Varied Lorikeet

The Varied Lorikeet is 19cm long. It is mainly green with short yellow longitudinal streaks. The forehead, and crown are red. The beak is red, the bare eye-rings are white, the lores are bare, and the irises are orange-yellow. The upper breast is mauve with longitudinal yellow streaks. The legs are bluish-grey. In the female the red on the head is less extensive, and the breast has duller colours. Juveniles are much duller and mainly green with an orange forehead, pale-brown iris, and a brown beak that is orange at the base. They mate from April–August and lay 2–4 white eggs in a tree hollow lined with eucalyptus leaves.

This lorikeet is resident in tropical lowland eucalypt and melaleuca forests, wetland and grassland areas in northern Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia. These birds are nomadic, following the flowering regime of eucalyptus and melaleucas within its range. Their movements are erratic and unpredictable. Varied Lorikeets are active and acrobatic and are very striking as they climb about a tree covered in blossom. They congregate in large numbers and their piercing call is deafening as the flock moves from tree to tree. Within BirdLife Northern Queensland, they are regularly observed in Cloncurry and Mount Isa.
From the desk of the Convenor

“Birds Australia and BOCA are dead – long live BirdLife Australia!”

We are reminded of the transition of our own Head of State, as last month we heralded the final meeting of Birds Australia North Queensland, and the formation of BirdLife Northern Queensland. And we have a new, strong and energetic committee, already brimming with ideas and know-how to energise all our members.

We have had our first committee meeting, and everyone has put up their hand to get stuck into the work of organising our new branch. Expect to see a full program over the coming 12 months, including:

◊ monitoring of our Important Bird Areas, such as Silver Plains, Atherton Tablelands and Southern Gulf for Sarus Cranes, Mt. Isa to Lawn Hill and Wollgorang spinifex grasslands for Carpentarian Grasswrens, and several IBAs in the Wet Tropics for Golden and Tooth-billed Bowerbirds;

◊ distributional surveys of enigmatic endemic species such as Buff-breasted Button-quail and Fawn-breasted Bowerbird;

◊ regular outings and presentations, likely to rotate to different centres in our region

◊ educational activities such as the always popular “Wave the Waders Good-bye” and “Birding for Beginners”;

◊ research support for threatened species such as Golden-shouldered Parrots, Southern Cassowary, Carpentarian Grasswren and Sarus Cranes;

◊ regular bird surveys as a contribution to conservation at Yourke Reserve (Bush Heritage) and Mungkan Kandju National Park.

If you have suggestions of what you would like to see your group undertake, or even better if you can offer to organise an activity, please contact any of the new committee members below, or via northernqld@birdlife.org.au. We would love to hear from you!

Great birding to you all,
Kath Shurcliff

Committee

Convenor -
Kath Shurcliff

Deputy Convenor -
Alan Gillanders

Secretary -
Murray Hunt

Treasurer -
Ian Northcott

IBA Coordinator -
Graham Harrington

Birdlists & Brochures -
Dominic Chaplin

Conservation Coordinator -
Martin Willis

Website Administrator -
Mikey Kudo

Activities Coordinator -
Doug Herrington

Crane Count Coordinator -
Virginia Simmonds

Newsletter Editor -
Karen Doyle

Member -
Martin Cachard

From left Kath Shurcliff (Convenor), Doug Herrington (Activities Co-ordinator), Murray Hunt (Secretary), Ian Northcott (Treasurer), Mikey Kudo (Website Administrator) and Virginia Simmonds (Crane Count Coordinator). Graham Harrington (Important Bird Areas Coordinator) took the photo.
Wave the Waders Goodbye

Before the annual gathering of north Queensland birders on the Cairns Esplanade to wave the waders goodbye for another northern summer, a workshop on identification was held. Some of the attendees have been struggling with wader ID for years but one was a lady just off the plane from North America. The Shorebird 2020 resources proved valuable not only in the workshop but in the field. In Cairns we are lucky to be able to go from our presentation room, across one lane of traffic and a little grass and the birds are there, at our feet almost.

More than 35 members and guests enjoyed a beautiful sunny afternoon and many wonderful birds; some in near full breeding plumage. Some of our summer residents including Red-necked Stints had already left but those remaining were bolstered by more southern sojourners like Red Knots. Having both breeding and non-breeding plumages on display was helpful to those wader wonderers and when confusion species appeared side by side it was even better. There are few places in the world where it is easier to watch waders than the Esplanade of Cairns.

Words by Alan Gillanders
Photos courtesy Greg Bortolussi
Cattana Wetlands

At 7am on Sunday 21 May, the BirdLife NQ group had a lovely birdwalk at Cattana Wetlands, Smithfield, on the Cairns Northern Beaches. We had a pretty good turn out, which included some of the BirdLife NQ Committee and members. The weather was sunny but a little too windy for my liking!

But straight away next to the car park we heard Lovely Fairy-wren, but unfortunately we couldn’t get onto them. They usually show themselves here at this spot pretty well, but not today!! As we headed into the wetlands proper we noted an abundance of Brown Honeyeaters, some of which were nesting. They seemed to have occupied the usual areas where the Brown-backed Honeyeaters always breed in the spring - interestingly, not many Brown-backeds were seen at the wetlands through the morning, where they are normally in very good numbers.

The next highlight was a calling White-browed Crake in the very first pond on the left of the path from the car park - unfortunately this bird didn’t show either!!

The main wetlands themselves didn’t support many waterbirds which is quite normal, with the numbers usually building up much later in the dry season. The usual Green Pygmy-geese, Pacific Black Ducks and Darters, Little Pied Cormorants, a few Australian Grebes and a lone Royal Spoonbill overhead, were really all that were there. A lot of Fairy Martins with a smattering of Tree Martins flew overhead with the myriad Swiftlets and Welcome Swallows.

As we rounded the southern end of the main lakes we were heading into good WB Crake territory - Martin calls this “Crake Corner”, where they roost and are most easily seen at any time of day. Well, we got onto a few of them, but not with any great views - it was starting off to be that kind of day!! Waiting for more crakes to show at this spot, a juvenile Rufous Whistler turned up. This is just the second season that we have had this species reported here - last year was my first record for the Cairns lowlands at this very spot!! It wasn’t the same bird, as last year I also had a juvenile here, so it may just be an overlooked and more regular occurrence of them in this part of Cairns.

Finch numbers were very low with just the usual Nutmeg Mannikins in numbers and a few Chestnut-breasted as well. Crimson Finch were not all that co-operative, but we did manage a group of 6 or 7 young birds in the canal on the west edge of the wetlands - this is a very reliable spot for Crims at this location as there are a number of big Pandanus trees here which this species loves.

A lone juvenile Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike showed itself in this southern part of the reserve - normally we get about 10 birds here in this section in the cooler months - they are not an easy bird on the Cairns lowlands.

Raptors were disappointing, but we did manage a sub-adult White-bellied Sea-Eagle, a lone but big female Brown Goshawk and a lone Black-shouldered Kite.

The best birding of the morning was in the area from the western end of the boardwalk and back to the western end of the car park via the track that leaves the boardwalk midway. We had a lone Grey Fantail which isn’t all that exciting, except that this bird was either of the race ‘keasti’ (our local and very distinctive upland bird) or ‘albiscapa’ (a very rare straggler from Tasmania) - either way, it was a great get and a rarity to be either of these races! We will be attempting to narrow down the exact race to which this individual belongs due to its significance - it would be a great shame not to get this bird on the record!!

As we moved north off the boardwalk we came across a large mixed foraging flock and some confiding Double-eyed Fig-parrots feeding on (you guessed it) ... ummm... figs!! Among and adjacent to this mixed feeding flock were Little Bronze-Cuckoos (visiting southern race ‘barnardi’ and local resident Gould’s ‘russatus’), Rufous Fantails (regularly seen here), Large-billed Gerygone, Spectacled Monarch, Dusky and Yellow-spotted Honeyeaters, Leaden Flycatchers (including
many juveniles) and the beautiful White-eared Monarch, which had us going for a few seconds as it looked very odd - the bird was a very young one in its juvenile plumage!! It's not often you see them in that stage of plumage and it is decidedly uncommon here on Cairns coast, even in the cooler months. They are much easier in the foothills around Cairns, but oh, what a pleasure it was to see one happily foraging at head-height and only 15 meters away!!

Words and Photos courtesy Martin Cachard

Bimblebox


I just returned from Bimblebox Nature Refuge, where I helped Maureen Cooper do a bird survey. Maureen was the former owner of Padaminka Wildlife Reserve in Walkerston, near Mackay She was also a relentless campaigner against Mackay Regional Council’s environmentally destructive activities. In the end Maureen moved to Victoria and was able to sell her sanctuary to a bunch of fine people who are managing Padaminka as a wildlife sanctuary although no longer open to the public.

We found 89 species of birds on Bimblebox, although the important and critically endangered Black-throated Finch eluded us on this occasion. However we were rewarded with many other species of significance including Hooded Robin, Cockatiel, Black-chinned and Striped Honeyeater, Brolgas and most of the raptors.

To see Bimblebox and imagine it to be dug up and turned into an open cut mine would simply be imagining the unthinkable!

Bimblebox is a fine example of pristine woodland where, with a limited number of cattle grazing, a high level of biodiversity is being maintained. Bimblebox also contains a separate area of fine healthlands featuring a host of rare plants and wild flowers. To see all this being destroyed for coal mining would be horrendous.

One evening we went nightspotting with Karl the 12 year-old son of the owners. Before we could spot any owls, Karl spotted a feral cat and being barefoot he ran it down and after getting scratched and bitten strangled it with his bare hands. Well, it had to be done. Karl also goes out with his motorbike some nights to catch the occasional rabbit. On the days he is not schooling on the air he helps his father work the station.

The people who manage Bimblebox deserve high praise for the way they care for their land.
for much of the morning and occasionally thereafter, so morning counts from the fixed survey points (spaced 0.5 to 2km apart) included records of calling birds not visible in more densely vegetated areas. In these cases distance estimations were again used to approximately plot calling birds; experience over this period and on previous surveys gave an effective detection distance for unison calling birds of up to 2km; calling birds that were visible at various estimated or measured distances gave support to this as a maximum detection distance in calm conditions (which prevailed during these surveys).

Cranes encountered were identified, aged (see Grant, 2005) and grouped according to apparent breeding categories:

- Potential breeding pairs – two adults observed together, without immature birds; or unison calling birds heard.
- Possibly non-breeding pairs – an adult pair with a first-year immature bird accompanying; adults that bred last year are less likely to breed again in 2012.
- Non-breeding immatures – first or second year immatures in groups of varying size.

For each observation, birds were plotted from the fixed positions or from opportunistic sightings while driving, using GPS co-ordinates of observer position with compass direction and estimated distance of birds. Each sighting or aural record was accompanied by habitat observations, broad while in the field (e.g. floodplain, Eucalyptus woodland, etc.) and refined later by reference to regional ecosystem maps available from
Contact Call

Gulf Crane Surveys (continued)

DERM. Habitat condition was also recorded, in particular extent of flooding.

Results and Discussion

Using an effective detection distance of 2km, the area surveyed on the Gulf Track transect was estimated at 20 sq km, and yielded totals of 20 potential breeding pairs for Sarus and 7 for Brolgas. The density of presumed breeding pairs was thus 1 pair of Sarus per sq km and a total of 1.35 crane pairs, combining both species. Five pairs with accompanying immature young also were recorded in the survey area, and some of these, in some years, undoubtedly breed also, based on observations of pairs reaching the Atherton Tablelands with immatures belonging to successive age classes (J.Grant, unpublished observations), so the density of breeding pairs may be higher. The next scheduled survey trip (April) may shed some further light on this. Additional pairs were undoubtedly missed during surveys also, as most records came from the more open habitats, but many of the calling birds were in woodland; pairs in more densely wooded areas of the transect (approximately 30% of this survey area) were presumably often undetected if their calls did not coincide with observer census times. Total density of cranes recorded in this survey transect was approximately 4 per sq km, in a ratio of 3.4 Sarus to 1 Brolga. It was clear that pairs of each species occurred in the same habitat types, with most of the observed pairs in Regional Ecosystem (RE) 2.3.4 (Blue grass Dichantium spp. And Brown topEulalia aurea grassland on plains of cracking clays) and RE 2.3.10 (Coolibah

Eucalyptus microtheca and box E.chlorophylla low open woodland and Broad-leaved tea tree Melaleuca viridiflora woodland and savannah on plains). These presumed breeding territories (again more observations in April will make this clearer) appear to show a high degree of overlap in habitat use, contrary to some earlier suggestions, perhaps simply reflecting different behaviour in different locations, but may also indicate more competition than previously thought for breeding habitat. No observations were made of direct interactions between the species, though one observation of a ‘standoff’ by calling birds, one pair of each species, suggested neighbouring territories may be defended interspecifically.

Early morning surveys on the accessible part of the Burke Developmental road, in densely wooded habitats (mainly RE 2.3.10) gave estimated densities of Sarus at 0.8 pairs per sq.km, slightly below that of the Gulf Track survey area, and no Brolgas. Possibly the open plains are a more favourable habitat for both Sarus and Brolga.

Further fieldwork will help clarify some of the observations made in the March surveys. Reliable estimates of density will help in identifying some of the habitat types surveyed as Critical Habitat for one or both of the crane species; at present none of the habitats in the survey areas, mapped in the RE maps from DERM, are indicated as critical habitat for any species in the accompanying documents. Further evidence of habitat use by nesting birds of both species will be of use in deducing their inter-relationships and helping to work out the dynamics of the long-term interaction between the species.

References


John Grant
The trip to Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park, 15-30 June 2011, saw four of us (Amanda Freeman, Brian Venables, Steve Murphy and myself) combing the park on foot, by vehicle and helicopter in search of the elusive Carpentarian Grasswren. Graham Harrington was to have led the trip but was lured away to Europe instead.

A concerted effort was undertaken to find these grasswrens here in 2008 but none were detected and they were feared to have succumbed to widespread fire in 2006. Then sightings in the park in 2010 prompted the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) to commission a more thorough investigation to assess where and why they have persisted in the park and how fire management could be tailored to ensure their survival and even possible range extension.

We visited sites where Carpentarian Grasswrens had previously been recorded, revisited our 2008 survey sites (deemed potentially suitable habitat at the time) and then surveyed new areas considered suitable habitat on the basis of their spinifex cover, topographic complexity and fire history. We spent 74.5 hours, walking nearly 84km and using call playback over 400 times in our searches.

Four new groups of Carpentarian Grasswrens were located and a fifth group was confirmed still living in the same area they had been recorded eight months previously. All sightings were in areas of sandstone where 75-100% of the vegetation within 1km had not burnt for at least 5 years. Each site had features providing refuge from fire such as rocky ridges, outcrops or low cliffs, reflected in the extensive cover of relatively tall spinifex.

BANQ recommended the identification and protection from fire of these existing relic grasswren populations and their adjacent habitat. A mosaic pattern of burning would allow grasswrens to move into older spinifex, which they depend on for food, shelter, nesting and protection from predators.

On a lighter note, the only group we found by helicopter was really entirely thanks to the pilot who couldn't put us down near our intended point. Just when we were all thinking we were wasting our time in unsuitable habitat, they responded to our playback. We were so engrossed that Amanda had to quietly warn Brian to keep watching the birds and not step back as there was a large snake behind him. It turned out to be an olive python.

One of the groups Amanda and I stumbled on without needing to use playback. Amanda had gone on ahead and I was about to catch her up after a toilet break when I heard a Carpentarian Grasswren call very close by. We had been using playback unsuccessfully in the vicinity so could not be sure if the bird was responding belatedly or just happened to be passing. Unfortunately the toilet-break method didn't work again.

Sadly, by September 2011 all sites where we recorded Carpentarian Grasswrens had been engulfed in an extensive wildfire. A return trip is being planned to see if any of these birds have survived and what they need in the way of unburnt fragments to do so. We also hope to analyse the fire history of the park and locate where grasswrens may be able to survive long term, to inform the development of a fire management plan for the park.

On a slightly brighter note, DERM reports that Carpentarian Grasswrens have since been found elsewhere in an unburnt part of the park in October of 2011. However, without careful management we risk losing this fascinating bird from yet another part of its former range.

The full report can be found on the website www.birdsaustralian.q.org/grasswrens.

Ceinwen Edwards
Eastern Koel and reactions with some other birds

Each morning on most days, I put out a couple of bananas on a small feeding table outside my kitchen window, mostly for honeyeaters (Macleays, Yellow-spotted, Graceful, Lewin’s and Yellow). Great Bowerbirds and Olive-backed Orioles also take advantage — a male bowerbird has a bower just 20 metres away. Through April of 2011, an immature male Eastern Koel in partial adult plumage arrived and stayed for about 4 weeks before suddenly disappearing, no doubt to koel wintering grounds far to the north-west.

I was first aware of him when he suddenly appeared on the feeder one morning. My initial reaction was a sense of sorrow for him as I was sure the other birds would give him a hard time. Through the previous breeding season we had often seen a fully-plumaged adult male Eastern Koel being relentlessly chased by Noisy Friarbirds and others, no doubt creating a distraction while his female was depositing an egg in some luckless friarbird or oriole nest. So, I was fairly sure that this young bird would be hard-pressed to get a meal here.

How wrong I was! He absolutely took over the feeder. It was his! He perched right above it and mercilessly chased every bird that came near. Even birds as small as Graceful Honeyeaters were viciously chased away. Great Bowerbirds especially felt the brunt of his wrath. He would chase them right up through the trees until they left for cover further up the hill and then return to his perch over the feeder. In the end I was pleased to see him go!

This year (April 2012) another koel in similar part male plumage suddenly appeared at the feeder, much to my dismay. But it was somewhat of a relief when he did not display as much aggression as the bird from the previous year. However, there was no doubt that his very presence was domineering — he would come to the feeder and simply use his bulk to commandeer it. All other birds would immediately retreat but were never driven away as viciously as they were last year. After he had his fill, he would retreat to the denser foliage of the overhanging tree, stay there for much of the day and ignore the goings on at the feeder.

But after this koel had been here for about two weeks, there was a further interesting development. A pair of Rainbow Lorikeets arrived at the feeder. I usually discourage lorikeets as they will take over a feeder and before long there will be nothing but dozens of lorikeets coming to it. On this occasion, the lorikeets did their usual trick and chased other species off but not in an overly aggressive manner. When a Great Bowerbird landed on a branch near them, they would walk along the branch towards the bowerbird until it flew off. And when they flew down to the feeder, the first thing they would do was walk around it chasing all the smaller honeyeaters off.

I was watching the activity one morning with the two lorikeets on a branch above the feeder when the young koel came in to feed. The reaction of the Lorikeets was amazing. They flew at him in an incredibly aggressive manner, feathers raised on their heads and back of their necks, accompanied by aggressive screaming, all the while flying right at him as if trying to belt him with their wings — activity I have never seen a lorikeet perform previously. The koel, at least three times as big as his pursuers, immediately took off up into the tree, hotly pursued by the two lorikeets still screaming. He quickly left for a nearby tree. There was no doubt that he had more than met his match. (I wondered then what would have eventuated had they encountered the very aggressive male from last year).

After the lorikeets had seen him off, they returned to the branch above the feeder. The difference between their aggression towards the koel and their normal aggression displayed towards the other birds was nothing short of remarkable. Why they would be so aggressive to a cuckoo which should have nothing to do with their lives is puzzling. It would be quite understandable when a species is a host of the cuckoo but being a Psitticine ?

Another thing which was surprising was the tameness of both males of a species which gives the impression of a shy and skulking bird through the time when they are present in Australia. When I would reach out of the window to put food on the table, all other birds would retreat. However, both Koels would often sit undeterred within two metres while I did so — reminiscence of a pet animal waiting for and knowing there was food to come — in fact so much so that I did wonder if they had been hand reared by people. But after further observations over the time they were here with people coming and going, it was fairly obvious they had not.

Words and Photo courtesy Lloyd Nielsen, Mt Molloy
Birding the southern Atherton Tablelands

Common Mynas are native to the Indian subcontinent and south-east Asia, however they have been introduced to many other regions of the world either deliberately or by the escape of caged birds. They are now well established in Africa, Madagascar, Australia, New Zealand, the Arabian Peninsula and throughout the islands of the Indian and Pacific Ocean. Populations are now also found in parts of Europe, China, Japan, the United States of America and even Russia.

Their initial introduction to Australia was by deliberate release in Victoria in the 1860s and 70s, with releases in NSW also around this time. Birds from Melbourne were bought to North Queensland in 1883 and released at Townsville, Ingham and Innisfail to control locusts and cane beetles. They spread to Cairns, and by 1918 mynas taken from Cairns were used to start populations in Toowoomba. By 1931 Common Mynas had established in Atherton.

Common Mynas are extremely invasive birds that quickly dominate an area. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature lists the Common Myna as one of only three birds in its 100 most invasive species worldwide. They are extremely territorial and aggressive, and will often attack other species or their nests, even without an apparent motive. In time they become the most abundant bird in the area, further increasing their ability to exclude other species through mobbing.

Common Mynas often nest and roost around buildings, where they cause a nuisance with loud garrulous calling at communal night roosts, the fouling of areas with excrement or nesting material blocking downpipes or creating fire hazards. However, they are a hollow-nesting species, and it is through their competition for natural nesting hollows that they have one of their largest effects on native species. Many of our native parrots, such as the Eastern and Crimson Rosella, are those losing vital nesting sites to the aggressive myna. Even mammals using tree hollows, such as the sugar glider, are vulnerable.

Once a native bird has established its nest, it is still not safe from attack. Common Mynas usurp or destroy active nests of other species, destroying their eggs and killing their chicks, or sometimes building their nest directly over the eggs or chicks of the original species. Active nests of parrots can be lost in this way, as can the nests of kingfishers, which utilise hollows that they excavate into termite nests. Even Australia’s largest kingfisher, the Laughing Kookaburra, can have its young killed and nest taken by Common Mynas.

Often mynas will remove another species chicks from a nesting hollow, but will not use the hollow themselves. The interference in the breeding of native birds may be an intentional strategy to reduce competition from other species and allow domination of the area. The harassment of adult native birds such that they are unable to feed their chicks can similarly cause their breeding to fail and allow the Common Myna to prevail.

But the affect on the breeding success of native species goes beyond competition for nesting hollows, for Common Mynas are also known to be nest predators, feeding on the eggs or chicks of native species. This has been well documented in overseas studies. For example, Common Mynas were found to be the main predator of Sooty Tern nests on Ascension Island (accounting for 25% of failed clutches), are the major egg predators of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters in Hawaii and were found to be undermining the recovery efforts for the endangered Tahitian Flycatcher by predating on their nests. There is anecdotal evidence of mynas attacking the nests of native doves, sunbirds and other species around Cairns.

Common Mynas are a bird that lives commensurably with humans, and as such is concentrated in urban or rural habitats. For most of us, this is also the area were we have our most intimate interactions with native birds and wildlife. It is the place where we wonder at the sunbird building its intricate nest on the porch, enjoy the Willie Wagtail fussing around the back lawn or the parrots performing acrobatics in the trees at the park. As the Common Myna increases in number and extends its range, we will see less of our much loved native birds. We will never completely eradicate the Common Myna, but if we can reduce their numbers, it will at least give our native birds a chance to persist in our human environments and continue to enrich our daily lives.

It was the desire to reverse the increasing dominance of Common Mynas that led to the launch of the Cairns Rotary Remove Indian Myna campaign in November 2011. The program has received tremendous support from the general public. Traps are produced by the Cairns Menshed and sold at cost (currently $75). By mid-May, 572 traps had been sold, with 150 orders outstanding. Well in excess of 10,000 mynas have been trapped and humanely euthanased. A similar program has been running in Canberra since 2006, and by the end of 2010 had resulted in Common Mynas retreating from being the third most abundant bird in Canberra gardens to the fourteenth. Hopefully we can achieve similar outcomes in Cairns. I’m sure our native birds would chiper their agreement. Further information on the program can be found by phoning Peter Goulding on 40544311, by email at info@cnsrim.org.au or on the website http://www.cnsrim.org.au.
A Red Jungle Fowl is a *Gallus gallus* and a *Galletto* in Italian is not an ice cream but a "rooster" or "cockerell" and a *motocicletta* is a motor cycle and when you see a *galletto* illustrated on a *motocicletta* then *Passerotto mio* (an italian love saying... literally my little bird) it is a 1950’s Moto Guzzi, 160 cc, half motorcycle - half motorscooter, favoured by the local priests getting about the narrow lanes of Italy without getting their cassocks or cinctures caught in the workings and thus ending up unceremoniously under a donkey.

The Galletto was built by a Carlo Guzzi who was a bit of a legend when it came to designing motorbikes. It combined the convenience and protection of the motorscooter and the handling and performance of a motorcycle.

Which reminds me about the two elderly nuns that were riding their parish motorbike from the bottom of Italy to Milano in the north on a pilgrimage to the duomo di Milano. Allegedly they were on a similar motorbike to the one above. Anyway, anyway, anyway... they were preceding along the autostrada (motorway) at a sedate nunly speed as you would expect from two geriatric brides of Christ and consequently holding up all the traffic when a carabinieri police officer pulled them over.

Scusi sister, said the police officer, you’re going too slowly, could you drive a little faster.

Bless you officer, replied the nun, but I saw the signs with 25 on it and assumed that was the speed limit.

No sister, replied the officer, that’s the route number for the autostrada, the actual speed limit is 100.

The carabinieri noticed that the nun on the pillion seat was looking a little shattered, her teeth were rattling and her hands were locked in a death grip around the waist of the nun-rider. What’s the matter with your sister on the back, asked the officer.

Oh, that’s probably because we’ve just got off autostrada 215.

With thanks from Chris Shaw

http://topbirdsandeveryfing.typepad.com/top-birds-everyfing/
The monsoon arrived late this year and with it some unfortunate casualties. When driving the Karumba-Normanton Road (Matilda Highway) we came across a number of dead birds, who had scrambled out of the water and on to the only dry land around - the road. Whilst investigating a very stoic Buff-breasted Rail who refused to leave her spot we saw the reason. A day old chick stuck in a puddle with just its head sticking out and only just. Sigh..... I hate seeing suffering, so that leaves you with either tapping the poor thing (yuck) or trying to do something to help. We chose the latter and picked it up (aprox 1/2 the size of a newly hatched chicken) and held it closely until it could dry out and brought it home in the pelting rain. The only fortunate thing is that rails appear to eat anything so it was slurping through a diet of slushy minced cat food, things seemed to be going so well, as it survived the night although didn't look great but we were still hopeful. Unfortunately, it was not to be and the little guy passed away. It is not the outcome we would have liked of course, I was rather looking forward to the quick turn around that this species appears to have, rather than most of the other orphans / run away delinquents we have raised over the years (namely tawny frog mouths) who take forever to rehabilitate back into the big wild world but also includes wallabies, brolga, corellas, and Albert the egret who was interesting until he ate the smallest child's pet fish (a sure sigh he was ready to return to the wild). But, our theory is if you don't try then you never know and Dee would have died within the hour.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind people to drive slowly and carefully around flood waters not only because of the risk to yourselves but also the wildlife, in past years we have seen lap wings nesting on the roads for the same reason bravely guarding their eggs from the inevitable and gaggles of magpie geese on the road at dusk trying to find somewhere dry for the chicks to sleep. I also would like to take this opportunity to encourage people to have a go, it doesn’t always work out the way we plan but, it is a wonderful experience when it does.

Words and photos courtesy Glenn & Allison, Ferryman Cruises, Karumba.
From the Editor

I hope that you’ve enjoyed reading your newsletter. I look forward to receiving your comments, feedback and contributions. Why don’t you consider a contribution to the September edition? I’d love to receive your email by August 22.

But don’t just stop at our newsletter, all branch newsletters are now on the BirdLife Australia website—have a look around, there’s lots of news and information.

Callender of Events

June
- Mungkan Kandju Survey – cancelled
- 9-11 ~ Campout at Kingfisher Park Julatten – BirdLife Townsville, Contact Ian Boyd

July
- 14 ~ Committee meeting – CWA Hall in Port Douglas
- 14 ~ club meeting with speakers and sausage sizzle
- 15 ~ Mt Lewis morning birding, contact Doug Herrington - 4098 1889
- 20-22 ~ Minnamoolka Station, Mt Garnet Campout, contact Dom Chaplin dominicchaplin@bigpond.com

September
- 1 ~ Crane Count. Contact Virginia Simmonds 4095 8126

October
- 12-19 Proposed Silver Plains Campout, contact Graham Harrington 4096 5051 or 0437 794 836
- 22-23 ~ Black-throated Finch waterhole count.

November
- tba ~ Mission Beach PIP Count, Committee meeting & Christmas dinner. Further details to be advised.

For Coming Events

Visit the websites for the latest details
www.birdsaustralianq.org
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