



The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 72
Winter 2010

Who's in Your Backyard?

BOCA member Barbara Oehring sends word of this unusual backyard sighting:

My husband Rolf noticed an unusual bird in our garden in Ferntree Gully on the morning of 25 March 2010 and called for me to come quickly and have a look. I had never seen such a pigeon. We checked the field guide and wondered what a White-headed Pigeon was doing in our area. We sighted it again the following day and the day after. Since then the visits have stopped but, luckily, I managed to get some photos of this unusual visitor.

Have you had any notable or unusual avian visitors to your backyard? Let us know at melbirdian@gmail.com or contact Graeme Hosken, our recorder of interesting sightings. See page 5 for more interesting sightings.



White-headed Pigeon in Ferntree Gully – Photo, Barbara Oehring

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MELBOCA Branch Meetings: Upcoming Guest Speakers

Tuesday 25 May 2010 8:00pm

Jo Oldland: "Birds Australia's Shorebirds 2020"

Jo is keen to raise awareness of the National Shorebird Monitoring Program and should be able to add an extra dimension to our knowledge and observation of Shorebirds.

Tuesday 27 July 2010 8:00 pm

Rachel Webster "Climate Change: Recent Developments in the Science and Technology"

Everyone has a view on climate change – informed or not. This is an opportunity to become one of the 'informed' because Professor Rachel Webster, astrophysicist at the University of Melbourne, is keen to share her expertise.

MELBOCA branch meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of every month (except December) in the Evergreen Centre, 45 Talbot Ave, Balwyn, not far from the library (Melway 46 E8). The meeting begins at 8:00pm and features a guest speaker and a Member's Topic segment. Entry is by a donation of \$4. Out-of-town members and visitors are always welcome!

Tuesday 22 June 2010 8:00pm

David Holland: "Owls, Frogmouths and Nightjars of Australia"

Renowned ornithologist, Dr David Hollands, will share with us his passion for owls. He has authored, including his own photographs, books on birds of the night, raptors, kingfishers and kookaburras.

Tuesday 24 August 2010 8:00pm

Paul Sinclair: "Remaking Connections between People and Nature"

Dr Paul Sinclair is an expert on the Murray River system. Currently with the ACF, he is one of Australia's leading conservationists, often heard on radio and television. We are thrilled to have Paul as our speaker.

MELBOCA President's Report 2010

Fourth President's Report for the Melbourne Branch of Bird Observation & Conservation Australia

The following is a behind the scenes look at how your committee and other volunteers have provided MELBOCA members a varied program of activities over the past year. MELBOCA is also called upon to assist the BOCA National Office in providing Guest Speakers for many organisations and conservation activities.

Your committee consists of 10 members who meet bi-monthly on the second Tuesday of the even months. **Janet Hand**, in addition to being the Secretary, is also our Education Officer. Financial matters are handled by **Bill Ramsay** who also produces and maintains, with Damian Kelly, a non committee member, the MELBOCA Website (www.melboca.org.au).

Conservation is the third word in BOCA and is an important duty administered for the committee by **Arthur Carew**.

The Melbirdian is our newsletter with input from members and edited by **Andrew Fuhrmann**.

Monthly meetings, on the fourth Tuesday of every month, require a guest speaker and a BOCA Member's Choice segment, formerly Bird of the Evening, which **Sunny Fernie** is responsible for organising. Committee member **Diane Tweeddale** is responsible for organising the MELBOCA Weekday Outings. Coach Outings were previously arranged by non-committee members **Veronica Goodwin**, **Jenny Mortlock** and **Lana Tinsley**, but, in 2010, committee member **John Young** has stepped into this position. John is planning for this activity to re-commence shortly.

With the formation of the PhotoBOCA branch, **Sonja Ross** joined the MELBOCA committee during the year as its representative. Money monitoring, a little different to bird monitoring, is placed in the capable hands of **Geoff Russell** when an audit of the books is required.

The following activities are organised through MELBOCA:

Wednesday Wanderings: now in its second program visiting various birding spots along the Yarra River, from Warrandyte to Melbourne, meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month, organised and led by **Celia M Browne**.

Yellingbo: on the first Sunday of the month, visiting the habitat of the Helmeted Honeyeater, with Maryanne Anderson as the organiser.

Beginners Outings: were formerly managed and led by Michelle Judson, but a change of occupation saw Michelle leave Australia for the UK late in 2009. **Alan** and **Hazel Veevers** stepped into this position and commenced their first monthly outing on the fourth Saturday of the month in February.

MELBOCA Monthly Meetings at Balwyn: assistance is provided from the following helpers on the night: supper, **Heather Mitchener**; door, **Eleanor**

Stephenson; shop, **Barbara Longmuir**; and Meeting Recorder, **Daphne Hards**.

In the latter part of 2009, problems were being encountered with the equipment being used for presentations at the monthly meetings. The committee decided that MELBOCA should purchase a new Laptop for their use and that a fund-raising night be organised to assist in its purchase. This was completed in November in the form of a Wader Information Night with a field trip to the Western Treatment Plant. Thirty-nine people attended and my thanks to **John Barkla** for his assistance in making this a successful activity. In addition, MELBOCA received a large donation from the estate of Linda Stock.

In addition to the Laptop, a Data Projector, purchased at an excellent price, a Remote Sender for the Laptop and, to make it easier for Daphne Hards to write up the meetings, a mini Digital Recorder were added to MELBOCA's equipment assets, now allowing a more professional presentation and recording on the night.

The MELBOCA Website has been extensively upgraded during the year. The MELBOCA Photography Group's photos are extensively used, mainly in the identification of species listed on the Site Outing Reports. A few species photos are still required. Perhaps you can help? Of the 241 species seen across 80 outing sites, 207 have photos.

A major activity by MELBOCA over the past three years has been providing survey assistance to BOCA and Melbourne Water, with MELBOCA teams surveying six of the ten wetlands in the Lower Dandenong Creek Catchment. The project was to finish in June 2010, but the contract with Melbourne Water has been extended another three years, with an additional wetland added in Scoresby, taking the total surveyed by MELBOCA to seven from July 2010. As of March 2010, 133 bird species have been recorded.

Our education activities have included providing assistance in finding speakers for many groups and schools.

Bird identification with Water Watch groups has recently started and species identification cards produced. Representatives of the branch visited the Bird Fair in NSW last year and will repeat again in September 2010. The Sticky-beak projects at Blackburn Lake over the past year have involved MELBOCA personnel and perhaps we may see youngsters join BOCA at a later date.

My thanks to the MELBOCA committee and to the many MELBOCA volunteers that have made the past year a success. The possible amalgamation between BOCA and Birds Australia will create additional challenges in the future and I am sure the activities enjoyed by BOCA members will not be lost if the joining of the two bodies occurs.

Graeme Hosken
MELBOCA President

MELBOCA Treasurer's Report for the year ended 31 December 2009

	2009		2008	
<u>Income Statement</u>	\$	\$	\$	\$
Revenue				
Meeting receipts	2,543		2,523	
Bequest by Linda Stock	1,000		0	
Wader Course fees	975		0	
Miscellaneous	138		0	
Donations	<u>382</u>		<u>30</u>	
		5,038		2,553
Less Expenses:				
Hire of meeting hall	1,260		1,256	
Gifts to guest speakers	332		174	
Sundry meeting expenses	215		78	
Computer and computer accessories	836		0	
Meeting recorder and extended warranty	119		0	
Website hosting fee	139		139	
Website domain registration fee	19		0	
Wader Course expenses	236		0	
Miscellaneous	<u>285</u>		<u>54</u>	
		<u>3,441</u>		<u>1,701</u>
Net Surplus for the year:		<u>1,597</u>		<u>852</u>
<u>Balance Sheet</u>				
Equity:				
Accumulated Funds				
Balance at start of year	2,138		1,286	
Add Net Surplus for the year	<u>1,597</u>		<u>852</u>	
Balance at end of year		<u>3,735</u>		<u>2,138</u>
Represented by:				
Cash at Bank	3,767		2,138	
Less unrepresented cheque	<u>32</u>		<u>0</u>	
		<u>3,735</u>		<u>2,138</u>

Notes:

1. Cash at Bank is an at call cheque account.
2. There were no outstanding liabilities at the end of the year.
3. Printing expenses for *The Melbirdian* are paid by BOCA and do not form part of the MELBOCA accounts.
4. MELBOCA is responsible for organizing Coach Tours but all income and expenses are included in BOCA's accounts.

Bill Ramsay
MELBOCA Treasurer

Past Meeting Reports

26 January 2010

John Young opened the meeting and passed the microphone to **Jill Plowright** for her diagnostic segment on egrets, viz. Cattle, Great, Intermediate, Little and Eastern Reef Egrets.

Egrets are large white birds with long necks and legs and a straight, serrated bill for catching and holding fish. Jill pointed out that the neck “kinks” are unreliable diagnostic features and that leg and bill colour can change between breeding and non-breeding. They all have plumes in breeding plumage.

The Cattle Egret, a winter visitor, is usually in flocks, looking for insects disturbed by animals, especially cattle. It has a short neck and a distinctive orange blush to head and chest in breeding plumage. The Great Egret has a long neck, 1.5 times the body length. Its gape extends back beyond the eye and the head is flattened. The bill and leg colour may change seasonally. The Intermediate Egret is daintier, with head more rounded and gape extending to beneath the eye. Its neck length is equal to its body length and is uncommon in Victoria. The Little Egret is smaller and has a rounded head. The bill is always black, the neck is shorter than the body, and, thanks to evolution, it has green soles to its feet! Eastern Reef Egrets have two colour morphs: white in the north and the more southerly grey. Their habitat is coastal – rocky shores, beaches and inlets. It has a long, thick bill and shorter, sturdy legs.

John introduced the main speaker, **Susan Myers**, whose talk had the exotic title of *Birds of Borneo*. Susan has spent a lot of her life visiting Asia, often as a tour leader, and she is the author of the recently published field guide, *Birds of Borneo*. Borneo lies north-west of the Wallace Line, thus its flora and fauna are more Asian than Australasian. It consists of the wealthy country of Brunei, two states of Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak, and the southern Indonesian state of Kalimantan. A map showed a low percentage of protected land, the main crop driving vegetation clearing being palm oil. The island is mostly low-lying, with a mountain range forming a central spine with several spurs, and the highest peaks in the north, particularly in Sabah. Many rivers, often swollen by monsoons, fan out to the coast and are the main means of transport. The indigenous Dayak people live much as they always have, in villages on river-banks.

There are approximately 635 bird species in Borneo, and 50 of these are endemic. Susan showed how most of the endemics can be found in Sabah, making this area the most rewarding bird-wise. During the Pleistocene Age, sea levels fell and birds moved across the land bridge from Asia. When sea levels rose again, birds were pushed east and north to Borneo, and then to Sabah, with the result that, within families, this area has a more ancient and endemic species set, and the rest of Borneo a more recent one. Susan gave pittas and falconets as examples.

Borneo straddles the equator and is classified “moist tropical” in climate. It is 25-35°C year round. There are two

monsoons, one “wet” monsoon from November to June, and a “dry” monsoon May to October. The rainforest canopy reaches 80 metres, one of the highest in the world. There are several habitat categories. First, lowland rainforest, 90% of which has been cleared for plantations. The remnants of this habitat are high canopy forest with a high level of biodiversity. Regular flooding occurs and a typical resident is the Proboscis Monkey. Second, offshore islands. Third, hill and montane forests, which have waterfalls, mists and many epiphytic plants, e.g. ferns. The bird groups found here are typical of the Himalayas. The last habitat group is Kerangas forest on sandy soil, supporting its own rainforest species and favoured habitat for spectacular pitcher plants.

Susan made impressive use of her own photography, and I shall mention my favourites. Reminding me of Botswana, Borneo has nine species of hornbill. The Bushy-crested gets about in raucous groups, and the Rhinoceros Hornbill is typical of those with a massive casque. Two kingfishers exhibit flashy plumage – the Blue-eared Kingfisher and the Red-backed Dwarf Kingfisher. Bright colouration is also typical of the barbet family. Two species of splendid pitta adorn the covers of Susan’s field guide: the Blue-headed Pitta on the British version, and the Blue-banded on the American. Susan likes the babbler family, as members tend to be furtive and offer a birding challenge; the Striped Wren-Babbler and Chestnut-winged Babbler may give their presence away by their calls. We also saw herons, ducks, eagles, cuckoos, broadbills and flycatchers.

We then toured Sabah again via mammals, reptiles, amphibians and flora. It was good to hear that Susan has not led a tour without seeing wild Orangutan, which only emphasizes the fact that they are restricted to ever decreasing habitat. Borneo has its own Bornean Pygmy Elephant, which is small, has straight tusks and a long tail reaching the ground. They roam in big herds of up to eighty.

Beware of snakes snoozing on branches, and water monitors cruising round water’s edge. Lizards abound and bright green gliding-frogs inhabit the forests. Insects are many with the greatest diversity in the mountains. Leeches disturb many tourists but, Susan says, at least they don’t carry deadly disease like the mosquito.

Susan allowed us to appreciate Charles Darwin’s quotation on Borneo: “one great, untidy, luxuriant hothouse of nature herself”.

John Barkla expressed MELBOCA’s gratitude to Susan for her fascinating armchair tour of a relatively close and accessible island. If you are inspired to seek her advice her email address is: myers_susan@yahoo.com.au

Barb Longmiur urged all to take advantage of the Blue Wren Gift Shop closing-down sale. **Bill Ramsay** outlined MELBOCA’s fund for new technology, saying that after the purchase of a new laptop computer the surplus was yet to be allocated. Then, after previewing next month’s MELBOCA meeting, John declared the meeting closed.

Daphne Hards

Past Meeting Reports (cont'd)

23 February 2010

The meeting was chaired by **Bill Ramsay** who greeted all, including new members and visitors. He then introduced **Dianne Tweeddale** to present the evening's Member's Choice segment. She related her trip to Egypt in September 2009. Chris Doughty led the tour for Peregrine Bird Tours, timed to coincide with the southward migration from Europe to Africa. They started in Cairo and visited the pyramids, tombs and temples. Birds popped up in the most arid situations, but they found that the birds are more active at night, in the cool, resting during the hottest hours of the day. So the birdwatchers adapted.

In parks and gardens, they saw warblers, martins, swallows, sunbirds and Hooded Crows. Buzzards and eagles were prominent. At Ras Mohammed National Park, devoid of greenery, birds such as the Northern Wheatear happily perched on rocks. White Stork were moving south, 2000 strong at a sewage works they visited, and Cattle Egret were seen at Luxor. At First Cataract, a shallow stretch of the Nile, were Grey, Striated, Squacco and Purple Herons, Black-capped Night Heron and 20 Little Bittern.

Dianne praised their hotel accommodation, and she always felt safe with the attendant security guards. The bird tally was 128 species. Bill added a request for Member's Choice volunteers to get in touch with **Sunny Fernie** (contact MELBOCA 03 9802 5250). She is looking for speakers for May and July.

Dr Mike Duncan was then introduced to give his talk on Africa, *An Orchid Fancier's View of the Birds of East Africa*. Mike is a Senior Scientist in the Department of Sustainability and Environment. His work involves threatened orchid conservation.

He arrived in Nairobi, Kenya, in January, the rainy season, with a small group of scientists to study orchids in Malawi, and following this they travelled as tourists in Malawi and Tanzania. Malawi is a landlocked nation with Lake Malawi, the second biggest lake in Africa, on its eastern boundary. Most of the land has been cleared for cropping, as 16 million people struggle to make a living. It is the third-poorest nation in Africa, and the tenth-poorest in the world. Most people live in little villages; vehicles are rare, so walking and cycling are how the locals get about. Children clustered round the white visitors and everyone was friendly. Mike's group bought food from stalls and markets. Birds accompanied their travels: the Hammerkop and Red-billed Teal at water, Little and European Bee-eaters, many weavers, the Red-collared Widowbird and Pin-tailed Whydah.

Malawi has granite mountains and it was on the lower slopes, amidst plantations (mainly mangoes), that the search for orchids happened. There are approximately 450 species of orchid in Malawi, and the few we saw looked spectacular. Higher up in the sub-tropical forest, in the territory of Yellow Baboon, they saw Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Yellow-vented Bulbul, Bronze Mannikin and Schalow's Turaco. Even the names are evocative.

Then on to northern Tanzania. They flew into Arusha and

during the following road trip they saw Speckled Mousebird, Blue-capped Cordon Bleu, Masked and Spekes Weaver, and the Red-billed Firebird. At Serengeti, the group stayed in permanent camps. The vast plains offered vistas of Blue Wildebeest and zebra as far as the eye could see. Many different antelope, a cheetah with cubs, Spotted Hyena, Masai Giraffe and lion all were successfully photographed, plus snakes, lizards and energetic dung beetles. Even Masai warriors posed for Mike's camera, looking out over their traditional lands. The birdlife was prolific. Guineafowl, francolin, sandgrouse, spurfowl, bustards, vultures, storks, cranes, rollers, barbets, sparrows and the African Hoopoe; and I cannot omit the brilliant starlings, Hildebrands and Superb, plus the iconic Secretary Bird.

Mike's party then visited Ngorongoro Crater, which is 19km in diameter. It was peak migration, and the crater was groaning with zebra, buffalo and, as well, the occasional Black Rhinoceros. The water held hippopotami, and Greater and Lesser Flamingo graced the shallows. Warthog entertained. The feathered species included plovers, pelican, spoonbill, ibis, Cattle Egret, jacana, geese, herons and storks.

Returning towards Nairobi, they visited Tarangire NP and again stayed in a permanent tent camp. The country here offered huge baobab trees, and big herds of Savannah Elephant moving through. Vervet monkeys were common too, also raptors – plenty of prey for the likes of the African Fish Eagle. Mike showed us many more species: Saddle-billed Stork, Avocet, hornbills, coucal, kingfisher, more weavers, babbler, pytilia. Who can go to the East African grasslands and not show a photo of Ostrich? We heard that the Ostrich female may lay many eggs in one spot, and the young possibly grow up in a crèche arrangement, though the true advantage of this strategy is unclear.

John Land thanked Mike for a well crafted and entertaining talk. **Bill Ramsay** reported that MELBOCA has now purchased a Sony data projector. He then went on to tell us that Howard and Jill Plowright are moving to Fish Creek in Gippsland. Our branch thanked them for their huge contributions and wished them well.

The untimely death of **Robyn Harry** was announced.

John Young has agreed to organize coach trips, and he told everyone that he would welcome suggestions of places to go. **Sonja Ross** encouraged all who wish to participate in the November PhotoBOCA 'Digital Photography in the Bush' conference at Gunbower Island to book accommodation early. All members are urged to respond to the recent letter about possible amalgamation with Birds Australia. Bill stressed the importance of this chance to air views. Bill made several announcements, noted rare sightings, flagged upcoming outings and then called the meeting closed.

Daphne Hards

Past Meeting Reports continued on page 11

Outing Report: Yellingbo Bird Walk

Sunday 7 March 2010

The trees were alive with movement. Laughing Kookaburra from all over the reserve were rejoicing the recent rains. There was the promise of rain again today – dark, foreboding clouds threatened. The forecast was for a top of 31 degrees. It was also the Labour Day long weekend. These were just two very good reasons for finding other things to do on the day.

But, still, three intrepid birders set out around the Yellingbo car park, walking from tree to tree with cameras at the ready. Have the Tawny Frogmouths returned yet? Perhaps we'll see them next month. Good photos were taken of Brown and Striated Thornbill that hopped along branches very close to the enthusiastic onlookers. Eastern Yellow Robin and White-naped Honeyeater had obviously had very good recent breeding seasons and were numerous throughout the reserve. Crested Shrike-tit called from nearby trees. There were also good numbers of Yellow-faced Honeyeater, and the cameras snapped joyously once again at the sight of a Rufous Whistler in the large Manna Gum at the car park.

As the sun desperately tried to peep through the ever-darkening sky, we took the usual walk by the Woori Yallock Creek behind the farms. Family groups of Red-browed Finch gathered in a small bush while Grey Fantail did their usual acrobatic tricks between the eucalypts. Superb Fairy-wren, some in eclipse plumage, danced through low-lying bushes. The occasional frog call was heard, and a Swamp Wallaby bounded away towards the back of the dry swamp as we came too close for comfort.

A couple of hopeful horses sauntered over to the perimeter fence of one of the nearby farms as we waited to give them a pat. In the distance behind them we could see Wood Duck surrounding the small dam close to the farmhouse.

Further down the track, White-browed Scrubwren scrambled noisily through the dead thicket by the creek and Silvereve moved through the trees above. Brown-headed

Honeyeater were visible here too.

A small group of Dusky Woodswallow flew above one of the swamps and landed in the dead trees allowing easier identification – a rare, yet welcome visitor to the reserve.

At the larger dam, towards the far end of the reserve, two Australasian Grebe made regular appearances as they dived for food. Black Duck, Dusky Moorhen and Purple Swamphen enjoyed the water as Welcome Swallow flew gracefully above. White-faced Heron perched in the nearby dead trees.

On the way back to the car park for a late lunch, a Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo perched on high in the dense canopy of eucalypt. What a surprise when a brilliant male Australian King-Parrot sat in the tree to the right? Cameras were snapping away madly when something flew overhead behind the group. It was in our sights for such a short time. It was definitely a raptor, but with no one having the presence of mind to photograph it, it went unidentified.

Golden Whistler and Rufous Whistler called for much of the day. White-naped Honeyeater with young were ever-present, as were the delightful Brown Thornbill and Laughing Kookaburra. One of the more pleasant sights, and much photographed, was a female Mistletoebird moving through an outcrop of mistletoe close to the track along which we were walking. One of the photographs actually showed the bird feeding on the fruit.

After an extended walk through Yellingbo and with the handicap of just three pairs of eyes, 40 birds were recorded for the day. It had been a very pleasant outing. The rain had held off all day, even though it had become quite warm during the afternoon. One can only plead for more pairs of eyes to help in the discovery of yet more birds each month!

Maryanne Anderson

Outing Report: Jells Park

Saturday 27 February 2010

Nineteen people arrived for the 10:00am start in overcast but fine conditions. Birds were plentiful, with Musk and Rainbow Lorikeets in the car park area. A circuit was walked with leaders **Hazel and Alan Veevers**, passing small ponds on the way down to the main lake, then around the lake through the conservation area. Darters and cormorants, perched on dead logs, provided good photo opportunities for those with cameras.

A total of 48 species were recorded. A further six members arrived for the start of the 1:30pm walk. Several of the morning group stayed on as the second walk took place. Initially heading towards the power lines, we were

rewarded with sightings of a Tawny Frogmouth and Gang-gang Cockatoos. Underneath the power lines was the day's highlight – a flock of Latham's Snipe, flying up and down the hill. At this point the rain started, but undeterred we again went round the lake (in the opposite direction to the morning walk), where an immature Australasian Darter had now joined its mother. Good sightings were had of several bush birds, including Rufous and Golden Whistlers. During the afternoon we saw an extra nine species, giving a grand total of 57 for the day. Many thanks to Geoff Deason for his assistance on our first day as leaders.

Hazel and Alan Veevers

Education Report – Can You Help?

In March, two MELBOCA members attended a BOCA Education Ideas Day at National Office. At this meeting it was proposed that we establish a database of willing members from which to recruit Education Activity volunteers who may be able to help out at events, perhaps several times a year each.

Are you prepared to be a Bird Guide and assist children and adults to identify local birds? Would you like to present talks to groups of adults or children? Are you pre-

pared to design PowerPoint presentations or teaching aids that someone else could present? Are you willing to put up displays or attend an information booth at festivals or community functions? Whatever your special talent I would love to hear from you.

Janet Hand
MELBOCA Education Officer
(03) 9842 4177 or info@melboca.org.au

Outing Report: Bellarine Peninsula

Monday 15 February 2010

Twenty-five of us assembled in windy conditions and headed out along the Belmont Common walk beside the golf course under the leadership of **Fred Smith**. The car park had been quite productive, with Red Wattlebird and New Holland Honeyeater in the trees, Superb Fairy-wren and White-browed Scrubwren in the understorey and Crested Pigeon and Australian Magpie at the edge of the golf course. Above flew Australian White Ibis, Little Raven, Welcome Swallow and introduced House Sparrow, Common Starling and Rock Dove. Highlights were an Australian Hobby and a Latham's Snipe flying quite high. It was interesting to see the latter species in travelling rather than skulking mode. A Red-browed Finch came past so low and close that it nearly dislodged Fred's hat.

So much to see from the car park, but the trail promised more and didn't disappoint. A lone Black-fronted Dotterel on the golf course took quite a lot of finding for most of us. It was one of only a few wader sightings that day. Chestnut Teal and Pacific Black Duck were common on the water and a White-faced Heron foraged near a few Black-winged Stilt. Purple Swamphen were visible amongst the vegetation. A few of us glimpsed an Australian Reed-Warbler as it flitted between clumps.

Back to the cars and a slightly challenging convoy drive through traffic to Balyang Sanctuary. Australian Pelican were roosting on each of the closer nest boxes and Rainbow Lorikeet raucously investigating potential nest holes. A mixed nesting colony of Little Pied and Little Black Cormorant apparently included a nesting Cattle Egret, the most southerly nesting location known. After much fruitless searching in the tree indicated, however, with scopes and bins, we declared it "a miss or a myth". A bare dead tree was photogenic, with at least five species perched at any time, including Great and Little Pied Cormorant, Australian White Ibis, female Australasian Darter and Rainbow Lorikeet.

Two reed warblers fed their youngster and perched in plain view at the small lake, giving some of us "ticks" and others some of their clearest views of this potentially elusive species. Sharp young eyes observed a different bird emerge onto the mud and the hushed cry of "Crake" went up. It was a Baillon's Crake, giving clear views of its back

to the rear half of our group as it foraged – and we couldn't catch the attention of the vanguard without spooking the bird. Then we heard them also saying "Crake", so we bypassed the grebes near the reeds and headed for the bridge where they had a second Baillon's giving excellent side and front views. Smiles all round and more "ticks", then it was lunch in the presence of a flock of watchful immature Silver Gull. Ducks and sparrows were also interested but unrewarded.

After lunch, it was down to the river to check out the nesting darters and Little Pied Cormorant. A juvenile Australian Darter flew across the river to check us out from a tree above our heads, turning the tables on the bird watchers. We admired the glossy plumage of the adult male darter and then it was time to drive to the Barwon River estuary.

High tide meant fewer birds roosting on sandbars but we added a small flock of Common Greenshank, an Eastern Curlew and a distant Bar-tailed Godwit, plus a few Black-fronted Dotterel. A lone Little Penguin lay on the sand near the greenshanks, perilously close to the path and houses. It was plump, with wings and feet in good condition. When it returned to the water, it swam well and out into the deeper channel. We wished it good speed and drove on to Drysdale and Lake Lorne. Here, Masked Lapwing were present in large numbers, a lone Blue-billed Duck and a lone Eastern Great Egret were on the water plus a couple of Australasian Shoveler. Royal Spoonbill came and went and a Latham's Snipe behaved much more familiarly, foraging on the mud at a distance requiring scopes.

At final bird call, a Whistling Kite flew into the area – what is a bird call without a last minute addition? At the end of the day we had a list of 72 species with some enthusiasts planning to prolong the day with a visit to McLeods Waterholes. The majority were heading home and we thanked Fred for all his work which had made such a very good day's birding.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Interesting Sightings

Field Note Reports – Entered 31 March 2010

The following MELBOCA Field Note Reports were received from members attending the MELBOCA monthly meeting held at Balwyn in January, February and March 2010, and email and WEB reports to MELBOCA.

The report includes **White-plumed Honeyeater**, **Eastern Spinebill**, **Bell** and **Noisy Miner** sightings within 40km Melbourne, plus other Field Reports.

MELBOCA is very interested in the apparent disappearance of the **White-plumed Honeyeater** from the Melbourne suburbs. Is this the case in your area and, if so, are **Noisy Miner** present? We would also like to know if **Eastern Spinebill** visit your garden.

Barry Clarris of Donvale has indicated that Eastern Spinebills have been regular visitors to his garden over the past 25 years and enjoy feeding in the many grevilleas and correas.

Bell Miner Sightings

The Department of Sustainability and Environment has received reports that **Bell Miner** numbers are reducing or have vacated areas they have occupied for many years. To assist DSE, MELBOCA is asking members to provide the following information:

1. Details of existing colonies (eg Date, Suburb, Melway reference and, if possible, how long the colony has occupied the area);
2. Details of colonies that have disappeared from their normal location. Details as above, Date, Suburb, etc.

Several years ago, BOCA conducted a similar survey in the Melbourne area, but only recorded where Bell Miner were located. It will be interesting to compare the records.

Existing Bell Miner Colonies

27 Dec. 2009	Merri Ck (CERES)	Brunswick East Mel: 30 B 7
28 Dec. 2009	Koomba Park	Wantirna Mel: 63 D 6

A Bell Miner colony is located near the Admin Block of the RBG **Cranbourne**. The colony relocated from the picnic ground after a control burn was conducted about five years ago.

Vacated Bell Miner Colonies

Templestowe (3106) – opposite Westerfolds Park – left area in 1997, not seen or heard since.

Warrandyte (3113) – not seen or heard since early 2009.

Donvale (3111) – Glenvale Rd. Barry Clarris reports that

White-plumed Honeyeater		
21 Feb. 2010 (27)	Parkville	3052
19 Mar. 2010 (2)	Prahran.	3181
Eastern Spinebill		
Feb. 2010	Templestowe	3106
Feb. 2010	Blackburn Lake	3130
01 Feb. 2010	Balwyn North	3104
06 Feb. 2010	Blackburn	3130
Mar. 2010	Blackburn	3130
Mar. 2010	Ivanhoe	3079
22 Mar. 2010	Glen Waverley	3150
Noisy Miner		
Most Days	Warrandyte	3113
Always	Burwood	3125
Feb. 2010	Blackburn	3130
Mar. 2010	Blackburn	3130

he has lived in a bushland area since 1971 where, within the first few years of his moving, a large colony of Bell Miner established itself in a valley west of his house, staying for several years before abruptly disappearing. After several more years, they returned in force with some nesting in his garden showing aggression to other avian residents, including Laughing Kookaburra, Crimson Rosella, Pied Currawong and Tawny Frogmouth. About three years ago, the Bell Miner colony declined and appeared to move west. For the past year they have not been seen or heard in Donvale, North Ringwood or Park Orchards.

Mt Waverley (3149) – Valley Reserve – colony existed several years ago near Regent St – Noisy Miner now occupy the area (Bill Ramsay).

Vermont South (3133) – Bellbird Dell – monthly surveys at this reserve – regular sightings from Jan. 2006 to May 2009 – none since (Peter Paul).

Mitcham (3132) – Yarran Dherran Reserve – monthly surveys at this reserve – no sightings after Sep. 2009 (Peter Paul).

Templestowe Lower (3107) – Birrarung Park – present in the park from Jan. 1985 – a conspicuous part of the birdlife along the river for the next couple of decades with their area expanding and contracting over this period – slow decline in their numbers was underway by the beginning of 2009 with numbers very low by mid-March with occasional calls but no sightings to May 2009 – last sighting, a single bird, was 15 Oct. 2009. During the last couple of years, the dry conditions have caused a marked change in the vegetation within the park (Mike Connor – see full article on page 10).

Information may be directed to MELBOCA on email at info@melboca.org.au.

Interesting Sightings (Cont'd)

Other Sightings

Date	Sighting	Street/Location	Suburb
05 Nov. 2009	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (first sighting of this species in the area – feeding in pines)	Clarendon Pde	West Footscray
06 Jan. 2010	Corella (sp) (7)	Clarendon Pde	West Footscray
20 Jan. 2010	Scarlet Honeyeater (1 – seen twice in the garden on the same day)	Butler Rd	Fern Tree Gully
24 Jan. 2010	Cockatiel (6)	Beach Rd	Werribee
27 Jan. 2010	Latham's Snipe (1)	Ruffy Lake Park	Doncaster
09 Feb. 2010	Crested Pigeon (1)	Falconer St	Nth Fitzroy
12 Feb. 2010	Little Corella (2 – unusual as 95% of Corella seen in the area are Long-billed)	Stafford Crt	Doncaster East
14 Feb. 2010	Straw-necked Ibis (10)	Reischiecks Reserve	Doncaster East
22 Feb. 2010	White-throated Needletail (50+)	Rye, Blairgowrie, Sorrento and Portsea	
Late Feb. 2010	Tawny Frogmouth (1)	Magnolia Rd	Ivanhoe
02 Mar. 2010	Collared Sparrowhawk (1)	Clark Rd	Ivanhoe
04 Mar. 2010	Brown Quail (2A, 3J – recorded during a BOCA/Melbourne Water Survey)	Mordialloc Ck Wetland	
20 Mar. 2010	Pied Currawong (3 – harassing a single Laughing Kookaburra)	Alma Park	St Kilda East

Notes Received

Common Blackbird – are they disappearing as well?

Peter Paul reports they are missing from the following areas:

Yarran Dheran, Mullum Mullum Ck, Mitcham, and Bell Bird Dell Reserve, Vermont

Are they missing from your area?

Welcome Swallow – Edithvale/ Seaford Wetlands

On 20 March, Helen Aston observed 70+ Welcome Swallow huddling together along a fence wire near a small pond. Occasionally, from one to five birds would leave the line to forage over the water and then return.

All MELBOCA Outing reports may be found on the MELBOCA Website, www.melboca.org.au

Backyard Birds!

I have modified a proforma used for the recording of species seen on MELBOCA Outings for entering your sighting records, now titled, 'Backyard Birds'.

The following information is requested:

Name, Site Name, From Date, Abundance, Status, Breeding, Habitat

If you don't want to include info on the latter four items, a cross will do beside the species seen.

Forms may be obtained by one of the following methods:

- 1 Forward your request by to info@melboca.org.au and I shall return the required documents by return email
- 2 Contact me on 9802 5250 and I shall post the documents to you.

From the records already received, a combined total of 132 species have been recorded.

The following species are in addition to the species listed on the proforma: Fork-tailed Swift, Barking Owl, Stubble Quail and Australian Koel.

Not included in the combined total are the following species, presumed escapees:

Cockatiel, Red-collared Lorikeet now grouped with the Rainbow Lorikeet, Red-winged Parrot, Budgerigar, Zebra Finch and Canary.

The **Backyard Birds** proforma may be found on the MELBOCA Website www.melboca.org.au. Good luck!

Records Received		
Location	Sp. No.	From
Balwyn	47	Apr. 1978
Melton South	44	2001
Brunswick West	48	Dec. 2006
Sunbury	75	?
Camberwell	63	1970
The Patch	70	1992
Clematis	85	Apr. 1980
Warrandyte North	31	?
Mount Waverley	61	Jan. 1993
Whealers Hill	53	1975

Dandenong Catchment Survey Summary

One three-year contract finishing and another to start. Yes, Melbourne Water has advised BOCA that the current contract for surveying 10 wetlands, which terminates this coming May, will be extended for another three years with the addition of a new wetland in Scoresby.

At present, five MELBOCA teams survey six wetlands, with one team doing two adjoining sites. From June, seven MELBOCA teams will be required as the Kilberry Boulevard Wetland in Hampton Park, one of the two adjoining sites, is undergoing major works, with 50 000 cubic meters of soil excavated to complete the project with 25 000 cubic meters of that taken off site. The next stage will be revegetation with over 200 000 native trees and shrubs to be planted, the majority in June with a follow up in November 2010. Due to the major increase in size, this site will require a new team. At present, the survey takes approximately 50 minutes. With the expanded site, a minimum of two hours will be required. At least three volunteers required for the monthly survey for three years. Fuel expenses may be claimed from BOCA.

The new wetland in Scoresby, to be called Rigby's, at present under construction, is situated between Dandenong Creek, East Link, Ferntree Gully Rd and Wellington Rd (Melway 72 C-D 10-12 and 81 B-D 1-2). A public lookout will be provided on the East Link side of the wetland as the general public will not be able to access the wetland. The MELBOCA survey team will be issued with keys from Melbourne Water to access the various trails within the wetland, enabling the surveys to be completed.

Due to the size of the wetland, the largest constructed in the Melbourne area, it is estimated each survey will take at least three hours. At present two persons have volunteered to survey this site. Others welcome.

As foreshadowed in February's *The Melbirdian*, a three-

month summary is included in this number for the six MELBOCA sites.

The highlights for January to March include the following new species added on survey days: Pink-eared Duck and House Sparrow (Waterford Wetlands); Brown Falcon (previously "Ns" – Hallam Valley Rd); and Caspian Tern (South Golf Links Rd). The Caspian Tern and Gang-gang Cockatoo are new species to the MELBOCA sites. Common Bronzwing, Black-shouldered Kite and Gang Gang Cockatoo were also added as "Ns" to Frog Hollow.

The March survey at River Gum Creek produced four frog species, with the Striped Marsh Frog being a new species



Common Bronzewing – Photo, Anthea Fleming

for MELBOCA sites. The heavy rains a few days prior to the survey provided plenty of fresh water in the drains beside the wetland, making excellent frog habitat.

Three members of MELBOCA have volunteered to take over the South Golf Links Rd site as Jill and Howard Plowright have moved to Foster and were unable to continue with the survey.

Graeme Hosken

Bell Miner Colonies: Birrarung Park, Lower Templestowe

Birrarung Park, in Lower Templestowe, has an extensive frontage on the Yarra River – this takes in parts of squares G3, H2, H3, J3 and J4 on Melway map 32. I have been making regular visits to Birrarung Park since early 1985 and have kept detailed records of birds seen there on each visit.

Bell Miner were present in the park on my first visit (22 January 1985) and were a conspicuous part of the birdlife along the river over the next couple of decades. The areas occupied by the birds seemed to expand and contract over this period; at times the species seemed to control much of the woodland immediately adjacent to the river, while at others the areas occupied would shrink. However, they were always to be found in certain areas.

Looking back at my records, it appears that a slow decline in numbers was underway by the beginning of 2009. During the period January to mid-March 2009, this species was seen on every visit, but numbers were very low.

During visits made on 23 March, 8 April and 12 May 2009, no birds were seen but occasional calls were heard. On 8 May, no birds were seen and no calls heard. Since then, with one exception, I have seen no Bell Miner in Birrarung Park. The exception was a single bird that was seen on 15 October 2009 at the very end of the narrow section that extends along the river behind the Clause seedfarm.

Over the last couple of years, there has been quite a marked change in the vegetation in the park because of dry conditions combined with a flourishing rabbit population. This has affected a number of bird species, especially the smaller ones. Red-browed Finch were formerly common but are now seen only very occasionally; Superb Fairy-wren used to be widespread and conspicuous but are now hard to find; thornbills seem to be much scarcer, as are White-browed Scrubwren.

Mike Connor, Lower Templestowe

Past Meeting Reports (cont'd)

23 March 2010

The convener of this evening's meeting was **Arthur Carew**, and after welcoming members and visitors he introduced **David Plant**, who has been a BOCA member for 40 years, and has been Vice-President of both BOCA and MELBOCA. David's topic for the night: *Journey to the North Coast*.

First, David and his wife Diane had to get to Darwin, and they chose to go on The Ghan, which they boarded in Adelaide. This journey was broken up by six-hour stops in both Alice Springs and Katherine – time enough to visit Katherine Gorge. From Darwin they visited Litchfield NP, and were enthralled by the slim, magnetic ant-hills, all aligned north-south. They also visited the last remaining airstrip of about twenty-three built during WWII, adjacent to the highway south of Darwin. There were replicas of three celebrated planes: a Spitfire, a Hurricane and a Typhoon.

On Darwin waterfront, they joined their splendid vessel, *Oceanic Discoverer*, operated by Coral Princess Cruises. This is a three-decked flat-bottomed cruiser, having thirty-six double cabins, all en suite. Jamie Anderson was their leader on tour, and David enthused about his skills and knowledge. The journey to Broome was a well-planned chain of islands and estuaries, the boat moving mainly at night. Each morning there was a new vista and location to explore.

The boat builders had abandoned the gangplank method of stepping aboard, with all its attendant anxieties, and instead had installed a snappy lift arrangement at the stern. When going ashore the passengers got into a Zodiac craft resting on the rear platform. The whole craft was lifted and lowered into the water. No fun at all! But, along the north coast, it is common to have fifteen metre tides, so novel boarding procedures are a must.

On leaving Darwin they soon saw Pied Oystercatcher and Osprey, two common birds for the trip; and along the rocky coast they had good views of Short-eared Rock Wallaby showing off their amazing agility. They saw both colour morphs of Eastern Reef Egret. Hermit crabs occupied the beaches, and David showed photographs of Sooty Oystercatcher, Crested Terns, Grey-tailed Tattler, Greenshank and Brahminy Kite. The striking coastal rock formations, all in golden hues, were a great fascination.

This coastline is rich in aboriginal art sites, mainly in caves. At Biggs Island, in particular, there is a wealth of well-preserved rock art.

Their visit, luckily, coincided with the emergence of newly hatched Flat-backed Turtles, seen scurrying for the sea. This event prompted the convergence of hundreds of hungry terns. Saltwater Crocodile were very common, many glimpsed amongst mangroves or basking on beaches. The danger lurking below was demonstrated by a crocodile and a shark fighting over a hunk of meat discarded from the vessel.

All landings had points of interest, and David took note of all the natural features, flora, fauna and geology. But woven through his story was a great collection of birds, many special to the north, such as White-throated and Bar-breasted Honeyeaters, Rainbow Pitta, Little Egret and Beach Stone-curlew. White-bellied Sea Eagles were common, and Black Kites were regular around settled areas like iron ore mines.

On an island off the Kimberley, an historic feature was a carving in the trunk of a boab tree. It commemorated the landing of Lt. Philip Parker King in 1820, and the repair of his vessel, Her Majesty's cutter, *Mermaid*. The ship had left Sydney to chart the northern coastline, and the results were so accurate that these early maps were used virtually unchanged until 30 or 40 years ago. The *Mermaid* made it back to Sydney.

Back out at sea in the twenty-first century, a pod of 20 to 30 humpback whales was enjoying the tropics. It was the season for Blue-ringed Octopus. The rock formations along the Kimberley coast showed clines and anticlines, and the layers in outcrops had dramatic colours. At the Horizontal Falls there was a chance to brave the rapids, created by the tide, in the Zodiac inflatable. David finished his trip in intrepid style, with photos to prove it.

Graeme Hosken thanked David for a colourful talk, which brought back memories for many of us.

Owing to a problem with computer compatibility, **Sonja Ross'** Member's Choice segment on *Birds Need Trees* came at the end of the meeting. Better luck next time, Sonja. Most of the audience could not see the laptop screen and the clever use of photographs, with a soundtrack compiled by **John Stirling**, showing all the ways in which birds utilise trees: for fruit, nectar and insects, for protection, for vantage points, a spot to preen and socialize, for courtship display and for nesting hollows and nest sites. It is quite remarkable that the Common Noddy and White Tern nest in trees.

Graeme reported the sad news of **John Kirton**, who died 17 February. He served the club in many ways, and his contribution is acknowledged elsewhere in this newsletter. For his activities, he was awarded a Distinguished Service Award in 2007.

Graeme spoke about garden bird records, and the continued funding of bird surveys of Melbourne Water managed wetlands by MELBOCA. **Barbara Longmuir** advertised shop items.

Arthur highlighted the need for volunteers to collate *The Melbirdian* in the week prior to the national mail out of the *Bird Observer*. Please give this some thought, and contact headquarters if you can help. After promoting forthcoming outings, Arthur drew the meeting to a close. And then, supertime.

Daphne Hards

Outing Report: Hallam Valley Floodplain Wetlands, Hampton Park

Tuesday 16 March 2010

This was a new site for most of us. The gate was not functioning as vandals had destroyed it, again. Disruption to birds from noise and potential chemical run-off from litter are very real problems here. The day was very warm but a slight breeze kept us comfortable as we followed our leader Rob Grosvenor. This is one of the MELBOCA sites for the BOCA Melbourne Water Dandenong Catchment Survey. The bird list for this section is so far 94 species, so we were as optimistic as one dares to be when birding. There were certainly birds – Black Swan foraged in twos and threes, Magpie-lark and Noisy Miner called – but quieter calls were difficult to detect once a sanding system started up in the adjacent factory yard. This is the fascination of the site: it is surrounded by working industries and yet there are birds.

Waterbirds included Pacific Black and Australian Wood Duck, Chestnut Teal, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen and Eurasian Coot plus several Australasian Grebe still in breeding plumage. Welcome Swallow and both Straw-necked and Australian White Ibis flew above us and thermals later supported soaring Australian Pelican. New Holland Honeyeater were joined by a couple of Red Wattlebird but White-plumed Honeyeater seemed to be restricted to only one treed area.

It was not all natives. Common Myna, Common Starling

and Common Blackbird were there, as were Spotted and Rock Dove. House Sparrows seemed few and European Goldfinch and Common Greenfinch preferred the growing stands of gorse. Initially, there were no raptor sightings, and then a Black-shouldered Kite was seen in the distance. It stayed perched, obligingly, as we walked closer, then flapped its wings. This spooked the starlings perched near, but they were not on the menu. The kite flew to an adjacent pole and proceeded to eat something smaller. A dragonfly, perhaps? A Brown Goshawk quartered near the trees, while raptor interactions continued later when a kite and a Swamp Harrier seemed to be sharing the same thermal reasonably amicably. Their thermal soaring was preceded by the alarm calls of Masked Lapwing, and we were rather impressed to count at least 23 lapwings in the flock beside the pond, quite an increase on the usual sightings of singles or pairs.

The presence of Little Black, Little Pied and Great Cormorant implied fish, but the size of the carp surfacing in the pond was far beyond what even the most greedy cormorants could be expected to handle. Returning for a relaxed lunch in the shade of the trees, we did a bird call which resulted in a list of 48 species for the walk. Thank you Rob, for sharing your study area with us.

Diane Tweeddale

Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings



Australian Wood Duck – Photo, Anthea Fleming

Member's Choice Segment – Call for Contributors

Every fourth Tuesday of every month, at the MELBOCA branch meeting, we dedicate five to ten minutes for a Member's Choice segment. This segment is an opportunity for members to share a topic of particular interest to them with all of us.

We are currently on the look out for contributors to this segment. It could be a bird species you have a special interest in. It could be a report on a recent tour, either in Australia or abroad. Perhaps there is an area that you've

been visiting for many years you'd like to share. Or maybe you have a collection of birding photographs. A tale of birding obsession? A quest? Or just a question? Let us know!

Sunny Fernie is the coordinator, so if you think you have a topic that would make for a suitable Member's Choice segment, or just want to run some ideas past us, please get in touch with Sunny through MELBOCA on email info@melboca.org.au or by phone **03 9592 7728**.

Outing Report: Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne

Saturday 24 April 2010

Despite a dismal weather forecast and overnight winds and rain, 24 members joined leaders **Hazel and Alan Veevers** at the Stringybark Car Park in fine weather conditions. As we reached the picnic area, Dusky Woodswallow were much in evidence, both flying and perched close together on the higher branches. Several Crested Shrike-tit were also clearly seen in the trees over and alongside the path. Golden Whistler and Eastern Yellow Robin were among other birds enjoyed in the early stages of the walk. A lone male Koala, roused from his slumber, also provided good opportunities for the many keen photographers in the group. As we left the bush for the open pastureland several Flame Robin were sighted, the males brightening up the overcast sky. A large flock of European Goldfinch were also active in this area. The water level in the lakes was very low but still supported a few species, such as Australasian Grebe and Purple Swamphen. A dead Copperhead Snake served to remind us to be cau-

tious. After crossing the bridge, we all had good views of Tasmanian Silveryeyes feeding in a Kangaroo Apple bush. A kestrel and another larger raptor, which was not identified, were then seen.

After lunch, we drove to the Australian Garden Car Park where red-flowering gums were alive with nectar eating birds, particularly New Holland Honeyeater and Red and Little Wattlebirds. Bell Miner were seen in a colony just over the fence. It is interesting that they no longer inhabit the Stringybark Picnic area. We then walked up to the Trig Lookout where we enjoyed 360 degree views. A short walk to the Woodlands Picnic Area produced very few birds, probably due to recent fuel reduction burns. We finished the day at the entrance to the Australian Garden where everyone agreed it had been a most enjoyable outing.

Hazel and Alan Veevers

Outing Report: Newport Lakes and Jawbone Reserve

Saturday 27 March 2010

Sixteen people joined leaders **Hazel and Alan Veevers** at Newport Lakes where many of the Eucalypts were in flower. Despite this, the only parrots seen were Rainbow Lorikeet. Red and Little Wattlebirds, New Holland and White-plumed Honeyeaters were the dominant birds in the bushland. A male Australasian Darter was a highlight among the usual water birds. A total of 34 species were recorded at the Lakes.

We drove the short distance to the mouth of Kororoit Creek for lunch, where we watched a wide variety of shore birds on the sand banks of the bay. These included Royal Spoonbill, Little Egret, Pied and Sooty Oyster-

catchers, and Crested Tern. An afternoon walk through the adjacent Jawbone Reserve produced many other good sightings, notable amongst them being Black-winged Stilt, Black-fronted Dotterel and Singing Honeyeater. Towards the end of the walk, we had excellent views of a Little Eagle in flight, before it perched on a post for all to get a close look. A male Blue-billed Duck emerging from the reeds in the very last pond provided the grand finale.

A total of 50 species for the afternoon, making 56 species for the day, brought the outing to a very satisfying conclusion.

Hazel and Alan Veevers

Seeking Melbourne Cattle Egret Sightings

Max Maddock of Ashtonfield, NSW, has been studying the Cattle Egret nesting colonies in the Hunter Region for several years and has noticed a decline in nests from a peak in 1988/89 of 1950 to 155 in the 2009/10 season.

In conjunction with the colony monitoring, Project Egret Watch is also examining Cattle Egret migration staging locations en route to their final destinations.

Max has requested information from MELBOCA members of sightings of Cattle Egret in Victoria over the past five years.

If you have records of Cattle Egret sightings as requested, please forward information to Max Maddock at email

maxandheather@bigpond.com or by post to:

*Mr M Maddock,
78 Ballydoyle Dr.,
Ashtonfield NSW 2323.*

Information required:

- Location (GPS, Melway or VicRoad reference; park/wetland name, suburb)
- Date and time of observation.
- Number of birds

Thankyou for your assistance.

*Graeme Hosken
Interesting Sighting Recorder*

Outing Report: Badger Weir, Healesville

Monday 12 April 2010

Clouds hung over the mountains as we drove up and assembled under the leadership of **Ken Baker**. The group totalled 20, but it was difficult to start walking when there were reports of lyrebirds around the car park. Most of us had close views of a male Superb Lyrebird at the base of a tree before we set off.

Drips of water were felt, were they drops dislodged by the breeze? Unfortunately, no. Rain started and umbrellas and raincoat hoods were elevated. We walked as far as a large fallen tree across the track. This was declared dicey in the wet conditions as it was quite slippery. Retracing our steps, most of the party took the creek track while a minority stayed with the road.

Small birds called in the canopy but lighting was less than favourable. Grey Fantail foraged acrobatically in flocks and Striated Thornbill was seen. Spotted Pardalote called frequently, but was only briefly seen. Not all birds were small – Grey Currawong called and foraged, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo were above us. A few Australian Raven called as they flew. White-eared and Lewin's Honeyeater both called, but only the latter was seen. Glimpses of Silvereye, White-throated Treecreeper and Eastern Yellow Robin were also recorded.

On the creek track, a lone observer noticed a robin which seemed to be red and may have been a Rose Robin, but

this was, unfortunately, unconfirmed. The two groups ended up observing a scratching male lyrebird from opposing sides. He scratched and we observed for at least 20 minutes. Many photos were taken as he was in clear view and only about four metres distant. A beautiful bird. Back in the shelter of a rotunda, we lunched in the company of the local layabouts – Crimson Rosella, which perched on heads and shoulders (shades of “pieces of eight!”) and were chased in their turn by a flock of aggressive Pied Currawong.

Though a Laughing Kookaburra had been seen at the start of the day, none appeared at lunch. Perhaps they were waiting for a barbecue. The flock of Common Bronzewing simply went about their foraging without bothering with the humans, while the resident Superb Fairy-wren flock also ignored us. After lunch, we walked back along the entry road and were rewarded with good views of a male Golden Whistler and fleeting glimpses of Large-billed Scrubwren which had also been registered on the creek track.

The bird list at the end of the day was 26 species and we considered we'd had a very good day's forest birding. Ken was thanked for all his preparation, which had contributed greatly to the day.

Diane Tweeddale

Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Outing Report: Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne

Wednesday 3 March 2010

There were 17 of us once we all assembled in the fine mild weather, with **Diane Tweeddale** as leader, ably assisted by the rest of the group. Bell Miner called as we approached the lake edge. A Black Swan with small cygnets caught our eyes initially and the familiar residents were listed: Dusky Moorhen and Eurasian Coot (both with well-grown young), Common Blackbird (one with a couple of white feathers), Common Myna plus Little Pied and Little Black Cormorant. Then a Nankeen Night-Heron stood obligingly in good view on the close muddy edge.

We slowly circled the lake keeping our collective eyes on the trees and bushes as well as the sky and the water. From Picnic Point we added Silver Gull, Australian Wood Duck, Chestnut Teal and Australasian Grebe, as well as White-faced Heron and House Sparrow near the cafe. An Eastern Spinebill and a Pied Currawong were also glimpsed near here.

A Long-necked Turtle sunned itself on the mud then retreated to the water's safety, while nearby a female Hardhead escorted her brood of five new young. We watched a Bell Miner and a Common Myna having a vigorous territorial dispute, then, on the south side of the lake, a sec-

ond Bell Miner was harassing a Little Raven. This harassment didn't faze the raven as, a moment later, it had stolen a jam tart from some picnickers and was departing with the booty.

We headed into the fern gully in the hope of an owl but drew a blank, finding instead a pair of Grey Fantail. We were impressed by the size and longevity of the combs of a honeybee hive in a tree; it's been there for years, as have warning signs in the adjacent garden beds.

The Australian rainforest area yielded few birds in the late morning. After lunching in the Rose Pavilion with Silvereye and Brown Thornbill calling, and an optimistic male Magpie-lark foraging around our feet, most of us walked on to the Long Island area.

Bird call had a species total of 38, with comments on how the garden's bird list has changed in recent years with the loss of Superb Fairy-wren and Tree Sparrow and fewer sightings of raptors. We were pleased to reacquaint ourselves with this most rewarding place so close to the CBD.

Diane Tweeddale

Convenor, MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Dates to Remember

Wednesday Wanderings (contact MELBOCA, Celia, 03 5982-1314)

Wed. 26 May 2010 – Yarra Bend Park/Bellbird Picnic Area, Kew – 9:45am (Mel 2D K6). Enter from Yarra Boulevard. Toilets on site. Upstream walk along the Yarra and return to picnic area for lunch by cars.

Wed. 23 Jun. 2010 – Yarra Bend Park/A.E. Corben Oval, Fairfield – 9:45am (Mel 2D E8). Enter from Yarra Bend Road off Heidelberg Road. Toilets on site. A longish downstream walk to Koori Gardens and Dights Falls Park, returning to cars for BYO lunch.

Wed. 28 Jul. 2010 – Studley Park (Yarra Bend Park) – 9:45am (Mel 2D F8). Enter parking area via Boathouse Road off The Boulevard, Kew. Toilets on site. BYO lunch or purchase lunch at Boathouse Cafe and join us at 12:30pm after walk around Galatea Point.

Wed. 25 Aug. 2010 – Dights Mill & Weir, Clifton Hill – 9:45am (Mel 2D A6). Small parking area, please park neatly & double up in cars where possible. Crossing the Creek, we look again at Dights Falls before walking upstream along Merri Creek & return for lunch back at the cars.

Beginners Outings (contact MELBOCA, Hazel, info@melboca.org.au)

Sat. 22 May 2010 – Pound Bend, Warrandyte – 10:00am (Mel 23 A11). Meet in the car park near the toilets.

Sat. 26 Jun. 2010 – O'Donohue Picnic Ground, Sherbrooke Forest – 10:00am (Mel 75 G3). Meet in the car park.

Sat. 24 Jul. 2010 – Banyule Flats, Viewbank – 10:00am (Mel 32 F2). Meet in the car park at the end of Somerset Drive.

Sat. 28 Aug. 2010 – Yellow Gum Park, Plenty – 10:00am (Mel 10 F5). Meet at in the car park.

Weekday Wanderings (contact MELBOCA, Diane, 03 9836 8692)

Wed. 16 Jun. 2010 – Birdsland Reserve, Belgrave Heights – 10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel 84 B2). Enter from McNichol Rd (Mel 75 C12). Park near toilets and picnic shelter (parking limited). Leader Ken Baker. All welcome, no need to book. Bushbirds.

Mon. 19 Jul. 2010 – One-Eye Forest via Heathcote – 10:00am to 3:00pm (Vicroads ref. 45 D8). Meet near toilets/information centre Heathcote. Convoy driving to different sites. Leader Marlene Lyell. All welcome, no need to book. Bushbirds.

Tue 17 Aug. 2010 – Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne – 10:00am to 3:00 pm (Mel 133 K12). Turn from South Gippsland Fwy into Ballarto Rd then into Botanic Drive. Meet in Stringybark Picnic Area. Toilets on site. Leader Pat Bingham. All welcome, no need to book. Bushbirds.

Birdwalk at Yellingbo Reserve (contact MELBOCA, Maryanne, 0402 283 080)

First Sunday of the month (6 Jun. 2010; 4 Jul. 2010; 1 Aug. 2010)

Take Warburton Hwy to Woori Yallock and turn right to Yellingbo. At Yellingbo, turn right towards Seville, then left into Macclesfield Rd. After 2.5km, turn right at large pine trees. Gate opens at 10:00am. Walk starts at 10:30am. On-site toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. Mel 305 G11.

Coach Trips (contact MELBOCA, John, 03 9844 2842)

The coach trip planned for 15 May 2010 has been cancelled as it clashes with the BOCA AGM. A trip to Phillip Island will now hopefully take place in early spring.

Could members please advise if there is any interest in midweek trips as they work out considerably cheaper than Saturdays (coach cost is one third less)?

Contact

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.melboca.org.au



*MELBOCA is the
Melbourne Branch of
Bird Observation &
Conservation Australia*

Song Thrush on Banyule Flats

Anthea Fleming sends word of this Song Thrush sighting:

"This morning [Monday 5 March] about 11:00am, I was following the fence around the south side of the dry billabong at Banyule Flats, heading south towards the river. I happened to put

my binoculars on a solitary bird perched in the open on top of a dead tree – to my great surprise it was a Song Thrush.

"I managed a couple of photos before it flew away. I cannot think when I last saw this species in the area."



Song Thrush at Banyule Flats, Heidelberg – Photo, Anthea Fleming

Have you snapped any interesting birds or examples of bird behaviour?

Contribute your photographs to *The Melbirdian* and help us illustrate the wonderful world of bird wildlife in Melbourne.

Send your snaps to *The Melbirdian* editor at melbirdian@gmail.com.

Don't forget to let us know where and when the shot was taken, along with any other relevant information.

Vale: John Kirton

23/11/36 – 17/02/10

John joined BOC in 1971, I guess from the interest he obtained from his parents who were both BOC members. Initially, John, his wife Pam and family enjoyed the many camping trips arranged by BOC. In 1984, John was the initial convener of the ABEP Guidelines Committee and served on the Administrative Committee until 1998. During this time John was elected president of BOC and served in this role from 1984 to 1986.

With the establishment of the Melbourne Branch of BOCA (MELBOCA) in 1996, John served on the MELBOCA Committee from its inception until 2006. John saw the need to follow up new BOCA members by inviting them to a New Members Day at BOCA's National

Office in Nunawading, which has continued on a yearly basis.

Coach Outing convener from 1999 to 2006 was one of John's highlights in his dedication to BOCA. These outings provided members, mainly those without their own transport, a way of visiting birding spots not accessible by public transport. In some cases, overnight stays were arranged, and meetings with country branch members organised so they could share their local birding haunts.

John received a BOCA Distinguished Service Award in 2007.

A birding friend remembered.

*Graeme Hosken
President, MELBOCA*

The Melbirdian is published four times a year. Member birding-related stories and articles (up to 800 words) are invited. The deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the Spring Edition is 19 July 2010.

Survey site number and location	Melway	Survey site number and location	Melway
1 Frog Hollow Wetland, Endeavour Hills	91 G9	4 South of Golf Links Road, Narre Warren	110 F11
2 Kilberry Boulevard, Hampton Park	96 J9	5 Hallam Valley Road, Hampton Park	96 A3
3 River Gum Ck Reserve, Hampton Park	96 H9	6 Waterford Wetland, Rowville	73 E10

Table 1. Bird species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

Bird species	Site number						Bird species	Site number					
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6
Black Swan			X	X	X		Australian Spotted Crake						
Australian Shelduck						X	Spotless Crake			X			
Australian Wood Duck	X	X			X	X	Black-tailed Native-hen						
Pink-eared Duck						N	Dusky Moorhen	X	X	X	X	X	X
Australasian Shoveler							Eurasian Coot	X		X	X	X	X
Grey Teal	X		X			X	Black-winged Stilt			X			
Chestnut Teal	X	X	X		X	X	Black-fronted Dotterel	X		X		X	
Northern Mallard			Ns				Red-kneed Dotterel						
Pacific Black Duck	X	X	X	X	X	X	Masked Lapwing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hardhead				Ns			Latham's Snipe	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blue-billed Duck						X	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper						
Australasian Grebe		X	X	X		X	Caspian Tern				N		
Hoary-headed Grebe							Pacific Gull					Ns	
Rock Dove	X		X	X			Silver Gull	X	X	X	X		X
Spotted Dove	X	X	X	X	X	X	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo		X				
Common Bronzewing	Ns						Gang Gang Cockatoo	Ns					
Crested Pigeon	X	X	X	X	X		Galah	X	X	X	X		X
Australasian Darter	X		X	X			Long-billed Corella			Ns	X		
Little Pied Cormorant	X	X	X	X	X	X	Little Corella	X	X	X			
Great Cormorant	X	N	X	X	X		Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	X	X	X			
Little Black Cormorant	X	X	X	X	X		Rainbow Lorikeet	X	X	X	X	X	
Pied Cormorant							Scaly-breasted Lorikeet						
Australian Pelican	X	X	X	X	X		Musk Lorikeet					X	
White-necked Heron							Crimson Rosella						
Eastern Great Egret	X		X				Eastern Rosella						
Intermediate Egret							Red-rumped Parrot						
Cattle Egret							Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo						
White-faced Heron	X	X	X	X	X		Shining Bronze-Cuckoo						
Little Egret				Ns			Pallid Cuckoo						
Australian White Ibis	X	X	X	X	X	X	Fantail Cuckoo						
Straw-necked Ibis	X		X		X	X	Laughing Kookaburra						
Royal Spoonbill	X	N	X		X		Superb Fairy-Wren	X	X	X	X	X	
Yellow-billed Spoonbill			X				White-browed Scrubwren				X	X	
Black-shouldered Kite	Ns			X			Yellow Thornbill						
White-bellied Sea-Eagle							Yellow-rumped Thornbill					Ns	
Whistling Kite	Ns				Ns		Brown Thornbill		X		X	X	
Black Kite							Spotted Pardalote					X	
Brown Goshawk							Striated Pardalote						
Collared Sparrowhawk							Yellow-faced Honeyeater						
Swamp Harrier				X			White-eared Honeyeater						
Little Eagle							White-plumed Honeyeater	X	X	X	X	X	
Nankeen Kestrel							Bell Miner						
Brown Falcon				Ns	N		Noisy Miner			X	X	X	
Australian Hobby		X					Little Wattlebird	X	X	X	X	X	
Peregrine Falcon							Red Wattlebird	X	X	X	X	X	
Purple Swamphen	X		X	X	X	X	White-fronted Chat	Ns				X	
Buff-banded Rail							Crescent Honeyeater						
Baillon's Crake					X		New Holland Honeyeater	X	X	X	X	X	

Survey site number and location	Melway	Survey site number and location	Melway
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White-naped Honeyeater						Little Grassbird	X	X	X	X	X	
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike					X	Brown Songlark						
White-winged Triller						Silvereye				X	X	
Golden Whistler			Ns			Welcome Swallow	X	X	X	X	X	X
Grey-shrike Thrush						Fairy Martin					X	
Grey Butcherbird	X	X	X	X	X	Tree Martin						
Australian Magpie	X	X	X	X	X	Common Blackbird	X	X	X	X	X	
Pied Currawong						Song Thrush						
Grey Fantail	Ns			X	X	Common Starling	X	X	X	X	X	X
Willie Wagtail	X	X	X	X	X	Common Myna	X	X	X	X	X	X
Australian Raven				Ns		Red-browed Finch				X	X	
Little Raven	X	X	X	X	X	House Sparrow	X	X	X	X	X	N
Magpie-lark	X	X	X	X	X	Eurasian Tree Sparrow			X			
Scarlet Robin						Australasian Pipit					X	
Flame Robin				Ns		European Goldfinch	X	X	X	X	X	
Horsfield's Bushlark						Common Greenfinch	X		X	X	X	
Eurasian Skylark												
Golden-headed Cisticola				X	X	Feral Duck	X					
Australian Reed-Warbler	X	X	X	X	X	Feral Goose						

Total number of bird species seen at each site during the current survey months:	48	42	54	51	55	27
Total number of bird species seen on survey days:	85	62	98	85	95	47
Total number of bird species seen at each site on Survey and Non-survey days:	91	62	101	90	97	47
Total number of bird species seen at all MELBOCA sites to date:	133					

Table 2. Other species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

Species	Site number						Species	Site number					
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6
Frogs							Mammals						
Eastern Common Froglet	X		X	X			Red Fox					N	
Southern Bullfrog			X	X			European Rabbit			X		X	
Spotted Marsh Frog			X				Brown Hare						
Striped Marsh Frog			N				Feral Cat						
							Fish						
							European Carp	X		X	X	X	

Key:

X Denotes species seen at this site during the current survey months.

N Denotes new species seen at this site during the current survey months.

Ns Denotes species seen on non-survey day.

 (Shading) denotes species seen at this site on previous surveys.