



Contact Call

Birds Australia—North Queensland Group



Birds Australia
Conservation Through Knowledge

December 2004: Spotted Harrier

Through the eyes of a child...

Our six year old grand-daughter came to stay with us this Spring. She was very proud to have undertaken the flight from Sydney on her own (marginally assisted by a small army of QANTAS staff). She quickly announced that she was in a story telling competition at school and how I must assist her in finding a compelling subject in north Queensland (I think she called it "interesting stuff" actually). Being somewhat bird orientated, I thought an experience with a Satin Bowerbird might provide the right "stuff". Before breakfast we walked up to our local bower armed with a few household items coloured blue, including my wife's ear-rings, secretly purloined. I showed her the bower, tastefully decorated with *Delarbria michieana* fruits, a crumpled can of lemonade and a couple of creamy-coloured flowers. I explained that if she put her blue offerings onto a log nearby the bird would surely find them and display them on his bower. Obviously a scientist in the making, she opined that he seemed to like yellow as well, so why had we only brought blue offerings? "I'll bring some thing yellow after breakfast", she said. Imagine my chagrin, when we returned two hours later, to find the offerings had duly disappeared but so had the bower! Totally destroyed. Apparently the enhanced decoration of this bower had posed a threat to a neighbour and he had done a George Bush on it. However, this story does have a happy ending. Two days later the bower had been rebuilt and the offerings of blue, yellow and red clothes pegs had resulted in acceptance of the blue one and rejection of the others. My reputation as guru for my grand-daughter was restored and the photographic record for the story was better than I had originally conceived. She didn't win the competition though! Shucks!

To all BA-NQG members I wish you a peaceful and happy Christmas break and great birding in the new year.

Graham Harrington, Convenor

BA North Queensland Group—Events Calendar Dec 04—March 05

December 2004

Sunday 5th December

Warrama, Cairns

BA-NQG have been asked by the Cairns Regional CDEP if we would be willing to conduct some bird surveys on their behalf. This is an Indigenous Employment and Training organisation based at Warrama on Lot 14 Johanna Road Trinity Park, Cairns. Warrama covers 25 acres and they are interested to know what birds are currently found on and/or passing through Warrama as they are considering revegetating some of the area and it would be very useful to know the bird status before they start. They are also keen to get some advice as to suitable plants to put in, so if anyone is able to help here we would like to know. The area consists of landscaping around some buildings, grassed areas, which are a result of a previous pineapple plantation, an interesting coastal paperbark wetland and a creek line containing riparian vegetation. It will not be hard work and will provide an opportunity to learn some survey techniques.

Meet at the car park, Johanna Road, Trinity Park, Cairns @ 6:30am. Contact Keith Fisher for more details on 4039 0972.

Saturday 11th December

Christmas Party—Lake Tinaroo

Virginia and Peter have kindly invited us to their home beside Lake Tinaroo at Kairi for the annual get-together. From Kairi follow the road towards Tinaroo Dam, look out for the Houseboat sign on the right and follow these until the bitumen runs out. Turn left on to Chinn Road and approx. 30m on your right will be signposted to the venue. Bring drinks and a plate. Meet at 2pm for a



relaxing afternoon and great company. Please contact Keith Fisher on 4039 0972 or Virginia on 4095 8302 for more information.

~ ALL WELCOME ~

January 2005

Saturday 29th & Sunday 30th January 2005

Kingfisher Park - Australia Day weekend

This has become BA-NQG's famous annual event. A weekend of exploring this unique area. Trips will depend on weather conditions. Communal dinner on Saturday night, bring a plate. Please book accommodation directly with Ron by phoning (07) 4094 1263, or email sootytowl@bigpond.com.au. Other enquiries, contact Keith Fisher.

Saturday 15th and Sunday 16th January

National Painted Snipe Survey

Contact Chris Tzaros on (03) 9882 2622 or email tn@birdsaustralia.com.au for survey forms. North Queensland surveys will also be held, so contact your local representative for details.

February 2005

Sunday 20th February

Warrama Survey, Cairns

Meet at 6:30am in the car park, Lot 14 Johanna Road, Trinity Park, Cairns. We will survey the wetland, creek line, grasslands and landscaped areas. Enquiries: Keith Fisher.

April 2005

Sunday 3rd April - Birding for Beginners

Another great morning with Graham Harrington. Details will be emailed to members, posted on the web or you can phone Graham closer to the day in 2005.

Inside this issue:

- Members Day May 2005
- National News—CEO
- Trip Reports - Congress Campout, Esplanade, Yungaburra markets, Mt Mulligan.
- BA-NQG Achievements 03-04
- Crane Count October 04
- News - shooters fined
- Interesting Sightings
- Cotton Pygmy-Goose survey
- Notice Board

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

BA-NQG keeps this site updated with regional events. Field Trips may change after publication. Contact local contacts for the latest information. This will allow for more flexibility, especially concerning weather conditions. Additional events may also be arranged.

The **Spotted Harrier** (*Circus assimilis*) adult bird has unmistakable plumage spotted with white. The juvenile is ginger barred tail, and fawn rump. The cere is yellow. The **Spotted Harrier** is a solitary harrier of crops, grassland, low shrubland and open woodland in inland and northern Australia. Its flight is buoyant with gentle, rhythmic wing-beats and extended glides, sailing low to the ground. The **Spotted Harrier** eats terrestrial birds, reptiles, large insects and sometimes carrion. In northern Australia, the laying season is usually June to September, being later in southern Australia (September to October). If conditions are right there might be two breeding seasons in a year, usually laying three eggs, although only one or two will make it to independence. Juveniles will then disperse or migrate up to 1600km, being of reproductive age at two years old. This species is not globally or nationally threatened. *This information sourced from The Birds of Prey of Australia by Stephen Debus.*

Spotted Harrier

is 50-61cm long, with a wingspan of 121-147cm. The with grey upperparts and chestnut underparts and brown, with pale upperwing coverts, heavily yellow, the eyes are yellow to orange-yellow and the



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Birds Australia 2003.

Atlas 2—Continuing the Research

If you would like to know the places in north Queensland which haven't been atlased to help plan your next trip out, then contact these coordinators for the latest information.

Don't forget to purchase your copy of the Atlas report by ordering through the Birding Shop. ☎ Charles for de-



tails.

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

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: bowerbird14@bigpond.com

Treasurer—Harry Cassidy Ph: (07) 4059 1058

Email: 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

Townsville Egret & Ibis Count Jo Wieneke 4771 4707 or Glenda Jeffries 4773 1802.

Cape York Atlas Surveys Graham Harrington 4096 5051

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.



Birds Australia

Members also receive four issues of the full-colour bird maga-

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

North Queensland to host BA Members Day ~ 28th May 2005, Cairns

What is Members Day?...

Members Day is a day for you, the members, to socialise, listen to excellent speakers' present papers and show posters on aspects of bird study and conservation in our region, shown in an easily understood format. Staff from National Office, including the CEO, outline projects and future directions for Birds Australia and generally let the members know how the organisation is performing. The

following day BA-NQG members will run field trips to areas of interest, showing what the region has to offer to birdwatchers.

Importantly it is a great occasion for local members to get to know one another as well as meet members from across Australia. Remember keep the weekend of the 28th & 29th of May free - it's not far away!



Seeking Presentations and Posters...

The Birds Australia Members Day and AGM is to be hosted by the North Queensland Group in Cairns on Saturday 28th May 2005. We intend to present delegates with a range of papers and posters relevant to the study and conservation of the birds of north Queensland. However, we are keen to consider other subjects to diversify the program.

Presentations relating to bird-based tourism would be welcomed. These may relate to experiences in promoting bird-based

tourism, or the benefits and/or threats it has produced. We are also keen to include reports on Birds Australia projects both national and regional.

As a guideline we are limiting spoken papers to a maximum of 30 minutes, including ten minutes of open discussion. If we are over-subscribed papers may have to be shorter or converted to poster presentation by negotiation with the author. As this is a general members day, presentations should be targeted towards the non-

Seeking Volunteers...

The committee has been working hard to get the organisation for the BA members day and AGM underway.

The venue will be the **Cairns Campus of JCU** on Saturday 28th May 2005.

For the weekend to be a success we will be needing volunteers to help out with various duties.

Volunteers will get free entry to the program of lectures and posters plus lunch and smokos.

Committee members will be available to help you along with these jobs.

Volunteers are required for:

- Registration desk - one person in charge and two or three helpers.
- Morning and Afternoon Tea - Jo Wieneke to coordinate, members are needed to help with platters and smokos
- Electronic equipment: we anticipate that an AV expert will be on hand but will need a couple of assistants.
- Publicity Officer.
- Poster Display Coordinator - Amanda Freeman will be coordinating.
- Field Trip Coordinator - we are considering two trips on the Sunday, one around Cairns and one on the Atherton Tablelands. We will also need guides for these trips.
- Plus a few "assistants" who can help out as required over the weekend.

We are anticipating having a dinner in the evening and would welcome suggestions as to a suitable venue not too far from JCU in Smithfield. The big unknown in all this planning is how many people will be coming, we are working on 130-150 people for the Members Day and 50-80 people for dinner.

Please contact Graham Harrington: email riflebird@austranet.com.au or phone 4096 5051 or

Keith Fisher: email lkfisher@optusnet.com.au or phone 4039 0972.



Draft Program...

Although the program is still very much in development we can indicate the general outline to help with your planning:

Location: James Cook University, Cairns Campus

Registration: 7:30am—8:30am

Morning program: 8:30am—12:30pm

Lunch: 12:15pm—1:30pm

Annual General Meeting : 1:30pm—2:30pm:

Afternoon program: 2:00pm—5:30pm

Dinner: 7:30pm



NOTES:

- Posters on other research and Birds Australia programs will be able to be viewed throughout the day.
- Cost will be approximately \$20 per person to cover catering but we will probably have an early bird discount.
- There will also be field trips during the following week around Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands.
- A Registration form will be in the next Wingspan

FNQ Wildbird Expo in conjunction with Members Day and AGM '05

Come and join the Mareeba Wetland Foundation in **May 2005** to help celebrate the wonderful birds of our region!

The Wildbird Expo was conceived in 2002 to bring together everyone involved with birds to share interests, knowledge and ideas and promote this wonderful interest to the outside world! Hence, we are continuing with our original Wildbird Expo, which I understand was greatly enjoyed by all. You are invited to come and set up a display or information stall on the day, or to promote your business and merchandise to visitors - locals and tourists alike! There will also be activities during the day such as presentations from various guest speakers, organised children's activities etc., all on the theme of birds. Whether you are an artist, author, accommodation owner, tour operator, educator or just a keen birder, we would love to see you! We hope the day will be as much fun for you as for the visitors.

There is no charge to come along to this all day event, and a BBQ lunch will be provided on behalf of the Mareeba

Wetlands to all exhibitors. The day will be open to the general public at the normal charge of \$8 entry into the Reserve and food and drink will be available.

A full itinerary of events and guest speakers will be prepared once I have received all responses. Promotional material and flyers, media release to the newspapers and local radio will all be done in the run up to the day. I have already received support from a number of local birders, and have several speakers lined up for the day, but there is room for more, so please give this some thought.

Please RSVP as soon as possible to let me know if you are available to join in and organise a display or event. Further details will be available in the next edition of Contact Call, or you can contact the Mareeba Wetlands Visitor Centre directly.

Julie Deleyev, Warden (Special Projects), Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetland Reserve, PO Box 175, Mareeba QLD 4880 . Tel/fax: 07 4093 2514. Mobile: 0428 325 005. Web site: www.mareebawetlands.com



~ TIP OF THE YEAR ~

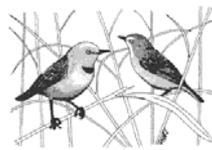
During late spring of 2003, we thought it might be an idea to use masking tape around our ankles. The tape should be applied to socks or pants sticky side outwards. We found that for stationary pursuits such as bird watching, hide work or having lunch in the bush, it is just about fool proof. Now we have no worries about our feet being in the leaf litter. Indeed, we even have competitions to see who catches the most ticks! Ginny holds the record with 14. The double-sided tape may be superior, but is more expensive. If put tightly the single sided is just as effective. The tape may need to be changed now and again if one is walking through low undergrowth or along dusty trails. One can stick tape across the shoulder and/or chest. This method is also very effective and stops the ticks from reaching the head. The upper parts are a bit more difficult to defend due to the nature of our clothing. The ticks we found only managed to move about 5-10mm onto the tape. The larger ticks sometimes made it to the centre of the 25mm tape. Once on, they remain there all day or until the tape is removed.

Jay Barnett. Reproduced from the Western Australian Bird Notes

National news from the CEO—Jim Downey

Projects brief update

- The 2004 State of Australian Birds Report is progressing well. The theme for this year is Wetland Birds and will be distributed to members with your December *Wingspan*. We will distribute this report to all Federal politicians, all Local Government Chief Executive Officers, all bird atlassers, all BA members and key selected State Government officials and politicians.
- We are pleased to announce the Federal Government has agreed to fund our Threatened Bird Network for at least a further two years.
- We have also obtained a grant from the Tony and Lisette Lewis Foundation to develop a website titled *Birdata*. The site will allow members, students and others to access data from our Atlas of Australian Birds for a myriad of uses. It will also allow input of bird sightings data. Work has commenced and we are aiming for a launch in the first half of 2005. Look out for *Birdata*!
- Recent funds have been raised for **Yellow Chat** surveys in Queensland, the continuation of our Cowra Woodlands project and a grant in NSW to take the Birds in Backyards project online.
- Our West Australian Group has secured further funds for the **Carnaby's Black Cockatoo** conservation project.



Annie Rogers
© Birds Australia 2003.

- During National Science week, which coincided with the Athens Olympic games, we competed and presented a migratory birds education project titled *Olympic Birds* for the Murray Darling Basin Commission. The project was a great success and the school kids that took part enjoyed it immensely. It was so successful we are presently discussing with the Commission how we might give it a wider application.
- In conjunction with the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) we recently launched the pocket Guide to Birds of Canberra and hope to raise funds to replicate these for each capital city in Australia. Copies of this were sent with September *Wingspan*
- Our 12 year project the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* is nearing completion with the seventh volume to be published in early 2005. This last volume features Bowerbirds, Finches and Woodswallows to name some.

Events

- For the best up to date information on Birds Australia activities around the country don't forget to use our online calendar of events on our website.
- The 2005 Members day and AGM will be held on Sat 28 May 2005 in Cairns Far North Queensland. Having lived in Cairns for 11 years I can vouch that the birding is stupendous!

Congress Campout 11th – 17th September

Four out of the 155 people who attended the 2004 Congress/Campout were from BA-NQG. The majority of people were based at Crow's Nest (near Toowoomba) for the week, which included the two day congress and five days of field trips to the surrounding areas.

The congress theme was "Birds Brigalow and Biodiversity" and had the usual high standard of speakers. There was a wide range of topics, including Conservation and management of woodlands, Birds and cotton, Effects of fragmentation in Brigalow woodlands in agricultural lands, Bird trails, History of John Gould and John Gilbert's Australian birds, which included the Leichhardt Expedition 1844-45, IBA's, Ethics of species re-introduction, Status of the Black-throated Finch in Queensland and an update from National Office on current and future projects including HANZAB. A fascinating two days, which was augmented with a very professional poster display.

The Saturday night dinner was livened up by Sean Dooley's after dinner speech entitled "Confessions of a Twitcher". He talked in a comic vein about the Big Twitch in 2002, when he found 703 Australian species in a single year.



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The campout events provided choices of up to six different field trips on each day exploring the full diversity of the area, including wetlands, rainforest, ironbark woodlands and following some of the Crows Nest bird trails. One of the highlights for us was seeing Beautiful Firetails and Regent Honeyeaters in the traprock country

west of Warwick.

The Birds Australia Southern Queensland Group (BASQ) is to be congratulated on their organisation for the week, which was pretty amazing considering they have only been operating for less than a year.

Unfortunately since the congress, part of the organising team, Graham (BASQ Secretary) and Donald Rodgers lost their home in the intense bush fires, which swept through Crows Nest. We wish them and their daughter, who also lost her house, all the best in the hard task of rebuilding their lives.

Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns

Cairns Esplanade Wader Count 16th October

Three members took part in the wader count and picked up a few visiting birders along the way. Good numbers of species and individuals were counted with the highest numbers going to the Great Knot, followed by Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Black-tailed Godwit. A solitary Lesser-crested Tern flew by; normally this

species keeps to the offshore islands and rarely ventures to the Esplanade. In all 28 species were recorded. The visiting birders were impressed with the Mangrove Robin and Shining Flycatcher, which were tracked down in the mangroves at the northern end. Five Little Bronze-cuckoo were chasing each other around in the mangroves calling and perching for great views just in front of us at eye level.

Keith Fisher, Cairns

Yungaburra Markets - 23rd October 2004

We had a lively time with quite a lot of interest in BA-NQG. We cleared \$222 after paying for an advertisement in the local paper and the cost of the stall. Our plants sold off by 8:30am. I saw why when I went for a walk. Ours were about a half to a third of the price of the equivalents!

Graham Harrington, Malanda

Mt. Mulligan Station 6-7th November

A small group of members met up in Dimbulah and drove out to the Mt. Mulligan Station homestead, about a 2 ½ hour drive from Cairns. The station homestead (385 m above sea-level) used to be the hospital for the once thriving town built to service the coal mine located here. Mt Mulligan forms a backdrop on one side of the homestead and was discovered by James Venture Mulligan who explored and named the area in 1874. At the time there was little interest in the area as all attention was focused on the rich gold deposits on the Palmer River. In 1910 coal mining started at Mt. Mulligan. A new mining town was built and in 1914 a railway branch line from Dimbulah was established. The town prospered until 19 September 1921 when an underground explosion killed 75 miners. At the time this accounted for every miner working in the mine (a memorial is now erected in the memory of those killed). They are all buried in the local cemetery. It was one of Australia's worst mining disasters and is still the worst to have occurred in Queensland. The mine was closed down



Andrew Plant
© Birds Australia 2003.

but the following year it was reopened and in 1923 the Queensland government acquired it from the operators. It functioned until 1957, although after the war it was heavily subsidised. The brown coal mined was low grade and some was used in the smelters at Chilligoe. The mine's final demise occurred with the completion of the Tully Falls Hydro-Electricity Scheme. Soon after the town was sold and most of the buildings were removed.

A camping area is located next to a lagoon near the homestead and proved to be a shady spot for most of the first day. With the temperatures nudging 40°C there was no point in birding in the open. The camp area proved to be productive with birds regularly passing by to keep us interested. A pair of Apostlebirds was busy trying to keep food up to their

Bird List for Mt Mulligan Station Field Trip

Australian Wood Duck
 Pacific Black Duck
 Grey Teal
 Australasian Grebe
 Darter
 Great Egret
 Intermediate Egret
 Wedge-tailed Eagle
 Brown Falcon
 Peregrine Falcon
 Eurasian Coot
 Black-fronted Dotterel
 Peaceful Dove
 Rainbow Lorikeet
 Red-winged Parrot
 Pale-headed Rosella
 Pallid Cuckoo
 Little Bronze-Cuckoo
 Common Koel
 Channel-billed Cuckoo
 Pheasant Coucal
 Laughing Kookaburra
 Blue-winged Kookaburra
 Forest Kingfisher



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 Birds Australia 2003.

Rainbow Bee-eater
 Dollarbird
 Red-backed Fairy-wren
 Red-browed Pardalote
 Striated Pardalote
 Weebill
 Fairy Gerygone (edge of wstn range)
 White-throated Gerygone
 Noisy Friarbird
 Little Friarbird
 Blue-faced Honeyeater
 Noisy Miner
 Yellow Honeyeater
 White-throated Honeyeater
 Brown Honeyeater
 Banded Honeyeater
 Jacky Winter
 Grey-crowned Babbler
 Varied Sittella
 Rufous Whistler
 Leaden Flycatcher
 Magpie-lark
 Spangled Drongo
 Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
 Cicadabird (southern migrant form)
 Olive-backed Oriole
 Black-faced Woodswallow
 Little Woodswallow
 Grey Butcherbird
 Pied Butcherbird (with juveniles)
 Australian Magpie (nesting)
 Pied Currawong
 Torresian Crow
 Apostlebird (nesting)
 Great Bowerbird
 Double Barred Finch
 Black-throated Finch
 Mistletoebird



63 species
 Jim Cox
 © Birds Australia 2003

*In addition: Black and Whistling Kite,
 Squatter Pigeon and White-winged Triller
 were seen on the road from Dimbulah.
 The only new bird for the trip at Leafgold
 Weir was Masked Lapwing.*

Keith & Lindsay Fisher, Cairns

BA-NQG Achievements of 2003-04...

Events, Fieldtrips and Projects

A varied and active calendar of events was held throughout the year with campouts, identification workshops, displays and day trips. Ongoing atlases were conducted at Redden Island, the Cairns Esplanade, Klapproth's scrub (Malanda), Cape York sites, Serpentine Lagoon (Townsville), Mt Zero/Taravale station and Blackbraes National Park. Wader identification sessions were conducted on the Cairns Esplanade, Crane Counts continued, Townsville egret and ibis counts are ongoing and the Beach Stone-curlew database continues to grow. The Easter campout to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy property was a great success.

Conservation Issues

BA-NQG continue to provide updated and improved bird lists to QPWS. The Southern Gulf Birds and Wetlands Forum at Karumba was a great success to the region. BA-NQG continue to provide input into the regional bodies: the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group in particular. The identification of Important Bird Areas is well underway, with a draft document due for release in 2005. Working with local government, in particular Atherton Shire Council with their issue of destructive Sulphur-crested Cockatoos at Tolga Scrub, an endangered rainforest reserve. While Townsville City Council have been amazed at the successful relocation of a White-bellied Sea-Eagles nest and two triumphant years raising three youngsters. The committee continues to be involved with the Golden-Shouldered Parrot, Gouldian Finch and Black-throated Finch Recovery Teams.

Bird Tourism as a Conservation Strategy

Promoting bird tourism has been a long-term strategy of Birds Australia. The philosophy is that by promoting the economic activity of birds watchers, we will improve our influence when lobbying for improved bird habitats. As such, we have been assisting local government with up-to-date information brochures for use in the community and with tourism promotion.

Representative Reports

The **Townsville** members have been busy with regular surveys to Serpentine Lagoon—a cooperative of properties under a Nature Refuge Agreement for the protection of the wetland and Serpentine Creek. A campout to Blackbraes National Park was a great opportunity to update and add to the already extensive bird list for the property. Although the Townsville region is home to thousands of cranes in August and September, the cranes proved more elusive during the Annual October Crane Count. The Australian Wildlife Conservancy played host to a joint trip with the Townsville Region of BOCA for the Easter campout at Mt Zero / Taravale which again proved that Paluma has a vast array of species.

The **Cairns and Atherton Tableland** members also kept busy with another successful Beginners Day at Emerald Falls Creek. Redden Island is getting the attention it deserves boosting an impressive bird list indeed. The Annual October Crane Count on the tablelands continues to gain valuable data on the movement and population of cranes in north Queensland which is currently the subject of international interest. We continue a presence at the Yungaburra markets, including one turnout to the Mission Beach markets. The Southern Gulf Birds and Wetlands Forum in Karumba, which run over two days, was well attended with excellent speakers and a prime opportunity to talk with landholders and traditional owners about wetland management.

Election of Committee

There was a change to the committee this year with many new faces taking the challenge. See page 2 for details.

Thank you

A big thank you was extended to Keith Fisher to recognise his 10 years service to bird conservation through BA-NQG. Along with Lindsay, their achievements are numerous. Also to Alastair and Amanda Freeman who tirelessly gave their time for BA-NQG commitments, both on the committee and for research.



Debbie Sullivan
 © Birds Australia 2003



Annual Crane Count October 2004

112 Crane Counters counted 6369 cranes landing at 27 roosts! 2004 is our second-best Sarus year (2991 Sarus in 2000) and best Brolga year (2889 Brolgas in 2001). The Brolga bonanza resulted from consistent performance at traditional sites *plus* a new site (Orient, near Ingham) *plus* an outstanding year at Innot Hot Springs, *plus* our best ever result close to Townsville (Cromarty / Reed Beds Rd). Thanks to the new organisers, and leaders & teams who took on new sites – every year the success of the Count depends on knowing where the birds are, and getting there (and back) on the night. One team hid in cattle yards; at another roost, strangers with champagne glasses wandered through; a team reported Double-Eyed Fig-Parrots in trees

Kate Gorringe-Smith
© Birds Australia 2003.



overhead (jeopardising their wine); and some counted 1000s of Magpie Geese. Here are the 2004 totals for LANDED cranes (with 'no-ID' birds allocated proportionately to species, as usual). Interestingly, flyovers were somewhat lower this year and more evenly spread between the Inner &

Outer Tablelands. When teams started phoning in results, they came by satellite, mobile and SMS – next year a Tally room Call Centre? The Tally room Hotel was sadly lacking the chef! But a central venue was appreciated by many and we'll improve the new format even more for 2005.

	Inner Tableland	Outer Tableland	Townsville Ingham	Total
Sarus	2103	42	0	2145
Brolga	163	3270	791	4224
Total	2266	3312	791	6369

Shooters fined for killing native birds...

Two Innisfail men were fined more than \$32,000 for shooting native birds while working on a barramundi farm. The employees were charged in relation to large-scale illegal shooting of pelicans, herons, lapwings and other species of birds while employees of Barramundi Waters fish farm at Cowley Beach, near Innisfail.

The two men appeared in the Innisfail Magistrates' Court on charge under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 for taking protected animals without authority. The birds were killed between June 2002 and August 2003.

Each man was ordered to pay a \$12,000 fine and \$4,000 each in court costs. They have given six months to pay the fines. The men were two of a number charged in relation to the same incidents.

In October 2004, the company and its director were ordered to pay \$285,000 in fines and research costs to improve bird management systems on the farm.

Environmental Protection Agency regional director Dr Margaret Card welcomed the court's decision. "All native birds in Queensland are protected and the large-scale shooting that occurred at the Barramundi Waters fish farm was a serious breach of laws that are in place to protect native species," Dr Card said.

"The company failed to comply with its obligations under the Nature Conservation Act."

Reproduced from The Cairns Post 6th November 2004.



Pied Imperial-Pigeon Update—Cameron Watt & Justine Douglas

Thank you to Justine Douglas and Cameron Watt for attending BA-NQG AGM at Murray Falls this year. With no electricity or white board, their presentation skills were tested as they explained the current state of play in regards to these beautiful birds and BA-NQG's mascot. The following is a summary of their presentation:

Justine Douglas: QPWS and GBRMPA continue to fund the annual PIP counts as part of their day-to-day marine park activities, coral monitoring and seabird surveys around the Brook Islands. Weed control and rubbish removal continue to dominate their work priority in the area. They are also the custodian of all the monitoring data from the annual counts.

The management plans for the Brook Islands as well as Hinchinbrook Island assist in determining priorities for the area. The Cardwell Shire Council are also involved with a seed collection project which is helping with local revegetation projects.

Cameron Watt: As part of his ecology studies at James Cook University, Cameron is correlating rainfall and

population data between Port Moresby and Cardwell. Cameron has found that there are general comparisons between peaks and troughs of rainfall and the PIP numbers, especially once shooting of the birds stopped in about 1977. Given this correlation, he is predicting that the current high numbers are a result of the good 1999/2000 wet season, and that the population will fall as a result of the previous recent dry years. With the shooting pressure removed, and the potential for the PIP population of North Brook Island to have reached some form of equilibrium, rainfall may now be the main influence on PIP numbers. A similar pattern appears when comparing rainfall data in Darwin.

Cameron is hoping that this project will also start to look at what effects varying rainfall are having on food quality and abundance, parasite loads and if this is translated to breeding success. If nestling survival can be monitored at the same time as rainfall and yearly counts, we may be able to put a picture together of what most influences PIP numbers.

Thank you to both Justine and Cameron for their informed presentations.

Helen McLaughlin, Townsville



Ian Hance
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Interesting sightings

Species	Date	Location	Observer	Comment
Wood Sandpiper	19/08/04	Hasties Swamp	JS	
Rufous Owl (2)	1/09/04	Centenary Lakes	JS	
Painted Snipe	1-11/09/04	Mt. Carbine Dam	DR	
Common Koel	5/09/04	Centenary Lakes	JS	Early return
Channel-billed Cuckoo	10/09/04	Centenary Lakes	JS	Early return
Spotted Whistling-Duck	14/09/04	Weipa	IM	5 Awonga Treat. Ponds, 10 Marpoon Rd. Ponds.
Common Koel	19/09/04	Mt. Isa	BF	1st for the season here
Little Tern	23/09/04	Cairns Esplanade	JS	
Lesser Sooty Owl	23/09/04	Stewart Creek Rd. Daintree Village	TF	
Beach Stone-curlew	24/09/04	Redden Island	JS	
Large-billed Gerygone	24/09/04	Red Mill House - Daintree Village	AF&TF	Nesting under window awning, 40m from nearest water
Red Goshawk (1)	24/09/04	Walsh River	DR	35km NW of Chillagoe
Spotless Crake	28/09/04	Bladensburg NP nr Winton	L & CE	Bough shed waterhole 22°33'37" E 142°57'39" GDA
Little Eagle	29/09/04	Pelican Waterhole, Winton	L & CE	S 22°23'29" E 143°00'45" GDA
Flock Bronzewing (2)	30/09/04	4km S of Logan Falls	L & CE	S 22°40'04" E 142°56'25" GDA
Grey Falcon (1)	30/09/04	Opalton	L & CE	S 23°14'44" , E 142°45" GDA
Dollarbird	1/10/04	Marks Lane, Yungaburra	JS	
Black-faced Monarch	1/10/04	Lake Barrine	JS	
Australian Pratincole (1)	1/10/04	Port Douglas, Links Golf Course	RN	17th fairway! Then at the 10th fairway beside lagoon
Painted Snipe (4)	5/10/04	Wide Bay, Lake Moondarra, Mt. Isa	BF	2M + 2F
Oriental Plover (60-100)	5/10/04	Wide Bay, Lake Moondarra, Mt. Isa	BF	
Ground Cuckoo-Shrike	10/10/04	Lansdown (Woodstock)	BH	Have not seen any this close to Townsville before
Little Curlew	9/10/04	France Rd. Edmonton	JS	1 on 9th, 5 on 10th Oct.
White-winged Triller	11/10/04	Dillon Rd, Caravonica	JS	Unusual on the coast in Cairns
Asian Dowitcher	12/10/04	Cairns Esplanade	KF	via other obs. Present for abt. 4 weeks.
Grass Owl	13/10/04	Cairns Airport	KF & LF	1st record we have in Cairns
Black Falcon	14/10/04	7km E Julia Creek	MG	via BF
Northern Fantail	16/10/04	Red Mill House - Daintree Villiage	AF & TF	1st Record for here.
Beach Stone-curlew (2)	Sept-Nov	Cairns Airport	KF & LF	Nesting, hatched chick 11th Oct.
Rufous Owl		Palm Cove	MC&OK	Clutching a not-so Laughing Kookaburra.
Glossy Ibis (1)	16/10/04	Yorkeys Knob Lagoon	KF & LF	Uncommon on the coast in Cairns
Satin Flycatcher (2)	17-20/10/04	Mt. Lewis	DR	Unusual
White-eared Monarch (1)	18/10/04	Mid Daintree River	DR	late stayer
Black-necked Stork (F)	20/10/04	Doherty Ck, Bowen	JW	Uncommon
White-throated Needletail	20/10/04	Kuranda, Cassowary House	PG	Drifting S. high over CH, screaming loudly
Blue-faced Parrot-Finch	27/10/04	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	KU	Juv., 1st for season & the 2nd in this location
Southern Cassowary (5)	29/10/04	Kuranda, Cassowary House	PG	Male + 4 chicks , drove of last of 2003 juv.
Spinifex Pigeon (5)	30/10/04	Routh Creek, Georgetown	PG	Reliable on the Newcastle Range
Black-throated Finch (20)	31/10/04	Cumberland Dam	PG	10 present on 29th & 30th
Plum-headed Finch (1)	31/10/04	Cumberland Dam Toxic Waste Pit	PG	With 10 Masked & Zebra Finch
Grey-fronted Honeyeater (1)	31/10/04	Nr. Georgetown	PG	
Channel-billed Cuckoo	31/10/04	Durham Dam, Georgetown	PG	
Pale-headed Rosella (1)	1/11/04	Lansdown (Woodstock)	BH	White left throat & white shoulders, unusual colour

Species	Date	Location	Observer	Comment
Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo	1-3/11/04	Mt. Lewis Road	DR	Birds located daily (isolated pop. in the area-ed.)
Grey Goshawk (1)	4/11/04	Townsville Palmetum	L & CE	(White morph) S 19°18'45 E 146°45'53 GDA
Satin Flycatcher (1)	5-7/11/04	Kauri Creek, Tinaroo Dam	D & AM	Seen on 3 consecutive days. Late record.
Wood Sandpiper (1)	7/11/04	Mt. Carbine Tailings Dam	DR	Uncommon
Eastern Spinebill (5)	7/11/04	Luster Crk.14km NW Mt. Molloy	DR	1st record at lower altitude, feeding on blossom.
Buff-breasted Paradise KF	8/11/04	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	RS	1st for season here
Black-tailed Godwits (5)	8/11/04	Goonyella Mine, Moranbah	RA	Tailings Dam at Goonyella Mine
Black-tailed Native-hen (1)	8/11/04	Goonyella Mine, Moranbah	RA	Tailings Dam at Goonyella Mine
Buff-breasted Paradise KF	9/11/04	Kamerunga, Cairns.	LF	1st for season here
Noisy Pitta (2)	10/11/04	Cromarty, Giru	BH	Annual dry season refuge from Mt. Elliot
Oriental Pratincole (4)	11/11/04	Mount Isa.	BF	Wide Bay, Lake Moondarra. Rare in this area
Pacific Golden Plover (2)	11/11/04	Mount Isa.	BF	Wide Bay, Lake Moondarra. Rare in this area
White-throated Nightjars (2)	11/11/2004	Mt Ossa, north of Mackay	RA	A pair, female sitting on 1 egg superbly camouflaged
Buff-breasted Paradise KF	13/11/04	Mareeba TAFE pond	PG	Flying S.- odd location,+ Black Bittern here mid-Oct.



Observers

LF-Lindsay Fisher	KF-Keith Fisher	BF-Bob Forsyth	KU- Klaus Ulenhut	JS - John Seale	RS - Ron Stannard
TF-Trish Forsyth (Red Mill House)	AF-Andrew Forsyth (Red Mill House)	RN - Dr.Richard Nowotny	D & AM - Dawn & Arnold Magarry	L & CE - Len & Chris Ezzy	MC & OK-Mark Culleton & Olivia King
IM - Ian May	DR-Del Richards	PG - Phil Gregory	MG - Marc Gardiner	JW - Jon Wren	RA - Richard Atkinson
BH - Bill Holmes					

Thanks to all the observers for sending in their reports. Due to space constraints some records may have to be omitted-apologies if records do not appear. Please check with observers before quoting any of these sightings.
Please send any unusual or interesting sightings to Keith Fisher - Thanks.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle chick found dead at base of nest

Having driven past the relocated **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** nest near Bunnings Warehouse, Townsville as often as possible since hearing they had chicks again this year, I was surprised in early August to see only one chick in the nest. On closer inspection I found one of the chicks dead at the base of the nest infested with mites. It appeared to not have been there too long so I collected the body and asked Jo Wieneke collect it for post mortem by a local veterinarian. The vet suggested that the bird was very anaemic and was also in poor condition and that the mites may have contributed to its death.

Before sending it off with Jo, I collected some of the mites and sent them to Matthew Shaw at the Queensland Museum. He identified the mites as *Ornithonyssus bursa*, the tropical fowl mite or so-called "starling" mite which is an introduced species that feeds on an enormous range of native birds even in remote habitats. He said that he was not surprised to find it on the eagles (mite infestations on raptors aren't uncommon) but reports of huge irruptions are rare, even rarer are cases where the mites are seen as a significant contributor to the death of the bird.

It's hard to say which came first, an unhealthy bird that was more susceptible to mite infestation, a bird that couldn't compete with its sibling, not receiving enough food and then being susceptible to mite infestations or if the mites contributed to the decline of the bird's health. Anyone finding a bird infested with mites can send a sample to:

Matthew Shaw
Inquiry Centre
Queensland Museum
P.O. Box 3300
South Brisbane 4101



If the bird is alive and obviously unhealthy, he would prefer the bird to be taken to a vet for clinical observations and any mite samples taken by the vet and sent to him. These observations are useful for his records when identifying the mites. If the bird is healthy or the mites come from chicks, a sample can go to him direct. Any observations are also helpful (eg, is the bird excessively preening, was the sample from chicks and so on) and an approximate number of mites (this can be roughly counted by estimating the number of mites on the crown of the bird within a specified area such as 1cm square).

Matthew is specifically interested in anything that comes from a tree-hole or cavity nest (e.g. treecreepers, parrots) or swiftlets but is happy for mite specimens from any infestation on any species.

Mite specimens are best sent preserved in a vial in 70% alcohol and sealed in post pack or cardboard box. Alternatively, contact me on (07) 47 225 238 and I'll send them off for you.

Anthony Contarino,
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Townsville

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

*** 2005 BA Members Day and AGM**

The North Queensland Regional Group is hosting Members Day and the Birds Australia Annual General Meeting in Cairns on Saturday May 28th 2005. We are planning a program that will highlight Birds Australia projects and the birds of north Queensland. We call now for expressions of interest from anyone who wishes to present a talk or a poster. We will organise field trips on the Sunday and will assist anyone who wishes to spend a longer time enjoying the wonderful bird watching opportunities in north Queensland. Contact: Graham Harrington on 4096 5051. More details in this newsletter.

* Cairns Crocodile Farm has closed to the public and is no longer available to birdwatchers, which is a pity as it was a reliable place for some difficult to see species.

* Excess Stock available free. National office have excess copies of our publication "The Action Plan for Australian Birds". It sets out conservation actions needed to save our 155 threatened bird species. If you would like a free copy and are prepared to pay for the postage (between \$5 to \$12 depending on where you are) please contact Michelle Sweeny at national office on (03) 9882 2622.

* BA-NQG have joined forces with Jenny and Deitmar from the Lake Morris Kiosk at Copperlode Dam to produce a Bird Brochure to help promote the birds and the great facilities at the Lake. Copies will soon be printed and will be available from Keith Fisher or the kiosk.

* Those members who have an email address should have been receiving messages from our mailing list. Quite a few email

Welcome new members

- Ms L Bourner, DAINTREE;
- Mr R Chandler, AITKENVALE;
- Mr & Mrs A & M McCaffry, MILLAA MILLAA;
- Mr G A Wood, HERBERTON

~ Diary Note ~

I am pleased to advise that Dr Graeme Hamilton has been appointed the new CEO of Birds Australia. Graeme is presently Australia's Chief Plant Protection Officer and has had a senior career in agriculture and environment within the Australian Government over 25 years. Graeme will start duties at BA on 6th December but for those attending the regional groups meeting on Friday 26th November Graeme will be attending and you will meet him there.

Regards
Henry Nix, President, Birds Australia.



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Where are the Cotton Pygmy-goose?



Mike Bamford © Birds Australia 2003.

The Cotton Pygmy-goose is gazetted as *Rare* under the Queensland's *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and in the Action Plan for Australian Birds Garnett and Crowley (2000) listed it as *Near Threatened*. Little is known about its movements, habitat preferences or food, and total population numbers are hard to estimate. As a small waterbird that often occurs amongst concealing vegetation and at low densities, the Cotton Pygmy-goose probably could not be effectively censused using aerial surveys. Between October 19-24 Roger Jaensch of Wetlands International organised a Cotton Pygmy-goose survey in central and northern Qld. Numbers were down in the Rockhampton area with only 99 birds - compared with 212 in 2003 counted at the 11 sites that still held water. None were recorded around Mackay or Bowen and 31 near Clermont. Only 16 were found on Ross River in Townsville but the largest return was 186+ at Blackbraes National Park, 170km north of Hughenden. Thanks to all who assisted in the survey. For a full report of the survey email Roger.Jaensch@epa.qld.gov.au.
Jo Wieneke, Townsville.

Please send items for March 2005 Contact Call by Mid February to:

Helen McLaughlin, 44 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens Qld 4810 or email helen.mclaughlin@nrm.qld.gov.au