



Contact Call



Birds Australia
Conservation Through Knowledge

Newsletter of the Birds Australia
North Queensland Group

Birds Australia
North Queensland Group

New faces

September 2005 Issue: Grey Goshawk

This edition of Contact Call comes at a time when there is much that is new. Just a few months ago, a new committee was constituted and, although I was on the previous committee, albeit for less than twelve months, I am new as Convenor. A good proportion of the other members are also new to the committee. Birds Australia also has a new CEO in Graeme Hamilton and is working on a new Strategic Plan for the next three years.

I have not met many of you who receive Contact Call but do look forward to doing so over the coming year. In the meantime, for what it is worth, I will tell you a little bit about myself so that you know what you have got yourselves into. I have lived in Townsville for a little over twelve years. Prior to that I lived and worked in western New South Wales for about the same amount of time, so I have moved from the semi-arid rangelands to the coastal dry tropics. These two general locations have given me a good variety of birding experiences. Since I came to Townsville I have worked as an ecologist for CSIRO. Most of my research has concentrated on pest plant species, their ecology and how to manage them. Some of my research has had a small 'bird component'. Currently, I am working on a large scale experiment on the Townsville Town Common Conservation Park where para grass, an introduced pasture species from South America has come to dominate the freshwater wetlands. This change in the vegetation has had negative consequences for most bird species that use these wetlands. We are testing options employing burning and cattle grazing to reduce the amount of para grass, alter vegetation structure and promote a variety of native plant species. We are documenting how bird populations respond to these managements. Perhaps I can tell you more of how that work is going in a future Contact Call?



Pictorella Mannikin
Steve Paton
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Outside of work I am involved with the Recovery Team for the Black-throated Finch. As you would be aware, this species had declined dramatically, especially across the southern part of its range. There is, however, a significant population in close proximity to Townsville. This situation is one where careful consideration needs to be given to ecological, economic and social issues if the species is to continue to do well in the local area. Hopefully, understanding the ecological needs of the species in the Townsville region will help better manage it elsewhere and, especially inform actions aimed to help the species recover further south.

The first meeting of the new committee was held in Cardwell on August 20 (see page 5). Given that there is a lot happening in both NQ and BA in general, I and others new to the committee will be on a steep learning curve. There is much for us to learn to get up to speed with the issues that the committee deals with. The wealth of experience of those who have been on the committee for some time has been, and I am sure will be, of great value. It is encouraging to experience the zeal of committee members and the membership in general. I have especially appreciated the role that Helen McLaughlin has played as secretary – she has ably made up for my inadequacies. I and the rest of the committee would welcome your ideas on how we can build BANQG over the coming 12 months and beyond.

Tony Grice, Convenor

BA North Queensland Group—Events Calendar Sept-Dec 2005

September 2005—Biodiversity month

The Month of September - Cotton Pygmy-Goose Survey. Participate in a Queensland survey at Townsville's Ross River and Dam, Serpentine Lagoon, Lake Tinaroo, Blackbraes NP, Lake Mitchell, Mareeba Wetlands, Valley of Lagoons or any of your local wetlands. Contact the Coordinator - Jo Wieneke on 4774 4707 for details on what information to record .

17-18th September - Townsville's Black-throated Finch survey. Join teams to survey waterholes around the vicinity of Ross River Dam and Woodstock as part of the Recovery Team's survey of the finch. Details on how to register and participate please contact Marnie McCullough on 4722 2519 or 0428 739819.

October 2005

Saturday 1st October—Annual Crane Count.

Everyone is welcome to come along and count Brolgas and Sarus Cranes as they fly into roost for the night. You can join a group or take on a roost you know about. This year, aerial surveys will happen in the Gulf at the same time, giving a great chance for the best Sarus Crane number ever. Our Brolga counts have been going really well also, do consider a Brolga site



even if you're far distant from any Sarus. For sites on the Tablelands, north to Cape York, west to the Gulf, contact Elinor Scambler email dacelo@austarnet.com.au or phone (07) 4095 3296, or just roll up to Hastings Swamp Atherton, 3:30 pm on the day to join a team. Bring sensible shoes, binoculars or telescope, torch, water. For sites along coast south to Townsville contact Jo Wieneke email bowerbird14@bigpond.com or phone (07) 4771 4707.



Join the Tablelands teams at the Tally Room (Champaign and calculators) at Malanda Hotel for a buffet dinner (6:30-8:30pm). Early bookings essential to avoid disappointment. Please book directly with the Malanda Hotel on (07) 40965488. The Crane News will be out soon for people who participated last year.

Join the email group and receive updates on Cranes and Crane Counts. Contact Elinor.

Saturday 22nd October—Yungaburra markets. 6am—midday. Join us at the October markets for another enjoyable morning. If you have anything to donate (books, plants etc) please contact Virginia on (07) 4095 8302.



Inside this issue:

- AGM and Committee profiles
- Queensland's Yellow Chat
- Conservation Plan for Migratory Birds
- North Qld's Beach Stone-curlew
- Committee meeting—August 05
- The role of birds and weed
- Interesting Sightings

Check out Birds Australia website "Calendar of Events" at www.birdsaustralia.com.au. BA-NQG keeps the site updated with regional events. Field Trips may change after publication. Local contacts can provide you with the latest information. This will allow more flexibility, especially concerning weather conditions. Additional events may also be arranged.

The Grey Goshawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*) is 38-55cm long with a wingspan of 71-110cm. For a lot of raptors the males are smaller than females, the Grey Goshawk is no exception with males being half the weight of females. It is slightly larger and heavier built than the Brown Goshawk, with broader wings and a shorter, squarer tail. It is a striking grey-and-white or all-white goshawk with bright orange-yellow cere and feet. The wings are very broad and rounded, and the legs and feet are massive. The Grey Goshawk is a solitary, secretive hawk of tall, wet forests in eastern and south-eastern Australia. The Grey Goshawk soars and glides on bowed wings, or slightly upswept wings when soaring to gain height rapidly. It eats mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, arthropods and sometimes carrion and forages mainly by still-hunting from a concealed perch in the tree canopy. In NQ the laying season is May to November. Pairs nest solitarily with the nest a platform of sticks 50-60cm across, 35cm deep, lined with green leaves, and placed up to 15m above the ground in the canopy of a living tree. The clutch size is usually two or three eggs. The Grey Goshawk is not globally or nationally threatened but classified as rare in Queensland.

Grey Goshawk



Information sourced from *The Birds of Prey of Australia* by Stephen Debus.

Atlas 2 continues...

Please continue to send your Atlas forms to the coordinators listed below, or submit them electronically to Birds Australia, via the web site:

Southern Region (Bowen to Cardwell)

Regional Organiser—Jo Wieneke 4771 4707

22 Bishop Street, Belgian Gardens Qld 4810

Northern Region (Cardwell to Cape York)

Regional Organiser—Graham Harrington 4096 5051

PO Box 680, Malanda Qld 4885



Other Contacts:

- Keith Fisher (Cairns) (07) 4039 0972
PO Box 2209, Cairns Qld 4870;
- Glenn Holmes (Atherton Tableland) (07) 4091 4364
PO Box 1246, Atherton Qld 4883; or
- Elinor Scambler (Atherton Tableland) (07) 4095 3296
MS1318 Gadgarra Road, Yungaburra Qld 4872.

2005-2006 BA-NQG Management Committee

Executive Committee

c/o PO Box 37 Belgian Gardens QLD 4810

Convenor—Tony Grice home phone: (07) 4725 7201

Email: tony.grice@csiro.au

Deputy Convenor—currently vacant

Secretary—Helen McLaughlin home phone: (07) 4771 3239

Email: helen_marty2000@hotmail.com

Treasurer—Harry Cassidy home phone: (07) 4057 5278

Email: harrycass40@hotmail.com

Committee members

Jo Wieneke (Townsville) John Frois (Cairns)
Elna Kerswell (Townsville) Allan Gillanders (Atherton)

Committee-elected Positions

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

Newsletter Editor—Helen McLaughlin

IBA Coordinators—Alastair Freeman &
Graham Harrington

Project Contacts

Beach Stone Curlew Survey Amanda Freeman
4095 2655 or aafreeman@qldnet.com.au

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

Regional Contacts

Townsville: Jo Wieneke Ph: 4771 4707

Cairns: vacant

Atherton Tableland: Mark Newton Ph: 40484747 (wk)

Email: mark.newton@nrm.qld.gov.au

Mossman / Daintree: Del Richards Ph: 4094 1199

Email: info@finefeathertours.com.au

Cape York: Sue Gould 4069 7585

Email: susanfgould@yahoo.com

Mount Isa: Bob Forsyth Ph: 4743 3210

Email: isabirdo@austarnet.com.au



Birds Australia Membership

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

This includes membership of the national organisation plus membership of our regional group,

Birds Australia—North Queensland Group.

Members also receive four issues of the full-colour bird magazine *Wingspan* and four issues of *Contact Call*, the BA-NQG newsletter. Membership forms are available from the Secretary or send subscriptions

directly to:

Birds Australia, 415 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn East, Victoria 3123

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



Birds Australia



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Annual General Meeting at Cowley Beach Training Area

Thanks to the Department of Defence, this year's AGM weekend was held at the Cowley Beach Training Area, south of Innisfail. The weather miraculously held out and provided a couple of fine days for the 20 people who attended. **Sergeant Myles Nichols** provided an informative history of the training area, including that it was selected in 1954 due to its tropical location, and provided the first trials for the Series 2 Land Rover in 1961. The Army took over the property in 1980, and since this time the training area has seen many changes, including a rebuild in 2003. The main land management issues faced today are the management of feral animals, maintaining access tracks and boundary fencing as well as maintaining the property given the increased usage in Defence activities. The AGM kicked off with the outgoing Convenor, **Graham Harrington**, providing a detailed report for the past years activities. The highlight of the year was the very successful Birds Australia Members Day and AGM in Cairns. The program of talks and posters was a veritable feast and the speakers are to be congratulated on presenting the science in such a way that both scientists and non-scientists could feel they had learnt a great deal by the end of the day. Credit must go to **Cliff Frith** for assembling the scientific program and **Keith Fisher** for the planning and logistics. Just some of the other projects for 2004-05 in the region worthy of mention are: the Black-throated Finch recovery project in Townsville, **Elinor Scambler's** Crane Count on the Tablelands, BANQG brochures which have primarily been completed by **Keith Fisher**, Important Bird Areas identified and accepted by BirdLife International and this newsletter *Contact Call*. The Treasurer's Report was then presented by **Harry Cassidy**, providing a healthy start to the next year. The election of the 2005-06 officers then proceeded with some new members taking up the challenge (see below for their details). Following the AGM **Jutta Jaunzemis**, Regional Environmental Officer, provided interesting information regarding the environmental values of the property, including the impressive bird list of 241 species and a plant list of 311 species. The main opportunities are in regards to cultural heritage, Beach Stone-curlew management, weed seed dispersal and phytophthora management. Thanks to **Jo Wieneke** for organising the weekend and to **SGT Myles Nichols** and the **Department of Defence** for hosting the event.

Welcome to the new North Queensland Committee

CONVENOR Dr Tony Grice

I have an interest in all things biotic and work as an ecologist in CSIRO. Much of my current research revolves around invasive plant species and how to counter their impacts. I have been watching birds for longer than I can remember. I cannot claim a favourite bird but do admit to a weakness for finches. I have a particular interest in land management and lifestyles that are compatible with the persistence of healthy, intact ecosystems.



excuse to travel and to meet fascinating people. Favourite bird:- the next one to give him a breathtaking surprise.

Ms Jo Wieneke bowerbird14@bigpond.com

I have been a member of Birds Australia, (RAOU when I joined), since the first atlas of Australian Birds in the 70s. I have been on the committee of BANQ for most of the time since it started and have enjoyed many campouts and taking part in surveys in good company. I feel lucky to live in the best birding region in Australia and try to make the most of, and work towards, protecting this wonderful area.

SECRETARY Ms Helen McLaughlin

Having grown up in NSW the move to sunny Queensland was an obvious one. After finishing university, I moved further north in search of the tropical rainforest. My love of other ecosystems soon followed with holidays to Lake Eyre, Cape York, the Gulf, Princess Charlotte Bay, and more recently the Kimberley. My knowledge of birds increased with these camping experiences. With an interest for conservation issues, I began to be involved with Birds Australia. I soon took up the position of newsletter editor and now secretary. These are big shoes to fill, so members will have to bear with me and my dial up email system.

Mr John Frois lorikeet2001au@yahoo.com.au

Originally from Austria, arrived in Australia in 1968 at age 21, have been living in Cairns since 1994 and work for Main Roads Dept. Enjoy the outdoors including bushwalking, swimming and cycling. When at home I often have my nose in a book. Have always been fond of nature and its creatures, however developed a strong passion for birds only a couple of years ago. Now I am wondering how I could have lived all those years and not pay more attention to our feathered friends. So yes, there is a lot to catch up on, but better late than never.



TREASURER Mr Harry Cassidy

I was introduced into birding as a schoolboy egg collector, as evidently a lot of the older birdos were. I was born in Queanbeyan so all my early birding was done in that area. I moved to Byron Bay in the early 80's. However due to being in the Motel business was unable to do any birding until retiring in 1997. I moved to the Gold Coast and went birding with the Gold Coast Birders. Moved to Mission Beach in Nov. 1998. I joined the RAOU in the early 1980's and even if I had no time to go birding I did a lot of reading.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mr Alan Gillanders spotlighting@cyberwizards.com.au
52, married to Maria, tourist guide and educator. Bird watching legitimised his antisocial behaviour when as a young teacher he needed space to rejuvenate. Now it is an

Ms Elna Kerswell elnakers@hotmail.com

Born in Mossman, grew up on a cane and dairy farm, with Mum's "What Bird is That?". Secondary schooling at St Gabriel's School in Charters Towers, then Teachers' College in Brisbane. Started teaching in Mossman, then to Cairns, Mareeba and Ayr before travelling on a ship to England, with another teacher friend. After 15 months in Britain, it was time to return to north Qld, via Canada, Los Angeles, and Asia. Joining the Department of Education and teaching on Thursday Island was a highlight. I decided to return to St Gabriel's as Head Mistress in 1972, and spent the next 30 years teaching at All Souls St Gabriels till retirement. Now I am able to rekindle my interest in birds and to spend time in the bush around Charters Towers and Townsville learning about the dry forest birds and plants.

Looking for Yellow Chats (Capricorn subspecies) in North Qld?

A small team from Central Queensland University's Centre for Environmental Management has been working on the recovery of the **Yellow Chat** (Capricorn subspecies, previously known as the Dawson subspecies) since about 2000. At the time of its listing as Critically Endangered in 2002 (under the *EPBC Act 1999*), the Capricorn subspecies was known only from one site (Curtis Island) in central coastal Queensland discovered by QPWS researchers in 1992. Prior to this it was thought to be extinct since it had not been seen for over 50 years.



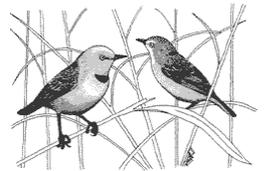
Male chat on club-rush

With the assistance of Wetlands International and QPWS staff, we started looking for mainland populations in mid 2003 concentrating on historically known locations in the Fitzroy Delta and north of Rockhampton in the Broad Sound area and succeeded beyond our wildest dreams

with several sites now located on half a dozen grazing properties in the region. Some of the sites support far more chats than at Curtis Island.

Given this success we decided to look further a-field and so sent Bob Black and Allan Briggs from BA Capricornia Group north and south of Rockhampton reaching the wilds of the Burdekin Delta to the north and Eurimbulah near Agnes Waters to the south. So far no success with these farther flung expeditions but we are still hopeful given some very prospective habitat in the Burdekin and possibly Mackay areas. What we are looking for besides the bird itself, is habitat with a complex mosaic of sedges and grasses on marine plains. Marine plain refers to areas either under current tidal influence or areas that had historical marine influence and hence have residual salinity in the soil. As a consequence of these residual salinities areas of saltmarsh plants are generally found e.g. patches of samphire and Marine Couch. However,

influence of freshwater is also very important as inundation by freshwater appears to drive the food production that supports breeding populations of these wetland-dependent birds. Tall sedges such as *Cyperus alopecuroides* and the salt tolerant club-rush *Schoenoplectus litoralis* are the most important



Yellow Chat
Annie Rogers
© Birds Australia 2003

species in providing shelter and breeding habitat, however, the consensus is that chats are fairly opportunistic and any tall cover in the right place will do. So in summary, a complex of sedges / grasses providing tall cover along drainage channels and basins on broad marine plains seem to provide core habitat.

The best time to look for **Yellow Chats** is in the breeding season when they are calling conspicuously, they also have a very distinct call once you get tuned into it. Breeding season is related to rainfall and inundation of marine plain habitat, so from late spring to post wet is the best time to survey.

There were a few places spotted by Bob that looked promising, particularly wetlands in the Barratta, Cromarty and Wunjunga areas. I'd be very interested to hear of any sightings (see details below). Also if you wish to be involved with our group on a regular basis, please contact me and I can direct you to the right places, arrange site access if needed and put you in contact with other interested parties. Regular visits to target sites offer the best chance of a sighting as numbers tend to be low and areas of possible habitat large.

We would like to acknowledge the considerable help given to us by land owners, by QPWS staff and other interested personnel from various agencies that helped make life easier when accessing areas of unfamiliar land.

Wayne Houston, Project Officer, Centre for Environmental Management, Central Queensland University. Ph (07) 4930 9087 email: w.houston@cqu.edu.au.



Feeding habitat of club rush and water couch



Cyperus along drainage lines provide core habitat

National Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds

A public comment period has opened on a Wildlife Conservation Plan of Migratory Shorebirds. At a national level Commonwealth legislation, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* provides for the development and implementation of Wildlife Conservation Plans. The Department of Environmental and Heritage, in consultation with interested stakeholders is developing a Plan for Migratory Shorebirds. The draft Plan is open for public comment for three months. At the end of this period the Plan will be revised, taking into consideration any comments received. The draft Plan is available on the Department of the Environment and Heritage website at www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/migratory/waterbirds/shorebird-plan, or can be obtained by emailing ciu@deh.gov.au or telephone free call 1800 803 772.

Comments must be received by close of business 17 November 2005 and sent to Migratory and Marine Species Section, Department of the Environment and Heritage, GPO Box 787, Canberra ACT 2601.

Beach Stone-curlew Survey—April 2005



Thank you to everyone who sent in records for the **Beach Stone-curlew** survey earlier in the year. Although we weren't able to organise a comprehensive survey of the Wet Tropics coast like we did back in April 2000, by people selecting beaches to survey at a time that suited them, we were, collectively, able to check up on quite a few of the regular **Beach Stone-curlew** haunts and help keep our sightings database up to date. I received reports from members for surveys conducted between March – June 2005. Over this time period, 18 **Beach Stone-curlews** were reported from eight locations distributed along the Wet Tropics coast (defined as between the Daintree and Tully Rivers to be comparable to the April 2000 survey). Refer Table below.

Coastal Section	No of Beach Stone-curlew
Wonga Beach	3
Yule Point	2
Yorkey's Knob	2
Mangrove Boardwalk, Cairns Airport	1
Cairns Airport	5
Etty Bay	1
Cowley Beach	2
Kurrimine Beach	2

This number is comparable to the 17 **Beach Stone-curlews** recorded between the Daintree and Tully rivers during the April 2000 survey. During that survey, **Beach Stone-curlews** were recorded from 14 distinct locations, compared to only eight this year. This may be simply because the coastline was more comprehensively surveyed in 2000, but there were a few spots, where **Beach Stone-curlews** have been regularly seen in the past, where observers dipped out in this years' survey. No **Beach Stone-curlews** were seen at

Mission Beach between Bingil Bay and South Mission (though a group of three, including a juvenile, was reported back in February at North Mission Beach). Neither were any reported from Ellis Beach, Palm Cove, Clifton Beach, Kewarra or Trinity Beach/Trinity Park. It would be really useful if anyone visiting these beaches could keep a note of if and when they see **Beach Stone-curlews** and send this information in to the database. Hopefully the lack of birds on these beaches was just a case of bad luck during the survey but we need to keep a watch to be sure. Are the birds still there? As well as the areas listed above, where beaches were surveyed but no birds seen, there were some important stretches of coastline that didn't get checked in this years' survey. They were; Newell Beach, Wangetti, Bramston Beach, Ella Bay and Kennedy Bay. Please, anyone visiting these beaches, let me know whether or not you see any **Beach Stone-curlews**. Just a quick phone call or email every six months or so is all that's needed. Some members living further south got out to check some of their local beaches too. There were records of **Beach Stone-curlews** at Lucinda (1), Taylor's Beach (2), Forrest Beach (3), Ross River mouth (1), Cleveland Bay (2) and Sarina (2). Records of **Beach Stone-curlews** from Torres Strait and Lizard Island take the prize for most distant observations though.

Thanks again to everyone that took part. Your records are entered in the Birds Australia North Queensland Group's **Beach Stone-curlew database**. I maintain the database on behalf of the group as a means of monitoring the distribution of **Beach Stone-curlews** on the Wet Tropical Coast, particularly the occurrence of **Beach Stone-curlews** on beaches with high human usage. This information is made available, as required, to help inform coastal planning. Please continue to support the monitoring effort by reporting **Beach Stone-curlews** sightings to me for the database.

Amanda Freeman, home phone (07) 4095 2655 (before 8:30pm) or email aafreeman@qld.chariot.net.au

First Committee Meeting for 2005-06 committee—20 August 2005



The new committee met in Cardwell for their first meeting. Here is a summary of the projects we are currently involved in:

- 🦅 **North Queensland Website:** the Committee have agreed that a website will assist us in providing up-to-date information on conservation issues, birding locations, regional contacts and raise the profile of the group;
- 🦅 **Envirogrant:** with the aim to attend the NQ Field Days in 2006 and Lotus Glen Field Days in 2007, the grant has provided money to prepare posters on relevant bird conservation issues of north Queensland.
- 🦅 **Birds Australia Strategic Plan 2006-08:** the committee have provided feedback to national office on the above draft document. It was also agreed to develop a plan for our NQ Group in line with the national strategic plan to set a direction and goals for the next three years.
- 🦅 **Conservation Issues:** Sue Gould (Weipa) has been working very hard with Comalco to protect the very important roosting sites of the Great and Lesser

Frigatebirds around Weipa (Refer June CC). This year will be the 9th annual crane count which is quickly gaining international recognition. Join teams on 1st October to be part of this amazing sight. The Department of the Environment and Heritage are currently calling for public submissions on the Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds (refer page 4 for details).

🦅 BA North Queensland Group will soon have its own poloshirt. The 100% cotton dress polo will look great at any event. Available at the Yungaburra markets (October) or from the Secretary for \$25.

🦅 The committee is currently involved with the project NQ Tropical Birding Trails involving seven local governments surrounding Townsville, north to include Cardwell. This project will investigate strategies for expanding and enhancing bird tourism in NQ.

🦅 The Committee will donate \$1000 to help the HANZAB project, as well as sponsored the Black-throated Finch.

Thanks to Girringun Training Centre for use of their great conference room and kitchen.

Birds and the Spread of Weeds

Over the last two hundred years, nearly 3000 plant species have become naturalized in Australia. Many have proved able to invade native vegetation, and although at least some provide resources (e.g. food, shelter) for native bird species, the overall effect of non-native plants of Australian ecosystems are negative. In many situations, the vegetation is dominated by these “environmental weeds” and this has significant repercussions for native plant and animal communities, including birds. Birds and non-native plants interact in a variety of ways. One factor that has been very important is the dispersal of “environmental weeds” by native birds. All of this is true in both the wet and dry tropics of north Queensland. Plants that are dispersed by birds typically have fleshy fruits, often coloured red, orange, yellow, purple or black when ripe. They fruits vary greatly in size and form, some containing a single seeds, others many. The size and form of fruits, along with their seasonal patterns of availability, will dictate which birds will consume the fruits and so spread the seeds. The behaviour of the birds, especially their movement patterns, will govern the patterns of seed dispersal.



Olive-backed Oriole
Andrew Plant
© Birds Australia 2003

The north Queensland avifauna contains many species that play a role in the dispersal of both native plants and environmental weeds. One of the most obvious is the **Southern Cassowary** whose role as a seed disperser is recognized as an important structuring force in tropical rainforests. The fruit pigeons are important: the **Pied Imperial-Pigeon**, **White-headed** and **Topknot Pigeons**, the **Brown Cuckoo-Dove**, **Emerald Dove**, and the **Superb**, **Rose-crowned** and **Wompoo Fruit-Doves**; at least some of these are highly mobile and so have the potential to disperse plants, including weeds, over long distances. Amongst the cuckoos, the **Channel-billed Cuckoos** and **Koel** are potential dispersers of weeds, their migrations from southeast Asia raising the possibility that they could even introduce new plant species to Australia. The trillers and cuckoo-shrikes, notably the **Barred Cuckoo-shrike**, also consume fruits and so disperse seeds, as do the **Olive-backed** and **Yellow Orioles** and the **Figbird**. Other important seed-dispersing birds of north Queensland are the **Pied Currawong**, **Trumpet Manucode**, the various bowerbird species (through both fruit consumption and the use of fruits in decorating their bowers), **Mistletoebird**, **Silvereeye** and **Metallic Starling**.

Some of these species are more important than others in spreading weeds. Mobile species that have adapted to human modified environments are especially significant because they are more likely to come into contact with introduced plants in those environments. Note that about 70% of our “environmental weeds” started out as garden plants. Studies in south-east Queensland, and other parts

of southern Australia, point to the **Pied Currawong**, **Figbird** and **Silvereeye** as amongst the most important dispersers of fleshy-fruited environmental weeds. Examples of important bird-dispersed environmental weeds of the wet and dry tropics are listed below.

- Lantana *Lantana camara* – well known Weed of National Significance and declared plant in Queensland that is still cultivated in parks and gardens; it is no longer legal to trade any forms of lantana in Queensland
- Pond apple *Annona glabra* – grown in wet tropics; fruits eaten and spread by cassowaries, pigs and water flows; a strongly invasive Weed of National Significance and declared plant in Queensland
- Chinese apple *Ziziphus mauritiana* – common in the dry tropics; spread by cattle, wallabies, emus and bustards; red-tailed black cockatoos destroy seeds; a declared plant in Queensland
- Broad-leaved pepper tree *Schinus terebinthifolius* – environmental weed in southern Queensland but still cultivated as street and garden plant in the north; favoured by mistletoe birds and figbirds
- Camphor laurel *Cinnamomum camphora* – popular street and farm tree prevalent in the sub-tropics and the Atherton tableland; attracts fruit pigeons
- Neem *Azadirachta indica* – widely cultivated domestically and in plantations; invades riparian zones of rivers in the dry tropics of northern Australia
- Grewia *Grewia asiatica* – shrub or small tree cultivated in parks and gardens but being spread into native vegetation
- Mock orange *Murraya paniculata* – commonly grown hedge plant in parks and gardens; very readily spread by birds
- Strawberry tree *Muntingia calabura*
- Devil’s fig *Solanum torvum* and wild tobacco *Solanum mauritiana* – two weeds whose fruits are readily spread by birds
- Venezuelan pokeweed *Phytolacca rivinoides* and rose myrtle *Rhodomyrtus tomentosa* – two relatively new garden plants that present a high risk as a bird-dispersed weeds

What can you do?

1. Avoid cultivating high risk bird-dispersed weeds in your garden. Instead, attract fruit-feeding birds to your garden by plant native fleshy-fruited species.
2. Look out for bird-dispersed weeds establishing in native vegetation and remove them as soon as possible.
3. Keep records of consumption of fruits of non-native plant species by birds – which weeds, which birds, where and when?



Trumpet Manucode
Andrew Plant
© Birds Australia 2003

Tony Grice, Townsville

Jo Wieneke is the new coordinator for Interesting Sightings:

Thanks to observers for sending in their reports and to John Seale's Cairns recording service (cairnsbirds@yahoo.com.au).

Please check with observers before quoting any of these sightings.

Please send any unusual or interesting sightings to Jo Wieneke at email bowerbird14@bigpond.com.

Contributors: AG-Alan Gillanders, BF-Bob Forsyth, BV-Brian Venables, DR-Del Richards, ET-Ellen Terrell, GH-Graham Harrington, HC-Harry Cassidy, JS-John Seale, JW-Jo Wieneke, KF-Keith Fisher, L&CE-Len & Chris Ezzy, LF- Lindsay Fisher, MA –Marleen Acton, PG-Phil Gregory, RM&AGr-Roy Mackay & Andree Griffin, T&AF-Trish & Andrew Forsyth, T&SC-Tom and Sylvia Claxton, TBOCA-Townsville Bird Observers Club, TG-Tony Grice.

Interesting sightings

Species	Date	Location	Observer	Comment
Buff-br. Paradise Kingfisher	22/5/05	Little Mulgrave River	DC	One late in season
Restless Flycatcher	29/5/05	Yorkeys Knob Golf Course Lagoon	KF	Previously reported by JM. Still present 3/7 KF
Magpie Goose (500+)	29/5/05	Cattana Wetlands	KF	Unusual number here for this time of year
Plum-headed Finch	1/6/05	Yorkeys Knob Golf Course Lagoon	PG	1st for this site. (1m, 2f). Still present on 3/7 KF
Channel-billed Cuckoo	2/6/05	Yorkeys Knob Golf Course Lagoon	DR	Late record
Blue-faced Parrot-Finch	3/6/05	Goldsborough Valley	JS	700m past end of bitumen on steep bank with Red-browed Firetail
Freckled Duck (8)	4/6/05	Mt. Carbine Dam	PG	Unusual
Cotton Pygmy Goose	5/6/05	Yorkeys Knob Golf Course Lagoon	PG	1 Adult Female seen 16/6, 2 on 3/7 - KF
Barking Owl	6/6/05	Cairns Esplanade	JC	In tree opposite McDonalds - rare visitor
Rufous Owl (2)	11/6/05	Centenary lakes swamp boardwalk	PV via BV	Just after 6pm a Rufous Owl took Orange Footed Scrubfowl, soon after joined another Rufous Owl
Channel-billed Cuckoo	13/6/05	Daintree	AF	Late in season (3 Juvs)
Rufous Owl	13/6/05	Cattana Wetlands	BV	Being mobbed by Spangled Drongos
White-necked Heron	19/6/05	Cairns Esplanade	K&LF	Not new for Esplanade list but extremely unusual at this location
Common Noddy	19/6/05	Florence St. Cairns City	LF	Landed on road then flew towards Esplanade
Brolga (3)	19/6/05	Paluma	RM & AGr	Unusual at this location 2 adult, 1 immature. Stayed for 3 days
Freckled Duck (22+)	20/6/05	Mt. Carbine Dam	DR	Increasing numbers since sighting on the 4/6
Black-chinned Honeyeater	20/6/05	Mungana Dam, 15km west Chillagoe	TF	
Australian Bustard	24/6/05	Cairns Airport	KF	Unusual in Cairns - last seen here ~ 3 years ago
Mangrove Robin	25/6/05	Albert River -5km east Burketown	IF, TH	Not recorded here in BA atlas before.
Red-headed Honeyeater	25/6/05	Nicholson River, 20km N. Burketown	IF, TH	Not recorded here in BA atlas before.
Little Kingfisher	26/6/05	Yorkeys Knob Golf Course Lagoon	KF	50spp seen in hour. Restless Flycatcher still present
White-eared Monarch	26/6/05	Redden Island, Cairns	KF	In mangroves
Australian Pratincole	30/6/05	Stewart Creek Road, Daintree	AF	
Buff-breasted Button-quail (2)	30/6/05	Mareeba Wetlands	GH via PG	On knoll 200m NE of Pandanus Lagoon
Red Goshawk (2)	4/7/05	Yungaburra	AG	Rare; sightings till mid August.
Crested Pigeon (20+)	6/7/05	Dam near Bob's Lookout	DR	1st local record for location which is 27km west of Mt. Carbine.
Gouldian Finch (12)	9/7/05	Musgrave (Red Goshawk nest site)	P & A O'Reilly	Seen again on 19/7/05 by Klaus Uhlenhut and party. Red & Black Faced + Juveniles.
Bowers Shrike-thrush	9/7/05	Crystal Cascades, Redlynch Valley	K&LF	Winter visitor to Cairns lowland.
Plum-headed Finch	15/7/05	Cumberland Dam, Georgetown	JW	Out of normal range
Red-footed Booby	19/7/05	Between port and Magnetic Is	JW	Immature bird on channel marker, 2 nd only record
Rufous Owl (2)	24/7/05	Centenary Lakes boardwalk, Cairns	JS	Being mobbed by Laughing Kookaburras
Great Crested Grebe	26/7/05	Paluma Dam	RM & AGr	One male, first record for Paluma
Grey Falcon	28/7/05	Granite Gorge, Mareeba	AG	Uncommon
Black Falcon	28/7/05	Beantree Rd E of Tolga	AG	Uncommon
Blue-faced Parrot-Finch	29/7/05	Lake Morris Road, Cairns	JS	5 km from start. Very unusual location
Southern Cassowary & chick	29/7/05	Bilyana Rest Area, N of Cardwell	TG	Unusual
White-gaped Honeyeater (3)	31/7/05	McLeod River, Nth of Mount Carbine	DR	Few records of isolated population
Star Finch (100+)	1/8/05	Lakefield NP	MC	Southern end of Nifold Plains
White-browed Scrubwren	6/8/05	Riverside Gardens, Townsville	TG	Very unusual in Townsville area
Red-necked Avocet (6)	12/8/05	Cairns Esplanade	PF	Irregular visitor. Observer— UK birder Peter Findlay
Wood Sandpiper (1)	12/8/05	Hasties Swamp, Atherton	TS	Observer— UK birder Tony Smith
Masked Owl (1)	17/8/05	Kingfisher Park, Julatten	K & LF	Roosting in park, previously seen in area
Southern Giant Petrel	18/8/05	Cape Pallarenda, Townsville	JW & MA	Very unusual; last record 1987
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	20/8/05	Lake Tinaroo, near Pelican Point	JL	Extension of normal range, records from Townsville
Black-chinned Honeyeater	22/8/05	Reed Beds Rd, Giru	JW	Uncommon
Wood Sandpiper	22/8/05	Morris Creek Rd, Giru	JW	Rare; few sightings in area



Plum-headed Finch
Barry Jahnke
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Padaminka

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

Thanks

Birds Australia—North Queensland is very grateful for the support given by **Member for Townsville, Mike Reynolds** for the printing of this edition of Contact Call



We regretfully advise of the sad loss of Gill Landsberg, of Cairns, who lost her battle to cancer. Gill was a mentor to so many, a keen birder and member of Birds Australia for many years. Gill will be missed by many.

kindest regards

BA North Queensland Group



Duck and quail hunting has been banned Queensland in a move welcomed by animal welfare groups. Environment Minister Desley Boyle yesterday (10/8/05) announced a permanent ban. A recent water bird population survey had revealed numbers at their lowest level since surveying began in 1984.



Pacific Black Duck
John Peter
© Birds Australia 2003

Courtesy Townsville Bulletin 11/8/05

Notice Board

- 🦋 **BANQG** has a club polo shirt embroidered with our logo, the Pied Imperial-Pigeon. This quality 100% cotton polo shirt will be available from October in a variety of sizes. They will be available at the Yungaburra markets, other events or from the Secretary.
- 🦋 **2005 Birds Australia Campout and Congress**, from 30th Sept - 7th Oct in Bendigo Victoria. "Challenges for Conservation in the 21st Century: Birds in a changing environment" Details on BA website.
- 🦋 **A Gouldian Finch** database is being collated by Del Richards to analyse recent sightings in NQ. Please contact Del if you know of any historic or recent sightings. Email del@finefeathertours.com.au

Welcome to our new members...

- 🦋 Dr D Gillieson, TRINITY BEACH;
- 🦋 Mr Peter Kirby, BLUEWATER PARK;
- 🦋 Ms D. Lambert, HYDE PARK;
- 🦋 Ms A. Mansfield, KURANDA;
- 🦋 J & K White, MOSSMAN;
- 🦋 Ms S. Yarrow, INNISFAIL.

Welcome to all our new members.
Please join us on any of our outings.
Check out www.birdsaustralia.com.au for an update of outings in our region.



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Please send items for December 2005 Contact Call by Mid November to:

Helen McLaughlin, Secretary, PO Box 37, Belgian Gardens 4810 or Email Helen at helen_marty2000@hotmail.com