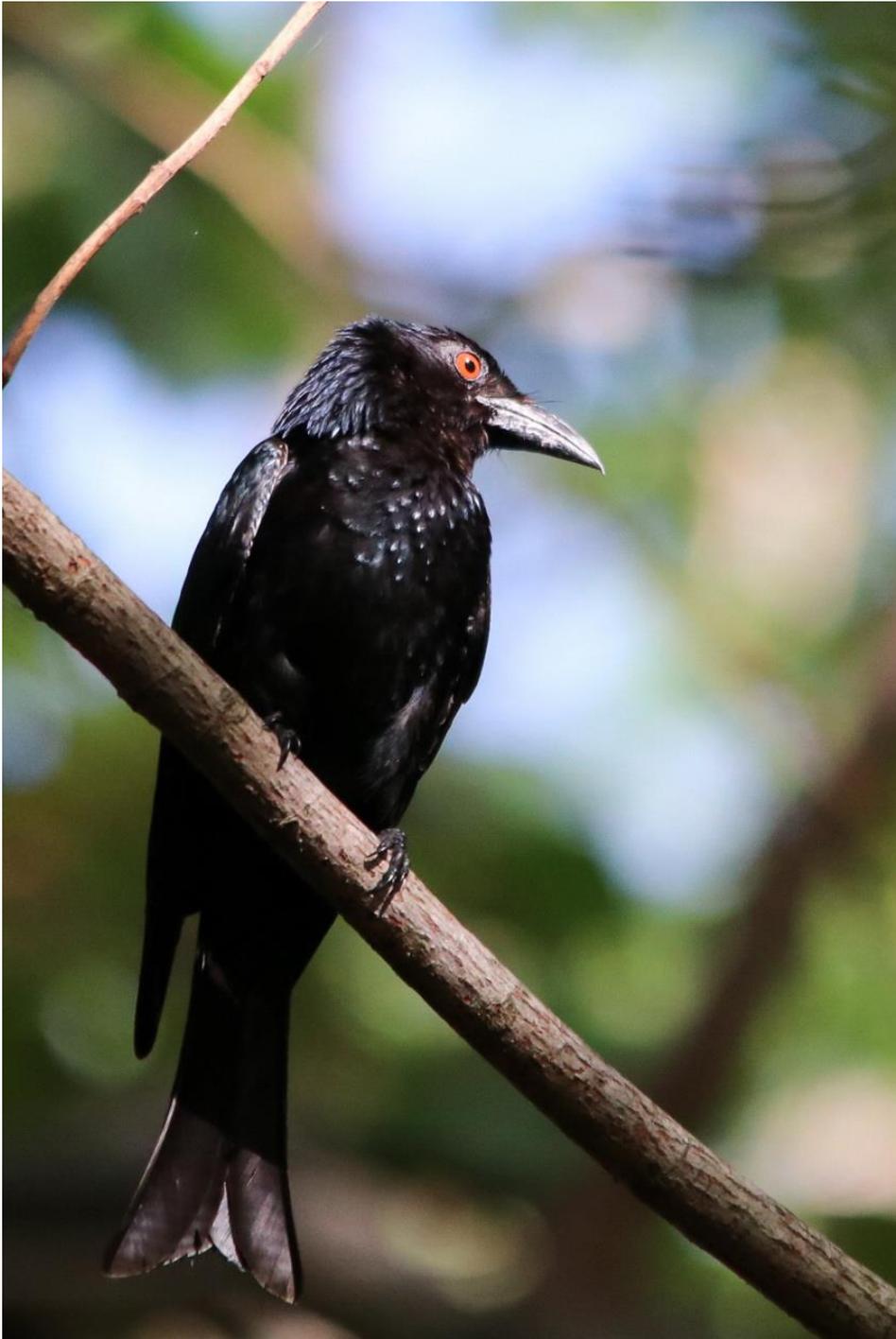


# The Drongo

Number 149 February 2018



*Annette Sibson*

Lord Howe

Rare Visitors

Mt. Lewis



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2018

2017 was a year full of activities for BirdLife Townsville. Just a quick look at our website activities page will give you a good indication of just how many outings and educational activities are available for members and visitors. All the regular surveys were completed and a few extra thrown in for good measure. The feedback from the visitors has been very positive, with particular emphasis on the friendliness and helpfulness of BirdLife Townsville members. Because of a lack of interest in camping trips there will be no more planned unless a member volunteers to organise and lead a campout. If you have a favourite camping spot you would like to share with members and are prepared to take on the leader role, notify the committee at [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au). The committee will publicise your proposed trip and take care of registering it as an official BirdLife Australia outing. Annette Sibson, who is reasonably new to birding and BirdLife Townsville, took on the role of leading an outing to Toomulla Beach. Annette's local knowledge ensured it was a resounding success. It would be good to see more members step up to lead outings to their favourite spots.

Secretary Wal Threlfall is a member of BirdLife Australia's National Safety Committee. For those who have attended a recent outing, you will have noticed that the sign-on book now has a simple and easily read statement regarding everyone's responsibility, which is in no small way thanks to Wal's input. Wal also travelled to Melbourne to attend BirdLife Australia's Branch Network meeting. This is an important venue for branches keeping in touch with what is going on at all levels of BirdLife Australia. Nina Doyle continues to keep our financial records in good order

2017 was another safe year with no incidents or accidents involving members or visitors being reported on any Birdlife Townsville activity – keep up the good work.

Janet Cross is BirdLife Townsville's representative on the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team, Wildlife Hazard Management Committee Townsville Airport.

As Norm Rains reports, BirdLife Townsville's Education program has been incredibly busy with activities including:

- reviewing and updating our digital education resources and images for displays at Libraries and other public events.
- production of a new BirdLife Townsville Brochure
- production of 'BirdLife Townsville -What we can do for you' pamphlet targeting schools
- several networking meetings with Townsville City Council, North Queensland Dry Tropics, Reef Guardian Schools and others.
- Supported NQ Dry Tropics 'Landscape Resilience' program at Horseshoe Lagoon
- Townsville City Council's Get Active Expo
- Townsville City Council World Wetland Day
- 2 Primary Schools' FLEC (Future Leaders Environmental Conservation)
- 7 School Presentations
- presentation at Good Shepherd Nursing Home
- Rollingstone Coastcare Group Information night and Bird Walk at Balgal Beach
- Landcare Volunteers
- Science Week at Museum of Tropical North Queensland
- Reef Guardian Schools Meetings
- Townsville Region Beekeepers Association

Thank you to all the members who made these activities possible by their support.

We will be implementing BirdLife Australia's Birds in School program in a couple of local schools early in 2018.

The club has continued working closely with Government and non-Government agencies to promote public awareness and conservation of habitat for our birds, including North Queensland Dry Tropics, Museum of Tropical North Queensland, Townsville Port Authority, Townsville City Council, and the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team.

We are still assisting Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries – Biosecurity Division Asian Honey Bee/ Varoa Mite Eradication Program by notifying them of Rainbow Bee-eater roosting sites. They now have a process in place for collecting the pellets.

All the Owl Boxes are now in place. A Rufous Owl was sighted in January sitting very close to the Bush Gardens box. The other boxes show signs of usage but it is not known what creature may be using them.

October saw a lot of activity as we promoted Bird Week. Members manned information stalls at three shopping centres. There was a very good response from the shoppers. This year we will do this activity the week before Bird Week as many people showed a great interest in doing the BackYard Bird Count and expressed disappointment in missing out on the whole week. Displays were set up in two of the City's libraries. Again, the feedback from the public was very positive. The Library staff have been very supportive and we have now secured the display cases at all three libraries for the whole of October 2018.

In October, Townsville experienced what has become a rare event. We had rain! Unfortunately, it led to the rescheduling of the Black-throated Finch Waterhole Survey which meant some members could not take part. The survey is one of BirdLife Townsville's major commitments so it would be great to see an increase in member participation. If you want to take part in the survey send an email to [yvette.williams@jcu.edu.au](mailto:yvette.williams@jcu.edu.au). You will then get notification when registration is due. You can nominate to be partnered with an experienced surveyor to get you started.

In the midst of all the above activities we managed to field two teams for the BirdLife Australia's National Twitchaton. As well as having a lot of fun, we managed to raise over \$700 for the Black-throated Finch and Eastern Curlew conservation projects.

The Photography Group is now meeting at the Townsville City Council Bicentennial Building 'Sound Shell'. Mark Horvath is still the coordinator and the group is still very popular and provides all the photographs for our brochures and library displays. You don't have to be a photographer to attend. You could come along just to admire some very nice bird pictures.

The 2017 Christmas function was a jolly success. The Sun Hotel proved to be a very popular venue and Nina's Christmas Trivia Quiz was a great, if sometimes confusing event. The staff said they enjoyed sitting back and watching everyone having so much fun.

BirdLife Townsville got off to a good start with the Shorebird 2020 surveys for 2018 with Ian Montgomery's workshop on Wader Identification. Three surveys have been conducted at Cungulla, Lucinda and Bushland Beach. Keep an eye on the website for the winter survey dates.

BirdLife Townsville would not be the success it is without a lot of hard work by many members.

A big thank you to: the committee members for all the hard work over the last year; Annette Sutton for making sure The Drongo comes out on time and is a high quality newsletter; all the members who have taken on the leader's role to ensure we can all enjoy the many and varied club activities; and of course, Beth, Wendy and gang for the scrumptious afternoon teas.

Please make sure you let the committee know (by email on [contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au](mailto:contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au)) what you think is good about the club and what you think would make it better.

*Janet Robino*



*PhotoGallery by Len Ezzy*

## LORD HOWE ISLAND

The Actons, Calverts and Charltons recently flew to Lord Howe Island. The Island is 11km long, 2km wide and 600 kms east of the Australian mainland. It is quite mountainous, Mt. Gower being the highest at 875 metres, followed by Mt. Liggard at 777 metres, and then there are others not quite so high. The population is approximately 350 and visitors are limited to 400 at any one time.

Transport is mostly limited to pushbikes or foot traffic, but there are a few cars available for hire, and Alf had fortunately arranged to hire one well before we travelled to the island. What a difference it made to the experience of those of us who have mobility issues. We were able to get to all areas of the island accessible by motor car.

On arrival we were collected at the airport by our host. He kindly stopped near the strip for us to view our first Lord Howe Island Wood-hen, very exciting; a lifer for all of us. We saw them in quite a few spots after this, including juveniles and chicks.

Around the main settlement we observed numbers of White Terns roosting and nesting low down in the pine trees; also seen in this area were Emerald Dove, Lord Howe Island Silver Eye, Sacred Kingfisher, Lord Howe Island Golden Whistler, Song Thrush, Common Blackbird and Buff Breasted Rail (these were seen everywhere, along with some adults with chicks). Along the airstrip were Golden Plover, Ruddy Turnstones, Masked Lapwing and Whimbrel. The swampy area at the end of the airstrip was just on dry, but hosted some Mallards and Purple Swamphen.



*Flesh-footed Shearwater*

We clambered up the sand hill at Blinky Beach and viewed hundreds of Sooty Terns nesting amongst the tussocks. It was an amazing sight to see them swooping, soaring and diving above our heads. We saw more of these birds near the cliffs at Searles Point, also Masked Boobies soaring on the wind.

Marleen and I went to Ned's Beach on dusk one evening to view the Flesh-footed Shearwaters returning to their burrows. What an impressive sight to see them soaring gracefully overhead, then flopping onto the grass/beach, and then flapping ungainly along the ground back to their rookeries. The next night we all went back to see it happen again. We stayed until it was too dark to see any more. We also visited Ned's Beach during the day to feed the friendly fish with the bought fish food.

Marleen and Malcolm did the strenuous walk to Malabar Headland.

We did two boat trips; the first to North Bay Beach, too chilly for us to snorkel but we did see several turtle species and some large reef fish. Along the beach we saw more Sooty Terns and Common (Brown) and Black Noddies, and Lord Howe Island Pied Currawong.



*Masked Booby* courtesy New Zealand Birds on Line

For our second boat trip we had to wait until the afternoon of our last day when the wind eventually died down enough for us to take the trip to Ball's Pyramid, about 25 kms south of LHI. Around Ball's Pyramid we had good views of Kermadec and Providence Petrels, Wedgetail Shearwaters, White Bellied Storm Petrels and Grey Ternlets skimming along the top of the waves. We also saw Red Tailed Tropic Birds, and Masked Boobies. All in all this trip was an amazing and well worth the wait.

We dipped out on seeing the Masked Owl; we did try but only managed to see the end results of its feasting.

For all of us this trip was an experience of a lifetime.

*Warren and Pat Charlton*

## LUCKY FIND

I was lucky enough to be talking to Wendy when she got a message from Beth to say "Tawny Frogmouths in front tree". We both headed straight to Beth's and easily found five Tawny Frogmouths.....two adults and three curious juveniles. Beth reports that they didn't hang around for more than a couple of days. I had my camera with me but didn't like to use the flash but fortunately managed to get a couple of reasonable shots.

*Janet Robino*



## ALEUTIAN TERN

For the first time in Australia, Aleutian Terns (*Onychoprion aleuticus*) can be seen at Old Bar, NSW. This species breeds in Alaska and migrates to the southern Pacific region during our summer. It is listed as vulnerable by the IUCN, and this is only the second time they've been recorded in Australia. The first time was a single bird at the same location in December 2016, but the observer (Liam Murphy) didn't realise he had a vagrant until reviewing photographs some months later. That submission is currently before BARC. Astoundingly, this year as many as 13 individuals have been recorded.



*Fluttering Shearwater*

Old Bar is on the north-eastern boundary of the Hunter region; and having had a trip back to my home town of Newcastle planned since November, I took a detour and went to see if I could get a look at this "mega" in mid January. The midday roost is reached after walking about one kilometre up the long beach. There had been a severe storm a couple of days before I arrived, and near where I could see a Ruddy Turnstone foraging among the debris, I found a beach washed juvenile Fluttering Shearwater, exhausted at the high water mark. I've found beach washed birds before and not one of them survived, but I couldn't just leave the little thing there. Long story short-sadly it didn't make it to the vet.



*Aleutian Tern*

The terns were easy to find thanks to the information on the Australian Twitchers facebook page. Very similar to the abundant Common tern, they can be identified in the field due to the greater amount of white around the eye. There were plenty of them on the sandbar of the lagoon, where they spend midday pretty much every day regardless of tide. Little Terns and Red-capped Plovers are breeding in the nearby dune system, which is enclosed with a fence to protect them. Along with the three terns already mentioned, there were loads of Crested Terns and the usual array of Godwits, Eastern Curlews, Whimbrels,

Red-necked Stints and a few Double-banded Plovers; all being stressed out by the occasional Sea-Eagle or Brahminy Kite. While it was a long way to go for a tern, it ended up being a good day in the sun.

*Graham Castles*

## SURPRISE SIGHTING

Happened to look out the bedroom window at ~0650 on Thursday morning and saw something shoot past, at about ground level, at a million miles an hour. First thought it was a rat until my brain kicked into gear and tried to recall what I had seen. It was brown and fast and my brain ruled out a rat but what? It shot into the native grasses we have growing in the front garden. I made the assumption it was a sparrow but thought I'd wait just in case. Did something about it make me feel otherwise? I don't know. It popped out again and when I looked at it you could tell it wasn't a sparrow. Very long tail, finer bill and sort of stripey on the back. I called Bron over to have a look and she immediately called it as a Tawny Grassbird, which is what I thought it was. It foraged on the lawn for several seconds and then ducked back into the grass not to be seen again. I'm guessing its quick movement was from one lot of grasses we have at the side of the house to the ones in the front garden. A first for our place and not something I ever expected to see in a suburban block like ours.



*Tawny Grassbird*

*Annette Sutton*

*Mark Horvath*

## SOME SERIOUS BIRDING!

Noah Strycker's *Birding Without Borders* is a firsthand account of a serious case of birdmania. In 2015, at age 28, Strycker set out to see as many bird species as he could in a single calendar year. This feat of extreme birding is called a Big Year, and it can be pursued on the local, state, continental or global scale. Strycker's goal was to be the first person to see more than half the world's roughly 10,100 species of birds in one year. Starting in Antarctica on Jan. 1, Strycker took 112 plane flights and traveled through 41 countries on all continents to observe 6,042 species of birds, smashing the previous record of 4,341.

Read more at

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/01/27/weekly-meanderings-27-january-2018/#yAAoMRwdqcWuhkjO.99>

*Graham Ccooksley*

## MY BACKYARD

28 years we've been living in this house and over that time I've seen lots of birds. Since 2012 when I really got into birding and bird photography in a big way I've tried to photograph the birds I've seen here. Just as an aside, I've been interested in birds most of my life, but growing up, working, raising kids always came first. Now that that's all done I have heaps of spare time, I can watch and photograph to my heart's content.



I remember many years ago having an owl come into a breeze way, chasing a mouse. It was night and no camera or even mobile phone in those days. It was most exciting, even though I only got a brief glimpse. We had another visiting owl for a time; the honeyeaters would go nuts so I knew that the owl had arrived in the mango tree. No idea what type of owl or honeyeater at that time.

I remember seeing Scaly-breasted Lorikeets in the callistemon tree one year. I looked them up in my precious Simpson and Day bird book, my bible for many years.



We had a raptor in one year. It ate our pet budgie and returned for a few days afterwards, looking for more. Sad but exciting to see such a bird on our outside table. No photos then either. I now know it was one of the goshawk/sparrowhawk species. There have been a few raptors over the years and I've been lucky enough to photograph a couple. The most exciting one was the one that had a bath in the fishpond. A blurry photo was the result, but I got some better ones after its bath.

These days I keep a log of what I see and I try to photograph the bird, not always successfully, but enough

to be able to id the bird. I've always got my 'ear out' for new calls or for sounds of 'mobbing' birds. That nearly always gets my attention, even if it's just the birds letting me know there's a cat outside the yard.

I also include a couple of neighbour trees into 'my backyard'. In the photo, the cassia and the tall eucalypt (especially) at back left harbour lots of different birds. The tall eucalypt is a bit of a mecca; the Pied Imperial Pigeons and Channel Billed Cuckoos love that tree.

I have a fishpond made from a set of cement washing tubs. It's good at attracting the birds. They like to bathe and eat the fish.



I'm up to 67 sightings now. Some of the more unusual that I have photographed have been Buff-banded Rail in 2012, Great Egret in 2013, Sacred Kingfisher in 2012, Rufous Fantail in 2013, Collared Sparrowhawk in 2013 (bathing) and of course the Eastern Barn Owl of last year. I see there's a bit of a gap in the years. I'll have to spend more time out in my own backyard instead of driving all over looking for birds!!

*Annette Sibson*

## AVOCETS

A few weeks ago we took a trip to "Duckworld" near Brandon. There was quite a bit of water in the lagoons but the birds mostly sat cooly on the other side of the water. A long walk across the cow paddocks and a telescope were needed to get a good look.

It was well worth it as there were Red-necked Avocets, heaps of Pink-eared Ducks, a lonely Freckled Duck and a couple of Pied Heron, one of my favourites. Marleen counted 61 species. I got 52.

The other species included a couple of thousand Magpie Geese but the above mentioned were the ones we don't see too often. Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns wheeled above the water holes closer to the road. One Pied Heron came right up near where we had parked. Not far away were some Rufous-throated Honeyeaters, Horsefield's Bushlarks and Red-backed Fairy-wrens. A couple of Brown Songlarks put on a great show.

Not bad for a trip fairly close to home.

*Annette Sutton*

## UNUSUAL VISITOR

Following a few reports of sightings of some Varied Lorikeets at Rowes Bay, Barbara and I headed down there early Thursday morning (8 February) to see if we could find them. We started at the Rowes Bay Caravan Park. The staff at the park went out of their way to help us out. Apparently we were too late for the Varied Lorikeets. Best time according to Cindy, the owner, is very early in the morning or about 5pm. They were most often seen feeding on the Coconut Palm flowers in front of the shop.

We were given the freedom of the park and directions of where to go to look for Barking Owls. As we were searching, without success, a staff member approached us to give us 'better directions' to the owls. He ended up saying, 'Oh, it's just easier if I take you there and show you'. He did, but unfortunately, the owls weren't there. He seemed much more disappointed than us. He kept shaking his head and saying 'they were sitting there on that branch watching me all day yesterday'. To paraphrase Banjo Patterson 'we should have been here last week (or yesterday)'.

Of course, back we went at 5pm, this time accompanied by my sister, Patsy. I left Barbara and Patsy near the children's playground to cross the road to deliver some BirdLife Townsville brochures to Cindy as we had discussed in the morning. Cindy said the Lorikeets were here somewhere as she had just heard them. As I went outside the shop to look in the palms indicated, I could see Barbara and Patsy frantically waving and beckoning me to hurry to where they were near the playground. I had to cross the road and, of course it was peak hour. It seemed to take me an age to get over to where Barbara and Patsy were standing, looking straight up into a freshly opened coconut palm flower. It was only about two meters above us. There, in the middle of the flower, was one very busily feeding Varied Lorikeet.



What a fantastic looking little bird! It was also a pretty aggressive little bird. We watched for at least an hour as he jealously defended 'his' flower. He chased off Helmeted Friarbirds and Blue-faced Honeyeaters. It has a very distinctive flight pattern and a much more gentle call than its Rainbow cousin. After the first couple of fly-overs by two other Varied Lorikeets it was easy to identify it by its Jizz. (Jizz is a term for the total combination of characteristics that serve to identify a particular species of bird or plant.)

We attracted a fair bit of attention of our own. Several visitors to the caravan park came over to see what was keeping us spellbound. To me, one of the great pleasures of birdwatching is 'sharing a bird' with people who have never seen it before. Some of the people had very limited English so there was a lot of gesturing and showing pictures in books. What a lovely way to spend an hour or so. And to make it even better there was a very pleasant sea breeze to keep us all cool on what had been a very hot and humid day.

*Janet Robino*

## ROMAN STARLINGS

As birdwatchers, we are mesmerised by the wonderful sight of a murmuration of Starlings. I am sure we have all watched videos of this wonderful spectacle or marvelled at it in a David Attenborough program.

Spare a thought for the long-suffering citizens of Rome. Every year they are visited by hordes of Starlings. They began visiting in 1925-1926 and one recent count has estimated them at four million. That's a lot of birds for a relatively small area. They tend to concentrate in a few areas and they cause a lot of problems.



*From St. Joseph's High School, County Armagh Website*

"Arrival time is typically about half-an-hour before sunset. This is after a day's gorging on insects, grains and even animal fodder, all over an area estimated as being as wide as 80 km. (Starlings are notoriously omnivorous; according to one study up to 5 per cent of Italy's entire olive production disappears down their throats – equally a daily rate of 10 olives per bird. Likewise for cherries, grapes, maize, name your food source.) Come dusk, back in their tree hotels, they can recover energy and rest their metabolisms." *Martin Bennett in an article from Wanted In Rome :- Rome's starlings: kinetic artists or urban pests? March 2017.*

What is the problem apart from all that marauding? It is the industrial amounts of guano that they deposit every night. It "often proves a peril for motorcyclists and pedestrians; guano mixed with feathers, rotting leaves and motor oils is skiddier than the slipperiest soap." Italy's capital reels with the stench of the droppings. Pedestrians carry umbrellas to protect themselves.

But something even worse has occurred recently. The birds have started dropping from the skies in large numbers. The hundreds of dead bodies add to the chaos created by the guano. A report in The Australian said that

the authorities were unable to explain the deaths. They seem to have occurred as the birds collided with one another in their acrobatic soarings.

The Times in London reported that

"at Porta Pia, one of the gates of Rome, and in other neighbourhoods, residents had to tiptoe around fallen birds' bodies, while mopeds risked skidding on corpses crushed by passing cars. "It was like a Hitchcock film — there was a lot of blood and the smell became horrible," Paolo Peroso, head of the Porta Pia residents' association, said.

Early tests on the dead birds ruled out poison or disease, said Francesca Manzia, head of a hospital run by the Italian League for the Protection of Birds. "We found they were in good health but suffering from the trauma and broken bones you would associate with collisions, either with each other or with cables," she said."

Another mystery waiting to be solved.

*Annette Sutton*

## MUSINGS FROM THE MUSEUM

As usual, life is never dull for the Taxidermy team.

Percy the Pelican

The best thing this month is that 'Percy', the flying Pelican, no longer flies aimlessly in the freezer but is at last 'flying' in The Great Gallery. In his new position he moves slowly on a 60lb breaking strain fishing line, suspended from a steel cable. As the aircon moves the air, Percy changes his position...sometimes flying towards the Pandora and sometimes away. Come and check him out and when you do be sure to write a comment in the book or survey sheet or even better, mention it on the MTQ Facebook page. More positive comments = more birds...

Cassowaries on the move

Problems with the freezer meant we were all required to work on shifting our frozen treasures from one freezer to another. It was decided that this was the perfect opportunity to sort and send some treasures to MTQ. We had a number of Cassowaries, collected over the last 10 years. Three of these are now in Brisbane while one of the remaining two is destined to find a home in Darwin. The remaining bird, not required at MTQ, will contribute its head and feet to the wonderful 'Box of Bits' to help educate students and others about these magnificent creatures.

Box of Bits

Norm was recently speaking to teachers at a Reef Guardian School presentation in the Burdekin. "Where are the "Heads on Sticks?" asked one, explaining that she thought these items were most impressive and had told newer participants that these items were well worth seeing. Norm will take the Box of Bits next trip. Wal used the Box of Bits at a presentation here in Townsville and for the first time included some bones and skulls. Wal had requested that the Box include the bones and

feathers of a bird to help him illustrate how the light frames help the bird to fly. It was suggested that he might like some other skulls for comparison and so he also had in his Box a dog skull and one from a turtle. Most of our skulls come from bodies of animals and birds that, after death, decomposed, leaving just the bones dried in the sun. When these come to us they are further cleaned and fixed so as to allow gentle handling. Like the mounted birds, the skulls of birds and animals are fascinating remains, allowing us all to learn about the different species and to marvel at the complexity of each.

Beth's Yard

Anyone visiting Beth at present may wonder at the two large white crates filled with water and secreted in various parts of her garden. These contain the skulls of a number of dolphins.



*Not a Stuffed Pelican*

*Annette Sutton*

These skulls had been donated to MTQ by members of the public, who no doubt found them on the sea-shore somewhere in the state. The skulls have been identified as various Dolphin species, but no other information remains with them. Any item held by a museum must have PROVENANCE. The what, where, who, when, why etc. of the specimen. Without these facts the item is of little value to a museum and so these items were destined to be disposed of. Here the Taxi team stepped in...."They will be of great interest to students," we argued. Children love "anything with teeth" we said. "They can be among the items available to be requested by the Birdlife educators in the Box of Bits", we reasoned. Permission was given for the taxi team to add these to our collection. Firstly the skulls must be cleaned, removing any remaining dried flesh.

Next the skulls will be treated to whiten the bones and then lastly the jaws fixed, that is the teeth replaced in the correct sockets and realigned, then re-glued.

The first part of this process is underway in the boxes in Beth's yard...

The things we do for education!

*Beth Snewin*



## MT LEWIS JULATTEN

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, Beth Snewin and I did a long morning's birding with Del Richards, a Mossman Bird Guide. We were off to an early start, meeting Del at the Julatten Caravan Park at 7.30a.m. After climbing into his decidedly well-used old van with all our gear, we headed for the Mt. Lewis turnoff. It was a slow trip up the rough track as Del frequently stopped to listen for the birds which he thought should be at that corner, or near that little drain. Several times we climbed out and walked up and down the road, searching successfully, or not, for various busy little birds which were all chirping and singing in the dense foliage. The first one found was actually a Grey Goshawk which seems to live just above the road on an exposed branch. Spectacled Monarch, Yellow-throated Scrubwrens and Starlings were sighted but many escaped our eagle eyes and remained hidden while Del called their names if we didn't recognize the call. Chowchillas and Whipbirds of course we knew but – no luck in sighting any.



*Spectacled Monarch*

Ray Sutton

We all climbed out at a concrete creek crossing to peer diligently into the large patch of guinea grass. Red-browed Finches popped up everywhere, but nary a Blue-faced Parrot Finch, which was our No. 1 target bird for the day. No luck – so on we drove until at last the clearing at the top of the range came into view. Del stopped while still in the trees before the open space, so we walked slowly and quietly up the road, being bombarded by calls. Those Red-browed Finches had been busy during the past months, as nearly every bird which flashed across in front of us was a Red-brow. They were up and down, in and out of the grass and up in the trees, as we stood riveted to the spot staring intently at each one hoping that this one was a Blue-face. Finally Del said, "In the grass in the shadow of that little tree-fern." Much staring through binoculars before we could exclaim positively that it was indeed the elusive Blue-faced Parrot Finch, with its lovely red tail and colourful face. Shortly one flew onto a nearby branch in full sunlight, which gave us a clear view.

Satin Bowerbirds chortled nearby, a Barred Cuckoo-shrike, a Bassian Thrush, Green Catbird, Golden Whistler, Brown Cuckoo-Dove and Lewin's Honeyeaters flew across the clearing while Mistletoe Birds dashed back and forth overhead. We drove further up the road, stopping at a tiny stream; out came the chairs, thermos and huge muffins for morning tea. As by this time, Beth and I had walked a considerable distance up and down the road in front of the van, we enjoyed the peaceful rest and

delicious repast. Del said that there were sometimes blue yabbies to be seen in the little rocky stream bed. Not today, but the Grey Fantails liked the area as much as we did, so entertained us for the next half hour flitting about in the leaves nearby. We continued along the road, again stopping often and walking up the hill until Del came to pick us up in the van. Each time, he walked with us for a good way before going back for the van.



*Blue-faced Parrot-Finch*

Ray Sutton

A Bowers Shrike-thrush and Superb Fruit-Dove were good finds and so was the delightful creek which bubbled down the sloping hillside. This was the lunch spot, beside the creek (I even had a drink of the pure and delicious water), in a suitable space under some trees which were inhabited by a flock of Bridled Honeyeaters. Two Topknot Pigeons arrived, then a Pacific Baza. More good ticks! That was the culmination of a great morning. Del is very easy to talk to and is greatly concerned that he and other local birders think that some poachers have been stealing the Golden Bowerbirds. No one has seen the ones from well-known sites for some time. Strangers have been seen acting suspiciously in the area. Apparently the authorities are trying to check this out, but we should all be concerned that "our bird" doesn't also disappear forever. The information isn't being made public until there is more proof, but we should keep our eyes open when birding in Paluma.



*Yellow-throated Scrubwren*

Ray Sutton

Beth and I completed the day by driving over to Molloy, where we found the red-eyed Squatter Pigeons and Great Bowerbirds. It was so dry at Abattoir Swamp that we couldn't even find an Eastern Yellow Robin or a Rufous Whistler. There were, though, several Brown-backed Honeyeaters building nests near the swamp itself, which is almost totally overgrown. Some cattle have been admitted to the area, so hopefully they will eat out the wretched para grass.

*Elna Kerswell*

## PALMETUM PRIZE

It's a nice Sunday morning and I haven't been out to take any photos for a while so today seems like a good day to do it. Where will I go? Hmmm! The next photo group theme is 'Water' and I've got some images of the species from Anderson Park and wonder if there is anything different at the Palmetum. Off I go to the Palmetum.

Oh cool, there are some Wandering Whistling-ducks here. I don't have many good shots of this species so I'll sit quietly and see if they will drift any closer and into the sunshine. You see I need them fairly close because I am only equipped with my shorter lens and I'm not sitting in the best spot. I'm facing into the sun as I am limited by the pond-side vegetation and most of the lagoon is in shade. While I'm waiting I may as well fire off a couple of shots for practice and to try and capture some images of the beautiful colours reflected in the water.

I take a few images of the ducks silhouetted against the lime green reflections of the far bank vegetation. I'm not really taking much notice of the ducks but reviewing the results on the back of the camera. One duck flies up onto a log on the other side of the lagoon and for some reason it doesn't quite look like the others. I take a couple of quick ID shots to have a look at it when I get home in case it is something unusual.

You see the thought of it being a Spotted Whistling-Duck did enter my head but I immediately dismiss that idea as they don't come down this far. Having dismissed the Spotted, I presume it is a young Wandering Whistling-Duck and I give it no more heed. I'm not familiar with



*My Original ID Image*

Spotted Whistling-Duck, having never seen one, or with immature Wandering Whistling-Ducks. I continue with my morning taking more photos, going for a walk and then returning when the sun is up a little higher and I am on the correct side of the lagoon to have the sun behind me. I happily snap off a few more shots in an attempt to get better images for future photo group themes such as 'Groupies' and 'In Flight'. Outing over, I head home.

After a nice morning tea it's time to download my images and see what I've got. The first image I want to look at is the funny looking duck on the log. I enlarge the image and immediately think that is not a Wandering Whistling-Duck at all!!!!. It is a Spotted Whistling-Duck! Having no experience of that species I get the bird guide out and have a gander. Bingo it is a Spotted. Lifer! It's a pity I didn't take a little more care in taking the ID photo but that's life.

I immediately crop the image and send it to 'contact@birdlifetownsville.org.au' so that the word can be spread. After my excitement dies down a little I start going through the rest of my images. Low and behold, there is the Spotted Whistling-Duck in some of the other images and better shots of it too, however mixed in with the Wandering Whistling-Ducks. Not blurry like the one I attached to my original email. Pity I didn't recognise it for what it was while I was at the Palmetum. I would have stayed until I got the shot. Oh well there may be a tomorrow.



*Swimming with his new friends*

Post Script. It wasn't there tomorrow!

*Mark Horvath*

## THE QUEST

At the beginning of each new year and the completion of the previous year's "The Quest" competition, your Committee has the enjoyable task of deciding which conservation program / organisation will receive the monies raised.

Monies raised through "The Quest" competition must, in accordance with the Rules, be donated to a conservation program / organisation.

This year your Committee has decided to donate the monies raised to the Museum of Tropical Queensland for the construction of an acrylic box to house bird specimens for display (members in attendance at this year's AGM would have seen the acrylic box housing the Barn Owl).

BirdLife Townsville will in turn have access to these display cases for our provision of education programs in the local schools.

*Wal Threlfall Secretary*



## IPSWICH GREAT BIRDING

I've recently spent time down in Ipswich with the grandgirls. One day my daughter-in-law took me to the Ipswich Nature Centre (Queens Park); that's a great place to go. There is a free entry mini zoo complete with bird aviary and in there is a Princess Parrot. My goodness, what a way to see such a pretty little bird. It was just wandering about feeding and interacting with other inmates. There are also White-headed and Wonga Pigeons lolling about. I didn't take my camera that day and we didn't go back, so no photos. Damn.

I love exploring new areas for good birding sites. I found Harding's Paddock, fifteen minutes south of Ipswich, where I saw a Speckled Warbler, a new bird for me so that was very exciting.



*Black-faced Monarch immature*

I also found Flinders Peak Conservation Park. Wow. What a great birding spot that turned out to be. I spent a morning there on my own and the next day returned with my daughter-in-law for another morning's outing.

Such a brilliant spot and only half an hour from the house. The creek was dry in the carpark area, but you can see that it would be quite lush in a good rain season.

Whipbirds were calling to each other on both mornings up until midday. Spangled Drongos were prolific, young ones mostly from what I could see. No binoculars, damn again.



*Speckled Warbler*

On both days I found new birds for me which made the spot even more exciting. Brown Thornbills seemed to be everywhere and on the second day I found my first White-browed Scrubwren, a bird I've always missed seeing up at Paluma.

My daughter-in-law is just beginning with her photography and birding hobby so it was great to find a spot that she can practice in and enjoy.

Here's a rough list of other birds that were seen over the two mornings:- Pied Currawong, Rufous Fantail, Brown Goshawk, Black-faced Monarch immature, Brown Quail, Spectacled Monarch, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Shining Bronze-cuckoo, Red-browed Finch, Bar-shouldered Dove, White-throated Treecreeper, Varied Triller, Silvereye, Tawny Grassbird, Lewin's Honeyeater, Olive-backed Oriole, Eastern Yellow Robin, Figbird, Red-backed Fairy-wren, and Leaden Flycatcher.



*Brown Thornbill*  
*Annette Sibson.*

## BIRDS AS FARMERS

In a small park area in Carlyle Gardens, a flock of nine Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo settled into a Terminalia sp. tree and promptly spent the day pruning all the outer foliage, including the green fruits. The resultant debris lay untouched under the tree, drying out for about a week. Then, when the birds thought the meal was ready, presumably the same nine birds returned and consumed all the seed pods in their inimitable fashion, with a pod in the left foot and happily munching away. This went on for five days (some feast) before they obviously reckoned enough is enough. These smart birds have learnt the art of farming a food resource for their own use.



*Good Tucker*

*Annette Sutton*

However, that is not the end of the story; next day, a small flock of Little Corella arrived and found a day's feeding on the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo's left overs. Enough you say, but then along came about a dozen Peaceful Dove and they spent a couple of days turning the next level of finer debris suited to their needs into fine dining! Who knows what other animals may have had a free meal thanks to the enterprising Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos? Fascinating behaviour.

*IvorPreston*

## RIGHT HANDED

Reuters From ABC Science

Parrots, like humans, choose to use one side of their body more than the other, with more of them left-handed - or, more precisely, left-footed than anything else.

Some species even try out both before deciding on one side.

Australian researchers found that virtually all the parrots they studied prefer to use either their left eye and left foot, or right eye and right foot.

"Basically, you get this very close relationship with the eye that they use to view the object and then the hand that they use to grasp it, and it's very consistent across all the species except a couple," says Dr Culum Brown, a senior lecturer at [Macquarie University](#) in Sydney, who led the study.

"In some species, they're so strongly right- or left-handed at the species level that there's effectively no variation."

In the study, published in the journal [Royal Society Biology Letters](#), Brown and his colleagues studied roughly 320 parrots from 16 different Australian species to see which eye they used to view potential foods.

They found that roughly 47 per cent were left-handed, 33 per cent right-handed, and the remainder ambidextrous.

In some cases young birds appeared to experiment with both sides before finally settling on one.

"With sulphur-crested cockatoos - every single individual we've seen is left-handed. But when you see the juveniles which have just fledged, they're experimenting with both hands, all the time," says Brown.

"They eventually settle on using their left hands."

So next time you observe parrots, check out which "hand" they use. Red-tailed Black and Sulphur-crested certainly use their left hand but Pale-headed Rosellas use their left.

Pale-headed Rosella have been photographed by Ray and myself, one left-footed, one right footed.



Annette Sutton

## 2018 AGM

A very well attended sixth Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Townsville was held on Saturday 10 February 2018 at the TCC Bicentennial Building and the following members were all elected unopposed:

**President:** Janet Robino

**Secretary:** Wal Threlfall

**Treasurer:** Nina Doyle

**Committee Members:** Janet Cross; Norm Rains; Annette Sibson; Julie Goldsbury; Mark Horvath and Michael McMaster

Members Beth Snewin and Wendy Kaus have again agreed to provide afternoon tea at our Monthly General Meetings.

Annette Sutton has also kindly agreed to once again coordinate, edit and produce the Branch's quarterly newsletter "The Drongo".

Our Guest Speaker on the day was long time member Ian Boyd whose presentation on the "Owls of the Townsville Region" was both informative and entertaining.

Congratulations and many thanks to those members as BirdLife Townsville would not be able to function without your generous involvement.

Returning Officer

Wal Threlfall

## MORE VISITORS

Spotted Whistling Duck observed and photographed by Mark Horvath at the Palmetum lagoon today, February 11<sup>th</sup>. --- checked it out myself and it was still there, hanging around with 30 odd Wandering Whistling-Ducks and 5 Plumed Whistling-Ducks.

Don't know what it is with Townsville -- Mark Horvath spotted a Tawny Grassbird in his backyard in January and now a Spotted Whistling-Duck in February --- Graham Castles spotted the Varied Lorikeet at Rowes Bay also in February---- and quite a few members have had the opportunity to also observe (except the Tawny Grassbird) these two exceptional visitors.

Wal Threlfall

## OWLS

A new book on Owls has been released. Called *The Secret Life of the Owl*, it is by John Lewis-Stempel. It is published by Doubleday and retails for \$24.99. It is a wide ranging essay on owls and treats all sorts of topics from their silent wings to the origins of their sinister reputation, often being linked with death in folklore. Not an owl textbook but a remarkable look at this remarkable bird.

Annette Sutton

## QUEST

Name	Quest Number	Date
Janet Robino	197	16-07-17
Marleen Acton	174	23-06-17
Annette Sibson	171	20-06-17
Graham Castles	171	20-06-17
Beth Snewin	169	18-06-17
Rosemary Payet	162	11-06-17
Elna Kerswell	161	10-06-17
Janet Cross	157	06-06-17
Wal Threlfall	157	06-06-17
Ian Leach	156	05-06-17
Annette Sutton	113	23-04-17
Pat Charlton	98	08-04-17
Warren Charlton	86	27-03-17
Carolyn Osterhaus	76	17-03-17

## CALENDAR

### March

1<sup>ST</sup> - Thursday - Wongaloo Conservation Park Survey (restricted access) -- Meet for 6.30 am at the Alligator Creek Roadhouse, Alligator Creek. Bring morning tea. Leader: Norm Rains 0458788107

4<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Town Common Conservation Park Survey - Meet 6.30 am at the Town Common main gate Rowes Bay. Leader: Mark Horvath 0409332633

6<sup>th</sup> - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Meet 7.00 pm at the TCC Bicentennial Building (Soundshell), Kirwan. Theme: "Water

6<sup>th</sup> - Tuesday - GBRMPA Reef Guardian Schools - Ingham - Education Committee Activity.

10<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Monthly Meeting 2.00PM Members Short Presentations

14<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Ross River Bush Garden Survey - Meet 6.30 am at end of Thompson St, Mundingburra. Leader: Malcolm Calvert 0418724554

18<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet 6.30 am in the Dam car park, Kelso.

### April

1<sup>st</sup> - Sunday - Town Common Conservation Park Rowes Bay

3<sup>rd</sup> - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Meet 7.00 pm at 10 McLaren Court, Kirwan. Theme: "Human Made".

5<sup>th</sup> - Thursday - Wongaloo Conservation Park Survey (restricted access) -- Meet 6.30 am at the Alligator Creek Roadhouse, Alligator Creek. Bring morning tea. Leader: Wal Threlfall 0429111055

14<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Monthly Meeting General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Bicentennial Building (Sound Shell) meeting room, Kirwan. Guest speaker: Deborah Carter - "Fight for Flight" - Raptor Wildlife Carer

15<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Ross River Dam Survey - Meet 6.30 am in the Dam car park, Kelso.

18<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Ross River Bush Garden Survey

18<sup>th</sup> - Wednesday - Mt Alma (Spotswood Family property) Survey, via Inkerman (weather dependant)-

- Meet 6.00 am Alligator Creek Roadhouse, Alligator Creek. Bring morning tea.

29<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Outing - Mingela / Clare Loop. Meet 6.30 am at the Annandale Central Shopping Centre, Cole's undercover car park, Annandale. This is an all-day outing bring morning tea and lunch.

Leader: Wal Threlfall 0429111055

### May

1<sup>st</sup> - Tuesday - Photography Group Meeting - Meet 7.00 pm at the TCC Bicentennial Building (Soundshell), Kirwan. Theme: "Shorebirds / Waders". Contact: Mark Horvath 0409332633

4<sup>th</sup> - Thursday - Wongaloo Conservation Park Survey - Meet 6.30 am at the Alligator Creek Roadhouse, Alligator Creek. Bring morning tea. Leader: Norm Rains 0458788107

7<sup>th</sup> - Sunday - Town Common Conservation Park Survey - Meet 7.00 am at the Town Common main gate, Rowes Bay. Leader: Malcolm Calvert 0418724554

13<sup>th</sup> - Saturday - Monthly Meeting - Committee Meeting (Noon) and General Meeting (2.00pm) Held in the Townsville City Council Bicentennial Building (Sound Shell) meeting room, Kirwan. Guest speaker: TBA

See the website for more details.

