Contact Call

birdlife
NORTHERN QUEENSLAND

Newsletter of BirdLife Northern Queensland Volume 11 Number 1 March 2022

In celebration of World Wetlands Day in February: Spotted Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna guttata*) at a wetland in Chewko, near Mareeba, north Queensland. 21 February 2022. Image courtesy of Dominic Chaplin.

birds are in our nature

In this issue…

Also

From the Convenor

By Ceri Pearce

It certainly feels like we are having a very rocky start to the year, with the Omicron wave, the terrible events emerging overseas in the Ukraine, and now serious flooding in southeast Queensland. Our hearts go out to all who are affected by these events.

As we emerge from the summer heat and wet season currently upon us, work behind the scenes is gaining momentum on our various projects, and activities program for 2022. As our program 'gels' we'll keep you posted with regular updates as new events evolve.

Hot on the heals of a successful World Wetlands Day event organised by Cairns Area Coordinator, Mikey Kudo on 5 February, and amongst our regular bird outings at Hasties Swamp and Warrina Lakes, we will soon have our Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 26 March, at Lake Barrine. Commencing the day with an early morning bird walk, followed by a lake cruise with morning tea on the boat (for a $20 donation), we will then have a quick AGM, followed by lunch (at own expense) for anyone wanting to stay on, relax and socialise by the lake. The last time we had the AGM at Lake Barrine, we had a fun-tastic social day out. Whether you are coming for the whole event or just part of it, we hope you can join us there on the 26th.

A special thank you to Ray Pierce, our project technical support who is retiring from the committee this year. Ray has made a valuable contribution, especially to our science and conservation projects. He has also presented talks and written great articles for Contact Call. Ray will still lead the Gouldian Finch Study Project in collaboration with NQ Natural History Group, as well as his other project work. We look forward to continuing to work with Ray, outside of the committee, after the 2022 AGM.

If you would like to nominate for a specific committee position or just to be part of the BNQ committee in 2022, please send your nomination to northernqld@birdlife.org.au

After the AGM, the very next day, we also have a 'Wave the Waders Goodbye' event in Cairns on March 27. If we are lucky, like we were last year, the Nordmann's Greenshank may still be present – yes Nordy has returned this season to Cairns.

There is lots happening, as this edition of Contact Call will illustrate. And there are lots of ways you can become involved. Whether it is recording the birds that you see in Birdata or as BirdLife compatible surveys in eBird, or joining our fund raising initiative for the critically endangered Golden-shouldered Parrot (see page 7), or advocating of bird conservation, you can make a difference. All you need to do is to come along and join in. We hope to see you soon. Cheers Ceri.

Grasswrens' A'Calling

By Kath Shurcliff

It is that time of year again, and it has been raining across the northwestern parts of Queensland and especially in Grasswren country! Those rains bode well for a good breeding season for the Grassies - and Henry Stoetzel, the PhD student who is studying these birds (and this year's Graham Harrington Research Scholar) has confirmed nesting is in full swing. That should result in high rates of encounters with family groups roaming around their territories, as we discovered during last year's surveys.

Last year we had the highest rate of successful 'hits'. We found grasswrens at half of the sites that we visited, with several having multiple groups or both Carpentarian and Kalkadoon Grasswrens. All our participants were able to get excellent views of these species, while wandering (and wondering) over the beautiful landscapes of the Mount Isa region. What will we find this year?

During May this year we hope to extend the area of searching for Carpentarian Grasswrens to the edges of their known distribution, and possibly into Boodjamulla National Park. We will also focus on the areas which have been targeted for control burns by Southern Gulf NRM, to reduce fuel loads that can carry destructive wildfires. Previously, the grasswrens have been found in the refuges of unburnt spinifex amongst the hilly terrain. So we will be checking amongst the refuges from the recent burn program.

Once again, we are calling for volunteers who

- are interested in helping us set up long-term monitoring sites to track population changes in these two species,
- can spend from 1-3 weeks in a beautiful part of western Queensland during May,
- enjoy camping in the outback and have your own equipment to be self-sufficient, including cooking your own meals,
- have access to a 4WD vehicle, as we will travel along outback station tracks.

We will work together in teams, and we will provide training in our methods and basic use of GPS, and tips for how to find the grasswrens. Fuel costs will be reimbursed.

Please join us by contacting Kath Shurcliff at crabplover@westnet.com.au or phone 04 7864 1987 for more details. And in case, you cannot wait, have a sneak view of what is in store for all who would like to help us with this work - just visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP79UbtqM0U and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrkELJed8xA.

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2022 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday 26th March at Lake Barrine, Atherton Tablelands.

7:30 am – 1:00 pm.
Join us for a social day (and a bit of business) at Lake Barrine.

7:30 am: Meet by the Lake for a bird walk (weather dependant).

9:00 am: Boat trip on the Lake with morning tea provided at the mooring at Cedar Bay. Option of walking the 1 1/2 km back to the tea room or returning by boat. There is a charge of $35 for this and we are asking for a donation of $20 towards the cost.

11:00 am: AGM in the room under the Tea Room. The agenda for the meeting is:

- Welcome and apologies
- Acceptance of draft minutes for 2021
- AGM presentation of Convenor's Annual Report for 2021 activities
- Treasurer's Report for 2021
- Election of Office Bearers and Committee Positions
- Any other business, Closure of AGM

Afterwards stay for lunch at your own expense.

VIEW DRAFT 2021 AGM MINUTES

Come for the whole morning or part of it.

Please RSPV to Lindsay Fisher at keithandlindsay4@bigpond.com or phone / message 0447 816 865.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Conservation Matters

by Peter Valentine

The theme today might be seen as problems and prospects, challenges and opportunities.

JACK BARNES MANGROVE BOARDWALK IN CAIRNS.

I want to start on a very positive note, an update on the Jack Barnes Boardwalk. Progress is substantial and the southern walk is almost completed, with signs now being developed. The parking solution is underway now. Work continues on the northern section with progress partly dependent on tides. The Traditional Owners (TO) for the area, Yirrganydji people and the Dawul Wuru rangers, are intimately involved and are a major force in progressing this project. The opening of the Boardwalk is likely to occur in June, perhaps on World Environment Day, and could provide a chance for BirdLife Northern Queensland to promote the value of birds. I am delighted to see the strong positive relationship between the TOs and the Airport Corporation and the commitment of both parties to an ongoing program of work. There is an intention to widen the scope a little to incorporate some conservation work, probably on both the ant plant (Endangered) and the Macleay's Fig-parrot (Vulnerable). There is no recovery plan or even much details about the fig-parrot but the activity could highlight the concerns about this delightful local bird, quite commonly seen in Cairns and on the airport land and surrounds.

Macleay's Fig-parrot (male) at Lake Eacham. Conservation status: Vulnerable. Image by Peter Valentine.

Macleay's Fig-parrot (female) at Lake Eacham. Conservation status: Vulnerable. Image by Peter Valentine.

BirdLife Northern Queensland could assist by supporting the work with knowledge and participation in any activities. The proposed development of recovery plans for these two species should take place over the next three years and the Corporation would welcome input from BirdLife Northern Queensland. Anyone interested and willing to offer support please contact us.

ADIOS, ADIEU, FAREWELL, GOODBYE

If you have not seen it yet, have a look at some recent conclusions from a research project into the real loss of birdlife on our continent since European settlement. Very sobering. It's available on The Conversation:

https://theconversation.com/native-birds-have-vanished-across-the-continent-since-colonisation-now-we-know-just-how-much-weve-lost-176239

The study found that in 69% of our country, at least one species of bird has gone extinct since Europeans arrived and in some areas as many as 17 species have vanished.

One local example is the Golden-shouldered Parrot, currently listed as Endangered (should be Critically Endangered). That species has gone extinct locally over 96% of its former range.

The worst areas of loss coincide with that great grain growing crescent across the south east from South Australia, through western Victoria, western NSW and southern Queensland. Most of that country has lost 10 or more species.

Solutions are clear but involve national leadership, a quality in extremely short supply sadly. Australia has already committed to a number of actions as part of our international obligations, but there is little sign of any on ground change. The author of the article urges reform of the EPBC Act, now way out of date as

mentioned in the previous Conservation Matters column, and as BirdLife Australia has been calling for over the past several years. Once again, very difficult to get any serious progress despite the need growing every day. And to a very large extent, these reported losses pre-date climate change impacts. With the ongoing rush to profit from fossil fuels dominating every breath in the Australian Government, the same study in 50 years will be very bleak. It's hard to imagine a more stressful future for wildlife than the one we face now and with little prospect for change. The best opportunity in the short term is to consider carefully how you decide to vote in the Federal election. There are always alternatives!

A NEW PARK FOR NORTHERN QUEENSLAND

One positive announcement recently was the purchase of The Lakes grazing property 100 km north of Hughenden to become a new National Park under Queensland law. While it was strange that the Queensland Government could not afford to pay the full price for it (a private gift from a USA philanthropist contributed $1.8 million), the news is welcome, and the location is important. About half-way between Porcupine Gorge NP and Blackbraes National Park, the 35,300 ha incorporates excellent wetlands as well as a range of habitat types. Opening the park to "birdwatchers" is under consideration, according to the Minister, Meaghan Scanlon.

A WEIRD APPROACH TO NATIONALISM – THE CASE OF ROAD AND TRAFFIC RULES

I managed to get a bit hot under the collar recently after discovering an example of the quest for national uniformity being seriously misplaced. It turns out that traffic speeds are not in the hands of local authorities, or even state roads people, but are caught up in a policy of conformity emanating from Canberra. I have been negotiating with the Tablelands Regional Council to get the speed limit reduced for a short section of road through the Curtain Fig National Park. Currently set at 80 kph, I have been seeking to lower the speed to 60 kph for the 1.3 km of winding narrow road running through the National Park. That would add 20 seconds to the transit time for through traffic. I want it to happen as a way to reduce impacts on wildlife and provide better safety for birders and other National Park visitors, and I gained support from QPWS for this effort. But here is the punch line – there is not allowed to be any consideration of wildlife in setting speed limits anywhere in Australia!! Can you imagine. Why would we even think such a prohibition was desirable? This comes into play also with the attempts to get speed limits reduced for Cassowary safety.

The Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) is currently reviewing the situation but I do not expect any changes. Perhaps members could talk with their state MP.

THE PRICE OF CONSERVATION KNOWLEDGE

I was delighted to learn of the final publication of the 2021 Action Plan for Australian Birds, especially with all the change since the last one in 2010. Unfortunately, it is published by CSIRO for the hefty sum of $150. While it had become clear in recent times that the CSIRO Publishing house was all about profit, it is disappointing that this critical volume, so valuable for community groups who do most of the heavy lifting for conservation, cannot be purchased in a cheaper version.

Lesser Sooty Owl "caught" by cane truck

Report by Del Richards

In late September 2021, a cane semitrailer hit a Lesser Sooty Owl at Julatten. The truck was traveling down hill at the time and its laden speed would be difficult to estimate.

The owl was on the grill, likely held there by a combination of vehicle velocity and the radiator cooling fan. It was raining at the time.

The truck traveled down the Rex Range to the cane marshaling facility at Cassowary, where the owl was first noticed.

The following day the victim was checked by a veterinary surgeon who was unable to detect any broken bones. The only damage was a displaced retina to the left eye.

The Lesser Sooty Owl went into care and responded well despite the short coming of the use of one eye.

After about seven weeks the fact was proven that the eye had repaired to the point of the bird being able to hunt and the individual was released back in its home territory.

How we can help the Golden-shouldered Parrot

By Lindsay Fisher

When we think of bird species that are endangered in our region of Northern Queensland, our thoughts go to the Wet Tropics and climate change affecting high altitude birds.

However, there is one species a long way from the Wet Tropics that is in trouble and needs our help.

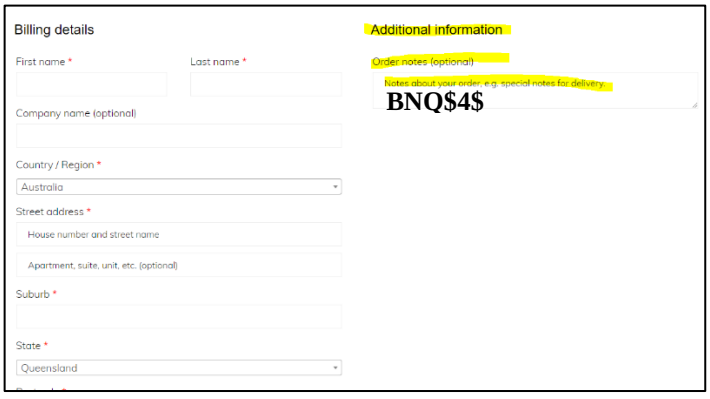
The Golden-shouldered Parrot is found at Artemis Station on Cape York Peninsula and habitat change is causing a dramatic fall in their numbers.

Artemis Nature Fund (ANF) was set up a few years ago to support the work being done on the property to hopefully reverse the decline of this beautiful parrot.

In June last year Birdlife Northern Queensland (BNQ) donated $2,000 to ANF. What we would like to do this year is to encourage you, our members and supporters, to donate to this worthwhile cause on a Dollar for Dollar (4) Donation basis where BNQ will match your donations up to a total of $2,000. Together, we can double the support we provide to save the endangered Golden-shouldered Parrot.

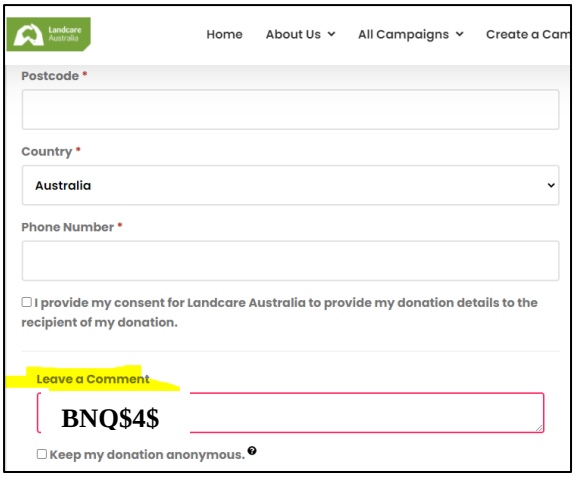
To do this just visit https://artemis.org.au/ and click on the donation heading and follow the prompts to donate.

The process is the same whether you choose to make a donation directly to the Artemis Nature Fund, or through their link to Landcare for tax deductability (also on their webpage). Follow the steps on the online form and when you reach the billing section add the following words to the section about 'additional information' or 'leave a comment' section - please write **BNQ4**. See the yellow section of the two examples provided to see where to write BNQ4.



Artemis Nature Fund online form example.

Golden-shouldered Parrot, male and female. Image courtesy of Doug Herrington, Birdwatching Tropical Australia.



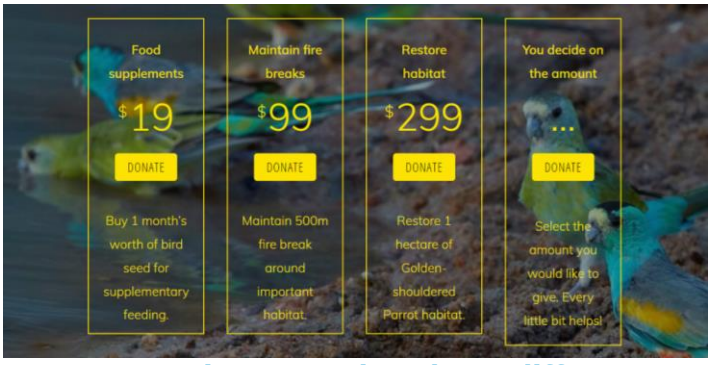
Landcare online form example (also on the ANF website).

This opportunity will run until the end of April and then we will make a donation from BNQ funds. We will report on the outcome in the next edition of Contact Call.

It is hoped that BNQ will be able to also assist ANF in the field sometime in the future.

The following article put out by ANF gives an overview of the work they have completed in 2021 to help save this beautiful parrot.

Lindsay Fisher
Treasurer, BirdLife Northern Queensland



Your generosity can make a huge difference.

Artemis Nature Fund

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Welcome to our summary of our work on Artemis in 2021.

We've included quite a bit of info here and we encourage everyone to read it with a cuppa.

For those people unfamiliar with the problems facing Golden-shouldered Parrots and what we're doing about it, we have big plans for Artemis in 2022. Funding permitting, we have identified a further 50 hectares of parrot habitat that urgently requires restoration. This includes areas where parrots haven't been seen in 10 years. So we are excited about the prospect of being able to help parrots regain some of their former distribution.

We hope you enjoy reading about our achievements in 2021 and we look forward to bringng you more updates in 2022.

Best wishes, Artemis Nature Fund

A REMINDER ABOUT WHY WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT GOLDEN-SHOULDERED PARROTS

Most people will already know about the worrying situation with Golden-shouldered Parrots. But to recap:

- since the 1920s they have disappeared from more than half of their range;
- the recent Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020 estimates there are 770-1100 individuals left in the wild;
- on Artemis, numbers have dropped from several hundred to about 50 birds over the past 10 years;
- once open habitats have become thick with trees, which has increased predation on parrots.

Golden-shouldered Parrot habitat on Artemis 20 years apart (above 2001, below 2021).

HABITAT CHANGE AND PREDATION

In May 2021, with the help of botanists Wendy Cooper & Rigel Jensen, we revisited vegetation survey plots that were measured 20 years ago by Sue Shephard, Gay Crowley and Stephen Garnett. We found that the woodland thickening is widespread on Artemis within practically all Golden-shouldered Parrot habitats.

Our work on Pied and Black-backed Butcherbirds has shown that these predators now occur at very high densities on Artemis. Some of the key things we have learned about butcherbirds are:

- they often live in groups (up to 5 for pied and 6 for black-backed). This probably relates to limited territory vacancies;
- despite >70 individuals now wearing coloured leg bands, the majority of sightings still involve unbanded birds (within a 810 ha study area). This suggests a large population size;
- GPS tracking has revealed small home ranges: about 8 ha for pied and 3 ha for black-backed.

An increased density of ambush predators, such as butcherbirds and feral cats, who hunt in thicker habitats has meant that parrots are more frequently killed while nesting, feeding and drinking.

The changes we observed are due to a complex interplay involving differences between how trees and grasses recover from fire during dry times versus wet times. Basically, regular burning when soil is dry, plus grazing, has allowed small trees to escape the grass layer that normally shades them out and stops them from becoming trees.

Wendy Cooper, Rigel Jensen and Sue Shephard surveying ground layer vegetation as part of the baseline monitoring on Artemis, May 2021

PRACTICAL ACTIONS TO RESTORE HABITATS AND DRIVE DOWN PREDATION

To save Golden-shouldered Parrots on Artemis, we need to reduce predation pressure. This is best done by restoring habitats to their natural, more open structure.

Previous research has shown that fires that burn during the storm season, when soil moisture is high, can maintain the open structure of habitats by limiting the growth of seedlings, suckers and small saplings.

But fires cannot kill larger trees that are causing thickening on Artemis. Instead, large trees need to be manually razed to ground level, where regenerating seedlings or suckers can be suppressed by shade competition from grasses and subsequent fires lit during the storm season.

THIS MANUAL WORK IS WHAT WE NEED TO DO TO SAVE GOLDEN-SHOULDERED PARROTS ON ARTEMIS.

ANF team member Patrick Webster prepares for a session restoring parrot habitats.

KEEPING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE LAW

At face value we are clearing native vegetation, even if the trees we need to clear shouldn't be there. This means we need to comply with Queensland's Vegetation Management Act 1999. It has been a challenge to navigate our way through that process but we succeeded in June 2021 with the establishment of a Voluntary Declaration (VDec) area. This is a special conservation designation added to the title of the property, which recognises the high conservation values of specific parts of Artemis. Restoration actions that protect and enhance these values, including clearing and thinning, can be conducted within the VDec area.

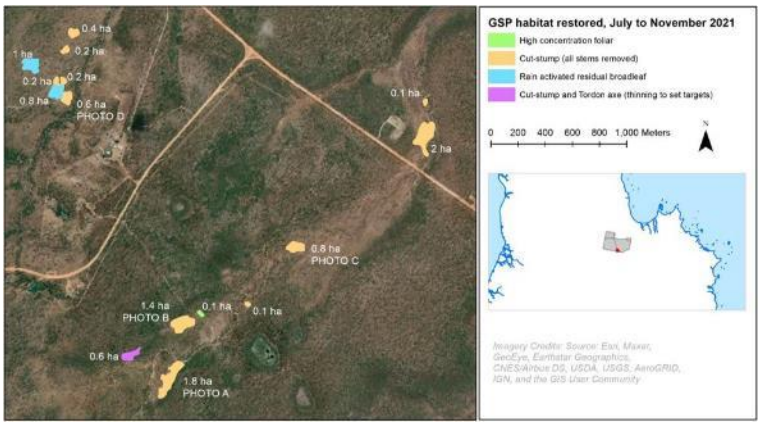
Vegetation management expert Geoff Messer overseeing clearing work right next to a tall termite mound parrot nest.

ALL SYSTEMS GO

The ink was barely dry on the VDec when in July we started razing trees to restore critical Golden-shouldered Parrot habitats. Working closely with vegetation management expert Geoff Messer, we developed a set of techniques that were dependent on each situation. For example, in areas that should be completely open grasslands we use a pelletised herbicide called "Graslan" that is activated by rain to only kill trees and leave the grasses intact. At other places we aim for instant knockdown of trees using clearing saws and chainsaws, with follow-up herbicide

treatment. Agricultural companies FMC and Corteva generously donated the products we needed in 2021.

By early November, we had restored 10.4 hectares of habitat at 15 locations on Artemis.



Map showing restored habitat areas on Artemis (July to November 2021)

Example of a 1.8 hectare area we restored to completely open grassland.

PARROT SURVIVAL AND POPULATION GROWTH

First, we are monitoring the change in parrot population size and survival using colour banding. Parrots are caught in mist-nets and fitted with unique combinations of coloured leg bands. This is a highly regulated activity requiring several permits and a licence. As of October, we had caught, banded and successfully released 44 parrots.

Following banding, we use automatic cameras at supplementary feeding stations to check who's coming and going, which will ultimately tell us about individual survival. While it's early stages yet, we've already gathered some good information, such as the return of an adult male who was banded among the first batch of 8 birds in December 2020; so he's still around after 310 days. What's more, in April, this bird bred at a nest about 800m from where he was banded. Colour-banding allows us to marry together the condition of nesting habitat (thick versus open) and survival. This provides us with the feedback necessary to tweak management should we not see the result we are expecting.

Censuses at feed stations and waterholes allow us to count the proportion of banded to unbanded birds, which is directly related to population size. Interestingly, towards the latter part of the October catching session we began to catch many more banded birds than unbanded birds. This provided us with the first insight into their true population size, which, given we had banded around 40 birds at the time, means we are talking about a population size of around 50-60 birds.

MONITORING IMPACTS

Our aim is to grow the population of Golden-shouldered Parrots on Artemis by reducing predation and expanding the area of suitable habitat. One of our challenges and a challenge for all conservation programs is working out how best to measure progress towards the aim. We are doing this in a number of ways, including measuring responses in vegetation, termite mounds (parrot nests) and butcherbirds. In 2021 we spent a lot of time monitoring the response in two other important factors: the parrots themselves and feral cats.

Lama Lama Ranger Alison Liddy with ANF team member Henry Stoetzel preparing to release a young male parrot after colour banding.

FERAL CAT RESPONSE

One of the techniques we use to restore habitats results in the accumulation of fallen timber, branches and leaves. Depending on the location and habitat, we also create "edges" between the grasslands and adjacent woodlands. Early dry season and storm burning are also important tools we use for habitat restoration and management. Each of these things could potentially benefit feral cats, making it possible that our actions could inadvertently attract cats to important parrot nesting areas.

To investigate this, we fitted GPS tracking collars to a sample of feral cats near areas where intensive management actions were carried out. This gave us great insights into the potential problem of attracting cats and also general information about cats and how we can better manage them.

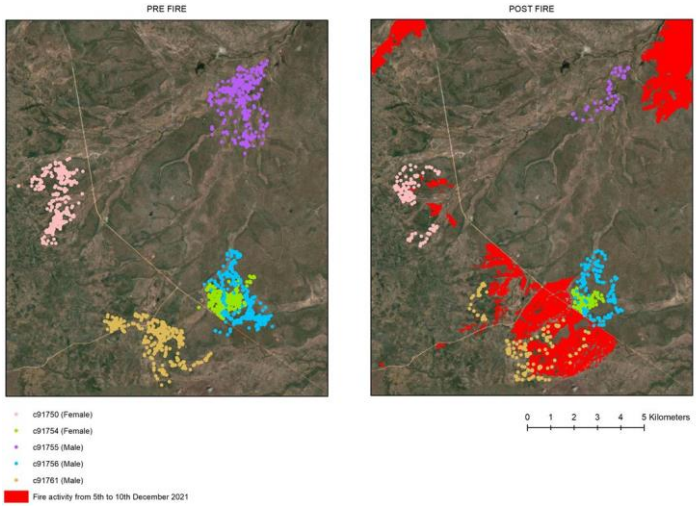
The key results of the work were:

- trapping rates suggest a very high density of feral cats on Artemis (our trap success was about 7 per 100 traps nights; the norm is about 1);
- home range for males was about 680 hectares, which is about twice the size for females;
- despite the significant difference in home range size between males and females, the average distance they moved each night was no different, at about 4-5 km;
- cats showed some activity during daylight hours, meaning that they could easily come across feeding or drinking Golden-shouldered Parrots;
- cats were not strongly attracted to the fires we lit in December as part of habitat restoration work; only one cat made visits to scars after fires, with 4 others showing little or no interest;
- cats were not strongly attracted to restoration areas; only one cat visited restoration areas more than once, although these visits still only amounted to about 5% of all GPS points logged for that cat.

The implications of these results for managing parrot habitats are:

- given the high density of feral cats on Artemis, that they occur right through parrot habitat, and are hunting sometimes during the day, we need to invest in regular cat control. This is an important finding, because cats are difficult and expensive to control, so now we can justify this investment;
- there is no urgent need to incorporate cat control into those areas which are restored and burnt. That said, such places can provide better opportunities for detection and removal by shooting, so should be visited during general cat control work.

Accumulation of small trees felled during habitat restoration could provide feral cats with resting or ambush locations.



Feral cat activity (coloured dots) around fires (red areas) lit in early December as part of our habitat restoration work.

A BETTER WAY TO REMOVE FERAL PIGS FROM PARROT HABITATS

Feral pigs are a destructive pest on Artemis. They love to eat perennial grasses that are important foods for Golden-shouldered Parrots and other native wildlife.

In 2021 we trialled a new poison bait delivery system which only pigs can access. They are the only animal with enough strength to lift the sliding door from its shut position to access the bait. This significantly reduces the risk of poisoning non-target animals.

After two months of pre-feeding and checking that non-target species were not accessing non-poisoned food, Cook Shire visited the trap site in November to arm the system with 1080. Camera trap monitoring suggests that up to 20 pigs have now been removed from Golden-shouldered Parrot habitat.

We have plans to remove many more pigs from parrot habitats in 2022.

A group of feral pigs accessing cracked corn during pre-feeding trials on Artemis in September.

Golden-shouldered Parrot, male. Image courtesy of Doug Herrington, Birdwatching Tropical Australia.

RANGER TRAINING

In October, three Indigenous Ranger groups visited Artemis to learn about the ecology of Golden-shouldered Parrots and how to do surveys to find out if they are on their country. They learned from Sue Shephard - who has done more Golden-shouldered Parrot surveys than anyone.

Each of the groups plan to do surveys in 2022 and each is dealing with slightly different cirumstances:

- Mary Valley Rangers will be re-visiting areas where parrots nested within the last few years;
- Lama Lama Rangers will be working in their country (near Coen) where parrots haven't been recorded for close to 70 years;
- Kunjen Rangers will be looking in country where parrots have never been recorded, but supports suitable habitat.

Catch up with videos https://artemis.org.au/anf-video/

When "the red red robin does not go bobbin' along" … Australian Robins in northern Queensland.

By Peter Valentine

The robin of Al Jolson's popular song was the American Robin; not really a robin – actually a thrush. Although itself named after the European Robin, the two are only distantly related to each other, as the latter is an old-world flycatcher, not a thrush. Our Australian robins were so-called because of a perceived similarity between them and the European Robin, something few would even imagine today! To begin with, the "red" in both the northern hemisphere examples (of non-robins) would only be perceived as such after a particularly bleak, grim and grey winter; unlike the brilliant red colours of some of our species. In addition, most of our robins do not even have a red breast, but include a range of plumage from yellow to brown and grey, black and white. Our "robins" are not necessarily called robins either – the group might be better described as "fly-robins" as they consist of robins, flycatchers (Australian), scrub-robins and fly-robins. However, the taxonomists have helpfully bundled them all in the family Petroicidae: sometimes called Australasian Robins because they are restricted to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand and some south Pacific islands. Split into many sub-families there are 54 species across this region, of which Australia has 23 if we include the Norfolk Island Robin.

Red-capped Robin male with its vivid red plumage, a distinctive "red-breast". This one is from the southwest of our region.

In the BLNQ Region we are well-blessed with distinctive species across the range, but only one with that red breast, the Red-capped Robin, and even that is confined to the drier western margins – the nearest credible sighting to the Wet Tropics is probably Talaroo and Georgetown, and further south at Blackbraes National Park. The majority of our robins come in different coloured plumage, but are even so, very appealing. In our region there are 13 species to be found, from Iron Range through the peninsula to the Wet Tropics and west to Boodjamulla NP in the gulf and the Mt Isa region. I wonder how many of our members have seen all our species?

Many members enjoy birding in the western inland areas and further afield where the male Red-capped Robin provides a stunning and dramatic encounter, often in the dull-coloured mulga scrub. The distinctive trilling call stands out. In similar habitat, the Hooded Robin captures attention with its smartly contrasting black and white plumage. As is often the case with robins, they make their presence known by flying into view, sometimes perching quite close as they observe the intruder.

Our most widespread robin is the Jacky Winter, accessible across our region and an excellent perch and sally hunter. One of the flycatcher group of robins, this species' confiding manners make it a charmer, providing memorable encounters, despite its dull plumage.

Hooded Robin male, a species in the dryer interior areas of our region.

Jacky Winter – one of the flycatcher robins and very widespread, this one was photographed at Flat Creek Station, near Georgetown.

White-faced Robin and nest, Iron Range.

Northern Scrub-robin along rainforest track at Iron Range.

White-browed Robin, quite common in the right habitat. This one was photographed near Townsville.

No trip to Iron Range is complete without encounters with the much-loved White-faced Robin, a sister species to the more widespread Pale-yellow Robin. In my many field trips to Iron Range, I always had them around our camp, usually at least two and sometimes more. They would simply turn up for a look and visit through the day. They would be breeding nearby if it was late in the year, a treat to see their beautifully decorated nest.

Somewhat more challenging to find is the Northern Scrub-robin, despite being one of our two largest robins (the Southern Scrub-robin is a fraction larger). Their distinctive call is often heard but they are well camouflaged as they hop along the ground on the forest floor. Once a pair is located it takes a bit of patience to wait until they show themselves, sometimes along tracks or open areas in the forest.

The biggest robin challenge at Iron Range however, is to find the Yellow-legged Flycatcher, a bird of the canopy confined to the far tip of Cape York Peninsula (from Iron Range northwards). Past records from the Atherton Tablelands have been shown to be cases of mistaken identity (see the recent article in North Queensland Naturalist by BLNQ member Elinor Scambler). This species spends a lot of time in the canopy (often on the edges of the rainforest) where it pursues flying insects. It sometimes cocks its tail when perched and it may be confused with a Grey Whistler but the distinctive yellow legs are definitive.

On the edge of the wetter coastal forests, especially along seasonal stream lines, White-browed Robins are quite common and may be easily observed. An attractive species, they have distinctive calls, appealing eyebrows and a handsome cocked tail.

Their sister species is only known in our region from the far northwest where it is common in the gorges of Boodjamulla National Park. The Buff-sided Robin is a very attractive species with rufous-buff flanks and its range extends well west to the Kimberleys.

The Buff-sided Robin, enters our region in the northwest, this one was photographed at Boodjamulla National Park.

One sister species of the Jacky Winter occurs across the tropics from Queensland to the Top End and prefers the slightly drier environments of pandanus, monsoon forests, riparian vegetation and mangroves. This is the appealing Lemon-bellied Flycatcher. Surprisingly, this species makes the smallest Australian nest, a tiny shallow cup that just takes the single egg and which the chick over-fills from hatching onward.

The very widespread Eastern Yellow Robin occurs along the coastal areas in the eastern states, from the southeast corner of SA through Victoria and NSW and up the eastern coast of Queensland. It only just reaches our region, where it is mainly coastal as far as Cooktown. This species has a substantial and well-decorated nest, sometimes even in urban areas. It can be very confiding and loves perching on the trunks of trees. I am always stunned by the vividness of the yellow when I raise my binoculars to look at one.

A quite distinctive robin can be found in mangroves across the tropics and is aptly named the Mangrove Robin. A reliable place for this species is the northern end of the Cairns Esplanade where its distinctive calls are easily heard.

Two robins that are largely confined to rainforest occur in the Wet Tropics. The Pale Yellow Robin is a small species often quite cryptic, but frequently seen on the edge of rainforests or in wait-a-while thickets. Some of what we know about the population in northern Queensland is due to the fine work of BirdLife Northern Queensland Branch Secretary, Renee Cassels who devoted her Honours thesis to this species.

The final species, a Wet Tropics endemic, is the distinctive, Grey-headed Robin. This large and attractive species is a bird one might associate with early mornings. It is typically the first bird to call in the rainforest dawn chorus (in the pre-dawn dark) and it continues to call well after sunset. If you want to enjoy this species you might listen to more from Al Jolson's song: "wake up, wake up, you sleepy head; get up, get up, get out of bed" … the Grey-headed Robin is already waiting.

Pale Yellow Robin in the wet tropics rainforest, this one at the Curtain Fig, Yungaburra.

The Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, widespread across the Australian tropics, here seen near Townsville.

Eastern Yellow Robin enters our region at the far northern end of its range, this one in a backyard in Atherton, showing its decorated nest.

The Mangrove Robin requires a certain fortitude to enjoy because it is usually associated with sand-flies! This one is from Cairns.

The Grey-headed Robin, endemic to the Wet Tropics, this one a backyard bird near Malanda.

2022 World Wetlands Day Celebration at Cattana Wetlands

By Mikey (Hidetoshi Kudo)

I was excited to see more than 40 people turn up to Cattana Wetlands for our World Wetlands Day celebration on 5 February 2022. The actual World Wetlands Day is 2 February. It marks the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention) in Iran, on 2 February 1971.

This year we decided to go out and enjoy our local wetlands. We were so fortunate that Jabiru volunteers, Geoff McClure and Denis Moeser took group leader roles and explained the work they had done in recent years in Cattana Wetlands, as part of Cairns Regional Council's Green Space Our Place volunteer program. It is amazing the impact that volunteers can have to create a huge difference to our environment and community.

Thank you, Geoff and Denis; and thank you Dave Anderson, from Cairns Birders, for discussing the birds in Cattana Wetlands at the Jabiru Lake viewing platform. Dave has done several bird surveys in the past and has been updating the original 2013 Cattana birds list. The final compiled list is awaiting publication.

Geoff and Denis set up two display tables to show nest boxes and the weed species that they have been trying to manage. The management of Cattana seems to have two aspects: controlling weeds (Navua Sedge and Para Grass etc.), and enhancing the biodiversity (installed nest boxes, new shallow wetland, sticks and logs in ponds). It seems to be working very well and volunteers have done an amazing job. Then it makes me think about what we can do as members of BirdLife. I would suggest we visit the park more, and report interesting sightings and expand the list of fauna so that we can prove that the biodiversity of Cattana is improving.

The highlights of our celebration were two Sugar Gliders in the nest boxes installed by Denis Moeser. He used a pole camera that had been gifted to Cattana by The Friends of the Botanic Gardens (FOBG), Cairns, and showed us the sleepy gliders as a live show. One Spotted Whistling-Duck was seen in the middle of Jacana Pond. On the way back, we checked the nest of Black Bittern, but unfortunately it was empty.

Overall, it was a great day out to celebrate World Wetlands Day in fresh air with like-minded friends who care about our wetlands.

Mikey (Hidetoshi Kudo), Cairns Area Coordinator

Denis Moeser (left) with a pole camera; Geoff McClure (centre) explaining bladderwort and weeds; Dave Anderson (right) with binoculars. Image courtesy of Mikey (Hidetoshi Kudo).

Particpants at the World Wetlands Day celebration, on 05 Feb 2022. Image courtesy of Shane Kennedy.

Prior to the World Wetlands Day celebration, 18 Spotted Whistling-Ducks were reported from the Cattana Wetlands. This year Cattana has been a very reliable place to see these rare visitors. Image courtesy of Mikey (Hidetoshi Kudo).

World Wetlands Day

2 FEBRUARY 2022

By Jennifer (Jenn) H Muir

On Saturday 5 February 2022, World Wetlands Day was celebrated at Cattana Wetlands in a Birdlife Northern Queensland outing. Its theme was 'Challenges to enhance the biodiversity of wetlands'.

World Wetlands Day is celebrated internationally each year on 2 February (or sometime during that month). It marks the anniversary of the signing, on 2 February 1971, of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) in Ramsar, Iran. Representatives from 18 nations signed the Ramsar Convention to stop global loss of wetlands, and to conserve and sustainably manage remaining wetlands.

The catalyst for this occurred when several environmentalists gathered to reaffirm the protection and importance of wetlands, though world celebrations didn't actually start then.

The first World Wetlands Day was celebrated in 1997 in American Samoa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, and Venezuela.

Since then, World Wetlands Day has been celebrated every year to increase global awareness of the critical role and value of wetlands for people, nature, and Planet Earth; to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands; and to conserve, through wise use and management, those that remain.

WHY DO WETLANDS MATTER?

Wetlands cover a small percentage of Planet Earth's surface, yet they are essential systems. They are rich in nature and vital to human life. They act as water sources and purifiers and help recharge the groundwater. Mangrove wetlands protect our shores. Wetlands are Planet Earth's greatest natural carbon stores, and are crucial to agriculture and fisheries.

The Ramsar Convention is an International Treaty for the protection of the world's wetlands. It maintains the Ramsar Sites List, and encourages member countries (known as Contracting Parties) to nominate sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or that are important for conserving biological diversity.

Source: www.ramsar.org

By January 2022 (as of 21 January 2022) the Convention had recorded:

- 172 Contracting Parties;
- 2,435 Wetlands of International Importance;
- 254,685,425 ha total surface of designated sites.

Ramsar's Secretariat is based at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) headquarters in Switzerland, and provides information that can be downloaded at www.worldwetlandsday.org.

This year (2022) is the first year that World Wetlands Day was observed as a United Nations International Day, following its adoption by the General Assembly on 30 August 2021. The theme, Wetlands Action for People and Nature, highlights the importance of actions that ensure wetlands are conserved and sustainably used. It was an appeal to invest financial, human and political capital to save the world's wetlands from disappearing, and to restore those we humans have degraded.

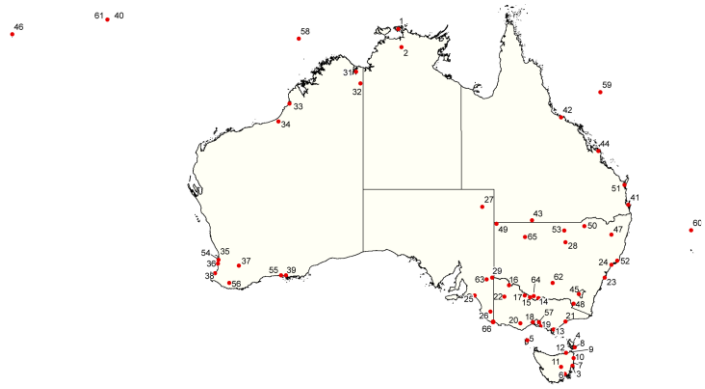
RAMSAR WETLANDS IN AUSTRALIA

Australia was one of the first countries (Gough Whitlam, of the Labour Party, was Australia's Prime Minister then) to become a Contracting Party to the Convention, and in 1974 designated the world's first Ramsar site: Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory.

Today (January 2022), Australia has 66 Ramsar Sites with a surface area of 8,307,694 hectares, forming an impressive estate of diverse wetland types (freshwater and marine, permanent and ephemeral) in every climatic zone. More information on Australia's wetlands and the Ramsar Convention in Australia is available from www.environment.gov.au/wetlands, or the Ramsar Convention website at www.ramsar.org

As at January 2022, Queensland has five Ramsar wetlands:

- Moreton Bay (Brisbane) – one of Australia's largest Ramsar-listed sites; and listed for its migratory shorebirds;
- Bowling Green Bay (south of Townsville);
- Currawinya Lakes (Currawinya National Park on Qld-NSW border near Hungerford) – one of Qld's largest national parks;
- Inskip Peninsula's Shoalwater and Corio Bay Area (Sunshine Coast); and
- Great Sandy Strait including Tin Can Bay and Tin Can Inlet – Ramsar-listed for migratory shorebirds.



Map source: https://www.awe.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications/factsheet-australias-ramsar-sites

IN CELEBRATION OF OUR WETLANDS

When you see a Pacific Black Duck, do you ever take it for granted? They are reasonably common, after all. But as this stunning image taken by Ian Wilson clearly demonstrates, even our common waterbirds can be absolutely beautiful. The Pacific Black Duck is one of the most versatile of the Australian ducks. It frequents all types of water, from isolated forest pools to tidal mudflats. For more information about Pacific Black Duck check out the BirdLife Australia bird profile page. To explore, learn, discover and enjoy more information about Aussie birds, go to Find a bird.

Image courtesy of (C) Ian Wilson, 2015, birdlifephotography.org.au

Cairns' Cattana Wetlands

By Jennifer H Muir

WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2 FEB. 2022

Because of the environmental significance of Cattana Wetlands, Birdlife Northern Queensland (BNQ) held a World Wetlands Day 2022 celebration there with the important topic for discussion: "Challenges to enhance the biodiversity of wetlands". See "World Wetlands Day 2022" in this Newsletter.

Cattana Wetlands is one of the few lacustrine reserves in Cairns suitable for water birds and waders. It is significant for its wide variety of habitats including several freshwater lakes of different depths (some of which become salty as they dry out), mudflats, fresh to brackish waterways, forest, woodland, and grasslands. A wide variety of habitats means a wide variety of food species, and therefore birds.

Globally, most fauna is declining due to habitat loss, climate change, and other human actions and many species are of particular concern because of greater decline. Cattana Wetlands is a refuge for some of these species.

INTRODUCING CATTANA WETLANDS ENVIRONMENTAL PARK

Cattana Wetlands is a well-known, popular birding site close to Cairns. It comprises an area of about 80 ha near Yorkey's Knob, about 12 kms north of Cairns City. The Traditional Custodians of the Cattana Wetlands region are the Indigenous Yirrganydji people, whose traditional lands and waters extended along the Cairns to Port Douglas coast. Another group, the Djabugay, occupied the mountainous areas and forest to the west.

Today's wetlands site is named after the Cattana family, who grew sugarcane there before it was sold to the Mulgrave Shire Council in 1993. Part of the property was mined for sand and gravel, resulting in several lakes.

Since then, several grants have been received by Cairns Regional Council (CRC) for rehabilitation and development of visitor facilities at the site, and in 2009 Cattana Wetlands Environmental Park (Cattana) was officially opened. Over the years, several community groups have assisted with rehabilitation plantings, and in 2013 the 'Jabirus', volunteers of CRC's Green Space Our Place program, commenced weekly restoration and maintenance of the site.

Map 1: from Cairns Regional Council's website - cairns.qld.gov.au

A Master Plan approved by CRC in 2017 increased the emphasis on wildlife protection and habitat enhancement. Although major plantings ceased in 2017, maintenance of wildlife corridors and special habitats continues, and the Jabirus continue to support the Park.

Cattana is a protected haven for many water, forest and bush birds; and popular with local, state, interstate, and international birders. Bird hides have been built at Kingfisher Pool and Jabiru Lake (Map 1 above) and there are numerous birding hotspots along the circuit walks at Kingfisher Pool, Cuckoo Lake/Crake Pond; and Jabiru Lake.

Jabiru Lake (image below right), largest of the Cattana lakes, comprises permanent fresh water to 2m deep, and small islands that provide shelter and roosting vegetation for some birds. During the wet season, all the other lakes are fresh water until, towards the end of the dry season, some become saltier as they dry out. Thus Cattana's lakes vary from semi-permanent swamps and freshwater lakes to mudflats, or grass/sedge dominated depressions.

ABOUT WETLANDS

Wetlands are defined as areas of land seasonally (at times dry or muddy) or permanently saturated with water, which may be static, flowing, fresh, brackish or saline. They may be natural (eg rivers, swamps, lakes/ponds, floodplains, salt marshes, estuaries, mudflats) or artificial, eg dams, or man-made lakes such as those at Cattana.

Planet Earth needs wetlands: they are a crucial part of our natural environment and it is vital they are protected. Globally, too many wetlands have been drained or filled in for human development. Without wetlands, many birds, other animals and plants just wouldn't exist. In particular, wetlands are an important habitat for waterbirds. Waterbirds' body, leg and bill shapes have evolved to enable many species to occupy this specialised habitat.

BIRD CONSERVATION AT CATTANA

As birds are such a crucial part of, and indicator of the health of, the world's environments, numerous government laws and international agreements have been established over the years to protect birds.

These laws include the Australian Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999; and in Qld, the Qld Government Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Nature Conservation Act 1992 (NCA). Further protection is provided by the Commonwealth Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds (2015). Many migratory birds breed during northern hemisphere summers when there is a super-abundant food supply for raising the young, then leave the region to avoid the severe winters.

In migrating to their southern hemisphere summer non-breeding grounds, many follow the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) which extends from Russia and Alaska, through East and South-east Asia, to Australia and New Zealand.

By 2017 over 45% of the world's rapidly increasing human population occupied the EAAF region, and associated pollution, land reclamation, hunting, and other threats continue. Loss of rest and refuel (R&R) stopover points along the coast are increasing the risks to birds following the EAAF, despite bilateral International Migratory Bird Agreements (MBA) set up to protect these birds. These Agreements still exist between Australia and: Japan (JAMBA 1974); China (CAMBA 1986); and the Republic of Korea (ROKAMBA 2006).

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) maintains a Red List of Threatened Species from which I downloaded (27 January 2022) the conservation status https://www.iucnredlist.org of the species discussed below.

Much of Planet Earth is so disturbed by human activity, that long-term viability of bird populations is also more affected by species lifespan. For example, a species that lives only three or four years, and doesn't breed until its second year, may only breed two or three times in its entire life, unless it breeds more than once a year. If habitat loss or disturbance prevents breeding in just one year, it may lose at least 25% of its breeding opportunities.

Before humanity had such an impact on the environment, nature's "boom and bust" cycle was a natural population control, helping to keep nature in balance. In today's world, wetland destruction and flora and fauna loss make birds much more vulnerable to further change.

BIRDS RECORDED AT CATTANA

At time of writing this article, a comprehensive list of Cattana birds is in preparation. Approximately two thirds are forest and bushland birds, and some use the grassland habitats (eg finches and mannikins). Others use the salt and mud flats (eg the waders Eastern Curlew and Red-necked Stint) and mangroves (eg Black Bittern). Almost 70 of the birds recorded at Cattana are water species that include not only freshwater birds but also shorebirds (waders), and a classified seabird that also favours fresh and saltwater inland lakes (Australian Pelican).

Here are three birds you might see at Cattana's Lakes, depending on time of year, day, and season.

BLACK BITTERN (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*)

The Qld Government's Nature Conservation Act (NCA) 1992 records Black Bittern's status as Least Concern; and IUCN's Red List (2016 global assessment) records it as Least Concern; population decreasing; average lifespan 4.1 years; Full Migrant: https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22697334/93608997.

However in Australia it's thought to be sedentary, with some regional movements. Though once considered widespread in Australia, it's known to have declined over the past 50-plus years due to destruction of river edge habitat for agriculture, as well as increasing salinity of the rivers. Once common in south-western WA, it's not known to have bred there for over 50 years. In 1992 one author listed it under Taxa of Special Concern. In NSW it was listed in 1999 as Vulnerable, and in Victoria it was classified in 2000 as Critically Endangered.

Black Bittern, Cattana Wetlands Mar 2021.
Image courtesy of Robert Dowe.

The Black Bittern has a varied conservation history, and in many cases its range is based on few observations. Research is needed to clarify this species' breeding behaviour, locations and distribution; and to locate the most important breeding areas. Geographic and individual variation patterns are unclear; species variation in plumage and size needs to be re-examined; and its status throughout its range needs to be clarified. (IUCN's Heron Specialist Group - downloaded 29 January 2022). Much remains to be learned about the Black Bittern.

Bitterns are elusive herons that live in somewhat secret solitude. They have a distinctive habit of freezing like sticks when alarmed: instantly going rigid, feathers compressed to slim their bodies and, with eyes open, stiffly pointing their bills and neck skyward.

Unlike other bitterns, Black Bitterns (aka Yellow-necked Bittern) will come out into the open during daylight, typically freezing when disturbed, but sometimes flying away as in this photo, often to perch in a tree.

Typically, they prefer dense vegetation of permanent wetland margins, where they feed day and/or night at water's edge. These habitats include forested streams and pools, mudflats and flooded bushland and, particularly in Australia, Pandanus fringed channels in swamps, Melaleuca swamps and coastal mangroves.

When feeding, they slowly stalk or stand to ambush a range of small animals, particularly fish and amphibians. Sometimes they plunge at it from a perch then stab it with their sharp bills.

Little is known about the courtship of this species, and its breeding distribution is little understood. In Australia, it breeds September to April and the nest is a loose platform, with a central shallow depression, in trees over water.

Nesting Black Bitterns with two or three chicks were recorded at Cattana in March 2021; and a pair was using the same nest in January 2022 - Robert and Suan Dowe (pers. comms).

In Australia, Black Bitterns are recorded coastally in WA's Kimberley, across 'The Top' and south through Qld to near Sydney NSW. Agriculture, increasing waterway salinity, and loss of wetlands reduce the range of habitats available for this bird.

EASTERN CURLEW [IUCN name: Far Eastern Curlew] (*Numenius madagascariensis*)

In its October 2021 update, Australia's EPBC Act 1999 listed Eastern Curlew as CRITICALLY ENDANGERED. IUCN states that the global population was estimated at 32,000 individuals in 2015 (undoubtedly during Australia's summer), including 28,000 in Australia. Global population decline is indicated by reduced numbers along EAAF stopover points in Korea and Japan, and a rapid decline in number of non-breeding individuals wintering in Australia and New Zealand.

IUCN's Red List (2016 global assessment) records Eastern Curlew as ENDANGERED; population decreasing; average lifespan 10.1 years; Full Migrant: https://www.iucnredlist.org/specieslist.org/species/22693199/118601473

Curlews are large, dull brownish wading birds mainly characterised by very long, decurved bills. Many of these waders, including the Eastern Curlew, breed in the northern hemisphere, and migrate to their southern hemisphere non-breeding grounds, arriving in our spring/summer and departing in autumn.

The Eastern Curlew's very long down-curved bill is 3.5 times longer than its head. The female is the world's largest wader and her bill is longer than the male's.

Eastern Curlew, Cairns Foreshore: a tidal, marine mudflat wetland habitat. 29 Aug 2021. Jennifer H Muir.

Stalking slowly and sedately, Eastern Curlews probe the mud with their long sensitive bills for small crabs and other invertebrates on coastal estuaries, mudflats and mangrove swamps.

Most of the world population winters in Australia, arriving around September/October. Eastern Curlews have been recorded at Cattana, as well as at Cairns foreshore's tidal, marine mudflats. They're more common on Australia's north and east coasts than on the west and south coasts. Some individuals winter in China, Peninsula Malaysia, Indonesia, New Guinea and New Zealand. Eastern Curlews breed in eastern Siberia and northern Mongolia on swampy moors and marshes, where their long legs enable them to use areas with taller vegetation: an advantage that shorter-legged species don't have.

Red-necked Stint on rocks at Michaelmas Cay, Cairns 21 Mar. 2021. Jennifer H Muir.

RED-NECKED STINT (*Calidris ruficollis*)

Birdlife International states that Red-necked Stint is considered Near Threatened because it is restricted to the EAAF where loss of key stopover sites in the Yellow Sea region are thought to be responsible for declines in water bird populations. The species is thought to be declining at a rate approaching the threshold for Vulnerable, according to 30 years monitoring data from around Australia and New Zealand.

IUCN's Red List (2016 global assessment) records Red-necked Stint as NEAR THREATENED; population decreasing; average lifespan 7 years; Full Migrant: https://www.iucnredlist.org.species/22693383/93401907

Stints are the world's smallest, strongly migratory sandpipers of the genus Calidris: easily distinguished from all other waders, except other dark-legged stints, by their quicker movements. Members of this genus are confusingly alike, at least in non-breeding plumage, presenting considerable field identification challenges.

In Australia, Red-necked Stints 'hang out' on tidal mudflats, running about rapidly, pecking at the surface with a sewing machine action, for marine invertebrates when the tide recedes. They roost on rocky outcrops or sandy beaches when the tide rises. They're also recorded on salt marshes, and brackish and freshwater wetlands with shallow water or wet sand/mud, such as at Cattana.

Breeding plumage on head, neck and breast is orange-red. They breed on the north-eastern Siberia tundra (more rarely western Alaska), then migrate along the EAAF to their southern hemisphere summer non-breeding grounds. Some also stop in eastern China and South-east Asia, or continue on to New Guinea and New Zealand.

In Australia they're widespread, except in the arid inland: adults arrive August/September and juveniles later. They return to their northern hemisphere breeding grounds March/April.

Like most waders using the EAAF, Red-necked Stints are threatened by coastal pollution, reclamation, and hunting along their migration route.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Purple Swamphens prey on gosling

By Del Richards

On 9th September 2021 I was guiding near Wari lake in Port Douglas and we noted a commotion at the waters edge. Upon investigation three Magpie Geese, a breeding unit were very vocal and upset. They had two downy goslings with them on the water. On closer inspection of the nearby shrubbery there were at least four Purple Swamphens present. The Magpie Geese had nested amongst the prolific Singapore Daisy near to the lake and their young had become stranded in it's growth in transit to the water. Within minutes we noted a Purple Swamphen with a gosling in the bill at the waters' edge with three more showing a keen interest in what was to be their next meal. The other species that breeds on the lake is the Dusky Moorhen and they seldom rear more than three young at any given time, a fraction of their usual outcome.

From the image it appears that these local Purple Swamphens take advantage of the local circumstances.

Magpie Geese with goslings.

Purple Swamphen with gosling chick

Purple Swamphen with gosling chick.

All images courtesy of Tim Stirling, Bendigo, VIC.

Notes on Wet Tropics Bowerbird Monitoring, 2021 season

By Dominic Chaplin

BACKGROUND

The biggest news of 2021 with respect to monitoring rainforest birds in the Wet Tropics was the release of Steve Williams JCU study 2000-2016. This showed notable reductions in the number of 14 local rainforest species. It is likely that climate change, causing more intense heat waves and reduced food availability, is the mechanism for the decline. In line with IUCN Red List status requirements, these species were subsequently given upgraded conservation status (Near Threatened to Endangered) in the other big news of 2021, with the release of *The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020*. An overview of these two publications is given in the latest Australian BirdLife magazine with a nod to local BirdLife members who contributed.

New ratings for Wet Tropics bird species from The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020	
Endangered	Brown Gerygone (Wet Tropics subspecies)
	Australian King Parrot (Wet Tropics subspecies)
	Fernwren
Vulnerable	Large-billed Scrubwren (Wet Tropics subspecies)
	Atherton Scrubwren
	Eastern Whipbird (Wet Tropics subspecies)
	Bower's Shrikethrush
	Mountain Thornbill
	Victoria's Riflebird
Near Threatened	White-throated Treecreeper (Wet Tropics subspecies)
	Grey-headed Robin
	Tooth-billed Bowerbird
	Golden Bowerbird
	Satin Bowerbird (Wet Tropics subspecies)

So, what can BirdLife Northern Queensland do to try and continue this work? We are currently discussing how best to proceed. The big problem is that a large number of surveys are required to iron out variabilities caused by time of day, time of year, conditions on the day, wandering species, species detectability, observer experience with calls etc etc. JCU carried out around 2000 30 min/150 m surveys at around 60 sites over 17 years. It is beyond the resources of BirdLife Northern Queensland to continue this volume of field work or to analyse the results. Perhaps if surveys could be targeted and encouraged then limited data could be useful and add to our understanding. Another problem is that Birdata, with excellent methodology of 2 ha 20 min or 500 m surveys is unfortunately rarely used by some members. I am uncertain if eBird, with no standard methodology, can usefully demonstrate much in the way of trends, unless BirdLife Australia compatible surveys are entered and clearly identified as such in the eBird record.

For a few years now we have been looking at bowerbirds. These have relatively repeatable behaviour which can be measured every year. Can they act as sentinel species to more conveniently measure the health of the forest and the other bird species? Up until this year we have been measuring where their bowers/courts are (area of occurrence) but we haven't tried to count the density of birds. A declining population might be expected to have a declining area of occurrence. This year we have started to attempt to count numbers of Tooth-billed Bowerbirds (TBB) calling.

The area of occurrence of TBB courts remains largely unchanged compared to historically known range. Overall density of TBBs is difficult to estimate as they tend to clump towards ridges and hill tops.

There is a tiny reduction in the area of occurrence of Golden Bowerbird (GB) bowers (a forest fragment at Topaz). Overall density of GBs is also difficult to measure as they are sparsely and locally distributed in suitable habitat.

Who knows what is happening to the Wet Tropics subspecies of Satin Bowerbirds which seem to exhibit minimal repeatable bower building behaviour in our region.

Satin Bowerbirds at Paluma. Bird on left is an adult male, with the bird on right being an immature male. (C)Tim Van Leeuwen 2021 birdlifephotography.org.au

NEW TOOTH-BILLED BOWERBIRDS WALKING SURVEYS

During their studies at Paluma in the late 1970's to 1980's, Cliff and Dawn Frith found Tooth-billed Bowerbirds, in peak season Oct-Nov, spent an average of 64% of the day at their courts (range 52-79%) calling most (94%) of the time. So in theory, during a walk through Tooth-billed Bowerbird habitat in peak season it should be possible to detect this percentage (%) of birds as they call loudly and distinctively.

It is possible to actually physically try and count the number of courts in a given area. We do try this at some locations. But it is hard work crashing through the forest and usually results in the observer getting stuck in the wait-a-while then frightening the birds away. Instead, as a new long term project we have set up a number of 1 km walks along easily accessible rainforest trails. All a quiet observer has to do is walk the 1 km and count how many Tooth-bills they can hear. Those who feel confident can also attempt to count the number of other birds heard as well. Instructions are on the Birdlife Northern Queensland website.

Forty-four surveys were carried out in 2021. Thirty-two different 1 km transects were walked at 26 locations (at some locations 2-3 km were walked for extra data). Around 215 courts were counted. Counts were also taken of the other 13 new threatened species.

We visited all the sites planned but ran out of time to get to Mt Misery, Cooktown. This is an important site as it is the most northerly and also one of the lowest with the first court at 570 m. Of note, our highest court, 1385 m at the peak of Mt Fisher was no longer active this season leaving a court at the peak of Mt Spurgeon 1333 m the highest known. On Mt Bartle Frere there is significant scope for uphill movement, but on the western walking track, there are no courts above 1150 m.

The results at a couple of sites show the variability between observers/days. It is worth doing more repeat surveys with different people/different days at a couple of sites to get a better handle on the variability. Trying to estimate the actual number of individuals of other species heard has massive variability between observers. I walked the same 1 km together with a highly skilled birder at Mt Lewis and our estimates varied by 100%!

Thanks very much to Elizabeth Lovett, Wendy Cooper, Jeff & Kerry Watson, Edward Bell, Yu Ota, Ceinwen Edwards, Sandra Christensen, Ceri Pearce, Martin Willis, Ashley & Suzanne Peake, Joanna S., Amanda Freeman, Ray Pierce, John Grant, Keith Fisher, John Frois, Cameron for assistance with TBB surveys.

TOOTH-BILLED BOWERBIRD COURT COUNTS

Physical court counts were continued at The School for Field Studies, Malanda Barnes Pikle, Lake Barrine, Lake Eacham and at Topaz.

The numbers of courts will fluctuate seasonally and numbers heard can vary daily and seasonally for many reasons. What's important though is whether through time there is a change greater than just that background variation. Overall numbers have been fairly stable for the last 10 years, with a drop at Lake Barrine.

The School For Field Studies (SFS) (770 m) - Amanda Freeman counted courts here. There has only been a slight change here, and in the nearby World Heritage Area, since 2004. In the 2021 season, the SFS "regrowth" area had eight courts active. Seven to ten courts have been active there over the last five years. The "Access Rd" had six courts active, a little down on the last five years that have seen seven to ten active courts. Overall, the number of courts have recovered to pre-cyclone Larry numbers.

Malanda Barnes Pikle (900 m) - Amanda Freeman counted courts here. There were seven courts active in the 2021 season. Court numbers there have ranged from six to nine over the past few years.

Lake Barrine (750 m) - Courts have been counted around the top circuit walking track by John Grant since 2008. Only three courts appeared to be active this season. I could not help but notice how close they were to the very busy road with near continuous high speed traffic. TBBs will naturally try to move towards a ridge, but this is exactly where the road is. I would predict a gradual drop in numbers at this site as the road noise increases through human population growth. In the longer term numbers will build up again as we convert to quieter electric vehicles. At neighbouring Curtain Fig Tree NP there are about four courts along the 1km of also very busy road. But they are a long way in and can only really be heard first thing before traffic starts up. Tooth-billed Bowerbirds do not like traffic noise.

Lake Barrine
No. Tooth-billed Bowerbird Courts

2008	2012	2015	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
6	6	6	6	6	5	5	3

Lake Eacham (780 m) - Southern lakeside incorporating the interpretive walk. The courts here have also been counted by John Grant since 2008. Seven courts were active compared to 5-8 (2008-2020). Court numbers are stable here, with little traffic problem.

Lake Eacham No. Tooth-billed Bowerbird Courts							
2008	2012	2015	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
8	5	5	5	5	5	5	7

Private Property Topaz (700 m) - Wendy Cooper has been counting the number of courts at this property for many years.

Private Property Topaz No. Tooth-billed Bowerbird Courts												
1986	1992	1997	2001	2006	2007	2008	2011	2016	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cyclone Winifred	41	30	26	Cyclone Larry	11	14	14	16	16	19	15	17

Kahalpahlim Track (870-1020 m) - There is a high density of courts along a 1.5 km section of this track with a steep ridge. These have been counted a few times and also one listening survey 2021. The listening survey showed a similar result to the court counting surveys.

Kahalpahlim Track No. Tooth-billed Bowerbird Courts			
2015	2017	2019	2021
23	28	28	25

Tooth-billed Bowerbirds Historical (Paluma (890 m) - This is our most important site as it was the location of Cliff and Dawn Frith's extensive long term Tooth-billed Bowerbird studies in the 1970's-80's. We have set up one transect directly through their study site plus another 1 km further along the track. We hope to draw on the knowledge gained from the original Frith work and make long term comparisons at this site.

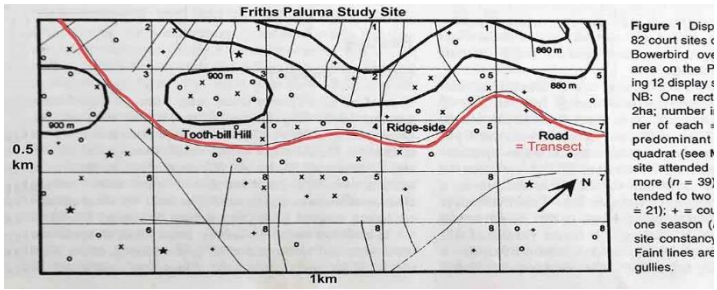


Figure 1 Disp
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The Friths counted court numbers at this study site on four different years:

- 1979 – 42 courts
- 1980 – 56 courts
- 1986 – 51 courts, and
- 1989 – 59 courts

That was an average of 52 courts per year present in the whole area, over 4 years. 82 courts were detected within the area overall between 1978-89, though some became disused. The map shows approx 55 courts were within 100 m of the current transect, suggesting the transect is in a good location to be able to monitor the majority of courts detected in the 1970's-80's.

Since the original work undertaken by the Frith's, the site has been severely disrupted following Cyclone Yasi, with thick regrowth pushing Golden Bowerbirds out. I believe the Toothbills can better adapt to the changing conditions whereas the Goldens are very reluctant to move bower site. However, more robust analysis is required to be certain.

Golden Bowerbirds

Golden Bowerbird bowers have been very stable during the ten years of this study so little attention was paid to them this season. We know of around 110 bowers. We attempt to check some every year and also end up bumping into more new bowers every year in the process.

- Five (5) new bowers were found.
- 26 exisiting bowers were checked and ok.
- Four (4) of these had moved about 20 m (treefall, rotted central perch, too close to road?, overcrowding?).
- One (1) of these had moved about 70 m (rotted central perch).
- One (1) small bower found in 2019 was abandoned for no obvious reason at Mt Fisher. But there are several other bowers nearby. Perhaps a practise bower.
- One (1) large bower, which is at least 10 years old, in Possum Valley/Herberton Range, was reported abandoned by owner Paul Tredgett. We will check this area next year to find where it has gone. Other bowers are nearby.
- One (1) bower at Mt Finnigan was reported to be in poor shape by Lewis Roberts. This is of more concern. Lewis has been walking the mountain his whole life. This bower is in a very obscure spot at the back of the mountain where no regular person would ever go. He has only ever known of one bower on the mountain exisiting at any one time which has moved around over 1 km during this time (could be different birds/families). We will check the area next year, but if it has moved more than about 70 m it could be extremely hard to find. This is also an important bower as it is the most northerly that we know of.

Golden Bowerbirds Historical - Topaz (670-770 m) -

- One (1) Golden Bowerbird bower at Frith's Topaz property (667 m) was abandoned approx 10 years ago (GB17). Another was hit by a tree around the same time. Not known to be replaced. Cliff saw a Golden Bowerbird in his garden mid 2021.
- At a private property at Topaz nearby, three (3) bowers were reported present in 1986 but all were abandoned by the late 1990's.
- At another property nearby, a Golden Bowerbird bower was reported abandoned in the early 1990s.

There is a theory that the young from these lower altitude birds need to reconnect with birds up on Bartle Frere, but there is a large area of agriculture in the way to the east. To the south, the forest is too low. The lack of a direct upward altitudinal forested tract possibly hinders bird flow out of and into the Topaz property areas and these birds were hence marooned after clearing.

We spent a morning checking out a promising looking ridge just north of the Topaz properties at 750-770 m. Several TTB courts were present but no Golden Bowerbird bowers were detected. It is likely that there are no more Golden Bowerbird bowers in this forest fragment.

Golden Bowerbirds - Historical Southern Area

Numbers of Golden Bowerbird bowers are clearly down at Paluma compared to the 1980's. Cyclone Yasi ravaged the area in 2011. Subsequent thick regrowth has crowded out where the bowers used to be here and at the Kirrama Range. The smashed forest above Cardwell may take some decades to recover.

There is a worry that bowerbirds, which might live for decades, could survive in a low altitude area, but there will be losses into the future as breeding success is reduced. A similar situation exists with long lived parrots. This may have happened at Topaz. Two of our lowest bowers are at Paluma (801 m) found in 1978 and Ravenshoe (855 m) found in 2013. These both still show some breeding activity. A young brown male was present at the Paluma bower this season. Three to four birds were also present close to the Ravenshoe bower.

BirdLife Northern Queensland bowerbird surveys will continue in 2022. Check the activities calendar for details and contact Dominic to get involved.

Author, Dominic Chaplin, was awarded a Cassowary Award by the Wet Tropics Management Authority in 2021, in recognition of his innovation and driving force behind BirdLife Northern Queensland's Bowerbird Monitoring project.

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News from Mount Isa

By Rex Whitehead

In late November 2021, a mate of mine from the Townsville region asked would I like to join him for a bit of birding on the Atherton Tablelands. I jumped at the idea and headed off from Mount Isa accordingly.

We got onto some good birds in the Julatten area including the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher, of which I was able to get some good images this time.

We went on to Cooktown where I was able to see the Spotted Whistling-Ducks thanks to Kath Shurcliff giving me the good oil on their location.

My mate had to return to Julatten, while I went further north as far as Musgrave. It had been about 40 years since I last drove the Peninsula Developmental Road (I don't think it had a name then). I couldn't get over how improved it was as there was very little dirt road south of Musgrave. From Musgrave I went back via the Cairns Esplanade to see what waders were around. This was prior to Nordy's welcome return. Who would have thought it would have returned. Maybe it never left.

From Cairns it was back home via Karumba, which is always a good birding destination. I managed three new birds on this trip (lifers) which was very pleasing.

On the local scene the birding has been great as always, until we had good rain in January, when the birds all fly off to greener pastures. The migratory waders go due to the rise in the lake water levels covering their food source. However, there are still a few Sharp-tailed and Wood Sandpipers at the Horse Paddocks. This season I have recorded 15 migratory species at Lake Moondarra. Maybe some will drop back in on their return journey north, providing their food source is available. I don't know how they do it, but they seem to know about this in advance. Wonderful things these birds.

Glossy Ibis displaying its beautiful colours. Who would have thought, they were this beautiful.

One bird we saw at Lake Moondarra late last year was a single Pied Heron. It was mixed in with a huge flock of Glossy Ibis which were all chasing locusts. We only saw the heron the once. In all my years here (60), I have never seen a Pied Heron here before.

That's what I love about Lake Moondarra, one never knows what bird might turn up.

The White-bellied Sea-eagles have once again successfully bred this season, with two lots of juveniles noticed. I know of four nesting sites for them now. One nest in particular has many turtle shells on it. Also, I have come across numerous trees which must be feeding trees due to the amount of turtle shells and catfish frames below them, usually below a horizontal branch.

White-bellied Sea-eagle nest. Note: turtle shells on the nest. Juvenile White-bellied Sea-eagle (image below).

I noticed, the Georgina River is in flood and the road to Birdsville is closed by the flooding of Eyre Creek at Cuttaburra Crossing. No doubt there will be some good birding to be had in the Channel country following the wet season.

That's all from Mount Isa for now folks.

Happy birding to you all.

Rex Whitehead.

Fungi and Featheries

By Barry Muir

Birds and fungi have close associations. Birds and all other animals on earth, including us, are dependent on fungi for our existence. All our fruits and vegetables depend on fungi; all our livestock survive only because of fungi; fish require fungi; all natural fibres such as cotton, bamboo and wool require fungi, and indirectly, all our coal, oil and natural gas came into existence because of fungi.

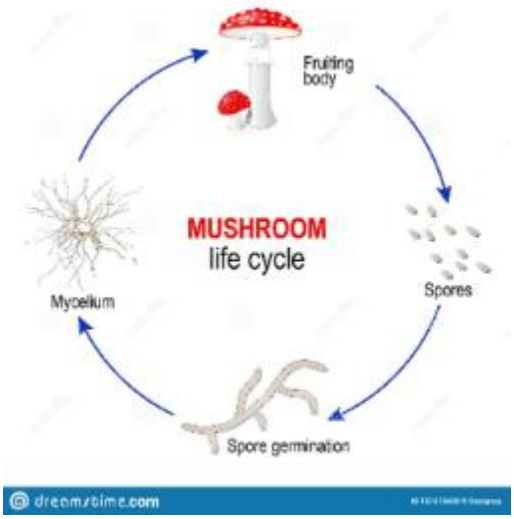
Fungi are largely out of sight and out of mind, and it is only in the last 100 years or so that their vital role on Earth has been recognised. Overall, schools and universities still teach very little about fungi, except for those of economic importance (eg, yeasts) or medicinal value (eg, penicillin and statins).

Firstly: an introduction. There are millions of fungal species. The fungus itself may be a single cell, or threads of cells called hyphae (hyphal threads), or a collection of them called a mycelium. These cells and hyphae live in soil, wood, on and inside us, and just about everywhere else, but it is often only when they fruit we become aware of their presence.

Their fruit may be minute, such as the black fuzz that grows in shower recess grout, or that green fuzz on a long forgotten plum in the fridge (collectively called moulds or microfungi: *micro* = small), to huge fruit bodies weighing half a tonne or more (collectively called macrofungi: *macro* = large). In USA's eastern Oregon's Blue Mountains there is a fungus mycelium that covers 7.8 square kilometres, and may be over 8,000 years old.

Amongst the microfungi, some are single-celled parasites of animals. One group produces minute spores that can swim: some of these, the Chytrid fungi, are infecting and killing our frogs with what is called Chytrid disease. Another group of microfungi lives only in the digestive tract of animals, including us.

Macrolepiota sp. Mar. 2010, Atherton Tablelands. Barry Muir



Simplified life-cycle of a typical mushroom fungus. Image courtesy of dreamtime.com

Many live in a symbiotic relationship with plants, as cells within the tissues of leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds and roots. These are collectively called endophytes (*endo* = inside, *phytus* = leaf). One of these specialist groups, called ectomycorrhizae (*ecto* = outside, *myco* = fungus, *rhiza* = root) are essential in the growth and survival of all trees, shrubs, grasses and other plants, and attach themselves to the outside of plant roots. Here they pass water and nutrients, especially phosphorous and trace elements, to the plant. The plant "pays" for these by supplying the fungi with sugar that it makes using sunlight and photosynthesis. The plant and fungus "communicate": if the fungus is not getting enough sugar it cuts back on the nutrient supply and the plant "recognises" this and increases sugar output to the fungus. Conversely, if the plant needs more water or trace elements, it may cut back on the sugar supply to the fungus, encouraging fungal output.

Colus hirudinosus, a decomposer fungus. Ellis Beach, north of Cairns, Feb. 2018. Barry Muir

Some are brightly coloured or of bizarre photogenic shapes, and some disperse their spores by attracting insects (eg, blowflies) using foul odours, fruity perfumes (eg, butterflies and moths), or earthy odours, ie the truffles that spread their spores by being eaten by birds and small marsupials.

Some of these macrofungi are also symbiotic with plants and live inside plant roots, growing small fungal masses inside the plant's cells. They do the same job as the ectomycorrhizae but are called endomycorrhizae (*endo* = inside).

By far the most conspicuous of the macrofungi are the decomposer/recyclers. These grow on any carbon-based material such as living and dead trees, stumps and branches, decaying leaves and bark, animal manure, and even dead fungi. They break complex carbon compounds such as cellulose, lignin, fats and sugars into simpler molecules that plants can use. Without the recyclers we would be neck deep in dead plant and animal debris in no time.

Marasmius sp. growing on wood – another decomposer. Cairns, Jan. 2017. Barry Muir

Now, with that background, we can get onto bird and fungus associations.

Brown Honeyeater nest with rhizomorphs marked with yellow arrows. Perth WA. Barry Muir

Firstly, birds eat fungi as food. Surprisingly, despite the myriad bird watchers out there, very few accurately record what birds are feeding on. Terms like "seeds and fruit" appear in literature, but useful comments such as Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo eating Beach Almond seeds, seem to fall through the cracks. Some comprehensive literature mentions fungi amongst foods consumed, but there is little documentation.

Personally, I have observed fungi being consumed by Emu, Cassowary, Malleefowl, Brush-turkey and Orange-footed Scrubfowl. In literature, Lyrebirds and Eastern Yellow Robin have been recorded eating fungi.

Many of these avian-preferred fungi are in a collection of species called truffles. Truffles are small, globular fungi that grow just beneath the soil surface, where they are invisible, but produce odours which animals can smell. The animals dig the truffles out. In fact, truffles are distributed almost solely by animals. The truffle is consumed, the animals travel some distance and the spores, unharmed, are pooped out in new places. All truffles are endomycorrhizal, so their distribution close to potential host plants is vital for the health of the bushland.

I have also observed *Mycena* (small mushrooms that grow on wood or soil) being eaten by Brush-turkey and Eastern Yellow Robin. Orange-footed Scrubfowl have been seen pecking bits off *Crepidotus* (a small bracket-like gilled fungus that grows on dead wood or bark of trees), and *Agaricus austrovinaceus* (a quite large mushroom). *Filoboletus manipularis* (small grey mushrooms that grow in clusters on wood) are consumed enthusiastically by Brush-turkey, as is *Pluteus petasatus* (a widespread large pale mushroom that grows on mulch).

Sometimes in the rainforest one finds a trail that is obviously used extensively by Brush-turkey and/or Orange-footed Scrubfowl. It is always worth a search along these trails after heavy rain because a wealth of mushrooms and other fungi spring up along the trail. Some spores are probably carried on the feet, legs and in the feathers, but many are probably transported in the birds' droppings.

On the subject of Brush-turkeys and Orange-footed Scubfowl, both build large nests of leaves and litter and, once abandoned, these are often great places to find small colourful fungi. They may grow in large numbers on the decomposing leaves and, would, over time, reduce the mounds to compost which is distributed by other animals, wind and rain.

Some birds use fungi as decoration or to assist in camouflage of their bowers or nests. Satin Bowerbird and one of the Lyrebirds, for example, are especially fond of a purple mushroom called *Lepista nuda* for decoration. A Golden Bowerbird bower on the Atherton Tableland is well decorated with a mould-like fungus called *Clavulicium extendens* which grows as a pure white coat over dead twigs. The Bowerbird seems to collect small fragments of the white twigs to highlight the bower.

Bowerbirds are also fond of the yellow-green lichen called *Usnea pulvinata*. This is the moss-like lichen frequently seen hanging in tufts or tassels from tree

branches in the wet, high humidity regions of the Tablelands. Lichens are a symbiotic relationship between a fungus and an algae in the same way as mycorrhizae are a symbiotic fungus associated with a tree or shrub.

Many birds incorporate fungi into their nests as binding material. Some fungi produce root-like strings of mycelia called rhizomorphs (*rhizo* = root, *morph* = form) and these are used like string to aid in nest construction by Willy Wagtail, Brown Honeyeater, Apostlebird, Grey Fantail and Spice Finch (aka Nutmeg Mannikin). An article by Frances Guard (2021) in Birdlife Northern Queensland Contact Call Vol. 10(2) discussed the use of rhizomorphs in some detail. Some birds incorporate lichen fungi into nests to aid in camouflage. Spectacled Monarch, Black-fronted Monarch and Eastern Yellow Robin are examples.

Inadvertently, many birds are consumers and distributers of endophytic fungi. Birds feed on petals, buds, seeds, fruit and leaves of plants, all of which contain endophytic fungi.

The host plant provides a protective sanctuary for the fungi and feeds them sugars. In return, endophytes produce a huge range of chemicals, some being well known, such as petal and fruit pigments; communication fragrances (flower perfumes); flavours (think mangoes, strawberries, apples); hormones (many of which are extracted from flowers for the perfume industry); and toxins, eg caffeine, nicotine, menthol, camphor, tannin, etc. These chemicals are used by the plant in defence against insect or pathogen attack.

We think of these substances as made by plants, but, in reality, most are made by the fungi that live inside the plant. When birds such as Torresian Imperial-Pigeons, Wompoo Fruit-Doves, or Metallic Starlings eat fruit and then poop the seeds out elsewhere, they are distributing the seeds but also passing on the endophytic fungi the seeds contain. Some fungal spores are also mixed in with pollen or nectar and are distributed by birds that feed on them.

Dispersal of fungi by birds is not just limited to local feeding ranges. There are myriads of marine fungi: especially yeasts; mycorrhizal fungi on mangroves, seaweeds and sea-grasses; and numerous pathogenic fungi that are parasites or live on dead or dying seaside plants and mangroves.

Long-range dispersers such as the many waders that migrate annually between the northern and southern hemispheres, carry spores in their gut, on their feathers, or in mud on their feet, transporting those spores across the globe. It is not coincidence, for example, that many mangrove pathogens and endophytes are found right along the Pacific Rim from Russia, through Japan, and Indonesia to Australia and New Zealand.

It is worth mentioning that Wallace's Line in Indonesia relates not just to bird distributions but is matched by fungi that are associated with those birds.

Black-faced Monarch nest with a liberal sprinkling of lichens and rhizomorphs. Atherton Tablelands. 28 Nov.2021. Barry Muir

Fungal diseases of birds should also be mentioned. There are vast numbers of fungal diseases, but most attack the bird's lungs and other soft, moist tissues such as the eyes. Fungal diseases in wild bird populations are infrequent, but are increasing out of control in cities where bird feeders, and random scattering of bread and seed, encourages wild birds to congregate, or domesticated species such as pigeons to accumulate. Most of these fungal diseases are spread by physical contact and several are also contagious to humans, especially to children who handle pet birds. Some, such as Histoplasmosis and Aspergillosus, can be fatal.

Finally, many of us are aware that bird populations are declining globally. Our first response is usually to blame land clearing for agriculture and housing, hunting and the wildlife trade as the culprits, but there is an even greater danger from global climate change. The warming climate is killing and altering the activities of endophytic fungi, and this is changing the fragrances of flowers and the taste of nectars and fruits. This, in turn is making these foods unattractive to birds and pollinating insects, so both sugar and insect food sources are declining.

Rising temperatures are also increasing fungal pathogens that attack insects, thereby reducing food for insectivores. Likewise, the altered climate is killing or altering mycorrhizal fungi, leading to a decline in plant health, and less flowering, fruit and seed set. A decrease in numbers of insectivores, nectarivores, frugivores and granivores then results in a loss of raptors and nocturnal birds of prey.

Further reading

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How to Watch Birds While Working on Fishes

By Helen Larson

I'm a retired ichthyologist, and have Curator Emeritus status at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin, so I keep working (taxonomy is really fish detective work). But I have watched and recorded birds well before I discovered fish.

The White Terns are entrancing to watch – I would have first seen these birds on Fanning Atoll in 1958, with Neville Cayley's 'What bird is that' to help me. This is Jeff's much more recent photo of one at Cocos-Keeling, with a squid for lunch.

During my 28 years at the Museum, I went to many countries to work on fishes – to visit museum collections, to collect specimens in the field, attend workshops or conferences or carry out collaborative projects with friends and colleagues. And eat good things with them.

Dinner after the IUCN Red List workshop at Muscat, Oman. We are waiting for our trevally and mackerel to be cooked. I saw 23 bird species in Oman, with a lifer Sooty Gull among them.

Here is a gathering of Sooty Gulls on a beach at Muscat. Photo by Philipp Weigel (CC-BY from Wkimedia Commons).

During all these fish trips, I birded as much as possible and often museum staff and colleagues would join me, in South Africa to Tahiti and the US, with many SE Asian places in between.

Typically, we work on fish for a week – this is the Gobiopterus revision team at Singapore: Kelvin Conway in front (who had never been to the tropics before), Kelvin Lim (collection manager and birdo), me, and Zeehan Jaafar (gobyologist and birdo). Gobiopterus are very tiny transparent schooling gobies that nobody understands.

Then we go birding. And these are our rewards; Band-bellied Crake and Hooded Pitta, both in the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Photos by Kelvin Lim.

Sometimes though, you just get too hot and tired after collecting in the mangroves to do anything but just sit in the shade and listen to the birds.

This is a government rest-house we stayed at in Brunei, where we had a week collecting mangrove fishes in very hot and steamy weather. And could not have a cold wine or two afterwards. The forest at the back of the rest-house was full of calling birds and singing gibbons. Saw or heard 22 species of birds in Brunei but no lifers.

South Africa is a great place for fish work and birding – managed to see 365 birds during my three trips there to work on the goby chapters of "The fishes of the Western Pacific" book. These are African penguins on the beach at Simons Town.

Nowadays, like everyone else, I can only daydream about birding again in places like India, Japan and the Solomon Islands etc. Up here in FNQ I feel safe and vaccinated but also trapped. I imagine that others reading this have made, cancelled and postponed bookings to birdy places overseas.

The Solomon Islands are fabulous for birds and fish – have only seen 67 bird species there but then I did spend some time fish-gazing on Tetepare, a protected area where it is very easy to see great birds. And fish and corals and turtles (I'm in the middle in the black sun-suit).

Colo-i-Suva forest reserve, Fiji

Now to successfully bird while doing fish work, some strategic planning is required, as usually fish conferences and workshops structure one's time to get maximum value out of the participants. Having a participant who doesn't pay attention to the guide or speaker but has binoculars fixed on the terns behind them can be a little baffling.

Colo-i-Suva forest reserve in Fiji is a great location for a birding day out after a week's Red List workshop on Pacific island fishes. So many great birds there – but now I want to go to Taveuni to see the Silktail and other endemics.

I was in Vietnam in 2007 to give a week's workshop on goby identification and museum techniques, at a fisheries college based outside Hanoi. Birds had been shot out and eaten everywhere so had to work hard to spot them among the traffic and people. But I did manage seeing 73 species after I was allowed 3 nights at Cuc Phuong National Park and a day at Tam Dao NP (because I was an invited scientist, the fisheries college that hosted me was responsible for my movements). At Cuc Phuong I had a young bird guide called Baih for a day, here is our lunch table.

I found that the pittas in Vietnam are entirely mythical. There is one calling in the undergrowth to the left, but do you think I could find it?

But here in FNQ we are so lucky to live among so many non-mythical birds. And we have enough forest intact even in our suburbs that we have recorded 120 bird species around our house at Wongaling.

Jeff Larson is the cassowary photographer.

Helen Larson

BirdLife Australia's

ethical birdwatching guidelines

Yellow-billed Spoonbill
by Nathan Watson

The welfare of birds always comes first

- Do not stress birds or expose them to danger (e.g. through flushing)
- Minimize the use and impact of spotlighting and call playback especially during nesting season and for threatened birds. We discourage the use of call playback but if used do not exceed three 30 sec bouts in 5 min total at any one site
- In bird photography, avoid lingering around nests or core territories, favourite feeding or drinking sites and limit the use of flashes
- Avoid handling birds (except in cases of extreme cause e.g. injured bird in danger)
- Help bird conservation by recording observations and standardised surveys. Make sure you keep sensitive data safe by using birdata.birdlife.org.au or in ebird.org - choose 'Hide Checklist' for threatened birds etc
- When providing food or water for native birds ensure this is done safely and appropriately for the birds. Artificial feeding cannot replace habitat protection.

Care for the birds' habitat

- Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist, especially in National Parks, reserves and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) **birdlife.org.au/KBA**
- Do not litter; rather pick up litter in bird habitat to inspire others to care
- Keep habitat disturbance and modification to a minimum
- Apply the same care to other fauna and flora as you do to birds.

Respect the law and the rights of others

- Do not enter private property or Indigenous lands without explicit permission
- Follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing use of roads and public areas

Be an advocate for bird conservation and birding

- Lead by example and know your audience – encourage others in ethical birding
- Share your knowledge and love for birds to inspire their conservation
- Engage and support local communities and get involved in conservation
- Support BirdLife Australia http://birdlife.org.au/support-us/join-us/

The complete **BirdLife Australia Ethical Birding Guidelines** are here http://www.birdlife.org.au/documents/POL-Ethical-Birding-Guidelines.pdf

Beach Stone-curlew
by Wilson Leonard

Make your birding count with Birdata.

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Give back to the birds!

Donate today and stand with BirdLife Australia to stop extinctions **birdlife.org.au/donate**

birdlife AUSTRALIA

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 assisant editor.

Newsletter deadlines for 2022

- ✓ April 30th for the June-July Edition
- ✓ July 30th for the September Edition
- ✓ October 10th for the December Edition

BirdLife Northern Queensland Newsletter
'Contact Call'
birdlifenqnewsletter@gmail.com
www.birdlifenq.org

WANT TO ADVERTISE IN CONTACT CALL?

Advertisements and sponsorship help support the local BirdLife group in Northern Queensland. Any profit is used for education and conservation projects in our region. The advertisements must be relevant to BirdLife Northern Queensland (BNQ) members and compatible with BirdLife Australia objectives and fund-raising guidelines.

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 and COVID-19

BirdLife Northern Queensland activities are managed in line with Queensland Government COVID-19 requirements. Activities may be cancelled at short notice if circumstances change.

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
- ❖ Practice physical distancing as much as possible and:
  - ➢ avoid contact such as hugs, kisses and handshakes
  - ➢ cover coughs and sneezes
  - ➢ use hand sanitiser or wash your hands regularly with soap and water
  - ➢ wherever possible keep at least 1.5 metres away, two big steps, from people you don't live with.
- ❖ Don't share personal equipment (e.g. binoculars).
- ❖ 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/

Go Hide-ing @ Wonga Beach

Stay lakeside in 'The Hide' cabin or 'The Cottage.'

- 2.5 acres absolute beachfront tropical gardens
- Coastal, wetland and forest birds
- 90 species recorded 500m radius in last 12 months
- Secluded setting
- Daintree Rainforest, Mossman Gorge, Atherton Tablelands, local tours

Self-contained 1BR units:
The Cottage
1 double bed + sofa bed
The Hide
1 double bed + triple bunk

Contact:
jhterracall@bigpond.com
Judy 0409 262 462
89-93 Snapper Island Drive, Wonga Beach, QLD

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NightSkySecrets are FNQ's local optical specialists with Binoculars & Spotters ideal for the bird watcher, nature lover or the casual observer. With Fully Multi Coated, HD, through to ED ultra flat field Spotters & Binoculars from Zeiss, Nikon, Kowa, Steiner, Bushnell, Celestron, Kson & more, we have the optics to suit every budget and experience

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Store: Shop 3 321 Sheridan St (Cnr. Smith St)
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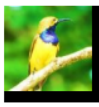

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BIRDWATCHERS & NATURE LOVERS ACCOMMODATION

Feathers'n'Friends Cottage is fully self-contained with extensive facilities to ensure up to 7 guests can enjoy short or extended stays.

The secluded lodging is surrounded by tropical rainforest and beautiful gardens with varying habitat and a large variety of birds and wildlife.

Located in the Hinterlands of Port Douglas just 90 minutes from Cairns Airport, activities in the area in the area include birdwatching at nearby Mt Lewis and Daintree River nature tours, Mossman Gorge and other attractions.

Check our website for details on rates and bookings and view photos of the property and wildlife:

www.feathersnfriends.com.au

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

Contact us: BirdLife Northern Queensland committee

Email: northernqld@birdlife.org.au

Internet: www.birdlifenq.org

BirdLife Northern Queensland 2022 Activities

Date	Time	Locality	Meeting place and other information	Contact the leader
Jan-March 2022	Anytime during the day	Anywhere along the coastline between the Daintree and Tully Rivers	**BEACH STONE-CURLEW SURVEYS 2022** This project is wrapping up early in 2022 and information about breeding success is still very much needed. If a walk along the beach and the thrill of seeing a rare and striking bird sounds exciting to you, we are seeking volunteers to survey beaches looking particularly for immature birds up until the end of March. It's as easy as walking along a beach birdwatching and filling out a form. Contact Amanda Freeman to identify the best beach near you and to receive an information kit. Of course, Beach Stone-curlew records are still very valuable after March and can be submitted direct to Birdata.	Contact Amanda Freeman at amandafreeman@naturenorth.com.au to identify the best beach near you that you can survey, and to receive an information kit.
April -July 2022			**FINCH SURVEY AND STUDIES** Multiple field camps are planned for March to June (they will be opportunistic around river conditions etc., hence no prescribed dates yet). We are aiming to train more people in survey methods and collect additional data on feeding and nesting of Gouldian Finches, all in collaboration with NQ Natural History Group www.nqnhg.org	For more information contact Ray Pierce: raypierce@bigpond.com
Friday 4 March 2022	7:00–9:00am	Hastie's Swamp, Atherton Meet at Hasties Swamp Hide car park	**HASTIES SWAMP MONTHLY BIRD SURVEY** You're invited to join us for a great morning of birding and collecting data on the birdlife in and around the swamp. Based mainly at and around the bird hide, members will survey the birds present at the wetlands and count the numbers of each species. Both waterbirds and bush birds in the adjacent fringing vegetation are included. We hope to follow the seasonal changes through the year. Bring binoculars/scope, field guide, notebook and pen, and morning 'smoko'.	For more information please contact Ron Schweitzer rgschweitzer@gmail.com
Sunday 13 March 2022	7:00–9:30am	Warrina Lakes, Innisfail Meet in the carpark in Park St, off the corner of Emily and Charles St, Innisfail	**BIRDING AROUND WARRINA LAKES** You're invited to join us for a couple of hours of social birding around Warrina Lakes. After birding we'll have morning tea at the lakes (BYO morning tea). It's the very wet tropics so bring an umbrella and waterproof shoes, just in case. Also, binoculars, sunscreen, hat, and insect repellent. In the event of a severe weather or other unforeseen circumstances, events may be cancelled at short notice. Contact the event organiser to confirm events.	Sandra Christensen, Cassowary Coast Area Coordinator For more information, please contact 0448 845 842. We hope you can make it!
Saturday 26 March 2022	From 7:00 am	Lake Barrine Teahouse	**SOCIAL EVENT AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** Joins us for a social day (and a bit of business) at Lake Barrine. 7:00 -a Bird Walk in the Lake Barrine area looking for rainforest specialities. Meet in the upper car park at Lake Barrine. Just in case it is wet, bring a raincoat/umbrella. 9:30 - Private Boat Cruise on Lake Barrine, lazy bird watching and chatting. Cost $20. Morning tea included. 10:30 – Annual General Meeting at the Lake Barrine Teahouse (downstairs). 12:30 – Join us for lunch downstairs at the tea house and overlooking the lake. Order and pay as individuals, joint private table to enjoy company and discussions.	Please RSVP to Lindsay Fisher lindsayjq@gmail.com

BirdLife Northern Queensland 2022 Activities

Date	Time	Locality	Meeting place and other information	Contact the leader
Sunday 27 March 2022	1:00 pm – 4:30 pm	Catalina Room at Cairns RSL Club, 119 Esplanade, Cairns	**WAVE THE WADERS GOODBYE** The migratory birds that have spent the past spring and summer on our shores are just about to return to their northern breeding grounds. This event is a great opportunity to farewell the birds and to learn about these visitors and other local shorebirds which rely heavily on the quality feeding grounds provided by our beautiful Cairns Esplanade. You don't have to be a 'wader' expert to join us. Beginners are most welcome. The event will start with presentations by guest speakers at the Catalina Room, Cairns RSL, from 1:00 pm. We will then move across the road to the Esplanade to view migratory shorebirds. Assistance is provided to help wader identification.	Contact : Mikey Kudo, Cairns Area Coordinator For more information, please contact me on kudo555@hotmail.co.jp or 0402 343 610
Friday 1 April 2022	7:00–9:00am	Hastie's Swamp, Atherton Meet at Hasties Swamp Hide car park	**HASTIES SWAMP MONTHLY BIRD SURVEY** You're invited to join us for a great morning of birding and collecting data on the birdlife in and around the swamp. Based mainly at and around the bird hide, members will survey the birds present at the wetlands and count the numbers of each species. Both waterbirds and bush birds in the adjacent fringing vegetation are included. We hope to follow the seasonal changes through the year. Bring binoculars/scope, field guide, notebook and pen, and morning 'smoko'.	For more information please contact Ron Schweitzer rgschweitzer@gmail.com
Sunday 10 April 2022	7:00–9:30am	Warrina Lakes, Innisfail Meet in the carpark in Park St, off the corner of Emily and Charles St, Innisfail	**BIRDING AROUND WARRINA LAKES** You're invited to join us for a couple of hours of social birding around Warrina Lakes. After birding we'll have morning tea at the lakes (BYO morning tea). It's the very wet tropics so bring an umbrella and waterproof shoes, just in case. Also, binoculars, sunscreen, hat, and insect repellent. In the event of a severe weather or other unforeseen circumstances, events may be cancelled at short notice. Contact the event organiser to confirm events.	Sandra Christensen, Cassowary Coast Area Coordinator For more information, please contact 0448 845 842. We hope you can make it!
Easter camp out Friday – Monday 15-18 April 2022	Arriving at afternoon of 15th and departing morning of 18th, we'll have 2 full days (16 & 17), unless you have more time to come and play.	We'll be based at Goldfields Caravan Park, but there are other accommodation options available you can choose. Make sure you book your accommodation to ensure a spot.	**EASTER OUTBACK BIRDING AT GEORGETOWN** Join us for a long weekend of casual birding at Georgetown, where the Einsleigh Uplands meets the Gulf Plains bioregions. Bird watching at Georgetown at Easter has a long history that goes back at least 40 years to the old North Queensland Naturalist days. There are plenty of birding opportunities in the area, including around Cumberland Dam. We're still making plans, so stay tuned for more details closer to the date, or contact us to register your interest in attending. Don't forget your togs, there's a swimming pool down the road – great for a refreshing swim after lunch on a hot day.	Please email us and RSVP to Lindsay Fisher and Ceri Pearce northernqld@birdlife.org.au
May 2021		Mt Isa region	**GRASS WREN SURVEY** We are seeking volunteers for the annual Grasswren Survey. Volunteers are welcome to come for as little as one week or for the whole 2-3 weeks. Fuel costs will be reimbursed. You will need to be self-sufficient, with high clearance vehicles, and ready to camp on the stations. We will work together in teams. This is an opportunity to see some beautiful country that is not publicly accessible, as well as many interesting birds. And enjoy time with great companions!!	Contact Kath Shurcliff for more information or to register. Email Kath at crabplover@westnet.com.au or phone: 04 7864 1987

BirdLife Northern Queensland 2022 Activities

Date	Time	Locality	Meeting place and other information	Contact the leader
Friday 6 May 2022	7:00–9:00am	Hastie's Swamp, Atherton Meet at Hasties Swamp Hide car park	**HASTIES SWAMP MONTHLY BIRD SURVEY** You're invited to join us for a great morning of birding and collecting data on the birdlife in and around the swamp. Based mainly at and around the bird hide, members will survey the birds present at the wetlands and count the numbers of each species. Both waterbirds and bush birds in the adjacent fringing vegetation are included. We hope to follow the seasonal changes through the year. Bring binoculars/scope, field guide, notebook and pen, and morning 'smoko'.	For more information please contact Ron Schweitzer rgschweitzer@gmail.com
Sunday 8 May 2022	7:00–9:30am	Warrina Lakes, Innisfail Meet in the carpark in Park St, off the corner of Emily and Charles St, Innisfail	**BIRDING AROUND WARRINA LAKES** You're invited to join us for a couple of hours of social birding around Warrina Lakes. After birding we'll have morning tea at the lakes (BYO morning tea). It's the very wet tropics so bring an umbrella and waterproof shoes, just in case. Also, binoculars, sunscreen, hat, and insect repellent.	For more information, please contact Sandra Christensen, Cassowary Coast Area Coordinator by Ph 0448 845 842, or Ceri Pearce on 0488 131 581
Friday 3 June 2022	7:00–9:00am	Hastie's Swamp, Atherton Meet at Hasties Swamp Hide car park	**HASTIES SWAMP MONTHLY BIRD SURVEY** You're invited to join us for a great morning of birding and collecting data on the birdlife in and around the swamp. Based mainly at and around the bird hide, members will survey the birds present at the wetlands and count the numbers of each species. Both waterbirds and bush birds in the adjacent fringing vegetation are included. We hope to follow the seasonal changes through the year. Bring binoculars/scope, field guide, notebook and pen, and morning 'smoko'.	For more information please contact Ron Schweitzer rgschweitzer@gmail.com
Sunday 12 June 2022	7:00–9:30 am	Warrina Lakes, Innisfail Meet in the carpark in Park St, off the corner of Emily and Charles St, Innisfail	**BIRDING AROUND WARRINA LAKES** You're invited to join us for a couple of hours of social birding around Warrina Lakes. After birding we'll have morning tea at the lakes (BYO morning tea). Bring binoculars, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent and morning 'smoko'. We hope you can make it!.	For more information, please contact Sandra Christensen, Cassowary Coast Area Coordinator by Ph 0448 845 842, or Ceri Pearce on 0488 131 581
Sunday 13 June 2022	10:00-18:00	Munro Martin Parklands, Cairns	**CAIRNS ECOFIESTA** BirdLife Northern Queensland is having a stall at the Cairns Ecofiesta. We are seeking volunteers to assist set up and breakdown the stall, and to run the stall. If you are interested in helping, for even just part of the day, please call Mikey.	For more information, please contact Mikey Kudo, Cairns Area Coordinator, by email at kudo555@hotmail.co.jp or Ph. 0402 343 610