

Contact Call



A male White-winged Fairywren in breeding plumage
Both images courtesy of Ian Montgomery, Birdway.com



A pair of Hooded Robins.

Where do you find these sensational birds? Where else but Winton. More inside in this edition.



Upcoming Birdlife Events

Birding for beginners Workshop at Mission Beach, 15th November.

Annual PIP count and Dinner at Mission Beach, 15th November.

Christmas BBQ Northern end of Cairns Esplanade at 3pm Saturday 13th December.

Bathing Birds survey, 23 January - 23 February 2015. See inside this issue for details

Australia Day Weekend outing to Kingfisher Park, 24-26 Jan 2015.

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Having a break in the wilds of western Queensland, looking for grasswrens

From the Convenor

I had the great fortune to have been part of the recent Kalkadoon/Dusky Grasswren survey in western Queensland. This survey organised by our own Graham Harrington was centred on Mt. Umbunmaroo, north of Boulia (see article in this newsletter). This trip brought home to me two very important points. First, how much our birds are subject to "bust and boom" scenarios. A year ago I had visited several of the same sites we did on this grasswren survey, and the list of species and numbers of individuals were very different on the two trips. Another year on, and with little rain to speak of, there were fewer birds, and no grasswrens once we crossed the Queensland border into the Northern Territory. So we will probably not plan a return journey to some of these interesting sites, until there are good rains for a season or two. And will there be grasswrens on our return?

Secondly, we were overwhelmed by the enthusiastic hospitality of the property owners and managers where we visited. They showed a great willingness to share their knowledge of their properties, and were also curious to know what we might find. They reinforced that working closely with land managers on the ground is so crucial for the success of our own organisation. We need to work closely with them even more than we do now.

Just a quick reminder that our annual Pied Imperial-Pigeon (or Torresian Imperial-Pigeon) counts are on in November – why not spend an afternoon at a nearby beach, and count all the pigeons you can see flying back to near-shore breeding islands? The more beaches we can cover, the more we learn where they feed on the mainland. As I write this, I can see 2 PIPs demolishing the fruits on a Native Olive tree in my backyard.

We also have our regular Christmas BBQ to round out the year, along with the Challenge Count – a "race" to see as many birds as possible within a defined area – an opportunity to spend a crazy 24 hours dashing around, and to showcase the depth of birds in your own area.

As this year fast draws to a close, I would like to take the opportunity to wish you and your families and friends the best of the forthcoming holiday season, and hope that you will have the chance to join us on one of our scheduled outings or meetings, and to support our BirdLife Australia events and campaigns.

Have a great holiday season, and enjoy your birding – see you in 2015!

Kath Shurcliff
Convenor

Your NQ Committee

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Getting kids interested in birding

Birding has a reputation as a nerdy hobby only for older people, but birding can be far more than tramping around the bush and making lists of birds. Introducing kids to birds creates a new generation of passionate, conscientious birders. Kids are usually fascinated by birds with their bright colours, quirky personalities and their ability to fly. Starting children out as young birders gives them a lifetime of opportunities to build a life list, support critical conservation efforts and explore the amazing world of birds. There are many ways to get kids involved in birding, no matter how young they may be, and doing so may rekindle your enthusiasm for birding as well.

The first step in getting kids interested in birding is to let them see birds. The easiest way to do this is a visit to the local zoo or other places where captive birds are kept so that they can get a close look at a wide range of interesting species. Some zoos offer unique programs such as free flight demonstrations or personalized bird encounters that could be the perfect spark to engage a fledgling birder. Try Cairns Zoo or Wildlife Habitat.

Unusual facts, crazy details and weird trivia capture children's imaginations, and it's easy to do that with bird trivia. Interesting odds and ends, such as the Australia's heaviest flying bird, why Cassowaries cannot fly and how scrubfowl nests work, can intrigue children and inspire them to learn more about different types of birds.

Practice reading skills while learning more about birds. Try birding novels such as *The Ivory-billed Obsession* and other titles for young readers, or choose simple field guides available at many news agents and most good book stores for a more practical but still age-appropriate book. For fun entertainment that incorporates birds, there many free online bird games and apps, ranging from silly arcade-style games to more educational migration-themed games. The Aussie Backyard Bird Count is a good example of what is available. Thousands of kids and adults will get to know their backyard birds between 20th and 26th of October this year by

taking part. All it takes is 15 minutes in your backyard, neighbourhood park or favourite green patch to be a part of this exciting citizen science event. Check it out at www.aussiebirdcount.org.au Not only can these games get kids interested in birds, but they can also help children practice hand-eye coordination or learn pattern recognition and other simple skills that can help them as they become birders.

Young children admire their parents and grandparents and try to emulate them, and a great way to introduce those children to birds is to be a good birder yourself. Take them on bird walks, teach them the best foods for birds, invite them to help with bird conservation projects, help them keep a life list and show them yours, and they will learn how important birding is to you. In time, it will be important to them as well!

Doug Herrington



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www.feathersnfriends.com.au

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An Australasian arms race of a different nature

Cuckoos lay their eggs in the nests of other species (hosts), which then mistakenly rear the young cuckoo as if it were their own. Many European and African cuckoos lay eggs that are exquisite mimics of their host's eggs. This mimicry arises from an evolutionary 'arms race' between host and cuckoo, with hosts evolving to recognise and reject odd-looking eggs, and cuckoos in turn evolving eggs that hosts can't detect.

Some Australasian bronze-cuckoos, however, do things differently. These cuckoos lay eggs that are cryptic in host nests, rather than mimetic. That is, the cuckoos' eggs are covered in a dark pigment that makes them indistinguishable from the nest-lining inside their hosts' domed nests. We placed eggs painted to be either cryptic (dark) or non-cryptic (bright) inside the nests of large-billed gerygones, a common host of the little bronze-cuckoo in Far North Queensland, and found that while the gerygones ignored both egg types, cuckoos removed an egg each time they laid in a nest and were more likely to take a bright egg than a dark one. We also found that gerygone nests regularly receive two or three cuckoo eggs.

This suggests that the reason bronze-cuckoos use a different strategy to European cuckoos is because they are trapped in a different kind of arms race - one within species, in which eggs must evade removal from other cuckoos targeting the same nests. Only one cuckoo can survive per nest, so for cuckoos there is an advantage to hiding one's eggs from subsequent cuckoos.

For more information, search out: Gloag, R., Keller, L.-A., Langmore, N.E. (2014). Cryptic cuckoo eggs hide from competing cuckoos. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B.*, 281:20141014.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2014.1014>

Ros Gloag

Postdoctoral Fellow, School of Biological Sciences
University of Sydney



Little bronze cuckoo chick in the nest of its host, the large-billed gerygone. Image courtesy of R. Gloag.



Three little bronze-cuckoo eggs and one large-billed gerygone egg from a parasitised gerygone nest. Image courtesy of R. Gloag.

An expedition to the mythical Mount Unbunmaroo



The terrain around Mount Unbunmaroo. Image courtesy of Graham Harrington.

This year the BirdLife Northern Queensland grasswren survey team concentrated on the “gap” between the Kalkadoon Grasswren and the Dusky Grasswren. Dusky Grasswrens are recorded for the Northern Territory as far east as the Dulcie Ranges National Park 400km to the west of Boulia. Kalkadoons come just south of Djarra in Queensland (see map below).



Intriguingly, a grasswren is recorded as breeding on the isolated Mount Unbunmaroo in Dick Schodde’s book published in 1986. Unfortunately the source of this record is lost so we do not know if it was a Dusky or (what would have then been) the first record of a Kalkadoon.

Three previous visits to the Mount had produced no grasswren sightings but a calling bird on the last visit sparked sufficient interest to get us back. If this mythical bird really exists the map shows many other suitable hills on the cattle stations between the currently accepted ranges of the two species.

The trouble was we did not know whether they had suitable spinifex cover on them.

The only way to find out was to go and look.

Kath Shurcliff, Ceinwen Edwards, Ray Pierce, Brian Venables and Graham Harrington from NQ were joined by grasswren veteran Philip Brook and two cleanskins from Sydney -Vaughan Wellington and Joost Werst to make up the team of four pairs of surveyors in as many vehicles. We anticipated hot weather but in fact it was pleasantly cool most of the time.

We started near Mount Isa to make sure everyone had a good look at Kalkadoons. Then on to Mount Unbunmaroo, where we met David Stewart, the renowned bird song recorder, who was interested to record the bird towards establishing its ID. Unfortunately, we failed to contact a grasswren. In fact it was so dry there were hardly any birds at all – our bird list was pathetic. The Rufous-crowned Emu-wrens we had waded through previously were all gone. The Fairy-wrens were “unsqueakable”. There were few insects and no tracks of mammals or reptiles in the sand.

As we surveyed the hills around Boulia and then down the Plenty Highway to Alice Springs we realised that the entire search area was as dry as desiccated Drongo droppings. Whether this was the cause of our failure to locate the grasswrens we don't know. We have no idea whether they were present but insufficiently hormonal to respond to our playback or they had gone walkabout. We will have to repeat the exercise when good rains have given the country and the birds a chance to recover from the double-whammy of widespread fire followed by one of the driest periods on record.

On the plus side we were universally made welcome on the cattle stations we visited; we discovered great places to camp; and we learnt a lot by seeing the country when it was so barren. Arid ecosystems operate on a boom and bust scenario, which makes it difficult to assess whether our two grasswrens are in permanent decline or are at a low point in a natural cycle. If they do not recover dramatically when conditions improve then we will have to blow the whistle and try to get landholders to help.

Graham Harrington



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Trip to Ecuador

Stella and I visited Ecuador for five weeks in July and early August. The vast majority of visitors go for the well-known Galapagos experience and we were no different, spending eight days on a boat and having a fantastic time. However, it was the mainland which really attracted us and where we spent most of our time birding.

One of the best areas for the first time visitor is undoubtedly the Mindo area (altitude range 1180 to 4780 metres) about two hours north of Quito on the western side of the cordillera. We stayed at the lovely Yellow House for nine days and were the only independent birders in the whole town.

The Mindo climate is ideal and it is very easy to get around on your own and organise a different daily itinerary to the many nearby birding hot spots. Long-Wattled Umbrellabird, Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, Crested and Golden-headed Quetzal are keynote species as well as trogons, manikins, antpittas and a delightful surfeit of tanagers and hummingbirds.

The eastern side of the slopes, like the western, present many different habitats with significant altitude and species diversity from Guango Lodge (2700m) through San Isidro (2000m) to Wildsumaco (1400m) and Gareno (500m) in the Amazon. This part of the trip we did as a tour. Highlight species were Fiery Topaz, Hoatzin, Military Macaw and Rufous Potoo.

Everywhere the birds are dazzling and the sheer variety simply gobsmacking – up to 1600 species in a country 33 times smaller than Australia. Travelling in Ecuador is extremely easy although it does help if you speak some Spanish. We found it easy to get good guides in the Mindo area when we needed them and would not book a tour from overseas again as we did on the eastern side. Rather, I would contact the guides personally and arrange on a needs basis. Apparently most overseas birders come down from the US during the northern winter months but when we were there numbers were low everywhere. I would love to go back again.

Report and images courtesy of Denis Walls

Yellow House, Mindo, NW Ecuador



Andean Cock-of-the-Rock
(orange eastern form)



Pale-mandibled Aracari



Toucan Barbet

Bronze-winged Parrot



Sparkling Violetear



Golden Tanager



Masked Trogon



Cassowaries on Cape York

Do Cassowaries still exist on Cape York Peninsula?

In September I made a brief visit to Iron Range National Park, camping for 3 nights. I was especially interested to try and find out the latest on the Cassowary situation in the area. Little information on Cassowaries on Cape York has been published in recent times.

The Cassowary Recovery Team has published information in the past which demonstrates the rarity of Cassowaries on Cape York: "The rarity or extreme uncommonness of the Cassowary can be gauged from the encounter rate in Crome & Moore's (1988) regional survey. This survey consisted of 211 transects being established between Mt Cook in the north and Mt Halifax in the south. Each transect was 1 km long and each transect was surveyed twice, once between January and May and again between May and September. During the survey, all droppings on the transects were mapped and collected and all cassowaries sighted or heard recorded. Over the two surveys of the 211 transects there were only four actual cassowary sightings and a total of only 10 sightings in nine months of field work which involved over 4500 km of walking. Similarly, in an intensive six month fauna survey of the McIlwraith Ranges on Cape York Peninsula, John Winter and colleagues did not sight or hear any Cassowaries and only recorded their presence from three droppings during the entire period of the survey."



Cape York Cassowaries are extremely wary and will run from cars and people, unlike this character at the Babinda Boulders who was working the picnic area, being fed chips by visitors (Since relocated by National Parks).

Cassowaries are now extinct at Lockerbie Scrub near Bamaga. It is speculated that overhunting in this area contributed to their demise. They are said to exist in the Jardine River National Park, although this author had until recently never seen any records to confirm this (see below). Signs of a bird population in trouble can be indicated if individuals cease to be recorded at the extremes of their range.

An examination of the Eremaea/e-bird data base shows but one record, a pair at the Iron Range in 2012.

There are various pressures on Cassowaries at Iron Range. This population could also be subject to hunting and is directly adjacent to a populated area. Traffic speed through the park has increased



Lovely greeting to the Iron Range National Park.



Not everyone loves Cassowaries. This sign had been shot at, then run over!

dramatically following paving of the dirt road. The usual pig problems are always present.

On arrival at the rainforest section at the western end of the park, we were greeted by Cassowary warning signs beside the road, an encouraging indication of their presence, even though one sign had been shot at and then run over!

In fact it was a simple matter to find out the latest on Cassowaries in the area. We just went and visited the ranger. "Yes", he said, "saw one just yesterday!" We went and visited the area, the West Claudie River crossing and indeed photographed one Cassowary footprint in the sand along the creek. The ranger regularly sees perhaps 4-5 birds. One nearby male is seen with three new chicks every season. He estimate there may be as many as 20 Cassowaries still present in the Iron Range area. They had even been recorded down at Chili Beach.

The behaviour of Cassowaries here is completely different to those in the Wet Tropics and perhaps more akin to those in New Guinea. On hearing a motor vehicle or human, the cassowaries run for their lives. No begging for a handout from passing motorists is seen here. These are truly wild birds. They have adopted this behaviour after being hunted by men with dogs. Hopefully this wary strategy will keep the local population going for years to come.

It is speculated that the Lockerbie Scrub population may one day be repopulated by birds from further South. Cassowaries would have to cross a large area of apparently unsuitable habitat to do this. But this year we received a record of a bird at Heathlands reserve, about halfway between the Iron Range and the Tip. This is a remarkable record and could be an Iron Range bird heading north or even a Jardine bird heading south.

So perhaps Cassowaries on Cape York Peninsula do have some future after all. Like the Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds, they just exist in very low densities spread over a large area which is mostly both inaccessible and infrequently visited by bird watchers.

Dominic Chaplin

Birds are in our nature

The 2014 Crane count

Many thanks to all the people who turned out morning and /or evening to seek out the cranes that visit our area at this time of year.

In the weeks leading up to the count people were commenting not only how late the birds were in showing up but how few birds were to be seen around. Other years the first cranes were to be seen mid-May but this year the first report to come in was from Jack Leighton near Pelican Point on Lake Tinaroo on the 24th of June which is about a month later than average. Maybe because of the proximity to popular roosting sites on the dam near Kairi the paddocks in that vicinity usually attract large numbers of birds but this year even though there were a number of what have previously been popular crop residues the cranes did not seem interested in that area .

And so the observation of few cranes persisted. It also demonstrates that the cranes have their own reasons for doing things and past experience is only a guide. This makes it hard to decide where to deploy the counters and how many at particular sites. Those who have been regular counters over the years will know that at some sites you do need more than a scribe and a counter. At the popular sites you need a scribe and a helper and at least two other counters.

Then there is the issue of which sites are the cranes going to use in that particular year. A fishing boat in a bay or a dog out for some fun on the evening can send the whole lot off somewhere else. We only hope that those birds turn up somewhere they will be counted. When you have a bird's eye view of the whole lake there are countless nooks and crannies where you can expect a peaceful night.

Crane counters are a precious resource to me so I try and make the exercise as rewarding for the counters as possible. That is why I send people to different sites as often as I can. The added advantage of this is that I have a team of counters who are adaptable and efficient at any site and can find their way to any site. New comers to the game find themselves in groups with some old hands where ever possible and learn their way around without stress.

People who are unable to attend the dinner miss out on the camaraderie of the whole event where the numbers are read out and experiences recounted. The dinner is followed by a talk on birds where ever they are found. This year the talk was by scientist Gay Crowley on managing habitat with the use of fire with special reference to Golden Shouldered Parrots. So I would like to say a special thank you to Gay for sharing this very pertinent information with us. And talking of numbers the tally revealed a very average count for the night .Thanks are also due to Shane Knuth and the ladies in his office in Atherton for the duplicating which they do for the event.

For next year's dinner presentation I would like members to bring along 3 of their favourite bird photos in a form that can be put into a projector and we will have a bird viewing that will I am sure show us the wide range of species we have in our area as well as the interesting birds members have encountered on their travels. It will not be a photography competition just a sharing of bird photos, humorous, beautiful or just plain interesting. You have a year to think about it and perhaps take your photos. I hope you enjoy your quest.

Virginia Simmonds

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Birdwatching Day Tours

The 'Daintree Boatman' also provides day tours combining a Daintree cruise with a visit to key sites of Julatten, Mt Molloy & Mt Lewis. If tides permit, a secondary cruise on the Mossman River may also be provided to observe birdlife unique to the mangrove environment. Day tours are customised to match guests' viewing and photographic desires.

BOOKINGS & ENQUIRIES
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Birding Blogs

A blog is a web site that contains online personal reflections, information, comments and images provided by the writer. Locally we have some great bird bloggers (people that have blogs and love to share information about their birdlife). Here are a few to get you started.

- Yvonne Cunningham's News from Coquette Point Innisfail:
<http://coquettepointinnisfail.blogspot.com.au/>
- Tony Ashton's news from Tyto wetlands, Ingham and beyond:
<http://tytotony.blogspot.com.au/>
- Keith and Lindsay Fisher's news from Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, Julatten:
<http://kingfisherparkbirdwatchers.blogspot.com.au/>

Mungalla Station Campout

with Birdlife Townsville, 4-6 October

Mungalla Station, just east of Ingham, is a cattle station owned and run by the traditional owners of the land, the Nywaigi Aboriginal people. In conjunction with Townsville Birdlife, Birdlife Northern Queensland members spent the long Labour Day weekend on the property, exploring the extensive wetlands, pastures and woodlands.

Our campsite was in the grounds of the current homestead, a glorious old building translocated from the old homestead site on a nearby floodplain. The amenities were basic, but there was no shortage of hot water to remove the dust after a long day. Daily bird sightings here included Bush Stone Curlew, White-gaped Honeyeater, Eastern Koel, and Cotton Pygmy Geese on the waterhole.

In all there were 16 birders on the outing, ten from the Townsville group, five from Birdlife Northern Queensland, and Mike Bysouth from the Gold Coast, a keen visitor to the north.

Some of us arrived on the Friday, so to fill in time, we birded around Tyto wetlands, picking up an easy 62 bird species over several hours before dusk. Highlights were good views of White-Browed Robin, Tawny Grassbird, Spotless Crake and an almost tame Buff-banded Rail.

Early Saturday morning, led by Ian Boyd and Chris Parry, a local birder and historian, we set off to explore the sand ridge area and wetlands. Ian had trouble dragging us away from the lagoon there as we were enthralled by the Glossy Ibis, Lathams Snipe, Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbill, and Greenshank, amongst quite a variety of other birdlife present.

After that we visited the old homestead site, which included the graves of James Cassidy and his son, whom founded the cattle station at the turn of the nineteenth century. Despite a heavy shower of rain that sent us scuttling, we still managed to pick up some lovely birds here. In particular, the Brush Cuckoos were constantly vying for our attention,



Looking at a Northern Fantail enroute to Broadwater. Image courtesy of Doug Herrington.

and we had good views of Shining Flycatcher, though only glimpses of the Lovely Fairy-Wrens.

We then set off for Taylors Beach and Lucinda (for lunch) to investigate sites for shore birds. The tide was a little high, but at Taylors Beach we found Grey-Tailed Tattler, Eastern Golden Plover and Whimbrel easily enough, whereas in the shallows around the point to the right of the Lucinda wharf we picked up Beach Stone Curlews, Bar-Tailed Godwit, Great Knot, Terek Sandpiper and Great and Lesser Sand Plovers, amongst others.

After a break back at camp, we ventured out again in the afternoon to visit the lagoons around the windmill. Close up views of Pratincoles could be obtained from the car as they were very common beside the track to the lagoon. The country here was open, with swampy pastures interspersed with shallow lagoons and water plant filled depressions.



Floodplains near the windmill, Mungalla Station.



Little lunch at Broadwater National Park.

Jacana and Purple Swamp-hens were in heaven in this habitat. White-winged Black Terns, Little Terns and Whiskered Terns were not uncommon flying over searching for food.

Those who ventured out spotlighting on the first night were excited to report 'Grass Owl.'

Sunday was a big day out to Broadwater National Park, about 50 km northwest of Ingham. On the drive in we stopped at beautiful Elphinstone creek to investigate the riverine habitat amongst the cane fields. Birds seen here included Fairy Gerygone and Northern Fantail.

Broadwater National Park itself was a bit crispy after our long dry spell, but the rainforest along the river still rewarded us with a number of rainforest bird species. Grey-headed Robin, Spectacled Monarch and Yellow-spotted Honeyeater were fairly common. Even a Yellow-breasted Boatbill was seen. Highlights included a Grey-headed Robin fledgling being fed by its parent, a Yellow-spotted Honeyeater making a delicate nest of moss, lichens and melaleuca threads, and an interesting sighting was a Bronze Cuckoo chick, barely fledged, being fed by Brown Gerygone and Large-billed Scrub Wren.

Lemon bellied flycatchers were quite common, particularly in the woodland we visited on the way to mangrove lined saline ponds on Sunday afternoon. On the mud flats there we had great views of Marsh Sandpipers, Greenshank, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper with the Black-winged Stilts. And the photographers went crazy over a family of cooperative Lovely Fairy Wrens.

On a subsequent visit to Tyto on our last morning in Ingham, White-browed Crake put on a performance in front of the hide as several birds vied for the territory. Thanks to 'Tyto Tony' Ashton on site for

sharing the moment and his wisdom of all things 'Tyto'.

Special thanks to Ian Boyd for so efficiently organising and guiding the camp out, and to Annette and Ray Sutton for pitching in and ferrying us around.

Ceri Pearce

News from the Daintree River

This is a regular column reporting wildlife observations from the Daintree River and environs by the 'Daintree Boatman', Murray Hunt.

Winter

In mid-April, Cyclone Ita struck the Far North, challenging the Daintree forest with strong winds and heavy rain. The Daintree River flooded, peaking at 10.5 metres, the biggest inundation since '96. A couple of houses were swamped, an immense mass of sediment was shifted, and several cows were transported several kilometres from home. Crocs dispersed briefly, seeking sanctuary up tributaries with less flow, returning to their previous domains after the river subsided. Birds too seemed disorientated, but soon returned to forage amongst broken riverine trees and shrubs.

In May, as if stimulated by the tempest, Golden Penda (*Xanthostemon chrysanthus*) quickly produced a super abundance of yellow flowers; a mass bloom described by locals as the best in decades. Taking advantage of such generosity a suite of sweet toothed descended, led by a shrieking maelstrom of Rainbow Lorikeets.

Much later, at the end of winter, Blue Quandong (*Elaeocarpus grandis*) produced a heavy harvest of brilliant blue berries - a favourite for a plethora of pigeons. In abnormally large numbers, Topknot Pigeon arrived to gorge, sometimes sharing the same heavy-laden tree with Pied Imperials and Wompoos.

Cassowaries also benefited from the mass fruiting. Recently near Jindalba Boardwalk, I was delighted to watch a large girl with impressive casque quietly ambling through the forest ingesting a dozen or more blue berries in no more than a minute.

However, these pleasing images of a bountiful forest hide the reality that this winter there was little fruit for wildlife in the Daintree due to the cyclone. Few animals ingest the fruit of Golden Penda and there was a delay of several months till Quandong provided relief for hungry frugivores. More frequent Cassowary sightings in the Daintree forest this winter probably reflect the temporary shortage of forest fruit, with hungry cassowaries forced to forage in more visible areas around roads and residences in search of fruit. The same concept probably also applies to the greater than usual abundance of Victoria's Riflebird seen on the Daintree River this winter, descending from storm-damaged hills to forage for food.

Spring

More recently, as we've moved into spring, it has been a delight to have a bird's eye view into the secret love life of several bird species.

The Large-billed Gerygone builds an impressive pendulous ramshackle nest suspended below a vertical vine. Courting involves fluttering between two partially built nests as if discussing the merit of each. Sometimes they pause on a nearby perch to seductively flutter wings rapidly. Sometimes they perch sideways at the end of the vine immediately above the nest and distinctly flare the tail (see image). Interpretation of this is difficult. It might be the female, flaring the tail like a pennant to instruct the male where to build; it might be the male hoping to advertise his prowess through ownership of such an excellent nesting vine.

Azure Kingfishers, on the other hand, renew their bonds through synchronous bowing. They seem to tease their suitors with a half-speed circular flight, more like a hovercraft than a jet fighter. They seem to test their partner's compatibility with a prolonged session of head-bobbing, wing-raising, and high pitched calls. A suitor's suitability is proven through persistence and attention to detail, perfectly matching the routine of the other.



Large-billed Gerygone at the nest flaring tail widely.

Great-billed Herons also have a special routine. Recently I was lucky to observe one bird calling – a strange guttural moan, somewhat akin to a bull's bellow – which succeeded in attracting another heron, flying in to join it on the same large branch. Perched within a couple of metres, the herons then proceeded to bellow alternately, each for about 10 seconds, each about half a dozen times. Great-billed Herons could never be accused of whispering 'sweet nothings'; courtship sounds more like an argument over who's going to do the dishes.



Azure Kingfishers engaged in a bowing ritual.

Murray Hunt



Winton birding

Having heard how interesting Winton is for birding, in early August 2014, Sandra and I headed out to investigate. Initially the weather was pretty appalling, so my first word of warning is that if it's raining, don't go off the road. Just out of Hughenden, we were attracted to the birds at a windmill. A quick stop nearly became a big problem as the black soil (mud) enveloped our tyres. Lucky for us we did get out, and also lucky for us (though not for Winton), the rain did not persist far or long.

As homework for the trip, we reread Doug Herrington's article in Contact Call March 2013 to pick up his tips. We also checked out any books that described where to find birds, and of course we asked our friends for advice. There is also an excellent brochure with a checklist called *Birds of the Winton Shire*, which you can pick up from the Winton Visitors Centre.

Sandra also contacted a Townsville Birdlife member currently living in Winton, John Lowry. John was a wonderful resource for us. He has an incredible knowledge of the local birdlife and the best locations to see them around Winton. John kindly donated a whole weekend to showing us around and sharing his birds with us. Having that insight empowered us for the rest of our stay at Winton as we explored further afield. It is John's photos that illustrate this article.

Where are the best places to look for birds at Winton?

1. Winton Sewerage Ponds

Many people prefer this site in the morning, but for us it was a late afternoon excursion on most days. I have never seen so many Australian Reed Warblers in my life, and you practically tripped

over the Little Grassbirds here. Baillons Crake, Spotted and Spotless Crake can be found here, though for our visits it was just three Baillons Crake. Hoary-headed Grebe and Australasian Shoveler were also amongst the many birds on the water. The ponds back onto the golf course where Crimson Chat are seen occasionally. We dipped on that species. We did see Plum-headed Finch. Oh, and once you've had enough birding, the sunsets here are glorious.

2. Winton Cooling Ponds and surrounds

John's house in Winton was across the road from the Cooling Ponds, so he knew the site well. We spent a morning exploring here. There are a number of ponds besides those most visible from the road. It is worth the drive/walk on the road into the show grounds, to explore the ponds further in. Amongst the variety of waterbirds here, our favourite bird sightings were White-winged Fairy-wrens and Hooded Robin, though we were also startled to find a Common Starling.

3. Pelican and Long Waterholes

Just out of Winton, past the Sewerage Ponds, Pelican Waterhole is reported to be good for birds, but it really didn't deliver for us during our visit. We found Yellow-billed Spoonbill here. Similarly Long Waterhole just south of Winton, was crowded with grey nomads and motorhomes when we visited, so we didn't hang around to bird watch (as there was nothing tempting on the water anyway).

The *Route of the River Red Gums*, in Bladensburg National Park, takes you to Bough Shed, Skull Hole, Engine Hole and other great spots in between. It is a 72km return trip from Winton. This website has further information: <http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/bladensburg/about.html>.



Mallee Ringneck



Spotted Bowerbird



Mulga Parrot



Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater

4. Bough Shed and Top Crossing area

Spotted Bowerbirds, dancing Brolgas and nesting Budgies, what else could you want! How about Hall's Babbler, Inland Thornbill, Variegated Fairy-wren, Diamond Doves, Cockatiels and nesting Little Eagles. And the list goes on. Do explore around Top Crossing (the crossing over Surprise Creek, on the way into Bough Shed), walk around the waterhole at Bough Shed as well as along Surprise Creek which runs into it when the rivers flow.

5. Engine Hole and Skull Hole

During our visit (fairly dry, with few waterholes) Engine hole was a great place to just sit and watch the birds come in. We almost had an Emu join us for lunch until he saw my car. To just sit and relax and watch flocks of Budgies, Zebra Finch, Galahs, White-plumed, Spiny-cheeked and Grey-headed Honeyeaters come in to drink is sensational!

Skull Hole was dry when we visited, but a couple of rock hollows that had recently filled with rainwater, provided an opportune watering point for thirsty finches and honeyeaters.

6. Scrammies Gorge and Logan Falls (Bladensburg National Park)

Access to Scrammies Gorge is via a side track in Bladensburg that takes you up into rocky jump-up country. Both the road in (check for waterholes on the way) and the site itself offer excellent birding opportunities.

Logan Falls is south of the River Red Gum route in Bladensburg National Park. Our best bird here was Mulga Parrot, which we chased from one waterhole to the next along the gorge to confirm our ID with good views of the yellow spot above the bill, its red-orange belly and lack of yellow collar. These birds can be confused with Australian Ringneck race *barnardi* (Eastern Mallee Ringneck)

which are also found in the area. We also had great views of other bush birds here such as Crested Bellbird.

7. The road to Opalton and around Opalton

We headed down to Opalton before dawn to squeeze our visit there into a day trip. Driving slowly to avoid the kangaroos, it was worth the drive as the sunrise over Bladensburg National Park was magnificent. Our best birding along the road was at creek crossings and dams. While there was little to no water in the creeks, and most of the gums were only in bud, not bloom, the creeks offered lush vegetation and seed. Eight Mile Creek delivered our top bird of the trip, with three Bourkes Parrot. We were able to get within metres of one pair and the birds let us stay there gawking at them for over 10 minutes.

The dam at the end of the airstrip (behind the Bush Park campground) in Opalton is a favourite bird watching site by many. By the time we got there it was midday and hot (the birds on the way had proven to be too great a distraction). We did see Halls Babbler, Mallee Ringnecks, Common Bronzewing and Spinifex Pigeons. We were also led on a merry dance amongst the spinifex, by what could have been a Spinifexbird, but never got a good enough look to confirm it. Note: next time stay overnight in Opalton.

8. The windmills (3) on the road between Hughenden and Winton.

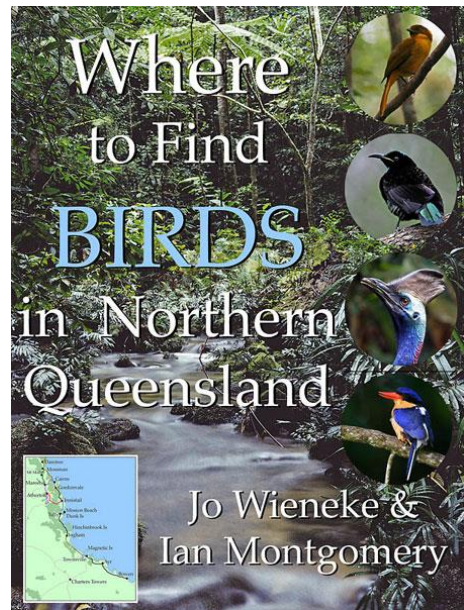
We stopped at each windmill on the way to and from Winton. They are easy to find along the main road. Do explore as there are perched dams and water troughs to attract the birds in. Black-faced and Dusky Woodswallow were not uncommon, and it was nice to see White-winged and Variegated Fairy-wrens, and Australian Reed Warbler again on the way home.

Zebra Finches were everywhere – we came to lovingly call them Zebs. More zebs!

We did not get out to Lark Quarry, another famous birding spot, and despite intensive searching in spinifex habitat wherever we went, we did not find Rufous-crowned Emu-wren or Striated Grasswren. We will have to go back! And do keep a lookout in Winton, as we had an Emu wander up John's road heading into town, and Brolgas were not uncommon on front lawns either. What an amazing place!

Thanks again to John Lowry for great bird guiding and the images in this article and to Sandra for coming on another 'expedition.' She will probably never let me live down finding *weird budgies* that ended up being Bourkes Parrots.

Ceri Pearce



Where to find birds in North Queensland

by Jo Wieneke and Ian Montgomery

In this ebook, wildlife photographer and writer Ian Montgomery revives Jo Wieneke's popular, now out-of-print book *Where to Find Birds in North-east Queensland*.

If you are planning anything from a day trip to an extended birding holiday in Northern Queensland, then this electronic guide is a must have. Profusely illustrated with more than 700 photos of birds, wildlife and locations, it contains detailed information on where to find 435 bird species in more than 150 locations. The 25 maps are designed to be used with the location chapters for birding trips along the coast and hinterland of north-eastern Queensland and further afield.

Navigating around in the book is easy, with thousands of internal links, lists of species of special interest, and indices to birds, locations and wildlife. There are 82 chapters on birds, one for each bird family, with information on all 435 species and, where appropriate, sub-species.

Finding Birds in Northern Queensland is completely self-contained for offline use, but the links to hundreds of websites, for use when online, supplement the internal content on national parks, places of interest, contacts, accommodation, birding guides, tours and references.

About the authors

Jo Wieneke's childhood passion for birds in rural England was rekindled while living on Magnetic Island for over 20 years. She has travelled widely in Northern Queensland, and used her experience to produce and self-publish the first edition of *Where to Find Birds in North-East Queensland* in 1992. She has contributed numerous articles to journals, and wrote and illustrated *Birds of Magnetic Island*. Jo is a long standing member of Birdlife Australia. For many years she worked on avian displays and taxidermy as an Honorary Associate at the Museum of Tropical Queensland in Townsville.

Ian Montgomery became a keen birdwatcher as a schoolboy in Ireland in the 1960s. After studying zoology at Trinity College Dublin, he migrated to Australia in 1971 and did a Ph.D. in animal behaviour at Sydney University. In 2003, he took early retirement from James Cook University to concentrate on bird photography. His website <http://www.birdway.com.au> now contains about 7000 photos of more than 1400 species of birds. His photos have been published widely, most recently in the digital version of the Pizzey and Knight Field Guide to the Birds of Australia.

Attracting birds to your backyard

Tips for maintaining a bird bath

Just like humans, birds need a place to drink and bath that is safe and hygienic. Here are some pointers on how you can maintain a bird bath in your backyard.

Shrubs around a bird bath provide a place to hide if visiting birds are threatened, but birds also like to scan the area before they visit, to make sure it is safe. So generally the rule is to place the bird bath in a small clearing, but with shrubs nearby. However, some early results from the Winter 'Bathing Birds Survey' by the National Parks Association of NSW in June-July suggest that if your birdbath is touching vegetation, small birds (honeyeaters, fairy wrens, finches and silvereye) are more likely to use it. Apparently larger birds aren't so worried about the need to duck for cover.

Elevating bird baths is a great way to avoid cats preying on the visiting birds.

Make sure pedestal bird baths are stable.

Make sure the bird bath is in dappled shade so the water stays cool.

Replace the water daily or at least second daily, and scrub out the bird bath regularly (but don't use cleaning products like detergent), instead, scrub and rinse the bowl with clean water.

Keep the water shallow, less than 5 cm.



White-cheeked Honeyeaters enjoying a drink. Image courtesy of Doug Herrington.



A Yellow-faced Honeyeater visiting the local watering hole with a friend. Image courtesy of Dough Herrington.

A bird bath with a rough base is ideal as it allows the birds to visit without drowning. Pebbles or sticks can help them get in and out safely.

For more information go to:

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/Bird-Baths>

The team at Birdlife Australia's 'Birds in backyards' (<http://birdlife.org.au/all-about-birds/birds-in-backyards/>) would like to say thank you to all the citizen scientists who participated in the 2014 winter Bathing Birds survey. They had an overwhelming response with over 1,100 citizen scientists taking part. They are planning a summer bathing birds survey early next year from 23rd January until 23rd of February. By the by, NSW and Victoria beat Queensland in the winter bathing birds survey participation rate. Surely that's a challenge we are not going to take laying down!

Ceri Pearce

Participate in the Summer Bathing Birds Survey

23rd of January - 23rd of February 2015.

Go to <http://www.bathingbirds.org.au> to sign up from December 2014.

Birds pooh on humans war on weed in Julatten

Clidemia hirta or Koster's Curse, is an invasive introduced declared Class 1 Pest that is a target species in a national eradication program. The only infestation of Koster's Curse in Australia is found in the Julatten district in Queensland.

In other parts of the world, this weed can be found in pastures, plantations and orchards, wasteland, roadsides, dryland crops, wetlands, national parks and along stream banks. In Queensland, Koster's Curse has great potential to cause millions of dollars of damage to primary production and irreversible damage to sensitive habitats and native plant communities, especially in the Wet Tropics region. In Hawaii most plants below the Koster's Curse canopy disappear, even those normally able to survive shady conditions (i.e. mosses, liverworts and soil-binding, mat-forming plants

This article is to help you identify Koster's Curse and to tell you what to do if you find any while you are bird watching.

Koster's Curse is a bushy, perennial evergreen shrub typically reaching 2-3 m in height. Its stems, leaves and fruit are covered in spreading, reddish bristly hairs. Leaves are opposite, elliptical, mostly 8-10 cm long, broadest across the middle. The leaf blades are bristly-hairy and wrinkled between the 5(-9) conspicuous longitudinal veins. The margins of the leaves are toothed to crenate

The flowers are borne on panicles composed of 6-20 individual flowers. Flowers are white with 5-7 petals and between 1 and 1.5 cm in diameter. The fruit is a berry, 4-5 mm in diameter, and 6-7 mm long. Koster's Curse starts flowering when it's around one year old and continues to flower and set fruit all year round. Mature plants bear up to 1000 purple berries each year with each berry containing more than 300 seeds. Research has demonstrated that the seed remains viable in the soil for more than 10 years.

The tiny Koster's Curse seed may be dispersed in mud and soil on tyres, boots and animal fur, or swept along by water, but by far the main means of dispersal is in the droppings of birds that have eaten the berries.



Koster's Curse leaves, flower and fruit (Photo: R. Anderson).

Extensive research on fruit removal rates for similar fruited native species, gut passage times and bird movement data in the Wet Tropics of Queensland suggests that the greatest dispersal distance, usually by Figbirds and Metallic Starlings, is likely to extend to at least 500m.

Teams from the National Four Tropical Weed Eradication Program conduct regular intensive field surveys in the Julatten district, on foot where control is primarily via hand removal. Seedlings are uprooted and tied to nearby trees with flagging tape to help identify active recruitment areas on subsequent surveys. Any reproductive material is carefully removed, bagged and incinerated.

Detecting all plants is difficult due to steep terrain, dense understories and high native plant diversity. The scope of the surveys is determined by a dispersal buffer of at least 500 m around mature plants but extended surveys are also undertaken to search high-risk areas such as creek lines.

You can help in the eradication of this nasty weed by calling Biosecurity Queensland 13 25 23 if you believe you have found it - even if you are not entirely sure. For more information visit the website: www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au

A hand-removed seedling - a sure sign you are in a Koster's Curse infestation site.





Notice board

Next newsletter deadline

Please submit stories/news/reports by January 30th 2015 for the first New Year edition to birdlifennqnewsletter@gmail.com.

*please note, if you have requested to receive printed newsletters from Birdlife Australia, these are usually posted out with the Australian Birdlife Magazine. The electronic version of Contact Call is available earlier, via email or on our web site.

Activities

Come and join us. Everybody's welcome.

For day trips, do bring a hat, sunscreen, lunch, refreshments/water, food and a folding chair. And don't forget your binoculars

For more information about an outing or an event, contact the leader listed or check the website.

Doug Herrington, Activities Coordinator

Calendar of events

Date	Time	Locality	Meeting place and other information	Leader	Phone/email
Sat. 15 th Nov.	7.30 am	Mission Beach. Lacey Creek Picnic area	Birding for beginners with Graham Harrington Contact Graham to register	Graham Harrington	Ph: 4096 5051 or 0423 794 836
Sat. 15 th Nov.	2pm till dusk 7pm	Mission Beach	Annual PIP Count and Dinner Meet at C4, then disperse to beach for counting Meet for dinner at Mission Beach Resort at 7pm	Trish Pontynen	Ph: 04 1773 5410
Sun. 7 th Dec.			Twichathon/Challenge Count Midnight to Midnight or any part thereof.	Dominic Chaplin	Please contact Dominic Chaplin Email for details
Sat. 13 th Dec.	3pm	Cairns	Christmas Party at Northern Esplanade Cairns (near kids play area) Birding and BBQ. Please note that the date and place have been changed.	Doug Herrington	Ph: 0418 757 288
Sat. 24- Mon. 26 th Jan 2015		Kingfisher Park, Julatten	Annual bird watching weekend at Kingfisher Park. Check the website http://www.birdlifennq.org/ closer to the date for details.		
Sat. 7 th Mar. 2015	5pm	Cairns	Annual General Meeting at Cominos House		

Birdlife Northern Queensland Annual General Meeting 2015

Early notice

The BirdLife Northern Queensland AGM, will be held on Saturday, 7th March 2015, at Cominos House in Cairns, starting at 5.00pm

Please mark the date in your calendar, and consider nominating for a position.

Nominations are called for the following positions:

- Convenor
- Deputy Convenor
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Committee Members

Birdlife Northern Queensland Committee Nomination Form

Position: _____

Nominee: _____

Nominated by: _____

Seconded by: _____

I hereby accept this nomination:
(signature of nominee)

Date: _____

**Please return this form before the meeting to
northernqld@birdlife.org.au**

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birdlife.org.au

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