

TOOWOOMBA BIRD OBSERVERS

NEWSLETTER

TO ENCOURAGE THE OBSERVATION AND STUDY OF THE BIRDS OF THE TOOWOOMBA AREA

DECEMBER 2024

EDITION 507

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<div>PLEASE CONTACT THE LEADER IF YOU WISH TO ATTEND</div> <div>HAPPY NEW YEAR</div> <div></div>																											

MID-WEEK WALK

WEST CREEK

Date: Wednesday 8th January 2025

Leader: Charles Dove

Time: 8:00 am

Meet location: West Creek - Cnr Lemway Ave & Marwedel St
Kearneys Spring
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/neCMpVu4ZGHsJAr8>

Approx 2 & 3km - BYO morning tea

Other details: Moderate walking. ***Closed footwear required.*** In the event of inclement weather contact the leader. *Facilities at this location.*

RSVP: To Charles Dove by 12:00 noon Tuesday 7th January 2025
Txt 0417 422 302 or email powerart@bigpond.net.au

DECEMBER MIDWEEK WALK

Dingo Mountain, Crows Nest, Wednesday 11th December

by Kathy Bowly

Only the brave or the foolhardy were enticed out for the December midweek walk at Dingo Mountain Reserve, Crows Nest, but we were well rewarded with a beautiful, almost untouched environment glistening with raindrops. On arrival, after driving out from Toowoomba in persistent drizzle and fog, the weather eased and by the time everyone had arrived the rain had stopped. And the little birds were flitting and singing about high in the treetops, but the overcast glare was an impediment for both watchers and photographer alike.

The first call to come to our attention was the clear descending trill of the Brush Cuckoo but it remained unseen for a while. As we began our walk into the reserve, we came across a small number of Leaden Flycatcher and in their midst was the Brush Cuckoo. The Leaden Flycatcher is one of the bird species whose nest the Brush Cuckoo parasitises.

A pair of Rufous Whistler were seen briefly and the White-throated Gerygone could be heard as we moved further into the reserve. As we approached the picnic area, a pair of Olive-backed Orioles were spied in the distant trees and flitted around the area for a short while.



Leaden Flycatcher by Charles Dove



Photo collage by Kathy Bowly

On the way out, we again came across the Leaden Flycatchers who were getting upset with a rather unmoved Australian Magpie. They were persistently dive bombing the “maggie” but it remained pretty unmoved.

While the birdlife was a little elusive, there was plenty of other things to capture our attention from flowering plants such as wattle and gums, rice flowers and hibbertia, purple fringe lily and many grass trees. There were quite a few different fungi popping up with the wet weather and plenty of insect life. Of interest were also the many nesting boxes in the trees which have been placed by the CNCS who have conducted surveys throughout the reserve.

Our final bird for the morning were the cheeky Grey Fantails which flitted nearby the path as we made our ways to the cars.

A great morning in a beautiful environment with enjoyable company- a lovely chance to get out after a few wet days and always a learning opportunity with Charles, thankyou.

Dingo Mountain - Crows Nest QLD 11/12/2024		6 members & friends	24 species
Crested Pigeon	Laughing Kookaburra	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Olive-backed Oriole
Masked Lapwing	White-throated Treecreeper	Noisy Miner	Grey Fantail
Galah	Superb Fairy-wren	Pied Currawong	Magpie Lark
Rainbow Lorikeet	White-throated Gerygone	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Torresian Crow
Shining Bronze-cuckoo	Brown Thornbill	Rufous Whistler	Leaden Flycatcher
Brush Cuckoo	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Australasian Figbird	Welcome Swallow

Reflections on the Bird Drawing and Poetry Competition 2024

by Charles Dove

THE FAIRY WREN

by Peter Frazer

Don't you love the little Fairy Wren
As he hops to and fro
Seeking out those insects
In the brushes thick and low.



Meeting with Peter Frazer, Bush Poet President, in August 2024 was a great pleasure and inspired me to create a little something for the schools. Peter had been trying to introduce poetry into the schools for a while and showed me a couple of his thoughts in words and pictures.

This is something that I was familiar with as in the latest book I published, “Redwood Park: Toowoomba’s Wildlife Treasure”, I incorporated a number of naive poems to reflect on the images throughout the book.

Something has caught my sight
Oh! what a delight
Sitting on a flower so bright
Yes, it is a Caper White

By Charles Dove



So with thoughts in my head now being viewed as a way to encourage the school children and schools to take an interest in this, I thought a competition may be the way to go. So with the assistance of a few friends, the idea of a Bird Drawing and Poetry competition began.

I set about and created a preliminary entry form and continued discussions with the owner of the Engine Room Cafe in Railway Street, where Toowoomba Bird Observers have their birds and wildlife exhibition. He generously offered the area to run the competition and would be happy to donate funding for the prizes as well. I then approached my friend Mick Atzeni, president of Toowoomba Bird Observers, to see if the club would be interested into taking on the competition and to oversee it. He agreed to discuss the idea with the committee, and it was agreed upon. Further to this, the TBO also generously offered a donation towards the prize fund as well.

I continued to review and update the prizes along with designing the competition entry form and the conditions page that needed to be added. I downloaded the list of state schools in the Toowoomba Region and then with the assistance of a couple of club members, Tony & Jennie, we sorted the list into email addresses for each school. Finally on October 2nd, emails were sent to the all-junior state schools in the Toowoomba region with the ages 6 years old to 12 years old being eligible to enter the competition.

I assembled a box for the entry forms, and just in time, as the first entry arrived next morning - a very keen entrant from Crows Nest. Over the next week, I received numerous questions from different schools and was delighted to hear that Poetry was part of the end of year exams for most schools. Good and not so good as the exams proved to be a bit of a hiccup with the school's priority being placed on the exams rather than the competition.

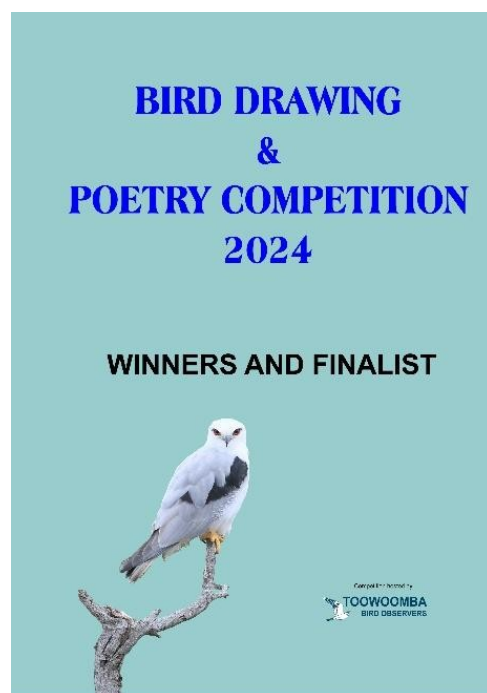
After a very slim response of entries arriving, I phoned a few schools which made me realise the situation, so I offered extended the deadline by a week. This certainly made a difference with over 200 entries arriving in the next week. I had arranged with the two independent judges and presenters, artist Kim Simmons and bush poet Peter Frazer, for the contest deadline to be extended, with judging day on 24th November and the presentation day on 30th November. Things were getting tight. I then received a message from a local school asking if they could bring in their entries on Monday 26th, so under the circumstances, with the exams, I agreed and asked Peter and Kim to do a preliminary judging of the various age groups and wait until Monday to do a final judgement.

Monday arrived and we received the final entries and had it all sorted before lunch. Now it was time to make the certificates which I managed to do in a couple of hours. Whilst this was happening, I had asked Anne Alcock to see if she could purchase the various vouchers. I was originally to phone the parents to see which gift voucher would be suitable for their child, but this was no longer possible. We now had to purchase them as a gift card to use, but unfortunately the cost factor was at face value and I had to supply Anne with extra funding to purchase the cards. Still not as easy as it sounds (Sorry Anne) - it seems you are limited to the quantity you can purchase at one time and must stipulate for each card the amount. One and half hours later Anne managed to get through the checkout.

Finally with the certificates all printed along with the gift cards, we were nearly there but a message from one of the parents about the spelling of their child's name needed fixing. Fortunately there was only one - the entry forms were not that easy to read from the younger kids, anyway all fixed now. As part of the presentations to the 15 winners, over and above the gift voucher and certificate, maybe a little something else for all the finalist could be added. Yes, I could do that, make up a book with all the finalist entries of their Drawing and Poem with their placing and including an index and cover. I checked out the prices from my printer and it worked out fine but the time frame would not make it possible. I then checked Officeworks, a bit much, but the timing would be OK. Thinking I could get one copy printed and email the copy to the parents, my son informed me that you need specific criteria and permissions to print and email kids drawings and names.

So I phoned all the parents for their permission and 6 hours later, all was well. I went down the road and had a copy of the book printed whilst I waited - it looked good. Anyway another twist in this as I was showing the book to my friend, Peter at the Engine Room, his friend who was sitting opposite asked I what was I going to do with the book. I explained and the conversation proceeded on how many kids and what was the cost of each book. He thought for a moment and then he said we will pay for the book. I grabbed my USB stick which had the copy of the book on it and rushed down to Officeworks who agreed to print it ready for pick up on Friday, the day before the presentation.

On Friday afternoon I collected the books and asked if I could get three more - no hope the printer had broken down. Oh well! Wow, not easy to keep focused at this stage as the chairs had not arrived and I needed to set up the staging area along with a two TVs hooked up to my laptop!



Saturday, I went down early to the Engine Room, the chairs had arrived, but I had forgotten to bring another lead needed to hook the TVs up. "Call a friend" and yes, Tony had what I needed and would bring it along. All set up and sorted - the certificates, gift cards and books set up just needed to sync them with the manual slideshow.

Saturday afternoon arrived along with torrential rain. Parents and kids were arriving with Janina, Tony, Jennie and Kathryn meeting and organising them with the seating arrangements. I had previously purchased a few colouring books and pencils to occupy the brothers and sisters of the finalist which did help. I received a couple of messages that a few were running late due to the weather. A slight delay was needed.

With everyone in place and waiting for the presentation and the kids getting restless, I was asked to put on one of my slide shows, so I opened up the Birds of Toowoomba video which included the bird calls and with the volume now on maximum there was plenty of encouragement from the audience - all was well!

After around 15 minutes the latecomers arrived. I stopped the video and with some small preliminaries, I introduced Poet Peter to take care of the proceedings. After a short speech by Peter and Kim, we finally started presentations and finished with the 24 certificates presented by Artist Kim Simmons, Bush Poet President Peter Frazer and Councillor Trevor Manteufel.

Councillor Trevor Manteufel gave a final encouraging response saying the competition should be continue next year and in years to follow as it brought together many communities, especially the small schools, in the Toowoomba Region. His suggestion is it might need a grant to help in the future.

A project of so many unforeseen tasks in such a short time I really find it hard to believe that it happened. It would not have happened without all the background support from members of Toowoomba Bird Observers – to them A BIG THANK YOU - and even though each of you may say it was not much for you to do, it did help me to remain focused and to complete something, that at times, I nearly thought could not be done.

"The most rewarding moment for me was looking at well over 120+ people, both adults and children, during the presentation with so many smiles of enjoyment from the very happy and proud parents looking at their happy children receiving their certificates etc." Charles Dove.



Peter Frazer, Trevor Manteufel, Charles Dove and Kim Simmons.

What's Happening in Williams Park, Highfields

Text and Photos by Tony Bond

Walking in Williams Park lately, it's noticeable how many Spangled Drongos there are. Normally one or two can be seen towards the northern end (Reis Road) but they've also been active close to the southern end (Scout hut) lately.

On a recent stroll I saw two adult pairs building new nests. I also watched a third pair going back and forth to another nest from where the small black head of a single chick occasionally looked out. Their nests are usually precariously located near the end of long spindly branches. Since then, we've had a couple of days of heavy rain and wind so I wondered how they had fared.

One nest had gone completely, while another had one adult sitting in residence. The third, the one with the chick, had obviously been battered by the storm. No longer a nest, it was a hanging jumble of twigs but still attached to the tree branch. I had no problem seeing the chick this time. In fact, two quite large chicks were sitting atop of the jumbled remains while the two parents took turns to feed them. It's amazing how they manage to stay there but I hope they learn to fly before the next storm.



The Powerful Owl is still around too. On one occasion he was in, what I believe, is one of his favourite feeding spots. He was holding a ring-tailed possum and the fern beneath was sprinkled with white droppings.



BIRD OF THE MONTH

Text courtesy of <https://www.birdsinbackyards.net>

Superb Fairy-wren Scientific Name: *Malurus cyaneus*

Atlas Number: 529

What does it look like?

Description: Adult male Superb Fairy-wrens are among the most brightly coloured of the species, especially during the breeding season. They have rich blue and black plumage above and on the throat. The belly is grey-white and the bill black. Females and young birds are mostly brown above with dull red-orange area around the eye and a brown bill. Females have a pale greenish gloss, absent in young birds, on the otherwise brown tail. The legs are brown in both sexes. Males from further inland and in the south-west of the range have more blue on the back and underparts.



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Similar species: Several other species of fairy-wren are found in Australia. The males of each species are quite distinct, but the females and young birds are often difficult to separate. Of the species that overlap in range with the Superb Fairy-wren, the female White-winged Fairy-wren *Malurus leucopterus* and Red-backed Fairy-wren *M. melanocephalus* lacks the chestnut colour around the eye, while the female Variegated Fairy-wren *M. lamberti* has a dull grey-blue wash. Both the Superb and White-winged Fairy-wrens are similar in size. The Variegated Fairy-wren is slightly larger in size and has a longer tail.

Where does it live?

Distribution: Superb Fairy-wrens are found south of the Tropic of Capricorn through eastern Australia and Tasmania to the south-eastern corner of South Australia.

Habitat: Seen in most habitat types where suitable dense cover and low shrubs occur. They are common in urban parks and gardens, and can be seen in small social groups. These groups normally consist of one dominant male and several females and young birds.



Photo: Kathy Bowly

What does it do?

Feeding:

Superb Fairy-wrens feed on insects and other small arthropods. These are caught mostly on the ground, but may also be taken from low bushes. Feeding takes place in small social groups.

Breeding:

The nest is a dome-shaped structure of grasses and other fine material. It is usually placed in a low bush and is constructed by the female. The female incubates the eggs alone, but both sexes feed the young. Other members of the group will also help with the feeding of the young.

Did you know?

Male Superb Fairy-wrens have been labelled as 'the least faithful birds in the world'. Females may be courted by up to 13 males in half an hour, and 76% of young are sired by males from outside the social group.

Calls

The Superb Fairy-wren gives a series of high pitched trills, which are given by both sexes. The male often extends these trills into song.

LINKS OF INTEREST

A new generation of Bird watchers

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-12-08/birdwatching-photography-attracting-new-demographic/>

While there was not much good news associated with the COVID pandemic, one positive aspect was the community interest in nature with people not being able to go much further than their local neighbourhood. Now more young people are connecting with nature and indulging in the joy of birdwatching. Here are some of their stories.

Understanding bird migration

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/oct/28/high-flying-life-of-australias-birds-revealed-in-new-detail-thanks-to-weather-radars>

The patterns of bird migration maybe an important consideration in the location of wind farms especially along the east coast of Australia.

Birds are changing their size and shape to cope with climate change

<https://theconversation.com/shrinking-wings-bigger-beaks-birds-are-reshaping-themselves-in-a-warming-world>

As the climate continues to warm, the body size of birds are getting smaller while appendages such as beaks, wings and tails are getting bigger. Check out how these changes may help with survival.

How cuckoos trick other birds

<https://www.livescience.com/how-cuckoos-trick-birds>

We have probably all been hearing the Channel-billed Cuckoo and the Eastern Koel lately as they have arrived for the breeding season. As a brood parasite, how do they trick the other birds into bringing up their young?

