

The Wren

Volume 5 Number 4 December 2016



Red-backed Fairy-wren (male in eclipse plumage)

Steve Dew

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Isn't it a great time of the year for the animal world. Many of our birds are nesting which is great if eggs turn into chicks and chicks make it through to adulthood. It also creates opportunity for others like those that prey on the unfortunate.

The return of the migratory birds is great for the region particularly the shorebirds whose numbers at the Shellgrit Creek high tide roost can reach up towards 2,000 on occasions. What a sight!

In an effort to boost awareness of our districts healthy and varied birdlife populations Birdlife Mackay are providing vital information to the MRC to highlight the potential the area has to offer.

By attracting people to town to go birding it will generate wealth throughout our community

Daryl Barnes

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HUNTING THE HONEYEATER

I had several sightings and had taken a couple of very average photos of the Eungella Honeyeater whilst helping out with the EHE Surveys Birdlife Mackay has been doing at Crediton State Forest.

This year's Birdlife Mackay Calendar had seen a couple of potential sponsors asking for photos of the EHE on their page of the calendar, but alas none of my pics so far were worthy.

I vowed to fix that problem for next year and timed our return to Mackay to coincide with the flowering of the Climbing Pandanus, my memory of beautiful pictures of EHE's taken by Robert Zimsek and Marlis Schoeb with the birds feeding on the flower had me focused on achieving the same.

Well the first trip up the hill was a whitewash, we spent the day in the clouds with windy and rainy weather the norm. We took a quick trip down The Diggings Road to see that pandanus was indeed flowering, but there was no sign of an EHE. We decided the trip down Dalrymple Road wouldn't be worth it and took a run out to the Eungella Dam.....a nice photo of a Bustard was all I could drum up.



The following week we set up camp at Finch Hatton Showgrounds, and with an early breakfast under our belt headed for Chelmans Road with a mainly sunny day on offer.

Sometimes the planets align...I was hearing the honeyeater calling as I was driving up the road, although I wasn't looking for them as the council had just watered the road ready for grading and I doubt the car spent much time with traction on all 4 wheels.

We arrived at the gate, I could hear honeyeaters all around, the camera was out in a flash as the pandanus flower closest to the car already had a bird feeding from it.....my first pics were a little shaky I can tell you.

Out came the deck chair and I sat and watched that flower, only to have birds come to it time and time again and my hands finally stopped shaking allowing good photos to be taken.

A short walk along the track and we were rewarded with pics of Rufous and Grey Fantails as well as more pics of the Eungella Honeyeater.

We later sat at the car eating our lunch and were rewarded with a visit from a male and female Regent Bowerbird, the male being camera shy sat at the very top of the tallest tree but the female wasn't so shy and I managed pics of her as well.

I estimate I saw as many as 20 individual EHE's which is good news for our only endemic bird, who has one of the smallest ranges in Australia.

Story and photo by Steve Dew

GOING COOKOO

I had an interesting visitor to my Walkerston back yard the other day. I was alerted to its presence by the crashing noise it made whilst landing in a bottlebrush tree near the kitchen. The bird that I saw was a Pheasant Coucal.

When the bird had regained its composure, it awkwardly scrambled down and out of the tree and onto the grassed area adjacent. After briefly checking out the yard it flew over the back fence and disappeared out of sight into the vegetation along the creek.

The booming call of a Pheasant Coucal is a long series of echoing notes initially slow then accelerating before slowing again and then falling away. The sound is often heard coming from dense thickets, undergrowth and cane fields around Mackay. This is the largest species of cuckoo in Australia and is the only one to construct and use its own nest for breeding purposes. Also, the Pheasant Coucal is the only bird of the species that spends much of its time on or near the ground generally flying only short distances and often landing rather clumsily.



Pheasant Coucal

Barry Heinrich

Each year when our cooler weather eases, two large parasitic cuckoo species migrate from the islands to the north of Australia. They are the Chanel-billed Cuckoo and the Common Koel. Their arrival is soon announced with their easily recognisable far reaching calls that echo out from the tree tops and at times, also throughout the night.

Most other cuckoos range from small to medium in size (14cm to 34 cm) and are somewhat secretive in habit, with each having a distinct call that often gets repeated monotonously for long periods. Eight of the cuckoo species can be found in the Mackay district; Pallid, Brush, Fan-tailed, Little Bronze-, Shining Bronze-, Gould's Bronze-, Horsefields Bronze- and Oriental.

For a bird to lay an egg in the nest of another species requires great cunning, stealth and perfect timing. Cuckoos are survivors.

Story by Daryl Barnes

BIRD WEEK

Birdlife Mackay were involved with the annual Bird Week by displaying banners and handing out give-aways to the public at the Gordon White Library. Highlighting birds and making the public aware that they too can become involved if they would like to contribute something to the welfare and preservation of birds and their habitat.

Gerry Woodruff and Joanne Morris



THE QUANDONG WEEKEND

The long weekend in October was the combined Christmas breakup weekend of Birdlife Mackay and the Society for Growing Australian Plants. The birding contingent was quite small. Everyone missed Daryl organising the bird side of things, but Barry stood in for him and tried to be in charge of Lesley, Desley, Coral, Francis and Penny. It was 6 birdos to 11 SGAPs.

We knew the weekend was going to be a very loose structure and you could do virtually whatever you wanted to. It certainly was lovely to sit on that elevated verandah and look out down to the rainforest and the creek. There was apparently a swimming hole across the creek, but stories of tumbles crossing the creek last year had everyone stay on the right side.

Short walks were taken around the lodge. We all set off down the road on Saturday afternoon, with the plant people not getting much further than 5m before they were engrossed in investigating native rainforest species. Golden Whistlers were whistling shrilling and were a very beautiful bird to watch against the green of the vegetation. With the Whistlers and the Crimson Rosellas and Eastern Spinebills and Scarlet Honeyeaters and Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, we were pointing out some of the region's most beautiful birds.



A Laughing Kookaburra had a perch in some dead timber easily seen from the verandah. He spent the weekend swooping down from there to collect food. His favourite seemed to be something that lived in the horse dung. Eastern Yellow Robins also dashed out from the edge of the forest to feed. Some Topknot Pigeons tempted Barry to wander closer with his camera, but they had him sussed and flew off just as he approached. A Forest Kingfisher delighted by using a dead treefern stump close to the verandah as his vantage point. We could hear the Noisy Pittas calling across the creek and thought they might have pleased us by wandering to the edge of the rainforest, but that didn't happen.

Eating was another highlight of the weekend. As soon as one meal was finished it seemed we were preparing for the next one. Judith had made up a roster for preparation and cleaning up duties so it all flowed smoothly. Rita and Harry had compiled a menu and bought the food and what a great job they did. We certainly never wanted for something delicious to eat. We even had a roast pork and beef "Christmas" dinner followed by warmed fruit cake and custard on Saturday night.

The raffles were drawn after lunch on Sunday. The SGAP one was more like a cent sale with heaps of garden type prizes on offer. Everyone managed to come home with something. I won a little Native Violet (still alive!) and some worm tea. Birdlife Mackay's Eungella Honeyeater painting by Madge was won by Greg Strohal.

After pack-up on Monday, we headed out to Chelman's Road to show the SGAPs the Eungella Honeyeater, hoping like mad that they would still be there and our stories of our great Sunday Bird Outing would not be disbelieved. We need not have worried. The EHs displayed on cue and a Regent Bowerbird also came to be in the action.

The final activity for the weekend was a visit to Ann and Wayne's extensive garden in Eungella township. While the plant people were gasping at the many different plants and flowers (the swamp orchids were just magnificent), Wayne showed the birdos a Topknot Pigeon sitting on a nest.

We filled up Anne's sunroom to consume our packed sandwiches before Ann brought out a pudding made with their home grown Davison Plums. Yum!

What a lovely weekend we had. Quandong Lodge is a truly magical place in the rainforest. We made some new friends. We learnt a lot about the Eungella vegetation. And we had a great time. Thank you to those who had the vision to hold this weekend and thank you to those who organised it.

Story by Lesley Deacon

HIDING FROM BIRDS

I recently had the opportunity to look at some bird hides and viewing platforms in the Townsville area. Six were



The Bunker

in Townsville with three at the Town Common and three at the Turbine Wetlands nearby. Then I checked out two at the Tyto Wetlands in Ingham and one at the Horseshoe Lagoon near the Haughton River.

Casting a critical eye over each one, I could find fault with all of them bar one. Poorly designed construction was an issue in some cases but waterbirds could see you as you approached the hide, in others. The second of the three hides at the Town Common known as the Bunker, was my overall choice for the best hide that I saw. The approaches to it were screened adequately and once inside there was seating with a long and wide gap for viewing the wetlands. If it was elevated a couple of metres it would have been perfect.

Observations and photo by Daryl Barnes

THE GOLDEN ONE

I missed my chance at a Golden Bowerbird when I was on the Atherton Tablelands, we had visited Mount Hypipamee and tracked down the known GBB bower there.

After about a half-hour wait, a local guide turned up with a couple of high-paying clients, he was friendly and shared his knowledge of the Golden Bowerbird with us, we hung around and talked to him and his clients for another half hour or so but left without a sighting. He later emailed me, telling me I had missed the bird by about 20 minutes.

That had been November 14 and another visit to the bower in January 15 netted the same result, as expected although you never know, right?

This year I was asked to help a mate out in Townsville, he said it would be hard work but lots of birding would be on the agenda. He was wrong about the first bit and right about the second.

Day one saw us heading up to Paluma to visit the known GBB bower at Birthday Creek Falls, with the chance of also seeing Victoria's Riflebird, Spotted Catbird, Tooth-billed Bowerbird, Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Pied Monarch....all high on our list.



Golden Bowerbird

Steve Dew



and attending to his bower

Steve Dew

Well Birthday Creek had a surprise for us, as soon as we started down the track we were hit with a barrage of calls, so many in fact, that we later realised it was a Tooth-billed Bowerbird.

A short stroll down the track and a well-worn detour later we were at the Golden One's bower, I settled down at the base of a tree while the others held back a bit and in no time a female briefly flew into view, hanging back maybe 10 metres from the bower, she promptly left but not before I got a quick snap of her.

Soon I could hear the male calling, and could just make him out hidden in the branches of a small tree, he disappeared for a little while but when he returned he sat a little closer and checked me out.....I returned the favour and took a couple of photos of course.

After another departure he returned and sat on a branch quite close to where I was sitting, maybe 5 metres, after sufficient paparazzi action he departed again, returning to a less conspicuous spot to do some more calling.

Next time he returned carrying a small white flower and proceeded to make some fine adjustments to the bower, I was stoked and managed to get some good shots.

We left him to his lad-wooning and walked the remainder of the track down to the bottom of the waterfall, not many other birds were in attendance although we did hear a Catbird and heard and saw many Bridled Honeyeaters.

Upon our return to the carpark old mate Tooth-bill was in full voice so much so his whereabouts were given away and we realised he was attending his own bower right next to the carpark and track entrance.

The TBBB's bower is fairly simple, he collects large leaves and lays them light-side up (many rainforest leaves have a lighter underside), essentially creating footlights for his stage where he preens and calls till the ladies can't stand it anymore and turn up for mating (I made that bit up).

We must have sat there and listened to his calling for 10-15 minutes, he only let up when another car arrived at the carpark, but not before I got a couple of good pics of him.

Other birds of note were White-cheeked and Scarlet Honeyeaters, Topknot Pigeons and a brief sighting of a Square-tailed Kite.

Sadly, the Catbirds stayed hidden and although we walked a few tracks and heard many Riflebirds, none made themselves available for observation or photo opportunities – next time!!



Golden Bowerbird

Paula Sjostedt

Story by Steve Dew

DRAGLINE SHUTDOWN

I was working for a contractor on a dragline shutdown on the Curragh Mine site near Blackwater. It was October and birds around the work site were busy feeding, mating and nesting. Prior to my visit to this area, three of the bird species I was seeing regularly here were unfamiliar to me.

The first of these were always in a loose flock of between ten and twenty in number. Mounted on the roof of the dragline was a large set of lights that were turned each night to help with sight visibility for the back shift. By morning when we arrived on site, Black-faced Woodswallows could regularly be seen displaying their aerobic skills catching insects that had been drawn by the night lights.



Large-tailed Nightjar

Ian Boyd

On several occasions I had the pleasure to watch one and sometimes two Diamond Doves as they wandered over an outer area of the pad pecking the ground searching for grass seeds to eat.

Another bird that I observed was on land adjacent the site. It would often sing continuously as it flew from one shrubby tree to another. The tune was a rather sharp but rollicking type that the bird repeated over and over. It was very distinctive. This calling would also take place for lengthy periods whilst it perched in low bushes. It took me awhile, but I eventually identified it as a Rufous Songlark.

Back at the Accommodation Centre where I was staying in Blackwater, there was a solitary bird there that would call out every morning without fail starting just before day-break. The call could be described as 'eerie' particularly on calm mornings.

Basically it began with an abrupt clear note to start and then, starting at a lower key, it would sing out seven or eight notes rising in pitch. This call would be repeated continually and would still be going on as I was leaving the camp to go to work after it was day-light. My conclusions on the identification here may be inaccurate but I'm thinking that this bird may have been a Large-tailed Nightjar.

Whilst some areas of native vegetation existed around the perimeter of the mine where we had access, it did provide some good bird habitat where two varieties of Wren, - the Superb and Red-backed, - were seen often. Males of both varieties were just brilliant with their spring plumages in full show.

Story by Daryl Barnes

SLADE POINT STATE SCHOOL MARKET DAY



The 2016 inaugural Slade Point State School market day was well organised and well patronised by the community with our big and bright banners attracted plenty of interest from the passing crowd. Club members were kept busy trying to provide satisfactory answers to at times 'curly' questions.

So well done and thanks to Gerry (& Kath), Steve and Tom for giving up their time to man Birdlife Mackay's stand during the morning of Saturday October 22nd.

Editor

WHAT BIRD WAS THAT?

I came from down south - came to enjoy all the sights
New plants and new wildlife - would be new delights
Foreign were the names - for me, were all exotics
Yes I was out of my depth - way up here in the tropics

'What bird was that?' - as something flew past
It was so hard to see - as it went by so fast
Up there in that tree - now I can see it at last
It's preening in the sunlight - and a morning shadow it cast

From the water's edge - came a twittering call
'What bird was that?' - it sounded to me rather small
Hidden well out of sight - amongst reeds that were tall
Whilst continually calling - it wasn't familiar at all

Whether by sight or by sound - you can easily get confused
When you're in foreign country - maybe you can be excused
But if you decide to seek help - and a bird app gets used
And you still get it wrong - maybe your ego gets bruised

But if the bird is not seen - its only the call that you hear
The identification of the bird - can often be unclear
As some birds can mislead - they can have quite a repertoire
Those that imitate - make them the hardest by far

But I stayed around long enough - get to know a fantail from a quail
A fairy wren from a swamp hen - and a wagtail from a rail
And I like what I saw - it suited me to a tee
Between the rainforest and the sea - is now where I'm gonna be

Daryl Barnes



WHERE SONG BEGAN

EXTRACTS from the book written by Tim Lowe

Page 17. The sheer number of eucalypt species – some 800 plus – is something to wonder about. Eucalyptus is the world's second largest genus of trees after figs. Whilst figs are spread over six continents, eucalypts are native to just one. The Sydney region alone has more than twice as many eucalypt species (100 plus) as Britain has total tree species.

Page 30. Australia is a place where birds and plants responding to each other have produced not only the world's biggest flowering feeding birds, but the world's tallest flowering plants (ie: Mountain Ash – Eucalyptus Regnans)

Page 31. Eucalypts rely on fire to exclude many competitors just as honeyeaters rely on aggression.

Page 40. In Australia, lerp varies in abundance by season, location and tree species, but some birds enjoy a year-round supply.

Page 41. Australia's evergreen trees allow psyllids to feed and breed year-round and bug numbers sometimes explode create feasting and breeding opportunities for birds.

Page 81. Extreme behavior in birds is more likely in Australia than anywhere else because its song birds have been diversifying for so long.

Page 90. At one ceremony in New Guinea attended by Richard Attenborough fresh feather worn by 500 men showed that at least 10,000 birds had been slaughtered to provide the headdresses of that one dance.

Page 93. If feral introduced monkeys spread across New Guinea they will change it forever. As well as fruits and seeds they eat lizards, crabs and importantly, the eggs and chicks of birds.

Page 109. A storm snaps off a limb, rain soaks into the base, fungus grows, termites arrive, holes form. Eucalypts are pivotal to parrot success offering lodgings as well as food.

Page 128. Parrots and songbirds are far and away the most intelligent and Australia gave the world both.

Page 211. Finches evolve fast by breeding and dying much younger than most Australian birds Zebra Finches can breed when two months old and they only live 12 years compared to a budgies 21.

Page 222. The problem with mosaic burning is how badly it can be done.

Page 223. Because fires on aboriginal lands are seldom used today for their original purposes, the burning is in some cases excessive and in others non-existent.

Page 257. The feature of Australia that is most revealing, I am convinced, is all the aggression between species.

Page 264. Whether helpful or harmful, Australia has strong bird-plant relationships. Plants tend to do better from birds than from mammals for two reasons; wings and teeth. Bird wings spread more pollen and seed than do animal legs and beaks are usually kinder to seeds than are jaws with teeth.

Page 265. Much about Australia reflects 'missing' mammals; a bird as the largest and most dangerous rainforest tenant, parrots that can do 'everything', and all the birds in New Guinea that use fruit.

Page 266. Australia's remarkable reptiles also fit into the picture of mammal poverty. With 960 species and more named each year, reptile diversity is nowhere higher.

Page 266. Reptiles could explain why Australia has the world's largest kingfishers, the kookaburras, since they often take reptile.

Page 268. Pollen mobility in Australia has probably dropped since the arrival of honeybees and it may drop further.

Page 304. Birds are cared about today in ways unimaginable a generation ago.

Contributed by Daryl Barnes

ANNUAL WATERHOLE COUNT

An extract from the Black-throated Finch Annual Waterhole Count 2014

The Annual Black-throated Finch waterhole count is conducted on the third weekend of October each year. 2014 was the 11th year of the count which attempts to quantify changes in the relative abundance of granivorous birds on the Townsville Coastal Plain. Each year volunteers are assigned to monitor the activity of birds using specific waterholes within areas judged to be black-throated finch habitat. Birds are counted as they drink at the monitored watering places so it is actually "drinking events" that are being counted rather than the number of birds – it is usually impossible to know whether a bird visits the watering place and drinks more than once. In addition to black-throated finches, the count records double-barred, zebra and plum-headed finches, chestnut-breasted mannikin, peaceful dove and squatter pigeon.



During this year's count, 35 volunteers monitored 18 specific locations. These included both farm dams and natural waterholes in creeks. Each was observed between 6am and 9am on the 18th and 19th of October, with "drinking events" of target species being recorded for each 15 minute interval.

This year, the target species (finches, peaceful doves, squatter pigeons) were observed at 17 out of the 18 watering places. The most frequently recorded of the target species was double-barred finch with a total of 628 "drinking events" across the two days and the 18 watering places. More than one-third of these were at one particular location. Peaceful dove was the second most frequently recorded species with 508 "drinking events". There were far fewer for chestnut-breasted mannikin ($n = 5$) and none for zebra (though there were incidental sightings of this species) or plum-headed finches ($n = 0$). Black-throated finches were observed at only 4 of the 18 watering places. The total number of black-throated finch "drinking events" was 263. Volunteers also reported 110 other bird species that were observed during the count. A list is provided at the end of this article.



Overall, the news from this year's count is a mixed bag. The numbers of black-throated finch drinking events was up from the low numbers recorded between 2010 ($n = 27$) and 2013 ($n = 198$) but still considerably lower than recorded in most years prior to that.

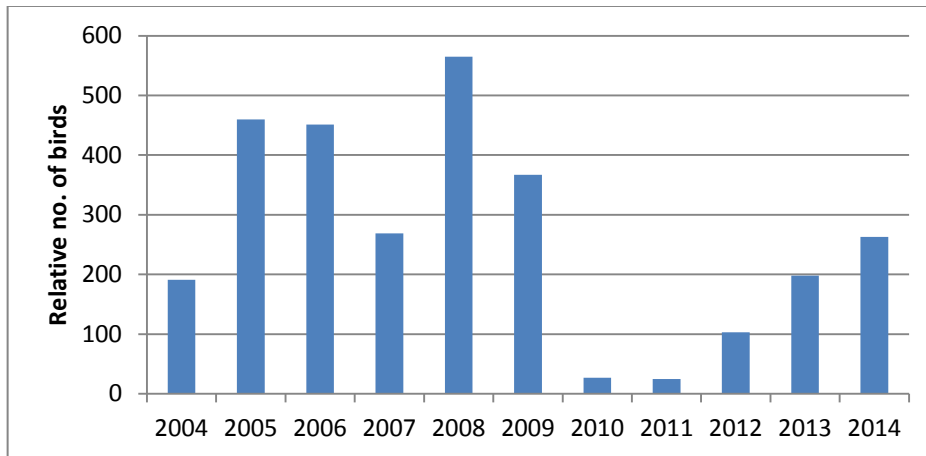
Black-throated Finches

Ian Boyd

The relative numbers of black-throated finches recorded in each year of the waterhole count since 2014 are shown in the graph below. Perhaps of greatest concern is the facts that birds were seen at only a small proportion of sites and that some sites that in past years have been very reliable have had few birds since 2009.

There are at least three possible explanations for the changes in the apparent relative abundance of black-throated finches on the Townsville Coastal Plain. These relate to (i) detectability; (ii) seasonal conditions or (iii) habitat change. Detectability of the birds using the waterhole count method can change because recent rainfall may mean that birds do not need to come to regular watering places to drink because there are alternative sources scattered more generally across the landscape.

Different seasonal conditions may mean that the resources that the birds need, especially grass seeds, vary in abundance and accessibility between years, leading to changes in breeding success and survival. Habitat deterioration, including loss of habitat due to changes in land-use, could lead to longer-term declines in finch populations. Continued monitoring of finch populations can help describe and explain population fluctuations and trends.



This figure records the number of “drinking events” by black-throated finches reported during each of the waterhole counts since 2004.

Extract provided by the coordinator of the Townsville BTF Recovery Team Yvette Williams

CHANCE MEETING

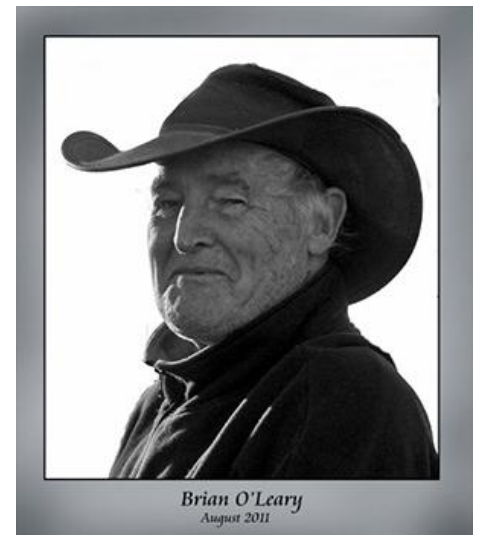
I got much pleasure from a brief meeting with a person whom I could only describe as being a colourful Aussie character. The person I am referring to on this occasion is a wildlife photographer come birder, Brian O’Leary.

I first saw an example of Brian’s work when I visited an art show at Paluma when accompanied by Gerry Woodruff, about a fortnight earlier. In one corner of the hall and on a large screen was a slide show of Brian’s work. They were all of local birds, mostly photos plus short videos. One of the organizers of the event, Colwyn Campbell, had got to know Brian well and so described a little of the man’s history to us and it made a fascinating story. But little did I realize then that I would actually come across this man one day.

Barry Deacon and I were given advice on where we could reliably see Black-throated Finches. So at 4.55 am we left our accommodation at the Leukaemia Foundation Village and traveled the 40 kilometers to the Woodstock Motocross track to meet with caretaker Mick.

Upon arrival we saw no signs of life apart from a greeting from Mick’s blue heeler. Barry parked the Land-Rover not far from a dual cab that was hooked up to an egg-shell single-axle caravan. Beside that was a campervan. Anyway, in good time all occupants were out and about and introductions were made. With us all having one thing in common, birds, much chat soon eventuated. Tourists from Scotland Tom and Sally had hired the campervan for a six month visit whilst the little egg-shell van was owned by wildlife photography Brian O’Leary who was making his way from Paluma to his home near Ulladulla in N.S.W. Mick did eventually join us in his wheelchair and he then fully explained the finch situation to everyone.

The Black-throated Finch situation was soon forgotten as cameras and bird issues dominated conversation for the next hour or so.....until we departed.



Story by Daryl Barnes

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS:

July 27th. Blue-faced Honeyeaters feeding female Common Koel in Cascade Gardens. – Desley Williams.

October 2nd. Two male Regent Bowerbirds at Chelmans Road gate. – club outing.

October 2nd. Forty estimated Eungella Honeyeaters along Chelmans Road track. – club outing.

October 5th. A Large-tailed Nightjar calling at Hodges Road Shoal Point. – Desley Williams.

SEPTEMBER 4TH MONTHLY CLUB OUTING LANDING ROAD & TEDLANDS



Cotton Pygmy Geese

Steve Dew

Two individuals reported seeing highlights for them, Jason, who frightened a Grey Goshawk from its perch before he could get any shots away, and Steve who watched as a Black-necked Stork landed in clear vision for him to capture some images.

Most of the species I expected to see we saw apart from any Royal Spoonbills and Grey Fantails. But of course, us not seeing either doesn't mean that they were completely absent from the areas we visited.

We welcomed Allison to the outing with it being here first ever foray into a group bird watching outing.

Report by Daryl Barnes

OCTOBER 3RD. MONTHLY CLUB OUTING CHELMAN'S ROAD EUNGELLA

With Daryl having his little 'rest and recreation' at The Townsville Hospital, he convinced us that we could lead the October Outing despite the fact that we have never attended one before. How hard could it be? People meet at a certain place at a certain time and look at birds. Sounds simple. The SCAP people asked how many we were expecting for the outing. Oh dear. Were we supposed to have numbers? We had no idea who was coming.

The six of us staying at Quandong Lodge, Barry, Lesley, Desley, Coral, Francis and Penny, had an early breakfast and drove out to Chelman's Road. Whereabouts do you meet, we wondered. None of us seemed to know. So we pulled up at the turnoff and soon had Jason and Gerry arrive to tell us we were in the wrong place. Poor Jason had decided to come up to Eungella a bit earlier for some photos, but had neglected to change his phone from Daylight Saving Time and so his alarm went off at 3:30am. By the time we met at 7:30 he had already taken 350 photos and flattened his camera flash battery. Deciding that everyone knew where to go if they were late, we headed out to the National Park entrance at the end of Chelman's Road. Rosemary soon arrived with her brother David and we had a group of ten.

As soon as we got out of the vehicles we heard the Eungella Honeyeaters calling loudly and persistently. Pairs of them were flying in and out of the Climbing Pandanus, chasing, calling, feeding on the flowers and pecking at insects on the underside of leaves. Everyone managed to have good sightings and as they were 'lifers' for a few people, it was a most exciting time.

Deciding we should try to record more than one species, we set off down the track. It was quite gloomy with the sun not yet high, but we still managed to hear and see quite a few birds. And all the way down the track we could hear the EHs calling as they darted through the forest. Normally the forest is full of Lewin's Honeyeater, but they were very few. We disturbed many Rufous Fantail sitting on the track, flitting and spinning to catch the insects. The flash of colour as they spread their tail was quite delightful. Maybe they were eating leeches. If so, they should have eaten a few more!



Regent Bowerbird

Steve Dew

Eventually, someone suggested it would be a very late morning tea if we didn't turn around. We should get our priorities right. We managed to spread out quite a bit on the return as we investigated the rousing White-browed Scrubwren, the aerial antics of the very dark coloured Grey Fantail, the flash of orange of the buzzing Spectacled Monarchs and some red-fruited raspberry – although the birds hadn't left much to savour. The latter group had a very good sighting of the colourful Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove and thought they could skite, until they caught up with the forward party who were gathered together after having a male Regent Bowerbird pose for them right on the side of the track.

Back at the cars, the Eungella Honeyeaters were still keeping us entertained. There was more photo taking and looking through binoculars than sipping tea and biscuits. A Regent Bowerbird pair flew into a favourite tree and we didn't know where to look! The hurried directions pointing out the birds' positions were a source of entertainment too. "It's in the tree – the big tree – with the green leaves. See the three branches – go to the middle one - go up until you see the hole in the sky.....". It is a wonder we all managed to sight any birds at all.

When birdcall was started, we were interrupted to say that we were supposed to first guess the total number of species seen to win the prize. The prize? Nobody told us about any prize! Everyone remained competitive though and the non-existent prize was awarded to David with 32. A recount to check gave it to Barry and Desley with 33. Then Gerry spotted another two birds and so won with 35. So sad we hadn't known about the prize, Gerry.

Everyone was invited back to Quandong Lodge for lunch. The plant people were busy poring over plastic packets of leaf samples with reference books and magnifying glasses and had even seen a Regent Bowerbird themselves. But nothing could dampen the birdos' enthusiasm. We had had a wonderful morning.

Report by Barry and Lesley Deacon

REMINDER

Please remember that the club has one final monthly outing for 2016. On November the 6th we visit a body of water on private property north of Mackay known as Lake Clive.

On December 3rd and 4th we participate in the annual Bird Count where anyone can be involved and no registrations are required. All you need to do is contact the coordinator of the event, Sam Tarlinton, then go birding with a friend or two and then send in your list of sightings. Contact me for Sam's details.

CAPE YORK PENINSULAR



The fluff-collecting Masked Finch and nesting Palm Cockatoos were just a couple of the highlights Merrilyn Paskins captured with her 'new' camera on a recent trip to the cape.

INAUGURAL TWITCHATHON



These three happy campers, who called themselves the WINGDINGS, formed Birdlife Mackay's first team to enter the Inaugural National TWITCHATHON. They, Dan Burndred, Sam Tarlinton & Kate Grayso, entered one of the three events available, the challenging 24-hour competition. And, if you can go by the big smiles on their faces, it looks like they are primed and ready for any challenge. Good birding guys.

This year, the sponsorship money raised will be equally shared between two Queensland birds, the Yellow Chat that can be located near Rockhampton and the Eungella Honeyeater of the Clarke Range.

Editor

TOWNSVILLE – HOSPITALS and BIRDS

When Daryl sent out an SOS for carers, I thought that could be something I could possibly do. I'm not really good with the hospital scene, but hadn't thought much about all the sitting in hospital corridors. As I was heading up to Townsville to take over from Steve and Barb, I reconciled myself to some inactivity, catching up on some reading and having a quiet ten days.

How wrong I was. It soon became apparent that Daryl was not going to let any grass grow under his feet, and although we had a pharmacy run just after I arrived, we managed to fit in a trip to Pallarenda to look for Nightjars. This was the forerunner to ten very busy days in which we left the unit more for birding activities than medical ones and were usually left by 6.30am. (But sometimes 5am.)

I must say that I did go to Townsville with one ulterior motive. I had read on Eremaea Birdlines of a sighting of a pair of Rufous Owl with two chicks on the Ross River. An earlier search on my last time in Townsville had been fruitless. With Daryl's encouragement, we did some detective work and were able to get a better idea of where the owls should be. Early the next morning we were standing under a huge tree with four pairs of Rufous Owl eyes staring down at us. How spectacular this was.



Rufous Owl – 1 adult & 1 juvenile

Barry Deacon

Daryl had had three previous carers take him to the Golden Bowerbird in Paluma, but had missed out on sighting the Riflebird and Spotted Catbird. I was keen to get better photos of the Golden Bowerbird so we headed back up the range to Paluma. We sat watching the bird for a long time but he would not attend his bower. Any disappointment in not getting the perfect Bowerbird photo though was offset by great views of the male and female Victoria's Riflebird and three Yellow-breasted Boatbill which were both 'lifers' for Daryl.

Another goal for me was a photo of a female Lovely Fairy-wren. I had seen this bird before but they are awesomely beautiful and I lacked a photo. We visited a contact who had these birds on her property. Not being put off by lucking out on the first visit, and having nothing to do with the scones and cream she served us for morning tea, we headed back to her property a few days later. As we were frustratingly about to call it quits, we heard chattering through the scrub and then suddenly they were above us. Only one male and one female. They stayed long enough for great viewing but not great photographic opportunities. We had been looking where you might find Fairy-wren, but these are more arboreal and are generally found higher up in fairly dense coastal scrub or rainforest fringes.

We birded every single day, travelling over 1,300km in and around Townsville and even joining the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team surveys. Turns out being a carer for someone on chemo is hard work. I had to come home to have a rest.

But Daryl and I can now possibly set ourselves up as birding tour guides in the Townsville region.

[Story and photo by Barry Deacon](#)

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

Sept. 11th. A Great Bowerbird and heard an Eastern Whipbird. Carlisle Gardens. – Desley Williams.

Oct. 10th. A Baillons Crake at the Botanic Gardens. – Madge Barnett.

Oct. 22nd. Two Indian Mynas in flight at Bucasia. – Dan Burndred.

Oct. 22nd. A Yellow-throated Miner at Bucasia Beach. – Dan Burndred.

Oct. 28th. A Cockatiel at the Botanic Gardens – Lesley Deacon.

CAPE YORK PENINSULAR



A male Eclectus Parrot attending a nest with the female close by looking on. These magnificent birds and more were discovered on Merrilyns trip through the cape in September.



BIRDLIFE MACKAY MONTHLY OUTINGS CALENDAR 2016

Each outing is on the first Sunday of the month.

Bring food, water, a fold-up chair, sun and insect protection.

A gold coin donation applies.

Date 2016	Destination	Meeting Place	Meeting Time	Contacts
November 6 th .	Lake Clive near Belmunda	Coningsby Service Station	0600	07 49593382 0427826677
December 4 th .	National Bird Challenge	N/A		07 49593382 0427826677

President/Newsletter: Daryl Barnes dbarnes02@dodo.com.au 07 49593382

Secretary: Tom Curtis tomcurtis93@gmail.com 0427826677

Webmaster: Steve Dew 0447511685

Wildlife Rescue Hotline: 0447543268

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