

Limmen NP – Will and Trish’s Excellent Adventure

Will Duiker

Club members Trish Bate and Will Duiker spent a couple of weeks this June in Limmen just prior to it being recognised as a National Park. The park is situated off the SE corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria. It stretches south



from the Roper River for more than 200km almost to the strangely named inland settlement of Cape Crawford. A large area on the west side has been excluded from the final boundary, presumably for Western Desert Resources and their Iron Ore proposal.

The park includes a section of coastline on the Gulf which we did not visit because we did not take a tinnie: access seems to be by boat along the rivers. Several large rivers transect the park including the Towns River, and the Limmen Bight River, and a high clearance 4WD is necessary at the crossings, especially early in the dry season.

These rivers attract fisherfolk who use numerous unofficial campsites on the Roper and organised campsites on the Towns and Limmen Bight, and commercial fishing camps.

The park appears to carry a high number of feral animals: we saw water buffalo and pigs, and a large number of cattle, which make a mess around many waterholes. Recent and continuing burning also discoloured the landscape.

Our primary focus was on finding places to watch birds, and safe places to swim such as Butterfly Springs. Birds are plentiful and even without approaching the coast we counted 73 species including a few that I had not encountered before such as the Yellow Tinted and Banded Honeyeaters as well as a good look at Gouldian finches and

Sarus Cranes at one of the small waterholes. Everywhere we stopped for a cuppa or camp, there were birds. Wherever there was burning the raptors were active including hundreds of Brown Falcons.

One added bonus is the neighbouring station, Lorella Springs, which has a large campground with facilities plus tracks throughout allowing access to many springs – some of which are thermal - and they also had better control of their cattle with many of the Billabongs and springs fenced off.

Ed: The (proposed) Limmen National Park, and the associated conflicts and difficulties, was described to the club by Stuart Blanch last year. This looks set to be another jewel in NT's nature crown, and well worth a visit.



Top: Trish Bate is dwarfed by sandstone pillars at the Lost City. Above: Sarus Cranes in Limmen National Park – an unusual sight within NT. Photos: Will Duiker

Interesting bird sightings

28 June to 24 July 2012

Compiled by Micha Jackson and Peter Kyne

Sightings are as reported (unvetted, unconfirmed) and have been compiled from emails sent to the NT Birds forum (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ntbirds>) moderated by Niven McCrie, postings on Birdline Northern Territory (<http://www.ereamaa.com/>) and from correspondences with birdwatchers. Bird names follow the IOC world checklist.

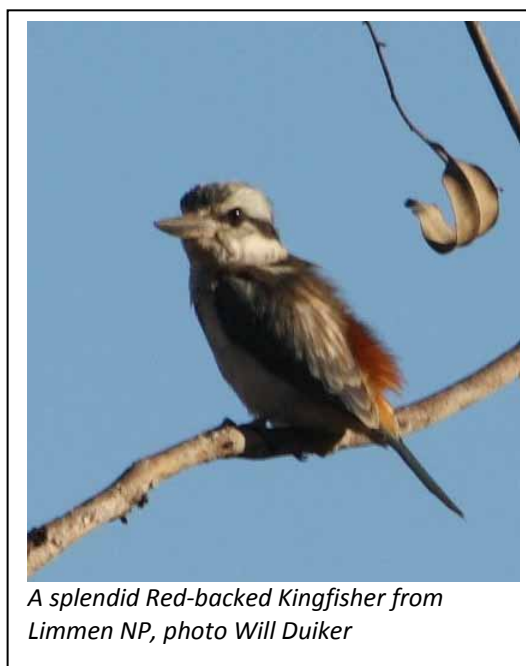
Species	Date	Location	Observer/s	Numbers/comments
Waterbirds, Seabirds & Shorebirds				
Australian Shelduck	9/7/12	Leanyer STP	Bas Hensen, Micha Jackson, Clive Garland	Most likely same individual; male
Great-Billed Heron	4/7/12	Daly River region	Peter Kyne	1 and subsequent sighting 9 July
Chestnut Rail	9/7/12	Stoddart Dr, Darwin	Tom Wilson	1
Eastern Curlew	22/7/12	Buffalo Creek	Bas Hensen	43
Birds Of Prey				
Black-Shouldered Kite	29/6/12	McMillans Rd, Darwin	Dominic Funnell	1 and subsequent sightings
Little Eagle	1/7/12	near Dundee Downs	Gerry Van Wees & Luke Paterson	1
Wedge-tailed Eagle	1/7/12	near Darwin airport	John Rawsthorne	1
Spotted Harrier	3/7/12	Daly River region	Pete Kyne	1
Red Goshawk	6/7/12	Mataranka Cabins	John Rogers	1 at nest site
Grey Goshawk	4/7/12	Daly River region	Peter Kyne	1 white morph
Grey Goshawk	7/7/12	Tiwi, Darwin	Ian Hance	1 at bird bath
Black Falcon	10/7/12	Marrakai Rd nr Adelaide R	Jodie Williams	1
Grey Falcon	21/7/12	Alice Springs STP	Max Arney, Greg Hunt, Philip Jackson, Frank Mitchell, Russell Thomson	1, & 1 10km N Alice Springs, Jean & Paul Newman
Other Non-Passerines				
Budgerigar	29/6/12	near Chainman Creek b/w Katherine River	Marc Gardner	40+
Australian Bustard	29/6/12	and Victoria Hwy	Marc Gardner	10+
Red-chested Buttonquail	30/6/12	Marrakai Road	Magen Pettit	1
Rufous Owl	7/7/12	Tiwi, Darwin	Ian Hance	1 calling
Pallid Cuckoo	15/7/12	Marrakai Road	John Rawsthorne	1 heard then seen
Passerines				
White-browed W/swallow	29/6/12	near Chainman Creek	Marc Gardner	40+ mixed flock with Masked WS
White-browed W/swallow	4/7/12	Gunlom, Kakadu NP	Tom Wilson	20+ with Masked WS
Singing Honeyeater	1/7/12	near Dundee Downs	Gerry Van Wees & Luke Paterson	4 feeding on flowering grevilleas
Cicadabird	21/7/12	Darwin hospital	Bas Hensen	1 female

Leanyer Ponds:

Access to Leanyer Ponds is generally available after induction through PAWC. Go to <https://www.rapidinduct.com.au/powerwater/waterservices> to commence the induction process. A key to the ponds may be obtained on payment of a \$50 deposit. Only those who have undertaken the induction and signed an indemnity can enter Leanyer Ponds.

Leanyer Sewage Ponds will be **temporarily closed** to birdwatchers from 1 May 2012 until September 2012 due to major works being undertaken by Power and Water. This work will involve significant mobile plant and equipment on-site to remove accumulated sludge in order to enhance the treatment process. Closure of the entire lagoon site to non-Power and Water staff will be required during this time. Power and Water will advise when the ponds will be re-opened to birdwatchers possessing a permit to access the site.

Bryan Baker has keys for the Alice Springs Sewage Ponds, available for collection in Darwin by members before they head south. Bryan can be reached in Darwin on 8948 2196.



A splendid Red-backed Kingfisher from Limmen NP, photo Will Duiker

Recent literature about Top End natural history

CONSERVATION, LAND MANAGEMENT & FIRE

Compiled by Don Franklin

Fire

- Beyer S, Kinnear A, Hutley LB, McGuinness K, Gibb K. 2011. Assessing the relationship between fire and grazing on soil characteristics and mite communities in a semi-arid savanna of northern Australia. *Pedobiologia* 54: 195-200.
- Cook GD, Jackson S, Williams RJ. 2012. A revolution in northern Australian fire management: recognition of Indigenous knowledge, practice and management. In *Flammable Australia. Fire regimes, biodiversity and ecosystems in a changing world*, ed. RA Bradstock, AM Gill, RJ Williams, pp. 293-306. CSIRO Publishing: Collingwood.
- Fensham R. 2012. Fire regimes in Australian tropical savanna: perspectives, paradigms and paradoxes. In *Flammable Australia. Fire regimes, biodiversity and ecosystems in a changing world*, ed. RA Bradstock, AM Gill, RJ Williams, pp. 173-194. CSIRO Publishing: Collingwood.
- Price OF, Russell-Smith J, Watt F. 2012. The influence of prescribed fire on the extent of wildfire in savanna landscapes of western Arnhem Land, Australia. *International Journal of Wildland Fire* 21: 297-305.

Land management

- Adams VM, Pressey RL, Stoeckl N. 2012. Estimating land and conservation management costs: The first step in designing a stewardship program for the Northern Territory. *Biological Conservation* 148: 44-53. [Daly River catchment]
- Ens E, Towler G. 2011. People and plants in Arnhem Land: maintaining ecological and cultural assets using Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal techniques. *Australasian Plant Conservation* 19:14-15.
- Puig CJ, Greiner R, Huchery C, Perkins I, Bowen I, Collier N, Garnett ST. 2011. Beyond cattle: potential futures of the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory. *The Rangeland Journal* 33: 181-194.

Carbon accounting

- Douglass L. 2011. Counting carbon (& biodiversity) out on the savanna. *Decision Point* 53: 8-10. [summary of Douglass *et al.* 2011, below]
- Douglass LL, Possingham HP, Carwardine J, Klein CJ, Roxburgh SH, Russell-Smith J, Wilson KA. 2011. The effect of carbon credits on savanna land management and priorities for biodiversity conservation. *PLoS ONE* 6: e23843.
- Grover SPP, Livesley SJ, Hutley LB, Jamali H, Fest B, Beringer J, Butterbach-Bahl K, Arndt SK. 2012. Land use change and the impact on greenhouse gas exchange in north Australian savanna soils. *Biogeosciences* 9: 423-437.
- Richards AE, Cook GD, Lynch BT. 2011. Optimal fire regimes for soil carbon storage in tropical savannas of Northern Australia. *Ecosystems* 14: 503-518.

Conservation – general

- Hermoso V, Kennard MJ. 2012. Uncertainty in coarse conservation assessments hinders the efficient achievement of conservation goals. *Biological Conservation* 147: 52-59.
- Hermoso V, Kennard MJ, Linke S. 2012. Integrating multidirectional connectivity requirements in systematic conservation planning for freshwater systems. *Diversity and Distributions* 18: 448-458.
- Laurance WF, Dell B, Turton SM, Lawes MJ, Hutley LB, McCallum H, Dale P, Bird M, Hardy G, Prideaux G, Gawne B, McMahon CR, Yuh R, Hero J-M, Schwarzkopf L, Krockenberger A, Douglas M, Silvesterk E, Mahony M, Vella K, Saikia U, Wahren C-H, Xu Z, Smith B, Cocklin C. 2011. The 10 Australian ecosystems most vulnerable to tipping points. *Biological Conservation* 144: 1472-1480.



Fire in western Arnhem Land

The extensive fire management scheme in western Arnhem Land is yielding results, as documented by analysis of fire scars from LANDSAT images for the twenty years from 1990 to 2009. Price *et al.* (2012) showed that the area burnt by prescription early in the dry season has increased and the amount burnt unintentionally late in the dry season has decreased – and that the relationship is almost exactly 1:1. In other words, for every hectare burnt early, one hectare less gets burnt later on.

The cost of conservation in the Daly River catchment

How much would it cost to change “routine land management” to “the additional requirements of conservation management on grazing properties” in the Daly River area? Adams *et al.* (2012) estimated the cost “at an average of \$1.99 per ha. We conclude that, if the most cost-effective properties are targeted, an annual budget of \$1 million would support stewardship agreements covering 90% of the catchment's area.”

Land clearing and greenhouse gas storage and emission

When vegetation is cleared, carbon is emitted. But what happens after that? Grover *et al.* (2012) investigated in the Douglas-Daly catchment. They found that, whilst wooded soils are a carbon sink, grassland soils are a carbon source, and the difference is substantial. (Another reason why the northern savannas shouldn't be cleared.)

Ecosystems most vulnerable

Amongst the 10 Australian ecosystems most vulnerable to tipping points – fundamental change, Laurance *et al.* (2011) included tropical savannas, coastal floodplains and wetlands, and salt marshes and mangroves.