

Birding Brisbane



Birds and Birdwatching in the River City

Volume 1, Issue 3

Cox's Sandpiper at Kianawah Road Wetland

On 12th Feb, Chris Attewell found a bird that sent many birders scurrying to the text books. Chris relates the exciting story of the find, and of solving the challenging identification.

I stopped for a brief look at the Kianawah Rd Wetlands. It didn't look overly promising but there were a few Sharpies amongst the mangrove seedlings along the foreshore so I grabbed the scope and headed to the shady patch along the adjoining property's fence line - it was already a hot morning.

Fairly soon a Swamp Harrier (a good bird for

the time of year itself) flushed a larger group of Sharpies which landed a short distance away. One bird stood out with its sharply demarcated 'bib', clean white flanks and longer drooping bill which immediately had me thinking Pectoral Sandpiper, however on closer inspection it didn't look quite right. The bill was all black, lacking the pale bases to the mandibles of a typical Pec, and was a touch longer and more decurved, almost like a Curlew Sandpiper; the legs were a dull olive rather than the yellow of a Pec or black of a Curlew Sand; the feathers of the wing converts seemed



Cox's Sandpiper at Kianawah Rd Wetland on 12th Feb (CA).

paler and lacking the darker centres of a Pec/Sharpie appearing more Curlew Sand like. I was a little stumped but the ABG had details of "Cox's Sandpiper", a Curlew – Pectoral Sandpiper hybrid, which was a very close match and explained the odd mix of features. Luckily it spent a while feeding allowing me time to get digiscoped video—Great find Chris!

Inside this issue:

Birding Western Enoggera Reservoir	3
Little Penguin in Moreton Bay	4
eBird skills: Maximising the value of sightings	5
Mystery Photo	5
Contributing to the Atlas	5
Undersurveyed Atlas Square: Vine Thicket	6
From the Atlas: Common Cicadabird	6
List of Observers	8

Highlights:

- Cox's Sandpiper turns up
- Little Penguin in Moreton Bay—in 1953!
- Brad Woodworth on birding western Enoggera Reservoir
- Maximising value of your eBird lists
- Contributing to the Atlas of the Birds of Brisbane
- Common Cicadabird species account

Bird news, February 2019

The sedate start to the birding year in January was more than made up for in February, with several fantastic birds turning up and many others returning or staying on. The star (non-hybrid) bird of the month

was undoubtedly the **Superb Fruit-Dove**, found by Matteo Grilli on his local patch at Banks St Reserve on the 14th, proving yet again that patch birding can pay off handsomely! You can read more about



Superb Fruit-Dove—a simply beautiful find for Valentine's Day at Banks Street Reserve. Photograph by Matteo Grilli.

Bird news, continued

Banks St and Matteo's birding there in last month's issue. Sadly, the bird could not be relocated by several folks who tried later that day and the following. Superb Fruit-

The long-staying **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at the Port of Brisbane continued throughout the month, with supporting cast including **Broad-billed Sandpiper**, the first returning **Double-banded Plover**, **Eastern Reef Egret** and **Spotted Harrier**. The **Asian Dowitcher** has not been seen since 30th January. The **Long-toed Stint** continued at GJ Fuller Oval Lagoons until 17th Feb, although the site was again flooded by king tides, and it was not present on 21st Feb (CA). Nearby at Kianawah Road Wetlands on 12th Feb, Chris Attewell pulled off the greatest find of the year so far—a splendid **Cox's Sandpiper**! (see cover feature). Also at Kianawah Rd was a **Black Falcon** on the 9th, although it did not linger (GT). A **Grey-crowned Babbler** was at Brisbane Airport on 10th & 27th Feb (AN).

Just a few hundred metres up the road at Sandy Camp Road Wetlands, both **Australian Little Bitterns** and **Black Bittern** have been showing well for some birders, although both species remain cryptic, and the **Black Bittern** especially is a tricky bird to locate. Other notable birds at Sandy Camp during February include **Little Eagle** (MW), **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike** (RS, SS, CS), **Pacific Swift** (RB, TP) and a **Grey Goshawk** (SP, MG). A **Little Eagle** was at Mookin-Bah Reserve on 24th (AB). One wonders if the continuing trickle of records in Brisbane's south-east indicates the odd wandering bird, or a resident pair somewhere? On the last day of the month, an **Oriental Cuckoo** was located at Whites Hill Reserve (EL, PG), perhaps indicative of the first autumn movements for this species.

Across the river to the North, there have been **Pacific Swifts** at Tinchy Tamba (AJ) and Mungo Scott Park (RF). This species departs earlier than **White-throated Needletail**, of which there were plenty right up to the month's end. Up to four **Australasian Shovelers** were at Dowse Lagoon

"At the end of my walk on the 14 of February, I spent some time between 7.30 to 8 am sitting by the edge of the creek under the two big Fig Trees looking at the birds coming and going when suddenly this beautiful young male Superb Fruit-dove landed on one of the lower branches above the water four metres from me. It didn't seem to be bothered too much by my presence and attempted to land for a drink but quickly flew back up after possibly seeing the Keelback that I had seen there just before. It flew from branch to branch without hurrying and hung around quietly for at least 15 minutes, it then moved higher in the canopy until it disappeared. I was astounded and could not believe I got such a great encounter with this rare and beautiful bird right in the middle of Brisbane's suburbs." - Matteo Grilli

until 17th Feb, and **Peregrine Falcons** were at Dowse Lagoon and Kedron Brook Wetlands. The latter was nearly dry over summer, and autumn wader passage has been disappointing. The lagoon has recently filled again, so keep a look out.

The approaching Cyclone Oma stayed well offshore mid-month, a relief for 99% of Brisbane's residents no doubt, but disappointing for birders, with no incursion of seabirds into Moreton Bay. A handful of birders tried sea-watching at Shorncliffe Pier but to no avail. No-one seawatched off Cape Moreton, which might have delivered some interesting species given the persistent south-easterly winds.

Further inland, notable records included the continuing **Freckled Duck** at Oxley Creek Common until 10th Feb (PW), four **Crested Shrike-tits** at Enoggera Reservoir on 15th Feb (BW, RAF), a **Black-chinned Honeyeater** at Shelley Road (RG), five **Dusky Woodswallows** at Gold Creek Reservoir on 25th (StPr) and a **Pale-**

vented Bush-hen with two chicks at Lake Manchester on 26th (AN). Expeditionary birding by Sara Young in Camerons Creek, Kholo on 10th Feb produced two **Jacky Winter** along with two **Speckled Warblers**; clearly an area worth further exploration.

Finally, it was a good month for nocturnal species. Numerous reports of **Tawny Frogmouths** from all over the city, with targeted searching for this species in underbirded Atlas squares delivering many new records of what must be a very widespread species across Brisbane (RAF). **White-throated Nightjars** were at Kholo (RAF), Mt Coot-tha (LI) and a cracking record from Octantis St Park in suburban Coorparoo on 25th (GN). **Australian Owlet-Nightjars** were

noted at Tinchy Tamba, Bellbird Grove and Enoggera Reservoir. Owls were less showy, with records of **Powerful Owl** from Whites Hill, suburban Albion, Mt Coot-tha, Fig Tree Pocket and Lake Manchester, and **Southern Boobook** from a handful of locations



Elliot Leach and Philip Griffin found this splendid Oriental Cuckoo at Whites Hill Reserve on 28th Feb, once again showing the rewards of patch birding (photo: EL).

Amanda Johnston had a Powerful Owl in suburban Albion, while Greg Neill had a White-throated Nightjar in Coorparoo!

around the city too. There are many new distributional records to be gained by some nocturnal birding here and there!

Well, 2019 continues to put on a great show for Brisbane birders, with the total number of species now over 270. Can you add to that number? Be sure to add all your sightings to eBird!

Round-up by Louis Backstrom and Richard Fuller

Site Profile: West end of Enoggera Reservoir

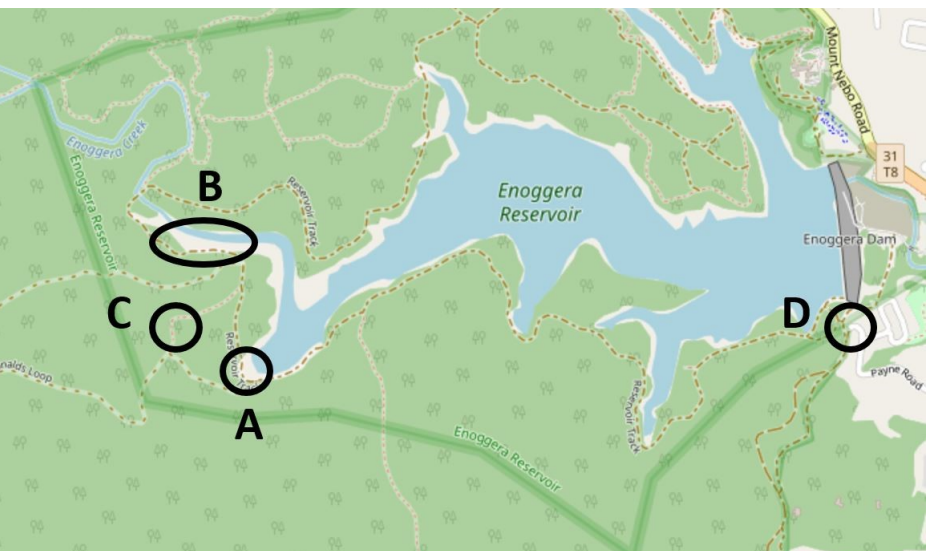
Enoggera Reservoir sits at the eastern edge of D'Aguilar National Park, west of The Gap, and is well known to many Brisbane birders, especially the popular Araucaria Circuit which hosts 300+ checklists and is currently ranked 12th among Brisbane eBird hotspots by total species. Comparatively, the western half of Enoggera Reservoir is scarcely birded, having hosted fewer than 10 complete checklists as of early 2019. Yet, with a mixture of eucalypt forest, small rainforest patches, meadows and wetlands, and open water all sitting at the eastern edge of the contiguous forests of the Brisbane range, the area has a huge amount of potential.

Highlights from the west end of Enoggera Reservoir from the past twelve months from various ob-



Crested Shrike-tits are encountered along the southern edge of Enoggera Reservoir relatively frequently. This one was photographed near McDonald's Loop on 15th Feb 2019 (RAF).

servers include Painted Buttonquail (A), Crested shrike-tit (C), White-eared Monarch, Dusky Woodswallow (B), Russet-tailed Thrush (B), and Lewin's Rail (B). In the evening, White-throated Nightjar can be seen swooping over the western meadows (A, B), with six individuals recently observed on Jan 23rd 2019 at (A), an unusually high count for Brisbane.



The western end of Enoggera Reservoir is much less heavily visited than the north-eastern corner, yet the birding there is productive, with recent good birds including Painted Buttonquail, White-eared Monarch, Crested Shrike-tit and Lewin's Rail.

At night, Southern Boobook and Australian Owlet Nightjar are often heard and seen on the walk to

and from the west end of reservoir along with a number of featherless beasts; recent encounters include Small-eyed Snake, Long-nosed Bandicoot, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Squirrel Glider, and Koala.

length, one-way, but the southern route is generally flatter and offers more frequent and up close views of the water and wetlands that fringe the reservoir. A handful of parking spaces are available at the end of Payne Road (D). Remember to minimise disturbance to the folks living along Payne Rd particularly when arriving early in the morning.

Story by Brad Woodworth



This stunning Painted Buttonquail was photographed by Louis Backstrom on 1 Jul 2018 along the Link Track near the western end of Enoggera Reservoir. Get there early for a chance of this species in the open.

From the Archives: Little Penguins in Brisbane!

One important aspect of the *Atlas* project is the addition of verified old and notable records into the eBird database that would not have otherwise made it into the project. Sources of these records include museum specimens, old newspaper and journal articles, as well as various other online biodiversity datasets, such as the *Atlas of Living Australia*, or Queensland Government's WildNet. One such record is this fantastic report of a Little Penguin, from the 1955 issue of *Emu*:

An Unusual Visitor to Moreton Bay. - An unusual visitor to Queensland appeared about October 1953. While on station at the mouth of Moreton Bay, members of the ship's company of the pilot steamer Matthew Flinders were surprised to hear repeated calls from the sea around the ship. This continued at intervals for a couple of days. Shouted invitations to the owner of the voice to show itself resulted in a Little Penguin's circling close around the ship. A crab net was lowered, the Penguin swam in, and so was lifted aboard. It would not accept food offered but seemed content to stay aboard and rest. When it appeared uneasy the net was produced again and the bird lowered back to the sea. Captain Con Reilly says these visits became regular with the penguin calling for its 'lift' about 10 a.m. daily. It would rest on the ship until daylight next morning, when it would call for the net and so be lowered to the water- presumably to go off fishing. This went on for a couple of months with the bird transferring per medium of its favourite crab net to the relief ship, John Oxley. After trying all spots the penguin chose the concrete floor in the bathroom as favourite- wood seemed least popular. The bird was inclined to peck at first but

soon became tame. Swimming near the ship it seemed frightened of bonitos and sharks but ignored dolphins. On one occasion the ship was anchored eight or nine miles from the usual spot but the penguin found it and called to be lifted aboard as usual. The sequence was broken when a sick man had to be rushed back to port and a wooden ship, the Captain Heath, took over pilot duty for a short time. These notes have been compiled from information kindly given by the above-mentioned ships' officers. We join in the hope that the penguin returned south to his kind and was not taken by one of the big sharks. - J. S. Robertson, East Brisbane, Qld., 24/10/54.

Another somewhat more dubious claim from the same time period – perhaps relating to the same bird, is noted in the *Courier Mail*, 9th October 1954:

Lonely penguin in Moreton Bay: GOING BUSH

with IAN Blast from the past—Page 2 of the GALL. - It happened an hour or so before dawn on a lonely Moreton Island beach - just at that hour when, after a night's fishing, the urge to sleep seems strongest. We were making back towards Cowan Cowan when something lurched across the sand in front of us, and disappeared into the wash of the short, lapping waves. It could have been the paper wrapping from someone's bait - but there was no off-shore breeze to blow paper into

the sea. It was not big enough for a seal, too fast for a turtle, and it seemed to show a lot of white. We eventually decided that it must have been a penguin, but hesitated, on joining the, remainder of our party, to mention the fact. Admittedly, we did not feel up to facing the guffaws that would surely greet such a claim. Had not one of our friends, some weeks previously, seen a seal riding a bicycle along the beach? - And had it not turned out to be a man from the whaling station, whose only resemblance to a seal was that they both liked fish. We knew that, occasionally, penguins paid a visit to Pt. Lookout, but we had never seen or heard of them on the inner bay shores.

Records such as these are currently being processed and verified by the *Atlas* team and will be uploaded to eBird soon – watch this space! Other intriguing historical records from Brisbane include White Tern, American Golden-Plover,



eBird skills: How can I maximise the value of my sightings in eBird?

So you want to contribute to the Atlas of the Birds of Brisbane? You'll need to use eBird to document your observations, but how do you make sure your data are as useful as possible?

There are many ways to maximise the value of your eBird checklists—we will address a couple here, but there are many more.

1. Record all species. Answering “yes” to the question “Are you submitting a complete checklist of the birds you were able to identify” ensures that we (and other users of eBird data) can be sure that a species not on your checklist was, to the best of your knowledge, not

present at the time of your observation. This is very important for obtaining accurate presence/absence data.

2. Keep your counts short and sweet. A big problem with much of the Brisbane eBird dataset is that it covers whole morning outings within one checklist, even if the distance covered is well over 5km. eBird recommends travelling counts be kept to <8km in length; for the Atlas we ask for shorter distances, especially given our grid cells are 2x2km—so be sure to split up your mornings to ensure our data is both time and location accurate. Don't be shy of submit-

ting more than 10 checklists in a big morning's outing! Stationary counts are also great.

3. Be sure to enter as much additional information as you know. Especially for the Atlas, we encourage you to use the Breeding Codes—this is critical for determining the breeding seasons of our species. The use of the comments section for any rare or unusual species is also encouraged—a well-documented sighting is a good sighting!

Visit <http://ebird.org/australia> to get started today, and for more tips and tricks! *Story by Louis Backstrom.*

Mystery photo



Can you identify this bird? The picture was taken in Brisbane. Answer next month.

Last month's challenge was a blurry mis-timed photo of a departing bird. One feature really stands out—the yellow vent. This, combined with rather plain underparts, and darkish tail leads only to one conclusion. A Golden Whistler, shown here a few seconds before in a much more helpful pose!



Golden Whistler, Pinnaroo Cemetery Swamp, 25th Sep 2018 (RAF).

Contributing to the Atlas

If you can, please donate your time and expertise to help make the Atlas the best it can be. For full details, see the [Contributing](#) section of the Atlas website. Here are some of the key things you can do to help create this landmark resource.

Go birdwatching within the Brisbane City Council area and enter your observations on eBird, a free tool for recording bird observations. All eBird records in Bris-

bane will be automatically included in the Atlas. If you have old records stored away on notebooks and such, you can enter them into eBird too! If you need help, contact an Atlas administrator.

Write some text for the Atlas, or edit and improve the existing text. Full instructions on how to edit Atlas pages are in the [Contributing](#) section of the Atlas website.

Contact Atlas editors with ques-

“All eBird records in Brisbane will be automatically included in the Atlas”

tions: Louis Backstrom (louis.backstrom@gmail.com) or Richard Fuller (r.fuller@uq.edu.au)

Undersurveyed Atlas Square: Vine Thicket

Brisbane is divided into 2 x 2 km Atlas squares. Each square has a target of 12 birdwatching visits in each of the four seasons. Each month we will feature an under-surveyed square to encourage you to get out and contribute.

A great grid square here! Hell Hole Break runs through here,

and is a relatively easy walk down off Mount Nebo Rd. Plenty of excellent habitat here too, so there's really no excuse.

Some nocturnal birding here could



Only 11 complete checklists in this Atlas square.

also be quite exciting - either from Mt Nebo Rd or along the walking tracks. Much of this square is inaccessible by walking trails, meaning that highly expeditionary birding is required to fill in the gaps here. Nocturnal work is also needed. Planning required!

Download the survey sheet [here](#).

Story by Louis Backstrom.

	Complete checklists	Total minutes	Total km		Species	Complete checklists	Incomplete checklists
Summer (Dec-Feb)	0/12	0/120	0/1	Louis Backstrom	25	9	0
Autumn (Mar-May)	0/12	0/120	0/1	Brad Woodworth	3	1	0
Winter (Jun-Aug)	11/12	128/120	4.1/1	Richard Fuller	3	1	0
Spring (Sep-Nov)	0/12	0/120	0/1				
Total	11	128	4.1				

From the Atlas: Common Cicadabird

Each month we will reproduce a draft species account from the Atlas. If you spot errors, or see any additions that can be made, jump right on to brisbanebirds.com and get editing! Or email Richard Fuller (r.fuller@uq.edu.au) for a Word Document that you can directly edit. This account was drafted by Louis Backstrom.

Category A; Moderately common summer migrant to remnant bush-land habitats across the city environs. Probably breeds within our region but only a handful of records. Not of conservation concern and numbers are possibly increasing slightly. The Cicadabird (aka Common or Slender-billed Cicadabird) is a small, sexually dimorphic species of cuckooshrike found across north and east Australia, New Guinea, Indonesia and numerous islands in the south Pacific. Adult males are a striking slate-grey colour all over, while females and younger birds are a lighter grey across the back with white, barred underparts. They are often first located by their distinctive call, which sounds very much like that of a cicada, for which they are named. Birds are

locally common across the city throughout summer, and may turn up anywhere, although they show a clear preference for remnant habitats rather than urban parks and gardens.

A typically solitary species of wooded habitats, the Cicadabird does not reach high abundance in Brisbane but nonetheless can be seen or heard quite regularly in certain parts of Brisbane over summer. Birds occur quite patchily within the LGA but appear to particularly favour the western woodlands where there are large tracts of connected forest for them to move through while feeding.

Birds have been found at all altitudes within Brisbane, from sea level to above 600m, but are typically found in more low-lying areas, with an average elevation of just under 100m. They never occur in particularly large flocks, with a high count of 12 birds at Gold Creek Reservoir (Fuller 2011) and only a handful of further records of more than 5 birds on a checklist. Cicadabirds are full summer migrants in south east Queensland, with peak numbers across Novem-

“If you spot errors, or see any additions that can be made, jump right on to brisbanebirds.com and get editing!”

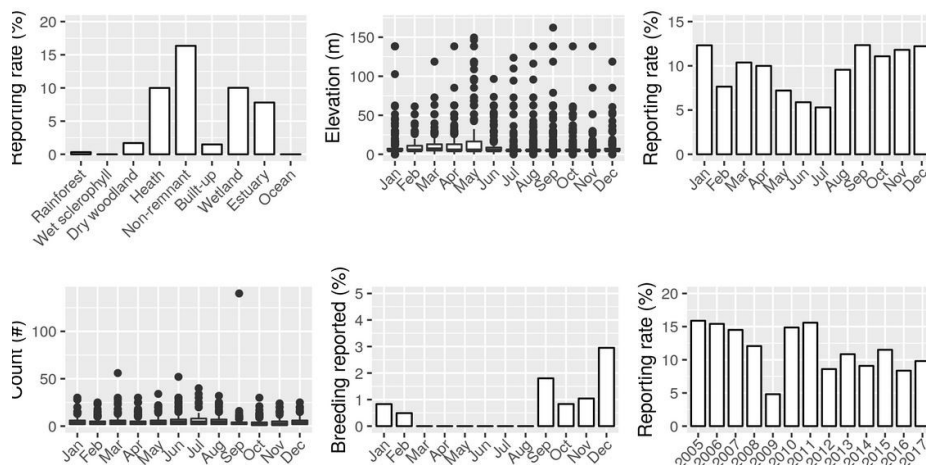
ber-February, dropping off to almost no records between May and September.

As a species seemingly quite reliant on undisturbed woodland habitats, Cicadabirds are at risk of habitat loss due to deforestation across much of their range. Fortunately, most of the remnant woodland in the Brisbane LGA is protected land (e.g. in D’Aguilar National Park) and so at less of a risk of logging and destruction.

Distribution and Habitat

Cicadabirds are found across most of Brisbane including on Moreton Island, but are patchy and do not occur anywhere regularly in large numbers. The most records come from the mid-western suburbs, from Moggill in the south to Mt Nebo in the north, although it is likely the species also occurs regu-

From the Atlas continued...



larly further west and in the Camel's Head but is underreported due to a lack of data. Similarly over on Moreton Island; there is plenty of suitable habitat for birds, particularly in the forested south half, so it is likely that birds are present (and may also breed) across summer on the island. More survey work is needed to determine this.

Within Brisbane, birds are found almost exclusively in remnant forested habitats: rainforest, wet sclerophyll and dry woodland. They are most common in wet sclerophyll, here the reporting rate is 13% across the whole year. Birds are also occasionally found in wetland and heath habitats (~5% of checklists), and are only rarely found in non-remnant, built-up and estuarine areas. Such low reporting rates across all habitats indicate that even over summer, this is not a particularly frequently encountered species.

Seasonally, the distribution of Cicadabirds shows a clear migratory pattern, with birds being almost completely absent from the city in the cooler months. The very few records of overwintering birds are spread out across the city from Nudgee in the north east to Anstead in the south west, indicating that the location within the LGA of birds does not change significantly, but the majority of birds migrate north toward Cape York and New Guinea over winter.

Seasonality

There are only 4 breeding records of Cicadabirds in Brisbane, 3 from Tinchi Tamba and 1 from Fitzgibbon Bushland. This is somewhat surprising given that the species breeds over the summer months (i.e. while it is in Brisbane). These four records are from mid-December to early January, in line with the season reported more widely across the range. It would be good to collect more breeding data for this species within Brisbane.

Trends

The reporting rate of Cicadabirds in Brisbane has remained somewhat stable throughout the Atlas period, with perhaps a slight overall increase in reports in the past decade. The average reporting rate is 5%, with 2014 being the best year so far for the species, where birds were reported on over 7.5% of checklists. There is a noticeable amount of annual variation in the reporting rate however, which may indicate migration patterns or birds following climate conditions as they move down the east coast of Australia in Spring and back again in Autumn. More work across several years would be helpful to further determine the nature of this species' abundance year-to-year.

Cicadabirds are not of significant

conservation concern within Brisbane in the sense that their population appears to be relatively stable, if not increasing, and their key habitats are somewhat well-protected under already-established bushland reserves and parks. They are still at risk of some habitat loss due to deforestation, which may impact the population, and - being a migratory species - could be affected by long-term climate change modifying their range. It would be good to monitor this species particularly, as the population health is likely indicative of the wider health of Brisbane's bushland and migratory birds.

Information Gaps

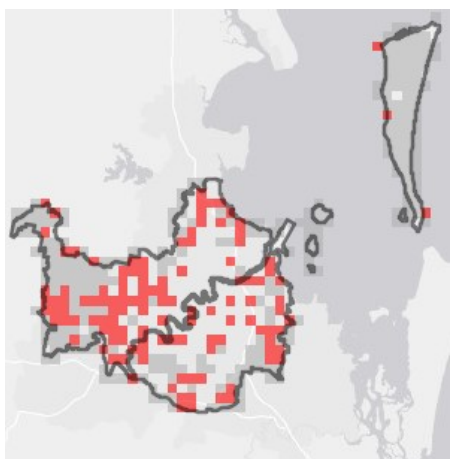
- Collect more information on this species' distribution in the western forests and Moreton Island
- Collect more breeding data for the birds
- Determine the causes of year-to-year abundance variation

Key Conservation Needs

- Protect bushland habitats which this species frequents

Contributors to Species Account

- Louis Backstrom



Birding Brisbane: Birds and Birdwatching in the River City

We would love to be able to use your photographs from eBird in future issues of Birding Brisbane. Please email Richard Fuller (r.fuller@uq.edu.au) to give us permission to reproduce your images directly from eBird.

brisbanebirds.com



Birding Brisbane is a monthly newsletter aimed at sharing information about birds and birdwatching in Brisbane. It is a companion project to the Atlas of the Birds of Brisbane, which is compiling all known information about the birds of Brisbane into a single reference work. The Atlas uses eBird data. Any eBird records submitted in Brisbane will automatically be incorporated into the Atlas.

The Atlas is being written by the birdwatching community, and is freely available at <http://brisbanebirds.com>

The geographic area encompassed by this newsletter is the Brisbane Local Government Authority boundary, and all coordinates offshore that are closer to Brisbane LGA than any other LGA.

Please feel free to contact the *Atlas* editors with any questions, suggestions or offers of help: Louis Backstrom (louis.backstrom@gmail.com); Richard Fuller (r.fuller@uq.edu.au)

List of Observers

CA Chris Attewell; DA David Anderson; TA Terence Alexander; DAr Doug Armstrong; AB Alexander Babych; DB Duan Biggs; KB Ken Bissett; LB Louis Backstrom; MB Mike Bennett; RB Roksana Boreli; TB Tyde Bands; FC Felicia Chan; JC Jon Coleman; KC Ken Cross; LC Lucy Coleman; GD Guy Dutson; GDa Gus Daly; JD Jill Duncan; MD Michael Daley; RE Rohan Etherington; SF Scott Fox; RF Rick Franks; RAF Richard Fuller; MG Malcolm Graham; PG Philip Griffin; RG Rod Gardner; NH Nikolas Haass; SH Sandra Harding; LI Lenn Isidore; AJ Amanda Johnston; BJ Brian Johnson; MJ Meg Johnson; EL Elliot Leach; PL Peter Lowe; SL Sue Lee; GM Gillie Matthew; IM Ian McMahon; JM John Merton; KM Kris McBride; LM Liam McGuire; SM Stephen Murray; TM Tom Mutton; AN Andrew Naumann; GN Greg Neill; SN Sean Nolan; TN Tim Norris; HP Hugh Possingham; SP Stuart Pickering; SPr Steven Pratt; StPr Stephen Prowse; TP Terry Percival; CS Chetna Sharma; JS Julie Sarna; RS Ramit Singal; SS Saurabh Sawant; GT Ged Tranter; MT Marie Tarrant; BW Brad Woodworth; MW Matt Wright; PW Phyllis Weintraub; CY Chris Young



Marsh Sandpiper, GJ Fuller Oval Lagoon, 17th Feb 2019 (TA)