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## NEWSLETTER 146



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*Image: Brown-headed Honeyeater, by Keith Egan*

### **Editorial**

Another year gone - a strange one, again. The effects of COVID will be with us for sometime. Two effects are outlined here, as Covid prompts us to further engage with the on line world.

With the AGM and all Committee meetings being held on line, it makes remote attendance possible for all members, wherever they are located. In particular, membership of the Management Committee is now possible for any interested member. It is a one-to-two hour meeting by Zoom every three months, plus any tasks committee members undertake to perform for the Association. If you have any queries about being on the Committee, feel free to email the President, Dr John Farrell at <[president@absa.asn.au](mailto:president@absa.asn.au)>

Committee is currently considering a proposal to hold our annual conference on-line, just as the Australasian Ornithological Conference will be next year (see below). It will take some working out, but it has some advantages, not least of which is to allow easy access for all members to attend on line.

We have also noted that a proposal is before NSW Parliament to significantly change the laws on the prevention of cruelty to animals in NSW. An ePetition with over 20,000 signatures has been presented to Parliament seeking abandonment of the proposals, which are described as making the wishes of animal rights groups such as PETA, Animal Liberation and Voiceless, the minimum standard for any interaction with animals. Whilst supporting the humane treatment of animals in scientific research, ABSAs

will need to ensure that any new rules do not make the handling of animals so difficult as to prohibit research designed to understand their biology, and in many cases, save them from extinction.

I tap in to a group of banders in NSW for informative and entertaining trip reports for this newsletter. I would love to have reports from all over Australia to share with members. So my request for the next newsletter is to banders and other researchers in **Western Australia** to send me a report - similar in length and content to the current report. Just send, with a few photos, to <[info@absa.asn.au](mailto:info@absa.asn.au)>. If I get a hundred, I will treat it as a "Summary of research in WA" and give them all a mention!

*Stein Boddington, Editor*

## **2022 Annual General Meeting and ABSA Conference**

Due to the uncertainty surrounding Covid, the Association's AGM will once again be held on-line in the third week of March 2022 (14th to 21st). Over one week, meeting business will be emailed to all members, along with the reports usually presented to the AGM - President's, Treasurer's, Corella Editor's. and Mist Net Service Manager's. Any motions intended to be put to the meeting will be included, and members will indicate their assent or otherwise by return email. Details and Nomination Forms will go out with the Corella mailout.

The annual scientific conference has once again been cancelled for the same reasons.

## **Fund for Avian Research - Call for Submissions**

The deadline for applications for funding support from ABSA's Fund for Avian Research (FAR) Grants is fast approaching.

The FAR Grants are intended to support researchers with project-related expenses such as buying equipment and/or travel within Australia. It is anticipated that approximately \$2,000 will be available in the 2022 round of funding. That amount is usually distributed across several applications.

The amount of money isn't large, but the applications don't need to be lengthy, either! If you are running a research project on some aspect of the Australian bird fauna and could use some extra funding, give it a go.

Please read the Assessment Criteria below carefully. Applicants should email their signed applications (as attachments either in .pdf or .doc formats) to:

[info@absa.asn.au](mailto:info@absa.asn.au)  
**by 31st December 2021**

### *FAR Grants - Assessment criteria*

#### 1. General Criteria

How well does the proposal relate to ABSA's objective "to support, encourage and promote the study of Australian birds and to contribute to their conservation" and the purpose of the avian research fund to "assist with the publication of information, the provision of education or the carrying on of research into various aspects of the avifauna of Australia"?

#### 2. Scientific and Technical Criteria

- a) Does the proposal have a clearly stated objective?
- b) Does the proposal include a clearly stated and practical methodology to achieve its objective?
- c) Is the methodology consistent with good scientific design and with good practice (including ethical considerations)?
- d) Is the achievement of the objective able to be measured or quantitatively assessed?
- e) If successful, how significant and/or useful will the outcome be in terms of our knowledge of the Australian avifauna and its conservation?
- f) How likely is the project to result in formal publication of results?

#### 3. Financial Criteria

- a) Does the proposal provide a clear and itemised account of how the funds will be spent?
- b) Are the allocations in the proposed budget appropriate and do they provide reasonable value for money?

## **Bird in the Hand 2 - Update**

Flightlines Number 36 was emailed to all bird banders by the ABBBS in September 2021 to advise that the Australian Faunal Directory had been updated for all fairy-wren species and subspecies in recognition of recent taxonomic changes. Consequently, the species codes for some species and all subspecies have been adopted for all future records submitted to the ABBBS. Flightlines Number 36 is available on line at:

The thirteen species field data profile sheets for fairy-wrens that are contained in Bird in the Hand (Second Edition) have subsequently been updated and uploaded to the ABSA website [absa.asn.au](http://absa.asn.au)

The profile sheets updated are listed below:

Black-backed Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus splendens melanotus</i>
Blue-breasted Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus pulcherrimus</i>
Lavender-flanked Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus assimilis dulcis</i>
Lovely Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus amabilis</i>
Purple-backed Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus assimilis assimilis</i>
Purple-crowned Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus coronatus</i>
Red-backed Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus melanocephalus</i>
Red-winged Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus elegans</i>
Splendid Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus splendens splendens</i>
Superb Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus cyaneus</i>
(Two sheets - Sheet 1 for Tasmanian subspecies and Sheet 2 for mainland and Kangaroo Island subspecies)	
Turquoise Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus splendens callainus</i>
Variegated Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus lamberti</i>
White-winged Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus leucopterus</i>

I have also commenced compilation of sheets for all of the New Zealand species. These will be uploaded to the website as they are completed. The Australian and New Zealand specific field data sheets will appear in different directories.

*Jeff Hardy*

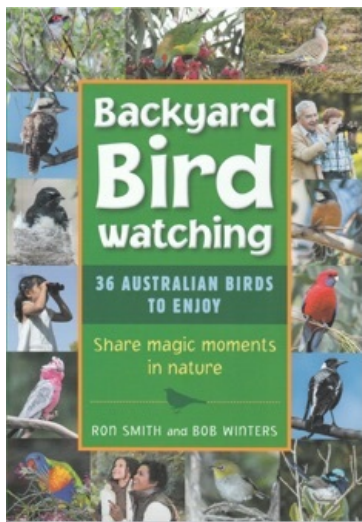
### **Looking for a Christmas present for your children or grandchildren?**

We have received a free copy of a lovely little book about bird watching aimed directly at kids. It's called Backyard Bird Watching by Ron Smith and Bob Winters and features 36 common birds, most of which can be easily found in parks and gardens. They are grouped in nine categories: parrots, hunting birds, black birds, black & white birds, grey & white birds, pigeons, honeyeaters, other small native birds and feral birds. A large photo of each bird is featured with some accompanying notes.

The authors give general tips on using binoculars and where to look, as well as a number of fun activities that the whole family can be involved with. You can even pop onto their website for a colouring-in book and puzzle ([backyardbirdwatching.com.au](http://backyardbirdwatching.com.au)).

The first member to reply to [info@absa.asn.au](mailto:info@absa.asn.au) with their name and address gets the copy.

*John Farrell*. President



### **Albatross Divorce**

<https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-03509-z>

Abstract

In many socially monogamous species, divorce is a strategy used to correct for sub-optimal partnerships and is informed by measures of previous breeding performance. The environment affects the productivity and survival of populations, thus indirectly affecting divorce via changes in demographic rates. However, whether environmental fluctuations directly modulate the prevalence of divorce in a population remains poorly understood. Here, using a longitudinal dataset on the long-lived black-browed albatross (*Thalassarche melanophris*) as a model organism, we test the hypothesis that environmental variability directly affects divorce. We found that divorce rate varied across years (1% to 8%). Individuals were more likely to divorce after breeding failures. However, regardless of previous breeding performance, the probability of divorce was directly affected by the environment, increasing in years with warm sea surface temperature anomalies (SSTA). Furthermore, our state-space models show that warm SSTA increased the probability of switching mates in females in successful relationships. For the first time, to our knowledge, we document the disruptive effects of challenging environmental conditions on the breeding processes of a monogamous population, potentially mediated by higher reproductive costs, changes in phenology and physiological stress. Environmentally driven divorce may therefore represent an overlooked consequence of global change.

### **Banded Pelicans on the Loose**

“Would it also be possible to put a call out for observers to look out for banded pelicans when they are out and about in their home towns? We have been working on a collaborative project with UNSW looking at movements of pelicans from a breeding colony in the Lachlan Catchment.

Our birds have orange leg bands with black numbers.

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/water/water-for-the-environment/lachlan/lake-brewster-pelican-banding>  
<https://citizen-science.seed.nsw.gov.au/project/lake-brewster-pelican-banding>

Any sightings can be reported via our pelican banding email [pe.li.bands@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pe.li.bands@environment.nsw.gov.au)

### **Bring Back the Bunyip Bird**

Australasian Bittern Summit 2022, Leeton, NSW, 1-4 February is a unique opportunity to connect with scientists, conservationists, wetland managers, birdwatchers and farmers who share a passion about the iconic Australasian Bittern.

Details at: <https://bit.ly/37k4hau>  
Photo courtesy of <[Depositphotos.com](https://www.depositphotos.com)>



### **Letters to the Editor!**

Just a small correction to the piece on 'Ripper' the mimicking Musk Duck in the latest ABSA newsletter [145]. He was not reared by a 'Wildlife volunteer' but, on the contrary, by a highly experienced professional waterfowl aviculturalist at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve near Canberra.

As so often happens journalists do not report everything correctly, in this case even in the respectable New Scientist! If you want the real story you might like to add the following link to our paper in the next newsletter:

<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2020.0243>

It is open access and free to download.

By the way, I enjoyed the latest newsletter!

*Peter Fullagar*

### **Action Plan for Australian Birds**

<https://www.birdlife.org.au/media/action-plan-for-australian-birds-released/>

“A worrying number of Australia’s birds are closer to extinction than they were a decade ago, according to a landmark new report which was launched today. But the new Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020 also shows the situation could have been much worse, if not for conservation efforts across Australia which have prevented further declines for many species.” (From the Birdlife Australia website, linked above).

“Written by more than 300 experts, the book was edited by Professor Stephen Garnett and Dr Barry Baker and published by CSIRO Publishing.” It gives us updated information on the conservation status of all birds in Australia, and the efforts being taken to ensure the survival of those under threat.

You can purchase the book from CSIRO Publishing:

<https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/7905/>

### **Breeding in Adversity**

A pair of Masked Lapwings *Vanellus miles* have just hatched four chicks in your editor’s local park in Western Sydney. “Not unusual”, you might say. But the male has a leg injury which has taken away all function of the leg. We don’t know how it happened, or when or where. He nevertheless stood one-legged guard for the duration of the incubation, and now mixes with his four chicks, protecting them from the local feral cats and passing dogs.

Only time will tell if his efforts will be rewarded.

### **Lorikeet Paralysis Syndrome - help wanted**

Lorikeet paralysis syndrome (LPS) is a paralytic disease of wild rainbow lorikeets *Trichoglossus haematodus* and less commonly other species of lorikeets in Australia. Manifestations of this disease range from the inability to fly and hindlimb weakness and ataxia, to a flaccid paralysis of all limbs and the neck, inability to blink, paralysis of the tongue, inability to swallow and voice change. The number of cases each year ranges from hundreds to thousands, making it one of the most important wildlife diseases and animal welfare concerns in Australia.

(From <https://doi.org/10.1111/avj.13107>)

Based on pathology findings, the researchers ruled out infectious disease like a virus as the cause of lorikeet paralysis syndrome. They settled on a toxin as the most likely cause - yet excluded known toxins that can cause neurological symptoms in wild birds, including pesticides, botulinum toxins and alcohol.

“This leaves us with the most likely suspect - a plant-derived toxin,” Professor Phalen said. “The seasonal occurrence of the syndrome suggests that the source of the toxin only blooms or has fruit during the warmer months and has a relatively limited range [northern NSW and southern QLD].

“Therefore, the next step is tracking blossoming and fruiting patterns of plants that lorikeets feed on and correlating them with the areas in which lorikeets with the syndrome are found.”

Members of the public can help with this by reporting the plant species wild rainbow lorikeets are feeding on in a designated area that spans from northern NSW to southern Queensland. Learn more about this citizen science project and how you can get involved.

(From <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/avj.13107>)

Citizen Science Project Details

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/science/our-research/research-areas/veterinary-science/lorikeet-paralysis-syndrome-project.html>

### **Australasian Ornithological Conference (AOC) - 2022**

This biennial conference will be held on-line next year, due to COVID. It will run from 8 - 10 February 2022. Full details at:

<https://aocaukland.blogs.auckland.ac.nz/>



### **Nariarra National Park features on ABC TV**

Landline (ABC TV - 5/11/21) ran a feature on Nariarra Station, which has recently been purchased by the NSW Government for a National Park, primarily to protect the habitat of the Grey Grasswren *Amytornis barbatus*. ABSA received grants to conduct the basic research which underpinned this decision.

The program features mostly the previous owner, an 84 year old man called Bill O'Conner. But it has many shots of the countryside (as well as Bill's extraordinary personal story).

It is available on **ABC Iview**, and is at about minute 40 of the one hour program.

### **Lazy? Or Smart?**

Took this photograph of a Satin Bowerbird's bower in my front garden. He has built only one side of the bower and used the small grass tussock as the other side. This is one lazy bird or a very smart one saving on resources and energy.

*John Farrell, President*



### **Trip Reports**

*Weddin Mountains National Park, NSW*  
4-6 November 2021



On first weekend in November we banded at Weddin. With a commitment on Sunday, Wendy and I started on Thursday, arriving early afternoon as rain cleared but ground and grass heads were sodden. Forecast rain was not good but we went anyway because winds were light and temperature mild.

After weeks of no access we were prepared to sit it out under the tarp. We set a handful of nets adjacent to the carpark, and more furlled ready for Friday. We had a late rush of 9 birds in 3 nets with James, Alice and Will arriving to assist.

Friday we had a sleep in with early drizzle after overnight rain. From 8-ish we opened 9 nets across the top side of the site. In the afternoon nets were set near Red Gums flowering at 5 and levee, and Alistair and Terry arrived and started on the regular central sites around 4 (11 more nets). With the rest of the crew arriving on Friday evening we banded all day Saturday with 37 nets spreading to open areas in perfect conditions.

Highlights include several old retraps, juvenile Heathwren, many birds with brood patches, Sittella, Shining Bronze Cuckoo, pair of Bee-eaters and a couple of Brown-headed Honeyeaters.

Oh ... and birthday cake for Alice and me. A Grey Fantail still retaining an immature rufous spot on a covert had a brood patch.

Bathroom entertainment was provided by Barking Gecko and Banjo Frog.

There has been 192mm of rain at Grenfell so far in November and we were fortunate to squeeze in between events.

*Richard Allen*



## Trip 187

Species	New	R	Total	oldest	bp
34 Common Bronzewing	2		2		
288 Eastern Rosella	1		1		
295 Red-rumped Parrot	1		1		
302 Turquoise Parrot		2	2	3+	
326 Sacred Kingfisher	1		1		
329 Rainbow Bee-eater	2		2		1
344 Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	2		2		
361 Grey Fantail	1	1	2	1+	1
364 Willie Wagtail	2	1	3	6+	1
392 Eastern Yellow Robin	6	8	14	10+, 10	9
401 Rufous Whistler	6	2	8	11 (x2)	1
408 Grey Shrike-thrush	2	2	4	3+ (x2)	
445 White-browed Babbler	2	3	5	2+	1
471 Yellow Thornbill	1		1		
484 Buff-rumped Thornbill		1	1	2+	1
498 Chestnut-rumped Heathwren	1		1	J	
504 Speckled Warbler	5	1	6	2+	1
509 Rufous Songlark	6		6		3
529 Superb Fairy-wren	1	1	2	2+	
549 Varied Sittella	1		1		
558 White-throated Treecreeper		1	1	2	
583 Brown-headed Honeyeater	2		2		
614 Yellow-faced Honeyeater	2		2		
617 White-eared Honeyeater	5		5		
625 White-plumed Honeyeater	6	20	26	10+, 9+, 6+	9
634 Noisy Miner	6		6		
640 Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	2		2		1
694 Pied Currawong	1		1		1
Total	67	43	110		12
# species	25	12	28		

61% 39%

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