

and managed to get us very good views of the Azure, Little and Sacred Kingfishers and excellent photography could be achieved. There was also good birding to had around Daintree village itself and the local pub did some of the best pub grub we have ever tasted. We were hoping that we could find our bogey bird for this trip at Daintree, the Lovely Fairy Wren. Australia has a variety of these Fairy Wrens with the Superb Fairy Wren having been voted in a national poll as Australia's favourite bird (Guardian on-line, 7th Nov, 2013). Unfortunately, this bird is not present in North Queensland but the Lovely Fairy Wren is still a stunning bird to see. We had been lucky enough to have good views of the Red-backed Fairy Wren on our first day but despite searching at known sites, the Lovely Fairy Wren continued to elude us. On our last day in Daintree we came across a Japanese bird guide with his clients observing activity in a tree and with his help we eventually got our bogey bird.

We finished Australia with a boat trip to the Great Barrier Reef and we were able to observe colonies of seabirds on a deserted sandy atoll. Our final list included Sooty and Crested Terns, Brown Booby, Common Noddy and the Frigatebird. We then put on the snorkel and fins to observe the fish and the disappointment of a bleached and dying Barrier Reef. Climate change and the run off of fertilizers and pesticides is having an impact on the Reef and Australia's coast line. More and more of the land in North Queensland is being turned over to agriculture and grazing with fields of sugar cane, bananas, avocados and tea stretching into the distance. This loss of habitat is having an impact on bird numbers and we found the birding and travelling involved quite challenging. We can only hope the 200 species we saw are still going to be there for future generations.

all photos by Keith Allen

Tony Gough's Diary

Tony Gough, a much-respected local birder and long-time member of our Group, thrilled us all with his wit and phenomenal birding knowledge. He died in 2015, and his extensive records have been painstakingly collated by Ian Hargreaves. Here is a further extract, one of many we will make available in the future.

Thursday 18th May 1967

I set off walking from Otley to go round the lower Washburn Valley – I only got as far as Lindley Bridge, however, when I ran out of time and walked back to Otley, 13:45 to 20:30.

The three young from the Song Thrush nest in Otley Park have fledged, leaving behind them the remains of one other squashed into the bottom of the nest. This explains, to some extent, why there was only three young.

I spent some time searching in vain for a nest when I saw a female Redstart among some trees by the road alongside Otley Plantation, where I found an empty Blackbird's nest behind the wall.

I didn't check all the hedgerow nests on the way up just a Chaffinch's where the female was sitting on four eggs.

Further up the road I ventured into the plantation, when I heard a Mistle Thrushes "rattling" as if mobbing – I saw not what. However, I did find an empty Whitethroat's nest in some low brambles and a Wren's nest in some tree ivy. The Wren flew from the nest and I counted six eggs with my finger. I also saw a male Bullfinch in the plantation.

I saw two Lapwings fly up from beside the boggy, rain-water pool in the fields coming to Farnley and marking where the last and most reluctant one rose from, I eventually discovered two small Lapwing chicks. The nest, about 100 yards away in an adjoining field, was empty and these young probably came from there. The nest did have three eggs, but I could easily have missed one of the chicks or perhaps it had met an untimely end. I first found this Lapwing's nest on 19th April when the eggs were already being incubated. 30 days ago, and just four days ago when I last looked the nest still had eggs so the young had hatched within the last four days and the Lapwing's incubation period must be around four weeks at least. I'd have a clearer idea if I knew when the eggs were laid, but surely it can't be much longer.

In finding these two chicks, I was just about to give up when I saw the pale buff neck band of one of them and almost immediately I saw the other nearby. Neither of the chicks moved, even when I threatened to tread on them, lowering my boot till it touched their down, but gently. They still didn't budge when I laid them in my hand, laying outstretched and flat, head, bill and neck flat and stubby little wings akimbo.

I searched for more young Lapwings in the next field, while 10 wailing adults flew around overhead. I only found one however, larger than the others I had just seen. This one, though it remained perfectly still during the search and allowed me to pick it up with no fuss, suddenly stood up on my hand and scrambled for "terra firma". Off it went on its long legs running across the field like a little, downy clown. Again the chick was by a wet, muddy patch in the middle of the field – the Lapwings seem to favour putting their young on muddy ground as soon as they can, perhaps feeding is better or easier there.



Lapwing eggs

photo: Paul King



Lapwing chick

photo: Phil Matthews

The Hedge Sparrow's nest at Farnley which had four eggs on Sunday, now has four downy young. Still no change in the nearby Wren's nest, almost certainly a Male's nest. The Blackbird's nest across the road still has four young, showing quills now. Back across the road, the Mistle Thrush was much more valiant today than on Sunday and she "rushed" me several times after I flushed her and climbed onto the wall to reach the nest. I just had time to feel the softness of the young when she bored in and struck me on the hand. I beat a hasty retreat, understanding now why she was more aggressive this time. The nest had four eggs on Sunday which have since hatched – I presume all did and that there are four young. I didn't check the neighbouring Song Thrush nest which had three eggs on Sunday.

The Wren's nest near the top of the lane to Lindley Bridge is still empty and again it is almost certainly a male's nest not to be used for breeding. The Blackbird's nest lower down still has five eggs, female sitting. I saw a pair of Grey Partridges in a field on my way down the lane.

The first Song Thrush nest still has three eggs, female sitting. The one opposite now has four downy young (it had four eggs on Sunday). Lower down the lane still, the Blackbird's nest we found with two eggs on Sunday, now has five. I found an extremely well-concealed Wren's nest in the ivy-covered wall bordering the lane past Lindley Woods. Empty though and I doubt if it will be used – it may even be last year's nest.

The small domed nest lower down the wall now has four eggs, it had one when Mary found it on Sunday. There was no bird in attendance when I first passed, but I noticed one strange thing – the loose, feather-lining has disappeared. I can't find a rational explanation for that. If some human agency was involved, then it seems reasonable to suppose that a few of the feathers, at least would still be clinging to the nearby grass and leaves, yet I saw none. Although I do suspect one egg has been taken, because reckoning on one egg being laid each day since we found the nest on Sunday, there should have been five eggs today. It is unlikely that four eggs represent the full clutch with such small eggs at this stage of the season and in any case the female would most likely have been brooding a full clutch. If the bird has removed the feathers, then I can't imagine why.

I was still in doubt as to what bird's nest this was, so on my way back up the lane I sat down to watch the nest from the other side of the road. I checked the nest first, of course, and found that there was one small feather beneath the eggs, but I'm sure it wasn't there earlier. I had only waited a few minutes when a Willow Warbler appeared on the wall ivy. It disappeared back over the wall, but soon bobbed back and made its way to the nest. I say "Willow Warbler", because the bird looked like one in every respect, right down to its palish coloured legs and I had a good look at the bird in good light and using binoculars at a range of 15 or 20 feet. It is still possible that it could be a "light-legged" Chiffchaff, but I think unlikely. The bird never uttered a sound and a few Willow Warblers and a Chiffchaff were singing not far away – so there is no help to identification there. It seems only reasonable, therefore, to claim the bird as a Willow Warbler which has deviated from the norm slightly in building a comparatively sketchy nest just off the ground instead of on it.

After the Willow Warbler had entered the nest, I moved my position a few yards to where I could see into the nest through glasses. The bird looked up anxiously at the approach of each passing vehicle, though there were but few today, but relaxed again when they roared past. The noise must have been deafening to her, low down in the nest, just inches from the road. After a while she burrowed beneath herself and came up with the small white feather (which I had just noticed in the nest) in her bill. It looked as big as her tiny head. She sat fiddling about with this feather for a few minutes before pushing it back into the bottom of the nest. I thought she was going to eject the feather at first, thereby explaining the missing feather-lining to some extent. She sat on the eggs for half an hour and then she left the nest for the trees in the wood, hunting for food among the leaves. She returned to the eggs in 10 minutes, however. I crept up on her with the half-formed idea of trying to grab her to check wing formula, but she flitted off the nest and over the wall when I got close.

There is a Redpoll's nest built half-way along a slender conifer branch jutting over the lane about 20 feet up. I heard the "cheeping" of the hungry young first and saw the female Redpoll visit the nest with food. No hope of reaching the nest. A pity because it is the first Redpoll's nest I've found.



Song Thrush

photo: Stephen Lilley



Lesser Redpoll

photo: Stephen Lilley

Later while watching the Willow Warbler at the nest, I heard a short trilling song on and off. It was often difficult to pick out of the other bird song from where I sat, but I suspected it was a Wood Warbler. I followed up the song and climbed over the wall into the wood. Almost immediately I saw the source of the song, but it was too far away. I began to move closer, when the bird suddenly flew much nearer and lower down, among the sparse leaves of a tall, thin elderberry shrub. The bird was a Wood Warbler – the first I’ve seen. Recalling a Willow Warbler in looks, but rather larger and brighter, greener and yellower. Greener above with a sulphur yellow tinged throat and breast, whiter belly, a conspicuous yellow supercilium. It moved on, still not far away, pausing every now and then to sing with up-pointed bill and “shivering” from end to end. The song consisted of a few light, short starting notes – “tit-tit-tit” – scarcely audible except at fairly close range, followed by a dry trill, reminiscent of a Wren’s chatter, but softer and much less staccato and explosive.

I had a poor, uncertain view of what might have been another Wood Warbler nearby – the first one’s mate perhaps – but it could have been a Willow Warbler. I only saw it in silhouette, high among thick leaves. I also heard a soft note “teeu” repeated several times which may have been another call of the Wood Warbler, but I had lost track of the bird and didn’t

actually see it uttering this note, though it was nearby.

Stockbridge Nature Reserve

This autumn we have spent money down on the Reserve on two projects.

The first was clearing an invasive weed out of the small ponds so that aquatic creatures can benefit. Using a donation made to the Group, we were able to employ people from Hollybush Conservation Centre in Kirkstall to work for a day clearing out the ponds. They came on 24 November in a large landrover holding seven volunteers which included two team leaders. As they parked their vehicle and got out, a small flock of about 12 Waxwings landed above them in a dead tree, a fitting welcome. With some volunteers wearing chest waders to pull out the weed, others piled the debris by the side of the ponds so as to allow any creatures to return to the water. Later in the day, wheelbarrows removed the material to a dry area where the weed would not grow. The day was a success as the volunteers enjoyed the work and the ponds benefitted by this management.



positioned. It took four people to get the box up a tree and place the straps accordingly to ensure a strong bond was made with the tree.

The hard work on the ponds and drain area soon paid dividends when a Little Egret was discovered feeding in the ditch. This was on 13

The second project refers to purchasing a Tawny Owl Box. This was bought from the Barn Owl Trust along with straps to attach the box to the tree. Using a paintbrush, waterproofing was applied before the box was



Above shows volunteers getting at the weed in the water. The other image is of the final result of the work – more open water.