the display with threatening rain clouds hovering above. The conditions turned away some stall holders and visitors, resulting in a quiet morning. We had some interest and managed to hand out a few brochures. Several members came along and gave their time to help out, which we were grateful for. Thanks to Virginia Simmons for organising the stall. Next Yungaburra market stall is on October 23rd, details in the events calendar on page 3.

*Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns*

### Cairns Esplanade National Winter Wader Count - 23rd July 2004

The national winter wader count along the Cairns Esplanade, produced a total of 538 birds from 22 species. The most predominant species was **Red-necked Stint** with 284, followed by **Silver Gull** 51, **Gull-billed Tern** 49, **Great Knot** 36 and **Bar-tailed Godwit** 25. There was 16 **Eastern Curlew**, 6 **Black-tailed Godwit**, 2 **Grey-tailed Tattler** and **Common Greenshank** plus 2 adult **Masked Lapwing** with 2 newly hatched chicks. Other species included **Australian Pelican, Great, Little and Intermediate Egret, Caspian and Crested Tern**.

Future wader counts are listed in the events calendar on page 3. Please contact Keith Fisher if you interested in helping with these counts.

*Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns*

### Tourism Information Night, Malanda - 21st August 2004

Graham Harrington's illustrated talk focused on the economic benefits that bird tourism can generate in our region by using Cairns as a point of entry into Australia. This in turn could provide an enormous economic incentive to protect bird habitats. The opportunities to attract overseas bird tourists from places such as the USA and UK, where bird related tourism is huge, was highlighted

Cairns was chosen as an ideal starting point because it already has tourist infrastructure and a variety of habitats easily accessed from the city. It offers the visitor a safe environment and over 350 bird species within a 50km radius of the city. Following on from this introduction, there was an overview of Australia's many different habitats before the focus was narrowed down to north Queensland. The habitats, birds that occur within them, the reason so many endemics occur here and the opportunities available to travel within North Queensland to more remote areas such as Cape York, were described.

Mathew Morris, who had obtained an MSc in Avitourism, then gave us an overview of his findings into the bird tourism market in Australia. He illustrated the problems that are faced by, what is considered in the tourist industry, a niche market. A debate followed with suggestions being put forward on how to increase awareness of the region and encourage more bird tourist to visit.

The talk certainly got people thinking about how we present bird tourism to the relevant tour organisations and increase visitation.

*Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns*

## Around the Region

### Black-throated Finch Surveys

### Tyto Wetlands

Peter Buosi, Marnie McCullough & I went for a tour on Saturday 7th August around some Black-throated Finch sites in the Townsville area. Peter (Natural Resources Assessments Pty Ltd) has been doing the environmental work for the gas pipeline, ensuring that it zigzags around the BTF nesting sites. We found flocks of 26 and 36 at two of my sites in Laudham Park, and a VERY conservative 80 birds at one of Peter's sites on NQ Water country - it would not have surprised me if there were twice that number or more at that site.

Unfortunately we took so long at those sites that we didn't even get to the other half. I think we can be fairly confident of finding BTF on demand! It has been a great year around Townsville for black-throated and plum-headed finches with spaced out rain and a long growing season, despite a lower than average total rainfall. Other finch species are not noticeably more numerous. Len Ezzy reported a few weeks ago that he was surrounded by 80 or more BTF at the Oak Valley reserve (east of Ross Dam - these other sites are SW and S)

*Bill Holmes, Townsville*

In late July we paid a visit to the Tyto Wetlands just a few hundred metres south of Ingham. As its name suggests, Grass Owl (*Tyto capensis*) are present here and have been reported breeding. The planning for this wetland has been assisted by John Young (well known local film maker and driving force for its conservation). Green Corp Volunteers have also done a lot of planting in the area.

A big group of Agile Wallabies greeted us at the start of the track, which after 800m arrives at a viewing platform overlooking a series of lagoons. Another walk of 2.5km goes around the lagoons, where there is another viewing platform under construction.

There are lots of pandanus providing plenty of breeding sites for **Crimson Finch**, which were present in good numbers. During our visit we listed just over 40 species.

Visitors look out for the signpost on the Bruce Highway and allow a couple of hours- it is well worth the visit. (The Grass Owls have generally been seen flying around at dusk-ed.)

*Dawn & Arnold Magarry*

### Nightjar Observations in the Townsville District

Large-tailed, White-throated and Spotted Nightjars may be found in the Townsville district. There is also the Owlet nightjar, which differs both in general appearance and in that its eyes are non-reflective. Large-tailed Nightjars may readily be located from their call, and the others by driving little-used roads at night and watching for red eye reflections.

In Britain in the days (and nights) before electric lights and torches, a curious superstition surrounded nightjars. The nightjar was said to be "a nocturnal robber who finds his way into the goat-pens, sucks the dugs of the goats, poisoning them to such an extent that the animals themselves are blinded, and their udders waste away" (Rev. C.A. Johns, 1862). From this superstition they derived their common name of "goatsucker". This term has lived on in the scientific names caprimulgidae and caprimulgus (capri=goat).

The Large-tailed Nightjar may be heard around Townsville. It has a distinctive repetitive call like an axe hitting a hollow log, or perhaps a hammer hitting a pipe, hence the common names of axe bird, plumber bird and carpenter bird. Last year I heard these nightjars along Ross River, and along heavily vegetated creeks in the bush. First call was in August and the last in January. I have also seen them during the day in paperbark scrubs near Giru. Apart from the call, their distinguishing feature is a white bar on each side of the tail. This nightjar also has highly visible white spots in the wings, which feature it shares with the Spotted Nightjar.

The Spotted nightjar has accounted for all but two of my road sightings. After a lapse of several years, I have again seen Spotted Nightjars again in the Townsville region, the first on April 24<sup>th</sup> at Laudham Park, repeated sightings of two pairs at Lansdown during May, and a single bird at Woodlands on June 16<sup>th</sup>. When the Spotted Nightjar rises in the light, the white patches in the wings are obvious, but there are no white bars on the tail.

The call of the White-throated Nightjar is similar to that of the Spotted Nightjar, and both differ markedly from the call of the Large-tailed Nightjar (Simpson & Day CD). Last year I heard one calling near the head of Central Creek, and this year I flushed one off the old Flinders Highway (May 8<sup>th</sup>). When a White-throated Nightjar flushes there is no visible white in the wing (or tail).

Nightjars on roads reveal themselves first by their red eye reflection. For a close-up view from the car, slow right down and roll forward until the bird is just visible over the bonnet. If it flushes, look for white wing spots and tail bars. Over the bonnet is not a bad position for binocular viewing, but you can do better.

Leave the engine running and the lights on. Get out of the car; keep your torch or spotlight on the bird, and without sound or conversation, sneak up to within a few feet. Watch the body language, and delay your progress if the bird is fidgeting.

The view of a Spotted Nightjar a few feet away is truly remarkable for the subtlety of colours and patterns and the minutely fine speckles within the greys behind the head.

Happy birding, and watch out for those dugs.

*Bill Holmes, Townsville*

### Fruiting Supermarket

In mid June about 20kms southwest of Mossman NQ our tour group were able to observe feeding activity in a huge fruiting fig. The tree was situated about 50 metres from dense rainforest which afforded a wonderful opportunity to view and estimate the number of birds feeding at any one time. Estimates were 25+ **Barred Cuckoo-shrike**, 20+ **Figbird**, 17+ **Wompoo Fruit-Dove**, 53+ **Double-eyed Fig-Parrot**, 70+ **Silvereye**, 4 **Tooth-billed Bowerbird**, 3 **Spotted Catbird**, 2+ **Victoria's Riflebird**, 30+ **Honeyeaters** of five species, **Macleay's**, **Bridled**, **Lewin's**, **Yellow-spotted** and **Graceful Honeyeater**.



The Silvereyes were taking sap from the (fruit) stems after the fruit itself had been taken by the larger species.

Two birders in our group, Lorna Bloom from Sydney and Graham Goodall from

Mossman shared my opinion that we had never observed so many birds feeding in one tree.

In the Wet Tropics native figs generally fruit twice a year which is an unusual feature, however this proves to be an advantage for local bird species.

*Del. Richards, Mossman, NQ*

## Around the Region (Cont.)

With Adam Arnold I headed out to the Lakefield NP area in search of a few “bogey birds” that I had not observed before. We knew it would be a rushed trip and decided to concentrate on a few “lifers” for me as Adam had not travelled further north than Mt. Carbine and was sure to get a great personal list anyway! As it turned out the limited access within Lakefield NP, due to closed roads, proved a blessing. We spent the first night at the Morehead River and the next at Marina Plains, near the old homestead - this was the only place we could get to within the NP area.

Nothing exciting turned up overnight at the Morehead River. From here we headed north towards Artemis Station looking for Golden-shouldered Parrot along the access road without success. We did see lots of **Australian Bustard**, a party of **Little Woodswallow** and a few **Emu**.

Heading east from Musgrave we decided to turn north along the Lilyvale road to look for the (ever elusive for me) Red Goshawk. Searching around the old nest site (from a few years ago), we missed the goshawk but saw in the area plenty of other good birds. These included **Banded, Bar-breasted and Rufous-banded Honeyeaters**, **Silver-crowned Friarbird**, **Red-browed Pardalote**, a lone **Black Bittern** (I've seen more of these in N.Qld this year since the “wet season” than ever before over 8 years!!); **Red-backed Kingfisher**, **Masked Finch** and **Rufous Songlark** (edge of N. distribution??) amongst many others.

It was nearing mid-day so we decided to head for Lakefield. We could not get through to Bizant so decided to find a camp near the old Marina Plains homestead - what a fantastic spot!! Grassland before us to the north, low paperbark amongst us and a huge lagoon behind us to the south.

A few **Black-breasted Buzzard** flew over the plains, **Yellow-spotted, Graceful and White-gaped Honeyeater** flew amongst us. A walk around the lagoon turned up **Pied Heron, White-winged Tern** and high numbers of waterfowl and corellas. That evening we were blessed with close views of a friendly male **Broad-billed Flycatcher** near the camp and **Barking Owl** calling as we swatted mozzies.

## Musgrave-Marina Plains 15-17/5/04

After dining we tried our luck at spotlighting on the adjacent plains - **Barking Owl** and **Papuan Frogmouth** aplenty. Near the fishing fleet camp we flushed a single **Grass Owl** from the road, getting excellent looks at the bird in the light as it flew away with its legs dangling down.

Next morning at 6.30am we birded the plains again and before long had a male **Brown Goshawk** on the roadside 10m ahead hiding below the tussocks ready to pounce on the many **Singing Bushlark** and **Richard's Pipits**. A few minutes later we saw 10 Zitting Cisticola beside the road amongst the grassland. We then headed to the mangroves, west of the fishing fleet camp, but nothing of any real note apart from a pair of **Broad-billed Flycatcher**. Unfortunately for Adam no Red-headed Honeyeater or Collared Kingfisher were present, where I had seen them some years back. Heading back to the homestead we looked for Star Finch but no luck, we had to be satisfied with a few groups of **Black-throated, Masked and Double-bar Finch** instead.

Due to time constraints we had to break camp and retrace our steps back to Cairns via Musgrave. Not wanting to give up on the GSP we stopped at Windmill Creek to the south of Musgrave. Here we walked parallel to the road for a kilometre across a creek then back towards the car. After almost losing all hope, we were about 100m from the car at 1.30pm, when I heard some parrots approaching the creek. I looked behind and saw a beautiful male **Golden-shouldered Parrot** then his mate alight on a dead branch right above us! They remain for 10mins. Before flying off west in the direction they had come - typical of how “chancy” birding can be.

Unfortunately we had to head home—satisfied with two new birds for me, both former “bogey” (**Grass Owl & Golden Shouldered Parrot**).

We recorded some 140 species in the area from Morehead River to Marina Plains in 40 hours, so we were really happy with some good quality species seen.

*Martin Cachard*

## Mt. Mulligan—west of Mareeba 8-19/8/04

I ventured out as I normally do once or twice a year, out to the beautiful station dam at Mt. Mulligan. Arriving at 6.30pm, we then dined to the sound of **Southern Boobook** owls. All the usually expected birds were found in the dry woodland around the dam (99% full) on the following morning. The dawn chorus was the best I have heard yet in this location. The **Blue-winged Kookaburra** got it started, then **Yellow Honeyeater** and later **Brown Honeyeater** chimed in. **Blue-faced Honeyeater** joined in and these three species of honeyeater kept it going exclusively on their own for a good 15 mins. I feel that this location is not taken seriously by the local birders, however I always return and it regularly rewards me. (We will rectify that on November's field trip - *ed*).

A walk to the Mt. Mulligan Falls high up the mountain provided an opportunity to see some wonderful views, but I was not all that optimistic about seeing too many birds as it was very dry and nearing mid-morning. After reaching the falls and resting with a cool swim, a pair of **Peregrine Falcon** began circling the cliffs above us. I kept a very close eye on them hoping to catch them on a breath-taking (yet deadly) dive down to the dam to strike a **Squatter Pigeon** or one of the many waterfowl resting on the dam. Nothing

happened!! I guess the birds were not flushed to create a target. I do enjoy watching the successful hunts that these birds make.

On the downhill return trip to camp about 11am two button-quails flushed from the side of the faint track not 2m away. One bird flew a few metres to the left, whilst the other flew straight along the track for about 5m before turning hard left for 3m and dropping to the ground. I was excited as I had just seen my first **Buff-breasted Button-quail**. I got great views as the second bird banked and turned revealing its huge size (for a button-quail [probably the female]) and overall pale appearance except for the wings. I got clear looks at the yellow feet and large pale bill as well as the very pale underparts. The habitat was perfect for what I understand for this species. We were on the scree-slope just below the cliff-line in seeding tussock-grass on loose gravelly ground. The birds were way to large for any other button-quail and I was 100% satisfied with my identification (given that I know Painted Button-quail extremely well from Victoria), and rapped that I have finally found this species after 8 years living in Cairns.

*Martin Cachard*

## Interesting sightings

Species	Date	Location	Observer	Comment
Yellow-rumped Thornbill (4)	25/04/04	Airstrip Bay at Lake Dalrymple	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 20°36'00", E 147°04'45" - GDA)
Beach Stone Curlew (2)	2/05/04	Lugger bay, Mission Beach	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 17°57'53", E 146°05'35" - GDA)
Mangrove Robin (2)	5/05/04	South Ross River Mouth	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°16'20", E 146°50'32" - GDA) 1 ad feeding 1 young
Ground Cuckoo-shrike (12)	15/05/04	Hervey Range Dev. Rd, Airstrip	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°27'55", E 146°07'41" - GDA)
White Plumed H/E (3)	15/05/04	Laroona Station, Cattle Dam	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°23'26", E 145°58'28" - GDA)
Singing H/E (5)	15/05/04	Laroona Station, Cattle Dam	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°23'26", E 145°58'28" - GDA)
Striated Sittella (11)	15/05/04	Laroona Station, Cattle Dam	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°23'26", E 145°58'28" - GDA)
Brown Treecreeper (6)	15/05/04	Laroona Station, Cattle Dam	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°23'26", E 145°58'28" - GDA)
Rufous Songlark (5)	15/05/04	Laroona Station, Cattle Dam	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°23'26", E 145°58'28" - GDA)
Red-backed Kingfisher (3)	15/05/04	Laroona Station, Cattle Dam	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°23'26", E 145°58'28" - GDA)
Lesser Sooty Owl (1)	18/05/04	Clifton Beach, Cairns	Ian Cowan	Calling. Very unusual in this location
Pied Imperial Pigeon (2)	22/05/04	Kewarra Beach, Cairns	Ian Cowan	Overwintering
Topknot Pigeons (100+)	25/05/04	Molongle Creek Mouth Caravan Park	Len & Chris Ezzy	(S 19°50'05", E 147°42'00" - GDA)
Australian Pratincole	30/05/04	Weipa	Sue Gould	On beach
Banded Lapwing (2)	31/5/04	Inverleigh Stn. West of Normanton	Martin Cachard	Outside northern edge of range
Channel-billed Cuckoo (4)	31/5/04	Leichardt Falls	Martin Cachard	Over-wintering ?
Pallid Cuckoo	1/06/04	Yungaburra	Allan Gillanders	Remains of juvenile plumage on upper chest & wings
Green Pygmy-goose (5)	2/6/04	Cloncurry	Martin Cachard	Edge of Range?
Crimson Chat (100's)	3-4/6/04	Mt. Isa area	Martin Cachard	
White-browed & Masked Woodswallow	3-4/6/04	Mt. Isa area	Martin Cachard	
Kalkadon Grasswren (5)	4/6/04	Sybella Creek, Mt. Isa area	Martin Cachard	(Never their when I go there! -ed)
Zitting Cisticola	6/06/04	Near Giru, S of Townsville	Len & Chris Ezzy	(19°30'01"S, 147°05'37"E - GDA) Not often seen
Pied Imperial Pigeon	6/06/04	Cungulla	Len & Chris Ezzy	(19°23' 57"S, 147°06'44"E - GDA) Over wintering bird
Jackie Winter	6/6/04	Carrington, near Hasties Swamp	John Seale	
Cotton Pygmy-goose	6/6/04	E. Barron Storage Dam, SE of Mareeba	John Seale	One for the database
Wedge-tailed Eagle	13/06/04	Red Mill House, Daintree Village	Trish & Andrew Forsyth	Uncommon in location
Pallid Cuckoo	19/6/04	Redden Street, Portsmith, Cairns	John Seale	Uncommon
Blue-faced Parrot-finch	8/8/04	Perseverance Road, Julatten	Del Richards	Moving down from higher summer breeding grounds
Square-tailed Kite	14/6/04	English Street, Manunda, Cairns	John Seale	Has been seen in this area for at least 3 years- <i>ed</i>
Superb Fruit-Dove	14/06/04	Red Mill House, Daintree Village	Trish & Andrew Forsyth	Male, not many around this year-poor fruiting season.
Bar-breasted Honeyeater	14/6/04	Leafgold Weir, Dimbulah	Dawn & Arnold Magarry	Patchy distribution in this area
Beach Stone-curlew	20/06/04	Ella Beach	Mandy Soymonoff	2 birds
Channel-billed Cuckoo	24/06/04	Weipa	Sue Gould	1st heard for season
Pied Imperial Pigeon	23/6/04	Page Road, Edmonton	John Seale	Overwintering?
Red-backed Kingfisher	23/6/04	Page Road, Edmonton	John Seale	Uncommon around Cairns this year
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	29/6/04	Nardello's Lagoon, Walkamin	Dawn & Arnold Magarry	Adult sitting on nest
Crimson Chat	30/6/04	Townsville Town Common	Jo Wieneke	Well out of it's normal range - 1st for Townsville (?)
Cotton Pygmy-goose	2/7/04	Cattana Wetlands	John Seale	Occasional appear on the coast around Cairns
Banded Honeyeater (ad+juv)	3/7/04	Lake Mitchell	John Seale	Breeding record
Bush-hen (1)	7 & 11-13/7/04	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Keith Fisher	Edge of road early morning
Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo	9/7/04	Rex Range, South of Mossman	Del Richards	Isolated population in the area
Bush Stone-curlew	9/07/04	Bayswater Road, Townsville	Len Ezzy	Bird trying to intimidate itself (its own reflection ) in a mirrored window, rushing at the reflection & quickly flicking & outstretching its wings. It made no sounds, just gestures. It did not matter to the bird that I was only about 10 metres away watching for about 10 minutes.
Beach Stone-curlew	12/7/04	Redden Island, Cairns	John Seale	Several pairs in the area - another record for database - <i>ed</i>
Squatter Pigeon (1)	16/07/04	Old Boar Pocket Road, Tinaroo Park.	Margaret & David Merrall	Uncommon in location

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 for the last few months sightings, plenty of interesting birds over these months - *Editor*

## Interesting sightings (Cont.)

Species	Date	Location	Observer	Comment
Little Bittern	16/07/04	Weipa	Sue Gould	A wildlife carer is looking after it - it was rescued with a broken foot. It hasn't been recorded here before distribution maps show that it could be expected.
Dollarbird	17/07/04	Mount Louisa	Len Ezzy	(19°16'48"S, 146°45'22"E - GDA). This solitary bird has been generally present, whilst observing the relocated White-bellied Sea Eagle's nest. All other Dollarbirds in the area appeared to have departed months earlier. The bird has been absent for the previous fortnight.
Banded Honeyeater	18/07/04	Granite Gorge, nr Mareeba	Allan Gillanders	Adult with 2 well grown young in nest
Striated Pardalote	18/07/04	Granite Gorge, nr Mareeba	Allan Gillanders	Adults feeding young
Black Falcon	18/07/04	Yungaburra	Allan Gillanders	Occasionally turn up in the region
Satin Bowerbird (4)	23/07/04	Whyanbeel, north of Mossman	Del Richards	Second lowland record in 9 years
Banded Honeyeater (100+)	25/07/04	Bakers Road, Mt. Molloy	Keith Fisher	Eucalypts just started flowering
Yellow Honeyeater (1)	25/07/04	Red Mill House, Daintree Village	Trish & Andrew Forsyth	Uncommon in location
Magpie Goose (14+young)	28/7/04	Lake Mitchell	Del Richards	Unusual
Golden Shouldered Parrot (3)	31/07/04	South Five Mile Creek	Darleen Kneen	Sue Shepherd said that they haven't been sighted that far north for a while. One male, one female and one juvenile male - all quite contentedly feeding on and around an anthill
Papuan Frogmouth	31/7/04	Port Douglas	Del Richards	On nest, unusually early record
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove	1/8/04	Centenary Lakes, Cairns Bot. Gardens		
Black-faced Monarch	1/8/04	Smithfield Cons. Park, Cairns	John Seale	Early return?
Rufous Songlark	2/8/04	Mareeba Wetlands	John Seale	Uncommon in the area
Barn Owl (3)	5/08/04	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Keith Fisher	Adults with 1 young in nest hollow
Spotted Whistling Duck	?	Weipa	Sue Gould	3 clutches have been raised this year
Cotton Pygmy -goose (9)	6/8/04	Cattana Wetlands, Smithfield	Dawn & Arnold Magarry	Uncommon on the coast around Cairns
Black Swan (3)	6/8/04	Cattana Wetlands, Smithfield	Dawn & Arnold Magarry	Have been present here spasmodically for at least 2 years
Cotton Pygmy-goose	9/8/04	Lake Mitchell	John Seale	
Crested Pigeon (2)	10/8/04	Kairi	Del Richards	Recent arrivals ?
Latham's Snipe (1)	10/8/04	Lake Tinaroo	Del Richards	Returning from breeding grounds
Golden Bowerbird	14/8/04	Mt. Bartle Frere	John Frois	In bower near summit & calling.
Black Swan (8)	14/8/04	Cairns CBD	Ian Cowan	Flying N-S at 1810
White-winged Fairy Wren	19/8/04	Longreach, 6km North	Bill Holmes	Nearing northern extent of winter range
Papuan Frogmouth (1)	22/8/04	Kamerunga, Cairns	Keith & Lindsay Fisher	Being attacked by 2 Black Butcherbirds

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## Cotton Pygmy-goose Survey

### Wanted Coordinator!

A Cotton Pygmy-goose Survey in our region has been suggested to try and assess accurately the current size and status of the population and the favoured breeding habitat. The Action Plan for Australian Birds, Garnett and Crowley (2000) lists the birds as near threatened with a breeding population of only 5000 but the reliability of this data is low. To be able to conduct this type of survey we need a coordinator to organise it, if anyone is interested please contact the secretary. Meanwhile we are asking members to keep records of sightings and numbers, which we will be able to incorporate into any future database.



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## BA-NQG Logo



As you can see from the front cover, the Pied Imperial Pigeon is once more featured as our local group logo. This pigeon, (drawn by Kate Gorrington-Smith in 1995), appeared on the original BNQ logo 9 years ago and flew off when we re-named ourselves BA-NQG. It has now returned as one of the updated regional group logos and can be expected to appear on all our display and club material.

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Contact Maureen Cooper  
P.O. Box 113, Walkerston, 4751.

Thanks to QPWS Townsville who have developed a database for the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team to assist with the capture of sightings and habitat information. This database will be used to model where likely hot spot areas may occur so that survey efforts can be focused. This will hopefully provide the Team with the information to monitor populations and learn more about their habitat and biology. If you would like to assist in these surveys, please contact the Recovery Team Coordinator Bernie Davis on (07) 4788 9904 or email: [bushlandbeach@bigpond.com](mailto:bushlandbeach@bigpond.com) or the sightings coordinator Marnie McCullough at [marnie.mccullough@dpi.qld.gov.au](mailto:marnie.mccullough@dpi.qld.gov.au) or phone 4722 2519.

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**Welcome new members**

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P. Buosi TOWNSVILLE  
Ms. V. Carter TOWNSVILLE  
Mr. G. Keats BAMAGA  
Mr. S. Mansfield KURANDA  
Dr. S. Radcliffe YUNGABURRA  
Mrs C. Rogers MOSSMAN  
Mr. Jim Ross CAIRNS

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

**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.

**The Great Night Parrot Search**

A Night Parrot expedition was organised in June/July 2004 by Richard Jordan and Fred van Gessel to follow-up a reported sighting of 4 birds near Wolfe Creek Crater, near Halls Creek WA in 2001. The search was unsuccessful, as many before have been. Those that took part in the search now appreciate the extent of suitable habitat over a vast area of Australia. It will take a huge effort and even more luck to track these mysterious birds down. So if you are ever out that way keep looking, you never know, it might be your lucky night!

Please send items for December 2004 Contact Call by Mid November to: Helen McLaughlin, PO Box 37, Belgian Gardens Q4810 or email Helen on [helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au](mailto:helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au)

Editor for this edition Keith Fisher