

Birding Brisbane



Birds and Birdwatching in the River City

Volume 1, Issue 1

Launch: Atlas of the Birds of Brisbane

January 2019 marks the launch of the *Atlas of the Birds of Brisbane*, a landmark resource aiming at documenting in one place everything we know about the birds of Brisbane.

With about 400 species of bird occurring in Brisbane, the city has the richest avifauna of any Australian state capital by far.



The Atlas is now open for contributions, see page 5.

Despite this, there is no single reference on Brisbane's birds. Previous magnificent related works include Donald Vernon's *Birds of Brisbane and Environs* published in 1968, and Greg Roberts' *Birds of South East Queensland*, published in 1979.

A vast amount of data on birds is available in eBird and other citizen science databases, but such platforms cannot place the data in a meaningful local context. Data is not knowledge.

Most importantly, knowledge on Brisbane's birds is not readily accessible to the public or to land planners and managers, such as Brisbane City

Council, who make decisions about the way land is used (e.g. protected or developed for residential or industrial purposes), which requires information about the status, distribution and conservation of each of our birds.

The Atlas is a resource that provides maps of the distribution of every species at the click of a mouse or the flip of a page, and includes analyses of where and when the birds are found and why they are found there.

Everyone can contribute to the Atlas. To find out how, turn to page 2. Happy birding in 2019!

<http://brisbanebirds.com>

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- Atlas project launches
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Kelp Gull appear in Brisbane
- Unlock the secrets of Archerfield Airport
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- Contributing to the Atlas of the Birds of Brisbane
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Bird news, December 2018

December was a month to remember—a rarity-filled bonanza! Tina Rider and Sean Nolan found a magnificent **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at the Port of Brisbane in the afternoon of 15th Dec. They broadcast the news immediately, but

only a small number of people were able to mobilise quickly enough to connect that afternoon. Fearing a repeat of the October bird at Tinchy Tamba, which was also found late afternoon but disappeared overnight, the assembled crowd the



Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Port of Brisbane, 16th Dec (RAF)

Bird news, continued

following morning was not disappointed. The bird clearly found the artificial roost at the Port to its liking, and was still present at the end of the month, even displaying occasionally to any Sharpies that would watch! The returning **Asian Dowitcher** was also present throughout the month, and a **Long-toed Stint** was there on 28th and 29th, with two on 31st (SM). One of these or another bird had been at GJ Fuller Oval Lagoon on 16th (GT,MD), and one can't help wondering if we have been overlooking this species in Brisbane in the past. Keep your eyes peeled wherever there are Sharpies! An **Eastern Reef Egret** appeared in the roost on 16th, and two were there on 24th, cementing this location as one of the best spots for this tricky species on the mainland coast of Brisbane.

Other wader news included good numbers of **Broad-billed Sandpipers** along the coast, with a great count of 30 at the Manly Wader Roost (restricted access) on 8th (LB,SH,BW). A **White-winged Black Tern** was another good find at Manly Wader roost on 1st (SH), and four were at Sandgate on 29th (IM). This is a species that has declined precipitously in Brisbane over the past few decades, and should be looked for in summer and autumn.

Leigh Wilson photographed a **Red-chested Buttonquail** in the flowerbeds outside the administration office at the Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens on 2nd, an incredible record! Unfortunately it couldn't be located the following morning. This is only the third documented Brisbane record, with Roy Sonnenburg finding both of the previous birds, in suburban Wilston on 4th Dec 2017 and Kalinga Park on 24th Nov 2018.

A **Superb Parrot** visited a back yard in Mount Crosby on 1st (JD,KB), and

although showing no obvious signs of captivity it seems unlikely to be a wild bird, given the long distance from the species' usual distribution.

A big surprise was in store for the closing days of the month, when Wayne Matthews found a crackling **Kelp Gull** at Wynnum Creek Boat Ramp. A 3rd calendar year bird, it performed extremely well until the year's end and will hopefully linger into January

for all those out of town for the summer break. On present knowledge, this is the second record for Brisbane, with the first being at Manly Wader Roost on 15th Dec 2013 (SP). Browsing on eBird, I was surprised to learn that Kelp Gulls have turned up all the way to the tip of Cape York, so it is certainly a species that wanders widely, and we might expect further records in future. Also, research of old records might uncover more—do contact us if you know of any historical

Brisbane records.

The Sunshine Coast pelagic on 12th was fairly quiet, with seabirds in Brisbane waters including **Sooty Tern**, **Wedge-tailed**, **Short-tailed** and a **Flesh-footed Shearwater**, only the last being particularly noteworthy.

Rounding up the rest of the month's news: The long-staying **Freckled**

Duck remained at Oxley Creek Common all month, 3 **Cotton Pygmy-Goose** at Dowse Lagoon on 13th (GT), and 2 at Blunder Creek Reserve on 19th (PL), two calling **King Quail** at Kedron Brook Wetlands Reserve on 11th (GD) and 22nd (MD), 2 **Oriental Cuckoos** at Tinchi Tamba on 27th (RF,FC) at 29th (MG), good numbers of **Pacific Swift** seen at various locations through the month, a great record of a **Beach Stone-curlew** at



Sooty Oystercatcher on the reefs off Dreveson Park, 22nd Dec, rare in mainland Brisbane (RAF)

Shorncliffe Pier on 19th (SM), a **Sooty Oystercatcher** at Manly Wader Roost on 15th (JD,KB,GM) and again off Dreveson Park on 22nd (RAF), two

Grey Plovers at the Port of Brisbane Shorebird roost on 14th (TN), one there on 24th (CY), and one at Manly Wader Roost on 15th (JD,KB,GM,JM), small numbers of **Red Knot** at Port of Brisbane and Manly Wader Roost, 2 **Pectoral Sandpipers** at Manly

Wader Roost on 15th (JM), and up to four at Kedron on 31st (MW), the returning **Common Sandpiper** at Kedron Brook Wetlands all month, a **Sooty Tern** at Nudgee Beach on 8th (LB), single **Black Bitterns** at Sandy Camp Road Wetlands on 3rd (DA) and 21st (SM), up to 3 **Australian Little Bitterns** there all month, 2 **Australasian Grass-owls** at Kedron Brook Wetlands on 10th (GD), a **Black Falcon** at Oxley Creek Common on 1st (RE), the long-staying **Grey-crowned Babbler** at 212 Hawkesbury Rd, Anstead on 9th (RG), a **Brown Songlark** at Kedron Brook Wetlands on 3rd (SM) and 22nd (MD), and a single **Plum-headed Finch** at Oxley Creek Common on several dates.

“Leigh Wilson photographed a Red-chested Buttonquail in the flowerbeds!”

2018 was a bumper year for Brisbane, with 323 species recorded, and 11,000 eBird checklists submitted. This was helped by several folks doing a “year list”. In the end, 10 birders saw more than 250 species, a brilliant achievement. The winning total was 305, by, ahem, yours truly. Full story at <http://www.fullerlab.org/category/blog>.

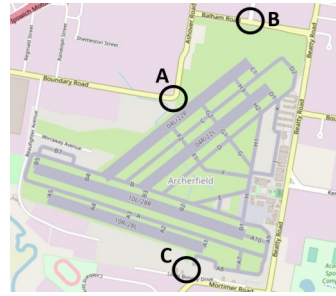
Round-up by Richard Fuller

Site Profile: Archerfield Airport

Archerfield Airport is an under-watched site with huge potential. A study comprising 36 monthly surveys between 1995 and 1998 by Peter Woodall revealed good numbers of Banded Lapwings between 1996 and 1998, together with vagrant Australian Pratincoles and Little Curlews! This astounding run of records resulted from a dedicated search from the perimeter fence. There have been very few records of any of these three species anywhere in Brisbane since. Birders have started to make recent visits (LB,RAF,EL), and already a Brown Songlark has been

found—on 4th Nov 2018 (RAF).

Access is reasonably easy, and one can survey pretty much the entire 200 hectare airfield from various points on the perimeter fence, especially the corner of Ashover Rd and Boundary Rd (A), the corner of Balham Rd and Barton St (B), and from the perimeter



The airport can be comprehensively surveyed from just three locations along the perimeter.

fence on Rockwell Dr (C). A telescope is essential as many birds are distant. Can you make a habit of regularly spending a morning at the airfield? Can you beat RAF's count of 118 Australian Magpies? Big rewards are surely possible.

Story by Richard Fuller

Mystery photo



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

Top 10 birding hotspots in Brisbane

- 1 Tinchi Tamba Wetlands Reserve—195 species
- 2 Lake Manchester—180 species
- 3 Oxley Creek Common—176 species
- 4 Kedron Brook Wetlands Reserve—171 species
- 5 Sandy Camp Road Wetlands—163 species
- 6 Gold Creek Reservoir—161 species
- 7 Shelley Road Park—158 species
- 8 Anstead Bushland Reserve—147 species
- 9 Lytton Wader Roost and Wynnum Mangrove Boardwalk—146 species
- 10 Priors Pocket, Moggill—144 species

eBird skills: Getting started with eBird Australia

eBird Australia is a free and open access citizen science project for collecting bird observations. The Eremaea system was incorporated into eBird Australia in 2014. Join thousands of Australian eBirders by visiting <http://ebird.org/australia> and signing up today. eBird Australia provides tools for

maintaining your personal bird records and you can visualize data with maps, graphs and charts.

A birder simply enters when, where, and how they went birding, then fills out a checklist of all the birds seen and heard during the outing. eBird provides various options including point counts, tran-

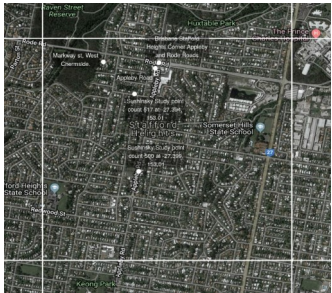
sects, and area searches using the BirdLife Australia protocols.

Friendly local experts check the records to ensure accuracy. eBird Australia data are open access, and also passed to Birdlife Australia, to ensure your data are available for research and conservation. Visit <http://ebird.org/australia> today!

Undersurveyed Atlas Square: Stafford Heights

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 undersurveyed square to encourage you to get out and contribute. We kick off with Stafford Heights. With only a small amount of open space in this square dominated by medium-density suburban housing,

this area would benefit from more survey effort across the entire area. Of note is Grey Gum Park across the road from Raven Street Reserve (which lies in the Chermside West Atlas Square) and the small section of green space just south



Only 16 species are known from Stafford Heights, can you find more?

of the corner of Webster and Rode Rd in the north east of the region. The square has been very poorly surveyed overall and is in need of some love. Nocturnal work is also needed. 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	5/120	0/1	Fuller Lab	14	2	0
Autumn (Mar-May)	0/12	0/120	0/1	Helen Gilliland	1	0	1
Winter (Jun-Aug)	0/12	0/120	0/1	Claire Anderson	1	0	1
Spring (Sep-Nov)	2/12	10/120	0/1	Tom Mutton	1	1	0
Total	3	15	0				

From the Atlas: Yellow-rumped Thornbill

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.



Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Priors Pocket, 17 Jun 2018 (RAF)

Category A; Sparse breeding resident and possible winter immigrant. A species of open habitats, the Yellow-rumped Thornbill occurs patchily across Brisbane, but beyond our border is common across much of Western Australia, South Australia, southern Northern Territory and the south east States. Yellow-rumped Thornbill has been recorded from most dis-

tricts across mainland Brisbane excluding the wetter forests of the Camel's Head and the south east corner (and the species has never been recorded on Moreton Island), but it is never really common and typically occurs in small numbers. Strongholds are at Prior's Pocket, Oxley Creek Common and the open country near the mouth of the Brisbane River. The highest count is of 12 birds at Oxley Creek Common (Possingham 2009) but typical counts are much lower, with only a handful of records over 5 birds.

The species is present in Brisbane year-round, although there is a substantial increase in reporting rate over the winter months, suggesting that birds might move into the city during winter, or our local birds might wander more widely at that time of year. The biggest counts also tend to occur in winter, suggesting immigration is a possibility, but in the absence of banding data it is difficult to be sure.

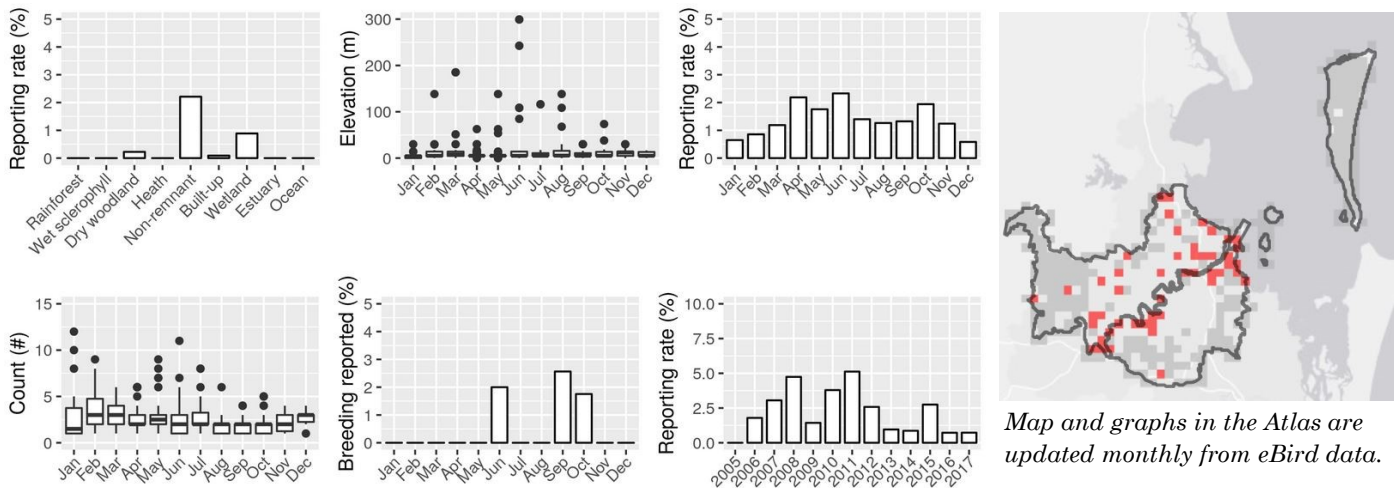
Distribution and Habitat

The Yellow-rumped Thornbill is

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

distributed widely across Brisbane, with a distinct preference for low altitude open habitats, although the species has been recorded up to 300m. Most commonly found in non-remnant and wetland edge habitats, the Yellow-rumped Thornbill favours open country with some tree cover, and birds can be seen on the ground, on fences, or in trees. Open habitats that seem suitable for the species occur fairly widely within Brisbane, and given the abundance of the species across much of Australia, it is perhaps surprising that Yellow-rumped Thornbill is as uncommon as it is within Brisbane. Even at its seasonal peak in June, the species is only observed on about 2.5% of checklists.

From the Atlas continued...



Seasonality

The species is present in Brisbane all year, although there is a clear increase in reporting rate over the cooler months. Breeding records are currently too sparse to form a pattern, but so far breeding has been reported in June, September and October. It would be good to collect more breeding data on this species, and to find out more about its seasonal movements and any evidence of migration or nomadism.

Trends

The reporting rate of Yellow-rumped Thornbill has been rather variable from year to year, with bumper years in 2008 and 2011

(reported on ~5% of checklists), but much rarer in other years such as 2014, 2016 and 2017 (reported on about 1% of checklists during these years). It would be good to conduct some analysis to understand why these fluctuations are happening, but no clear directional trend is apparent from the data, suggesting we aren't yet witnessing a wholesale decline. Outside Brisbane, the species is common across large parts of the continent, and as such is of no particular conservation concern nationally. Yet its apparent scarcity in Brisbane means it is a species that should be monitored fairly closely.

Information Gaps

- Identify the reasons behind its fluctuating abundance across

years

- Determine whether nomadic or migratory movements are occurring
- Collect more breeding data so the seasonal pattern of breeding can be established
- Collect audio and photographic records

Key Conservation Needs

- Monitor abundance so any declines can be detected early
- Be vigilant for habitat loss in any of its Brisbane strongholds

Contributors to Species Account

- Louis Backstrom
- Richard Fuller

Contributing to the *Atlas*

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

Go birdwatching within the Brisbane City Council area and enter your observations on eBird, a free tool for recording bird observations. All eBird records in Bris-

bane 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! If you need help, contact an *Atlas* administrator.

Write some text for the *Atlas*, or edit and improve the existing text. Full instructions on how to edit *Atlas* pages are in the [Contributing](#) section of the *Atlas* website.

Contact *Atlas* editors with ques-

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

tions: Louis Backstrom (louis.backstrom@gmail.com) or Richard Fuller (r.fuller@uq.edu.au)

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.

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 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

DA David Anderson; KB Ken Bissett; LB Louis Backstrom; FC Felicia Chan; GD Guy Dutson; JD Jill Duncan; MD Michael Daley; RE Rohan Etherington; RAF Richard Fuller; RF Rick Franks; MG Malcolm Graham; RG Rod Gardner; SH Sandra Harding; EL Elliot Leach; PL Peter Lowe, GM Gilie Matthew; IM Ian McMahon; JM John Merton; SM Stephen Murray; TN Tim Norris; SP Stuart Pickering; GT Ged Tranter; BW Brad Woodworth; CY Chris Young



Tahiti Petrel, off Cape Moreton, 12th December (RAF)
