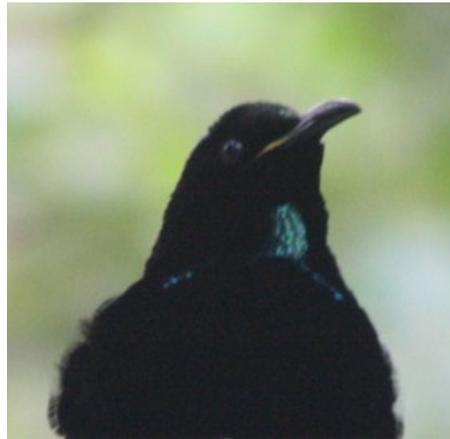


# Contact Call



Photos courtesy of Karen Doyle



## Victoria's Riflebird

The Victoria's Riflebird, *Ptiloris victoriae* also known as Duwuduwu to the local Aboriginal people, is a bird of paradise endemic to the mountain rainforests of the Wet Tropics region between Paluma and Cooktown, where it resides year-round.

The smallest of the three riflebirds, it measures between 23–25 cm. The male has an iridescent purple sheen plumage, which becomes more blue-green on the head and more bronze on the lower breast. The throat is velvety black with a metallic green and blue triangular patch in the center. The female has a pale eyebrow and the buff under parts faintly barred with brown. Their call is a loud rasping "y-a-a-a-s-s".

They clamber around the trunks of trees probing in crevices and under bark for insects. Although the bulk of their diet is fruits from the trees, some of which they peel by holding the fruit with one foot and removing the skin with their bill. Small parties collect at fruiting trees and chase off other frugivorous birds.

A common species in its limited range, the Victoria's Riflebird is evaluated as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

When the male begins to display, he erects the feathers of his throat and sides to accentuate the bright colours of his plumage in the shafts of sunlight that pierce the dimness of the rainforest. He curves his rounded wings above his body and tilts his head back to expose his chin and throat to the light and then moves from side to side in a fashion that looks almost mechanical.

The female is attracted to the male's display post by his raspy 'yaass' call, which becomes softer and more tuneful during the display.

The pair then face each other closely and each bird raises and extends its wings forward alternately in an increasingly rapid rhythm. Finally the male embraces the female with both wings and copulation ensues.

The Victoria's Riflebird was discovered by John MacGillivray for John Gould in 1848 and is named after Queen Victoria.



## From the Desk of the Acting Convener

I am back in the chair temporarily following Ivor's resignation and until the AGM and Formation Meeting of BirdLife Northern Queensland. Birdlife will have two regional groups in north Qld, BirdLife Townsville being the other. For those of you who live in their catchment you will automatically be members of that group but I hope you will elect to receive our newsletter as well. You may be members of more than one branch and I think that means regional groups. Because of our complex and different structures and history, the transition period of the merger has been fraught and things will continue to develop. Unfortunately this has distracted your committee from organising as many activities as we would like.

Talking of the committee, we will need more members to take on this responsibility. We have the basis of a team but new blood is welcome. See the notice for the AGM weekend program.

Wishing you pleasant birding surprises, Alan Gillanders.

## From the Editor

I hope you enjoy the new layout of the first edition of Contact Call. I chose to name it 'Victoria's Riflebird' as a fitting glamorous first newsletter.

But don't limit yourself to just one newsletter because all BirdLife branches newsletters can be found on the BirdLife Australia website.



A rare sighting for most people, this Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo made an appearance in the middle of a Birds Australia North Queensland committee meeting that was being held on the Atherton Tableland.



Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo ~ Photo courtesy of Ian Montgomery - [www.birdway.com.au](http://www.birdway.com.au)

## Committee

Acting Convener

Alan Gillanders

Secretary

Murray Hunt

IBA Coordinator

Graham Harrington

Website Administrator

Vacant

Members

Beth Snewin

Elna Kerswell

Kath Shurcliff

Treasurer

Ian Northcott

Birdlists & Brochures

Dominic Chaplin

Activities Coordinator

Sandi Oswald

Newsletter Editor

Karen Doyle

Contact us

BirdLife Northern Queensland Committee

email: [banq@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:banq@birdsaustralia.com.au)

[www.birdsaustralianq.org](http://www.birdsaustralianq.org)

## Buff-breasted Button-quail

A successful search for the Buff-breasted Button-quail was carried out by BANQ in December 2011. Following lengthy research into sightings over the last ten years, 13 volunteers surveyed an area near Lake Mitchell and also at Mt Mulligan.

The Buff-breasted Button-quail is perhaps Australia's second rarest bird. In recent years it has been recorded in very low numbers on the dry infertile rocky hillslopes West of the Great Divide. Although there are hundreds or perhaps thousands of square kilometers of this habitat, this area is very sparsely populated. It is even more rarely visited by birders. Coupled with this low density, clear identification, even by experienced birders, is very difficult. A button-quail is usually viewed at best as a brown blur visible for a few seconds as it races away from the observer before plunging back into grass cover. The BBBQ has never been photographed and its call has never been recorded.

The Birds Australia, Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010 (Garnett et al.) lists the following

Conservation Objectives:

1. Stable numbers at monitored locations
2. Conservation burning for the species at least at 1 site

Information Required:

1. Reliable means of detecting the birds
2. A photograph and sound recording
3. Better knowledge of distribution, life history & ecology
4. Impacts of fire, cattle & pigs on habitat.

### Lake Mitchell Truck Inspection site

This is the site where we believe we recorded a BBBQ . 21km North of Mareeba the road widens for a truck

inspection area. There is a car park here and a track leads towards the hills. Similar habitat exists for perhaps most of the way on the East side of the road between Mt Molloy and Mareeba but this is the easiest place to park. This is currently the best known site for the BBBQ and there are have been several recent claims here.

This area had been burnt about four months previously. We originally thought it would not be suitable but in late November after a few recent showers, fresh grass was coming up, not too thick and a lot of seed was forming. This is perhaps very good habitat. The burning may well accidentally fit conveniently with the conservation burning objectives of the Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010

During our survey 4 Brown Quail, 3 Painted Button-quail and one bird believed to be a good candidate for a female Buff-breasted Button-quail were recorded.

**Mount Mulligan** (50 km North of Dimbulah, 60 km west of Mt Molloy)

BBBQs were recorded here in 2004. There is a vast expanse of rocky hillslope at the base of the mountain. This is the site of Australia's worst ever mining disaster. In 1921 75 coal miners were killed in an explosion that was heard as far away as Mt Molloy. Birding in the deserted ruins of the township, the fluting calls of currawongs echoing off the red cliffs of the giant monolith towering above, is a spooky and surreal experience.

It was very dry here after no rain for many months but grass was still fairly thick. 7 Brown Quail were recorded.

More details of our research and survey are found on our website. We are thinking of making the BBBQ survey a regular BirdLife Northern Queensland event.

Dominic Chaplin



The winners of the 2011 Photography Competition are out and displayed on facebook and the website.



Our new website is live now! It is the place to go for everything about Australia's birds and their conservation.

Explore, Learn, Discover, Enjoy!  
[birdlife.org.au](http://birdlife.org.au)



Photo courtesy of Dominic Chaplin - [www.pinecreekpictures.com.au](http://www.pinecreekpictures.com.au)

## Michaelmas Cay

In January, the inaugural BirdLife Northern Queensland outing to Michaelmas Cay was a great success. Although rather hot, all participants enjoyed perfect sea conditions, smooth and calm, great for enjoying the wildlife both above and below the water. The Seastar boat was selected. This is the first boat to arrive and it's small friendly and personal nature makes it a great choice for a day out.

January was chosen as this coincides with the tern's breeding period. The terns were gathering in large numbers with plenty of nests and chicks present. With no predators these sea birds were all extremely tame and the chicks were even more tame. They would walk right underneath you in an attempt to find some shade. One chick spent the morning sheltering beside my camera bag in an attempt to get cool.

The Brown Boobies had a fixed perch and would vigorously repel all invaders. All possible perches were taken up and anyone sitting still for long enough could become a vantage point. All over the island large colonies of birds were gathering. Some birds mixed it up a little but most preferred to stay in groups of the same species.

In recent years Red-footed Boobies have been present out on Michaelmas Cay. One intermediate phase morph was present. The Red-footed Boobies seem not to like the Cay itself but prefer to rest on boats moored nearby. We had one distant view of this bird sharing a tender.

We had originally planned to make a careful count of all the species present. But with such large numbers coming and going, an accurate count is extremely difficult. It is only possible to walk on a smaller portion of the island to

avoid disturbing the colonies but the Seastar captain kindly took us around the back of the island where we could get better views of some of the shy frigatebirds and Brown Boobies.

We made a very rough estimate of the numbers present to give an idea of what was present:

Lesser Frigatebird 1  
Great Frigatebird 3  
Red-footed Booby 1  
Brown Booby 60  
Ruddy Turnstone 20  
Silver Gull 20  
Crested Tern ~1000  
Lesser Crested Tern ~1000  
Sooty Tern ~ 5,000-8,000  
Common Noddy ~10,000-15,000  
Black Noddy 3 Seen but probably more overlooked  
Black-naped Tern 3 near the Cay but none on land

After a few hours at the Cay we headed the short distance over to Hastings Reef. Several Black-naped Terns and a couple of Bridled Terns, not seen on Michaelmas Cay were present. Conditions at Hastings Reef were perfect for snorkelling. Turtles and sharks were seen but for me the highlight of the day was not a bird but the experience of swimming amongst a slow moving school of 20 giant green Hump-headed Maori Wrasse. This was described to me as like swimming with herd of dinosaurs. See the website for more beautiful images [http://www.birdsaustralianq.org/reports/michaelmas\\_cay\\_2012.htm](http://www.birdsaustralianq.org/reports/michaelmas_cay_2012.htm)

Dominic Chaplin

### Birding the southern Atherton Tablelands

A small but enthusiastic band of birders gathered outside the Butchers Creek School in the misty morning. Members from Townsville, Innisfail and Mossman joined one local to search the rainforest edges between there and Bartle Frere. Thankfully the local had extra wet weather gear.

Even before we had gathered many good birds had been seen and a mammal specimen gathered for the Museum of Tropical Qld. Buff-banded Rails fed along the roadside. A white phase Grey Goshawk plummeted past one car and both species of swifts were seen flying with Australian Swiftlets. Later White-throated Needletails were seen hawking just over rows of tea.

As we sorted plans for the morning a *Gallinago* snipe was seen to circle the school, our group and the then the community hall before disappearing over a bamboo plantation. No species identification was made but there was some jocular speculation.

We did not stop for the View at Lammonds Hill on the way out as there was none but the cloud had lifted by our

return. Our first walk reviled a few of the rainforest edge specialists but the birds were keeping fairly quite in the gloom. More birds appeared on the second section to the east. The third walk hit pay dirt though: three species of monarchs, three parrots and three finches. The highlight was the second group of Blue-faced Parrot-Finches. These birds were chasing each other around, feeding and sometimes sitting out in the open for extended periods. At one stage I responded to an alarm call (human) to see a BFPF flying straight for my head.

After a late morning tea four of the party went to view the bower of a Golden Bowerbird at Mt Hypipamee where the bird is still working with sticks though not adding decorations at this time. He is taking opportunistic advantage of a branch fall to reform his bower. Strangely he is still working on his secondary tower from this last season too. It will be interesting to see what becomes of this bower next breeding season.

Alan Gillanders

#### **Saturday 21 April Final AGM, BANQ and Formation Meeting, BirdLife Northern Queensland**

Venue: School Hall, State School, Maple Street, Yungaburra.

- 3:00pm Afternoon Tea
- 3:30pm Welcome
- 3:40pm Illustrated talk on IBAs by Cheryl Gole
- 4:30pm Final AGM, BANQ
- 4:45pm Formation Meeting, Birdlife Northern Queensland
- 6:30pm Bring a Plate Dinner
- 7:30pm Talk on Bird Photography by Martin Willis



Pale-yellow Robin ~ Photo courtesy Karen Doyle

### BirdLife Townsville

BirdLife Townsville would like extend an invitation to BirdLife Northern Queensland members to join in all or part of our Easter Campout based in Atherton at the Woodlands Tourist Park, 141 Herberton Road, Atherton (1800 041 441). The program will run between **Friday 6 April and Monday 9 April**. All members are welcome to attend all or part of the program and the Townsville members would gratefully accept BirdLife North Queensland members guidance to the special birding spots of the Tablelands. For further details or to register an interest please contact Ian Boyd at [ninox45@bigpond.com](mailto:ninox45@bigpond.com) or phone 4778 1945.

### BirdLife Northern Queensland

## Call for nominations Birdlife Northern Queensland

Nominations are called for the following positions to be elected at the BirdLife Formation Meeting on Saturday 21 April 2012 :

- ◆ Convenor
- ◆ Deputy Convenor
- ◆ Secretary
- ◆ Treasurer
- ◆ Committee Members (8)

Alan Gillanders  
Acting Convenor

## Notice of AGM & Formation Meeting Birdlife Northern Queensland 3pm Saturday 21 April 2012 Yungaburra

The Formation Meeting of Birdlife Northern Queensland is called to consider the following agenda:

1. Apologies
2. Report for 2011
3. Declare BA AGM closed
4. Election of committee and officers for BirdLife Northern Queensland
5. General business

Alan Gillanders  
Acting Convenor

## For Coming Events

Visit the websites  
for up to date details  
[www.birdsaustralianq.org](http://www.birdsaustralianq.org)  
[www.trboc.org.au](http://www.trboc.org.au)

### Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats. With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

#### Add your voice



[birdlife.org.au](http://birdlife.org.au)

## Birdlife Northern Queensland Committee Nomination Form

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

Nominated by: \_\_\_\_\_

Seconded by: \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby accept this nomination:

\_\_\_\_\_

(signature of nominee)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form before 8 April 2012 to:  
The Secretary, Birdlife Northern Queensland,  
PO Box 531, Port Douglas Q 4877

Alan Gillanders  
Acting Convenor