

## The Village Birders

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### G'Day Mate! Seen Any Birds?

*Birding Australia by Eric and Ruth Wigg*

Wow! Double wow! Did we see birds! A total of 130 species! Our three-week trip to tropical Australia far exceeded our expectations. We had been dreaming of a birding trip "Down Under" for several years and our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary provided the ideal occasion. With the aid of the internet we compiled an itinerary taking us to five birding hot spots.

While staying at a wildlife resort in Queensland's Atherton Tablelands, an area of lush farmland and rain forest, we were able to see exotic birds right from our verandah. Imagine having a male and female bird of paradise (Victoria's Riflebird) fly onto your railing to have a taste of banana! The more secretive forest birds we enjoyed by listening to their calls. Hiking the local trails and birding in wetlands and nearby town parks gave us views of many new birds like the Rainbow Lorikeet, King-Parrot, Forest Kingfisher, Plumed Whistling-Duck and Golden Whistler.



**Blue-winged Kookaburra**

The Collared Kingfisher, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove and Grey-crowned Babbler were added to our list, along with many others.

Then it was off to the outback where mile after mile there was no sign of human habitation, only open woodland, flood plain and termite mounds. Birding was great at Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) and Kakadu National Parks. We got excellent looks at the Blue-winged Kookaburra, the Blue-faced honeyeater and the pink Galah Cockatoo. The concentration of water birds at Fogg Dam, our last stop, was truly amazing. The huge Black-necked Stork, Pied Heron, Comb-crested Jacana, Yellow Oriole, Crimson Finch and Rufous-banded Honeyeater were among the notables here.

The Daintree National Park on the Coral Sea in north Queensland was our next stop, with more rain forest birding as well as seashore. The excitement of seeing our first Rainbow Bee-eater was probably the highlight there with a glimpse of the rare ostrich-like Southern Cassowary a close second. Then there was the Olive-backed Sunbird, Welcome Swallow, Straw-necked Ibis and Red-capped Plover to name a few of the others identified.

A flight from Cairns to Darwin in the Northern Territory provided locales for more new birds as well as good views of birds we had seen in Queensland. Darwin environs had several great birding spots including a spacious botanical garden filled with tropical trees, flowers and plantings.



**Blue-faced Honeyeater**

Seeing and photographing different kinds of parrots, cockatoos, honeyeaters, finches, etc. in the wild was truly exciting. It was also fun to note the variation in water birds compared to the ones we know. For an experience of a lifetime, we heartily recommend birding "Down Under".

## In Praise of Poultry

This season of holidays seems the right time to explore another variety of bird, poultry. That term usually refers to birds domesticated to provide meat, eggs and perhaps feathers to their human keepers. There are a few other uses, as we shall note.

The modern agribusiness system of production of eggs and meat certainly would concern even the least empathetic of person and that won't be a topic of discussion today. Instead we will concentrate on the farmyard varieties of chickens, turkeys, ducks and a few others.

Chickens are of world wide nutritional value. They provide eggs and the second most consumed meat (tasty goat is #1). They are productive in all phases and easy to raise. All chickens descend from the Junglefowl. As is his wont, man has selectively bred birds to fill his needs. Some are meaty, some prolific layers, some extra broody and some just pretty. There are 437 recognized breeds of chicken ranging from the 15-17 lb. Wyandotte to the 1-2 lb. bantam group. Chickens have one extra feature - they are amusing. Watching them hustle about is as amusing as most sit-coms.

Eggs vary in size and color - both are genetic characteristics. The Aracauna, a South American breed, lays eggs of pink, green, blue and gold. They are close to the Junglefowl and prefer to roost in trees and forage for their food.

Ducks are an equally valuable domestic bird, especially in Indo-Asia. The white Pekin duck (à la *Donald* and *Aflac*) has been bred for bountiful breast meat while the Khaki Campbell can lay as many as 365 protein rich eggs a year. Duck feathers are collected for quilts and clothing. Plus, ducks are charming.

Geese are purported to be silly birds but they hold an equal place with Steve Jobs in the world of communication. They were domesticated to provide the quills with which to write. Monasteries bred and raised their own flocks to provide quills of acceptable quality for their glorious hand copied books.

Turkeys, our own North American bird, must be mentioned. 'Tis the season! They have only been domesticated a few hundred years and aren't as adapted to confinement. Raising them is a trickier business than chickens or ducks. In an earlier column I mentioned a feral response to birds. A disturbed tom turkey, tail extended, feathers raised, wattles and comb angry red, stamping his well spurred legs can remind us all of North America not so long ago. One can almost hear tom toms.

Possibly ostrich and Emu should be included as they are farmed for meat, leather and oil. It is just hard for me to consider these ornery birds as domestic.

Over the upcoming holidays whether enjoying wings at the Super Bowl, turkey dinner for Thanksgiving, scrambled eggs with the family or cuddling under a warm quilt, thank our birds in all their variety.

Lyn Comans

## 2010 Christmas Bird Count

The 2010 CBC will be held on December 14, 2010. This is a major event and requires all available manpower to help count birds. No prior birding experience is required, as we do need record-keepers with each birding team. Please sign up early so the CBC coordinator can make team assignments. Contact Barbara Gay, co-leader, at 751-6069 or [stkite@triton.net](mailto:stkite@triton.net). There will be refreshments at the Blue House, Sunnyhill Farm at the conclusion of the count. A required contribution of \$5 will go to the National Audubon Society to cover costs of CBC administration and for the 2010 CBC magazine you will all receive.

Barb Gay

## Rare Groove-Billed Ani Sighting



**John Affleck** and **Al Rousch** decided to chase after the Groove-Billed Ani rarity that was reported on the La Chua Trail near Gainesville in late October. They arrived at the trail at about 8 am in the fog and walked about 1.5 miles to the observation tower where the bird WAS RIGHT THERE.

## November and December Events

During November we will be visiting Wood Duck Drive, Ocklawaha Prairie, and Ponce Inlet. The monthly meeting on November 27 will feature Jim Dinsmore presenting "Birding the Galapagos Islands".

December trips will include visits to Carney Island, Bear's Head, and Citrus County landfill.

For details of these events see the Calendar of Events for October 2010 to January 2011 which was included in the September issue of *Cheep Talk* and is also available at [www.villagebirders.org/tripsOct10toJan11.pdf](http://www.villagebirders.org/tripsOct10toJan11.pdf)

The next *Cheep Talk* is scheduled for January 15, 2011. Keep sending your birding experiences and photos. This and previous issues of *Cheep Talk* are available on our website in color.

Best wishes to all for a happy and healthy holiday season.

### Cheep Talk

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# Summer Birding Around

This is your column. Here you will find interesting birding stories, sightings, etc. submitted by members. Send your short item to [CheepTalk@Xemaps.com](mailto:CheepTalk@Xemaps.com).

**Alice Horst and Kris St. Germain** visited many places within a one and a half-hour drive of The Villages. Withlacoochee State Forest and Chinsegut Nature Center have always been wonderful for spring birding and did not disappoint in July. "We saw Blue-headed, Yellow-throated, Red-eyed, and White-eyed Vireos, Scarlet Tanagers, Woodpeckers, Towhees, and more. We sat at the Chinsegut Nature Center picnic tables and watched Sandhill Cranes eating from bird feeders along with Chickadees and Cardinals and spotted Blue Grosbeaks on our drive home.

"At Alexander Springs in Ocala National Forest we heard Yellow-billed Cuckoos and saw many young Carolina Wrens and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. There were not many birds in July. Enroute to the picnic tables at Mill Dam Recreation Area we saw Towhees, juvenile Northern Parulas, Carolina Wrens, and Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers. Outside the entrance to Juniper Springs Recreation Area we found some American Kestrels.

"During August we saw Mississippi Kites soaring overhead at Kanapaha Gardens in Gainesville." Soon after this trip Alice saw The Villages' first ever Mississippi Kite soaring over the fields near the VA Hospital off of CR 42 behind Publix.

"In Hernando County on Kettering Road we searched for Burrowing Owls. We saw many Meadowlarks, Kestrels and other raptors, but no Owls. At Linda Pederson Park we saw Manatees and at Brooksville Cemetery we saw Yellow-throated Warblers and Northern Parulas. On the way home we encountered 25 Swallow-tail Kites on CR 229 off of CR 466, just above us. WOW, is that something!



**Barred Owl at Mead Garden**

Incredible! At Sabal Bluff, in Leesburg we saw many Northern Parulas, American Redstarts, Prairie, Hooded, Worm-eating, and Yellow-throated Warblers, Red-eyed, Blue-headed, and Yellow-throated Vireos, Great-crested Flycatchers and Eastern Wood-Pewees. FALL migration had begun!"

**Barb Gay** reported on the beginnings of the migration in early September. She saw: Sanderling, Semipalmated Plover, ten American Golden Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Baird's Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Pectoral

Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher and 27 Wilson's Phalarope along with Eared Grebe, Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler and American Redstart. Barb's daughter **Beth (Shalow)** was treated to thousands of migrating Common Nighthawks while sitting out on her deck in the evening. "I've only seen this once and I was jealous - it's quite a sight. As I was typing this I saw a commotion in the bushes behind my porch. I get many different birds in there as it is great cover and there are berries and seeds galore. Among the mixture of usual suspects were five House wrens, at least that's what I was able to count. The number of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds has increased over the last two weeks and I now have four feeders up with lot's of drinking and chasing."

**Al Rousch** found that a northern Minnesota flock of fishing Common Mergansers is a joy to watch during the late summer and early fall. "Groups of forty or more mergansers will team-up and slowly work calm water shallow bays



**Common Merganser**

hunting for minnows. The hunt starts by the group assuming a C shape formation, which moves forward with the mouth of C in front so it will trap the minnows inside where all members of the team can feed on them. They all also swim forward with their heads underwater scanning for their prey. Then, BOOM, they all dive

into the C for a feeding frenzy. After a minute or so of feeding, the C forms again for another try. I watched one large group cover most of a 30-acre bay while I was eating lunch on a huge rock overlooking the bay. Better than the movies."

In June as **John and Pat Affleck** were driving into the old farm lane that leads to their summer cottage in Port-Daniel, Québec an incredible color of blue flashed past the windshield. John had never witnessed a Bluebird there. After unpacking the car, he grabbed his bins and headed out to the backyard to confirm that indeed, it was a Bluebird, and not just one, but a pair. Furthermore, they had taken up residence in a little bird box he had placed on a wooden, pastoral pole, which supports a fence. John Burroughs wrote in 1880 "The Bluebird enjoys the preeminence of being the first hint of color that cheers our northern landscape." "I personally have always been captured by its burst of blue and now it joined the ever-present lupine as a harbinger of spring.

"My cousins pointed out to me earlier in the year that there was no ice on the Bay de Chaleur this past winter. Mockingbirds, Turkey and Black Vultures visiting Hopetown, Shigawake and Port-Daniel? Mon Dieu! Was Florida coming to the Gaspé? Now Bluebirds? Could it be?

"Interestingly, the Bluebird is only found on the North American Continent and not in England, but we all get the important message that its image is a universal one of love and hope.

"So, I guess the saying, "if you build it they will come" has a ring of truth to it."

## Cuban Émigré

A Pewee was seen in south Florida,  
A Cuban, was he, a rarity!  
Not the usual kind that we usually find  
but quite a different variety.

I was packing to visit friends in the North.  
I was sorry I had to leave.  
Would he possibly stay, 23 extra days,  
So I could see him in Miami?

Birdbrains reported most every day  
That the Cuban Pewee was there.  
He was still being seen within the same trees.  
A long way from Cuba, quite rare.

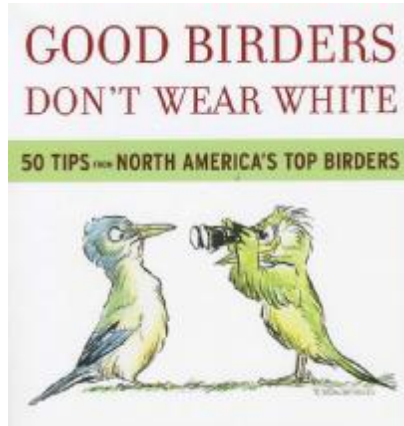
I drove to the Park as fast as I could  
And met others birders searching.  
The Cuban arrived and to my surprise  
A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was perching .

So, don't give up when you go chase a bird.  
Sometimes we get really lucky!  
Since I persisted, on that day I listed  
both Flycatcher and Cuban Pewee.

Alice Horst

## Dress for Success

A few years back, Lisa White compiled and edited 50 short articles by top birders, each providing a tip on some aspect of the sport. The resulting book, "Good Birders Don't Wear White", is worth a look by anyone seeking to improve his or her birding skills. In the article from which the title is taken, Sheri Williamson reminds us that some bird species are sensitive to certain colors. Specifically, forest dwelling birds tend to notice and react negatively to (that is, fly away from) very light or bright colors.



This is a good thing to keep in mind when you are preparing for a bird walk with the Village Birders. If we're going to be birding for perching birds (and almost all of our walks spend at least some time searching the bushes and trees), you'll help yourself and the club by wearing appropriately dark and subdued clothing. I like dark greens and tans, but navy blues and dark grays are just fine. Save the bright red windbreakers and the white or yellow shirts for the golf course.

I know it's hard for some people with good fashion sense to dress drab (they might say ugly), but it makes good birding sense, and is the easiest way to see more birds in less time.

Paul Nistico

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