

Contact Call

Newsletter of BirdLife Northern Queensland

Volume 11 Number 4

December 2022

Summer is here, and so are the annual summer migrants

North Queensland is the summer destination for many migrating bird species. It's hard to miss the large flocks of raucous Metallic Starlings (*Aplonis metallica*) at this time of year. While some Metallic Starlings overwinter in our area, many, many more migrate from Papua New Guinea to our region each year to breed during the summer months. Metallic Starlings are very social, and can form large noisy colonies in nest trees, where their domed-shaped stick nests seem to hang from every twig and branch. And it can be a marvel to sit back and watch the late afternoon skies fill with clouds of Metallic Starlings seeking out places to roost for the night. Summer is certainly a rewarding time to go bird watching in the tropical north.



Adult Metallic Starling. Image courtesy of Dominic Chaplin.

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From the Convenor

By Ceri Pearce



Dr Martine Maron (left), President of BirdLife Australia, presents Graham Harrington with Honorary Life Membership.

In September this year, we were delighted to have Dr Martine Maron, President of BirdLife Australia, join us to participate in the Annual Crane Count. Following a rewarding afternoon counting Sarus Crane and Brolga that were coming in to a busy roost site, Martine attended the Crane Count dinner and awarded Graham Harrington (in person) with Honorary Life

Membership of BirdLife Australia. Graham's extraordinary long-term contribution to the Annual Crane Count made the occasion a perfect event to receive the accolade. Thanks to Ed Bell and Sanne Boland for organising the weekend's activities as well as the crane count support team and participants for their individual and team effort.

After the award ceremony, Martine provided an update on the strategic changes occurring at Birdlife Australia (website renewal, conservation, and participation strategy launches, etc), and then provided a fascinating presentation about her research on the aggressive, native Noisy Miner and its impact on woodland bird assemblages. She also discussed her research findings in relation to evaluation of noisy miner removal as a means to increasing woodland bird richness and abundance. The talk was thought provoking in its consideration of the ethical and practical dilemmas faced when trying to conserve species that have been impacted by a native bird. A very big thank you to Martine for travelling all the way from Brisbane to present the award and participate in the crane count. It was an honour to have her visit us.

We receive numerous invitations to participate in environmental and other social events but do not have a ready pool of volunteers who can organise our participation and set up and look after a BirdLife Northern Queensland (BNQ) stall/display. These are fun events, usually at markets and festivals engaging with the community about birds and BirdLife. If organisation and/or involvement in this kind of social activity appeals to you, please contact us at northernqld@birdlife.org.au

Finally, I just wanted to let you know that I will be retiring as BNQ Convenor at our next Annual General Meeting in March 2023. I've learnt so much about BNQ and the various activities we are involved in during my stint as Convenor and I never cease to be inspired by the joy, passion and commitment of everyone involved. If you are interested in the Convenor role or other committee positions, we are always on the lookout for bright new faces to help us deliver an exciting program of activities and projects. Our strong and active branch depends on your support, and also on the contributions of our committee members, and project leaders and their teams. Please don't hesitate to contact us to find out about how you can get more involved.

Wishing you great birding and all the best for the holiday season,

Cheers Ceri



BirdLife Northern Queensland Committee

Contact us at northernqld@birdlife.org.au

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Conservation Matters

By Peter Valentine, 15th October 2022

I hope everyone caught the news item about the Federal Environment Minister's commitment to zero extinctions. In addition to the commitment to 30% of our land area going into protected areas (mentioned in Conservation Matters in Contact Call Vol 11 No 3, page 4), the Minister's new Threatened Species Action Plan is called *Towards Zero Extinctions*. Currently there are over 1,800 species listed as Threatened, Endangered or Critically Endangered under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). Of these, the new *Action Plan* identifies 110 priority species including 22 bird species. No great surprises and scope for rather more work than is identified if zero extinctions are truly the target.

Within our region, priority species listed are Eastern Curlew, Golden-shouldered Parrot, and Red Goshawk: Night Parrot (?) and Plains-wanderer (?), might (doubtfully?) occur in our outback area. The Twenty Priority places in the new plan include the Eastern Forests of Far North Queensland, and Raine Island in the far northern Great Barrier Reef (GBR). Tanya Plibersek had this to say: *This Action Plan sets ambitious targets, such as preventing any new extinctions of plants and animals; protecting and conserving an additional 50 million hectares of Australia's land mass; and better managing feral cats, foxes and gamba grass.* These are excellent targets and we must hope that the government allocates sufficient resources and skills to achieve these outcomes.

Many of our members have been enjoying the opportunity to follow a pair of Peregrine Falcons nesting on a sloping ledge in the vertical walls of the crater at Mt Hypipamee National Park. Three eggs were laid by 5 August and then a lengthy brooding period followed with successful hatching, although one hatchling did not last long. The other two were well fed by the parents and grew rapidly as white downy chicks over the next few weeks. By early October flight feathers were replacing down and the chicks were engaging in wing-flapping exercises. On the BirdLife Northern Queensland (BNQ) Facebook Group page many photos were posted showing the progress of the nesting from eggs to fledging. Sadly, on 13 October the smaller of the two chicks attempted flight but failed, and drowned in the water-filled floor of the crater. The second chick continued to be fed by both parents and finally fledged despite several swims in the crater.

I recall that during my early birding years in the 1960s and 1970s there was grave concern for the Peregrine Falcon globally due to the widespread agricultural use of DDT and organophosphates.



The surviving Peregrine Falcon, full-fledged and ready to leave The Crater. Image by Peter Valentine.

Eggshell thinning was recorded everywhere and the species was in a grim situation. The banning of DDT allowed an impressive recovery and while remaining uncommon, the species is now considered secure. It was fascinating while watching the Mt Hypipamee family to see the great pleasure many visitors took in being shown the birds. A very public location with sometimes hundreds of visitors passing through the lookout meant the birds were quite accustomed to movement and human noises. Visitors from all over Australia and from overseas all expressed pleasure and awe at the sight. Sharing these encounters probably helps grow conservation commitment, much as the webcam Peregrine nests in high rise buildings have accomplished, including in Melbourne. While there are concerns about potential theft of eggs or chicks, the degree of public attention and exposure may have helped security, as well as the sheer walls of the rock face. There was perhaps at least one attempt by someone to fly a drone at the site and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) Rangers posted signs warning against the use of drones. Overall the very positive experiences probably advanced conservation interests.

The announcement that the NSW Government is going to raise the height of the Warragamba Dam has been followed by significant opposition including from BirdLife Australia (BA) due to the impacts on the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater. Head of Conservation for BA, Dr Sam Vine, points out that the thousands of hectares of forest that will be inundated upstream contain critical breeding habitat for the species. The proposal attracted serious negative comment when first raised last year due to impacts on the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage site. These impacts are on some of the forest areas that were not burnt during the horrendous bushfires in the previous summers.

It has now been revealed that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been conducted in an extremely prejudicial way with the Environmental Consultant told to reword certain passages and that after her resignation (to protect her professional reputation) some of the statements were deleted by her replacement. These included a paragraph stating the "removal and degradation of critical breeding habitat may lead to the loss of the local population which would represent a considerable increase in population fragmentation at the entire population scale" that was removed entirely.

An official inquiry by law firm MinterEllison identified the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) processes as managed by WaterNSW as not being in accordance with best practice. A cross party Parliamentary Inquiry has opposed the raising of the dam wall and offered alternatives. There is concern that the NSW Government is trying to avoid paying the full amount of any compensation cost from the dam raising by underestimating the actual impacts. It looks very like an opportunity for the Federal Government to get involved - we are talking about two Matters of National Significance: World Heritage and the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater, one of the Priority species in the new Action Plan. Over to you Tanya.

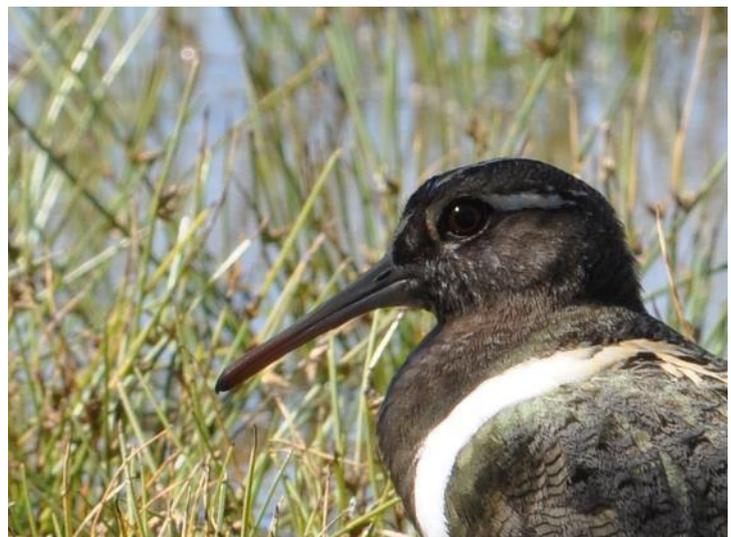
Here is a call out for help from all birders and others in our region and elsewhere. Concerns have been raised about our endemic and endangered Australian Painted Snipe. There have been very few sightings reported since January 2021, and it would be very helpful for anyone with a record of a sighting to contribute that information for an ongoing assessment. The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020 (Garnett & Baker, 2021) has estimated that the current population has significantly fallen and could be as low as 340 individuals. The main threats are ephemeral wetlands impacted by agriculture or weeds, and more frequent droughts. If anyone has any sightings please send your data to BirdLife Australia:

chris.purnell@birdlife.org.au Precise locations need not be disclosed.

One important habitat for this species is the Cayley Wetlands at Abbott Point, near Bowen. The species has been known to breed there, and a series of surveys (published in 2020) estimated a population of 35 individuals including some immatures in June 2012. Access to that area is limited due to the coal-loading facility. More recent records are known in Townsville and elsewhere. Please check your records and help provide information to BirdLife. In our region sightings in the past include Normanton, Mareeba, Mt Carbine, Atherton (Hasties Swamp), Cairns, Ingham and near Townsville.



A pair of Australian Painted Snipe, Bowra.



Australian Painted Snipe, Bowra.

Birding by the Sea

By Adrian Walsh

I love living and birding near the ocean. I think it's a hangover from my upbringing on the windswept Lancashire coast of north-west England. Yet, however different Cairns is climatologically and ecologically from my childhood haunts, it shares a critical thing in common – the meeting point of the land and sea.

There's something about that boundary that is embedded in my psyche, together with the birds I used to observe regularly: the wildfowl that would migrate in tens of thousands from their breeding grounds in the mysterious Arctic tundra – from Greenland, Iceland, Spitzbergen and Novaya Zemlya; and the waders that would be seen regularly in their company during the winter months.

The common calidrids (the typical sandpipers) were the Dunlins and Red Knots, and you would regularly see mesmerising murmurations as thousands of mixed-flock waders would take to the air along the shoreline. However, there was one calidrid that I loved to watch, but which was more difficult to observe on the coast.

So, as a young teenager, I'd hop on my bicycle most weekends and cycle 11 miles to an inland wetland RSPB reserve – Martin Mere, where I first became accustomed to the cacophony of wintering wildfowl, but also some waders. It was here, I'd be able to hunker down in one of the many excellent hides and watch the enigmatic Ruff.

The Australian Bird Guide describes Ruff as a "Large, gangly sandpiper with bizarre breeding plumages and behaviour." Although Ruff is a regular, yet rare visitor to Australia (with a handful of reports from the Cairns region), it was a commonly seen non-breeding visitor to the UK.

I was lucky enough to return to the UK in February and re-visit Martin Mere, where I was more than happy to acquaint myself with nine Ruff, which were possibly Reeve – the name given to the female Ruff. Having not seen one for many years, I had forgotten just how odd it looks in the flesh. You just can't mistake it for any other wader, never mind any other bird.

I like to think that it's the Hoatzin of waders – unique, slightly weird, yet also attracting a congratulatory admiration that it exists in the first place. It appears completely out of proportion, like an avian equivalent of that pot-bellied dinosaur, Therizinosaur. The group I saw were all adult non-breeding, with a knot-like bill, orange legs, a rotund white belly, and brown upperparts with distinct white edges to the feathers.

Ruff, however, get their name from the spectacular male breeding plumage, which resembles the fashionable decorative collars seen in 16th century England. Unfortunately breeding plumage has not been seen yet in an Australian specimen.

The foraging method has some similarities to a Common Greenshank: it's an exploratory wader that is fairly quick, with a tendency to frequently stand tall, and survey the surroundings, and sometimes turn back and forth and circle, whilst prodding the substrate.

Trying to pick a handful of waders to talk about is an almost impossible task for me. Most weekends I'll be scanning the mudflats of the Cairns Esplanade, checking the regulars, and seeing if anything unusual crops up. This time of year is particularly exciting, as the migration of waders from their Northern Hemisphere breeding grounds on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) inevitably brings birds that are moulting out of their breeding plumage, but it also brings the juveniles which, depending on the species, can be identifiable on a scale from fairly straight forward to a bit harder, then moving upwards from quite difficult to devilishly difficult, which is quickly followed by don't even try.

That's the part I love the most. It's the "What is that?" question that hits you with full force when you see the unfamiliar. There's a few pairs of waders commonly seen in northern Queensland that some birders have the most difficulty differentiating – the Lesser from the Greater Sand Plover, the Bar-tailed from the Black-tailed Godwit, the Great from the Red Knot, and the Grey-tailed Tattler from the Wandering. Of course there are many more, but the Red Knot is an interesting one because we do commonly get around 200 Great Knots feeding on the Cairns Esplanade, and the occasional Red Knot will be in the mix, so it's always great to re-familiarise oneself with the idiosyncrasies of that sandpiper as it attempts to hide in plain sight.

The Red Knot's main features that differentiate it from the Great Knot are the smaller size, drabber plumage, small chevrons along the flanks, and shorter bill. Depending on the distance from which you see the bird, some of those features are more noticeable than others and, paradoxically, it's actually easier to pick up the size difference at a distance, even when silhouetted against the tideline. However, one thing that is commonly overlooked is the Red Knot's foraging method.

Next time you find a Red Knot, or have one pointed out to you, observe it for 10 minutes in comparison to the Great Knots (as inevitably you will find it with its larger cousins). What you'll find is that it is a much busier and slightly faster forager. It's a subtle difference that, together with size, may just help you pick one out at a distance.



Red Knot, juvenile, Cairns Esplanade, September 2022

Almost every Red Knot I've seen on the Esplanade has been an adult non-breeding bird, but this year I managed to see a spectacularly plumaged juvenile. I most certainly had a "What is that?" moment, before realising, with the combination of size, bill length and buff breast, that it must be a young Red Knot. All the Australian bird guides I own don't quite capture the tones or contrast that I saw in this bird, but the key plumage identifier of pale fringes and dark submarginal line to the coverts is a perfect description of what you will find on a juvenile Red Knot.



Asian Dowitcher, juvenile, Cairns Esplanade, October 2022

Recently we had another celebrated juvenile wader visit our shores for a little less than three weeks – the Asian Dowitcher. This species is a highly-twitchable rare migrant that seems to show up in Cairns on average once every two to three years. The last time

for Cairns was in 2019, when I saw it briefly at high tide one afternoon. This time around, I managed to observe the dowitcher many times, and got a real sense of its 'jizz' and foraging behaviour. It's often compared to the Bar-tailed Godwit, with which it shares superficial similarities, but once you get a close (or even a far) look at the dark straight bill, with its bulbous tip, there's no mistaking this bird belongs to the genus *Limnodromus*. Seen next to a Bar-tailed Godwit, you can tell that it is slightly smaller, but the thing that really sets it apart is, again, the way it forages.

You'll often hear waders associated with the phrase sewing machine in terms of the probing action. However, that could be applied generically to most waders. The Asian Dowitcher has a metronomic, methodical, almost mechanically repeatable action – it seems to probe from once to thrice, then walk a step or two, and repeat. It's almost as if it's operating in the uncanny valley of an AI-coded automaton that hasn't quite figured out how to look 'real'.

I recently came across another striking juvenile wader that could be classed as fairly straightforward to identify unless you throw into the mix the fact that it is almost identical to another bird: the only saving grace being this other wader is an exceptionally rare vagrant. I'm talking about Pacific Golden Plovers and American Golden Plovers.



Pacific Golden Plover, juvenile, Cairns Esplanade, October 2022.

In northern Queensland the Pacific Golden Plovers frequent local salt marshes, the Cairns Esplanade and other known locations such as France Road turf farm. Their foraging style is shared amongst the plovers and is a stop-run-stop-probe affair. The definitive identification paper on separating the Pacific from the American Golden Plovers in the field (Johnson *et al.*, 2004) was written based on data collected from first year and adult birds in breeding plumage simply

because that was the only way the researchers knew which species was which. Even though there is minor variation in bill and tibia length, there is considerable cross-over in these measurements, so the most reliable feature is that in Pacific Golden Plovers only two to three primaries extend beyond the tertials, but in the American Golden Plovers it is four to five primaries. However, as no juveniles were used in the study, this may not be a reliable marker in the field for the younger birds. They noted that any extralimital records of these plovers may be "impossible to identify with certainty". The juvenile that I saw at the north end of the Cairns Esplanade had three primary projections and the tibia and bill did seem to be on the long side. However, really good close photographs are necessary to spend time on post-observational analysis of these features. So I'm not saying that this is a don't even try kind of wader, as the trying is where most of the fun is.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the superstar of north Queensland waders, the Nordmann's Greenshank, which we are all hoping will return for the 2022/2023 summer. However, I will have a paper published in Stilt (the Australian Wader Study Group's journal) in December 2022 that will delve into the details of my observations over two seasons, so please check that out.

**Newsflash. After finishing this article at 4pm on 30 October 2022, I went birding at Dunne Rd Swamp, near Cattana Wetlands in Cairns and, incredibly, discovered a very rare Ruff. It's the first time I've seen the species in Australia!

Adrian Walsh



Ruff, Dunne Rd Swamp, Cairns, 30 October 2022
(with Sharp-tailed Sandpiper on the right)



Ruff, Martin Mere RSPB, Lancashire, England, March 2022.

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A Quest for Riflebirds

By Thomas MacGillavry

The Birds-of-Paradise of New Guinea and tropical Australia represent some of the most staggeringly beautiful and unusual birds on our planet. While the ornate plumes of the males have been collected and treasured by Europeans since as early as the 16th century, and possibly as early as 50,000 years ago by native Papuans, it wasn't until the mid-19th century that Western naturalists were able to observe their spectacular courtships in the wild.

Perhaps the most notable of these Western naturalists was Alfred Russel Wallace, who spent many years observing and collecting Birds-of-Paradise in Australasia, and was instrumental in developing early evolutionary theory alongside Charles Darwin. It is without doubt that Darwin, too - despite never having seen a living Bird-of-Paradise - was greatly inspired by their beauty, which helped form what I consider to be his most unique contribution to science: the theory of sexual selection through female choice.

However, despite a long history of scientific interest in the Birds-of-Paradise, their remoteness has prevented all but a few dedicated researchers from conducting detailed studies on their courtship displays, leaving many questions about the behaviour and evolution of these spectacular birds unanswered.

In an attempt to remedy this, my PhD thesis focuses on the courtship behaviour of Victoria's Riflebird, a Bird-of-Paradise common in the Atherton Tablelands.

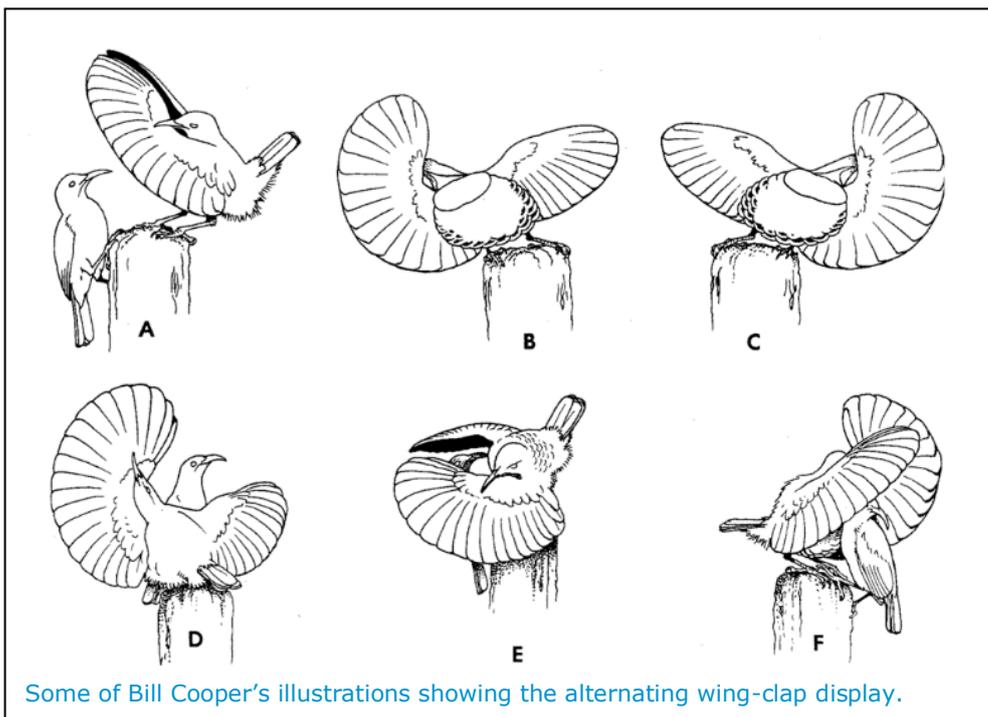


An adult male Victoria's Riflebird displays to a visiting bird, likely a female (photo courtesy of Martin Willis)

The first European to discover this species was John MacGillivray, who worked as a collector for the esteemed ornithologist John Gould in his famous expedition to Australia in the 1840s. Gould formally described the species in 1850, naming it *Ptiloris victoriae* in honour of Queen Victoria, thus beginning the tradition of naming Birds-of-Paradise after European monarchs.

The last scientific paper to be published on the courtships of Victoria's Riflebird was authored by none other than Cliff Frith in 1996, and illustrated by the renowned painter William (Bill) Cooper. Bill was even known to train the birds in his back garden to feed from his hand and enter his shirt pockets, a practice not uncommon among people living in the rainforests. This means that, to the envy of many a European, North Queensland is one of the few places in the world where Birds-of-Paradise may be included in one's garden birds checklist (though it should be noted that the feeding of wild birds is best avoided).

In their paper, Cliff and Bill described the basic elements of the courtship displays of Victoria's Riflebird, comparing it with the other riflebird species. The courts (sites where courtship happens) of these birds are typically vertical dead tree stumps, though I have seen many birds also displaying on horizontal branches and vines. On one occasion, an adult male was even seen displaying to a female on the shoulder of a person who was feeding them! While males call throughout their territories, one can often find them at their courts by



Some of Bill Cooper's illustrations showing the alternating wing-clap display.

following their harsh, hissing *yaass!* calls, which is somewhat infrequently followed by a second syllable.

Once a male spots a potential mate, he raises his wings above his head, forming what resembles a living satellite dish, during which he may also display his bright yellow gape. This has been referred to as the circular wings posture.

Anticipation then builds as the male slowly extends and flexes his legs until a potential mate finally lands on his display perch, at which point he will begin the more dynamic phase of his routine called the alternating wing-clap display, where he jerks his wings and head from side-to-side in alternating motions.

One can only try to imagine what this looks like from a female's perspective; a rustling blur of black and shining sapphire, complete with a sheen of sparkling blue-green which - owing to their more elaborate visual systems - must appear all the more spectacular when viewed through a bird's eyes.

One can also try to imagine what it is like for the male to produce this display. Any time I tried to re-enact it myself, I quickly became quite disoriented and dizzy. It is an impressive feat of motor coordination that males don't only perform such a display, but also do so in a way that accounts for the position of the female, all the while remaining balanced on a narrow perch.

Anyone who has seen an adult male Victoria's Riflebird display to a female may have noticed how carefully they adjust not only their position, but also their effort in response to their audience. Males appear to reduce the rate at which they clap their wings when females look away from them, but increase in tempo when they see that the female is paying attention.

This may seem obvious, but the ability of animals to flexibly adjust their behaviour according to what they think another individual is experiencing, seems to evolve only under certain ecological and social circumstances. In this case, it's certainly beneficial for a courting male to have a feel for what a visiting female is experiencing, as his reproductive success depends almost entirely on whether or not she finds him attractive enough to mate with.

Indeed, wooing a female requires considerable social and motor skills, which require prolonged periods of dedicated practice. This may - at least in part - explain why male birds-of-paradise, bowerbirds, and mannikins, to name a few, spend many years in drab plumage, looking very much like females, after which they grow their characteristic adult feathers.



A young male Victoria's Riflebird displays atop a dead tree fern (photo courtesy of Thomas MacGillivray).

Amazingly, to offset the reproductive costs of these long immature periods, young males may produce viable sperm and "sneak" copulations at the courts of adults!

While the immature males of some species spend at least some of their time cheekily stealing copulations from adults, much of their time is spent practicing their displays, and in a handful of species, immature males practice with each other. In the Victoria's Riflebird, for instance, drab-coloured young males are often seen practicing in pairs, and less frequently in groups of three or four.

Interestingly, when John MacGillivray first described the habits of immature male Victoria's Riflebirds in the 1800s, he thought they were fighting. He even mentioned that he managed to shoot three birds with one shot of his hunting rifle as they were so occupied with their "pugnacious" habits. While no scientific studies have been conducted on the topic, I am convinced what MacGillivray saw were practice displays, not acts of violence.

There may, however, be some truth to his original description. While young males may indeed cooperate to some extent to hone their skills, they may also compete with each other for practice time.

To test between these hypotheses, I am interested in applying methods originally designed for the analysis of human speech to the displays of immature male riflebirds. For instance, just like during conversations, humans take turns in speaking, though we may occasionally interrupt one another. Sometimes, a conversation may represent an exemplary bout of turn-taking, while at other times - during a heated argument, for instance - conversations are plagued by interruptions. Applying this to riflebirds, evidence of turn-taking suggests that males cooperate, while

significant interruptions during practice courtships would suggest that males compete for practice time.

This latter outcome may lead one to question why males practice together at all. My hypothesis is that, since males presumably benefit from practicing with a “dummy” female - much like how boxers practice with a sparring partner - some social interaction between males should persist, as young males search for their dance partners, even when they refuse to take fair turns.

While there is still much to be learned about the Victoria’s Riflebird, I worry about the future of this species, as it is currently classified as “Vulnerable” in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

The decline in populations of riflebirds is almost entirely due to the extensive clearing of their rainforest habitat. With the vast majority of birds occurring in old growth and 25-year regrowth forest, it is imperative to stop any further deforestation in the Wet Tropics and restore the areas that have been converted to pastures. If this doesn’t happen, it won’t be long before many of the Wet Tropics’ beloved endemic animals will have vanished from the planet forever - the main culprit being the world’s ravenous desire for beef.

Certainly, we must ask ourselves: is it worth wasting the world’s natural beauty for a luxury food we don’t need?

During my PhD, I hope to answer at least some questions about the courtship displays of these marvellous birds. However, I would consider much of this time wasted if I don’t manage to inspire people along the way to better appreciate nature, and strive for its conservation.

As the influential primatologist and conservationist Jane Goodall once said:

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”



Two young male Victoria’s Riflebirds practice their courtships together (photo courtesy of Thomas MacGillavry).

Monitoring for Wet Tropics Birds in Wooroonooran National Park - Project Update

by Ceri Pearce and Dr Amanda Freeman

Many of our special Wet Tropics birds are in trouble. The climate is changing, habitats and resources are shifting, but we lack information about some species' population trends. Not enough is known about most species' specific requirements to understand how or why climate change is affecting them. The *Monitoring for Wet Tropics Birds in Wooroonooran National Park* Project aims to re-establish bird monitoring by harnessing the skill and interest of Birdlife volunteers and other interested bird observers and using the Birdata app to capture and store data.

A Wet Tropics bird monitoring training package was developed by Dr Amanda Freeman and delivered at three free workshops to 22 participants in Sept 2022.

For those people who were unable to attend the workshops, the training manual and a recorded presentation is now available in the *Birds with Altitude* project area of the BirdLife Northern Queensland website <https://www.birdlifeq.org/birds-with-altitude>



Dr Amanda Freeman providing Wet Tropics bird monitoring training to participants at the Lake Barrine Workshop Saturday 3 September 2022, 10.00am – 4.00pm.



Dr Freeman explaining how to measure 200 m as part of 2 Ha, 20 min bird survey (Cairns workshop, Saturday, 24 September 2022, 9:00am – 12:00pm).



The training manual and a recorded presentation is available in the *Birds with Altitude* project area of the BirdLife Northern Queensland website <https://www.birdlifeq.org/birds-with-altitude>.

Since the training was delivered in early September, trainees and volunteers have been putting their new knowledge and skills to good use, undertaking 2 Ha 20 minute surveys and 500 m area surveys in Wooroonooran National Park. A historical comparison of surveys undertaken (based on data in Birdata) identified that the number of bird surveys completed in the National Park has increased dramatically in 2022 (see Figure 1), even in comparison with pre-COVID years. This is as a direct result of the training workshops and the enthusiasm of the volunteers who are keen to do something positive about monitoring threatened Wet Tropics birds.

Survey site selection is limited by ease of access to the national park, but nevertheless, quite a number of sites have been monitored across the area, as illustrated in Figure 2.

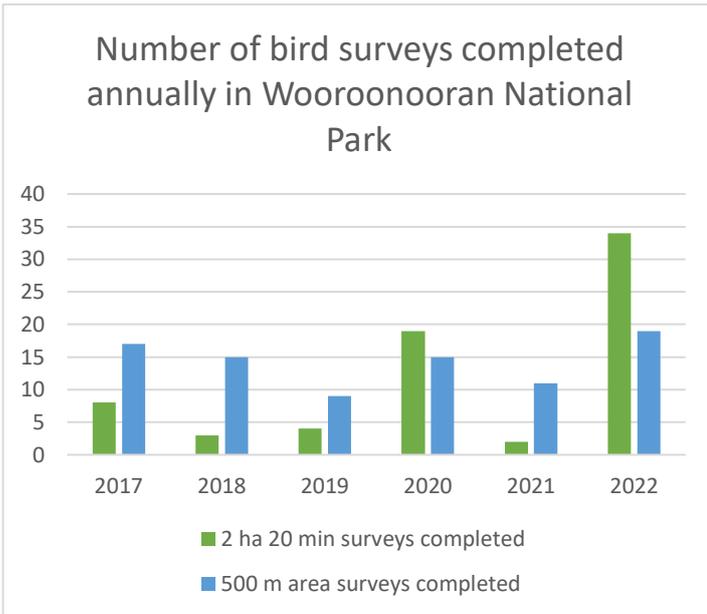


Figure 1. Number of bird surveys completed annually in Wooroonooran National Park. Since the training workshops started in early September, the number of surveys has increased.

For the 14 Wet Tropics endemic threatened birds identified in the Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020 (Garnett & Baker, 2021), knowing the altitude of the detection site is important as it helps us monitor bird species distribution and population for the effects of climate change, over time. Table 1 identifies the 14 threatened birds, and also which of the two survey methods have detected them in the last two months, and at which altitude. It is too early to glean any meaningful information from these results yet; however this monitoring is ongoing and it is hoped that over time, the data may reveal trends.

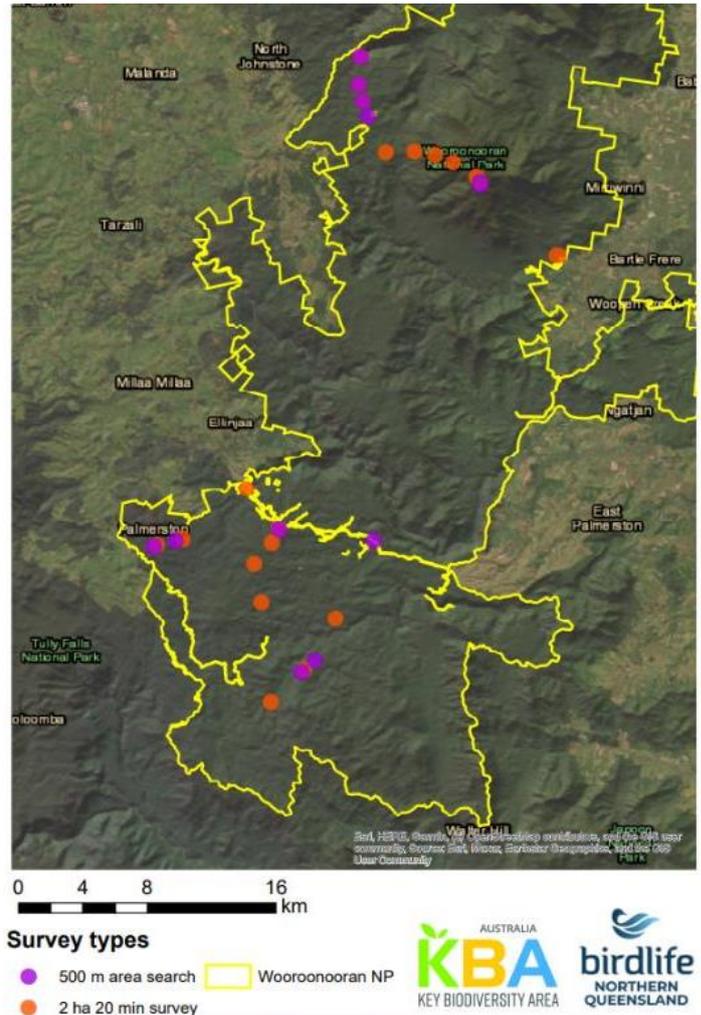


Figure 2. Map illustrating sites where 2 Ha/20 min surveys and 500 m area surveys have been completed in Wooroonooran National Park so far in 2022.

Table 1. Detection of threatened birds using two survey methods (data from September and October 2022)

Threatened species	2 Ha, 20 minute survey	Altitude (m) found at	500 m area survey	Altitude (m) found at
Wet Tropics King Parrot (<i>Alisterus scapularis minor</i>)	2 surveys	580 & 807	4 surveys	580 & 826
Tooth-billed Bowerbird (<i>Scenopoeetes dentirostris</i>)	14 surveys	540-1163	9 surveys	580-826
Golden Bowerbird (<i>Prionodura newtoniana</i>)	1 survey	1163	0	0
Wet Tropics Satin Bowerbird (<i>Ptilonorhynchus violaceus minor</i>)	3 surveys	752-807	1 survey	826
Little Treecreeper (<i>Cormobates leucophaea minor</i>)	9 surveys	540-1478	8 surveys	580-826
Fernwren (<i>Orescopus guttularis</i>)	2 surveys	839 & 1513	4 surveys	711 & 1501
Brown Gerygone (<i>Gerygone mouki mouki</i>)	9 surveys	647-807	8 surveys	580-826
Atherton Scrubwren (<i>Sericornis keri</i>)	1 survey	580	1 survey	580
Large-billed Scrubwren (<i>Sericornis magnirostra viridior</i>)	7 surveys	122-807	6 surveys	388-826
Mountain Thornbill (<i>Acanthiza katherina</i>)	0	0	1 survey	826
Bower's Shrike-thrush (<i>Colluricincla boweri</i>)	5 surveys	540-839	4 surveys	580-826
Eastern Whipbird (<i>Psophodes olivaceus lateralis</i>)	18 surveys	451-1513	13 surveys	580-1505
Victoria's Riflebird (<i>Lophorina victoriae</i>)	15 surveys	466-807	11 surveys	388-826
Grey-headed Robin (<i>Heteromyias cinereifrons</i>)	10 surveys	540-807	9 surveys	580-826



Brown Gerygone is just one of the bird species identified as threatened in the Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020 (Garnett and Baker, 2021). Image (C)John Barkla 2011 birdlifephotography.org.au

Why Wooroonooran National Park?

Because it's World Heritage listed forests cover the full range of elevation from the coastal lowlands to the tops of Queensland's highest mountain ranges at Mt Bartle Frere and Bellenden Ker. It is home to all the Wet Tropics endemic bird species, including those threatened by climate change, and it is stunningly beautiful.

The Monitoring for Wet Tropics Birds in Wooroonooran National Park Project is supported by a Queensland Government Community Sustainability Action Grant – Round 6 for Conservation – Community Engagement on Queensland's National Parks and State Forests: CSAP059.

And special thanks to Renee Cassels, our Communications Coordinator, who designed our Birds with Altitude/Wet Tropics Bird Monitoring Manual.



Nandroya Falls, Wooroonooran National Park. Take the walking track from Henrietta Creek camping area on the Palmerston Highway.

What can you do?

You can help by surveying for Wet Tropics birds and recording your observations in Birddata. In particular, you can join the challenge to survey birds in Wooroonooran National Park.

A video presentation about the project can be found here - <https://www.birdlifengq.org/birds-with-altitude>. The *Birds with Altitude* manual also has additional information about the survey methods and important safety information, as well as details of the accessible places in Wooroonooran National Park where you can visit and undertake bird surveys.



THE WOOROO NOORAN CHALLENGE

BirdLife Northern Queensland is running a competition to encourage bird monitoring in Wooroonooran National Park.

You could win a copy of the latest Compact Australian Bird Guide by Jeff Davies, Peter Menkhorst, Danny Rogers, Rohan Clarke, Peter Marsack and Kim Franklin (2021).

The competition winner will be the person who completes the most BirdLife Australia compatible surveys in Wooroonooran National Park and enters the surveys into Birddata.

The surveys must be undertaken between 4 September and 31 December 2022 and be entered in Birddata before 1 January 2023.

The winner will be announced in January 2023.



Wet Tropics subspecies of King Parrot. Image courtesy of Peter Valentine.

Looking for Golden Bowerbird

When BirdLife Australia President, Professor Martine Maron let us know that she had never seen a Golden Bowerbird, we couldn't resist trying to find one for her to see during her recent visit. Thanks to Alan Gillanders, Martine's wish came true. She was able to see a spectacular male Golden Bowerbird, decorating a fruit and lichen laden bower. Special thanks to Alan, <http://www.alanswildlifetours.com.au/>



Watching the male decorate his bower



All smiles having seen a Golden Bowerbird; Alan Gillanders, Marine Maron and Alison Faigniez.



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www.feathersnfriends.com.au

Hosts:
 Wendy and Richard
 244 Clacherty Road
 Julatten QLD 4871
 Email:
feathersnfriends@outlook.com

Birdlife Northern Queensland at Charley's Mt Edna property

By Ruth Medd

BirdLife Northern Queensland (BNQ) is collaborating with private landowner Charley's Chocolates to record 'Charley's birds'.

In 2022, Charley's Chocolates www.charleys.com.au expanded its property to include 80 hectares of endangered lowland tropical rainforest. This land had walking trails constructed when the property was a banana farm.

Charley's is a cocoa grower, Australian chocolate maker and seller, and a tourism destination for chocolate tours - <https://www.charleys.com.au/what-to-expect/>

The property as a whole comprises:

- a building with offices, accommodation, and space for 'chocolate events';
- cleared land of 40 hectares, some suitable for growing more cocoa; and
- endangered lowland tropical rainforest with associated flora and fauna.

Being an environmentally conscious enterprise, Charley's contacted Ceri Pearce to see if BNQ could assist with identifying the birdlife at Charley's. An enthusiastic yes was received.

BIRDING AT MT EDNA – THE PROJECT

This project involves BNQ's Ceri Pearce, Sandra Christensen and Greg Dawes, who walked the grassland rainforest tracks, identifying our birds.



A view of the rainforest

A BirdLife Australia standard survey method (500m area search) was completed during both visits which was entered into eBird.org (an initiative of Cornell University). Through a collaborative data sharing arrangement between eBird and BirdLife Australia, the data will later be uploaded into BirdLife Australia's Birdata as well.

An initial bird survey was completed on 4 September 2022, with a follow-up survey undertaken on 5 November 2022. It's early days, but already 54 bird species have been identified on the Mt Edna property.

Some of the notable birds are:

- Southern Cassowary (sub-adult);
- Torresian Imperial-Pigeon (now visiting the area from Papua New Guinea);
- Wompoo and Superb Fruit-Doves, as well as Topknot Pigeon and Brown Cuckoo-Dove;
- White-bellied Sea Eagle (adult and 2 juveniles) so evidence of successful breeding in the area;
- Wet Tropics endemic birds such as Macleay's Honeyeater and Yellow-spotted (Cryptic) Honeyeater, as well as the Wet Tropics subspecies of Eastern Whipbird which has recently been identified as Vulnerable in the Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020 (Garnett and Baker 2021); and
- Lovely Fairy-wren – a party of 4 birds. Lovely Fairy-wren is one of the indicator species in the Coastal Wet Tropics Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) which runs from Cairns to Cardwell and includes iconic coastal national parks (a few of which are right near Charley's).

Ceri, Sandra and Greg will continue surveying the site and monitor changing migratory and breeding cycles on subsequent visits to Mt Edna.

Vegetation

There are many plant species in our rainforest. Charley's is collaborating with Peter Rowles, President of local conservation group C4, to identify the notable flora in the rainforest.

Find Charley's at 388 El Arish-Mission Beach Road Qld 4852. Tel (07) 4068 5011



White-eared Monarch at Charley's Chocolate Factory Mt Edna Property near Mission Beach. Image courtesy of Greg Dawe.

References

Charley's rainforest at <https://www.charleys.com.au/blog/charleys-magnificent-tropical-rainforest/>

Charley's sustainability at <https://www.charleys.com.au/our-sustainability/>

Terrain Natural Resource Management (NRM) (?2022?). Minister for the Environment announcement Dec 2021. <https://terrain.org.au/lowland-rainforest/>

Wikipedia (2022). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tropical_rainforest

Endnote

On 20 December 2021, then Federal Minister for the Environment, Sussan Ley, announced that she had made the decision to list Lowland Tropical Rainforest of the Wet Tropics as an Endangered Ecological Community under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act (1999). (Terrain NRM, 2021).

Where are the Lowland Wet Tropics?

The Lowland Tropical Rainforest lies between Townsville and Cooktown mostly below 80-100m elevation, with some areas at higher elevations on the gently rising plateau at Mena Creek and East Palmerston near Innisfail. It includes a wide range of plants and animals, from tall evergreen trees with large leaves and buttresses (eg palms and figs) to animals such as cassowaries, tree kangaroos and tree frogs.

Far North Queensland's Wet Tropics rainforests have gradually declined over the years due to land clearing.

[Chair Australian Chocolate](#)
Ruth.medd@bigpond.com

World Cassowary Day at C4

By Helen Larson

On Saturday 24 September 2022, the Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation (C4) held an Open Day at Mission Beach to celebrate World Cassowary Day.

Invited speakers were Dinouk Perera, Department of Environment and Science (DES); and Daryl Dickson, Chair of the Mahogany Glider Recovery team; along with contributors Mission Beach Wildcare; BirdLife Northern Queensland (BNQ); Frog Safe; Brettcorp; and the Mission Beach Historical Society.

C4 volunteers made the day happen and the Cassowary Coast Yarners put up decorations and bunting. Many people attending the Open Day were interstate and overseas visitors, and there was good conversation and Q&A.



Mission Beach Wildcare members are often the first responders to cassowary vehicle strikes (and manage to stay cheerful). Photo by Jeff Larson



BNQ getting ready. Photo by Jeff Larson



Dinouk Perera from DES speaking on cassowary incidents; how to behave if one meets a wild cassowary; and to *Not Feed* cassowaries. He reminded us that the phone number to report sightings, orphaned chicks, incidents, near misses, injuries, sick or deceased cassowaries is 1300 130 372. Photo by Councillor Trudy Tschui



Helen of BNQ with visitors hoping to see a wild cassowary. Photo by Councillor Trudy Tschui



And Brettcorp reminded us that One Tree Matters, while making sure the sausages would be ready for everyone. Photo by Brett Krause

Gardens 4 Birds

By Jennifer H Muir

Gardens are special for me and a favourite place in which to 'hang out', listen to the 'featheries', and generally soak in the pleasurable peace and ambiance, especially when I'm gardening.

When we bought our suburban Whitfield property in 2015, the rear garden had narrow strips of plants along the fences and a wide expanse of lawn. The previous owner had a dog, and used to feed the Common Mynas, so when we moved in, few birds other than introduced mynas and sparrows were spending time in the garden.

We changed this, and now we have our own tiny (by natural rainforest standards) home-made rainforest, less lawn, and wider gardens full of trees and shrubs along the fences. Thus we created a more diverse habitat within our very suburban property, which has attracted insects and 30-plus native birds. This is an ongoing 'project', and as we continue to plant nectivore/insectivore/insect-attracting plants, we hope to bring in more native species.

However, sadly our garden and our rear neighbour's garden make up just a tiny oasis - in a 'semi-desert' of lawns and houses. Thank goodness for our rear neighbour, as otherwise, there'd be just our lonely little oasis. Fortunately, our neighbour values trees too.... The rest of our neighbourhood comprises mostly treeless properties with large expanses of lawn, including the road verges. This of course limits the species diversity and numbers of individual birds feeding, 'loafing' or breeding in our area.

Our immediate next-door neighbour on one side hates trees as they drop leaves. On the other side, the neighbours dislike gardening, and trees would drop leaves into their swimming pool. Sadly, today this is the more usual way of gardens in urban and suburban areas - few trees and less wildlife.

We can all improve on that. And I believe we should. Far too much plant and wildlife diversity has been lost because of human development. Do we really want a world without birds, insects and other wildlife? Australia has a poor record in maintaining its native flora and fauna and we need to turn that around before it's too late. And we can all help by providing a healthy habitat with sufficient natural food, and water and shelter in our gardens for our native wildlife.

Then, what if we could establish a vegetation corridor along our street's rear gardens through a connection with our neighbours? If each household planted its garden with plant species that would bring in native birds and insects, the result could be a corridor of gardens that would allow a larger, wider suburban habitat for wildlife, which could move around within it,



Lime Berry (*Micromelium minutum*) is a native medium-sized shrub to small tree. Butterflies love it too.

finding or following the food sources. This could 'grow', so that over time, suburbs could become large oases of interconnected gardens with a wide diversity of flora and fauna.

So, how to go about it: choice of plants is important. Table 1 below contains a few suggestions of plants that could bring native birds and insects into your garden. Buying plants from plant nurseries or botanic gardens is probably wise as pest species such as Electric Ants, Yellow Crazy Ants, etc can be spread with plants obtained from private gardens.

Some words of caution: some of the plants in this table are not native to Australia or are from other parts of Australia. So, if you have a garden in an area with, or surrounded by mostly native vegetation, it's better to maintain that if possible. Why remove what you already have to replace it with plants that will take a long time to reach the level and density of what you currently have?

Further, beware of invasive species. They can outcompete and replace native species, spread wildly and take over, negatively impacting on the diversity of the area.



Blue flax lily



Native Cordyline

Table 1: Examples of plants that attract birds and other wildlife in our region.

BIRD FEEDING TYPE	AUSTRALIAN NATIVE EXAMPLES	GOOD PLANTS	AVOID OR MANAGE
GRANIVORES (feed on seeds & grain)	Brush-turkey Cockatoos Doves Finches & Mannikins Scrubfowl	Acacia (all species) Bauhinia varieties Callistemon (Bottlebrushes) Carpet Grass (<i>Axonopus</i>) Grevillea (all species) Hakea (all species) Melaleuca (all species) Many herby weed & grass species Native grasses	Bottle Plant (<i>Jatropha</i>) - invasive
NECTIVORES (feed on nectar & sometimes pollen of flowers)	Honeyeaters (including Friarbirds) Lorikeets Sunbird	Alpinia varieties Banksia (all species) Brazilian Redcoat (<i>Megaskepasma</i>) Callistemon (Bottlebrushes) Citrus (all species) Costus (all tall species) Grevillea (all species) Hibiscus (red single varieties) Hummingbird Bush (<i>Hamelia</i>) Melaleuca (all species) Mexican Torch (<i>Pachystachys</i>) Most palms (mainly for pollen) Powder Puff/Pixie Puffs (<i>Calliandra</i>) Umbrella Tree (<i>Schefflera</i>) Yellow Penda (<i>Xanthostemon</i>)	Allamanda – all have toxic nectar Heliconia (all species) very rarely used
FRUGIVORES (feed on fruit)	Figbirds Fruit-Doves Metallic Starling Mistletoebird Pigeons Silvereye	Bandicoot Berry (<i>Leea indica</i>) Blue Tongue (<i>Melastoma affine</i>) Blue flax lily (<i>Dianella</i>) Harveys Buttonwood (<i>Glochidion</i>) Lime berry (<i>Micromelium minutum</i>) Mistletoe (all species) Native Cordylines Native palms with small fruit Syzygium (all species) Umbrella Tree (<i>Schefflera</i>)	Brazilian Cherry - invasive Shoebuttton Ardisia – invasive Yellow Oleander – invasive
INSECTIVORES (feed on insects, spiders, centipedes, etc)	Bee-eater Brush-turkey Frogmouth Honeyeaters (including Friarbirds) Ibis Kookaburras Lapwings Scrubfowl Stone-curlew Sunbird (particularly small spiders for chicks)	Acacia (all species) Bower of Beauty (<i>Pandorea</i>) Callistemon (Bottlebrushes) Native Cordylines Crepe Myrtle (<i>Lagerstroemia</i>) Grevillea (all species) Hakea (all species) Ixora varieties Melaleuca (all species) Native Ixora (<i>Parvetta</i>) Native palms (all species) Pentas varieties Sandpaper Vine (<i>Petraea</i>) Snowflake/White Angel (<i>Wrightia</i>) Syzygium varieties (Lilly Pillies) Tree Jasmine (<i>Radermachera</i>) Umbrella Tree (<i>Schefflera</i>) Wheel of Fire (<i>Stenocarpus</i>) Yellow Ipé (<i>Tabebuia</i>) Yellow Penda (<i>Xanthostemon</i>) Many herby weed & grass species	Coconut Palm – dangerous Singapore Daisy – invasive

News from Mount Isa

By Rex Whitehead

The birding in Mount Isa has been quite good. I have noticed that a few visiting birders have been able to score on both the Kalkadoon and Carpentarian Grasswrens.

Masked Lapwing, with four chicks, under the wings.



The breeding of ground-frequenting birds like lapwings, dotterels, plovers and bustard is well under way as I have seen chicks of all species

frequently. Check out the Masked Lapwing showing 10 legs (above) – with four chicks under its wings.

I also saw a pair of Masked Lapwing in breeding mode, attacking a male Bustard as he came too close to their chicks. The performance of the Bustard was quite funny as it nearly fell over. It then decided "I'm getting out of here!" and flew off.

The migratory bird numbers appear to be down at the moment, with the exception of the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers which are always in good numbers. However, I have recorded seven species here to date. Hopefully, more will arrive soon.

On my return from a recent trip to the Cape York area I called in to Karumba for a couple of days. The migratory bird numbers appeared to be lower than other years there also.



The water level in Lake Moondarra is quite low. However, this hasn't had any effect on migratory shorebird numbers in other years as there are

plenty of exposed mud flats from where they can get their food. It's when the lake fills that the migrants disperse, as they lose their food source. There are many waders at the horse paddocks as I write this.

Whilst a native bird, one that I've never seen in Karumba before was an Olive-backed Sunbird. I thought Karumba was outside their known range. It was feeding on the flowers of the Calotrope, which is an introduced invasive plant species.



Little Curlew

On my recent trip east, as normal I stopped off at Cumberland Dam at Georgetown. The dam was dry but the good news is that there was an earth moving plant cleaning it out, which no doubt will increase the dams holding capacity.

My trip east took in the Atherton Tablelands where I was able to get a couple of lifers (thanks Lynette, for the help there).

From the Tablelands I went to Artemis Station, then on to the known Red Goshawk site which was another lifer as I missed it last year. Then on to Iron Range where I haven't been since the 1980s. For the whole trip, I managed to photograph 72 species, 14 of which were lifers. I dipped out on some others that were on my bucket list. But that's a good excuse for another trip.

What was surprising to me was the amount of road-works along with new bridges, etc, being constructed on the road to the Tip of Cape York.



Red Goshawk

Although, I had been as far as Musgrave 11 months ago, the advancement of the bitumen was amazing. No excuse now for anyone not making the trip as the country is beautiful, as are the birding opportunities. I can recommend it to all. Take a leaf from the Northern Territory ad, "You'll never never know, if you never never go".

Anyhow. Merry Christmas, and good birding to all. And safe travels.

Rex Whitehead

Newhaven - 20 Years On

By Lindsay Fisher



Jo Wieneke and Graham Harrington at the opening ceremony in 2002

In 2002 it was the Australian Year of the Outback, and Birds Australia, as it was then, celebrated by holding its Congress and Campout in the Red Centre. North Queensland was represented by Graham Harrington, Jo Wieneke, and Keith and myself driving across the Sandover Highway to attend. Our first stop in Alice Springs was to a camping shop to buy beanies and gloves as we had forgotten just how cold it was there in the winter!

The Conference was held at the Alice Springs Convention Centre and the theme was Outback Birds: Past, Present, and Future. As always, it was an excellent event and one highlight was a visit to the Alice Springs Desert Park in the MacDonnell Ranges where we could see many of the birds that had been discussed at the Conference.

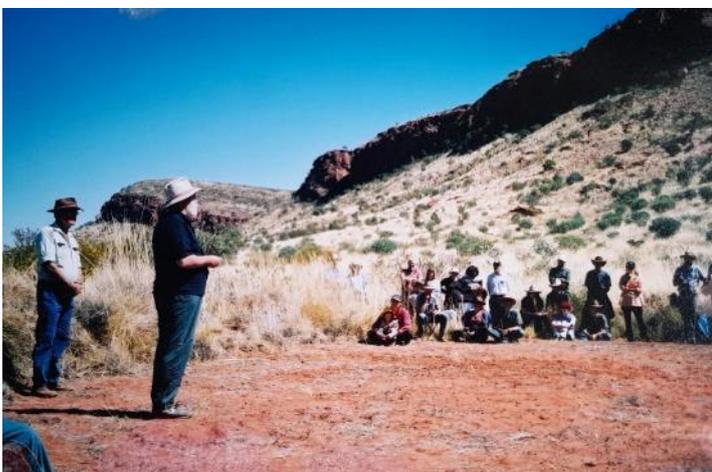


Lindsay and Keith Fisher and some rugged scenery at Newhaven

In 2000 Birds Australia had purchased a 262,000 ha property called Newhaven, 340 kms north-west of Alice Springs, and this is where the week-long campout was held. The official opening ceremony was held with the Traditional Owners, along with many surveys and visits to some of the huge variety of habitats the property has. It was a wonderful experience and we had always wanted to go back one day. A few years later Birds Australia realised that running such a large and remote property was difficult, and came to an agreement with The Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) to take it over. One condition was that it would still be open for birdwatchers to visit.

Earlier this year (2022) when trying to decide where to go for an extended camping trip in August and September, we decided to make Newhaven our destination. We booked six nights in mid-August then planned the rest of the trip around it. We hadn't been back to Alice Springs for 20 years, so enjoyed revisiting the Desert Park and the Alice Springs Sewage Ponds (or Waste Stabilisation Ponds as it is now known).

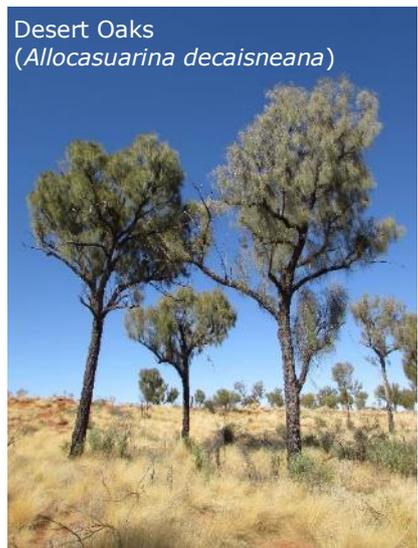
We drove to Newhaven stopping off at Kunoth Bore on the Tanami Track to find Grey Honeyeater which was waiting for us at the old tank! We camped at the Tilmouth Well Roadhouse where we had a brilliant sighting of a Black Falcon pursuing a Hobby. The road into Newhaven is a good sand track which only becomes corrugated for the last 30 kms. It takes you through some stunning scenery and we had to stop a couple of times as a camel was blocking the road - definitely a creature to give way to!



Henry Nix at the opening ceremony

The camp site gives you a wide choice, with interweaving tracks taking you to the showers and toilets which are conveniently situated next to the bird water trough. Some sites have fire pits and tables and most are shady and all are spacious. Adjacent to the campground is Lookout Hill which is a steep climb, but gives amazing views and a weak Telstra signal! Large ring-binders are provided giving species lists; detailed information of the landscape, flora and fauna; and six self-drive maps for different parts of the property, with details of where to stop and what to observe. The drives are between 40 and 110 kms and most can be comfortably done in a morning.

We enjoyed the birdlife visiting the water trough every day - Pink Cockatoo (aka Major Mitchell's Cockatoo), Zebra Finch, Diamond Dove and budgies. Everywhere we went on the property there were Zebra Finch and we wondered where they were finding water. Then we realised we only saw them at the campground water trough in the middle of the day, so they must all fly in then - up to 500 at a time!



Desert Oaks
(*Allocasuarina decaisneana*)

The birding was hard work as there was little in flower and no surface water. However, we enjoyed the challenge appreciating each time we successfully identified a glimpse of a bird. Inland Thornbill, Southern Whiteface, Purple-backed Fairywren and Western Gerygone were just some of the small birds flitting around in the mulga.

The flora was another challenge with so many trees and plants to try to identify, but the stands of Desert Oaks (*Allocasuarina decaisneana*) were easily identified and quite stunning. The sand dunes, salt lakes and rugged quartzite mountain ranges provide an amazing backdrop to the property.

We had taken our camera trap, set it among the sand and salt bush at night, and got some great footage of Spinifex Hopping Mouse and Desert Mouse. The AWC researchers were all busy watching footage of the Central Rock Rats that had just been released in the 9,450 ha feral predator-free enclosure and we only managed a brief conversation with one of them. However, two volunteers busy with their duties were happy to have a chat about what was happening at Newhaven.

If you are travelling to the Red Centre and have time to spend at Newhaven it is definitely worth the effort.



Predator-free fence



Our camp



Lake Bennett



Sand dune Lake Bennett



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Anyone with an interest in birds can make an important contribution to our knowledge of Australian birds by getting involved in Birdata.

The improved and easy-to-use [Birdata web portal](#) is making it simple to register and to submit your bird surveys. A free Birdata mobile app for Apple and Android is available from the app stores and allows for direct data entry in the field. The portal has replaced previous versions of Birdata in 2016, but don't worry: all of your existing data has been transferred across.

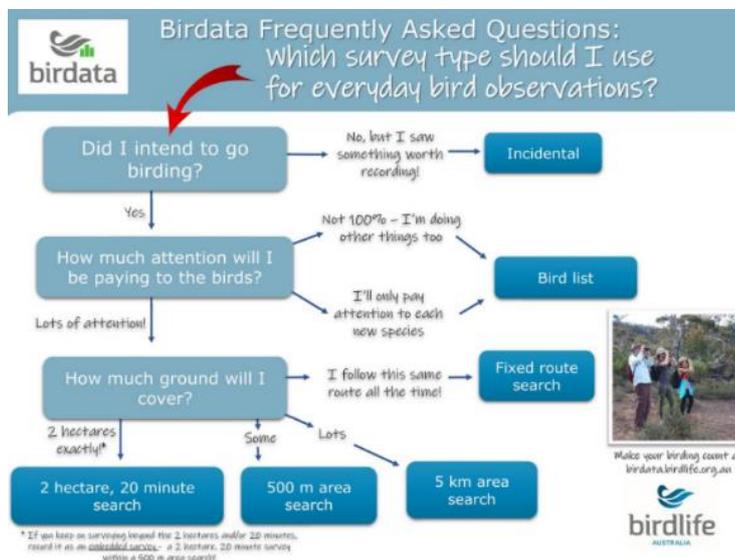
As well as making things easy for you, the Birdata web portal has many features that let you take control of your own data: it's simple to keep your own lists (site, species, or the last month or year, for example) and generate distribution maps and site lists with the click of a button. You can even edit your records if you've made a mistake.

So why don't you register. Every survey completed in Birdata helps us learn more about our precious birds.

LEARNING HOW TO USE BIRDATA HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER.

Check out the new video [Birdata App Tutorial- learn how to navigate through the Birdata app - YouTube](#)

And go to [Survey Techniques | Birdata \(birdlife.org.au\)](#) to learn more about Survey Techniques



Noticeboard

FROM THE EDITORS

Thank you to all contributors to this edition of Contact Call. We really appreciate your articles, reports, and images. If you would like to submit to the newsletter, don't hesitate to contact the editor or assistant editor.

Newsletter deadlines for 2023

- January 30th for the February-March Edition
- April 10th for the May/June Edition
- July 10th for the September Edition
- October 10th for the December Edition

BirdLife Northern Queensland Newsletter 'Contact Call'

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Quarter page advertisements for four issues can be purchased for \$80 plus GST, or \$25 plus GST for single-issue advertisements. Contact the Editor of Contact Call or the BNQ Treasurer for further information.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO ORGANISE AN ACTIVITY IN YOUR AREA? OR PERHAPS A CAMP OUT?

The BirdLife Northern Queensland role of activities coordinator is currently vacant. If you would like to take on this role, or even just help with organising a single event, don't hesitate to contact us at northernqld@birdlife.org.au

Advice on BirdLife Northern Queensland Activities

BirdLife Northern Queensland activities may be cancelled at short notice, for example, in the event of adverse or severe weather. Please register to attend activities by contacting the activity leader. That way they are aware of your intention to attend and have your contact details should the event be cancelled.

Additionally, BirdLife Northern Queensland activities are managed in line with Queensland Government COVID-19 requirements.

Please remember, if you plan on attending BirdLife Northern Queensland activities or events:

- ❖ Contact the activity organiser to confirm your attendance;
- ❖ Stay at home if you are unwell;
- ❖ Wear a mask if that makes you comfortable or if mandated by Queensland Government COVID-19 requirements;
- ❖ Complete the event sign in sheet on arrival.

For more information:

<https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/>



Join us on Facebook



Or visit our new website

<https://www.birdlifeng.org/>

The BirdLife Northern Queensland Committee has approved running a Birding Challenge in 2023 as a means of encouraging participants to get out birding more often; to try using Birddata and to raise small amounts of funds for the Branch. The details are set out below. If you would like to participate, please make sure you register as soon as possible. The deadline for registration is 31st January 2023, but early registration will help motivate your participation. Registration is achieved by notifying the Challenge Coordinator (peter.valentine@jcu.edu.au) your name and email address.

Conservation Birding Challenge

Purpose:

1. to provide participants an added incentive to go birding;
2. to raise funds for BirdLife Northern Queensland;
3. to encourage use of Birddata.

Description:

Participants are challenged to maintain the cumulative number of bird species recorded by them for the year, ahead of the number of days passed for the year. If the number of days passed in the year exceeds the number of bird species recorded the participant has reached their end point for the current challenge.

Rules:

1. Any person may enter the Challenge but must register with the Coordinator by the 31st January each year.
2. Birding commences on the 1st January each year and records of birding are kept by each participant. It is suggested that participants use either Birddata or eBird as a simple means of maintaining their birding records, but each member may choose to use whatever means suits them.
3. A participant may continue with the challenge throughout the year until they reach a point where they run out of new bird species to add to their list and the total cumulative number of bird species seen is less than the total number of days of the year passed.
4. The end point of the challenge is the 31st of December, at which point only participants with 365 or more species of birds recorded remain active.
5. At the end of the year, each participant will contribute to the BirdLife Northern Queensland, an amount of money equivalent to the number of species recorded as part of the challenge at a rate of **5 cents per species recorded**. Each participant will periodically provide the Challenge Coordinator with a total number of birds recorded for the year.
6. The Coordinator will report to the BirdLife Northern Queensland a periodic statement of progress in the Challenge through the year, based on updates from all participants every three months.
7. Each participant is entitled to record a bird species for their challenge if the bird seen or heard allows its identity to be determined. Taxonomy follows either the BirdLife List or the Birddata or eBird records. A single species may only be counted once.
8. Geographic extent: for this challenge only birds seen within **BirdLife Northern Queensland** area may be included. (Refer to the website for further information www.birdlifengq.org or go to <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/>)
9. Totals of birds seen accumulate and participants may stay ahead of the number of days by any amount at any time.

Examples of how it works:

- a) On the first of January, a birder sees 65 species. That result means they are in credit until the 6th March and are not required to add to their list until that date. A keen and active participant may accumulate sufficient species in January to last until a much later date in the year.
- b) By the 31st March participants must have recorded at least 90 species to stay in the Challenge. By the 30th June, at least 181 species must be recorded. By 30th September, 273 species would be required.
- c) If on the 1st October a birder with 273 species on their list does not record another new species, then that birder drops out of the challenge.



Phone: Friends House (07) 4032 3900
www.botanicfriends Cairns.org.au
 email: info@botanicfriends Cairns.org.au

IMPORTANT NEWS!



Photo: november 10 2016

**CAIRNS BOTANIC GARDENS
 TUESDAY MORNING FREE GUIDED BIRD TOURS
 THAT MEET AT FRIENDS HOUSE
 (IN FLECKER GARDEN BETWEEN THE CONSERVATORY &
 MCCORMACK STREET-COLLINS AVENUE CORNER – see map)
 WILL START AT
7.30 AM
 FROM
TUESDAY 3 JANUARY 2023**



Cairns Botanic Gardens
 Flecker Garden & Gondwanan Evolution Garden

and Centenary Lakes
 Please turn over for map of Tanks Arts Centre,
 Centenary Lakes & Rainforest Boardwalk

Map features include: Information, Toilets, Disabled Access/Facilities, Cafe/Restaurant, Telephone, Bus Stop, Shelter, Picnic Tables, Drinking Water, and various garden areas like Flecker Garden, Gondwanan Evolution Garden, and Centenary Lakes.



Thanks for being part of our mob in 2022.

BirdLife Northern Queensland
 wishes you a safe, happy and relaxing
 festive season.

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.

[facebook.com/BirdLifeAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/BirdLifeAustralia)
[@BirdLifeOz](https://twitter.com/BirdLifeOz)

birdlife.org.au

Add your voice



Enjoy the rewards of membership, making a real difference for our native birds



Contributing your time is one of the most effective ways to help



Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats