

Birding Brisbane



Birds and Birdwatching in the River City

Volume 1, Issue 5

Brisbane Pelagic dates for 2019, free place for young birder

Dates for the remaining 2019 Sunshine Coast pelagic trips are now confirmed. The trip starts from Mooloolaba and visits the continental shelf in Brisbane waters. The July trip is full, but there is a waiting list—you might still make it onto the trip if someone pulls out. The dates are Jul 14, Oct 27 and Nov 24. Dates for 2020 will be confirmed soon.

We are pleased to be introducing one FREE place on each trip for a young or student birder. This does not increase the cost for other participants – it is being paid for independently. The recipient of the free place will be under 25 years



Antarctic Prion at the continental shelf off Cape Moreton on 27 May 2018 (RAF).

old or in full time education. Applicants should outline how they meet the criteria and answer “why attending the pelagic will further their skills and interest in

birdwatching”. We will choose one winning application for each trip. Email Richard Fuller – r.fuller@uq.edu.au to book a place or to ask any questions.

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Highlights:

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- *Buff-breasted Sandpiper departs*
- *Eastern Curlews leave for breeding grounds*
- *eBird photos*
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Bird news, April 2019

April was something of lull after the excitement of the first three months of the year, and the departure of migrants gave many many coastal birders a rest! Yet there were some interesting inland-derived species and pas-

sage migrants appearing through the month.

By far the biggest rarity was the monumental record of a Turquoise Parrot photographed by Anita Nahuysen on 10th April in an area of pri-



Turquoise Parrot at Cannon Hill Bushland on 10th April. Photograph by Anita Nahuysen.

Bird news, continued

vate land that she accessed for work at Cannon Hill in the eastern suburbs! This is only the fifth

eBird record of this species for Brisbane. Anita takes up the story, "I found a Turquoise Parrot in bushland behind the newly constructed Minnippi Estate, at Cannon Hill. I watched the bird feeding on the ground, before flying up to a nearby branch where I managed to get some distant photographs. Many birds occur

in the Minnippi Parklands and surrounds, but the Turquoise Parrot was a definite standout! Upon returning to the site the following day, the parrot was sadly nowhere to be seen... Unfortunately, the bird wasn't within a public access area, it was within the Minnippi estate grounds, but behind a gated area (need council or other key). Most of the site is a construction site at the moment" With no further sign of the bird, a chase doesn't seem warranted now, but we are grateful to Anita for sharing her photographs, and the record has now been documented on eBird.

The other star bird of the month was the Buff-breasted Sandpiper at the Port of Brisbane Shorebird Roost, which hung on until 4th (CA) before presumably departing. Safe travels Buffy, maybe see you next summer!

The long-staying Cotton Pygmy-Goose at Brisbane Entertainment Centre Lagoons was only seen once this month, on 1st Apr (BM), and the Dowse Lagoon bird was

present on 5th and 6th. It's worth keeping an eye out for Radjah Shelduck, as the Greenbank bird



This White-winged Triller was at Kianawah Rd Wetland on 7th April. The streaking on the underparts and scalloping on the upperparts indicate that this is a juvenile, and breeding was documented at Sandy Camp Rd Wetlands this year. Photograph by Terence Alexander.

(in Logan LGA - outside Brisbane) reappeared after an absence on 14th April (SL, JS).

Six Australasian Shovelers were at Kedron Brook Wetlands Reserve on 3rd (CA), and still there on 28th (GT). Kedron is hands down the most reliable site in Brisbane to catch up with this scarce straggler to Brisbane.

Great Crested Grebes put in a good showing this month, suggesting some sort of coastward movement, with a string of records at the traditional site of Lake Manchester, including nine on 22nd (BW), but also an unusual record of one at Enoggera Reservoir on 13th (PW).

The couple of Oriental Cuckoos from late March hung on at Tinchi Tamba Wetlands Reserve until 13th (DL), delighting a grateful stream of visitors and posing for photographs.

White-throated Nightjar records thinned out this month, with only two birds observed, singles at Bell-

bird Grove on 22nd (LR) and Gold Creek Reservoir on 26th (LI). Although numbers do probably decline during the cooler months, perhaps there is also a reduction in nocturnal birding effort at this time of year, since only one Australian Owlet-nightjar was recorded, again a single at Gold Creek Reservoir, on 6th (CB).

A calling Lewin's Rail was a good find at the second dip at Oxley Creek Common on 2nd (JV), and there were no other Brisbane records of this species in April.

Shorebird records were predictably rather thin on the ground this month, although highlights were 4 Grey Plovers and 2 Ruddy Turnstones on St Helena Island on 10th (RC), 8 Black-tailed Godwits at Tinchi Tamba on 6th (RS). Highlights of a Queensland Wader Study Group wader ID day at the Manly Wader Roost on 13th were several Greater Sand-Plovers, 4 Double-banded Plovers, a whopping 60 Ruddy Turnstones, and 4 Broad-billed Sandpipers. A Lesser Crested Tern was in Shorncliffe on 16th (GW, PW).

A Black-necked Stork briefly graced Kianawah Road Wetland on 10th (DR) and one or two birds have been wandering widely in SEQ recently, not seemingly settled at the moment.

Deborah Metters had a Yellow-billed Spoonbill at Sandy Camp Road Wetlands on 21st, which, perhaps surprisingly, was the only Brisbane record this month. This is a species to look out for in the cooler months, so keep your eyes open.

There was a scattering of Square-tailed Kite records this month, including a bird hanging around the Fitzgibbon / Tinchi Tamba area, and a good record of 2 birds at

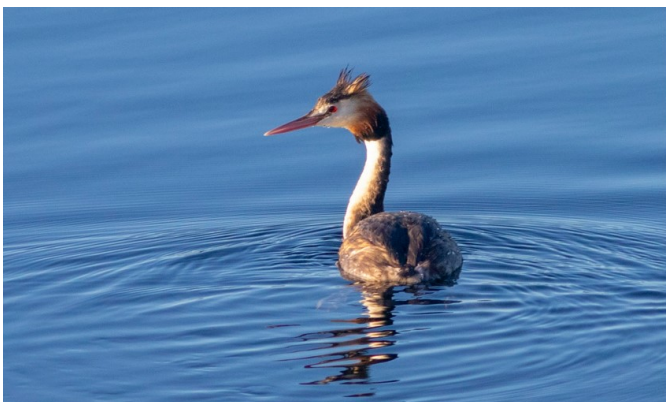
Bird news, continued

Sherwood Arboretum on 18th (HP). It was also a good month for Little Eagle, with coastal records at Tinchi Tamba between 13th and 27th, and one at Kedron Brook Wetlands Reserve on 28th, all by Ged Tranter. Message to everyone that isn't Ged Tranter – look up! To be fair on Chris Burwell, he photographed a pale phase Little Eagle at Priors Pocket Road on 25th. There were scattered records of both Swamp and Spotted Harriers through the month. Grey Goshawks appeared at Fitgibbon Bushland and Tinchi Tamba but were scarce this month otherwise.

Owl records were thin this month, although a Barn Owl was a good find at Anstead SES Depot on 22nd (RG)

A couple of Crimson Rosellas was a good record for the relatively low elevation Bellbird Grove on 22nd (LR), while 10 birds at Lawton Road on 11th (BM) was a high count – it's good to see this localised species continuing to occur in good numbers in the D'Aguilar National Park.

A New Holland Honeyeater was at Cabbage Tree Creek at Lake Manchester Road on 26th (JD, KB).



Great Crested Grebe is a scarce bird in Brisbane, and records peak in spring and autumn. This birds was at Lake Manchester on 26th Apr (photo: SM).



Adult Little Eagle at Tinchi Tamba Wetlands Reserve on 13 Apr (GT).

A Barred Cuckooshrike was an excellent find by Louis Backstrom at Tinchi Tamba on 15th, and there was a broad sprinkling of White-bellied Cuckooshrikes this month across the city, with a concentration of records in the east probably reflecting better coverage there compared to the west. Clearly, April is a good month to get this species in your local woodland patch! White-winged Trillers were hanging on with singles at Oxley Creek Common on 2nd (SC) and Kianawah Road Wetland on 7th (TA). A Shining Flycatcher was at

Tinchi Tamba on 11th (GT), where the species is probably regular but largely inaccessible in the mangroves. A good record of five Apostlebirds at McLeod Country Golf Club on 26th (TM) was away from the well-known sites at Anstead. A Jacky Winter at Gold Creek Reservoir was a good find on

12th (SP) – this species is probably only a straggler to Gold Creek. Finally, Plum-headed Finches



This stunning Rose Robin was at Shelley Road Park, near Lake Manchester, on 21 Apr (Photo: GT).

were much in evidence this month, with records from Sandy Camp Road Wetlands on 25th (BP), Oxley Creek Common throughout the month (many observers), Priors Pocket Road on 14th (CB), and Cabbage Tree Creek at Lake Manchester Road on 27th (PW).

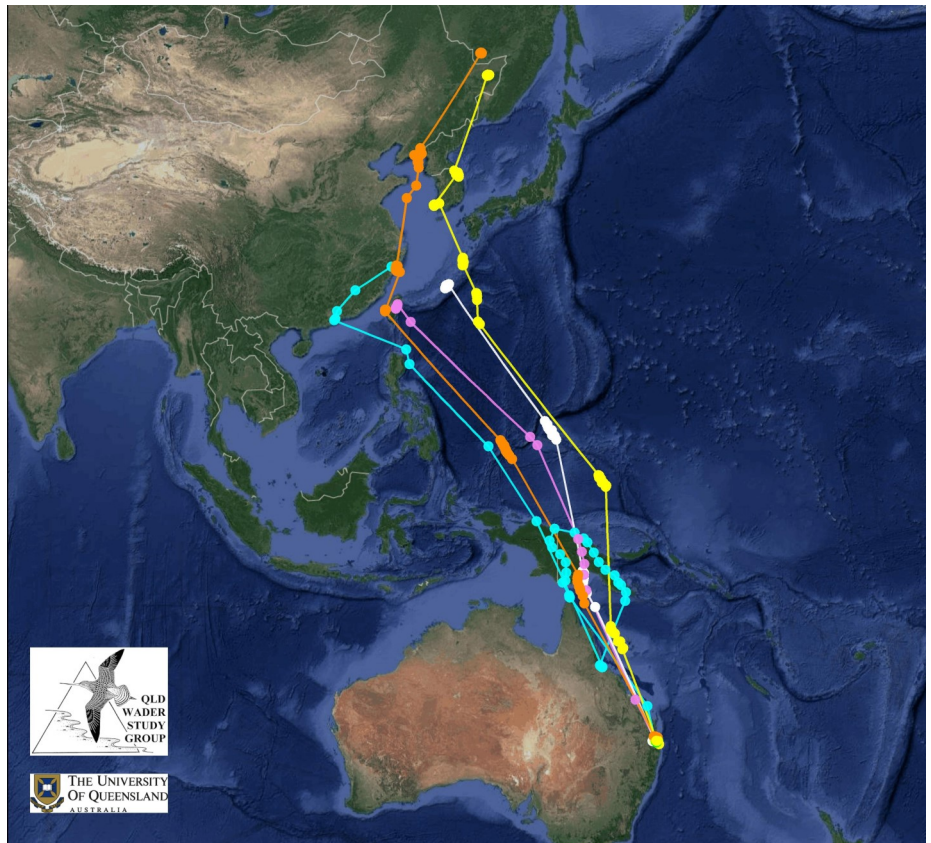
Round-up by Richard Fuller, Sandra Gallienne & Louis Backstrom.

Feature: Eastern Curlew tracking

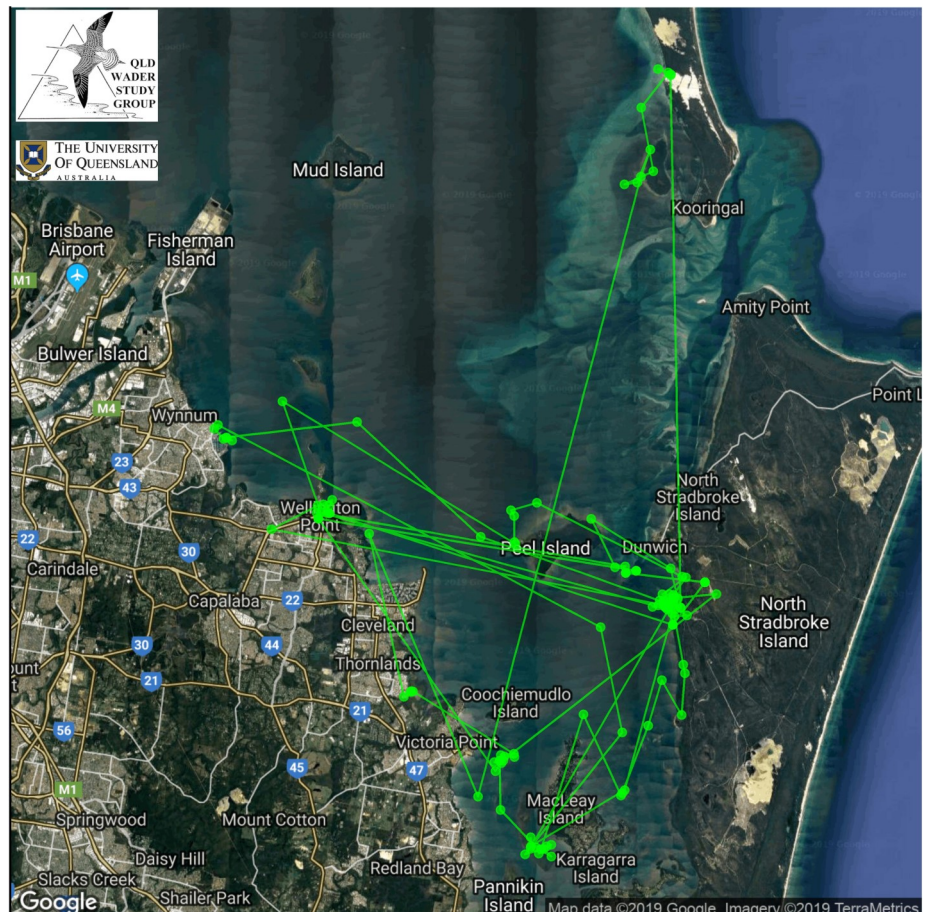
As birders that have visited Moreton Bay's beaches and coastlines recently will well know, most of the more than 30,000 migratory shorebirds that spend the Australian summer in Moreton Bay have now left for their northern hemisphere breeding grounds. This includes five Far Eastern Curlew that were equipped with tracking devices by the Queensland Wader Study Group at Manly Wader Roost, Toorbul Wader Roost, and Geoff Skinner Wetlands in Moreton Bay over the summers of 2017/18 and 2018/19. Two of the curlew (orange and yellow) are being tracked for the second consecutive year and have already reached their breeding areas; amazingly, the exact same breeding areas they occupied in 2018! The northward migrations of the other three curlew (cyan, purple, white) are still in progress, with the three birds last detected in eastern China, Taiwan, and Okinawa (Japan), respectively. A sixth curlew (green) continues to move about Moreton Bay roosting and foraging as it has done since it was initially equipped with a tracking device as an immature bird in early March 2018. This curlew, which wears green leg-flag AAJ, has yet to attempt its first northward migration, highlighting the year-round importance of Moreton Bay as a nursery for young shorebirds not yet ready to embark on their first migration north. Have you spotted AAJ recently?

Follow the Queensland Wader Study Group on Facebook or visit www.waders.org.au to keep up-to-speed on the tracking of Far Eastern Curlew and other migratory shorebirds of Moreton Bay.

Story by Brad Woodworth.



Above: International migration of five Eastern Curlews from Moreton Bay. Below: movements of one non-migrating immature bird (leg flag AAJ) within the Bay in April and May 2019.



eBird skills: Documenting records with photographs

Have you ever checked out the Illustrated Checklist for the Brisbane Region or a favourite hotspot? It's worth checking this out, if simply to admire the many beautiful photos that some of Brisbane's best photographers have contributed to eBird. You can add your star rating to these photos too. You can learn other interesting information just by looking at the photos; which plumage phases occur in Brisbane, do we have photos of any hybrids, leucistic birds or other unusual plumage variants, do all sites have extensive photo coverage and where is extra effort needed?

With the exception of some of the

pelagic birds, most of Brisbane's birds have at least one photo but more are always needed, especially for the more uncommon species. There are still several species without any photos. Species with no photo-documentation in Brisbane at the time of writing include among others, wild-type Mallard, Wandering Tattler, Red-backed Buttonquail, lots of seabirds, Red-winged Parrot, Brown Treecreeper, Dusky Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, Logrunner, Australian Raven, and Australasian Bushlark.

So this is a big call out for help! PHOTOS PLEASE!! And they don't have to all be great - ordi-

nary is just fine too.

The importance of adding photos and/or detailed notes about what you saw if you don't have one is becoming more apparent the more the data is used. When compiling notes be sure to include detailed description on the appearance of the bird, and how it was distinguished from similar species.

Whilst this article has focussed on photos, the same call for sound documentation is also made. This is just as important as the photo library for researchers and our thanks is given to all users who have added sound media too. *Story by Sandra Gallienne.*

Mystery photo



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

Last month's challenge was a rather nondescript brown bird—the stuff of nightmares! A closer look reveals a stubby black bill, rather rich brown upperparts contrasting with clean white underparts, and importantly, some black and white in the tail. This combination of features indicates a gerygone, but which one? The bird doesn't have the dark smudgy head and grey cheek patches of the Brown, and lacks the white uppertail flashes of the super-rare Western. This only leaves Mangrove Gerygone.



Mangrove Gerygone, above at Kianawah Rd on 3 Jan 2018, below at Boggy Creek on 12 Jun 2016 (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*”*

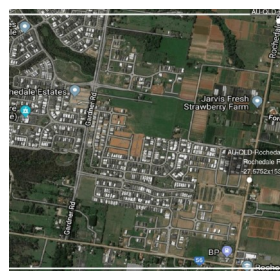
Contact *Atlas* administrators with questions: Louis Backstrom (louis.backstrom@gmail.com) or Richard Fuller

Undersurveyed Atlas Square: Rochedale

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 has only 2 species recorded so far, but could be

rather interesting, with its strawberry farms, creeks, and patches of bush-land. Clearly lots of potential! Key areas of interest are the bushland north of miles Platting Road,



Only 2 species known from this Atlas square!!!!

farmland alongside Rochedale Road, the creeka long Parklands Circuit. There is much construction happening in this square—visit before it is too late.

Download the survey sheet [here](#).

Story by Richard Fuller.

	Complete checklists	Total minutes	Total km		Species	Complete checklists	Incomplete checklists
Summer (Dec–Feb)	0/12	0/120	0/1	Finn Roff-Marsh	2	0	1
Autumn (Mar–May)	0/12	0/120	0/1	Richard Fuller	1	0	1
Winter (Jun–Aug)	0/12	0/120	0/1				
Spring (Sep–Nov)	0/12	0/120	0/1				
Total	0	0	0				

From the Atlas: Great Crested Grebe

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; Rare and localised resident of aquatic habitats on the edges of the city, occasional nomadic visitor more widely across the region. Not of conservation concern, but numbers in Brisbane are low and may be threatened with habitat loss. An uncommon and localised species of waterbird in Brisbane, the Great Crested Grebe is a distinctive species, much larger than our other two grebes, with a brown and white body and a beautiful rich brown-and-white head with distinctive black crest during the breeding season. Birds are gregarious, although most counts of Brisbane are of small flocks less than a dozen birds in size. Birds are very patchily distributed and are only common at a handful of sites, although they occur more widely as nomads.

Widespread across much of Eurasia, Africa and Australasia, the Great Crested Grebe is an uncommon bird in Brisbane, and never reaches particularly high abundances at any given site, although counts of nearly 100 birds are known. Within Brisbane, birds are highly localised and generally restricted to a handful of regular sites, although further records outside these strongholds are not uncommon, suggesting an element of nomadic dispersion.

Counts of more than ten birds are known from only one location in Brisbane, Lake Manchester (where the average count is more than 5 birds per reporting checklist, compared with 3.8 for all of Brisbane), with a high count of 76 birds in one morning in December 2011 (Roberts [2011](#)). Breeding has never been reported within the city, a somewhat surprising result given birds are mostly present year-round at their regular sites.

Although birds are present year-round, there is a significant increase in records between autumn and spring, suggesting these birds are at least partial winter immi-

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

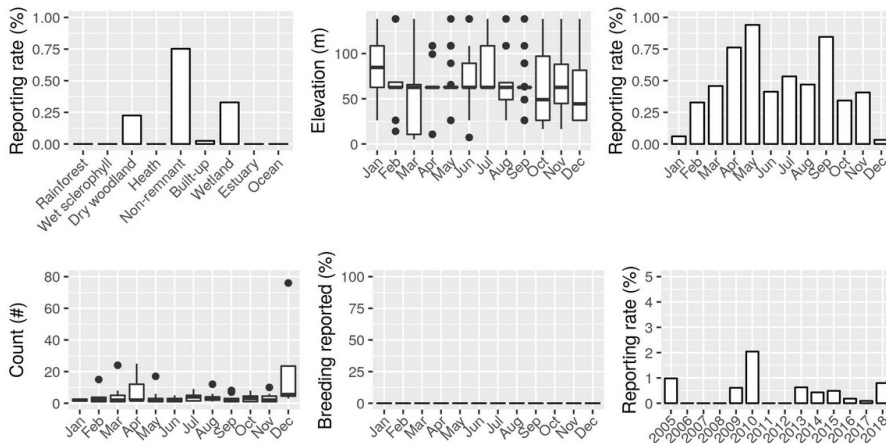
grants, which may partly explain the lack of breeding records for this species locally, as birds generally breed over summer across Australia (Marchant & Higgins [1990](#)).

As a species somewhat dependent on waterbodies with plentiful fringing vegetation and sufficient prey, this species is somewhat threatened locally, especially given its already rare and localised nature. Of particular conservation importance are the sites at which this species is concentrated, such as Lake Manchester and other waterbodies in Brisbane’s far west.

Distribution and Habitat

Great Crested Grebes are a highly localised species within Brisbane, having only occurred in just over two dozen Atlas squares, and being regular at even fewer. The on-

From the Atlas continued...



ly location locally they can be described as common at is Lake Manchester, where birds are seen on more than 40% of complete checklists. Occasional birds are seen at other reservoirs around the city, such as Enoggera Reservoir and Gold Creek Dam, but are only occasional outside these waterbodies. The species has never been recorded on Moreton Island, likely due to the scarcity of open waterbodies with fringing vegetation.

Birds are somewhat widely distributed across elevational gradients on the mainland, occurring from sea level to about 150m in elevation; this is presumably a result of Brisbane's large waterbodies being found at a range of elevations rather than birds having specific altitudinal preferences. There is some seasonal variation in the distribution of records within Brisbane, with most dispersive records of nomadic birds around the city coming from autumn and winter (when this species is more common locally), with records in spring and summer typically being restricted to this species' known strongholds on the western reservoirs. This suggests that birds disperse widely over the cooler months, and then congregate back together on large dams to breed over summer, with most (if not all) birds breeding extraliminally to Brisbane's borders.

In terms of habitat, Great Crested

Grebes are found generally across three habitat types in Brisbane, although within all three of these types they are almost exclusively found on or very near to water (despite a handful of flyover records from other habitats). Birds are most common on non-remnant waterbodies, which includes most of Brisbane's large reservoirs, with further records coming from wetlands and dry woodland environments. This suggests that birds may be somewhat well-adapted to anthropogenic habitats, but the lack of records from suburban parks and lakes suggests that this species is not as likely to cope with increased urbanisation as other waterbirds are, such as the [Australasian Grebe](#), which is seemingly well-adapted to urban living. This has important implications for the conservation of this species, both locally and more widely.

Seasonality

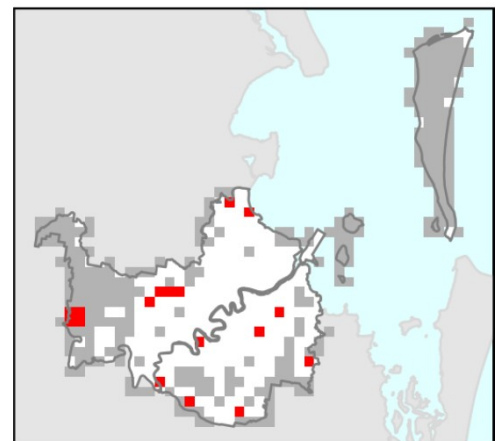
Great Crested Grebes exhibit a strong seasonal pattern of abundance, with birds significantly more common over the middle of the year than they are in summer. This suggests that our local birds are mostly migrants, choosing to spend the winter in Brisbane before dispersing elsewhere over summer, presumably to breed (as this species has never been reported as breeding within our region). Given that this species shows [relatively little seasonal variation](#) across the entirety of south east

Queensland, it would appear that birds do not disperse particularly widely, and may move inland to areas such as Somerset or the Lockyer Valley over summer. The exact nature of this behaviour, and the causes behind it, are currently unknown and merit further investigation.

Trends

The reporting rate for Great Crested Grebes in Brisbane has been quite variable over the *Atlas* period, with certain years having individuals being relatively common, and other years having no records. This suggests that the annual abundance of birds in the region is quite variable, and likely driven by other factors both external and internal to Brisbane. Given the Brisbane population seems to be mostly (if not wholly) migratory, this may be driven by the suitability of habitat at this species' breeding sites, with birds choosing to remain local to the sites when conditions are favourable, and dispersing more widely when they are not. More work in this area would be beneficial.

Great Crested Grebes are not of any conservation nationally or locally, although they are uncommon across nearly the entirety of Australia, and the total number of birds in Brisbane almost certainly is less than 100 (more detailed



From the Atlas continued...

studies and analyses are needed to confirm this). It would be good to ensure the protection of key sites for this species, especially Lake Manchester, to protect our birds from any potential future declines.

Information Gaps

- Determine where Brisbane's birds go over summer
- Find the breeding sites of Brisbane's birds (wherever they are)
- Determine the underlying causes behind apparent seasonal variation
- Determine the causes behind annual abundance variations
- Conduct frequent comprehensive counts at the main sites for the species

Key Conservation Needs

- Protect wetlands from being drained
- Protect wetlands from loss of fringing vegetation
- Protect the key sites for this species
- Conduct more comprehensive counts for this species' total population in Brisbane

Contributors to Species Account

- Louis Backstrom

From the Atlas continued...



Great Crested Grebe, above: breeding-plumaged adult at Sherwood Arboretum, 12 Nov 2010 (CW); below non-breeding adult with partially retained crest and tippets at Lake Manchester, 15 Jul 2018 (SM)



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

TA Terence Alexander; CA Chris Attewell; KB Ken Bissett; CB Chris Burwell; RC Rae Clark; SC Steve Cunningham; JD Jill Duncan; RG Rod Gardner; LI Lenn Isidore; SL Sue Lee; BM Braden McDonald; TM Tom Mutton; BP Bill Popple; HP Hugh Possingham; SP Steve Prowse; LR Laurie Ross; JS Julie Sarna; RS Ross Smith; GT Ged Tranter; JV Jason Vassallo; GW Gretel Waugh; BW Brad Woodworth; CW Chris Wiley; PW Phyllis Weintraub.



Restless Flycatcher, Kianawah Rd Wetland, 7 Apr 2019 (TA)