



NATURE TERRITORY

November 2008

Newsletter of the Northern Territory Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Committee Member:	<i>vacant</i>

Club web-site: <http://www.geocities.com/ntfieldnaturalists>

Meetings are generally held on the second Wednesday of every month, commencing at 7:45 PM, in Blue 1.03 (Business Faculty Building) on the Casuarina Campus of Charles Darwin University.

Subscriptions are on a financial-year basis and are: Families/Institutional - \$30; Singles - \$25; Concessions - \$15. Part-year discounts are available for new members from January 1 each year.



By the time this newsletter reaches you, birdo, general naturalist and photographer Ashley Carlson will have left town. One of his many legacies is a set of wonderful photos, including this one of a Green Tree-frog *Litoria caerulea*. More of Ashley's photos are on pages 4 & 6.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in *Nature Territory* are not necessarily those of the NT Field Naturalists Club Inc. or members of its Committee.

Club activities

November meeting. Wednesday November 12, 7:45 PM. Blue 1.03 (Business Bldg.), CDU.

Don Franklin

"Slow boat on the Mekong"

From its source high on the Tibetan plateau, the mighty Mekong River flows south and south-east for over 4,000 km to its debouchment in Vietnam. After leaving China, it flows through or along the border of Laos for over 1,000 km, passing through the Golden Triangle and beside the well-forested far north of Thailand. Don will present a photo-travelogue of a journey along the rivers, mountains and forests of far northern Thailand and the adjacent but more remote north-west of Laos. The region is home to the impoverished ethnic-minority hill-tribes, to landscapes and forests of great beauty and diversity where the flora of the South-east Asian lowlands merges with that of the Himalayas, and to challenging bird-watching with occasional wonderful rewards. A feature of the journey was 6½ days of travel by boat on the Mekong and its tributaries, by "slow boat" passenger ferry, by smaller craft, and for two days in a leaky wooden canoe along a remote, rapid-strewn river



Above: late afternoon on the Mekong River at Luang Prabang, Laos.

Left: montane forest canopy, northern Thailand.

Photos: Don Franklin.



Don is a Research Fellow in the School for Environmental Research at Charles Darwin University. He has the (bad?) habit of turning every journey into an exploration of natural history.

November field trip. Sunday November 23, 8 AM. Casuarina Coastal Reserve. A morning of

general natural history. Yes it is early, but it will minimise the heat!

Meet at the Free Beach Car Park (use the Trower Road entrance to the Reserve, take the right hand road and just keep going). As usual, bring plenty of water, sun and insect protection; also binoculars and plant or bird field guides if you have them.

Many trees are fruiting and have their new season leaves to make identification easier; the fruit also attract many birds such as the charismatic Rose-crowned Fruit-dove. Gavin and Meg, whose local 'patch' this is, will assist with locating birds and Gay and Steve will help with plant identification. A small NT Field Nats booklet describing some of the commoner plants of the Reserve will be available.

For more info contact Fiona on fiona.douglas@octa4.net.au or phone 8985 4179.

December 2008 meeting. Wednesday December 10. Tess Atie: *Bush tucker.*

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Club notices

Welcome to new members: Max Moulds (from Kuranda, Qld., rejoining after several years absence);
Tissa Ratnayeke

Thank you

The previous issue was proof-read by Christine Maas and collated and mailed by Susan Jacups. It was printed by Gay Crowley and Don Franklin using equipment kindly made available by the Biodiversity Unit, Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Berrimah and the School for Environmental Research at Charles Darwin University.

More changes to the Committee

After a brief stay, Brian Thistleton has resigned. Even in that short time, Brian has made a valued contribution and we look forward to more of Brian's great photos, and perhaps a talk, in the future.

Tida Nou has moved to Darwin from Jabiru to take up a new job (WWF Threatened Species Coordinator), and has kindly agreed to fill one of the vacancies on the Committee. Welcome, Tida!

Newsletter contributions welcome

Sightings, reports, travelogues, reviews, photographs, sketches, news, comments, opinions, theories , anything relevant to natural history. Please forward material to eucalypt@octa4.net.au or the Club's postal address, or contact the editor on 8948 1293.

Deadline for the December newsletter: Friday November 21.

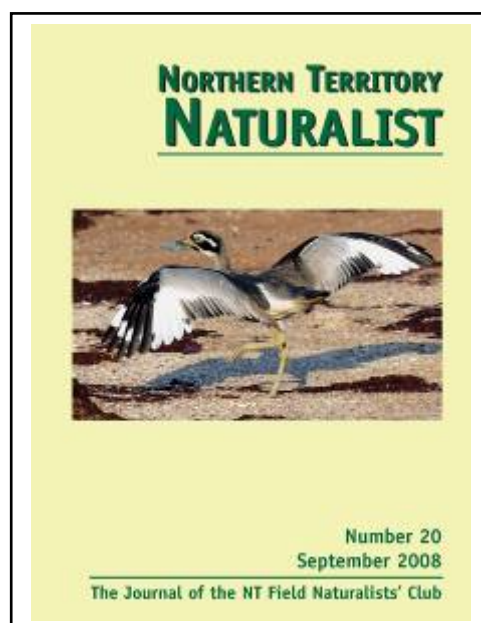
Need an NTFNC membership form? Go to: <http://www.geocities.com/ntfieldnaturalists/subscription.htm>.

Northern Territory Naturalist

The Editorial Committee of the *Northern Territory Naturalist* is now calling for manuscripts for issue no. 21. Manuscripts may relate to any aspect of natural history or ecology relevant to the Northern Territory, and may include reviews, papers, research reports, species profiles and thesis abstracts.

Northern Territory Naturalist is a registered, peer-reviewed journal (ISSN 0155-4093). Author instructions may be downloaded from <http://www.geocities.com/ntfieldnaturalists/journal.htm>. If possible, manuscripts should be submitted in digital form by emailing to lynda.prior@cdu.edu.au. Editors of the journal are Dr Lynda Prior and Dr Michael Braby.

Back issues of the *Northern Territory Naturalist* are available individually (some in photocopy only) or as a set. The cost of a set is \$50- for nos. 1-18 or \$60- for nos. 1-19. Contact Don Franklin, eucalypt@octa4.net.au.



Sewage Pond Keys - Leanyer and Alice Springs

NT Field Naturalists have access to this world-famous bird-watching spot. The key can be collected from Graham Brown (h) 8945 4745. A refundable \$50.00 deposit is required at time of collecting the key, which is available only to members. Conditions imposed by PowerWater Corporation apply to all visitors to the ponds. These are not onerous and are made clear at time of picking up the keys.

Bryan Baker has keys for the Alice Springs Sewage Ponds, available for collection in Darwin by members before they head south. Bryan can be reached in Darwin on 8948 2196.

Backyard critters

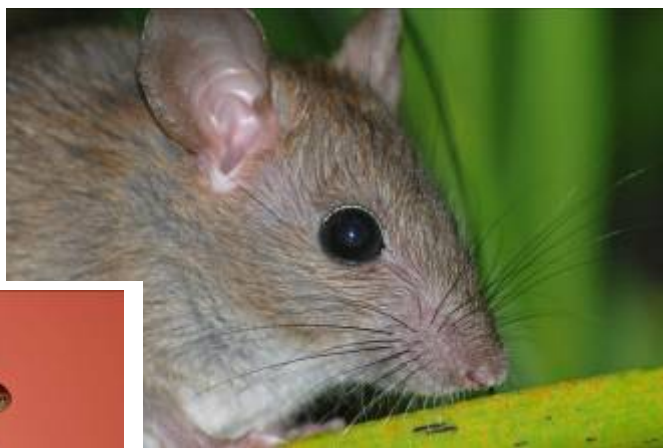
From a Wagaman backyard, photos by Ashley Carlson

Steve Reynolds identified the reptiles.

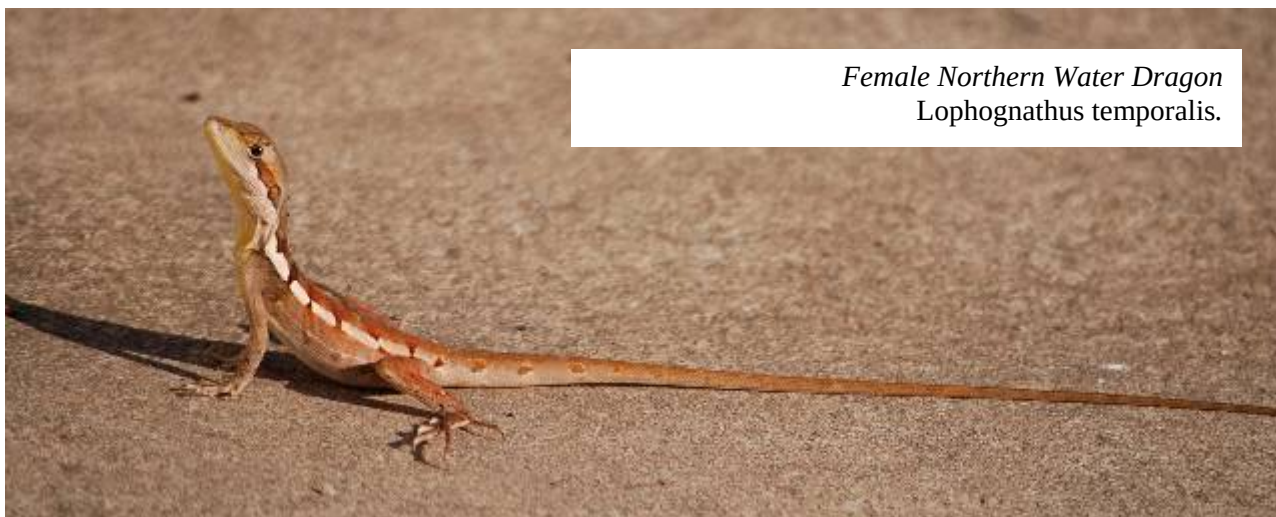


Left: *Brush-tailed Possum*
Trichosurus vulpecula
(northern subspecies *arnhemensis*).

Below: a rat,
probably a *Black Rat* *Rattus rattus*.



Left: a skink, probably the
Slender Rainbow Skink *Carlia gracilis*.



Female Northern Water Dragon
Lophognathus temporalis.

Draft NTFNC position on wildfowl hunting

Gabriel Crowley - 16 October 2008

Introduction

Two events spurred the NTFNC committee to develop a position on wildfowl hunting in the Northern Territory. The first was a request from the Coalition Against Duck Shooting that the Club become a signatory to a call for a permanent national ban on recreational shooting of native waterbirds. The second is the release of Draft Management Program for the Magpie Goose in the Northern Territory of Australia, 2008–2013 (www.nt.gov.au/nretas/wildlife/programs/public/index.html) by the Department of Natural resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport (NRETAS), which was open for public comment until 17 October 2008. The need to make a rapid decision on the call for a national ban, and the time frame for commenting on the management plan, meant that we were unable to canvas the opinion of the membership on this issue. As the Committee, which reflects the diversity of members in the Club, was able to come to a consensus, we believed that our position was likely to represent the majority view of the membership. We have subsequently submitted this position both to the Coalition Against Duck Shooting and as a response to the NRETAS management plan. However, we invite comment from the membership on this issue until 31 December 2008. Until the committee has had an opportunity to consider this feedback the position remains in Draft form. Depending on the type of feedback we receive, further opportunities may be required to discuss this position at a future general meeting.

Preamble

Wildfowl such as Magpie Geese, Pygmy-geese and a range of duck species exist in healthy populations in the Northern Territory, with strongholds on the coastal plains of the Top End. Wetlands used by wildfowl are generally in good condition, little impacted by developments such as clearance or agriculture. The last decade has seen above average to average rainfall in the Top End. None of the wildfowl of the Northern Territory is considered threatened at a Territory or National Level.

Wildfowl are culturally and economically important to the Indigenous people of the Northern Territory, who hunted many species and harvested their eggs. Wildfowl are also important totemically, and many of the wetlands they use are story places. Traditional Owners in the Northern Territory have a responsibility to maintain the environment, and undertake management, such as burning, and ceremonies to do this. Many of these practices continue today, although hunting is often undertaken with the aid of firearms. Indigenous harvest represents the majority of wildfowl taken.

Wildfowl of the Northern Territory are also hunted more widely. There is a hunting season. Greatest takes under permit are of Magpie Geese, but Pacific Black Duck, Wandering Whistling-duck, Plumed Whistling-duck, Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck, Hardhead and Australian Wood Duck can also be taken (see www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife/permits/pdf/waterfowlfact.pdf).

The Northern Territory Government manages wildfowl through the Wildlife Management branch of NRETAS. Its Draft Management Program for the Magpie Goose in the Northern Territory of Australia, 2008–2013 has four principal objectives of the Management Program are to:

1. Maintain viable wild populations of the Magpie Goose.
2. Promote the long-term protection of the wetland habitats on which Magpie Geese and other wetland fauna depend.
3. Facilitate, where appropriate, the sustainable use of Magpie Goose populations.
4. Provide ongoing refinement of Magpie Goose management through timely evaluation of management prescriptions and performance.

On the basis of population studies the following limits to harvest are proposed

- Indigenous and recreational harvesting: 8.5% of the regional population; and
- Agricultural protection: 1% of the regional population.

Regular population monitoring will be undertaken to determine impacts. Considerable resources are required to implement this plan.

The Coalition Against Duck Shooting has proposed a permanent national ban on recreational duck hunting, on the basis that:

- Recreational shooting of native waterbirds is unsustainable.
- Duck shooting is cruel because of high wounding rates caused by the spray of shot gun pellets.
- The public overwhelmingly opposes the activity.
- The Victorian, Tasmanian, South Australian and Northern Territory governments are ignoring environmental and ethical issues in maintaining legislation that authorises the shooting of native waterbirds for recreational purposes.

They are demanding that the Federal government:

1. develop a national approach to the issue by permanently banning recreational duck shooting on all RAMSAR wetlands throughout Australia
2. seek the co-operation of all States/Territory governments for an agreement nationwide to permanently ban the activity.

The NTFNC committee sympathises with the concern for wildfowl populations in eastern Australia and for animal welfare. It believes, however, that environmental and cultural conditions in the NT differ substantially from those in the eastern states. We have therefore developed the following draft position.

Draft Position Statement

Northern Territory Field Naturalists Club Inc.

- 1) Recognises the unique relationship between Traditional Owners and waterfowl, including the right to hunt birds and harvest eggs, and undertake other cultural and management practices.
- 2) Supports the sustainable harvest of wildfowl, where sustainability can be demonstrated through monitoring and assessment.
- 3) Believes that cruelty to all animals taken for food should be avoided wherever possible.
- 4) Believes that the best protection for wildfowl is to maintain wildfowl habitat in good condition (ensuring management of fire, weeds and feral animals).
- 5) Supports the Northern Territory Government's approach to Wildfowl Management, and the Draft Management Program for the Magpie Goose in the Northern Territory of Australia, 2008–2013, on the proviso that:
 - i) The plan is fully and permanently resourced.
 - ii) Both population trends and hunting/harvest rates are monitored annually.
 - iii) Submission of hunting returns is compulsory, in order to support population modelling.
 - iv) Hunters are required to have minimal environmental impact, and to remove all cartridges and other refuse.
 - v) Limits are placed on hunting and harvesting where monitoring indicates unsustainable population changes, regardless of their cause.
 - vi) The community, especially the Indigenous community, is consulted throughout the planning and management process.
 - vii) There be no commercial take of adults from populations of wildfowl.
 - viii) All use of lead shot is banned across the Northern Territory.
 - ix) A management program with similar principles be developed for all other wildfowl species that are permitted to be hunted in the Northern Territory.

NTFNC members are invited to send any comments on this draft statement to Gabriel.Crowley@cdu.edu.au.



Protect the birds, or protect their habitat? Wandering (left) and Plumed (right foreground) Whistling-ducks. Photo: Ashley Carlson.

Life in the open spaces

Reporting back on the talk at the October Club meeting

Tida Nou

At the October club meeting, Peter Dostine presented a talk about his PhD project on the Flock Bronzewing. The Flock Bronzewing (*Phaps histrionica*) is an iconic pigeon of the open ranges of northern Australia. The most notable feature of the species is the sporadic and infrequent appearance of immense flocks (called *megaflocks*) during good seasons, followed by its disappearance for years or even decades. This makes for challenges in studying the species (what if it vanished for the entire study period?). Peter Dostine has bravely taken on the challenge to investigate aspects of the ecology of the species.



Female, immature and male Flock Bronzewings. Photo: Martin Armstrong.

Like other granivorous birds in the northern savannas, the Flock Bronzewing faces an uncertain future. The species has undergone a large contraction from the south-eastern part of its range. This is thought to be as a result of degradation of critical habitats through pastoral practices, inappropriate fire regimes and severe drought. Peter's project is playing a critical role in increasing understanding of the

species, particularly where they are found in different seasons and what resources enable them to do well.

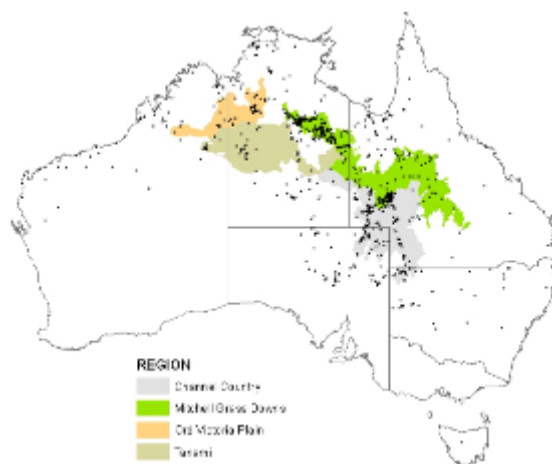
Peter trialed different methods for catching Flock Bronzewings for 18 months! Decoys, seed boats and mist nets failed, but persistence and creativity eventually led to some captures using carefully hidden traps based on leg snares.

Peter conducted a large scale community-based surveys to obtain information about the distribution and abundance of the species. A questionnaire with 10 simple questions about the species was distributed to pastoral land owners in northern Australia. One hundred and eighteen respondents provided over 1200 reports in an 18 month period, most of them from the species' current strongholds – the Barkly Tableland in the NT and the Channel Country of south-western Queensland. Results indicate that the populations respond to fluxes in resources associated with years of above average rainfall (including flood conditions) with appearance in large numbers during these times

Other components of the project involved the use of satellite transmitters and satellite imagery to investigate resource distribution, and studies of diet and seasonal patterns of habitat use. Satellite telemetry results indicated that Flock Bronzewings undertake movements up to 200 km in response to food resources availability.

Seeds of 35 different species were recorded in dietary studies; however the species appear to prefer four ephemeral species, including *Trichodesma zeylanicum* and *Wedelia saperrima*. The species has a strong association with deep cracking black clay soils grassy plains and Hoop Mitchell grass.

The future of the Flock Bronzewing will depend on sympathetic management of pastoral lands, so it will be important to effectively engage with pastoral landholders. Hopefully this project will demonstrate how conservation management can incorporate highly irruptive species.



Historical and recent records of the Flock Bronzewing (dots), showing major centres on the Barkly Tableland and the Gulf County.
Map prepared by Peter Dostine.

Loafing around Lagoons

Reporting on the Club's October excursion

Sherry Prince

On Sunday, 12th October 2008, a party of fifteen visited two sites around Knuckey Lagoons and the Palmerston settling ponds. It was a moderately warm morning, clear sky with little or no wind. The Fiddler's Lane site had very little water in it, however there were plenty of Magpie Geese taking advantage of the shade of the mango trees nearby. The variety of birds was greater than it first seemed and included many Australian Pratincole and Little Curlew.

After about an hour's viewing, the group then moved on to the Snipe Lagoon area. Here we saw quite a large variety of birds, including a large flock (over 100) of Brolgas, much to the delight of everyone, especially the newer members. It was wonderful to watch the numbers increase as more and more flew in to join those on the ground. Also spotted were three species of Egret – Great Egret, Little Egret and Cattle Egret, the last of which was in breeding plumage. Various waterbirds and waders were identified, including Straw-necked and Glossy Ibis. At one stage, a lone Jabiru [Black-necked Stork] graced us with its presence.



Above: magnificent in flight – the Brolga.

Photo: Trevor Collins.

Below: teeming with birds – Snipe Lagoon on the day.

Photo: Don Franklin.



By this stage, the weather was getting warmer and several members opted to seek the shade of the vehicles. It was then decided we should mosey down to the Palmerston settling ponds – truly a unique experience for the uninitiated!! However, despite the heat and the rather unsavoury odours wafting through the mangroves, it was well worth any discomfort. The writer was delighted to view a female Shining Flycatcher as well as a Mangrove Robin. Red-headed Honeyeaters were in abundance.

It was an extremely interesting and rewarding day for a novice bird observer such as myself. Judging from comments from the more experienced members of the group, we were lucky to see such a vast range of birdlife considering the dryness of the areas we visited.

Bird list for the day is available from Ian Hance (ian_hance@yahoo.com.au).



Birding field natters in a favoured habitat – around the sewage outfall. Photo: Gavin O'Brien.

Nature Territory, November 2008

Mangrove Robin. Photo: Bob Lewis,

<http://flickr.com/photos/18731552@N00/1837728128>.



Interesting bird sightings

11 September to 16 October 2008

Compiled by Ian Hance

Sightings are as reported (unvetted, unconfirmed) and have been mostly compiled from the e-mail digest of the NT birder website (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ntbirds>) moderated by Niven McCrie.

Species	Date	Location	Observer/s	Nos./comments
Waterbirds				
Little (Eurasian) Grebe	30/09/2008	Leanyer Sewage Ponds	Niven McCrie	1; still present 10/10
Great-billed Heron	10/10/2008	Buffalo Creek	Niven McCrie	1
Brolga	12/10/2008	Snipe Lagoon, Knuckeys	Field Nats.	138
Chestnut Rail	6/10/2008	Buffalo Creek	Johnny Estbergs	6
~	10/10/2008	Buffalo Creek	Niven McCrie	2
Buff-banded Rail	7/10/2008	Progress Ave Nightcliff	Fiona Douglas	1
Diurnal raptors				
Pacific Baza	5/10/2008	Stuart Park	Leon Compton & Mark Ziembicki	1
~	10/10/2008	Buffalo Creek	Niven McCrie	3
Nankeen Kestrel	10/10/2008	Bayview Haven	Niven McCrie	1; unusual location
Australian Hobby	5/10/2008	Elizabeth River Bridge	Ashley Carlson	1
Black Falcon	7/10/2008	Fiddlers, Knuckeys Lagoons	Niven McCrie	1
Waders				
Little Ringed Plover	30/09/2008	Leanyer Sewage Ponds	Niven McCrie	4
~	7/10/2008	Fiddlers, Knuckeys Lagoons	Niven McCrie	1
Oriental Plover	30/09/2008	Leanyer Sewage Ponds	Niven McCrie	1
~	8/10/2008	Leanyer Sewage Ponds	Niven McCrie	1
Little Curlew	7/10/2008	Fiddlers, Knuckeys Lagoons	Niven McCrie	20
~	12/10/2008	Snipe Lagoon, Knuckeys	Field Nats.	66
Marsh Sandpiper	11/09/2008	Fiddlers, Knuckeys Lagoons	Bas Hensen	3
Wood Sandpiper	11/09/2008	Fiddlers, Knuckeys Lagoons	Bas Hensen	5
Long-toed Stint	30/09/2008	Leanyer Sewage Ponds	Niven McCrie	1
Broad-billed Sandpiper	7/10/2008	Palmerston Sewage Ponds	Bas Hensen	1
Oriental Pratincole	11/09/2008	Darwin Airport	Lunar Eclipse	17
Australian Pratincole	7/10/2008	Knuckeys Lagoons	Niven McCrie	20
Other non-passerines				
Lesser Frigatebird	3/10/2008	Sandy Creek	Bas Hensen	1 imm. flying
Large-tailed Nightjar	5/10/2008	Howard Springs	Ashley Carlson	4 at roost
Fork-tailed Swift	10/10/2008	Buffalo Creek	Niven McCrie	30-40; first for season?
Northern Rosella	7/10/2008	Catalina Road Palmerston	Bas Hensen	3
Oriental Cuckoo	27/09/08	Nightcliff Rocks	Niven McCrie	1
~	3/10/2008	Botanic Gardens	Rohan Clarke	3
Rufous Owl	5/10/2008	Goyder R., Central Arnhem H'way	Michael Braby	2
~	5/10/2008	Botanic Gardens	Niven McCrie	1
~	10/10/2008	Botanic Gardens	Niven McCrie	2 Rainforest
Barking Owl	10/10/2008	Botanic Gardens	Niven McCrie	2
Little Kingfisher	5/10/2008	Sandy Creek	Ashley Carlson	1
Passerines				
White-breasted Whistler	5/10/2008	Elizabeth River Bridge	Ashley Carlson	1
Gouldian Finch	4/10/2009	Mary River Gravel Pits	Rohan Clarke	1 male black-head, 8-9 juvs.
Yellow-rumped Mannikin	4/10/2008	Mary River Gravel Pits	Rohan Clarke	6
Yellow Wagtail	20/09/2008	Leanyer Sewage Ponds	Niven McCrie	1
~	7/10/2008	Leanyer Sewage Ponds	Niven McCrie	1

This Little (Eurasian) Grebe is possibly only the second record for Australia. Can you pick it from an Australasian Grebe?
The first record was also from the Leanyer Sewage Ponds.
Photo: Niven McCrie.



Bustards in the Top End



Australian Bustard (?male displaying).
Photos: Brian Thistleton.

Using a combination of landholder surveys and remote sensing analysis of landscape “greenness” as a measure of recent rainfall, Ziembicki & Woinarski (2007; see *Recent Literature*, p11)) documented patterns and drivers of occurrence in the Australian Bustard at regional scales across Australia. One such region was a combination of the Top End and Kimberley, for which they obtained 49 landholder responses. Most landholders in the region regarded the Australian Bustard as resident on their properties, but with a weak tendency for a wet season peak in abundance. Breeding in the region was reported throughout the year but with a clear peak in wet season months. The most frequently reported reason for above average numbers was “good rains” and modelling of reported abundances in the Top End and Kimberley against the greenness index demonstrated a strong relationship with rainfall in the previous year.



Exotic Ants in the Northern Territory

Invasion by non-native ant species that monopolise environments is a major and evidently emerging problem across tropical Australia in both urban areas and bushland. The Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts has established a project to assess the distribution, potential spread, areas of incursion, and impacts of exotic ants in the Northern Territory.

As it is difficult to contain exotic ants once established, the focus of a new website (www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife/programs/exotic_ants/index.html) is to educate and involve the community in identifying and reporting exotic ant discoveries. The website also contains pages identifying exotic ant species, both those that are already established in the NT and those species that remain a threat, being established in other parts of the north.

A free Ant Collection Kit, is available and the general public is encouraged to send in the samples they collect for identification.

National waterbirds survey

As part of this survey, wetlands in the Northern Territory were surveyed from helicopters, mainly by Richard Kingsford, Ray Chatto and Mark Ziembicki, during mid-October. Information about these surveys and other components of the national survey is available at http://www.wetrivers.unsw.edu.au/docs/rp_nws_home.html.

Recent literature about Top End natural history

BIRDS

Compiled by Don Franklin

Not so technical

Cooney S. 2008. Birds of the Never-Never. *Wingspan* 18(2): 44-45.

Stafford A. 2008. Top End treats. Birding hotspots in Darwin and Kakadu. *Wingspan* 18(3): 44-45.

Species-specific

Carlson AJ. 2008. Nesting event of the Cicadabird *Coracina tenuirostris* in the Northern Territory. *Northern Territory Naturalist* 20: 38-40.

Keates A, Collins T, Franklin DC. 2008. Aggressive behaviour by the Beach Stone-curlew. *Northern Territory Naturalist* 20: 34-37.

Ziembicki M, Woinarski J. 2007. Monitoring continental movement patterns of the Australian Bustard through community-based surveys and remote sensing. *Pacific Conservation Biology* 13: 128-142.

Other

Garnett ST, Brook BW. 2007. Modelling to forestall extinction of Australian tropical birds. *Journal of Ornithology* 148: 311-320.

Gosper D, Holmes G. 2008. A survey of diurnal raptors in the wet-dry tropics, northern Australia. *Corella* 32: 71-75.

Noske RA, Fischer S, Brook BW. 2008. Artificial nest predation rates vary among habitats in the Australian monsoon tropics. *Ecological Research* 23: 519-527.

Predation of birds nests

We know that more nest attempts by small birds fail than succeed, and that predation is the major cause of failure. But beyond that, remarkably little is known because it is a difficult topic to investigate. One way around this is to conduct experiments with artificial nests. Noske *et al.* (2008) did just that, investigating rates of predation on open and dome-shaped nests in four habitats – mangroves, monsoon rainforests, paperbark forest eucalypt woodland – at six intervals over a year around Darwin. A quail egg and an artificial egg made of plasticine were placed in each artificial nest. Cup-shaped artificial nests consisted of a half a tennis ball painted brown, left to air, then covered with coconut fibre and wool or paperbark. Dome-shaped nests consisted of a whole tennis ball treated as above after two holes were cut into it.

Perhaps surprisingly, there was little variation in predation rates with season, and not much difference between open and dome-shaped nests except in paperbark forest, where open nests suffered higher predation rates. However, there was a dramatic effect of habitat, with nests in mangroves experiencing four times higher rates of predation than those in paperbark forests and eucalypt woodland.

Raptor surveys

Gosper & Holmes (2008) counted raptors as they drove from Wyndham in the Kimberley across the Top End to near Georgetown in north Queensland, repeating the protocol adopted in the “Birds of Prey Watch” scheme of 1986-1990. They observed 1175 raptors of 14 species (plus 5 more species whilst not driving).

The Black Kite was by far the most common (51%), followed by the Whistling Kite (15%), Nankeen Kestrel (14%), Brown Falcon (13%) and Wedge-tailed Eagle (2%). Raptors were particularly abundant on the Barkly Tableland. Across all of WA and the NT (but not Qld.), raptors were markedly more abundant than for the comparable time of year during the BOP Watch surveys.

*Fifth most common:
the Wedge-tailed Eagle.
Photo: Trevor Collins.*

