



THE CAIRNS FROGMOUTH

All correspondence to: info@cairnsbirders.com
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*As we take our next step, let us remember the
First People to walk this land.*

Cairns Birders is a group of people who share common interests. We are not a club. There is no leader. Those joining in any outings/activities are expected to follow the 'common space' expectations and do so at their own risk. NO trespassing on habitat or private property.

EVENTS:

Check for updates [HERE](#)

Sunday 20th September	8am	Rifle Creek then Abattoir Swamp Meet at Rifle Creek Rest Area, Mt Molloy
Tuesday - every week	7:30	Friends' House , Botanic Gardens, Collins Ave, Cairns
Sunday 27th Sept	8:00	Springvale Rd, Wondecla
Sunday 4th October	7:30	Centenary Lakes
Sunday 11th October	7:30	JCU TBA
Cairns Birders' Epic Excursion	October 2026	TANZANIA FULL

ONLINE SHOP

Cairns Birders merchandise

Look for sales!

All designs are available as car stickers, caps, T-shirts, cushions, aprons, telephone covers and many many other options.

All profits from sales of images displaying "Cairns Birders" go to Cairns Birders for miscellaneous expenses. [Redbubble Store](#)

Art by Yorz Trooley



This day started the day before—for some of us at least—as we joined Doug and his family for some stargazing with Ian from Night Sky. We gathered on private property right at the end of Kay Road, where a few of us camped and birded before the evening activities began. We managed to spot some great birds, including the **Weebill**, **Red-backed Fairywren**, **Little Lorikeets** and **White-throated Gerygone**. Flimsy patches of cloud did not deter Ian, whose passion for astronomy and deep knowledge of the night sky were on full display. Nebulas, clusters, binary systems, satellites, light-years, planets... but don't mention astrology... Pah! It was an excellent night.



Olive-backed Oriole

Scott Ritchie

The next morning, we met the rest of the group at the beginning of Kay Road. It was already quite windy, which always makes life a little more complicated for birds and birders alike. Nonetheless, we picked up a few species here, including **Olive-backed Orioles**, **Australasian Figbirds**, **Rufous Whistlers**, and **Black Kites**. Throughout this area, the local grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea johnsonii*) are coming into flower. They are spectacular plants, and their flower stalks make the perfect prop for bird photography when honeyeaters come in to feed. But not today—perhaps it was just too windy.

We moved on to our main birding site of the day, where most of us followed the

Channel Access road for a stretch. Along the way, we saw **Striated Pardalotes**, **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes**, **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes**, **Yellow Honeyeaters**, **Brown Honeyeaters**, **White-throated Honeyeaters**, **Little Friarbirds**, **Plumed Whistling-Ducks**, **Tawny Grassbirds**, and, for a lucky few, a couple of **Squatter Pigeons**. A small **button-quail** also popped into view, though it didn't stay long enough for a positive ID.

We then back-tracked and birded down Sabine Road. In the scrub near the junction, we spotted some scurrying **Brown Quail**. As usual, they were not cooperating, but the **Squatter Pigeons**, on the other hand, were quite confiding. This patch can

be great for honeyeaters and mistletoebirds, but it was quiet today; however, **Australasian Figbirds** were abundant, and **Pale-headed Rosellas** were common, albeit flighty and difficult to get a clear view of.

This area is often excellent for raptors, and today was no exception. Plenty of **Black Kites** patrolled the skies, twisting their tails in slow, tight turns. We also spotted **Nankeen Kestrels**, a distant **Wedge-tailed Eagle** that required Miles' telescope for an ID, and a juvenile **Brown Goshawk** that performed a perfect fly-by for Scott's camera.



White-throated Gerygone

Sean Kennedy



Brown Goshawk

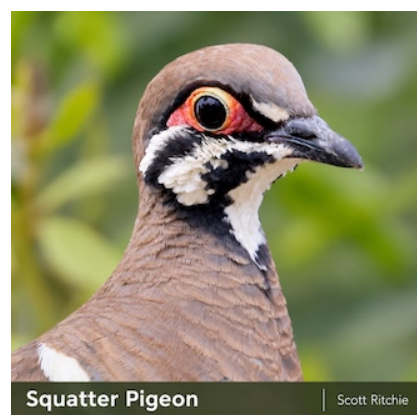
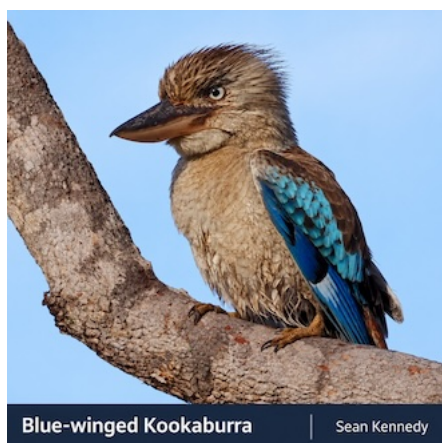
Scott Ritchie

As everyone began preparing for morning tea, I followed the calls of several **Great Bowerbirds**, which are plentiful here. I spotted one high in a tree flashing its pink crest and quickly summoned the others. While I never quite managed to get "that" photo, I did discover the bower itself, beautifully decorated with broken glass and roofing bolts.



Morning tea was a standout feature in its own right. The central table was piled high with goodies - fruit loaves, mandarins, quiche and biscuits. It was a highlight not just for the abundance and variety of food, but for the wonderful spirit of sharing. Well done, Cairns Birders!

Plumed Whistling-Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Brown Quail, Crested Pigeon, Squatter Pigeon, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Pheasant Coucal, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Little Bronze-Cuckoo, Sahul Brush Cuckoo, Bush Stone-curlew, buttonquail sp., Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Eastern Cattle-Egret, Plumed Egret, Pacific Baza, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Brown Goshawk, Black Kite, Rainbow Bee-eater, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Forest Kingfisher, Nankeen Kestrel, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Pale-headed Rosella, Rainbow Lorikeet, Great Bowerbird, Yellow Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, White-throated Honeyeater, Little Friarbird, Striated Pardalote, Black-faced Cuckooshrike, White-bellied Cuckooshrike, Rufous Whistler, Olive-backed Oriole, Australasian Figbird, Willie Wagtail, Spangled Drongo, Tawny Grassbird, Common Myna, Mistletoebird, Sahul Sunbird, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin.



This walk is free and open to all. It is part of the Friends of the Botanic Gardens program of activities. 7:30 Tuesday mornings. [Meet near the 'Friends' office, near the Conservatory.](#)

During the night I could hear the rain, but as the early light spread across the landscape, I was hopeful for a shower-free morning. I carried my umbrella anyway, just in case. A good crowd turned up—18 locals, 4 from interstate, 1 from Asia, and 2 from the UK.

Jake was my scribe today, and we got an early start, building our list as we gathered. The early birds included the Torresian Imperial-Pigeon, Black Butcherbird, Rainbow Lorikeet, Australian Brush-turkey, and Australasian Figbird. Nothing too exciting initially, so as we moved on, I kept up interest by pointing out the coffee trees. We had just reached a cacao tree when Jake interjected, "There's a pademelon!"



Red-legged Pademelon

Daniel Win-Mac

Sure enough, right under the cacao tree, in plain sight, was a female Red-legged Pademelon having a bit of a scratch and groom, completely oblivious to our presence. It was a huge hit for the visitors!

The Australian Brush-turkeys are prominent at the moment. Resplendent with larger, brighter wattles, the males were strutting their stuff and chasing off the competition. There is a new mound underway under one of the flame trees near the McCormack gate. Meanwhile, that huge mound near the Gondwana Garden seems to be getting even bigger; the Orange-footed Scrubfowl are responsible for this one, and it has been active for about 25 years now. 'Tis the season!

Julie asked about the Torresian Imperial-Pigeons (TIPs)—specifically, whether they were also known as Nutmeg Pigeons, and why. We took to the boardwalk because the answer lay right there. I stopped and pointed out a native nutmeg tree (*Myristica insipida*). TIPs are strict frugivores (fruit eaters) and these native nutmegs are a favorite food, swallowed whole so that the seeds are spread far and wide. Early naturalists also called them Spice Pigeons.

We emerged from the pandanus and paperbark swamp onto the banks of Freshwater Lake. First impressions were quiet, but deceiving; scouring a couple of likely habitats revealed a Black Bittern, and a little later, Jake spotted a Little Kingfisher. Both are highly "tickable" species for locals and visitors alike. A few Pacific Black Ducks were present, alongside our two dumped domestic ducks, Moriarty and Holmes. The Comb-crested Jacana is still here, but the grebe was nowhere to be seen.



Orange-ftd Megapode

Jon Westaway



Moving on, we added Osprey, Sacred Kingfisher, Bush Stone-curlew, and Masked Lapwing to our tally. We then headed down Lerp Lane to pick up a few more, including the Spangled Drongo and Mistletoebird, before walking up Lily Creek where we flushed a Whimbrel, which took off downstream.

On the final leg of our walk, we encountered a flock of Metallic Starlings high up in a Peanut Tree (*Sterculia quadrifida*), busy eating the nutritious black seeds from the large, bright orange, star-shaped pods.

It was an average day numbers-wise with 40 species recorded, but we found some quality birds and plenty of interesting things along the way.



Sahul Sunbird

Jon Westaway



Aus Brushturkey

Daniel Win-Mac



Krefft's River Turtle

Jake Moores

Pacific Black Duck, Muscovy Duck x Mallard (hybrid), Australian Brushturkey, Orange-footed Megapode, Torresian Imperial-Pigeon, Australian Swiftlet, Bush Stone-curlew, Masked Lapwing, Comb-crested Jacana, Eurasian Whimbrel, Australian White Ibis, Black Bittern, Little Egret, Great Egret, Osprey, Pacific Baza, Rainbow Bee-eater, Little Kingfisher, Laughing Kookaburra, Torresian Kingfisher, Sacred Kingfisher, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Rainbow Lorikeet, Yellow-spotted Honeyeater, Yellow Honeyeater, Helmeted Friarbird, Varied Triller, Sahul Cicadabird, Yellow Oriole, Australasian Figbird, Black Butcherbird, Willie Wagtail, Spangled Drongo, Magpie-lark, Welcome Swallow, Metallic Starling, Common Myna, Mistletoebird, Sahul Sunbird.



Black Bittern

Scott Ritchie

The Return of the Kelp Gull - and the value of our archives Shane Kennedy

Birds come and go on the Esplanade all the time. Their comings and goings have been a source of fascination for many decades, cementing the Cairns Esplanade as a world-renowned birding hotspot. The migrating shorebirds in particular hold a serious challenge—as, let's face it, at one stage of our birding evolution, they all looked the same! Some of these birds are regulars that return annually. Others, like the current Broad-billed Sandpiper, likely visit every year but only in tiny numbers, while the recent appearance of the Common Redshank marks a species last confirmed here 30 years ago.



Not all visiting birds are quite so challenging to identify, and the recent arrival of a Kelp Gull is a perfect example. It completely dwarfs our local Silver Gulls, boasting black wings with leading and trailing white trim, and a heavy yellow bill featuring a prominent orange spot on the lower mandible. Its last confirmed eBird listing for the area was back in 2019—but is that the whole story?



Piecing together this history highlights the immense value of Rowdy's archives and the historical Cairns Birders Newsletter (known today as the Cairns Frogmouth). Without this dedicated care in maintaining the club's written history, the exact timelines and colorful field stories of the region's great rarities would easily be lost to time. Of course, keeping an archive is one thing; indexing it so it can be effectively searched for the gems it contains is another. For this, we have Dave, our IT man, to thank.

According to those archives, the timeline for the Kelp Gull in the Cairns region is remarkably sparse, defined by long periods of absolute absence broken by sudden, intense excitement:

- **November 1988:** The initial regional record was logged in the retro-data.
- **November 1997:** Del Richards located a lone bird at Newell Beach, which swiftly relocated to the Cairns Esplanade. The historical newsletter from that year perfectly captured the buzz: *"The arrival in Cairns of a lonely Kelp Gull—Brisbane is their usual northerly limit and it has been 9 years almost to the day that the last one was sighted this far north... The Kelp Gull is very cooperative at high tide—it usually stands on the beach close to the Esplanade wall and allows fairly close approach by birdos and photographers—the other gulls are definitely freaked-out by its presence, especially when it takes to the air!"*
- **July 2019:** Pippy Cannon spotted a bird at Machans Beach, later confirmed on the Esplanade by Doug Herrington and Nikolas Haass. The club affectionately christened it "*Larus dominicanus race pippii on Pippy's Patch*", while members Al and Marg Bennett sent in comparison shots of West Australian Pacific Gulls showing off their "*stonking bills*."

The 2019 twitch generated immense camaraderie. Local birding legend John Crowhurst beautifully recorded his joy at connecting with the bird right after being discharged from the hospital:

"... so I rang Andy and in no time there we were, three of us—Andy, Kazu and I (in a wheelchair)—observing birds on the Esplanade. Serendipity—straight through the gate at Muddy's and there it was—the now famous Kelp Gull that I thought I would never see."

Following the 2019 sightings, the regional archive went quiet—until now. An extraordinary active mega-alert has just shattered the silence on the Cairns Esplanade!

A fresh Kelp Gull has officially been tracked and confirmed on the local mudflats. This massive discovery belongs to Drew Haffenden, who skillfully picked out the rare southern vagrant roaming between the Esplanade's northern and southern hotspots. Recognizing the magnitude of the sighting, Shane Kennedy immediately went to work getting the word out to the wider birding network, mobilizing local twitchers and ensuring the community could capitalize on the anomaly.

Thanks to the foundations laid down in the Cairns Frogmouth records, the local timeline now boasts a proud historical sequence: **1988, 1997, 2019, and now, 2026**. It is a stark reminder that the Esplanade's capacity for generating mega-rarities remains beautifully unpredictable—and underscores why keeping the club archives alive is so vital for the birders of tomorrow.

Grab your optics and head down to the waterfront—the race is officially back on!



Letters:

Just for your information-

The Birdlife meeting was definitely worth attending, the speaker (Cliff Frith) was excellent, about 60+ attendees.

We learned a lot about why it's important to take photographs, especially of unusual behaviour!

So glad we could attend, and thank you for sharing in your newsletter.

Ann & Phillip Breeze

(Cootamundra, NSW)

BIRDSCRIBE Our home grown app taking over the world! Dave Lyons

G'day Cairns Birders,

A progress report and a favour, and the favour isn't more testing from you, you've done your share.

Since some of you kicked the tyres on **BirdScribe** over winter, it's grown up. Free on both app stores, and the big change this fortnight: it learns. Correct a bird once, "sistickle" to Golden-headed Cisticola, and it ranks first every time you say it that way again. Flick Auto-log on a name you trust and it logs the bird the moment you say it, eyes still on the canopy. Full list at birdscribe.com/whats-new.

Here's the thing. The app runs region by region now, and each region's built-in names come from the birders who train it there. The UK list is being built as we speak by some serious birders over there, and FNQ is covered because it's home ground. The rest of Australia is empty. A birder in Sydney or Perth is still starting from scratch, and it'd be a poor show if the Poms end up with better coverage than most of the country.

So the favour: your networks. Every one of you knows birders down south and out west, club mates, trip mates, the rellies who bird. If you know someone who'd enjoy putting their stamp on their patch, point them at birdscribe.com/trailblazers. First birder in a region sets its voice, their corrections become the defaults everyone after them starts with, and there's a straight line to me for anything the app gets wrong.

It's free, it stays free, and the more of the country it learns, the better it gets for all of us.

Rowdy's Ramblings

Bird song and music: - [Flamingo ... Duke Ellington](#)

Cairns Birders' Archives are now available for a mere \$5 each including postage. The flash-drive contains more than 830 newsletters and related articles going back some **27 years** and you can update it yourself as each new newsletter appears. Simply SMS your postal address to Rowdy B on 0406 068 295 and promise to buy him a beer someday. Remember, if you want to contribute to Cairns Birders funds, consider taking your cans and bottles to a recycling point near you and direct the funds to the account below. Alternatively, meet us on our **'first outing of the month' Centenary Lakes or Cattana Wetlands) and hand over your empties to Rowdy.** CAIRNS BIRDERS Containers for Change Account C10211514.

The Bird Quiz

Louise Baume

What is this ?



Last week's quiz: Eastern Whipbird



Extra Extra! Read all about it ...

Live-cam of the falcons at 367 Collins St, Melbourne.

They've been nesting here since the early 1990s and this pair have four eggs laid about a week ago so they're due to hatch around the end of the month. [LINK](#)

BIRDSCRIBE is up and running - Voice control bird listing, inc. exporting to ebird - [LINK](#)



**19-25
October
2026**

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[Part of What's About, our weekly birding wrap - see all editions](#)

These records are flagged as unusual by eBird's automated filters and may be reviewed, corrected or withdrawn afterwards. We re-check each one against eBird before posting, but a flagged sighting is provisional until it is confirmed.

If last month belonged to the Redshank, this one belongs to the **Kelp Gull**. The bird that turned up on the Cairns Esplanade a fortnight ago has not only stayed, it has become the most-watched bird on the coast, logged day after day by a steady stream of birders. For one stretch of foreshore to host two genuine mega-rarities back to back is a remarkable run of form, and word has travelled well beyond Cairns.



The gull that stayed

A Kelp Gull is a serious rarity for tropical Queensland, and this one has settled in beautifully. Through the week it was reported right along the Esplanade, from the northern end to the southern, morning and afternoon, and even from a balcony or two overlooking the water. It is still being seen as we go to press. If you have not been down yet, it has been reliable, and the northern end at a falling tide remains the best bet. Coming so soon after the Redshank, it is turning the Cairns foreshore into the place to be this spring.

And a quiet farewell

While the gull holds court, the bird it succeeded has bowed out for good. The last lingering **Common Redshank** report was reviewed and withdrawn this week, which closes the book on a three-week stay that will be talked about for a long time. From one world-class vagrant straight into another, the Esplanade has had a spring to remember.





Spring is pouring in

Behind the headline birds, the migration is at full tilt. The waders led the way with a Broad-billed Sandpiper on the Esplanade, a Grey Plover and a Double-banded Plover, a Common Sandpiper up around Mount Carbine and a Sanderling on the Barron River mouth. A Satin Flycatcher turned up near Port Douglas, a Papuan Eclectus at the Wildlife Habitat, and White-browed Woodswallows are moving through. Up on the Tablelands the rainforest and dry-country edges are busy, with plenty of movement through Julatten, the Crater Lakes and out towards Chillagoe. After the winter lull, there is a lot about.

Flagged as unusual by eBird (relayed, not verified by us)

Our top three flagged records for the week, by number of reports. These are pulled straight from eBird's automated rare-bird filter, not verified by us, and may be reviewed, corrected or withdrawn. eBird also flagged a number of common species on subspecies grounds this week; we have left those out.

1. Kelp Gull - reported daily right along the Cairns Esplanade, comfortably the most-watched bird of the week.
2. Ashy-bellied White-eye - reported from Green Island, off Cairns.
3. Sanderling - reported at the Barron River mouth.

Our thanks, as ever, to everyone who got out and logged what they saw, and to the local photographers who share their shots; the whole picture is built from all of it.

That was the week around Cairns and the Tablelands. A Kelp Gull holding court, the shorebirds arriving daily, and the coast in the form of its life. See you Thursday.



