

Birding Brisbane



Birds and Birdwatching in the River City

Volume 1, Issue 4

Pelagic birding in Brisbane

Greg Roberts has organised a brilliant series of 32 pelagic trips from Mooloolaba over the last eight years, recording an array of nice seabirds. The area of the continental shelf visited during the trips is in Brisbane waters (more on this next month). Highlights include Brown Skua, Long-tailed Jaeger, Red-tailed Tropicbird, Buller's and Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, White-bellied Storm-petrel, Soft-plumaged Petrel, Mottled Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Black Petrel. And best of all, Australia's first Stejneger's Petrel! Greg



Black-bellied Storm-petrel at the continental shelf off Cape Moreton on 3 Jun 2018 (RAF).

is now handing over the reins to Richard Fuller and James Martin, who will try to do justice to the great tradition started by Greg. Keep a look

out—pelagic trip dates will be advertised right here in *Birding Brisbane*.

See Greg's blog at <http://sunshinecoast-birds.blogspot.com>

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Highlights:

- Exhausted Grey Ternlet appears
- Tundra Peregrine at Tinchi Tamba
- Flock of Cockatiels at Anstead
- Historical eBird lists
- Contributing to the Atlas of the Birds of Brisbane
- Go birding in Virginia!
- Grey Teal species account

Bird news, March 2019

Often a good month for passage migrants, this year's March proved to be no exception, with some fantastic birds turning up and others staying on, much to the delight of local birders. The star bird of the month was something of a sad story that unfolded on 9th Mar, when

a Grey Ternlet landed in boat on Moreton Bay off Wynnum. Clearly in some distress, it was taken to a veterinary practice where it was given first aid treatment and then passed to the RSPCA for further care. Sadly the bird had to be euthanized on humane



Grey Ternlet—found exhausted off Wynnum and taken into care on 9th March. Photograph by Lena Chi.

Bird news, continued

grounds due to severe emaciation and anaemia. This is the first record of this pelagic species in Brisbane.

The other great bird of the month was a vagrant *calidus* Peregrine Falcon, recorded at the Tinch Tamba wader roost by Ged Tranter and Rick Franks on the 28th – these birds are a rare visitor to Australia from Siberia, and this is only the second Brisbane record of which we are aware. The first

was also seen at Tinch Tamba on 17th March 2017 (SM). Clearly, it is worth looking carefully at Peregrines!

Let the editors know if you are aware of any further records. Elsewhere the month began strongly, with Australasian Grass-Owl and King Quail at Kedron Brook Wetlands (EL) on the 1st, and a pair of Australian Spotted Crakes at Kianawah Rd (MG), which ended up staying on for the duration of the month.

This was quickly followed by Satin Flycatchers, at Gold Creek Reservoir and Banks Street Reserve (both MGr) – there were several other March records of this species just outside Brisbane, suggesting a strong movement through our region. In fact all four of the possible species of flycatcher in Brisbane were recorded this month; Ged Tranter had two female-type Shining Flycatchers deep in the mangroves at Tinch Tamba on the 24th, and Restless Flycatchers were at Sandy Camp (AB, JCu) and Brookfield (JB, KMc). Leaden Flycatchers were about in good numbers all month.

Also at Sandy Camp this month were White-bellied Cuckooshrike (TN), Black Bittern (AH), an early Yellow-billed Spoonbill (TA), lingering Pacific Swifts and the long-staying Australian Little Bittern. White-bellied Cuck-

ooshrikes and Pacific Swifts were both seen widely around the city this month. Nearby at Kianawah Rd Wet-



This Tundra Peregrine Falcon (subspecies calidus) was at Tinch Tamba on 28th March. Identified by its pale back and long moustachial stripe, it is a rare visitor to Australia, and this appears to be the first documented record in Brisbane (photo: GT).

lands, the Cox's Sandpiper continued to show for the first couple of weeks of the month, but was not seen after 9th (RE). Louis Backstrom also found a Little Wattlebird there on 12th—a site first—and a Little Eagle was seen on 8th (MW). A Black Falcon was nearby

"I was at Anstead Bushland Reserve early on March 13th to hopefully see & photograph the Oriental Cuckoos that had been seen over the previous several days. I was in luck in locating them quite quickly at the lookout area, but the periodic presence of dogs with their owners & other visitors to the lookout seemed to make them nervous & fly off short distances. Another local birder, Mike, had joined me as we waited for the OC return to their favourite set of trees. It was 7.45am & as we chatted, I could hear what sounded like Cockatiels approaching from the west. Suddenly they were there almost overhead of us, just on the edge of the Power lines easement, still calling & I knew straight away that they were Cockatiels. I pointed my camera at the birds to get just 2 silhouette photos of 6 of the birds as they flew quickly past us heading in an easterly direction. Mike reported to me that he saw a further 8 – 12 birds in the flock which would make the flock to be approximately 14 – 18 Cockatiels. (I didn't see the other birds as the camera was up to my face within a flash of sighting them). The encounter lasted < 15 seconds." - Sue Lee

at Hemmant Recreation Reserve on 21st (CA), although as is typical for this species it promptly disappeared.

At the Port of Brisbane, the fantastic summer at the roost got even better, with "Buffy" continuing on for the first ten days, only to disappear for two weeks then reappear on the 30th, the Long-toed Stint reappearing on the



A male Australian Little Bittern performed at Sandy Camp Rd Wetlands before the water levels rose mid-month after rain (TA).

27th and a Wood Sandpiper turning up on the 20th (CA), the first eBird record in Brisbane since 2017. Other good birds at the site this month included Eastern Reef Egret, Black-tailed Godwit and Broad-billed Sandpiper. A Double-banded Plover was at Manly Wader Roost (restricted access) on the 2nd (BW) and 16th (GP, SN, TR) – this winter visitor will increase in numbers over the coming months.

Offshore a couple of Tahiti Petrels, along with a single Flesh-footed and small numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were seen in Brisbane waters on the Mooloolaba pelagic on 24th.

This month also proved to be good further inland, with some much needed rain breathing life into the western suburbs, turning up a few nice species. A Striated Thornbill was a great find at Gold Creek Reservoir on 31st (CB) and a Square-tailed Kite was photographed over Ferny Grove on 31st (CP, SK). A Rufous Songlark put in a brief appearance at Priors Pocket on 30th (RG).

Lake Manchester and Kholo had a run of good birds, with King Quail (RAF), Fuscous Honeyeater (AH, RAF) and Weebill (RG) along with Oriental Cuckoo and Cotton Pygmy-Goose

Bird news, continued

(RG). Indeed, this month has been a phenomenal period for Oriental Cuckoos, with birds turning up at Lake Manchester, Anstead Bushland Reserve and Tinchi Tamba, with most being unusually twitchable. Also at Anstead were a flock of up to 18 Cockatiels on the 13th, with such a large flock unquestionably being wild birds. White-throated Nightjars were recorded from several areas across the city, even as far in as Banks Street Reserve (MG), while Jacky Winters were at a couple of locations near Lake Manchester, suggesting that this species is commoner in Brisbane than previously thought, and perhaps resident. Slightly closer in to the city, Spotted Quail-thrush at Mt Coot-tha (BH) and Mog-gill Conservation Park (CA) were notable records.

Tinchi Tamba had an excellent month, with several fantastic birds being recorded including the aforementioned Oriental Cuckoo and Shining Flycatcher, the New Zealand (*lucidus*) subspecies of Shining Bronze-Cuckoo on 23rd (GT) and 25th (SM), Asian Dowitcher on 19th (CA), Broad-billed Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Australasian Shoveler on 28th (a site first; RF, GT), White-bellied Cuckooshrike and Wedge-tailed Eagle.

Other notable birds around the city this month include a Grey-Crowned Babbler at the airport (perhaps the last remnants of the small population that used to exist along the coast) (AN), a Barn Owl at Herston (TA),



*The green feathers in the crown of this Shining Bronze-cuckoo identify it as the New Zealand subspecies *lucidus*, a scarce passage migrant through Brisbane. This one was photographed by Stephen Murray at Tinchi Tamba on 23rd.*

Spotted Harrier at Oxley Creek Common (GK, S&DW) and Prior's Pocket (CB), Plum-headed Finch also at Oxley Creek Common (HP, PW) and Prior's Pocket (RG, JD, KB, LI), Black-necked Stork (RC) on the 30th at Oxley Creek Common and at Linkfield Rd Gravel Pits on 31st (JW), Cotton Pygmy-Goose at the Boondall Entertainment Centre and a Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove in suburban Tarragindi (CS). Right at the month's end suburbia also scored with a juvenile White-eared Monarch in Woodland Street Park (HA, TA), either indicating a local breeding event or dispersing individual. All in all, a great month!!



This stunning juvenile White-eared Monarch was a brilliant suburban find in Carindale by Hayley and Terence Alexander on 31st (Photo: HA).

Round-up by Louis Backstrom, Richard Fuller and Sandra Gallienne.

Note: As an addendum to the January issue of this newsletter, we would also like to thank Trevor and Esme Ross for independently finding the New Year's Kelp Gull and putting the word out via eBird—brilliant work from all involved!



Yellow-billed Spoonbill is a scarce visitor in the cooler months to Brisbane—this early bird was at Sandy Camp Rd Wetlands on 11th and 12th March, giving good views to those who twitched it (photo: TA).

Site Profile: Jacky Winter Corner (Lake Manchester / Kholo Rd)

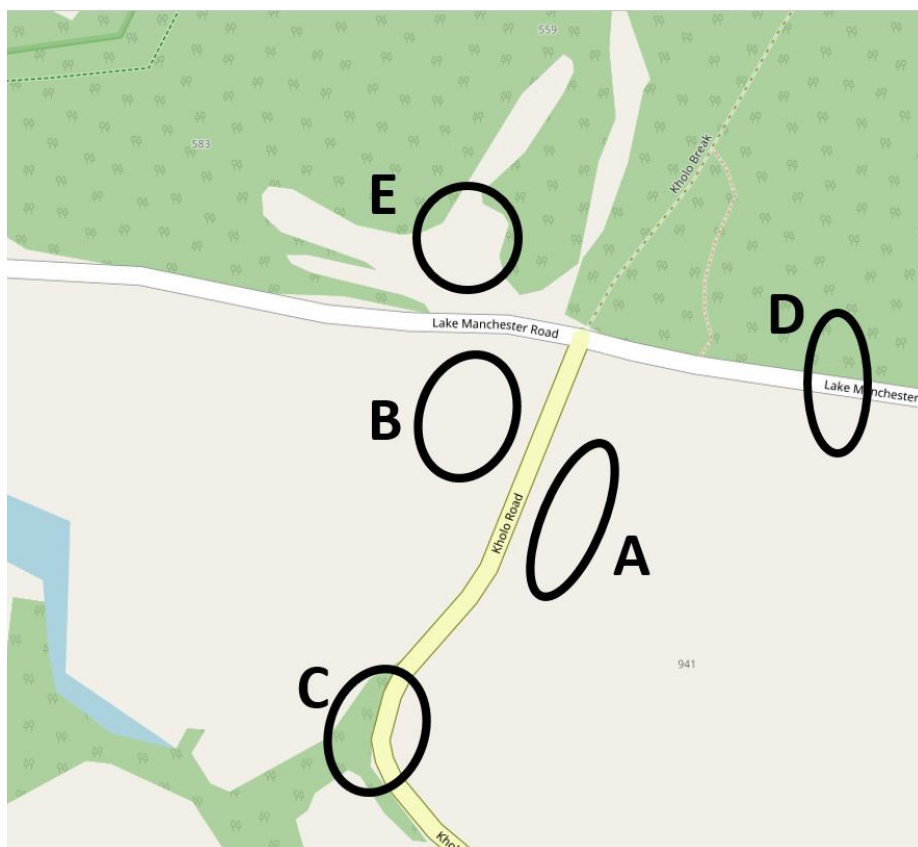
Perhaps Brisbane's most unlikely biodiversity hotspot, the affectionately named Jacky Winter Corner (on eBird as the much more dull "Kholo Rd at Lake Manchester Rd, Kholo") is a remarkable location in the western suburbs, just 5 minutes prior to the turnoff for Lake Manchester and Shelley Rd Park on Lake Manchester Rd.

"Discovered" by birders in mid-2018, thanks to the fantastic sighting of a pair of Jacky Winters at the site in late May by Ged Tranter, this unassuming patch of woodland, paddock and swamp has already notched up quite the list of sought-after bird species.

In addition to the Jacky Winters, which appear to be resident at the site, and are easier to find here than at any other known site in Brisbane (try for them around the area marked A on the map), the other major drawcard for Brisbane birders here are King Quail, which occur in the marshy paddock to the south west of the corner (marked B on the map). The birds are easily heard calling on a still night from the grass, but are much more difficult to spot—especially as access into the paddock is strictly forbidden without permission from the landholder.

Several nocturnal species have been recorded from the corner, including White-throated Nightjar, Australian Owlet-Nightjar, Barn Owl and Southern Boobook. This area, in addition to Lake Manchester and Shelley Rd Park, make up a fantastic region to spot-light nocturnal species in.

The site is also notable for having a wide variety of raptors occasionally recorded soaring overhead, including Square-tailed Kite and Wedge-tailed Eagle, both scarce species within Brisbane.



The 115 species that have been recorded at Jacky Winter Corner—just the intersection of two roads—are testament to the fact that anywhere can be a birding hotspot, and testament to birding off the beaten track every once in a while.

Small creeks (marked C and D on the map) and farm dam (E) also provide slightly different habitat to the open woodland and farmland that dominates this site, and have attracted a handful of waterbirds such as ducks, grebes, herons and the odd Buff-banded Rail and Comb-crested Jacana. LB and RAF once saw a Platypus at (C).

Finally, in addition to all the excellent common species at this site, Jacky Winter Corner has to be one of the best spots in Brisbane for an inland vagrant to turn up, on account of its proximity to the border and the wide variety of habitat available to the prospective mega. *Petroica* robins and rare honeyeaters are both groups to look out for, but anything could turn up!

If ever you're out for a morning's birding at Lake Manchester, Shelley Rd Park or Kholo, you abso-

lutely must stop by this little corner on your way past—the possibilities are truly endless. For the more determined birder, Kholo Break leads north from the corner and could turn up interesting species—who knows what you might find? *Story by Louis Backstrom.*



Jacky Winter at Jacky Winter Corner, 26 May 2018 (RAF).

eBird skills: Entering historical data

Do you have old birding records lying around in notebooks or a spreadsheet gathering dust? Get them into eBird! Historical records help build perspective in the database, and allow us to look farther back in time when conducting analyses. Any user can enter his or her old bird records into eBird by using their regular eBird account and simply changing the date on the data entry form to reflect the correct observation date. It may also be useful to enter data as a proxy for another observer, including those who do not have an account or have passed away. It is possible to have multiple ac-

counts in eBird, so you can create a proxy account on another person's behalf. Ideally, you would use that person's name and make it clear in the checklist comments that the data are being entered by another party

A few things to note:

Make sure that if effort information is available with these old data, that it is entered along with the records. The data will be more significant if there are effort data associated with the bird data, but never make up effort information.

Historical data is commonly missing count information or has only

imprecise counts (e.g., 'present', 'a few', 'hundreds') so please be careful to use an 'x' to indicate presence where appropriate. If the count is a range (e.g., '100-125'), enter the lower number and include the full range in comments.

A real human being must be able to provide supporting details on questionable records entered into the database, so be prepared to be contact by friendly reviewers from time to time!

Visit <http://ebird.org/australia> to get started today, and for more tips and tricks! *Story edited from eBird Help system.*

Mystery photo



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

Last month's challenge was a photograph of a roosting bird. It looks pale greyish, but the torchlight and the hunched up posture of the bird complicate getting a feel for what type of bird it is. But one little feature stands out as a giveaway—the yellowish-green coloration on the secondaries. This should set off alarm bells, and combined with the pale overall coloration gives this away as a Noisy Miner. This bird was roosting beside a track in Oxford Grove Park, Mitchelton.



Noisy Miner, Oxford Grove Park, 21th Jan 2019 (RAF).

Contributing to the *Atlas*

If you can, please donate your time and expertise to help make the *Atlas of the Birds of Brisbane* the best it can be. For full details, see the [Contributing](#) section of the *Atlas* website—<http://brisbanebirds.com>. Here are some of the key things you can do to help create this landmark resource.

Go birdwatching in the Brisbane City Council area and enter your observations on eBird, a free tool

for recording bird observations. All eBird records in Brisbane 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!

Write some text for the *Atlas*, or edit and improve the existing text. Full instructions are in the [Contributing](#) section of the *Atlas* website, or contact an administrator for a Word document that you can edit.

*"All eBird records in Brisbane will be automatically included in the *Atlas*"*

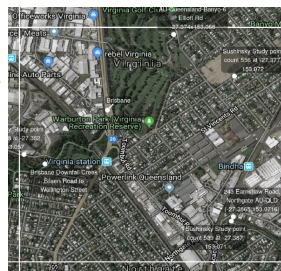
Contact *Atlas* administrators with questions: Louis Backstrom (louis.backstrom@gmail.com) or Richard Fuller

Undersurveyed Atlas Square: Virginia

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.

This Atlas square is an easy target for additional Atlassing, and alt-

hough urbanised there is lots of potential. Key areas of interest are the Virginia Golf Club, paying special attention to areas with tree cover, which is at a premi-



Only 11 complete checklists in this Atlas square.

um in this Atlas square. Warburton Park at the south end of the Golf Course is publicly accessible, and entry to the golf course itself could be negotiated. West of Virginia station, the bush-land along Downfall Creek could yield some interesting species.

Download the survey sheet [here](#).
Story by
Louis Backstrom.

	Complete checklists	Total minutes	Total km		Species	Complete checklists	Incomplete checklists
Summer (Dec-Feb)	1/12	85/120	2.6/1	Tom Tarrant	18	1	0
Autumn (Mar-May)	0/12	0/120	0/1	Tom Mutton	16	1	0
Winter (Jun-Aug)	1/12	127/120	0.8/1	Fuller Lab	13	3	0
Spring (Sep-Nov)	3/12	15/120	0/1	Eric Pilotte	4	0	1
Total	5	227	3.4				

From the Atlas: Grey Teal

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; Common and wide-spread resident and winter visitor. Common resident of wetlands and waterways across Brisbane. More records in winter, suggesting a degree of migratory behaviour, although occurrence fluctuates year-to-year. Breeds during spring and summer. Not of conservation concern. One of Australia's commonest ducks, Grey Teal is a plainly-plumaged species, often difficult to distinguish from the closely-related Chestnut Teal. Grey Teal is gregarious, with counts of up to 350 birds having been reported. The species is widely distributed across the lowlands of Brisbane up to about 150m, and counts of over 200 birds have been reported from 4 locations: Kedron Brook Wetlands, Dowse Lagoon, GJ Fuller Oval Lagoons and Swan Lake at

the Port of Brisbane. Birds breed in Brisbane, and breeding has been reported from 6 locations across the region, with most records being of recently fledged young. Teal are present in Brisbane all year-round, although there is a marked increase in reporting rate over the cooler months from May-September, indicating that this species may be a partial winter immigrant.

Although this species appears somewhat dependent on wetland habitats, which are threatened by modification and destruction, birds appear to be quite well-adapted to artificial environments and well-suited to suburban living. As a result, this species' status within Brisbane appears stable at this time. Nonetheless, care is needed to maintain high quality wetlands, natural or artificial, that are suitable for waterfowl. Of particular importance are the sites this species is most common at, for example Kedron Brook Wetlands, Dowse Lagoon and Prior's Pocket.

Distribution and Habitat

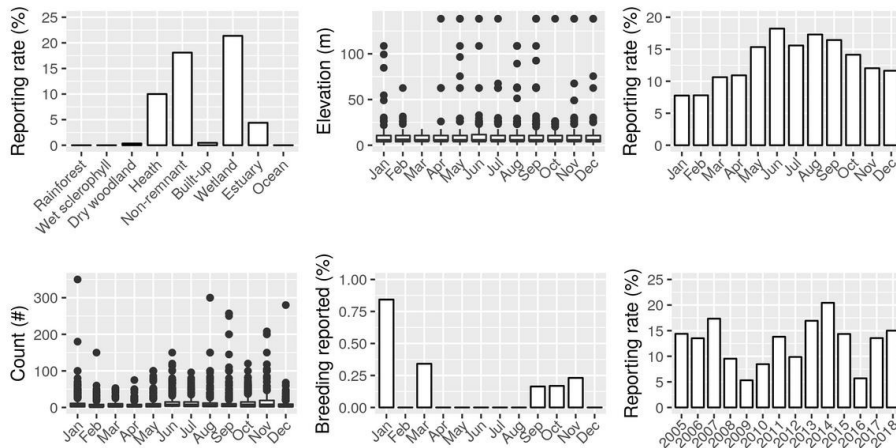
Grey Teal are found all across

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

Brisbane wherever there is water, especially along the Brisbane River and the coastal wetlands of Moreton Bay from Tinchi Tamba in the north to Mookin-Bah in the south. They appear to be more or less absent from the well-forested north west of the region, and are probably best described as uncommon on Moreton Island, although very few data exist for this region of our city. Grey Teal are more or less a lowland species within Brisbane, occurring at a mean elevation of under 20m; the highest records come from the Lake Manchester region, with birds being reported up to 175m in altitude. Their altitudinal distribution is presumably driven by the availability of suitable waterways and wetlands, which are more or less absent in the elevated parts of the city.

Birds have been reported from a wide variety of habitats, but are

From the Atlas continued...



by far the most common in non-remnant and wetland environments, where the reporting rate is approximately 20%. Their geographic distribution across Brisbane is presumably mostly driven by the availability of such habitats. The distribution of Grey Teal within the city shows no clear seasonal variation, with approximately the same areas occupied throughout the year, despite birds being significantly more regularly reported over winter.

Furthermore, this species is known to be highly nomadic, with birds wandering widely in search of water during times of drought. While Brisbane's climate and landscape is vastly different to that found across inland Australia, where this species is widely found, it is likely that Brisbane's population has some connection to the inland birds, and as a result Brisbane's birds may move inland during boom periods of widespread rain and flood. On a more local level, it is likely that birds wander widely across the city in search of optimal habitat, although more fine-scale monitoring is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Seasonality

Grey Teal are quite a seasonally-variable species within Brisbane, being much more common over the cooler months of the year. The reporting rate between May and September is over 15%, while

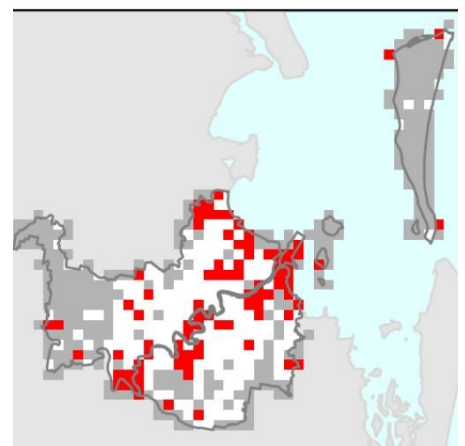
across the rest of the year it is somewhat lower; during January and February birds are only reported on 7.5% of checklists. This indicates that a large proportion of Brisbane's population are migratory, presumably moving outside the Brisbane region in spring and returning in autumn to spend winter near the coast. It is not currently known, however, where the birds go, and how regular this movement is. Given that the breeding season for this species is generally over spring and summer, this indicates that many birds move inland to breed, with only a handful of breeders remaining to breed in Brisbane. Much more work is needed to determine the specific nature of this pattern.

As noted above, Grey Teal are highly nomadic birds, and their distribution typically follows that of recent rainfall. Brisbane's birds have been found to disappear with the advent of rainfall further inland, and birds have been known to move several hundred kilometres in a matter of days following heavy rain. As a consequence of this, the overall distribution and abundance of Grey Teal in Brisbane is likely highly variable, and seasonal patterns of abundance (i.e. birds being on average more regular during winter) are likely a result of long-term climatic trends affecting the movements of this species across the whole of Australia. Clearly, much more work is needed in this area!

There are fewer than 10 confirmed reports of Grey Teal breeding in Brisbane, a low result for such a widely-distributed and common bird. As noted above, this is likely a result of birds typically moving elsewhere to breed, with only a handful of birds remaining in the region over the breeding season, and fewer still choosing to breed here. Breeding has been reported from six locations, widely distributed across the region from Prior's Pocket in the south west to Kedron Brook Wetlands in the north east. It would be good to collect more breeding information about this species within Brisbane, and conduct some specific surveys for this species over spring and summer to determine how many birds do breed, and if prevailing climatic conditions inland affect these numbers.

Trends

As would be expected for such a strongly-nomadic and likely migratory bird, the annual reporting rate for Grey Teal in Brisbane has been highly variable over the *Atlas* period, with some years having birds being reported on 20% of checklists and others as low as 5%. Of note were the years 2009 and 2016, where birds were reported on just 5% of checklists in each year. 2016 was characterised by well-above-average rainfall across



From the Atlas continued...

the majority of inland Australia and drier-than-usual conditions in south east Queensland, suggesting that Brisbane's birds may have moved inland for much of the year to capitalise on favourable conditions. 2009, on the other hand, was a more varied year, with south east Queensland receiving slightly below average levels of rainfall, most of inland Australia record significantly below average levels but the Gulf of Carpentaria receiving very large quantities of rain, as much as 200% of the annual average. It is therefore possible that Brisbane's birds moved north during the wet season to make the most of conditions there.

Such nomadic movements are well-known in the literature, as discussed above, and Brisbane's birds have been found to move outside the region during periods of heavy inland rain, suggesting that great variation in annual abundance is not unusual. It would, however, be good to quantitatively assess the nature of such movements, and to determine where Brisbane's birds go when they move outside the region. Nomadic birds may be understudied compared to species which are regular migrators or resident, and it is likely Grey Teal, given their significant levels of nomadism, are affected by this phenomenon; the true extent and nature of their dispersal from Brisbane to broader Australia is almost certainly very poorly understood.

Grey Teal are not of any significant conservation concern in the sense that Brisbane's population is rather peripheral to the main distribution of the species in Australia, and the overall population appears to be fairly stable over time. However, anthropogenic climate change is likely to significantly impact this species' survival, both in Brisbane and across Australia. As the climate warms and dries, birds will likely be restricted more

and more to localised sources of permanent water, rather than being able to survive in a boom-or-bust manner on temporary waterholes across inland Australia. As such, the distribution and abundance of this species, both within Brisbane and more broadly across Australia, should be monitored closely for any signs of population declines.

Information Gaps

- Confirm whether Brisbane's birds move inland during favourable conditions
- Determine the extent of any regular migratory behaviour in this species
- Determine the key motivators behind this species' movements throughout the country and within Brisbane
- Determine whether Brisbane's birds move around locally, and what factors affect their local distribution
- Collect more breeding information for this species within Brisbane
- Understand what proportion of birds move inland or elsewhere to breed and what proportion remain in Brisbane

Key Conservation Needs

- Monitor the species' population across Australia for any declines
- Protect this species' habitat at key sites within Brisbane

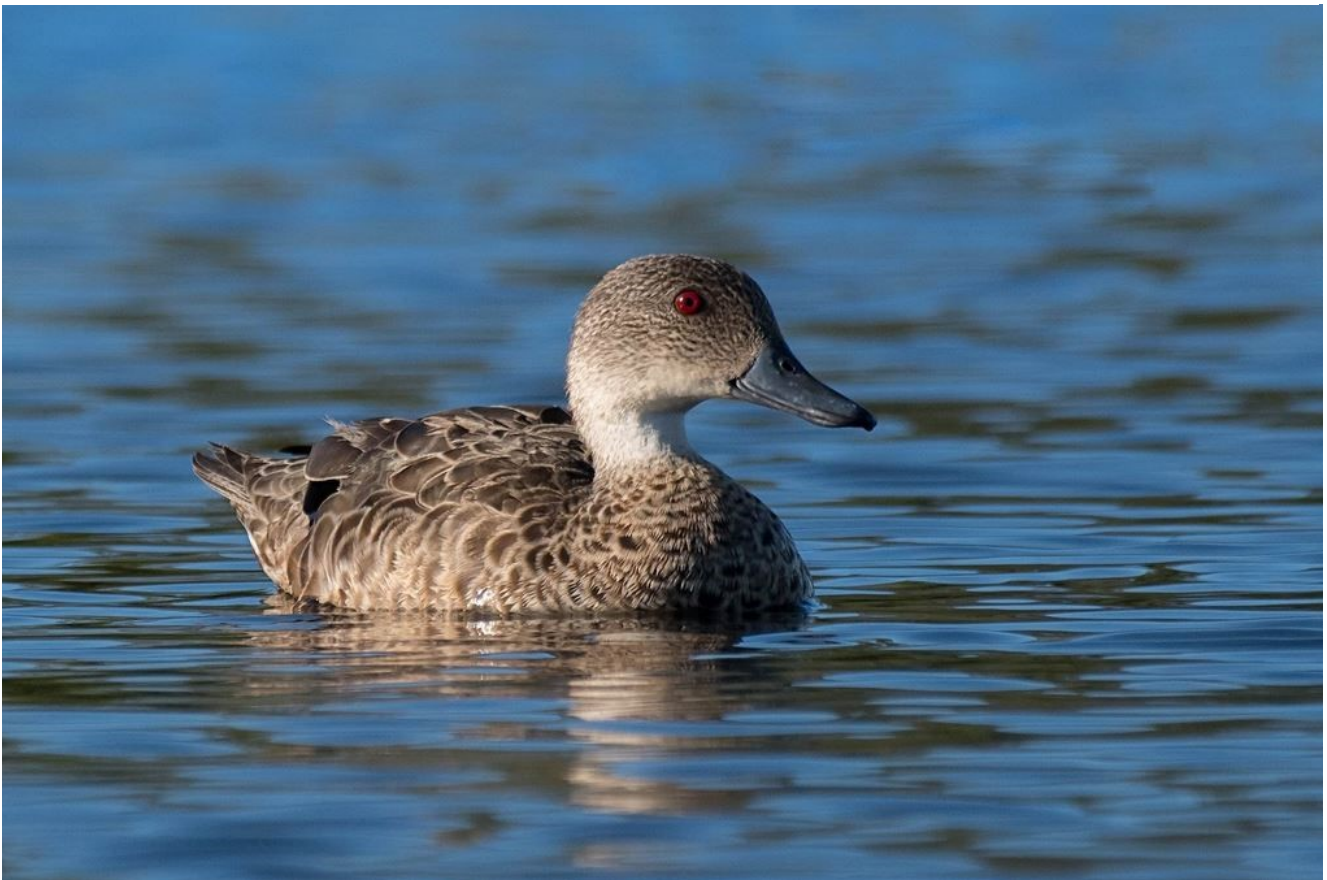
Contributors to Species Account

- Louis Backstrom

From the Atlas continued...



Grey Teal, above: Kedron Brook Wetlands, 5 Jun 2018 (GT); below: GJ Fuller Oval Lagoons, 17 Feb 2019 (TA).



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)

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Derek Whitehead; TA Terence Alexander; TN Tim Norris; TR Tina Rider



Golden Whistler, Woodland St Park, Carindale, 31 Mar 2019 (HA)