

downundercalendar

APRIL

April 25 ANZAC Day

The DUCW Board met in March and regretfully decided to cancel any local ANZAC Day remembrance service this year, due to COVID uncertainties. However, we would direct members and friends to access online services in Australia from the National War Memorial in Canberra, and other cities, and in New Zealand from the Pukeahu National War Memorial Park in Wellington, and other cities. Links will be emailed to members closer to the date. Remember the time differences and plan accordingly.

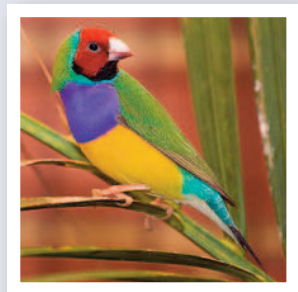
JULY

Sunday, July 10 Pool Party 3 pm at 57 D'Arcy Drive

Lynley and family have offered their pool and backyard for a return to this eagerly anticipated summer social occasion for the Club. In addition to swimming and socialising, there will be a backyard barbecue. The Club will provide the burgers, hotdogs and buns. Members attending are asked to bring drinks, and an accompanying dish to share – salads, pasta, desserts. If you plan to attend, please call Lynley at 204-269-1510 or email social@downunderclub.mb.ca.

OTHER EVENTS

A **brunch get-together** sometime is still on the cards and we will be in contact by email.



Learn about finches, (like this Gouldian finch by Martin Pot), on Birds I View on page 8.

The Down Under Club of Winnipeg meets on Treaty 1 territory in the Province of Manitoba and the homeland of the Métis Nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we live and gather, and all the lands from whence we came, including Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the elders past, present and emerging.

Land Acknowledgement for the DUCW

A few months ago at our AGM, the following minutes were recorded:

"Prompted by some thought-provoking comments initiated by Liz Hydesmith, a discussion was held regarding the DUCW's recognition of the First Nations of Australia, New Zealand and Canada. It was accepted that more discussions need to be held so that the DUCW can meaningfully address this subject."

Liz's comments coincided with and spurred on an early exploration into a land acknowledgement for the club. The challenge was how to represent all three cultures – Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Canada – in a way that represented our heritage, our lives here, and the purpose and functions of the DUCW. Research led to the collation of a number of acknowledgements from various institutions, businesses and individuals in those countries.

It was clear there was a lot of variation of language, shaped to some degree by the type of services each group provided, but some basics began to emerge.

Over several months, advice was sought from a diverse group, including the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Manitoba Museum, Assiniboine Park Conservancy, Manitoba Association of Playwrights, Fort Whyte Alive, University of Manitoba, Australian Government, City of Adelaide, Māori Language Services (MLS) with the New Zealand Government, and the Métis Federation.

Liz and I talked at length about the wording, purpose and application, and fine-tuned the language. After sharing the sixth draft with the DUCW executive, and adding Cather-

ine Bowering's suggestion re Métis representation, the final version of our land acknowledgement is as above.

Based on a recommendation from MLS, we included "Aotearoa New Zealand" because Aotearoa has been used for centuries by Māori, scholarly writings have been using Aotearoa New Zealand for decades, and broadcasters and politicians use either one or the other or both. MLS also noted that "... some people have strongly held opinions about this."

Ultimately, we hope to include the acknowledgement:

- On the front page of *The Southern Yarn*, perhaps below the Calendar
- On our website on the Home page, About page or Events page
- On our Facebook page in "About"
- In my signature at the end of DUCW emails – this is already in place

The acknowledgement is respectful and inclusive, represents our three main countries, is the result of direct communication with key entities, and drawn from the many acknowledgements collected.

When the final draft was shared with MLS, they responded: "This is really beautiful. I failed to mention in my previous communication that an acknowledgement of those who have passed away, and thereby those that grieve for them, is also traditionally important for Māori, but you've already included that too. I like it!"

We'd like to know what you think. Please email any of your thoughts and comments to info@downunderclub.mb.ca.

– Jenny Gates

editorially yours

Charlie Powell



Editorial

Hopefully, amongst the more serious pieces, you'll find enough light-hearted content in this issue to help you through your day ...

Thank you to Jenny, Peter, Brian, Judy, Chris, Malcolm, Dennis and our advertisers.

The Ode

The Ode comes from "For the Fallen", a poem by the English poet and writer Laurence Binyon and was published in London in *The Winoing Fan; Poems on the Great War* in 1914. The verse, which became the League Ode, was already used in association with commemoration services in Australia in 1921.

FOR THE FALLEN,

by LAURENCE BINYON (1869-1943)

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
Our country mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.

**They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
and in the morning
We will remember them.**

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond our country's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.

president's ramblings

Peter Munn



St. Vital does not have Punxsutawney Phil to tell us when there are six more weeks of winter. We get by with Bucktooth Bruce, our friendly resident rabbit. He came highly recommended after two years doing prognostication for Stranmillis Avenue.

I'm not sure why he was highly recommended because quite frankly he has been a bust. He was sighted for the first time this year, indicating winter would finish on May 8, which is way off the mark. Maybe it's time to check out some nice white sauce recipes.

On a serious note, at its recent Board meeting, your Club executive discussed the opening up of the Club's activities, with the first major consideration being the ANZAC Day ceremony. Allowing for all circumstances, but with regret, it was agreed not to hold the ceremony this year.

However, moving on to later in the year, we are planning on holding a pool party on July 10, and it would be great to have a lot of members there for a reunion of sorts. Lynley once again has graciously opened up her backyard to us for a swim and a barbie, and I hope to see you there again.

Enjoy the spring,
- Peter



Fingers crossed that our pool party will go ahead on July 10.



Travel restarting!

We look forward to helping you plan your dream vacation again!
The following destinations have re-opened: Australia, Fiji & Tahiti!
(List not exhaustive and current as of 28 Mar 2022
and subject to change; entry requirements apply).
Contact us directly for up-to-date travel info

*Want to modify this package?
Contact us for additional travel dates, departure cities, excursions and/or any hotel upgrades.

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150yearsago

knowing our history



Upper Fort Garry in 1870 (image: mhs.mb.ca)

The Red River Settlement

[Source: Red River North Heritage] Red River Settlement was a colony built at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers long before Confederation. It would become the city of Winnipeg. It became an official colony in 1812 with the arrival of settlers from the Scottish Highlands, known today as Selkirk Settlers. They sailed from their homeland to York Factory on Hudson Bay and travelled the waterways to Red River. However, those settlers were not the first residents of Red River Settlement.

Thousands of First Nations people had lived in the region for generations. French and English explorers and fur traders arrived in the late 1600s and early 1700s and mixed with the First Nations people. Others referred to their children as 'half-breeds' (Cree/Scots or English) and Métis (Saulteaux/Ojibway and French). After the Scottish settlers arrived, others followed.

In 1872, the population of Red River Settlement totalled about 15,000 people. Most residents were of First Nations and/or Métis/'half-breed' heritage. Other residents were of European heritage from Scotland, England, Ireland, Germany, eastern Canada, and the United States. As the population grew, so did the settlement, reaching over a large area of land.

DOWNUNDER TRAVEL

The last couple of years have been especially tough here at Downunder Travel. For a while, it looked like we might lose our 16-year-old business, but then in early August 2020, we started helping repatriate Australians back home. Impacted by restrictions and cancellations, it was extremely difficult to get into Australia during Covid.

Fortunately, we were able to rely on our strong connections in the industry, and word spread quickly that we were helping Aussies across North America get home. We are eternally grateful to the Australian community for trusting us during Covid, and for inadvertently saving our company from ruin.

Looking ahead, we are slowly getting back to what we do best – booking airfares and complete vacation packages for you. To help with that, we are now also Destination Specialists in Costa Rica, Belize and Panama.

If you need any assistance planning your vacation to Australia, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Belize, Panama, and a myriad of wonderful destinations in the South Pacific, please call us at 1-866-470-4414. We are here to help.

Jason Webb



KIWI INSTALLATIONS

Since 1997, Kiwi Installations has specialized in sunroom installation, and selling, installing and servicing rolling security shutters for commercial businesses and residential properties. During the summer months we also do decks and fences.

As of January this year, Kiwi Installations also became a dealer for Rock Glass, the virtually unbreakable glass used on both commercial and residential properties. Rock Glass totally works. In fact, you can take a hammer to it without any damaging results. It's just one more defence against the bad guys.

If you would like a quote on any of the products we deal in – shutters, rock glass, grills, decks, fences – call Terry at 204-229-6642 or 204-663-6549 and we can arrange a visit.

And yes, I am a Kiwi, through and through.

Terry Roberts

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Call Terry 204-229-6642 or 204-663-6549

Recipes from Flying Doctors

[Source: *Your Flying Doctor Autumn 2022*]

Please enjoy these recipes from some of our very talented flight nurses. Flight Nurse Judy Silk loves baking a Passionfruit Slice because it's delicious, easy to make and she has a good supply of passionfruit vines in her Perth garden. She often brings baked goodies into work, much to the delight of her colleagues. Senior Flight Nurse Erica Wilson is known for sharing her amazing cooking for the team at Port Hedland. Her cooking is famous across the RFDS in WA. [Link]



Passionfruit Slice

Ingredients – 1 cup self-raising flour, 1 cup sugar, 1 cup coconut, 125g butter melted, 1 395ml tin condensed milk, 1 small tin passionfruit pulp, juice of half a lemon.

Method – 1. Mix flour, sugar and coconut together. 2. Add melted butter and mix well. 3. Press mixture into a 20cm x 30cm slice tin lined with baking paper. 4. Bake at 170 degrees Celsius for 13 minutes. 5. Remove from oven and pat down gently with the back of a spoon to make slice level. 6. Spread combined condensed milk, passionfruit and lemon juice over cooked base and return to oven for five minutes. 7. Serve cold.

Mango Chutney

Ingredients – 3 just ripe mangoes, diced into rough cubes, 2 brown onions diced, 1 cup brown sugar, 2 cups white sugar, 1 tablespoon grated or minced ginger, 2 cloves crushed garlic, 2 teaspoons ground cumin, 1 teaspoon ground coriander, 1 tablespoon mustard seeds, 1 teaspoon mustard powder, 1 teaspoon turmeric, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon pepper, ½ teaspoon chilli flakes, ½ teaspoon mixed spice.

Method – 1. Put all ingredients into a heavy-based pot and mix together. Bring to the boil over high heat. 2. Reduce heat and simmer for about an hour. 3. Stir occasionally until the mixture has thickened, while still having lumps of mango in it. 4. Fill clean jars while chutney is still very hot. 5. Immediately seal and invert the jars until cooled. 6. Store in a cool dark place. 7. After opened, store in the fridge.



Wombat trivia

It is well known that the wombat eats roots and leaves, but did you know that the resulting poop is expelled as cubes? It's a fact, and scientists have finally figured out how. Bored due to COVID isolations, they decided to dissect some road-kill specimens. They found that unique grooves in the gut and different types of muscles move the motion with less regular contractions than the steady peristaltic waves of most mammals. As to why, they speculate it may help with territory marking if the poop doesn't roll off the rocks and logs. Now you know. [Link]

newszealand

various sources, see web links in online edition



Walnuts come of age

[Source: *Otago Daily Times: 2 March, 2022*]

Canterbury's walnut growers are making a living off their nut trees now that they are fully grown. A nearly 16ha orchard of 2,700 trees owned by New Zealand Walnut Industry Group researcher Dr Heather North and Clive Marsh is now at this stage. Their Lincoln orchard, first planted in about 2000, is the region's most mature commercial operation, but other orchards of 30ha and 40ha are approaching full growth.

Now that commercial operations and processing facilities are in place, the industry group and Walnuts New Zealand Co-operative is looking to bring in new growers. Small harvests from year six of planting build up to full production at 16 to 20 years when the trees have full canopies. North said developing an orchard to a crop-bearing stage was a long-term project and many growers had off-farm jobs, at least in the early years.

There was room for newcomers, including farmers, who might plant trees and inte-

grate them with other farming such as initially mowing rows for hay and then grazing livestock in older orchards. As North said, "It feels like we have all the pieces of the puzzle now in place - we have the co-op, the machinery and know-how to grow the trees. There's still a lot to learn and develop, but we have a set of knowledge to hand on to new growers." She said the future was bright with a trial of new varieties – particularly Lara – brought in from overseas breeding programs that look higher yielding than locally sourced Rex or Meyric.



Amazing find in an ATM

[Source *ABC North Qld, Jessica Naunton and Sally Rafferty, 15 March, 2022*] A postcard sent from the battlefields of World War I has turned up in a busy Townsville shopping centre and will be delivered to the family of its intended recipient – 106 years late.

The postcard was addressed to New Zealander Roy Coombridge from his brother-in-law Bert Cooke, but when cleaner Stephanie Schultz stumbled upon it last week, she originally mistook it for a discarded shopping list. Upon closer inspection, she discovered it was an important piece of wartime history. "I thought it was just another receipt and was ready to chuck it in the bin," Ms Schultz said. "Then I noticed there was writing and I thought it [was] probably just someone's grocery list and I saw it was a card. I started reading it and I was just like, 'Why is he talking about the Turks?' and I was like, 'Oh my God!'"

A colleague of Ms Schultz pointed out the date stamp, which read 1915. "I realised that's over 100 years old, and I got chills," she said. "We were shocked that a card that old was still floating around."

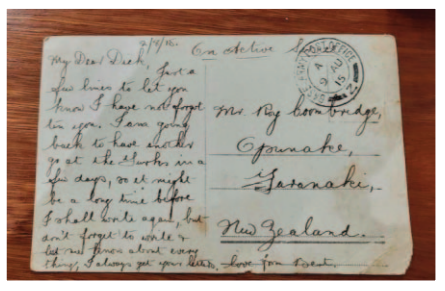
Bert Cooke was in his early 20s and serving with the Anzacs in Turkey when he wrote to his younger brother-in-law in Taranaki, New Zealand. He said he was "going back to have another go at the Turks in a few days. It might be a long time before I can write again."

continued on page 5...

...continued from page 4

After reading the heartfelt letter, Ms Schultz took to social media without hesitation to try to track down the family. "The response was unbelievable," she said. "I just thought someone might say, 'Oh that's mine', but two lovely people have gone on the internet and researched the names and they found the son. Within 24 hours we knew [who] it belonged to."

Roy Coombridge's son, Kevin, was shocked to receive a phone call this week telling him the century-old postcard had been found almost 3,500 kilometres from its intended destination. But the mystery did not end there. Mr Coombridge said he was baffled because the New Zealand-based family had no ties to Townsville, North Queensland. "It just came out of the blue," he said. "My only guess was the postmark says something about an army base, so I assume



that must have been up in Queensland."

Mr Coombridge said his father was much younger than Bert Cooke, and was just 14 when the war broke out. "Bert married Dad's sister. He was quite a bit older than Dad, but took Dad under his wing," he said.

Their close relationship continued after Bert Cooke returned home from the war. "Dad and Bert actually farmed together at one stage on the family farm in Taranaki," Mr Coombridge said.



What's Up with Vegemite ?

The Vegemite brand has a history spanning more than 98 years and is proudly owned by the great Australian food company – Bega Cheese Limited. When Bega Cheese purchased the Vegemite brand in 2017, they successfully returned the beloved spread to Australian ownership for the first time in more than 90 years.

Vegemite has been proudly made in Port Melbourne, Australia since 1923, and will celebrate its MITEY 100th birthday on October 25, 2023. Can you believe it has been almost 100 years since Vegemite graced the shelves of Australian grocers?

We will revisit this next year, but in the meantime, you can brush up your history here: [\[Link\]](#)

And for those wondering about the supply of Vegemite on local shelves ...

It used to be that Vegemite was available in several stores in Winnipeg, but in the early 2000s, that all changed. Apparently, Vegemite had been banned because of its folate levels. Folate is an FDA-regulated food additive, and there were reports that travellers had their precious jars of black gold confiscated upon arriving from Australia.

But that has all been debunked by numerous sources. Nevertheless, as recently as four years ago, when we started calling local companies about Vegemite, they repeated the story and claimed that was why they didn't stock it any longer. London Drugs wrote, "I am sorry to inform you that Kraft Vegemite has been pulled by CFIA, and we are not allowed to sell it in Canada due to the ingredients listed in the product."

That convinced us to contact both the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) in the US and CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) to get the real story, but in response to our question, "Do you currently have a ban on Vegemite?" we were told, "There is no ban on personal food imports of Vegemite."

Personal food imports? What about commercial imports? Nothing definitive on that, and efforts to contact Kraft in Australia about this were unsuccessful. But suffice to say, Vegemite is not currently available on shelves in Winnipeg.

However, you CAN buy Vegemite at Stonewall Family Foods – the only place we know of that stocks it in Manitoba. Phone 204-467-5553 or email swfamilyfoods@gmail.com to arrange for purchase and pick-up before supplies run out. And yes, you do have to make the trip yourself – they do not ship to Winnipeg Family Food stores.

You're welcome!

Roy Coombridge never served in the war, but dedicated his life to service as a Methodist pastor, and father of five. He died in 1985 at the age of 85. The family is now working with Bert Cooke's surviving relatives to try to piece together more details about the veteran, who also lived to an old age.

Mr Coombridge said it meant so much to the family to be reunited with the card, which provided an emotional glimpse of the past. "I didn't know Uncle Bert, hardly at all," he said. "I remember he was a very quiet man. He had suffered quite a bit during the war, he had suffered from a mustard gas attack, I know that, so he was quite an unwell man."

Ms Schulz said she was excited the postcard was finally making the journey home. "I'm going to send it registered mail so it can get to the son, so they can treasure it forever," she said.



The CAC Boomerang prototype. [\[Link\]](#)

80yearsago

knowing our history

4 May – The Battle of the Coral Sea begins.

19 May – The prototype CAC Boomerang, an Australian designed and built fighter aircraft, takes to the air for the first time.

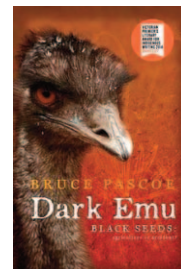
22 May – American soldier Eddie Leonski is arrested and charged for the "Brownout Murders" of three women.

31 May – During an attack on Sydney Harbour, a Japanese midget submarine sinks the converted Sydney ferry, HMAS *Kutta-bul*, killing 21.

Aussiebooks

good reads

Dark Emu, Aboriginal Australia and the birth of agriculture, by Bruce Pascoe. This book provides an enlightening insight into the extent and sophistication of the first peoples' agricultural practices as witnessed by early white explorers and settlers. (Cover art and titles vary by edition.)



The Speewah

[Thank you to Dennis Woodford
for informing us of this]

The Speewah is a mythical Australian station that is the subject of many tall tales told by Australian bushmen. The stories of the Speewah are Australian folktales in the oral tradition. The Speewah is synonymous with hyperbole as many of the tales about the place are used to enhance the storytellers' masculinity by relating events of extreme hardship and overcoming the dangers of the Australian wilderness.

Typically, men talk of the Speewah when they are faced with hard labour as a means of making their jobs mentally easier, though it can also be seen as a way of legitimising their bragging. Speech of this sort is used to make light of the situation, or to re-affirm the speakers' masculinity or bush skills to the detriment of others.

The Speewah station in The Kimberleys, Western Australia, is considered by some to be the original Speewah of legend, but may merely have been named after the legend in homage. The town of Speewah is located west of Cairns on the Kennedy Highway and is considered to be named after the legend.

The Speewah is an imaginary land and its boundaries have never been defined: the Speewah can be anywhere that the storyteller wants it to be, and tales have it situated anywhere from Cape York to the Otways, from Brisbane to Broome, and literally anywhere in Australia. Its location is kept ambiguous and when questioned people from different regions of Australia will give a different answer. 'The men from the Darling

The Speewa Ferry.
Photo: Mattinbgn,
CC BY SA 3.0, [Link]



Ranges said it was back o' Bourke and the men of Bourke said it was out West and the men of the West pointed to Queensland and in Queensland they told you the Speewah was in the Kimberleys.'

At any rate the territory itself is supposedly very large. When one wanted to close the gate to the station, he had to take a week's rations with him, and a jackaroo who was sent to bring the cows in from the horse paddock was said to be gone for six months, not due to incompetence (for there are no incompetent workers on the Speewah) but simply due to the sheer size of the Speewah. When the cook was frying up bacon and eggs for the men, he needed a motorbike to get around the frying pan. The dust storms were so thick that the rabbits dug warrens in them. The boundary riders had to make sure that their watches were changed for each separate time zone.

A portion of land owned by Jim Dillon south-west of Wyndham, Western Australia, that was settled at the beginning of the 20th century was named after the mythical land of the Speewah. This property (or station) still appears on maps as 'The Speewah' and has caused much debate from the storytell-

ing community as to whether or not this is the original Speewah of legend or whether (which is more likely) it is merely named after the legend in homage. This property is listed by the Australian Government as being 16°26 S 127°57 E.

There is also a "Speewa" straddling the border of Victoria and New South Wales near 35°13 S 143°30 E. The Speewa Ferry across the Murray River links Speewa, Victoria, with Speewa, New South Wales.

There is a hidden, private "Speewah" in the south west of Western Australia that has its roots in the original "Speewah" in the Kimberleys.

Speewah is also a real place in Far North Queensland. It is about 10 kilometres west of Cairns and a few kilometres south of the tourist town of Kuranda. It could be described as a bushland residential area.

Source: [wikipedia]



BushYarn

Big birds in the bush ...

The new chum was travelling up-country for the first time and was full of questions about the outback and the native bird life in particular.

'And what is the smallest bird in the Australian bush?' he enquired.

'That would be our tiny tom-tits,' replied the station ringer.

'And what would be the largest bird?'

'Arh, that would be the emu - the largest bird in the entire world,' sighed the ringer.

Time passed and they were driving through a small town and the new chum excitedly pointed to the local schoolyard where they had two tame emus pecking their war around the playground.

'Look! Look! What are those birds?'

The driver glanced over and laconically mumbled: 'Those? They're tom-tits, mate.'

Source: 'Classic Bush Yarns' by Warren Fahey, 2001



Commonwealthnews

Queen's Jubilee music project

On February 14, 2022, the Commonwealth Secretariat issued an open call for creatives across the Commonwealth – both professional and amateur – to take part in an exciting project to mark the Queen's Jubilee. The 'Commonwealth Natural Wonders in Music' project aims to unite those with a passion for music and art to work together on a new song and accompanying video celebrating the natural wonders of the Commonwealth.

The piece will weave together sounds from the natural world (e.g., wind through the trees, bird song, the sounds of the waves and waterfalls) and traditional national music to create a melody that reflects the richness of life across the Commonwealth's 54 countries. The video will feature performances from musicians filmed against a backdrop of stunning locations, as well as work from artists and illustrators.

Delivered in partnership with professional music group The Dionysus Ensemble, the project will celebrate the wide array of environmental riches and artistic talent that can be found in the Commonwealth. The finished work will be released in time for The Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend in June 2022.

The Queen's address on Commonwealth Day

[Source: *people.com*, by Simon Perry, March 14, 2022] Queen Elizabeth is continuing to affirm her "service" to Britain and dozens of countries around the world. In her annual Commonwealth Day message, the 95-year-old monarch echoed the vow she made on her 21st birthday in 1947 that she will be forever "devoted" to her public work. On Friday, the Queen, who has suffered a series of health issues since October, announced she was bowing out of attending the service and wanted her son Prince Charles to represent her at the service.

"In this year of my Platinum Jubilee, it has given me pleasure to renew the promise I made in 1947, that my life will always be devoted in service," she stated in her message, which she wrote at Windsor Castle. It was released as the annual Commonwealth Day service took place at Westminster Abbey.

Although she recently recovered from COVID-19, *people.com* understands that the Queen's absence from the Commonwealth

Day Service is not related to illness. There were discussions surrounding the monarch's comfort when it came to her travel arrangements and attending the service, which celebrates the union of the 54 nations that make up the Commonwealth. "The Queen will continue with other planned engagements, including in-person audiences, in the week ahead," Buckingham Palace said in a statement.

Affectionately calling the Commonwealth the "family of nations" in her message, the Queen also reiterated her hope that the countries – from Canada to Australia to India and Jamaica – can be a "point of connection, co-operation and friendship." She adds, "It is a place to come together to pursue common goals and the common good, providing everyone with the opportunity to serve and benefit."

Signing her message, "Elizabeth R," she seemingly referenced Russia's attack on Ukraine and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (she tested positive for coronavirus on Feb. 20) as she concluded her message: "In these testing times, it is my hope that you can draw strength and inspiration from what we share, as we work together towards a healthy, sustainable and prosperous future for all." [Link]

(not only) a New Zealand joke

An American, an Andorran, an Angolan, an Antiguan, an Argentine, an Armenian, an Australian, an Austrian, an Azerbaijani, a Bahamian, a Bahraini, a Bangladeshi, a Barbadian, a Barbudans, a Batswanan, a Belarusian, a Belgian, a Belizean, a Beninese, a Bhutanese, a Bolivian, a Bosnian, a Brazilian, a Brit, a Bruneian, a Bulgarian, a Burkinabe, a Burmese, a Burundian, a Cambodian, a Cameroonian, a Canadian, a Cape Verdean, a Central African, a Chadian, a Chilean, a Chinese, a Colombian, a Comoran, a Congolese, a Costa Rican, a Croatian, a Cuban, a Cypriot, a Czech, a Dane, a Djibouti, a Dominican, a Dutchman, an East Timorese, an Ecuadorean, an Egyptian, an Emirian, an Equatorial Guinean, an Eritrean, an Estonian, an Ethiopian, a Fijian, a Filipino, a Finn, a Frenchman, a Gabonese, a Gambian, a Georgian, a German, a Ghanaian, a Greek, a Grenadian, a Guatemalan, a Guinea-Bissauan, a Guinean, a Guyanese, a Haitian, a Herzegovinian, a Honduran, a Hungarian, an I-Kiribati, an Icelander, an Indian, an Indonesian, an Iranian, an Iraqi, an Irishman, an Israeli, an Italian, an Ivorian, a Jamaican, a Japanese, a Jordanian, a Kazakhstani, a Kenyan, a Kittian and Nevisian, a Kuwaiti, a Kyrgyz, a Laotian, a Latvian, a Lebanese, a Liberian, a Libyan, a Liechtensteiner, a Lithuanian, a Luxembourger, a Macedonian, a Malagasy, a Malawian, a Malaysian, a Maldivian, a Malian, a Maltese, a Marshallese, a Mauritanian, a Mauritius, a Mexican, a Micronesian, a Moldovan, a Monacan, a Mongolian, a Moroccan, a Mosotho, a Motswana, a Mozambican, a Namibian, a Nauruan, a Nepalese, a New Zealander, a Nicaraguan, a Nigerian, a Nigerien, a North Korean, a Northern Irishman, a Norwegian, an Omani, a Pakistani, a Palauan, a Palestinian, a Panamanian, a Papua New Guinean, a Paraguayan, a Peruvian, a Pole, a Portuguese, a Qatari, a Romanian, a Russian, a Rwandan, a Saint Lucian, a Salvadoran, a Samoan, a San Marinese, a Sao Tomean, a Saudi, a Scottish, a Senegalese, a Serbian, a Seychellois, a Sierra Leonean, a Singaporean, a Slovakian, a Slovenian, a Solomon Islander, a Somali, a South African, a South Korean, a Spaniard, a Sri Lankan, a Sudanese, a Surinamer, a Swazi, a Swede, a Swiss, a Syrian, a Taiwanese, a Tajik, a Tanzanian, a Togolese, a Tongan, a Trinidadian or Tobagonian, a Tunisian, a Turkish, a Tuvaluan, a Ugandan, a Ukrainian, a Uruguayan, a Uzbekistani, a Venezuelan, a Vietnamese, a Welshman, a Yemenite, a Zambian and a Zimbabwean all walk into a fine restaurant. "I'm sorry," says the maître d', "but you can't come in here without a Thai."

[Source: [Link]]

Finches

One of life's little joys is the pleasure that birds offer as they fly in and out of our day. The earliest "pets" I can remember having to care for were zebra finches – in a homemade aviary in backyard suburban Brisbane. After that there were various canaries and budgerigars, in indoor cages.

These days, that pleasure comes from watching the volunteer feathered visitors outside the window. The greater variety adds to the enjoyment. In fact, so much variety that I printed off three pages of photos (18 pics) of the more frequent and sometimes confusing sparrows and finches. Sometimes their background markings are similar, but I've learnt that the finches have larger, conical, beaks and generally the males show more colour than their sparrow counterparts. A good example is the house finch compared to the house sparrow.

Four species of finch were introduced to New Zealand during the 1860s:

chaffinches – the male has a distinctive slate-grey head and nape, and is a rich pinkish-brown underneath. The female is paler pinkish-fawn underneath, with a brown head and nape. Both male and female have a double white wing-bar;

greenfinches – olive-green with yellow outer wing feathers, and they show flashes of yellow as they fly past, often in large flocks;

goldfinches – New Zealand's most colourful finches are bright red from their bill over their face to their forehead. They have a black crown and collar, black-and-gold wings, and shades of brown, buff and white on their body; and

redpolls – the smallest of the finches, weighing just 12 grams and measuring about 12 cm. They have a streaky brown body with a red forehead, and the male has a bright crimson chest in breeding season. [Link]

Australia's finches belong to the Estrildidae family. They are small birds (10-16 cm) widely spread across Australia's shrubby forests and grasslands (and pet cages). The Avicultural Society of Australia list 19 of them. While the zebra is still the most popular for fanciers who enjoy them captive, the Gouldian is the more iconic.



Top: House finch, by John Benson of Madison, WI.

Above: Zebra finch, by Laurie Boyle.

250 years of decline Lost, but not forgotten

[Source: *The Conversation*; Michelle Ward, Ph.D. candidate, U of Qld]

In the last 250 years, 22 native birds have gone extinct. We found two more currently listed as threatened under Australia's environmental legislation may now also be extinct.

One is the eastern star finch. This bird was once found from northern New South Wales to Queensland's Burdekin River. A victim of overgrazing, it has not been seen since 1995. Surprisingly, this bird is only listed as "endangered" rather than "critically endangered" under Australian law.

The other is the Tiwi Islands hooded robin, which has not been seen for 27 years. Changed fire patterns from European colonisation and invasive species such as cats and weeds have likely driven it to extinction.

Other species are on their last legs. The western ground parrot, for example, once swept across large parts of Western Australia, but are now in just two locations: Cape Arid National Park and Nuytsland Nature Reserve.

They've become locally extinct across more than 99% of their historical habitat because of habitat destruction, invasive species, and changed fire patterns. They're at significant risk from isolated catastrophic events such as major bushfires. For example, the 2019-2020 fires alone destroyed 40% of the bird's last remaining habitat. [Link]



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