

# The Drongo

Number 147 August 2017



*Len Ezzy*

Croatia

White  
Mountains

Richmond



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Good news! At long last stage one of the Owl Box Project is completed. All five boxes have been made and installed in sites around Townsville. The next step is to keep observing them to see if the owls think they are as comfy and enticing as we do.

We've had good numbers of members and visitors at the regular Branch outings. It seems that the Hervey's Range Heritage Tea Rooms outing is number one on many list of 'must-dos'. Apart from the good birding, the breakfast is well worth the trip up the hill.

Remember, if there is somewhere you are familiar with and think it would be a good place for a Branch Outing, let us know. You may also be prepared to be the leader and share this place with others. Just email the committee on [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au).

Don't forget the Photography Group is now held at the Soundshell so there is enough room to open it up to everyone. Even you are not a photographer yourself, you may want to come along and enjoy viewing some fantastic photos of birds. Bring your own supper and stay for a chat after the show. Check the Activities page on the website for details.

*Janet Robino*

### **YOUR COMMITTEE**

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*The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Birdlife Townsville.*

## BIRDING CROATIA

Wendy and I have been trying to look for birds while on holiday in Europe but it has been very difficult to find them. The best place we found was the beautiful Plitvice Lakes in Croatia.

We went looking around the hotel whenever we had a chance and were rewarded with some new birds. We were able to identify both male and female European Robins, Common Blackbirds and the Song Thrush. The latter two were eating small yellow fallen fruits. It was the same spot that Wendy saw the Great Spotted Woodpecker. She had good views and of course it flew just as I got to the spot!

On the lakes themselves we only saw Mallards while the picnic place where we stopped at the end of our walk gave us great views of the Eurasian Jays near the rubbish bins while around the picnic tables, European Chaffinches looked hopefully for crumbs. This unnamed one below was also around the picnic area and was also seen picking insects off the trees near the hotel.

As we walked around the many different lakes and waterfalls we saw some small birds and I asked our guide if she knew what the birds were. "Nightingale," she said knowledgeably. I was inclined to believe her until another, obviously a different species, was also identified as a Nightingale. Better views had me convinced I was seeing a Great Tit and an Lbj.

This Plitvice Lake's National Park is a mountainous World Heritage site in central Croatia and is renowned for its stunning natural beauty. On the walking tour we walked on wooden footbridges, with no side protection I might add, passing lakes, deep canyons and cascading falls covered in green foliage. We saw the "Great Waterfall" which is the largest waterfall in Croatia. At the end of the walk we were collected in an electric boat and taken across the Kozjak Lake which is their largest lake. Swimming has not been allowed since 2006 and while dogs are still allowed they have to be on leashes and are not supposed to swim...although we saw some that sure looked wet to me. I am sure I read that some of the forests within the National park are ancient forests which probably accounts for the increase in birdlife.



Around the hotel next morning we added the Nightingale, and the White Wagtail. House Martins were building nests under the eaves of some of the buildings and of course there were the usual little brown jobs that showed themselves very briefly and sang happily so we knew they

were there but couldn't see them. Too many leaves on the trees.

In the bus the next day we managed to see three more Storks. These were feeding on insects etc in the freshly cut grass beside the highway. In a paddock of wheat stubble were some large white birds that looked like Great Egrets - but I was some distance from them. The most common raptors are the Honey Buzzard and the Kestrel. Other of note were the Mute Swans on Lake Bled.



I am sure you saw more birds on your outing to Harvey's Range than we have managed in our first month away. It is sad when the main birds seen are pigeons and Hooded Crows. There is no birdsong to wake us in the morning and the only other pair of binoculars seen since we left Australia have belonged to the birding guide we paid in Italy. I hope we never take for granted the wonderful treasure we have in our abundant birdlife.

Happy birding to you all.

*Beth & Wendy*

PS. The water is as blue as the photo shows and the trees as green. It is a wonderful place, worth checking out on line.

## NIGHTINGALES

Nightingales are slightly larger than robins, with a robust, broad-tailed, rather plain brown appearance. They are skulking and extremely local in their distribution in the UK while in much of southern Europe, they are common and more easily seen. The famous song is indeed of high quality, with a fast succession of high, low and rich notes that few other species can match.

Male Nightingales explore by day, seduce by night. Those who live near nightingale nests know all too well that the males often sing all night. Yet the birds aren't considered nocturnal animals, as they feed, socialize, and do most of their singing during daylight hours.

## NORTHERN TERRITORY

Graham and I are travelling around birding at the moment and were lucky enough to get nine new species while we were in the Northern Territory. One of the highlight birds was the Rainbow Pitta which accompanied us on part of our walk at Howard Springs Nature Park. He was a friendly little bird and kept hopping from one side of the path to the other, not really worrying about us at all. The only problem was the low light due to the early morning.



*Rainbow Pitta*

The Hooded Parrot and some Gouldian finches also provided excitement near Edith Falls

We were also very privileged to photograph the White-lined Honeyeater, Sandstone Shrike-thrush and a Partridge Pigeon in the Gubara walk in Kakadu National Park. We didn't realise that the Shrike-thrush threw his voice so well. A guide had a group of birdwatchers near us and kindly pointed out the bird on a rock way in the distance. He was also very happy that I had spotted the White-lined Honeyeater. I was disappointed with my photos of the White-lined Honeyeater, but as I only saw two birds for a very short time, at least I was fortunate enough to actually get a photo at all.



*Gouldian Finch*

The Partridge Pigeon was spooked by us walking back up the track. Again this lovely bird sat above us so that the cameras could run hot for a short time.

So many birds are said to be in different areas up here, but they don't say how hard most of them are to

find. The Black-tailed Treecreeper and the White-quilled Rock-pigeon were also highlights for us.



*Blacktailed Treecreeper*

All in all we think that the Northern Territory yielded a wonderful trip.

*Denise Holder*

## FUNNY RAINBOWS

I was watching through the kitchen window about a dozen Rainbow Lorikeets having a wonderful time bathing in my birdbath. Something spooked most of them, leaving three to continue. One bird was still sitting in the water, one very wet bird had crawled out and was sitting on the edge and the other decided to also fly into a nearby tree.



Then something I have never seen before happened. The bird on the edge decided to fly but because it was so wet it dropped straight off the edge to the ground in amongst the salvia and weeds that are around the base of the birdbath. I of course was laughing and wondering just what it would do. Very close to the birdbath is a stand made from galvanised pipe that used to be a feeder for Pale-heads. Anyway it obviously found its way through the plants to this stand and had to claw its way, beak and feet, to the cross bar. After a minute or so of fluffing feathers and the occasional shake it was then able to fly into another close tree. (I have often seen birds struggle to make the tree which is about 1.5 metres away due to being so wet but never seen one fall off the edge.)

*Marleen Acton*

## SCRUBBY RETURNS PART 2

I am now happy to report that my level of admiration for scrubby has lifted most substantially from 'grudging' to outright and generous praise and approval. So what brought on this change of heart you ask?

Well, to get his mound to sufficient size in the chosen location, which he achieved by mid February, Scrubby had to consider a number of factors, including sunshine and shade, availability of material and a clear path from the source of the material to the mound site some 20 metres distant.



He very cleverly used a combination of shade from the vined trellis, dappled shade from other garden trees and deep shade from tall mango trees to regulate the amount and intensity of sunshine each day. He had obviously checked out the area to satisfy himself that there was a more than adequate source of partly decomposed mango leaves and twigs for the mound in the general area of his chosen site, and finally that there was a clear path, free of fences or other obstructions, for him to move the raw material to the mound site.

I became more interested in his project when work commenced and wondered how he was going to move a large quantity of scattered organic material from under the mango trees to his mound site, quickly and efficiently. The simplicity of his plan was amazing, as was its execution.

He commenced on the southern approach by first scratching up a substantial heap of partially decomposed material from under two adjacent mango trees. He then formed a ribbon of this material approximately 1 metre wide, three metres long and 100 mm high in the direction of his proposed mound site and then moved this ribbon in approximately 3 metre stages, always along the same path, until it was in position to be used to form the mound. He repeated these three metre long by 1 metre wide ribbons a number of times until all of the material from under the two mango trees on the southern approach was in place at the mound site. He then repeated the process from the eastern approach until he

was satisfied with the completed job. The two chosen paths from the source of the material to the mound site were as near as can be to a right angle to each other. He had chosen these paths with calculated accuracy as they were the shortest routes free of obstructions to the mound site. He also demonstrated great confidence in his own ability to get the job done in time for increasing his family in the window of opportunity when conditions were ideal for incubation, simply by tenaciously sticking to the task in hand, working only in the cool of the morning and late afternoon, but working very hard during those periods.

I studied his method of transportation of the material very carefully and I must say that using a rake alone (without the use of a wheelbarrow), I would have been forced to adopt Scrubby's strategy as the only effective way to move this amount of material to a predetermined site.

Another interesting observation was Scrubby's use of his muscular legs and body weight to achieve best results, particularly in the transportation stage of the mound building. His movements were perfectly rhythmical and appeared as a sort rocking motion that required pivoting forward and backward on his knee joint, with alternate scratching and leg movements. Like all other mound-builders Scrubby had to face away from the direction he tossed the material and remarkable he kept his direction very well. I reckon his vertical tail has evolved to facilitate this action, allowing material to slip past the rear of his body unimpeded during the scratching action.

He worked across the 1 metre face of the ribbon, religiously using alternate legs to toss the material in the desired direction, sometimes up to 500mm in the air. The result of his labour is there now for all to see, a perfectly viable mound to incubate the eggs of his female companions, built by hard work to an obviously well-thought-out plan. Well done Scrubby!!!! And congratulations on the at least three very young chicks that appeared over a week or so in late-March, no doubt products of your mound.



Now I know that some people consider themselves to be fortunate in having an active Great Bowerbird's bower in their yards. I agree that while this may be a great talking point, these bowers are nothing compared to an active mound built by this bright, astute, perspicacious, diligent, hardworking, industrious, tireless, indefatigable, persistent, dynamic, progressive native bird, my mate Scrubby!!!!.

*Norm Rains*

## WHITE MOUNTAINS

Back in mid-March Bron and I thought we would travel out to Pentland and the White Mountains National Park (WMNP) for a couple of days to see if the recent rain had made any impact on the area. As we drove out you could see that there had been some rain as the landscape was quite a bit greener than it had been on our previous trips to the area. Unfortunately, what greeted us in Pentland was not encouraging. The dam was as dry as.



*Big Swamp in the wet*

Stopping in at the craft shop and chatting to the lady managing the place gave us a little more heart as she stated that some local areas got over two inches of rain recently, although Pentland got less than an inch. Putting dry Pentland behind us we headed up to WMNP and Cann's Camp. There was some indication that it had rained with the occasional roadside puddle and damp patches along the track.



*Big Swamp in the dry*

The thing I really wanted to check out though was Big Swamp or as some would call it, 'Shovel Dam'. If there was a decent fall in the locality then there was a good chance of some run off from the hills, which may have found its way to the swamp. That was my hope as I wanted another crack at photographing some wetland birds, as I did on a previous visit in May 2015. Then I was lucky enough to photograph Grey Teal, Australasian

Grebe, and Eurasian Coot all of which had obviously bred there, as a significant portion of the birds were juveniles.

On approaching Big Swamp it was easy to see that, if rain had fallen, it wasn't enough. The place was, like Pentland, as dry as. There were only a few species around with Grey Butcherbirds dominating and these were mostly immatures. We were lucky enough to score a couple of Squatter Pigeons on the way out, which is a species we had not encountered here before. Other than those it was only the usual species with Pale-headed Rosella, Red-



*Squatter Pigeon*

winged Parrot, Rufous Whistler, White-throated Gerygone, and a Forest Kingfisher probably being the best of them

It was a shame to see it in such a state as on a previous trip in 2012 it was in all its glory and a sight to behold. Hopefully sometime soon rain will fall and it will fill again and look once again as it did in July 2012.

*Mark Horvath*

## Morning Magic

I saw the email about the Radjah Shelduck turning up at Fairfield Waters on Sunday and it said it was seen last Wednesday so I didn't hold out much hope and I was right. It was like the Avocets. Days too late. But it gets you out at least.



*Radjah Shelduck*

But we certainly had a feast of birds in that small area in about fifteen minutes. First of all the ferals. There were Pigeons, Mynas and Sparrows. In the trees we found Blue-faced, Brown and Rufous-throated Honeyeaters. A Drongo sat nice and close but too deep in shadow for a decent photograph.

Two very noisy Great Bowerbirds flew into a tree nearby and chased each other back and forth, rousing all the while. The male had his lilac patch fully extended so maybe it was a lovers' quarrel. He lost interest in the female and began gathering tiny red berries off the tree. Then a female Figbird flew in while Magpie-larks and Magpies hunted around on the grass.



*Plumed Whistling-Ducks*

Some White Ibis and a Royal Spoonbill claimed a rock wall that went out into the water. Along the banks were hundreds of Plumed Whistling-Ducks. A dozen or so Pacific Blacks and another dozen Wood Duck mingled in amongst them but no Radjah. Two Black-fronted Dotterels patrolled the edge and if they got too close to the Plumed they were quickly seen off. On the far side of the lagoon a female Darter sat drying off, and right down the end some Pelicans were having a swim. A few motley looking Mallards and a few domestic ducks made up the rest of the water birds.

Just as we were leaving, a Willie Wagtail and a pair of Peaceful Doves popped up to say hello. I wonder if the residents along there know what a rich little patch they live in.

*Annette Sutton*

## TOWN COMMON JULY

While many members were enjoying a campout at Mt Alma (Spotwood's), five hardy souls braved a bleak looking morning to do the monthly survey at the Common.



*Pacific Baza*

We were greeted with a miserable grey sky and some very dark clouds threatening to rain us out. We were not daunted. In fact, most Townsvillians would welcome being caught out in the rain! We did get a few very light showers - and they were very light. There was a reasonably strong breeze which made it a bit chilly for us locals. It was hard work ID-ing some birds because of the grey sky and moving foliage.

Despite the weather, it turned out to be a pretty good morning of birding. There was water in all waterholes and we recorded 66 species with 542 birds. Some highlights were: the presence of three Red-necked Avocets; a beautifully coloured Swamp Harrier doing a wonderful aerial performance; a fly-over of five Pacific Bazas with one doing a graceful display flight; and one very wet, bedraggled White-bellied Sea-Eagle trying to dry off and preen himself back to some semblance of his majestic self.

Noticeable no-shows were the finches. Only two Double-bar Finches were sighted all morning.



*White-bellied Sea-Eagle*

It was such a great morning that we all kept at it till 1100, and not one complaint about missing a morning tea break!

*Janet Robino*

## RICHMOND

In early August four couples from the club loaded up their vans and took off for Richmond. First night was spent at Pentland. We visited the gravel pits and then drove part of the way to Sawpit Gully. I have never seen White Mountains so quiet. But it was nice to be out in the bush. We picked up Brown, Singing and maybe one or two Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, some Noisy Friarbirds, a lone Rufous Whistler female and little else. Malcolm heard Variegated Fairy-wrens.



*Singing Honeyeater*

Another quick visit to the gravel pits on Thursday morning then off to Hughenden. Morning tea at F J Holden's. What a super place. On to Richmond. Not far from the van sites on Lake Fred Tritton, Black-tailed Native-Hens were wandering around. Easily seen around the lake were Black-winged Stilts, Australasian Grebes, a few Black Swans and lots of Coots. A few ducks, a great Egret and some Little Black Cormorants were there as well. But to make up for the fairly small number of water birds there were hundreds and hundreds of Galahs. They particularly liked playing in the trees by the vans and slept in serried rows on the powerlines at the front of the park at night. Lots of Magpie-larks and Yellow-throated Honeyeaters and quite a few Crows and Black Kites made up the rest.



The highlight of the trip was a visit to Hampstead Springs in the Gregory Ranges. The owner of the property, Ross, picks everyone up in a little Mercedes bus (no airconditioning but good roof vents) and the drives you for quite a while on dirt and corrugated rods. He took us over the black soil country where he grows out his steers and then up into the ranges where he has his breeders. The escarpments and rock formations are very impressive. The main attraction is a "peep hole" through the end of one of the escarpments. It is really an archway. He built the road up to the viewing area himself with the help of his son. True bushmen can do anything.



We moved on to the homestead which is set on a bit of a rise above a ti-tree swamp. The trees and underlying bracken are in such contrast to the surrounding country. There is a permanent spring and he has had a water wheel built to take water up to the homestead. The homestead garden is a true oasis. There are all sorts of trees, shrubs and bushes. Oranges, pawpaws and mangoes from the garden were served at lunch, along with a stockman's stew and damper. Ross's wife, Linda, is in charge of the garden. Their house was brought out to the property from Richmond, and it looks great with louvered verandahs keeping them cool from the summer sun. Sparky, a pet Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, made his

presence known. It is a far cry from the tin sheds and dirt floors they lived in for many years. Linda taught all their four children by correspondence (in tin sheds). She deserves a medal. Or two.

We went on to look at breeder cows and late season calves in an area where Ross can trap them if he needs to. Dingoes can be a problem. All the time we were driving, Ross spoke about life in the early days, his ideas on feeding stock and the experiments he is doing with supplements, the types of soil, how black soil "works", the trees that grow all around and the grasses. Ross says that Mitchell grass roots can go down about fifteen feet. It can live for thirty years or more and can be heavily grazed.

On the last day Marleen found the sewerage ponds. There in all its splendour was a Red-necked Avocet. Lots of Crested Pigeons and Willie Wagtails, on the banks and in the water were Australasian Grebes and a mixture of Pacific Black Ducks, Pink-eared Ducks and Hardheads. Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels were around the edges. Some people found White-winged fairy-wrens, Buff-banded Rail and Brown Quail. Not me.



*Red-necked Avocet*

All in all a good trip, topped off by dinner at the Mud Hut in Richmond. That was preceded by a trip to the Richmond Hospital to get Ray a tetanus needle after he had a fight with a barbed wire fence but that is another story.



*All Mod Cons*

Thanks to Marleen and Alf for organising the trip.

*Annette Sutton*

## GOING WEST JULY 2017

I recently teamed up with my birding friend from SA, Liz Carpenter, for a twelve day meander through parts of Western Queensland that included stopovers at Lake Elphinstone West of Mackay, Fairbairn Dam at Emerald, Lake Dunn near Aramac, Bladensburg NP at Winton and Kooroorinya Falls Nature Reserve, south of Prairie. We recorded a total of 119 species on the trip, many of which were present at more than one location visited.

The most numerous species were from the black and white brigade, notably the Australian Magpie, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail and Pied Butcherbird. Both Black and Whistling Kites were also recorded in most locations. The most prolific honeyeaters were the White-plumed which were in large numbers at Lake Dunn, Bladensburg NP and Kooroorinya. There were also heaps of nectar-eaters at the Burra Range borrow pits, including the Noisy Friarbird, Brown Honeyeater, as well as Spiny-cheeked and Singing Honeyeaters.

A couple of firsts for me for 2017 were the Spiny-cheeked and Singing Honeyeaters together with two bonus raptors, the Little Eagle at Lake Dunn and Kooroorinya and the Black-breasted Buzzard also (nesting) at Kooroorinya. Another interesting sighting was a group of three Banded Lapwings a few kilometres short of Morella on the Muttaborra – Morella stretch of dirt road. I have seen these birds a few times previously in places like Woodstock near Townsville, outside Julia Creek and once before on the same stretch of road as this most recent sighting.



*White-plumed Honeyeater*

My one and only "lifer" for the trip was a single Black Falcon encountered on the Muttaborra-Lake Dunn Road, a few kilometres outbound from Lake Dunn. The bird was as black as a crow but appeared to be more sooty than shiny in the light in which we saw it. The bird flew very fast on powerful wings to confidently take what appeared to be a large grasshopper from the road in front of us as we travelled along at about 80km/h. What an inspirational bird!!!

Our first stopover for the trip was at Lake Elphinstone, a free-camping site with showers (cold) and flush toilets on the northern edge of the shallow freshwater lake about

100 km west of Mackay. We travelled inland on the sealed road from Delta, north of Bowen, then via Collinsville and Glenden to reach this destination at about 4pm on our first day out. We were met by a scene of absolute tranquillity with heaps of water birds bobbing about on glassy water, so we set up the camper about 3 metres from the water line. Unfortunately a cool breeze set in at sundown which not only rippled the lake and spoiled our view, but also sent us looking for warm clothes.



*Black-breasted Buzzard*

The makeup of the dawn chorus on both mornings at Lake Elphinstone was vastly different and a welcome contrast from the new-day birdsong experienced at home.

Although distant magpies, corvids and butcherbirds were all part of the ensemble, the prime calls in the early hours were from the many species of waterfowl, including Black Swans, Hardheads, Pacific Black Ducks, Black-winged Stilts, Grey Teal, Australian Darters, Dusky Moorhens, Eurasian Coots, Black and Little Pied Cormorants and Cotton Pygmy-geese. It was a pleasure to greet the day with the variety of calls from this diverse group of birds, and all at close range.

Others that visited the campsite early in the day included Apostlebirds, Willie Wagtails, Black-fronted Dotterels, an Intermediate Egret, Laughing Kookaburras, Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Black and Whistling Kites and Torresian Crows. The nearby walk along the roadway revealed a host of other species including Crested Pigeons, Double-barred Finches, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, Pheasant Coucal, Red-backed Fairy Wren and Grey Fantails.

We recorded 53 species all up at Lake Elphinstone and immediate surrounds which enthused us to move on to our next stopover at Fairburn Dam, Emerald for more birding experiences.

The next leg of our journey included a short stop at Moranbah, a bustling modern mining town about an hour and a half from Lake Elphinstone on a mostly sealed road (bar a 3k dirt section near one of the mines). We enjoyed smoko in an open space seating arrangement in the "Town Square" precinct in the company of a heap of Crows and Noisy Miners (feathered variety). We also visited a supermarket and were agreeably surprised at the competitive prices of shelf items including fresh produce. Fuel prices here were also on a par with Townsville.

From Moranbah we travelled to Emerald via the town of Clermont where we spent an enjoyable couple of hours checking out the various interesting displays of mining and agricultural machinery plus a detailed collection of

photographs dealing with the flood that severely damaged the town in 1816. The museum's collection also included a wide range of memorabilia depicting the lives of local people down through the ages. The local Tourist Information Centre is also housed at the museum and the manager was very knowledgeable about local birdlife and other matters relating to the district. Whilst at Clermont we also visited the remains of the gold-mining township of Copperfield where my paternal grandmother was born and raised prior to her family moving to Croydon in the Gulf Country in pursuit of the elusive yellow metal. All that remains at Copperfield, aside from the nearby cemetery, is the now closed general store and a brick chimney, a relic from the ore smelters.

We arrived late in the afternoon at the Lake Maraboon Holiday Village on the outskirts of Emerald on the shore of Fairbairn Dam. The contrast between here and Lake Elphinstone was remarkable; many more vans, less space and many more people. Having said this, the staff were very helpful to the extent that a man appeared at our booked site and skilfully guided me to ensure I reversed the camper trailer in the correct position to take advantage of the concrete slab and other features provided at each site. The amenities at this place were very presentable, a credit to the management and staff.

The morning bird chorus was also vastly different from the previous night, with the only species present being Silver Gulls, Noisy Miners and cheeky crows. At breakfast we were joined by a pair of Rainbow Lorikeets who demolished a couple of Vita Weet biscuits before departing for greener pastures. The other noise added to the morning chorus was a stream of 4WD towing boats past our site to access the boat ramp on the lake shore for a day's Red-Clawing and fishing. They must catch heaps because there are signs everywhere about proper disposal of inedible portions.



*Australian Bustards*

Our birding in Emerald was centred on the 30 year old, 42 ha, Botanical Gardens established on both banks of the Nogoia River close to the centre of town. The plantings in the garden represent twelve different themed plant communities, most of which are of local origin. Whilst there was water in the main stream and some associated billabongs, the river was not flowing fast, if at all. Nevertheless there were plenty of water birds to see, including Pacific Black Ducks, Australasian Grebes, Dusky Moorhens and Australian Wood Ducks. Bush birds included Laughing Kookaburras, Apostlebirds, Australian Magpies Black-eared Honeyeater, Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Crested Pigeons, Pied Butcherbirds, Willie Wagtails, Yellow-rumped Thornbills, White-throated Honeyeaters, Weebill spp., Striated Pardalote, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Rainbow Lorikeets and Little Corellas.

In all we found 38 species in a two hour ramble through the gardens and thoroughly enjoyed the place.

Whilst at Emerald we took advantage of the location and toured some nearby gem fields. The usual Black and Whites, Kites and Crested Pigeons were plentiful in the open spaces. Of course we yielded to temptation and purchased a bucket of material from a mine site which we sifted through to find a few sapphires. Emerald is worth a visit!!.



*Harry Redford – Captain Starlight*

The next part of our trip was to Lake Dunn, located about 68 km NE of Aramac., which we accessed via Barcardine and of course we stopped to see the now deceased "Tree of Knowledge", housed in a wooden sculpture (for want of a better word), in the town's main street. . The tree, a *Eucalyptus papuana*, is revered as a meeting place during the 1891 Shearers' Strike but was intentionally poisoned by an unknown shameless person in 2006 when it was about 200 years old. The tree has been preserved for posterity in its present location but it lives on (sort of) through one of its descendants growing in the Australian Workers' Heritage Centre also located in Barcardine

Barcardine also has a very attractive Visitor Information (Phone 4651 1724 email [tourism@barc.qld.gov.au](mailto:tourism@barc.qld.gov.au)) which can supply heaps of information on the attractions in the area. Of particular interest to birders is the colourful brochure "Artesian Country Birdwatching" that provides a list of places to go, a map of the area centred on Barcardine and a bird list of 203 species recorded in the district.

One feature of Barcardine we failed to visit because of time constraints is the Lara Wetlands, 28 km south of Barcardine on the Blackall Road. There are heaps of birds and other wildlife there by all accounts at \$10.00 per night this is a place worth spending some time at. Pets and children are welcome; no charge for kids under 5years; no powered sites but generators in a designated area are permitted. I will definitely be going there one day in the future.

Anyhow, enough of Barky!!

We arrived at Lake Dunn late in the afternoon after spending a brief time in Aramac fuelling up. Our journey to Lake Dunn along a 68km sealed road, was slow because we dawdled somewhat admiring and photographing a small sample of a series of 25 sculptures in the district by a local artist who works in scrap metal and other scrap material.

A brochure "The Lake Dunn Sculpture Trail" is available from several western Tourist Information Centres,

including Barcardine 4651 1724; Aramac 4652 9999; and Muttaborra 4658 7147.

Lake Dunn is a freshwater lake, 3.2 km long and 1.6 km wide, named after James Dunn, a head stockman from a nearby station who discovered the lake after tracking some errant cattle there many years ago. As in other locations we spent two nights and a day at this lake, looking around and of course birding. The morning chorus was similar to that of Lake Elphinstone and much improved on that of Lake Maraboon at Emerald. There were hundreds of White-plumed Honeyeaters as well as the usual black and whites. Water Birds included Australian White Ibises, Australian Pelicans, Australasian Darters, Black Swans with young, Black-fronted Dotterels, Black-tailed Native Hens, Caspian Terns, Crimson Chats, Eurasian Coots, Grey Teals, Hardheads, Intermediate Egrets, Pacific Black Ducks, Royal Spoonbills, Silver Gulls, Straw-necked Ibises White-faced Herons, White-necked Herons and Yellow Spoonbills. Bush birds included Apostlebirds, Australian Ravens, Black Kites, a single Black Falcon, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes, Black-faced Woodswallows, Blue-winged Kookaburras, Brolgas, Brown Falcons, Brown Honeyeaters, Brown Quails, Common Bronzings, Dusky Woodswallows, Emu, Fairy Martins, Galahs, Grey Shrike Thrush, Grey-crowned Babblers, Jacky Winters, Little Corellas, Masked Lapwing, Mistletoebirds, Noisy Miners, Pale-headed Rosella, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Restless Flycatchers, Rufous Songlarks, Rufous Whistlers, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, Torresian Crows, Tree Martins, Variegated Fairy Wrens, Wedge-tailed Eagles, Welcome Swallow, Whistling Kite, White-faced Heron, White-necked Heron, White-plumed Honeyeaters and Yellow-throated miners.

We recorded 66 species in this location, the highest count for all locations, including the Black Falcon sighted shortly after leaving the lake. We also stopped at the "White Station Healing Circle" not far from where we saw the Black Falcon. This site is a supposedly aboriginal healing place made of stones and one of a number of such sites around the world. I stood in the centre of the circle but felt no vibes. Probably because of my perfect body!!.



*Little Eagle*

From Lake Dunn we travelled to Bladensburg National Park via Muttaborra, following the dirt road to Morella on the Landsborough Highway. It was on this short leg that we recorded three Banded Lapwings.

Our next stopover location was Bladensburg National Park where we recorded only 38 Species. There was very little

water at the Bough Shed Hole Camping area or the nearby Top Crossing. The temperature plummeted to 4degC on the first night and a flannelette shirt was required for the first few hours of the morning.



*Copperfield Chimney*

The Dawn Chorus at the campsite was poor on both mornings with only a few Apostlebirds and White-plumed Honeyeaters making an appearance. We visited Skull Hole where we recorded a few bush birds and Engine Hole where we saw Singing Honeyeaters, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, Zebra Finches and a White-necked Heron. We also visited Scrammy Lookout, Scrammy Gorge and Scrammy Waterhole but saw no birds of any importance except for a dozen or so Spinifex Pigeons. According to the Ranger, there had been about 25mm of local rain on the escarpment and many of the small rock-holes were brimming with water.

On our way to Scrammy we saw a Brown Songlark, a Crested Bellbird, several Crimson Chats (not fully coloured) and a Yellow-rumped Thornbill. We also encountered a Wedge-Tailed Eagle and Whistling Kite devouring the remains of a recent roadkill. We also saw about fifty Cockatiels roosting in a dead tree out on the flat country.

In summary, Bladensburg was good for birding but not quite up to the standard experienced in previous visits. Before departing Winton we took a peep at the sewerage ponds where we recorded heaps of Pink-eared Ducks as well as a number of Grey Teal, a couple of Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels, Australasian Grebes, Black-winged Stilts. The Black & White brigade were also present together with Black and Whistling Kites. All water plants have been removed since I last visited the ponds, which makes it easier to see the birds but harder to approach them. We recorded 21 species at the ponds, not bad for about half an hour at this very small site.

From Bladensburg and the Sewerage Ponds we journeyed to Kooroorinya Falls Nature Reserve which is about 60K South of Prairie on the sealed Muttaborra Road. There were a surprising number of caravanners at the site, taking advantage of the \$5.00 per night hot showers and flush toilets and the plentiful supply of Red-claw in the adjacent Tower Hill Creek. We recorded only 32 species at this location which is about par for the course for me at this site.

Species sighted at Kooroorinya included Apostlebirds, a sole Australian Bustard and the only one for the whole trip, Australian Magpies, Black-faced Woodswallows, Blue-winged Kookaburras, Crested Pigeons, Crimson Chats, a Grey Shrike-Thrush, Grey-headed Honeyeaters, Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo, Jacky Winters, Little Crows, Magpie Larks, Mistletoebirds, Pale-headed Rosella, Red-winged Parrots, Restless Flycatchers, Singing and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, a single Spotted Bowerbird, Striated Pardalotes and Whistling Kites. I was also excited to find a pair of Little Eagles enjoying the early morning sun in separate trees as well as a nesting Black-breasted Buzzard that circled over the campsite a few times each day, showing off its unique under-wing colouring and pattern. We departed Kooroorinya around mid-morning on the last day of our trip, savouring the last few minutes in the bush. I will definitely go back to that little birding wonderland.



*Black-faced Woodswallows*

On the last leg of our way home we stopped off at the Burra borrow pits for smoko and to look for honeyeaters feeding in the full-flowering native plants at that location. We weren't disappointed either, recording Blue-faced, Brown, Singing and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters within minutes. All in all we had a wonderful trip, saw many birds and different habitats and enjoyed wonderful Dawn Choruses at most locations. The west certainly has many attractions for birdwatchers and it is my experience that facilities are improved with each visit. Most places are able to be accessed by conventional vehicles and tent-camping is still popular with many young families at some sites. Many, but not all places, cater for pets as long as they are controlled at all times, and many places tolerate quiet generators in designated areas and at stipulated times.

I am hooked on the places we visited, the climate out there and abundant wildlife. I am certainly looking forward to future trips to these wonderful places 'Out West'.

*Norm Rains*

## HAMPSTEAD SPRINGS

After suffering years of drought, a Richmond producer has opened his property to tourists as another source of income.

Ross and Linda Mickan drew their property, Hampstead Springs, 150 kilometres north of Richmond, through a land ballot back in 1986 and started their cattle business of Brahman cross from scratch on a 50,000 acre block.

After a several years of terrible drought, in 2014 the Mickan's lost cattle and were forced to drive cattle on the road. In 2015 they had to remove cattle from their black soil country. Last year, Ross and Linda started their business Hampstead Tours.

"We saw all these caravans going backwards and forwards and we said 'we have something a bit different and off the beaten track' and thought tourists may want to have a look at it," Ms Mickan said.

"We back onto the Gregory Range and Gilbert River so it is like a little oasis that you wouldn't expect in outback Queensland. Most of the people that travel are interested in seeing something different so we felt the market was there."

And they were right. Striving to keep the nucleus of their herd, Ross and Linda let 460 people onto their property last year to showcase their hidden oasis.

"A lot of our guests comment and said the biggest part for them was seeing what station life was all about and how personal the experience is." Because Ross is the owner and has lived all the stories he can give them a clear understanding of what happens.



*Morning Tea in the Gregory Ranges*

"We started with a bare block and now having been here 30 years Ross tells the story of starting from scratch, sleeping in a swag, putting up the first fence, first paddock and building the house. We pitch it off the beaten track, something they won't see driving down the highway, the landscape variety and country hospitality.

*From the North West Star*

*Samantha Walton 16<sup>th</sup> May 2017*



## National Challenge Count December 2015 & 2016

Each year in December Birdlife Townsville participates in the National Challenge Count and this year (2017) will be no exception, with the count being conducted over the weekend of Saturday 2 and Sunday 3 December. Members will hear more of this event closer to the date.

With the Australian 2016 Count now in for each of the participating states, it's worthwhile comparing the results with that of 2015.

Australia	Total Species	Total Species	Total Birds	Total Birds
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Melbourne Area	180	163	17,677	8,683
Victorian Country	278	269	96,073	59,991
New South Wales	179	191	6,752	5,194
Queensland	283	236	35,147	13,539
Western Australia	14	N/A	84	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>155,733</b>	<b>87,407</b>

Queensland	Total Species	Total Species	Total Birds	Total Birds
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Atherton T/ands	N/A	113	N/A	1,703
Cairns Mossman	83	N/A	2,334	N/A
Fraser Coast	N/A	129	N/A	2,486
Hervey Bay	151	N/A	3,039	N/A
Innisfail	105	N/A	1,349	N/A
Mackay	161	N/A	4,091	N/A
Mareeba	67	N/A	616	N/A
Townsville	94	178	23,718	9,350
<b>Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>35,147</b>	<b>13,539</b>

	Species	Species	Species	Species	Birds	Birds	Birds	Birds
Townsville	2013	2014	2015	2016	2013	2014	2015	2016
	207	190	194	178	11,200	13,974	23,718	9,350

The number of species and birds recorded is slowly decreasing, with the standout year for Townsville being 2015 and when analysing the data (2015) we find that large numbers of Shorebirds were recorded ----

Lesser Sand Plover: 1250 with none recorded in 2016 -- Great Knot: 3674 with 502 recorded in 2016  
 Red-necked Stint: 764 with 82 recorded in 2016 -- Little Tern: 2904 with 186 recorded in 2016  
 Red-capped Plover: 438 with 30 recorded in 2016

and Wetland birds ---- Eurasian Coot: 1396 with none recorded in 2016 -- Australian Wood Duck: 221 with none recorded in 2016.

### So what do we make of this:

Even though WA didn't participate in 2016, it can be seen that the total number of birds recorded is on a downward slide and this could be due to a number of reasons --- not as many Branches participating (with the exception of WA and QLD the teams participating in each of the other states listed, is constant). Global and National issues such as climate change, urban development, weed infestation, reclamation and loss of habitat as well as feeding areas.

I know it is only a small sample, but it builds on studies undertaken by many in the Global Bird Community, which indicate the world's population of birds are under threat and Australia is no exception.

*Wal Threlfall*

## QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Niel Bruce	374	09-01-18
Chris Ezzy	331	27-11-17
Len Ezzy	329	25-11-17
Ian Leach	305	01-11-17
Marleen Acton	262	19-09-17
Pat Charlton	257	14-09-17
Beth Snewin	251	08-09-17
Graham Castles	248	05-09-17
Warren Charlton	248	05-09-17
Elna Kerswell	245	02-09-17
Rosemary Payet	237	25-08-17
Janet Robino	218	06-08-17
Janet Cross	209	28-07-17
Annette Sutton	204	23-07-17
Wal Threlfall	195	14-07-17
Annette Sibson	188	07-07-17
Kyran Staunton	176	25-06-17
Wendy Kaus	163	12-06-17
Philip Haig	144	24-05-17
Julia Haig	120	30-04-17
Carolyn Osterhaus	112	22-04-17
Norm Rains	81	22-03-17
Julia Goldsbury	79	20-03-17

*At White Mountains from Mark Horvath*

