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Forty-four Years of *The Sunbird* – a Tribute to Scientists and Amateur Ornithologists Alike

Richard A. Noske

Abstract

The content of *The Sunbird*, journal of Birds Queensland (Queensland Ornithological Society), over 44 years from 1970 to the end of 2013, is reviewed and compared with that of *The Australian Bird Watcher* (ABW), published by the Bird Observers Club over 44 years, from 1959 to 2002 (Ley 2011). Given its restricted geographical scope (mainly Queensland), *Sunbird* compares well with the nation-wide ABW, having just under half the total number of contributions and authors. Refereed articles comprised an identical percentage (88%) of contributions in both journals, and the proportions allocated to each major subject area were remarkably similar. However, while the vast majority of major contributors to ABW were amateur ornithologists, almost half of those to *Sunbird* were institution-based scientists, whose contributions, in terms of volume, exceeded that of amateur ornithologists (58% vs 42%, respectively).

About 9% of articles concerned studies conducted outside Queensland, mostly in northeast New South Wales. Not surprisingly, for studies within Queensland, regional coverage was heavily biased (47% of all articles) towards the populous southeast. Passerines were the subject of about 40% of articles, commensurate with their representation among all birds, but only 22% of the pages devoted to breeding behaviour concerned passerines. Relatively few articles in the journal concerned migration, and the majority appeared before 1990. Yet data on the timing of migration are important in determining the behavioural responses of birds to climate change and other threats. Early volumes of the journal featured the results of the QOS Annual Bird Count and Garden Bird Survey, yet these pioneering projects, which provided rich sources of data for *Sunbird* articles, were short-lived. As scientists are increasingly obliged to publish in high impact journals, the collection and publication of breeding and migration data have become the responsibility of birdwatchers and citizen scientists. *The Sunbird* remains an important and highly respected vehicle for the publication of such information.

The Contribution of Queensland Birdwatchers to Ornithology: How Does it Compare With That of Other States?

Richard A. Noske

Abstract

Among the activities promoted by the original Council of the Queensland Ornithological Society (QOS, now known as Birds Queensland) in 1969 were participation in the Nest Record Scheme (NRS) of the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union (now BirdLife Australia) and involvement in bird banding studies. In this review I evaluate the contribution of Queensland birdwatchers to these two activities since 1969, and compare this with their participation in four national bird survey projects. Contrary to the aspirations of those QOS pioneers, participation in the NRS and bird banding has been poor. The number of nest records submitted in Queensland ranked fifth among the eight states and territories, and the number of participants in Queensland was second lowest. Similarly, the number of registered banders in Queensland from 1953 to 2013 ranked last and second last among all states and territories in terms of their total population and surface area. The number of birds banded in Queensland ranked third last.

During the two national bird Atlases, Queensland was the least well surveyed of the eastern states. However, in terms of its population, Queensland's contribution was 50–70% higher than that of either New South Wales or Victoria. Similarly, adjusting for its small population, Queensland was the largest contributor of the three eastern states to Eremaea-eBird from 2010 to 2014. Projects which involved counting birds, like the Annual Bird Counts (1972–1983) and Garden Bird Surveys (1979, 1999), were popular in the early days of QOS, but today, only the small, but highly dedicated Queensland Wader Study Group conducts regular counts. Predicting the responses of birds to climate change and other human-induced impacts rely on a detailed knowledge of the timing of breeding and movements, yet such information is still lacking for the majority of land bird species in Queensland. Birdwatchers and other 'citizen scientists' offer the only hope that such knowledge will be obtained before it is too late.

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* on the Maroochy River of Queensland's Sunshine Coast: a Probable Recent Expansion of Range

Ian Gynther

Abstract

Observations of Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* made during 2012 and 2013 in estuarine wetland habitats of the Maroochy River of southeast Queensland apparently represent the first records of the species from the Sunshine Coast and indicate that the lower Maroochy River area supports a resident, breeding population. This locality is more than 60 km south of the previously published coastal limit of distribution of the Large-tailed Nightjar. Although constituting only a minor extension to the species' known distribution, these records are nevertheless significant because they strongly suggest this population is a newly established one. Climate change offers a plausible explanation for the bird's southward range expansion into previously unoccupied areas. With ongoing climatic warming predicted, the Large-tailed Nightjar may be expected to continue expanding its Queensland distribution southwards.

Habitat of the Black-chinned Honeyeater *Melithreptis gularis gularis* in the Greater Brisbane Region, Queensland

Steve Priday

Abstract

The south-eastern subspecies of the Black-chinned Honeyeater *Melithreptis gularis gularis* is one of several bird species occurring in woodland and open forest habitats in south eastern Australia that have experienced serious population declines in recent decades. Managing for the conservation of the Black-chinned Honeyeater, or decision-making with respect to the species in relation to development assessment, may be hindered by large gaps in our understanding of its basic biology and its low detectability. This study examined the floristic assemblages at locations at which the species has been recorded in the greater Brisbane region. Within the study area, the Black-chinned Honeyeater appears to be a habitat specialist, particularly favouring open forests in which *Eucalyptus moluccana* is a dominant species. It was also recorded in open forests dominated by *Corymbia henryi* and *Eucalyptus fibrosa* subsp. *fibrosa*.