



TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS inc.

(An affiliated Group of the Bird Observers Club of Australia)

P.O. Box 4730, Toowoomba East 4350

MEMBERSHIP: Adults/Families \$20 Students \$10

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President -	Ken McKeown	07 4630 3774	Treasurer -	Gloria Glass	07 4630 7054
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Editor -	Michael Atzeni	07 4639 2761		Helen Wilson	07 4636 4362

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

NEWSLETTER No. 274 - February 1999

Editorial

Good to see some heeded my advice and went for the Painted Honeyeaters. The Sturdee's sighting on 24 January was the last reported sighting so, if you missed them this season, I'm quietly confident they'll show up again later in the year.

Our old favourites, the **Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** are back in town, the first report being a group of 6 from President Ken on 12 February. Several reports since suggest Toowoomba's bird lovers are in for another enjoyable season while the White Cedar lasts. I've have been trying to establish the extent and magnitude of the influx into south-east Queensland through the Birding-Aus email list and will summarise these results at a later date. So grateful to anyone who can send me details of their past and current Red-tail sightings in SE Queensland.

This month, we close the book on the fantastic **Botswana birding holiday** Gloria and Diana had, and on a local note, we have a snippet on **mimicry by Lewin's Honeyeater**, a report on the **Unleaded Petrel's victory** effort in last year's **Queensland Twitchathon**, and on a much sadder note, an account from a colleague of the **recent local extinction of Grey-crowned Babblers** on her Rockmount property, below the range. Some will recall I mentioned the gradual decline of this same population over a year ago.

Reports on the beginner outings will be held over till next month.

Local Extinction of Grey-crowned Babblers at Rockmount

I moved to Lowanna in 1980. It had been a one-room school, established in 1899 on 11 acres and finally closed as a school in 1965. It is situated in a steep valley south-east of Toowoomba, fronting Stockyard Creek. The hill behind it has never been cleared, the scrub dominated by Narrow-leaved Ironbark, with some Queensland Blue Gums, Moreton Bay Ash and Angophora spp. The middle storey is largely Fringed Wattle and these days, lantana.

About 5 acres around the school building were cleared to accommodate a pony paddock, tennis court and playground. About 6 large trees, mostly Queensland Blue Gums, were left in the cleared area and a number of exotics, including Leopardwood, Jacaranda, *Albizia* sp. and Cape Chestnut were planted on Arbor Days. Some of these trees are known to be 90 years of age.

When I moved to Lowanna there was a large group of Grey-crowned Babblers present, apparently in permanent residence. I estimate that were 22 to 25 birds in all. In an area known for its prolific bird life, the babblers were the most obvious species, always active on the grass around the "school" or to be heard in the margins of the scrub. Local farmers, all of whom had been to school there and several of whom were now in their late sixties, told me that there had "always" been babblers (or Happy Families, as they call them) at the school, although nowhere else in the valley.

Periodically, the babblers constructed roosts in the larger of the two Leopardwood trees and also in the Cape Chestnut tree, each tree accommodating up to three roosts at a time. Over almost two decades, I have never seen roosts in any other tree. These two trees are close to the house, the Leopardwood being only 4 metres away. Over almost two decades also I have never seen the slightest sign that the babblers were breeding, nor have I ever seen young birds.

The babblers followed a daily routine that over the years hardly varied. They would emerge from whichever of the roosts they happened to be using in the morning and gather at the southwestern corner of the cleared area, at the top of the creek bank. Here they would feed and chatter for an hour or so, gradually moving around the margins of the scrub as the day progressed. About an hour before sunset they would gather on the entrance road, at the southeastern corner of the clearing, for a communal dustbath. As dusk approached they would fly back to the roosts and gradually settle for the night.

My mowing the grass was always the prelude to a great deal of roost refurbishment, as was a windy day, no doubt providing numerous twigs suitable for roost building. However I have never seen a babbler carrying food.

The total number of babblers on the property has declined steadily, particularly in recent years. When I returned in 1985 from two years overseas, the number had dropped to about 18. Some 5 years later, it was down to about 12. The following year there were 10. By early 1998 the number had further declined to 7. By mid 1998, this had dropped to 5. One week before Christmas 1998, there were none at all. I have not sighted them since and the roosts are falling into disrepair.

Carol Stephens
Toowoomba Veterinary Laboratory
203 Tor Street (PO Box 102)
TOOWOOMBA 4350
Phone 07 4688 1355 Fax 07 4688 1195

[Thanks to Carol for permission to publish this report. I encourage anyone who sees Grey-crowned Babblers in the Stockyard/Rockmount area to report them to Carol or the Records Officer immediately. Ed.]

The 1998 Queensland Twitchathon

The weekend of the 7-8 November 1998 once again saw the "Unleaded Petrels" contesting the Queensland Twitchathon. Unlike previous years the team did not have a chance to do any reconnaissance, so we basically relied on experience from past years.

Mick Atzeni, Ken McKeown and I started, as usual, at Manly where we arrived early to check out the waders prior to a twelve noon start. This enables the team to get off to a quick start with all the species already located. Besides the usual waders and terns we were lucky enough to see a not-so-common Common Tern as we were leaving. With all the waders out of the way, we headed straight for the Wynnum Mangrove Boardwalk for Collared Kingfisher and Mangrove Gerygone.

It was then onto Lake Samsonvale hoping for some quail, waterbirds and some general bush birding. We did not have much luck here, and will not return in future years. However the drive to Mount Glorious, and the mountain itself proved quite fruitful. Birds of note were Topknot Pigeon, White-throated Needletail, Red-browed Treecreeper, Paradise Riflebird and Russet-tailed Thrush. Spotighting on the way back to Highfields, where we saw Barn Owl and Tawny Frogmouth, ending the first half of the twitch. Our tally now was over 130 species. Other highlights of the first day were Pacific Baza, Swamp Harrier and Little Bronze-Cuckoo.

Sunday morning started at 3.00 am when we headed for Ravensbourne National Park in the hope of getting some nocturnal species before the dawn chorus. This proved a waste of time and an extra hour in bed would have been of more benefit. Once dawn arrived, lots of species were recorded but most of these had been seen the previous

day. Suffice to say, a disastrous start to the morning, and with low spirits, we headed back towards Highfields to try for some dry country birds.

Things started to improve from here and we added most of the expected species in our run back to Toowoomba. Included in these were Common Bronzewing, Grey-crowned Babbler, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater and Apostlebird. It was then down into the Lockyer Valley for more bush birds and, hopefully, several waterbirds that we missed the previous day. Most species were taking us longer to find than we had planned and we were starting to get a little anxious. The waterbird sites in the Lockyer Valley proved to be disappointing, and with half an hour still to go, and all planned sites checked, we were at a quandary as to where to try next. Would we try for the Bell Miners back at Preston that we knew we would get, or would we go to Bill Gunn Dam (Lake Dyer) and gamble on getting more than one species? We decided on the latter, and with a pair of Black Falcons seen en route, our decision was immediately justified. A Marsh Sandpiper at the dam then proved a bonus and was the last species seen.

I always like to get at least 200 species and was disappointed to only get 197. I was sure this would not be enough to win. But with a dearth of waterbirds in south-east Queensland, Ken and Mick thought it would be hard to beat. As it turned out they were correct and the "Unleaded Petrels" were Queensland Twitchathon winners for 1998.

Pat McConnell

Botswana Birdwatching, 22 June to 14 July 1998(Part 4 & Final).

(This is a shortened version of the article. Paragraphs about animals have generally been shortened to, e.g., "... elephants ...". Please e-mail us (g.glass@bigpond.com) if you would like the full version of 10 pages. If you would prefer the 21-page version, say so. Also if you would like the full bird list.)

We set up camp, and then drove down to the bank of the Chobe and along a lower bank not far above the water. The water had obviously come here earlier than into the delta. We saw our first pelicans as well as other waterbirds, and the bushbirds were nearly as fascinating as those on the water: more Heuglin's Robins, which we'd first seen at Semetsi, and three species of francolins. These 'game' birds look like larger versions of (Australian) quail, and there were usually a few about in most places, especially where there was some water. The Chobe, when we were there, was a bit like the Moanachira, though without so many channels. lion cubs ...

I have a good bird list for this drive. New birds were a Tropical Boubou, Red-billed Teal, Grey-headed Gulls, and a small dotterel-like plover we identified with the help of Brodie's book as a Kittlitz's Plover. There were more whistle-ducks, Fulvous as well as White-faced; the Fulvous were very much like Australian Plumed Whistling-ducks: similar plumes on the sides, similar tail pattern, stance and the way they land. Besides the gulls, there were Whiskered Terns. As in Australia, these terns inhabit fresh water places. We even managed to see a few small birds: more Blue Waxbills and some Red-billed Queleas. There were also some skimmers, sitting on a sandbank. We didn't, however, see them 'ploughing' the surface of the water with their lower mandibles to catch fish. There was a lone White Stork, its beautiful red bill gleaming in the sun.

There were Feral Pigeons on one of the higher buildings, though Brodie's book which we looked at later didn't acknowledge their presence in the area. ... We returned the way we had come, adding a Golden-breasted Bunting to our list, seeing some kudus, a monitor lizard (looking a bit like a small crocodile basking on the sand at the water's edge) and some bushbucks complete with oxpeckers. ...

The plan for the next day was to go into Kasane again and take a boat cruise in the afternoon. ... We must have been more assiduous with our birdwatching that day, and the list includes many new birds: Greater Scimitarbill, a Gymnogene (one of the large birds of prey), Knob-billed Ducks, a White-browed Robin and Grey-headed Sparrows. Brodie also identified a Purple-crested Lourie, a beautiful bird in the book, but I could not see it at all. There were the usual Grey Louries and many others we had seen earlier, plus a Capped Wheatear. At last we got a Fiscal Shrike, a bird we had been trying to write down for days, but Brodie kept insisting on a Swamp or Tropical Boubou. ... Following the sighting of a female Cardinal Woodpecker, I have a note that we had seen 122 bird species so far.

The guide on our Chobe boat cruise identified the swallows flitting about and under the boat deck (between the two hulls) as Wire-tailed. This we confirmed when they settled on a dead branch. We set off out into the main channel, where we found another boat guide was trying to get a nearby Fish Eagle to come down from its nest and snatch a fish he threw. ...

New birds on this cruise were Spur-winged Geese, a Red-winged Pratincole, Ethiopian Snipe, a Wattled Plover flying over, several individual Green-backed Herons, and our first White-fronted Bee-eaters, which have pale and bright crimson beyond the white around the face. A flock of small sparrow-like birds our guide identified as Red Bishops in non-breeding plumage. We saw a couple of individual Squacco Herons in the grass at the edges and quite a few egrets, Large White, Intermediate or Yellow-billed and Little. Also Cattle Egrets, so-called, though they were with the mob of buffalos. ... Our guide mentioned Yellow-billed Oxpeckers. Previously I had not realised there were two oxpeckers, so I guess we had been looking at them, along with the Red-billed, on many animals. ... One other feature of the cruise was the large number of Pied Kingfishers all along the stretch of water and the many nestholes in the banks. Perhaps some holes belonged to bee-eaters.

... elephants snorkelling ... and so-called mock charge ...

The final day of our safari with Brodie sadly had arrived. The big pack-up, in to Kasane, where we again saw the Feral Pigeons, on to the border crossing at Kazangula (for we had come full circle now), not far from Kasane, then into Zimbabwe and north the 70 or so kilometres to Victoria Falls.

The other safarists were dropped off at their hotels, and we were transferred across into Zambia (our fourth country), traversing the Zambesi bridge just below the falls, to go to *Thorn trees Lodge*, where we were to spend two nights. ...

The first morning we birdwatched around the lodge until breakfast. I was delighted to find some Pied Wagtails, more especially as I knew what they were before I looked at the book. A Fish Eagle was calling, there were Vervet Monkeys eating the figs along the riverbank and over the lodges, and I saw a Malachite Kingfisher dash along the river. There were parties of Red-billed Queleas and Blue Waxbills which we saw often during our stay. There were also other finch-like birds, a few, who had red eye-stripes, which in the book I found were Common Waxbills. Both mornings I heard what I assumed to be Hadada Ibis, and once saw large black birds disappearing.

After breakfast we embarked for our cruise. ... The first interesting bird was a female Finfoot, an elusive long waterbird-cum-duck, which apparently could usually be found near the edge of the water under the hanging vegetation just along from the lodge. We saw it first at the water's edge where we could see its bright orange legs and feet, then it swam, to escape us, no doubt, and was partially submerged, and we noted its longish neck.

We saw a Tropical Boubou and Yellow White-eyes. Later in the day, I watched small parties of them cavorting in the lawn sprinkler back at the lodge. A Hamerkop flew by, and we had good sightings of a Golden Oriole, most beautiful. Our guide pointed out a Trumpeter Hornbill, the first hornbill we'd seen with a big casque on the upper bill (a couple of species have this) and, a little later, a Grey Hornbill. There were Pied Kingfishers and Grey Louries, a Green-backed Heron and some jacanas. ... another Malachite Kingfisher. An exquisite bird which perched on a horizontal reed and stayed and stayed, despite our proximity. Altogether an enjoyable morning.

We birded about the lodge during our long wait for lunch. This was when I watched various parties coming to bathe and preen in the small lawn sprinkler. Numbers of Yellow White-eyes, some Black-eyed Bulbuls (common in most places throughout the trip, though Semetsi and other places had Red-eyed ones as well) and other small birds. Three Red-faced Mousebirds also came to bathe. It was great to be able to have studied, close views of them. All the views I had had, so far, had been of them, supposedly, screeching away from mistletoe clumps. There were waxbills and Grey-headed Sparrows pecking in the dusty areas, a Black-backed Cisticola, some drongoes (also common in most places) and a Black-crowned Tchagra.

During the afternoon we were taken to the Zambian side of Victoria Falls, where we could see the northern end of the wide, wide falls.... ... rhinos ...

The next morning, before our departure, I looked for more birds and was delighted to see another kingfisher, this time a Brown-headed, to add to the Pied and Malachite we had seen already.

Back into Zimbabwe and to the Sprayview Hotel where we were to spend our last night. However, we had two treats still in store: an elephant-back safari in the afternoon and a tour of the falls the next morning.

After a drive of perhaps 20 km, we came to Woodlands Estate, we found four elephants saddled and ready to go with guides already in place. ... Again we had a very knowledgeable guide, whose name was Zenzo. On seeing a

flock of small birds, he said, 'Those are queleas.' I asked, 'Red-billed?' He laughed and said 'Yes.' After that he gave full species names. ... a small black and white bird, ... a Southern Black Tit, a new bird for us. ...

Our last day in Africa had arrived. When our Vic Falls guide picked us up we asked if we could skip the tour of the falls and would he find us some birds. ... We saw a Yellow-bellied Bulbul (with white eye-ring), which I had glimpsed near the Chobe River a few days earlier. We had good view of Red-billed Woodhoopoes, working over the trunks of trees. Our guide said he could hear Black-collared Barbets, then we saw one, then three, and noticed two of them were feeding the one between them with jackal berries. We saw again a Black-backed Puffback, but this one didn't oblige with the puff. Its red eye made its identification sure. There was also a Chin-spot Batis, and Diana saw another kingfisher (our fourth kingfisher), the Striped. Almost our final bird on the outing was a new one, a Collared Palm Thrush, a rufous bird with a distinctive black line encircling its white breast. Its breast-mark enabled easy identification by flipping through the book. This was also the last bird we recorded for our trip and brought the number to 169. ...Then, after a snack lunch, it was off to the international airport, a short flight to Johannesburg, and the long flight home.

Altogether, a most enjoyable and relaxing holiday and we would highly recommend *Wilderness Dawning* to anyone. Our travel agent had rhapsodised that Brodie would make it the trip of a lifetime, and she wasn't far wrong. Thank you, Brodie!

Gloria Glass & Diana Beal

Chatterboxes

There on the right on a low branch in full view was the delightful Rufous Whistler singing away happily. There in another tree on the left the tuneful twitter of a Lewin's Honeyeater.

After the Rufous Whistler sang again, I heard what sounded like a second Rufous Whistler replying from the tree on the left. Strange, did I miss its mate? On double checking the tree on the left, all I could see was the Lewin's Honeyeater.

Then, while focussed on the Lewin's, it again replied to the Rufous Whistler in what was a very good imitation of the latter, complete with mini-"whips".

Rosalie Rudduck

Members' Bird Notes

Members of the Toowoomba Bird Observers have submitted all sightings. Accuracy not vouched for by TBO. Please check with observer(s) before citing.

Brolga (2)*	19/12/98	Flying over Mt Lofty area, E. Toowoomba	JC
Painted Honeyeater**	24/01/99	Oakey Golf Club, Jondaryan	NS, WS
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (6) ***	12/02/99	Table Top Estate	KM
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (4)	18/02/99	East Toowoomba	MA

* Third record for survey area.

** No sightings since. Will be interesting to see if they are annual visitors to this patch.

*** First record for the survey area this year. Please record numbers and dates of all RTBC sightings.

MA	M. Atzeni	JC	J. Caughley	KM	K. McKeown	NS	N Sturdee
WS	W Sturdee						

COMING EVENTS

February Outing

Location: Goomburra State Forest
Dates: Saturday, 27 February
Leader: Ken McKeown 07 4630 3774
Time: 7 am in the camping grounds

Info: A marvellous place to relax and bushwalk. BBQ facilities available for those wanting to make a day of it. Goomburra turnoff is just south of Allora.

National Parks Day Weekend

Location: Wilga Campground, Lake Broadwater
Dates: 20-21 March
Contact: May Bennie 07 4663 3553
 Malcolm Wilson 07 4662 2353

Info: See article in last month's newsletter.

March Outing

Location: Ravensbourne N.P.
Date: Saturday, 27 March
Contact: Michael Atzeni 07 4639 2761

April Outing

Location: Killarney area
Date: Sunday, 25 April
Leader: Ken Wells 07 4661 2547

May Outing

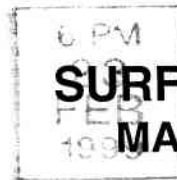
Location: Mt Clunie
Date: Saturday/Sunday, 29/30 May

June Outing

Location: Helidon Hills
Date: Sunday, 27 June

Reminder: Leaders should take the Attendance Book and First Aid Kit on all Outings. All attending members and visitors should sign the Attendance book for insurance purposes.

If undeliverable return to
 Toowoomba Bird Observers Inc
 PO Box 4730
 TOOWOOMBA EAST Q 4350



**SURFACE
 MAIL**



M Jacobs*
 21 Sylvan Court
 TOOWOOMBA 4350