



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER NO. 5/85 June 1985 (Released monthly at club nights)

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1. NOTES FROM THE MAY MEETING 8/5/85

a) Attendance - 51, an excellent turnout. We were pleased to welcome new members Janet Keegan, Roger Heading, Bruce Turnbull and Glen Albrecht.

b) Bird Call of the Evening - Presented by Sue Hamonet

The first call that Sue played was one that is familiar to us all - the Australian Raven (*Corvus coronoides*) with its powerful voice and its aah-aah-aahaah call. The second call was that of the Torresian Crow (*Corvus orru*) which is the tropical counterpart of the Australian Raven. These birds are very similar when in flight and in parts of Australia where their ranges overlap it is only their calls which set them apart. The Torresian Crow has a much more nasal, high-pitched call and never the aah sound of the Australian Raven, which was well demonstrated by the tape played by Sue.

c) Bird of the Evening - Presented by Nancy Chopping.

The King Parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*) belongs to the family of Longtailed Parrots and occurs along most of the eastern coast of Australia. Being such brilliantly coloured large birds they are fairly conspicuous and never fail to impress, however familiar one becomes with them. Usually occupying rainforest and coastal Eucalypt forests, they disperse outside the breeding season and visit parklands, orchards & gardens, which is no doubt why Nancy has recently been lucky enough to observe these beautiful birds in her Kotara garden.

d) Guest Speaker - Keith Richards.

The name of tonight's guest speaker is probably familiar to many members who also belong to the Bird Observer's Club of Victoria, as Keith Richards is their treasurer and also an honorary life member. Together with his wife he developed an interest in photographing birds as a means of spreading his interest in birds amongst friends and acquaintances. His wife Beryl quickly developed into a very proficient bird photographer until ended by her death in 1981.

Tonight's talk was based on a trip that the couple made in 1979, during which they travelled from Derby in Western Australia to Cairns, and then back to Melbourne down the east coast. It was the first part of this trip across the top of Australia which provided the subject and slides for this evening.

The starting point at Derby provided highlights such as the Large-billed Warbler, Yellow-tinted Honeyeater and the Blue-winged Kookaburra, which is apparently extending its range down the coast of W.A. Stone-curlews were common but on reaching the Mitchell Plateau the Black Grasswren defied all attempts at successful photography.

Some photos did come easily, however, with the Marsh and White-browed

Crakes being photographed from the 5th tee of the Kununurra Golf Course. Magpie Geese were also less wary than usual.

The Kimberleys were abundant in finches, both in the number of species and in individuals present. Between 200 and 300 Spinifex Pigeons were encountered making for a local waterhole and were easily photographed as they walked over Keith's feet in their haste to get a drink. In the Northern Territory some very rare slides of the Yellow Chat and White-lined Honeyeater were taken as well as some of the Lilac-crowned Wren, which was found living along various river banks.

The trip then took us into Queensland with large numbers of waders in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Riflebirds and Golden Bowerbirds in the Atherton Tablelands and the Red-necked Rail at Julaten Caravan Park. This leg of the trip ended at Cairns, where the Richards relaxed and watched the Varied Honeyeaters along the waterfront. Before turning south they went out to Michaelmas Cay to see the large numbers of breeding terns there and were able to photograph Sooty, Bridled and Black-naped Terns and the Common Noddy.

This trip was one of many made by the Richards during 10 years of travelling around Australia photographing birds. I'm sure all members were made suitably envious and will join in thanking Keith for showing us some of his excellent slides, and for sharing some of his experiences with us.

2. WEEKEND CAMP - McDONALDS VALLEY, NEAR ST. ALBANS. 18th-19th May

The privilege of spending a weekend on private property was ours this weekend, thanks to the hospitality of our absentee hosts, John & Terry Rainbow. Auriol and David made us feel very welcome on their behalf, and the roll-up of twelve folk experienced a somewhat less austere weekend than the time of year might suggest.

Saturday was cold & grey, punctuated by the odd splash of wintery sunshine, and the birds kept a rather discouragingly low profile. A diversion to the St. Albans Common, a lovely wetland area nearby, gave those with telescopes a chance to debate at length on identification problems, arising mostly because of the very poor light. Both numbers & species were low. Some of those seen included the Coot, Swamphen, Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Little Grebe, Cormorants and a Darter characteristically drying out with outstretched wings. The drive back to camp conveniently passed by the historic Settlers Arms at St. Albans, requiring a stop to view more birds. (What better way to learn how to identify King Quail and various parrots than to study the caged variety?) Needless to say, some tarried longer than others, their dedication to the study of ornithology duly noted!

An evening spent around a large open fire with good company, food & drink can never fail to be enjoyed. So pleasant was this environment that a couple of us (despite our usual spartan tendencies) moved inside to sleep near the fire, in order not to waste the warmth of the last dying embers. When the mist lifted on Sunday morning the sun's warmth activated the birds at last. Our morning walk produced good sightings - male Golden Whistler, Rose Robin, Yellow Robin, White-eared Honeyeater, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Gang-gang Cockatoos, and a young Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo exhibiting unusual calls & behaviour (observed by Jim Cook). Excellent views of Rock Warblers were obtained. Dozens of Eastern Rosellas

and a sprinkling of Crimsons dotted a ploughed paddock, and Lyrebirds called from down the valley but kept out of sight.

The total species seen and heard for the weekend numbered 67. Thanks again to the Rainbows for making the weekend possible. We would love to visit again at another time of year to do a comparative survey of birds present.

MAVIS GILLIES.

3. CAIRNS MUDFLATS.

Keith Richards in his talk mentioned the current threat to the Cairns mudflats which are in danger of being reclaimed for a tourist development. The following is reprinted from the Bird Observers Club Newsletter, May 1985.

CAIRNS MUDFLATS ENDANGERED

We wish to draw to your attention a development proposal regarding the Cairns mudflats, which are listed on the register of the National Estate. Brett Lane of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, which has carried out work on the Cairns mudflats as part of the National Wader Studies Program, has stated that the Cairns mudflats are the most important area in north-eastern Queensland for Waders, and as such, are critical to the survival of a substantial proportion of the Waders that occur in this part of Australia. Of these Waders, 23 species are subject to the conditions of the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement.

The situation at present, is that the Queensland Government has granted the Cairns based company, McKellar Development Corporation, the right to apply for reclamation of a 60 hectare section of the Cairns mudflats for a tourist complex, subject to the result of their 12 month feasibility studies. The company has indicated to our Society that these feasibility studies will include an Environmental Impact Study, however, they have given no assurance that public input will be invited to a draft EIS.

Our branch has been involved in the protection of the Cairns mudflats since 1974 and in February of this year, presented a case to the Land Court to defend our objection to a 4 hectare reclamation proposal for harbour facilities and a car park. Our objection was not sustained by Mr. Golby, Minister of Water Resources, approved this reclamation which is in fact an integral part of Stage 1 of the McKellar proposal.

Our branch intends to mount a campaign that will, amongst other things, demonstrate to the Queensland Government and the McKellar Development Corporation, the significance of the bird life of the Cairns mudflats and the value placed on the mudflats by organizations and individuals both within Australia and overseas.

We also hope to bring pressure to bear on the government for a full and public Environmental Impact Study.

• How You Can Help:

To this end we are seeking your assistance to carry out some or all of the following actions.

1) Provide us with details of visits made to the Cairns mudflats by members of your organization over the last five years, so that we can document the tourist value of the Cairns mudflats in their present undeveloped state.

2) Write to Mr. J.P. Golby, Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services indicating the value that your organization places on the Cairns mudflats and the danger that development poses to the integrity of the area. Request a public EIS.

3) Write to Mr. J. Dowson, Managing Director of McKellar Development Corporation, Aquarius Building, The Esplanade, Cairns 4870, expressing your opposition to the project. (Please send copies of your letters to us for our files, so that they can be used in court, if necessary).

4) Put an article in your organization's newsletter describing the threat to the Cairns mudflats and request members to write personal letters, especially if they have visited Cairns.

Concerted action will be needed if this damaging development proposal is to be stopped. Thank you for your help.

Dr. Lesley Clark, President of Cairns Branch,
Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland

Members who have enjoyed the prolific bird-life of the Cairns waterfront are asked to send details as requested in (1) above to the B.O.C. Conservation Committee, c/o B.O.C. Centre, P.O. Box 185, Nunawading 3131. They are also asked to write to the Queensland Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services, Mr. J.P. Golby, protesting at this misuse of mudflats which are home for some months of the year to birds protected by the Australia-Japan Migratory Bird Treaty.

This is precisely the type of alienation of habitat to which Duncan Parrish referred.

4. COMING EVENTS

- SUNDAY 23rd June - Trip to the Australian Museum Sydney. A 'behind the scenes' look at the Department of Ornithology. Contact Kay Imrie 52 4524
- SUNDAY 21st ~~June~~ July - Field Day at Mt Sugarloaf. -A walk along the Mt. Sugarloaf Range Road (carry lunch with you). Meet 9am lower car park. Contact Nigel Walker 300138.
- SUNDAY 25th August - Munmorah State Recreation Area. Meet Coles' Car Park, Belmont 8am. Contact Sue Hamonet 58 1023
- MONDAY 1st July - Management Committee Meeting, Garden Suburb Public School. 7.30 pm.
- WEDNESDAY 10th July - Club Night. Garden Suburb Public School. 7.30 pm.