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## NEWSLETTER 148

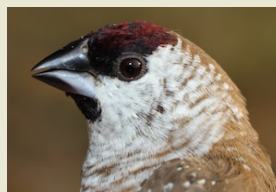


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*Image: Plum-headed Finch, by Darryl McKay*

### Editorial

**I** apologise to members for the lateness of this newsletter, brought about by illness. At least it is still June!

**O**ne issue that looms is the consensus that obtaining Animal Ethics approvals for banding projects is likely to be imposed very soon. We have successfully resisted several previous moves for this in the past, arguing that the training and procedures inherent in becoming an "A" Class bander are sufficient to meet the strictures and standards of animal ethics.

Exactly how it will be implemented, and how amateur researchers will be expected to obtain such approvals, is not worked out at this stage. ABSA will strenuously advocate for a minimalist approach that does not kill off amateur research, but rather makes it possible to conduct research without huge costs, but still ensure the safety and ethical treatment of the birds involved.

**A**nother imposition on the Association is the new requirement that, to continue to offer a tax deduction for donations to the ABSA Fund for Avian Research, we must become a registered charity, as well as being a Registered Environmental Organisation. That application is under way.

**L**astly, COVID has introduced us to alternative, and sometimes productive ways of conducting the Association's business on line, but the wording of our constitution does not reflect the new ways of

**doing things. So expect that at the next AGM, there will be a some amendments to our constitution put up for approval, to bring it into the post-Covid era.**

### **Book: "Birds of the Cumberland Plain"**

ABSA was successful in obtaining funding to publish this book, which "presents data from over 50 years of avian research across the Cumberland Plain" (the plain on which Sydney is built).

"It establishes baseline data that will be extremely valuable for researchers and bird enthusiasts in years to come as the effects of climate change become increasingly apparent".

The book is now available, free of charge, to members of ABSA, with a \$20 postage and handling fee. Shortly, an order form will be sent to all members by email, giving options for paying the fee to reserve your copy.

### **Drongo of a Name**

Have you ever wondered where the name Drongo came from? Is this bird really "a bit of a drongo?"

The answer is "no", although the names are related. Drongo the dullard comes from a racehorse of that name, which is thought to be named after the Spangled Drongo. The nag never managed to win a race, despite being placed many times, and the name came to be associated with failure /foolishness/lack of intelligence.

But "Drongo" as a name for a bird comes from a local name on the island of Madagascar for a resident representative of the *Dicrurus* genus, to which all thirty Drongo species belong. (From Wikipedia)

### **History of Birding NSW**

A full history of Birding NSW has been written, and published to members, and I am assured that a copy will be placed in the near future on their [website](#). In many ways, it parallels the history of ABSA, with bird enthusiasts giving expression to their passion in creating and sustaining an organisation over many years.

Perhaps it is time for the official ABSA history to be written!

*Paid Advertisement*



Neil Hermes Safaris – birding tours this year

August 13	<b>SEABIRD PELAGIC CRUISE ex Jervis Bay</b> Six hour boat cruise from Jervis Bay to shelf. Big comfortable charter boat. Great outside viewing points. Also large enclosed lounge with toilets etc. Seabird experts on hand. Hope for lots of lifers \$275 pp
Sept 2-9	<b>BIRDS AND HISTORY NORFOLK ISLAND</b> 8 day fully escorted tour of Norfolk Island. General interest tour of Norfolk' plus its wildlife and history. Includes airfare from Sydney, motel accommodation, car hire. Ex Sydney Led by Neil and Michael Hermes \$2539pp
Oct 10-14	<b>MELIPHAGA MAGIC TOUR</b> Our spring hunt for honeyeaters and other inland birds. Includes Round Hill Nature Reserve and the famous Chat alley. Includes motel accommodation Ex Canberra 5 day 4 nights Led by Mark Clayton and Neil Hermes \$1250pp
Nov 10-12	<b>ON TRAIL OF THE PLAINS WANDERER</b> A days birding in the Deniliquin area followed by a night-time watching the elusive Plains wanderer. Great for lifers list. 3 day 2 nights \$895pp Led by Philip Maher and Neil Hermes Includes motel accommodation Ex Canberra
2023 June TBA	<b>PARADISE BIRDS - TASTE OF NEW GUINEA</b> 7 day 6 nights exploring the birds of Cairns and Port Moresby Highlights Birds of Paradise, bowerbirds and Palm Cockatoos Led by Mark Clayton and Neil Hermes Tour is open for expressions of interest, details to come.

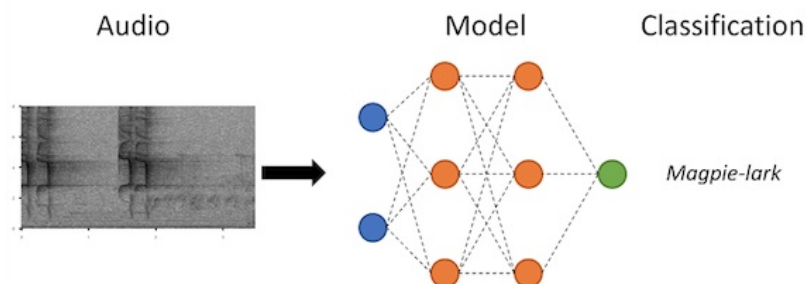
Book at [neilhermes.com.au/safaris/](http://neilhermes.com.au/safaris/)

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## Citizen Science - help develop bird-call A.I.

[Zooniverse.org](http://Zooniverse.org) is a website portal that connects researchers with volunteers who, in their spare time, contribute by making routine classifications of data. Typical tasks are identifying patterns in astronomical photographs that may indicate quasars, planets etc, or, in this case, identifying remote recordings of birdsong to enable an Artificial Intelligence to learn to automatically identify species present in a recording.

Slade Allen-Ankins, research fellow, Sebastian Hofer, PhD candidate and Professor Lin Schwarzkopf are the project leads, all from James Cook University, Townsville.



From the FAQ section of their Zooniverse page:

### Why is it important to develop automated recognisers?

Acoustic recorders and data storage capabilities are constantly improving. We are now at the point where we can collect much more data than it is possible to listen to. One way to get around this problem is to develop call recognition models for species of interest. However, this requires a lot of labelled data to train the models with, much more than researchers can do on their own. Your help will be invaluable in providing researchers with the data required to develop these recognisers.

### What are you hoping to learn from analysing these recordings?

If we are able to accurately detect species vocalisations in long-duration recordings the potential value to research is huge. With this data, we could improve our understanding of where and when certain species occur across Australia, how environmental conditions interact with occurrence, as well as general monitoring of how species and communities change over time.

### Where did all these recordings come from?

The recordings in this project are from all around Australia collected as part of the Australian Acoustic Observatory (<https://acousticobservatory.org/>).

If you are interested, go to:

<https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/sladeaa/birdsong/about/research>

### Brush Turkeys and Meat

Angus Dalton reports in the Sydney Morning Herald of June 4th that Dr John Martin of the Taronga Institute of Science and Learning spotted, and filmed a Brush-Turkey not only defending a roadkill Bandicoot from competitors, but then tucking in to for a meat meal.

Martin asked for people to report brush turkey sightings and any other strange feeding behaviours of suburban birds on the Big City Birds app, which is helping researchers discover how native birds are adapting to city living. See the full story at:

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/never-seen-that-before-brush-turkeys-are-turning-carnivorous-in-sydney-suburbs-20220603-p5aqt5.html>

### Heartfelt Plea from Esk, Queensland

I am writing to you from our small country town of Esk, which is located in South East Queensland.

Our town's backdrop is the majestic Mount Glen Rock. The mountain and surrounds are home to an abundance of birdlife, ranging from the smaller species of Fairy wrens, Finches, Fantails, Thornbills, Willie Wagtail, Pardalote, various Honeyeaters, along with Rainbow Bee-eaters, Spangled Drongoes, Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, Pale-headed Eastern Rosellas, Galahs, King Parrots, both the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo & Sulphur-crested White Cockatoo, Kingfishers, Whip birds, various Cuckoos, Wood ducks, Whistler ducks, Banded Rail, Curlew, Magpies, Currawongs, Butcher birds, Peewee, Pigeons, Doves, Quails, various Owls, Brush Turkeys, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Wedge-tailed Eagle and more. It is also home to the Threatened Red Goshawk and Threatened Squatter Pigeon.

Native residents also include the Endangered Koala, Threatened Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby, Protected Little Grey-headed Flying Fox, and many other native fauna, and flora, including the Lloyd's Native Olive.

We absolutely adore all the life on our mountain. Unfortunately, our local Somerset Regional Council, plans to develop Mount Glen Rock into a Recreational Adventure Park. This is predominantly for the pleasure of Mountain bike riders, with over 95% of the 28kms of trails for this group only. With only 1km of dedicated 'walking only' trail, there is no mention of attracting bird watching groups, wildlife observers, researchers or nature photographers.

As avid bird watchers, and lovers of all our unique Australian wildlife and environment, we are strongly opposing this current development.

Our Care4esK group, recently set up a Facebook page and also have an online petition. You can find further information here with posts and updates. If our cause resonates with you, would you please consider signing, sharing and promoting these for us.

<https://www.facebook.com/Care4esk-106326282060365/>

Darren and Jacqui Bate  
Care4esK Spokespersons

### A Kids Guide to Migratory Shorebirds

It's nice to see CSIRO Publishing putting out books that teach children about birds, and this one is about shorebirds, which rarely get a mention.

From their blurb:

"Strap in for a flying adventure, following the amazing journeys of Australia's migratory shorebirds. Join Milly on her microlight adventure and discover how amazing and awesome migratory shorebirds are!

In A Shorebird Flying Adventure you'll take a trip to the Arctic tundra and back. On the way you'll meet the birds who travel phenomenal distances every year and explore their precious wetland habitats and breeding grounds. Learn fascinating facts about their diet and find out Milly's top tips to tell one species from another. Grab your binoculars, hop on board and let's go bird watching!

Reading level varies from child to child, but we recommend this book for ages 6 to 9."

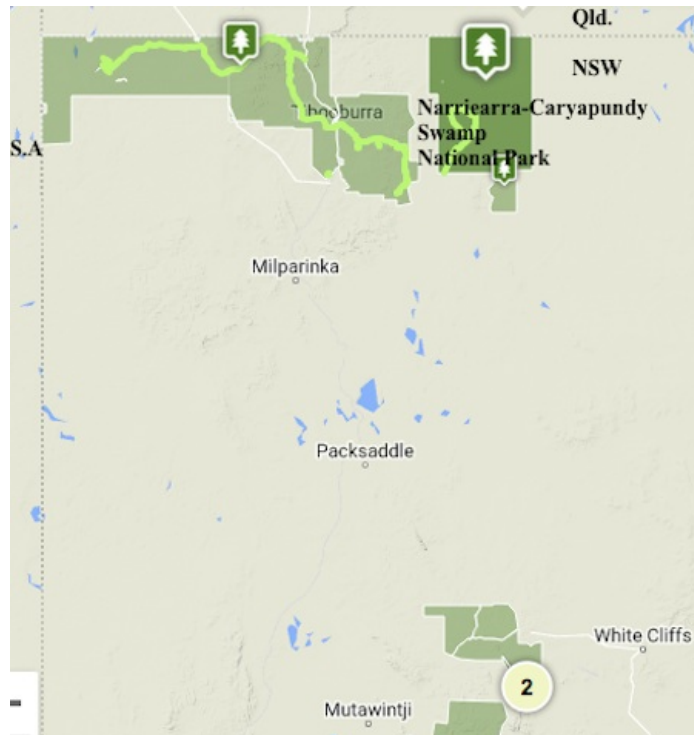
Details at: <https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/8006/>

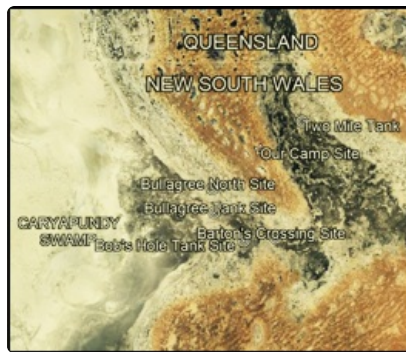


## Trip Reports

*Narriearra-Caryapundy Swamp National Park - final trip.*

Our team (11 - with 2 arriving in the second week) gathered, as usual, at the Corner Country Store in Tibooburra, NSW, for an egg and bacon roll before heading out to the Narriearra-Caryapundy Swamp National Park. Many of the tracks had been graded recently so access to our new camp site near Two Mile Tank was fairly easy going.





We set up on a large sand ridge next to several clay pans which in hind sight was a wise choice as they provided water to do our washing.

*Our camp site*



We had chosen 4 banding sites prior to the start of our study - these were where we had caught and tracked Grey Grasswrens in previous years. We first banded at Barton's Crossing and were fortunate to trap 4 Grey Grasswrens and place transmitters on them. We were able to track these birds for three weeks providing an excellent data set. We then shifted to a site near Bob's Hole Tank and again were fortunate in being able to trap and attach a transmitter to another bird.

Then came the rain!

This curtailed our research for a couple of days as most of the clay pans filled with water and were treacherous to cross without getting bogged. Finally the sun came out and the wind strengthened making ideal conditions to dry out the countryside. Even the lizards took advantage of the water and some even went for a swim.



*Bearded Dragon going for a swim in our clay pan.*



But then we were hit by a storm which dumped another 10 mm at least on us. This severely limited access to our sites for banding and tracking.

Towards the end of the second week, after three further days of fine weather, we attempted to get to Tibooburra as two couples had planned to leave at this stage. On our first attempt we were turned back from the major exit tracks due to muddy conditions so another route was tried. This time we were faced with a swollen creek and copious mud and had to return to camp.

We took stock of our provisions and water supply and notified National Park personnel just in case the weather deteriorated. With the way out blocked for some days we decided not to be deterred and continued banding and tracking. We caught another two grasswrens at the Bullagree Tank site bringing the total to 7 birds – just shy of the 10 we hoped to catch.

We kept in contact with National Parks personnel via our satellite phone and were informed that more rain was due in the forthcoming week and were advised to leave before the upcoming weekend. This meant that the last 2 birds would only be able to be tracked for a short period of time but this didn't turn out to be an issue as they both, after the first day, couldn't be located. Several days were spent traversing the property tracks listening for the tell-tale beeps to no avail. A decision was then made to cancel trapping at the other sites we had earmarked for sampling and to depart on the Saturday.

The sand dunes posed no problem for our vehicles on our departure but the low lying clay regions were still boggy and one vehicle had to be extricated from the mud. We were met halfway by 2 national park rangers who escorted us to the park entrance.

We arrived at Tibooburra with our vehicles covered in mud but with smiles on our faces as we thought of a lovely, warm, all-over shower.

Even though rain curtailed some of our research activities we were still pleased with the data we were able to collect on the movements and foraging areas of the Grey Grasswrens.



*A friendly visitor to one of our sites*



*A not so friendly visitor to our campsite*

This trip brings to an end our tracking research of the Grey Grasswren on Narriearra. The ABSA Grey Grasswren Research Team would like to thank all those volunteers who braved the wilderness over many years to assist in this study which culminated in the declaration of the area as a national park and thus ensured the protection of the Grey Grasswren.

*John Farrell*  
On behalf of the ABSA Research Team

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