



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

p.o.box 67 - darling heights - 4350

MEMBERSHIP : Adults/Families \$18 Students \$10

CLUB OFFICERS :

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" To encourage the observation and study of the birds of the Toowoomba area "

NEWSLETTER No. 212 - SEPTEMBER 1993

EDITORIAL:

Old Spring; the time of birth and renewal, of sprouting and spawning, of budding and hatching. Yes, take a look around, the season of new life has arrived again like a yearly carnival. Stark, wintry limbs bursting into pale-green life, migratory flycatchers churring, Dollarbirds cackling, Pittas 'walking to work', raucous Channel-bills and strident Koels, all revelling in the change of season and thinking seriously about the next generation. Waders returning from their monumental journeys to the Northern Hemisphere and kingfishers popping-up on telephone wires everywhere never fail to convey an overwhelming sense of 'starting over' and continuity. Its a great atmosphere and a fascinating time of year for birders and naturalists. Make sure to take advantage of the ambience, comrades.

Sorry about last month's newsletter. I hope no-one turned the pages too many times looking for the promised Annual Species Summary! A jolt of confusion crept into the editorial process I'm afraid. (See 'From the President...' in this newsletter). Next month is our Annual General Meeting, the culmination of the TBO year, and the executive heartily invites all members to attend. A great time to meet people with like interests, have a chat, elect an executive for the coming year, and listen to our knowledgeable guest speaker, Dr Ian Gynther from the Naturesearch program. A nomination form for executive positions is included in this news-sheet. If you are interested in assisting with the operation of the club, please fill-in and post to Ann. Several positions are particularly in need of some interest at this stage. If you would like to make some enquiries, please speak with Ann. Annual subscriptions are due on 1 November. Good birding!

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS AUGUST OUTING - Lake Dyer and Sandy Ck - Mt Berryman Road, 29 August 1993.

It was with some trepidation that I prepared for this outing as once again our longed-for rain threatened a very wet Sunday. However, I should know by now that often this means a small band of extra-keen birders and some excellent sightings. Just go prepared! And so things turned out.

We met at Lake Dyer under lowering skies but no rain actually fell until the outing drew to its close some five hours later and away up at the head of the Blenheim valley with 71 species to our credit. Reward indeed for intrepid birders. Bill Gunn Dam, ex Lake Dyer, was by no means bereft of birds. This favourite birding haunt of old, then a shallow woodland lagoon with plenty of cover for observers, has

since been transformed into a vast open water storage catchment for the surrounding area. Now the harsh and ugly man-made outlines are starting to soften; the trees, shrubs and grasses starting to grow and with the water much depleted in the current drought, there is again some sort of habitat for a considerable variety of species. With Black Swans, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants, a lone Great Egret, stately Pelicans, a pair of Pink-eared Ducks, numbers of Grey Teal, a huge raft of Australasian Grebes, scatterings of avocets and stilts with diminutive dotterels scavenging along the muddy shoreline we had plenty to observe - and doubtless missed even more. Several Whiskered Terns, Fairy Martins, the odd Welcome and White-backed Swallow provided aerial interest until a magnificent White-bellied Sea-Eagle soared overhead causing consternation below.

Our attention was diverted by a flock of finches drifting past, mostly Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, as far as we could tell, which landed conveniently nearby and we found Reed Warblers and cisticolas in the marshy growth near the outlet before sighting Royal Spoonbills and Maned Geese as we left. By way of a complete contrast, the rest of the morning was spent sorting out bush birds well up the valley to the south of the tiny hamlet of Blenheim. Always a great birding area with steeply-wooded hillsides closing in and the little creek criss-crossing the road amidst Melaleucas, Acacias and other vegetation. Birds were close at hand so even in the poor light good views of an Azure Kingfisher, male Superb and Red-backed Wrens in splendid new velvety plumage, Wonga Pigeons and Brown Cuckoo-Doves with brief glimpses of Satin Bowerbirds (females and immatures) as they moved about in thick cover, were enjoyed by everyone.

Great birds. Pleasant company. What more could one ask for ?

Ann Shore

FROM THE PRESIDENT....

As members will be aware, our last newsletter was only four pages long and did not include the Annual Species Summary for 1992 as reported. This is no way the fault of our trusty Editor Don. Due to a shortage of articles, Don had decided to include the annual summary which then made the newsletter ten pages long. However this also put it just over the maximum weight as required by Australia Post for our category of bulk postage. To cut a long story short, the summary was left out and Record's Officer Rod quickly produced the Member's Bird Notes and a four page newsletter resulted. Both Annual Species Summaries (1987 and 1992) can be obtained on request from Ann.

Pat McConnell

THE SPOONBILL AND THE EGRET

On reading the above title, you may well be expecting to read one of Aesop's fables. Let me assure you, then, that the following is a true story, unfabled, concerning a relationship between these two birds which I have now been lucky enough to observe on several occasions. The scene of these observations has been Tingalpa Creek, coastal Brisbane; a mangrove-lined water-course emptying into Moreton Bay at Thorneside.

The creek, despite regularly carrying raw sewage and other foul compounds, is an excellent place for birds and wildlife in general. Mangrove Herons, Kingfishers, Honeyeaters and Warblers, Royal Spoonbills, Little and Great Egrets, Caspian Terns, White-bellied Sea-Eagles, Ospreys, Chestnut Teal, shags and many others abound along its banks, or fish in its depths. I regularly obtain exercise (and birdwatch at the same time) by paddling a kayak through its dubious waters. One day whilst paddling along, doing my level best to dodge the 'blind mullets' and chemical spills, I observed two white birds pacing along the bank together, parallel and clearly as a pair. One was a Royal Spoonbill. It was wading through the water slowly, swishing its bill from side to side in the usual Spoonbill feeding pattern, relying

on its hair-trigger reflexes to snap up any aquatic creature it may encounter. It walked parallel to the shore in about two inches of water. The other bird was a Little Egret and it strode along the shore keeping perfectly abreast with its larger companion, fiercely concentrating on the feeding activities of the spoonbill.

"What in the name of Aesop is going on here?", I thought, much confused by this strange pairing. As I stopped and quietly watched, the purpose of this unusual collaboration became apparent. Occasionally, by way of ripples, I could see that the actions of the spoonbill were flushing little fish or shrimp from the shallows, but some little creatures were flitting out of the spoonbill's reach. These escapees were the focus of the egret's presence. Its sharp bill, propelled by a spring-loaded neck, would dart out in an attempt to thwart their escape. On several occasions I saw it rewarded by the capture of a small squirming silver object, which it hastily swallowed. The spoonbill, meanwhile, kept about its business. It appeared that the larger of the two associates had nothing to gain from the relationship, however wasn't inconvenienced. The egret on the other had, was depending on the spoonbill to flush its prey. On making enquiries I found that this unusual pairing is probably best described as a type of *commensal* relationship, where organism A depends on organism B, but organism B couldn't care less whether A is present or not. Anyone seen any similar alliances ?

Don Gaydon

AUSTRALIAN HOBBY KILLS BAT

On the fifth of May 1993 I was in my backyard in Helidon trying to sort out the plants from the weeds. This is not as easy as it sounds after 16 months of neglect. It wasn't long before I was saved from this drudgery by the alarm calls of some resident Noisy Miners. Rushing inside to grab my binoculars I emerged hoping to see some rare bird of prey. But alas nothing. Those stupid Noisy Miners were probably just chasing themselves again.

Still scanning the skies in hope (looking at nothing is better than doing the gardening), I was surprised to see some small bats out hunting early as it still wasn't dusk. It was then that I saw an Australian Hobby skimming the roof-tops. Those Noisy Miners were not as stupid as I thought. This hobby was not playing games and the microchiropteran was an easy target for it. The hunt was over almost before it had started and the hobby flew to a nearby perch to consume its prey. As is often the case, these small insectivorous bats, though adept themselves when hunting at night, are easy prey if they venture out early.

Pat McConnell

The following lovely poem was submitted by Joe Deuble, written by his grand-daughter Nicole.

FREE AS A BIRD

The unblinking face of the morning
Is flung out across a brave new sky
The sunrise is simmering away on the horizon
And the birds are remembering what it is to fly.

A sliver of gold slices the darkness
And challenges the remnants of the dawn.
The blanket of fog on the creek is lifting
And in the bushland shadows, a new day is born.

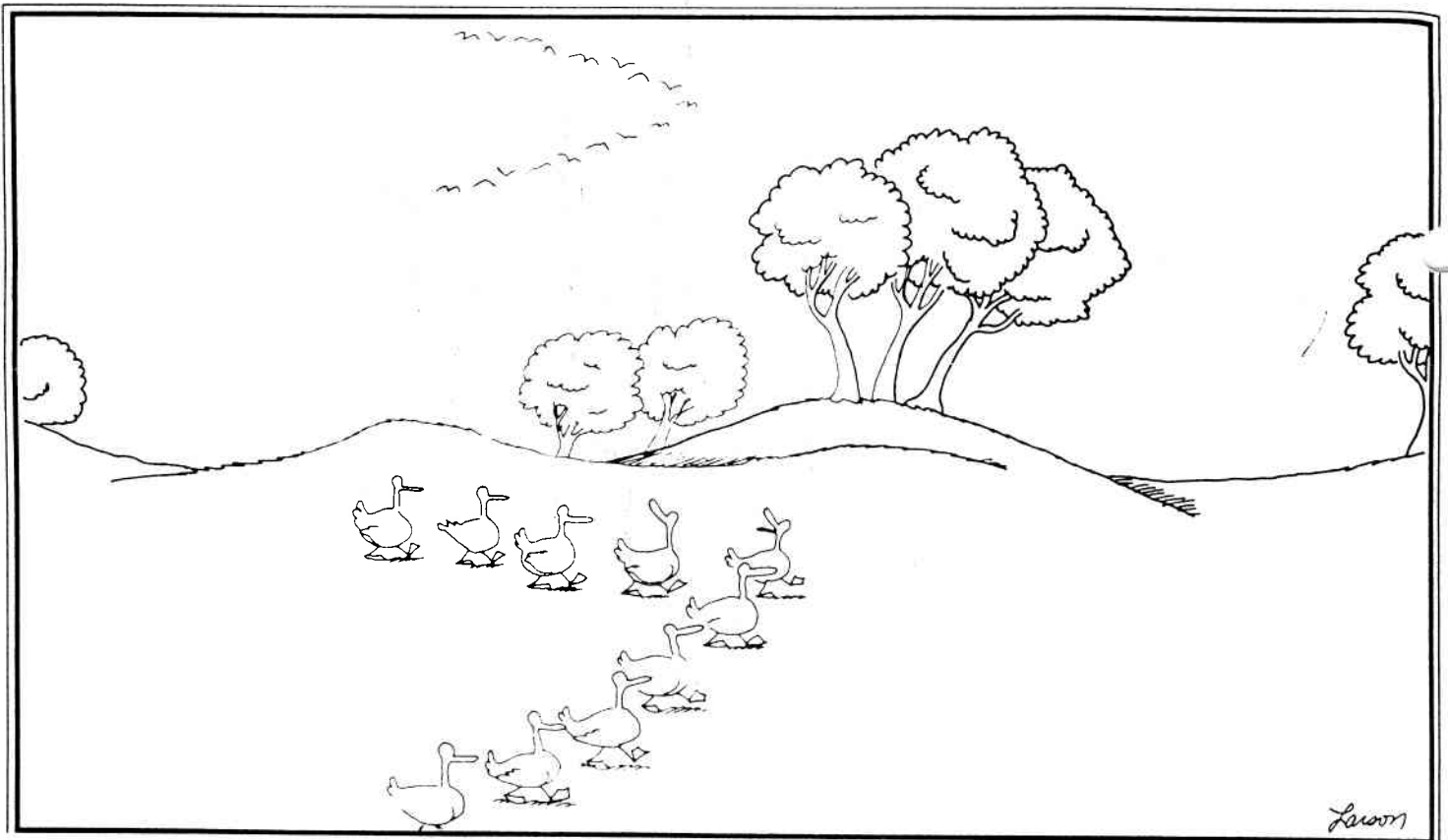
Man has not touched this place yet
But the animals do not fear his embrace.
They remember humanity as a horse and rider
Not a bulldozer or gun, but a hat and a face.

The birds know nothing of his culture
Of how he thinks, speaks or feels.
They will not dread his ill-conceived illusions
For all that the bush knows is instinctive but real.

Snug in their tiny pockets of existence
They are unashamed to squabble and scream.
What would we know of their primitive liberties
Our world and our society is not all that it seems.

And the business of the birds
Is of little concern to you or me
The tread of this age is so convincingly relevant
That it is sometimes hard to hear their call and often hard to see.

Beneath the morning sun, one is compelled to pause
And think of nothing but leaves and sky.
As sunrise tumbles onto a blue canvas
We wish that true freedom could again be ours and that we too, could fly.



"Say . . . Look what THEY'RE doing."

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS INC.
NOMINATION FORM FOR EXECUTIVE POSITIONS 1993-1994
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 11 OCTOBER 1993

1. **Position :**

Name of Nominee :

Nominated by :

Seconded by :

Acceptance (Signature of Nominee) :

Date :

2. **Position :**

Name of Nominee :

Nominated by :

Seconded by :

Acceptance (Signature of Nominee) :

Date :

3. **Position :**

Name of Nominee :

Nominated by :

Seconded by :

Acceptance (Signature of Nominee) :

Date :

To be returned to the Secretary not less than 14 days before the AGM.

September 1993 Outing:

Location: Withcott area
Assembly Point: Withcott Hotel car-park.
Time: 7.00 am
Date: 26 September
Leader: contact Ann Shore

Info: Local bush-birds expected.

TBO Annual General Meeting:

Location: QCWA Hall, Withcott, cnr Biggs Rd and Warrego Highway.
Date: Monday, 11 October
Time: 7.00 pm

P.S. Ian will speak on
bird navigation. AHS.

Info: The guest speaker this year will be Dr Ian Gynther from the Naturesearch program. He will discuss issues relating to the Toowoomba region and vegetation types found within our area. It is usual protocol for members to bring a tray of nibblies/savouries and drinks.

Theatre Night :

Date: 22 October
Time: 8 pm
Contact: Ann Shore or Pat Cleary

info: The production will be Noel Coward's *Private Lives*, tickets \$10 each including refreshments. From previous experience, these evenings are exceptional value and most worthwhile. A proportion of profits from the performance will go to our club.

TBO Bird-a-thon:

Date: 23/24 October. Plans to be announced at the AGM.

SURFACE MAIL

THE TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS NEWSLETTER

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