

## Surveying Site 2! The perils of bird surveys

Rae Lister

We had no mobile reception and were unable to contact Heather on the Saturday morning of the Grenfell bird survey to give an estimate of our arrival time. We later heard the Optus Network was down for some hours in the Grenfell area. As we drove into the private property we found Heather outside anticipating our arrival and hurriedly finishing her breakfast. She had arrived back late the night before after twelve months in Brisbane. We drove around the back and Heather opened the passenger door to her vehicle for the two dogs to jump in and then got in herself and we followed her as she drove to the site. Paul wondered aloud how many birds we might see with two boisterous dogs in tow.

On arrival at the site a mob of beautiful Belted Galloways were right beside the entry gate and they began to moo. I saw that each had an ear tag with their name written on it. Personally I thought how sweet that they were greeting us and particularly noted Amber. She was a big girl. As Heather opened the gate for us we walked through and the dogs Jessie and Ziggy romped in too. Heather said she would lead us around the site so we set off with me noting the time at 9:10. We had not gone very far when the mooing became bellowing and we turned to see Amber leading a charge for us. I turned to look at the others and particularly Heather seeking guidance in this situation. It was then that I saw the excited dogs were safely ensconced behind us for protection and that the mooing and bellowing had nothing to do with us. Heather made a swift decision to remove the dogs from the site and closed the gate.

We returned to the task at hand which was to scan and listen out for birds. The cows walked alongside us. Were they hoping for protection? There was a sense of relative calm, which I judged by Daisy allowing her calf to suckle. Still it was impossible to hear any birds, should there be any remaining on our side of the mountain, as some cows would not let the matter drop. They continued to moo their outrage albeit a few decibels below the bellowing! Nigel spoke harshly to them to no avail.

Heather led us down an incline and I noted aloud that the cows were no longer accompanying us as perhaps they preferred walking only on the flat. Soon after that we heard bellowing again and spun around to see Amber leading the charge down the hill. At the same time we saw that Ziggy was behind us and Jessie was on the other side of the charging herd. Heather shouted doggy commands like stay, sit, etc to Jessie which she only partially obeyed as it was obvious she wanted to cross the void to relative safety behind us. Dogs being dogs they had run around the fence until they found a weakness they could exploit and get back in to the action.

Being the timekeeper I called time up and we moved purposefully towards Jessie and the gate. Amber and co ceased their descent and we made our way safely out the gate. As we left the enclosure Heather told us that they recently had a wild dog attack which had killed some sheep and also some goats and the remainder of the goat herd had bolted and none have returned. On the other hand the Belted Galloway herd remained intact. They had protected their calves and themselves from the attack.

I am afraid to say my contribution to the bird count was nil. Other team members (Paul, Nigel and Stephen) said they had seen three species and heard three more, which was impressive. Stephen continuing to take photographs under the circumstances was no less impressive.



Rae Lister with Heather Lamb's sheepdog, Jessie, after they were chased by cows: Photograph by Stephen Hey



Herd of Belted Galloway Cows, which chased Rae and her group while the dogs hid behind the people. Photograph by Stephen Hey