

The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 78 Summer 2011

Leucistic Australasian Grebe



Leucistic Australasian grebe seen by John McKenzie and David Ford in South Morang – photo by David Ford. Below, a not-quite-white grebe believed by John and David to be the parent – photo by David Ford.

Following Bill Ramsay's article in the winter 2011 edition of *The Melbirdian* about degrees of albinism in birds, we received the following note from John McKenzie and David Ford regarding an apparently leucistic Australasian Grebe in South Morang:

“The white Australasian Grebe I took a photo of in June this year was in a constructed wetland in a housing estate in South Morang. I have been admiring this bird since I first saw it as a young hatchling late last year. One of its parents (don't know which) – still in one of the Morang wetlands (see inset picture) – was also very pale in colour, though not nearly as white. This bird has only a bit of colouration around its head, while its parent had the full colour around its head. It will be interesting to

see what offspring this one produces this year.



“These birds apparently don't wander very far. This particular bird has been in the same pond since it hatched, even though there are plenty of other ponds associated with this wetland. Its pale parent has moved out of this pond into another, not 500m south, in Morang Wetlands, Plenty

Gorge Park, in what the park rangers refer to as the "tortoise pond". In March, I saw it with another clutch of young – all normal colour. I noticed that a lot of the Grebe in the area had two clutches last season – it was a good one for the wetlands.”

There is no mention of aberrant plumage in Australasian Grebes in HANZAB (Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds), although Australasian Grebe is in the first HANZAB volume, which contains less information than subsequent volumes about aberrant plumage.

As Graeme points out, because the bird has retained some colour in the head, it should be described as 'partial albinism' or leucistic.

Angus Muir, from the Mornington Peninsula, a keen bird watcher and camera operator, was walking along the coast in August when he spotted two Nankeen Kestrels mating. Fortunately, Angus is rarely caught without his camera and managed to capture the event on film.

The spectacular picture on the right is from that footage.



In Erratum

In the meeting report for 28 June 2011 about a Frogmouth family in Janet Flynn's garden, the fourth paragraph should begin "Janet and Peter's bird family came to the attention of Marian Weaving, who is doing a PhD on Tawny Frogmouths. She radio-tagged the adults....."

MELBOCA Branch Meetings: Upcoming Guest Speakers

**Tuesday 22 November 2011
8:00pm**

Matt Ruchel: "Victorian Nature - values and challenges."

We welcome Matt Ruchel, the Executive Director of the Victorian National Parks Association, to give us an up-to-date overview of the changes to and demands on our National Parks.

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!

Banyule Homestead

Inside this edition of *The Melbirdian*, we have two pieces on Banyule Flats – Anthea Fleming's Member's Choice segment in the July Meeting Report and an outing report from Diane Tweeddale. It is worth noting that plans were recently approved to build townhouses next to the iconic Banyule Homestead, which overlooks the former pastureland. The building is a settler-era, Elizabethan-style mansion and was one of the first buildings given heritage listing by the National Trust.

Extensive lobbying of all councillors by – among others – the Friends of Banyule,

occurred during the lead up to the council meeting on the 6 June. Letterboxing by local residents and emailing by FOB to Councillors, members, other community groups and the press helped publicise the issue leading up to the Council meeting and ensured a packed gallery for the meeting. A number of speakers, including those from Friends of Banyule, Heidelberg Historic Society and the community put well argued and passionate submissions in objection to the application.

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Costa Rica: Meeting Report

Tuesday 26 July 2011

The meeting was chaired by **Diane Tweeddale**, welcoming several visitors among the large audience. The Member's Choice topic on Banyule Flats was presented by **Anthea Fleming**.

We were shown photos of Banyule Flats as Anthea first saw it in 1975 – a swamp with Banyule House high up on the hill, built between 1845 and 1848 and still the oldest house in the area. A farmland scene in 1980 showed dairy cattle on the eastern river flats and beef cattle on the west. In 1970, the Heidelberg Council bought the western Banyule Flats to construct a sports complex with many playing fields there. The local birds there, at this time, in-

in mixed clumps to counter freeway planning. Now, 22 years on, these have proved a great addition to Banyule Flats.

With the drought, the billabong dried up, providing good viewing of snipe, including a Painted Snipe in 2001. There is now a full billabong with good cover and abundant birds. Powerful Owl and Eastern Grey Kangaroo have made their return, with wombats, platypus and the occasional Koala.

Lately, the freeway threat has again raised its head, although, after the most recent rains, the flood plain on Beverley Road is more evident and a tunnel might not be viable, but Anthea appealed to everyone to be vigilant about



Banyule Billabong in 1980 – a very different scene from what we see today – photo, Anthea Fleming

cluded field birds such as Australasian Pipit, Eurasian Skylark and Stubble Quail. There were local protests at the loss of open habitat and the Warringal Conservation Society was formed. The Council was persuaded to undertake native plantings along Banyule Road. In 1980, the Yarra Valley National Parks bought the dairy farm, looked after the billabong and planted lots of Manna Gums to complement the large trees already there. Bush birds started appearing—Tawny Frogmouth and Common Bronzewing. In 1989, the Conservation Society planted thousands of trees

the freeway threat. The website to contact for further information is : www.friendsofbanyule.org.

Pat Bingham, our guest speaker for the evening, hardly needed an introduction. She started birding with a beginner's course in upstate New York in the late 1960's and was hooked. She joined BOCA immediately on arriving in Melbourne and has been enthusiastically encouraging others to get involved in birding matters. Pat's topic for the night was *Birding in Costa Rica*.

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Costa Rica, named for its gold deposits in 1502 by Christopher Columbus, is a country about two-thirds the size of Tasmania, with many varied habitats. The central valley holds most of the population; east and west lie the lowland rainforests with dry savannah lowlands to the north-west. A mountain range over 3500m runs down the centre with no corridors through it. Throughout the talk Pat showed us maps to illustrate the tour route. Costa Rica is a land-bridge between North and South America with 850 bird species of which 25% are migratory.

It was a tour party of six with Frederic Van Hove of Amazilia Tours as their guide. Pat had a wish list of 22 birds, which included Resplendent Quetzal, Three-Wattled Bellbird, Bare-necked Umbrellabird, Scarlet Macaw, Boat-billed Heron, Sungrebe, Sunbittern, Swallow-tailed kite, Groove-billed Ani, Common Potoo, Violet Sabrewing, White-fronted Nunbird, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Long-tailed Satin-flycatcher and Montezuma Oropendula. She paid tribute to John Barkla's magnificent photos with which she used to illustrate her talk.

From San José the tour went to La Paz Waterfall Gardens (1300m) with its many humming-bird feeders. The first day the Violet Sabrewing and the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald Humming-birds were seen and brilliantly photographed. It took eight hours to travel a short distance to Gaviion Lodge (60m). Pat showed us photos of Blue-grey and Golden-hooded Tanagers, tropical American birds with saw-edged bills to mash food. There was also a Clay-colored Thrush, a people-friendly bird which is the national bird of Costa Rica.

The La Selva Biological Reserve was established in 1950 – it is a second-growth forest. The suspension bridge entrance to La Selva is 40ft above the river, but is regularly flooded in the wet season. The tour party saw several hundred thousand turkey vultures migrating north, as well as about 35 Swallow-tailed Kites. We were shown pictures of the Yellow Warbler and Chestnut-sided Warbler, two of many species migrating north for breeding.

It was then on to Laguna del Lagarto in the lowlands, with lovely buildings and gardens complete with canoes and caymans. A highlight here was the Agami Heron, usually very shy and found in dark rainforest, but here, out in the open. It is about the size of a Great Egret, with a long bill, brilliantly coloured and is a very slow mover. One of the birds seen here was the Great Green Macaw, endangered because most of the Dipteryx trees, in whose hollows they nest, have been felled for building material. There are only 200 breeding birds left. There have subsequently been extensive plantings of Dipteryx, but it will take about 100 years for hollows to develop. The White-fronted Nunbird was a quiet little bird compared to the House Wren, which is a very noisy cave dweller. The Keel-billed Toucan is spectacular, the body about the size of a currawong and bill nearly as big again.

The Arenal Volcano is 7000 years old, 7650m high and is one of the ten most active volcanoes in the world. There have been minor eruptions since 1968 when the Arenal Observatory was set up for research. The touring party was lucky enough to see two minor eruptions, a spectacular one at night and a morning eruption seen from the garden. The gardens were stunning with upland forests and

the first sight of the Bicolored Antbird, the size of a fat Yellow Robin with a big eye. The ant-birds eat the insects disturbed by the army ants.

The Monteverde Cloud Forest was a reserve set up by Quakers to escape American conscription. The Resplendent Quetzal is found here. It was a sacred bird for the ancient Indians and is the national bird of Guatemala. The Slate-throated Redstart is a local warbler. The Three-wattled Bellbird sits under the canopy and utters an incredible call – like a tin can hit by a mallet – which makes a marvellous echo. Locally indigenous to Monteverde Cloud Forest is the hummingbird-pollinated *Heliconia monteverdiensis*.

The tour then went to Palo Verde which is hot and dry affording brilliant camouflage to the Ctenosaur Lizard. There are many lianas and mangoes, the latter initially imported from Asia for food and now enjoyed by the Capuchin monkey. The Turquoise-browed Motmot has a racquet-tail and looks like a bee-eater. The Lesser Ground-Cuckoo is found here as well. The Scarlet Macaw was seen every day on the west coast, but their numbers are diminishing due to poaching and habitat destruction.

The tour then went up the Rio Tarcoles, a wide meandering river with mangroves with banks and low-tide mudflats for waders, such as the Roseate Spoonbill. The Boat-billed Heron scoops his food with his wide bill. The Common Potoo is first cousin to the frogmouth. The Rio Sierpe Lodge is 32km down river and very isolated. They had some pre-Columbian artefacts in the bar, including a stone hand-axe and a chipped granite sphere. The Yellow-billed Cotinga, a fruit-eater, was another rare sighting. Here, one finds the hummingbird-pollinated native pink climber and the non-native Seven Weeks Cap Hibiscus.

Then on to the Talamanca Mountains, the highest range in Costa Rica at 3800m. Here there are reserves set aside for indigenous Central American Indians. In the Dota Valley (2600-3000m) is a unique oak forest only on the west side of the Talamanca Mountains. The Acorn Woodpecker frequents this forest. Underneath the oak trees we have native begonias and stalked puffballs. Los Quetzales National Park in the Dota Valley is one of the newest national parks for Quetzals. There were many hummingbird feeders where the Magnificent Hummingbird and the Fiery-throated Hummingbird were caught on camera. Rancho Naturalista is a mecca for birdwatchers – 400 birds in the area, 200 birds in the garden. In the garden, Verbena grows, one of the few hummingbird-attracting plants that is not red. We saw photos of the Montezuma Oropendula and its colonial nestings with grass pouches nearly one metre long. In Rio Platarilla there is lots of rafting. On the last morning, the wing display of a flying sunbittern was a special farewell. All of the bird wish list had been seen except the Sungrebe.

Pat was thanked by **Helen Astor** who said she felt she herself had just been to Costa Rica because of John's beautiful photos and Pat's infectious enthusiasm. Barbara Longmuir advertised wares from the Blue Wren Gift Shop. Graeme demonstrated the difference in the calls between the Australian and Little Raven on his iPhone and took interesting sightings, then the meeting was closed by Diane.

Bush Birds and Bandicoots: Meeting Report

23 August 2011

Janet Hand welcomed the audience, including a new member, and invited **Bill Ramsay** to give the **Member's Topic**, which he called *An Unusual Egret*. As BOCA's unusual sightings co-ordinator, Bill had received a report and photograph of a bird at Coombabah Swamp, near Southport on the Gold Coast and a request for identification. As the photo is pivotal to this tricky story please read Bill's own account in the November 2011 edition of *Bird Observer*.

Janet then introduced the guest speaker, **Bronwyn Merritt**, who, with degrees and experience in environmental science, is now Co-ordinator of Land Management and Infrastructure at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Cranbourne (RBGC). Bronwyn's talk was titled *Bush Birds and Bandicoots*. The gardens comprise 363 hectares of native bushland 45 km to the south-east of Melbourne in the City of Casey, with a history of sand mining, agriculture and use by the military.

It was recognised that the sandy soil was suited to native plants, and the land was acquired by the Royal Botanic Gardens in order to showcase Australian flora. Stage 1 of the Australian Garden is complete and Stage 2 is in progress. They have approximately 65,000 visitors per year, and a staff of 45. The recently completed Australian Garden is a big attraction, not least because it supports a population of approximately 100 Southern Brown Bandicoot.

The remaining bushland, about 250 hectares, has five distinct vegetation types:

1. Heathy woodland on the sandy rises, dominated by Coastal Manna Gum, an excellent habitat for animals and birds;
2. Wet Heath, which has been invaded by two Bell Miner colonies;
3. Grassy Woodland, 80 hectares of high-quality grasses under *E.radiata* and *E.gonicalyx*;
4. Wetland Complex, having dams for native perch plus artificial wetlands, rich in birds;
5. Grassland, which is baled each season due to the fire risk, despite supporting Stubble Quail and Painted Button-quail.

Weeds are a big problem and management plans are such that 36 sections are weeded once every five years.

There are approximately 150 species of birds, 25 mammals, 20 reptiles and 12 frogs. The snake population is healthy, and with so many visitors, individual snakes sometimes have to be removed.

The Southern Brown Bandicoot is endemic to most of Victoria, but is now quite rare due to habitat loss, predators (cat, fox, dog), barriers to movement, few secure

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Bush landscape at Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne: looking east from Trig Tower lookout – photo courtesy of Bronwyn Merritt





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populations, urban expansion, fragmentation and isolation. Camera monitoring showed that within RBGC the pests are fox, cats, rabbits and Common Myna, and all these have separate management plans. Fox management consists primarily in maintaining an 8km feral-proof fence, which has gates specifically designed for wombats. Recent surveys show that there has been a spike in bandicoot numbers, especially since the 2010/11 spring and summer rains. The bandicoots themselves are healthy, strong and mainly just need monitoring. But foxes avail themselves of the main gates during public opening times, and, as yet, a means to stop this has not been found. Fox baiting occurs as necessary.

RBGC has obtained permission to trap Common Mynas, the main goal being to reverse the downward trend in indigenous birds. Ten months' trapping has removed 250 mynas, but there has been a subsequent increase in Bell Miners. Despite this, however, there has also been an increase in indigenous bird species.

Fire Ecology and Management are key elements in the total management of RBGC. They carry out small (2hec) mosaic burns and achieve good regeneration.

Urban Growth is building up to be a big threat to the viability of the gardens. The City of Casey has a current population of 220,000, and housing estates abut RBGC to the west, north and east. It is critical that a bio-link be established to the south, it being the only possibility of keeping wildlife populations in communication with each other.

RBGC is working tirelessly to achieve this corridor before it is too late.

In closing, Bronwyn showed us some amusing video footage of a project funded by DSE, and designed to help bandicoots pass back and forth across the feral-proof fence. Pipe-mounted trapdoors have been set in the fence at ground level, designed to be a snug fit for a bandicoot and deter larger animals. The RBGC bandicoots get plenty of tucker; quickly learning how to negotiate the trapdoor, their tubby tummies required considerable wriggling to get through the pipe.

Pat Bingham thanked Bronwyn for telling us about the aspects of RBGC which we, as birders, don't know about.

Janet negotiated her way through a list of announcements, only a few of which need reporting here. She announced forthcoming outings and camps and invited Ruth Akie to highlight items on the Blue Wren Gift Shop stall. Graeme Hosken took interesting sightings and gave outing reports, and Janet asked for volunteers to help her with displays and as outing leaders.

For those who remember Barbara Garrett and husband Bill, it was noted with sadness that Bill has died. Barbara led mid-week outings, and, later, bunk-style camps, and was a leading light at Warrnambool BOCA, always with Bill at her side.

Noting that the September meeting would be MELBOCA's AGM, Janet declared the meeting over.

Daphne Hards

Courting Birds: Meeting Report

27 September 2011

The meeting commenced with the MELBOCA AGM, which was efficiently conducted by president, Graeme Hosken, treasurer, Bill Ramsay, and secretary, Janet Hand.

Following right along, Graeme led the monthly meeting and introduced Elizabeth Lloyd, who brought a significant video to show us as the Member's Topic. Elizabeth is a member of Friends of the Great Victoria Desert, who carry out surveys each year for the South Australian Department of Natural Resources. They head into the desert with all they need for two weeks plus emergency supplies.

This year they had the delight of seeing Princess Parrots, twenty or so, and one of the party, Fred Murray Walker, took excellent footage of these beautiful birds. Not only did we see the birds perched in the Marble Gums, but subsequent billing and cooing proceeded to copulation in a strong wind, and with interesting tail management. This is probably the first time Princess Parrot sexual activity has been recorded, and is encouraging for the future of that species.

Graeme then invited Janet Hand to give her talk on Courting Birds, a presentation which she had previously

prepared on lovebirds. Janet honed her topic to Australian birds, but mentioned that the family of lovebirds is limited to Africa and Madagascar, where nine species are recognised. Famed for their fondness for sitting in pairs and mutual preening, they have been kept in captivity around the world since the mid-1800s. Stringent quarantine rules prevent importation into Australia.

Parrots and lorikeets, like lovebirds, perch together and preen each other's feathers. Doves and pigeons display with cooing and bobbing, and male finches present grasses to their intended, which could be nesting material.

Waterbirds usually conduct their courtship in the water: Great Crested Grebe face each other with crests and ruffs erect, preening and offering each other nesting material. At the climax of the display they rise up and collide breast to breast, but mating occurs in the hidden confines of their nest.

There were four apt examples in Janet's category of "smart movers and shakers". Brolgas dance, and the dance can be lengthy. The Peacock displays his magnificent tail to his much plainer mate. Lyrebird males also use

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the tail in courtship. Sixteen highly modified tail feathers are thrown forward over the head during display. Albert's Lyrebird uses a vine or twiggy platform for display whereas the Superb Lyrebird chooses to be on or near an earth mound. Both males sing loudly with mimicry.

Many birds have plumage colour changes prior to the breeding season. We miss seeing the breeding plumage of our wader migrants which breed in the northern hemisphere. Cattle Egret don an orange head, Australasian Grebe advertise with brown head with yellow spot, Australian White Ibis have red areas under the wing and White-necked Heron have darker streaks on the front of their long neck.

Other species grow extra feathers or plumes, such as the Nankeen Night Heron which grows a long extra head feather which lies down his back.

Fairy-wren males undergo striking colour changes. Young males resemble the plain females in the non-breeding season, but attain bright plumage in time for spring. The cycles continue for 4-5 years and then they keep their colourful strip all year round.

The next group strut their stuff. Musk Duck males exude their musky odour, engorge the lobe at the throat and perform a noisy splashing courtship display. The male Frigatebird puffs up his red throat patch, and male Australian Bustards produce a long beard. Of course, Janet had excellent photographs from the BOCA collection to illustrate her talk.

Bowerbirds are considered by some to be the most advanced of all birds due to their remarkable courtship behaviour. Males of all Australian bowerbirds (except the Spotted Catbird and the Tooth-billed Bowerbird) build bowers or clear a court, and decorate in various ways to impress females. Species with the brightest plumage have the least spectacular bower.

With bower built, the males call much of the day, some with song almost exclusive to courting. Females perform all the nest building, egg incubation and the feeding of young. Janet described the characteristics of each of the 8 Australian species; our Victorian bowerbird, the Satin, builds a stick bower and paints the inside with a glue made from chewing leaves, then decorates the entrance with blue berries and blue objects. Males thief building material and blue items from each other, and bowers are reused for 1-2 years before rebuilding.

Parenting amongst birds is extremely diverse. Swans and Musk Ducks appear to mate for life, though Swan females may be unfaithful. Most bird species share in nest building and raising of young, however, Mallee Fowl hatchlings have to dig themselves out of the mound and completely fend for themselves. Few survive due to foxes and cats. With Australian Brush Turkeys, the temperature of the mound determines the sex of the offspring.

Chicks of Emperor Penguins are left in large crèches while the parents feed. Emu males are solely responsible for watching over the young, and one adult male may be seen with a dozen chicks. Three families exhibit co-

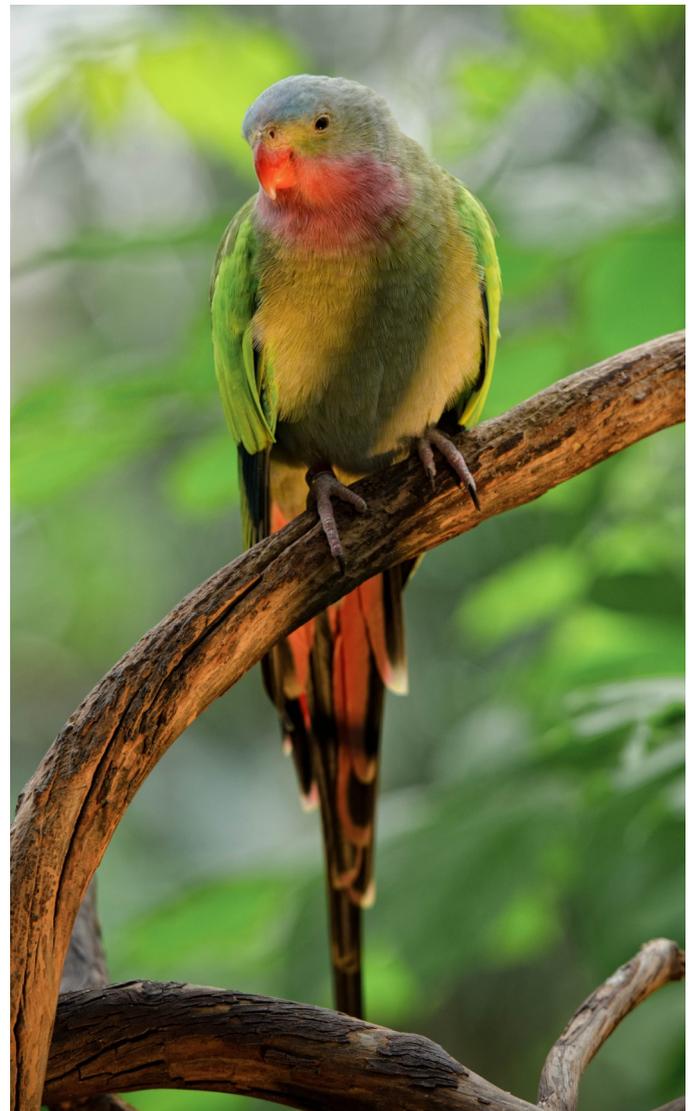
operative chick raising, viz. choughs, babblers and apostlebirds. In this way adolescent birds learn to build nests and forage for food.

Lastly, the cuckoo family has the ugly trait of laying an egg in the nest of another species, often a much smaller bird. When hatched, the baby cuckoo instinctively evicts other eggs and chicks from the nest, leaving the host parents to raise the young cuckoo. We have seven species of cuckoo in Australia.

Bill Ramsay thanked Janet, and compared his courtship tactics to the Chestnut Teal's "burp-whistle"!

Graeme continued with a colourful roundup of outings completed, and many spring outings and camps ahead. **Barbara Longmuir** emphasised that the Blue Wen Gift Shop is closing, and that we should all buy items, many discounted, while we can. Graeme told us of Bell Miner traps and noted that magpies are swooping again. After *Interesting Sightings* Graeme closed the meeting.

Daphne Hards



Princess Parrot – photo, Wikipedia.



Interesting Sightings

Field Note Reports – Entered 12 October 2011

The following Field Reports were received from members attending the MELBOCA monthly meetings held at Balwyn on 26 July, 23 August and 27 September, plus email and web reports to the BOCA National Office. All MELBOCA Outing reports may be found on the MELBOCA Website, www.melboca.org.au.

Graeme Hosken, Recorder

20-Jul-11	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (1)	Brimbank Park	Keilor East
20-Jul-11	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Bennett Ave	Mt Waverley
21-Jul-11	Brown Gerygone (3)		Ferntree Gully National Park
23-Jul-11	Buff-banded Rail (2)	Westerfolds Park	Templestowe
24-Jul-11	Olive-backed Oriole (1)	Laverton St	Williamstown
31-Jul-11	Hardhead (13), Galah (150+) – Friends of Royal Park Winter Bird Survey highlights	Royal Park	Parkville
1-Aug-11	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (2)	Tyrrell Ave	Blackburn
18-Aug-11	Cattle Egret (30)	Braeside Park	Braeside
	Red-rumped Parrot (2) - The pair were feeding under an Oak Tree on the footpath.	Grattan St	Carlton
23-Aug-11	Spotted Harrier(1)	Western Treatment Plant	Werribee
26-Aug-11	Buff-banded Rail (1)	Kilberry Wetland	Hampton Park
29-Aug-11	Eastern Great Egret (1), Nankeen Night Heron (9) - including one juvenile, Intermediate Egret (1)	Heatherton Rd South Wetland - surveyed by BAY-BOCA for Melbourne Water	Doveton
30-Aug-11	Australasian Shoveler (M), Nankeen Night Heron (1), Intermediate Egret (1)	Heatherton Rd North Wetland - surveyed by BAY-BOCA for Melbourne Water	Dandenong North
31-Aug-11	Cattle Egret (8)	Brown Rd	Officer
23-Sep-11	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo (1)	Cooloongatta Rd	Camberwell
25-Sep-11	Australian Reed-Warbler (29), Hardhead (42), Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo (3) – Friends of Royal Park Spring Bird Survey highlights	Royal Park	Parkville
25-Sep-11	White-plumed Honeyeater (56) with one active nest	Royal Park	Parkville
6-Oct-11	Long-billed Corella (2)	Adele Ave	Ferntree Gully
8-Oct-11	Latham's Snipe (17), Buff-banded Rail (1), Brown Quail (2) – wetland approximately 800m south of River Gum Ck Wetland , a Melbourne Water site being surveyed by MELBOCA. A large Ibis rookery is also at the site on private land. (Mel 96 H 11)	Coral Dve	Hampton Park
12-Oct-11	Pallid Cuckoo (1), Horsfield's (1), Shining (1) Bronze-Cuckoos, Olive-backed Oriole (6)	The 100 Acres	Park Orchards

Requests

Tawny Frogmouth sightings in Melbourne's East

Marian Weaving is doing a PhD at Deakin University on the Tawny Frogmouth. Marian requires breeding or roosting sites in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. MELBOCA members last year provided Marian with many sightings which was much appreciated. If you can assist, Marian may be contacted on 0438 315 333 or at marian.weaving@deakin.edu.au.

Bell Miner

Natasha Marshal, an Honours student at the University of New England is researching the habitat requirements and movements of the Bell Miner. If you know of colonies, existing or old, please contact Natasha at nmarsh10@une.edu.au.



Interesting Sightings (cont'd)

Members Comments

Have you noticed a decline of Common Myna in your area? Bob Young, who lives in Mt Waverley, has noticed a dramatic decline to almost zero from up to 50 in his front garden. Perhaps someone in the neighbourhood may be trapping the Mynas?

In Canberra, a project is underway to eliminate the Common Myna from the area by trapping and disposing of them in a humane way. In Victoria, the Yarra Indian Myna

Action Group Inc. has recently been set up to reduce the impact of Common Myna on our native birds and animals. Traps of a similar design to that being used in Canberra are being constructed and may be purchased through their Website www.yimag.org.au or by requesting information on the project by emailing info@yimag.org.au.

Information on the organisation will be displayed at the November MELBOCA meeting at Balwyn.

Outing report: Three Chain Road, Broadford

Wednesday 4 October, 2011
species count: 76

Springtime brings on breeding, especially after decent rains. We were fortunate that the day was fine, mild and calm as weather the previous week had been "interesting" with flooding rains, the evidence of which was seen in the debris levels in the creek lines of our walk.

Some of those who met at Kilmore tried to extend the boundaries for birdwatching, but to no avail, Three Chain Road area it formally was. And how good it was. John Prytherch led a group of 25 around an area which was unfamiliar for most of us.

The dam beside the rendezvous point included Hardhead, Australasian Grebe and nesting Little Pied Cormorant. Cuckoos were calling and by the walk's end we had listed Horsefield's and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, plus Pallid and Fan-tailed Cuckoo. Buff-rumped Thornbill were numerous and active in the lower foliage.

Nests sighted included large stick nests, mud nests of White-winged Chough (one with a bird on it) and active ones of White-plumed Honeyeater and Restless Flycatcher amongst foliage at the end of branches. A Crimson Rosella investigated a hole in a dead trunk quite close to the perch of a Sacred Kingfisher.

We were checking to identify thornbills when we realised we were not alone. The goat in the paddock across the creek line was following our progress quite closely. Perhaps it was hoping for a handout. A few more steps and a rapid light call alerted several luckily positioned people to 5 Swift Parrot passing overhead.

A small group of White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike also flew rapidly over the canopy. Definitely, you had to be in the

right place at the right time. The male Scarlet Robin earlier in the walk was much more co-operative. Brown-headed Honeyeater presented some challenge but seemed less flighty than on other walks.

Many of us saw the pair of Wedge-tailed Eagle above the trees and watched as ravens mobbed the eagle holding something brightly red in its talons – bloody or a red-plumaged bird?

Rufous Whistler called and at least one male was sighted while the single Golden Whistler seen was a female. This contrasted to the numerous calls and sightings of Grey Shrike-thrush.

Also above the canopy were Dusky Woodswallow and a few Fairy Martin. Initially, we heard Laughing Kookaburra, that essential sound of the eastern Australian bush, and subsequently saw them in pairs. No sightings of the calling Olive-backed Oriole were reported but most of us certainly heard it.

At lunchtime, the local Hooded Robin pair was the highlight but sightings of a Red-rumped Parrot and numerous Brown Treecreeper were also appreciated. Birds quietened down in the afternoon but we were able to add Rufous Songlark and then a (rather challenging) female Brown Songlark

As the end of the walk approached some planned to continue if possible. Others were constrained by their return driving times so birdcall was held. The species total of 76 was cause for satisfaction all round and we applauded John for his planning which introduced so many of us so memorably to this fascinating area.

Diane Tweeddale

Outing Report: Wonthaggi Area

September 7, 2011
species count: 69

How do you report a very successful walk? Do you dwell on the challenges of sighting the Southern Emu-wrens as they flitted above the heath or the satisfaction of adding

another species of honeyeater to the expanding list? Or do you start with the White-faced Heron chicks in the pine tree at the meeting place or the flock of seven Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos flying over as we prepared to drive out to the first walking location?

Continued on page 10





Continued from page 9

Nola Thorpe led our group of 15 on what started as a grey, threatening day. However, the wind was not too strong and the only shower fell lightly as we walked back to the cars for lunch and as we lunched in the picnic shelter.

We briefly parked along the road and attempted to watch a Spotted Pardalote nest burrow but our numbers were too great and we moved on so that the birds could descend unthreatened.

Spring flowers were an added pleasure, wattles as well as leptospermum and banksias, with orchids in the understory and clematis and love creeper climbing through. The perfumes added another dimension to the walk. Before we entered the heathland reserve we paused for a flock of Cattle Egrets in a paddock, many in breeding plumage.

Eurasian Skylarks soared and sung over the paddocks and by this stage the Honeyeater species included New Holland, White-eared and Yellow-faced plus Noisy Miner, soon to be joined by Crescent Honeyeater and Red Wattlebird. Grey Fantails were our constant companions (as they were throughout the walk) and stragglers caught sight of a Brush Bronzewing.

A Pied Cormorant flew over just before we sighted a pair of Striated Fieldwrens on the path ahead. After lunch we

drove to Baxters Wetland and walked out to the Tanktown area where revegetation is in progress to restore the melaleuca swamp which existed before coal mining altered the landscape. Paths are being constructed and connecting walks should be pleasant for locals and tourists alike. A preliminary birdcall gave a total of 61 species but then we elected to drive out to Skip Lane and check the adjacent permanent wetland. This added a further 8 species to the tally.

Black Swans carefully guarded their new cygnets, Purple Swamphens stayed close to their small black chicks while Masked Lapwings were less protective of their fluffy chicks, even though a pair of Swamp Harriers was high overhead and a single harrier flew low in the sunlight.

Ducks had been restricted to Chestnut Teal till now but here were Hardhead and Blue-billed Duck as well as numerous Australian White Ibis, a few Straw-necked Ibis and a solitary Royal Spoonbill plus Dusky Moorhen and Eurasian Coot. Little Grassbird called but was not seen and looking into the lowering sun was challenging.

The bird list was now 69 and we thanked Nola for all her planning and for showing us the potential of Wonthaggi. More than one of us was considering a return visit as we headed home.

Diane Tweeddale

Outing Report: Coranderrk Bushland, Badger Creek

**16 August, 2011
species count: 54**

Fourteen people checked the clouds for rain but it stayed dry, if windy, while we drove into the reserve. Arthur Carew led us down to park beside the bush hut and then we walked toward Lake Coranderrk, checking out calls. Little Raven, Red Wattlebird and Superb Fairy-wren were soon noted and later seen, while White-eared Honeyeater and Spotted Pardalote remained difficult to actually see. Other calls were Eastern Spinebill, White-throated Tree-creeper and Golden Whistler – ah, the joys of aural birding on a windy day. We hoped that the wind maintained its current strength as one of the sanctuary rangers phoned us to warn that if the wind became too strong we would need to leave for safety reasons, and the sight of the occasional “widow-maker” speared into the ground was a sobering confirmation.

However, the birds were present. The lake contained many Eurasian Coot but also Hardhead and Pacific Black and Blue-billed Duck, the last brilliantly coloured in the newly arrived sunshine. Australasian Darter were on nests and perched, drying plumage. Little Pied Cormorant also perched while Australasian Grebe swam close to the reeds on the far side of the lake. A pale Swamp Harrier quartered that side of the lake. Frogs called from the lake’s edge and from the various creeks in the reserve. A welcome sound. Crimson Rosella and Magpie-lark had joined the list on the approach to the lake then we added more Grey Fantail and several New Holland Honeyeater

as we battled the wind sweeping across the width of the lake. A change of direction at lake’s end brought calmer conditions, wrens, fantails and a splendidly coloured male Scarlet Robin. A well-grown male Eastern Grey Kangaroo stood his ground as we walked past. Striated Pardalote was easily heard but took time to see while White-browed Scrubwren took even longer. We heard but never saw Laughing Kookaburra and Mistletoebird and thought White-naped Honeyeater would be similarly frustrating until good views were obtained. There’s an ancient fallen canoe tree in the reserve, now sheltered from the worst of the weather. Other maintenance clearly includes a vermin trapping program, possibly feral cats. As we headed back to the cars Brown Goshawk and Wedge-tailed Eagle soared above and Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Masked Lapwing were heard. A short detour to search for Powerful Owl was not productive, except of fungi and greenhood orchids. We did the bird call at the end of lunch and were gratified to total 54 definite species observed, plus a Corella sp. Well led, Arthur!

After lunch we were guided around a couple of the captive breeding cages of the Helmeted Honeyeater. Bronwyn McCulloch of the Threatened Species Recovery Program talked of the techniques used to maximize breeding success and genetic diversity. The photographers in our group tried for non-intrusive photos though the birds were quite a challenge in the lighting conditions. All in all it was a very good day’s birding.

Diane Tweeddale



Education Report

As usual, Education becomes busy in Spring. In August, I made a return visit to the ladies at the Maryvale Hostel in Boronia. On this occasion I was ably assisted by John Young.

On the second weekend of September, the Yarra Yarra Australian Plant Society held their annual Plant Expo in Eltham. MELBOCA had an information table there for the fourth year. Graeme Hosken and Bill Ramsay helped with setting up on the Friday and Graeme also assisted with dismantling the display on Sunday. I was assisted over the weekend by Elizabeth Ainsworth, Diane Tweeddale, Joy Pagon, Eleanor Stephenson and Daphne Hards. Over 1000 people attended this event so we gained a lot of exposure and discussed many interesting bird observations.

The following Monday evening, Graeme gave a presentation to the Waverley Walking Club which was followed by another presentation later in the month to the Bayswater Ladies Probus Club.

On a cold, wet, windy Grand Final Day, the Mitchell Aus-

tralian Plant Society held their first Wildflower Show at Kilmore. Attendance was not high but I was there trying to promote our club. The display of plants and flowers were a credit to the organisers.

Several members organised library displays in October to promote Bird Week and its theme of 'Birds need trees'.

As I write this, I am busy with final preparations for the thirteenth Breakfast with the Birds at Banyule on 23 October. Indications are that a similar number of people will be attending as in 2010.

Our first joint BOCA/BA Educational activity will be the launching of 'Birds in Backyards' in Victoria at Blackburn Lake in November.

My thanks to all those who have assisted me this year – your help is greatly appreciated.

Janet Hand

MELBOCA Education Officer

(03) 9842 4177 or info@melboca.org.au

Outing report: Pound Bend, Warrandyte

20 September, 2011
species count: 44

The previous day had been wildly windy and the first arrival was disconcerted to find the park still "closed due to extreme weather conditions". The arrival of the rangers to remove the sign and open the gate was a great relief – Plan B was not required. There were intermittent showers, some heavy, plus gusting winds until lunchtime, but the afternoon fined to calm and sunny.

Hazel and Alan Veevers led our group of 12. The car park birds were the usual suspects, Noisy Miner, Rainbow Lorikeet, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Australian Magpie, but the calls of currawongs, ravens and shrike-thrushes promised more to come. A highlight was a pair of Gang-gang Cockatoos flying and calling overhead as we started our walk.

The understory was populated by Superb Fairy-wren and White-browed Scrubwren with Brown Thornbill foraging slightly higher above the ground. A pair of Striated Pardalote obligingly moved around on a dead tree, affording very good views before they flew off.

The river had been high and was still flowing well and the rapids roared. Few waterbirds were seen today, a couple of Pacific Black Duck and a Dusky Moorhen with its well-grown young on the river plus a Little Pied Cormorant near the youth hostel dam. A discussion revolved around two people's very brief sightings – were those birds Australian Pelicans or Straw-necked Ibis? Discussion remained civilised and never became "robust". Birdwatchers do not "do robust". The birds did not make the count for the group but the question remained.

Suddenly we arrived at a birding "hot spot" and the species count rose as Welcome Swallow, White-throated Treecreeper and Eastern Yellow Robin were noted. The last was feeding an immature.

A paddock with grazing Clydesdales only yielded Common Myna and a late-arriving Pacific Black Duck. Then an Olive-backed Oriole called invisibly to our right. This was followed by the call of a Grey Butcherbird but it was an immature butcherbird that we saw.

No raptors were identified today, though a couple were very briefly glimpsed before they disappeared behind trees.

Returning to the cars we checked out the tunnel where the water roared but birds were scarce. Lunch was taken under shelter to avoid one of the showers and, afterwards, we convoyed up to the park entrance where we walked along the ridge track. Here the highlights were a Fan-tailed Cuckoo, which called from a perch then flew across the river, and a White-winged Chough on its mud nest high above the track in a eucalypt.

Turning back, we encountered an immature Golden Whistler in a Cherry Balart and then more choughs flying up from below the ridge. It was time for bird call and we were delighted to record 44 species with more than one person smiling over "lifers".

Our thanks went to Hazel and Alan for their preparations leading to such a good day's birding.

Diane Tweeddale

Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays outings



Outing Report: Banyule Flats, Viewbank

19 October, 2011
species count: 63

The warmth and the wind did not deter 25 people from assembling in the car park.

Lyn Easton led us, but, before we headed out, alarm calls alerted us to a Brown Goshawk flying overhead. The fluting notes of a Grey Butcherbird sent us on our walk towards the filled wetlands. Here the bird list grew rapidly as the “3 musketeers”, swamphen, coot and moorhen, were listed along with the ducks, Hardhead, Chestnut and Grey Teal and Pacific Black Duck. A pair of Silver Gull had apparently ignored perceived truths by nesting, not in a colony, in a duck nest box.

Both Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebe dived and swam while a lone Black Swan was apparently the slow-developing offspring of adults which had moved on in search of better foraging for food and nesting material. The deeper water limited pond weed growth and made access problems for even the swans’ long necks. Lots of water is clearly a mixed blessing.

Grass growth had been dramatic and we kept to the paths to avoid close encounters with snakes on such a warm day. Frog calls were heard and a lone White-faced Heron which perched on a tree, and later on a stump in a pond, probably fed well on frogs.

The vantage point at the end of the path to the wetlands did not disappoint. As well as waterbirds, there was a pair of Red-rumped Parrot on a well-hollowed dead tree in the water. A Latham’s Snipe could be chased down with binoculars and was much clearer in the ‘scope. However, later, beside the “grotty pond”, we were delighted to observe a much closer snipe and many smiles resulted over brief but close encounters.

The wind made viewing in the foliage quite a challenge, but eventually both Spotted and Striated Pardalote made

the list, the latter tending a nest hole in a tree.

Most small bird movement turned out to be Grey Fantail but we kept checking. This brought rewards to those who sighted Sacred Kingfisher near the river bank while the rest of the group noted the call.

People at the end of the line were rewarded with good views and some photos of a juvenile Laughing Kookaburra in its nest hole in a dead tree near the track. Next, Lyn was able to lead us to a Tawny Frogmouth on a nest, and it was but a short distance further when we detected a second bird (the mate?) perched in clear view on a dead tree. Not so easy was another frogmouth where a blowing branch of leaves mostly obscured the view.

Lunch started to assume considerable importance and we walked back to the cars for rest and resuscitation. Afterwards we headed out past the golf course and towards the transmission line.

No raptors were seen but we sighted a male Mistletoebird and then several Dusky Woodswallow before both Shining and Horsefield’s Bronze-Cuckoo were seen and compared and their contrasting calls noted. This was a quiet highlight for those who had previously only had tantalising glimpses.

On turning back Cattle Egret were seen among the grazing bullocks while an Olive-backed Oriole called and added to our list, though the bird remained unseen. The high points were not yet over. Two female Australian King-Parrot foraged quietly and were spotted by a sharp-eyed observer.

A Yellow-faced Honeyeater called and appeared briefly while a Rufous Whistler called invisibly. Back at the car park for bird call and we found the species total was 63. Thank you Lyn for a rewarding walk in a suburban gem.

Diane Tweeddale



Tawny Frogmouth with chick and nest – photo, Janet Hand



Beginners Outings

Lillydale Lake 27 August 2011 species count: 51

A flotilla of model yachts did not appear to disturb the many Australasian Darters perched around the lake as 30 members gathered on a cool but fine morning. A flock of Little Corellas feeding on the ground nearby also gave the beginners excellent views.

As the group set off towards the wetlands, a Fantail Cuckoo was heard calling and was located in a tree near the boardwalk along with an Olive-backed Oriole and a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike. As the group emerged from the treed area, a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles was sighted in the distance.

We then walked along the creek to the Olinda Wetlands where it was encouraging to see the rapid growth of recent plantings that were now providing good habitat for birds such as an Eastern Yellow Robin and Grey Shrike-thrush. Several species were seen in the wetlands, including Black Swan and Australasian Grebe. A pair of Masked Lapwings with small chicks was feeding on the marshy ground.

On returning towards Lillydale Lake, the group climbed uphill towards two dead trees where Eastern Rosellas, Striated Pardalotes and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were all investigating possible nest sites. At the lake, many Australasian Darters were still visible but no cormorants had been seen at all, prompting some discussion as to why this should be the case.

A relaxed lunch was then enjoyed away from the main picnic area, followed by a bird call where 51 species were recorded for the morning. This was then followed by a short walk along the lakeside and up the hill beside the hospital. Good views were enjoyed but no further species were added to the total. It was agreed that despite the large numbers of other people using the park it still provided a rewarding venue for bird watching.

100 Acres Reserve, Park Orchards 22 October 2011 species count: 50

Visibility was poor as 19 members set off along a narrow track in the 100 Acres Reserve, where a Tawny Frogmouth on a high nest provided an early spotting challenge for the Beginners. An Olive-backed Oriole could be heard and was soon located on a dead tree beside the track. A Great Egret was fishing at the edge of the Brown Dam, providing the photographers with an excellent opportunity, and a Little Pied Cormorant was perched on an overhanging branch.

It was great to see the dam full and providing good habitat, after being completely empty for many years. The group then continued downhill to the gully where the only remaining Bell Miner colony in Park Orchards is now located. Several other species were also found at this location.

We then traversed the reserve, admiring the abundant spring flowers as well as seeing White-throated Tree-creeper and Silvereye. Just over the boundary, another nesting Tawny Frogmouth was spotted, this time with one (possibly two) young chicks. Close by, two Long-billed Corellas were investigating a nest hollow, and soon afterwards a pair of King Parrots appeared. Magpie-lark and its mud nest were photographed as it returned to feed its young.

At lunchtime, back at the oval, a flypast by a flock of about eighty Little Black Cormorants provided a most unusual sighting for this area. After lunch, most of the group went for a shorter walk down to the Tadpole Dam which provided some good additional sightings of Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Varied Sittella, Golden Whistler, Eastern Yellow Robin and a small flock of Gang-gang Cockatoos. A total of fifty species were recorded for the day, including eight types of parrot, which was an excellent result considering the overcast weather conditions.

Jumping Creek 24 September 2011 species count 37

Lush vegetation, following the good winter rain, made birds hard to see for the 25 participants on the Beginners Outing at Jumping Creek.

Shining Bronze Cuckoo and Golden Whistler were clearly heard as the group set off along the inland track where the most commonly seen honeyeater was the White-eared. A good sighting along this track was a pair of Bassian Thrushes, new to many beginners, foraging a few metres away in a leafy gully. A Striated Pardalote was first heard then located in a tree at the junction with the Stane Brae track.

Heading up the track, a family of White-winged Choughs and a Fan-tailed Cuckoo were clearly seen, whilst on the horizon a Wedge-tailed Eagle was being mobbed by an unidentified smaller bird.

We then followed the Nature Trail where the highlight was a very young Eastern Yellow Robin which had yet to grow its tail feathers.

Lunch back at the car park afforded views of a Red Wattlebird feeding its young in a nearby nest. Afterwards, almost half the group stayed to walk along the river towards Blacks Flat, finding five more species including three Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos. An amusing diversion was witnessing the efforts of two canoeists stranded harmlessly on rocks in the rapids. A generous round of applause was given when they finally freed themselves.

A total of 37 species was recorded for the day – surprisingly few given the ideal weather conditions. Nonetheless, there were some very good sightings and the spring flowers were enjoyed by all.

Leaders, Hazel and Alan Veevers



Banyule Homestead (cont'd)

Continued from page 2

According to reports in the *Age*:

National Trust conservation manager Paul Roser said the mansion ranked in importance alongside other grand Victorian homesteads such as Como and Ripponlea but, unlike those places, had already ceded most of its original grounds to urban development."

To quote the Friends of Banyule winter newsletter:

Council eventually moved a motion objecting to the application on heritage grounds, resulting in a submission being lodged by Council supporting FOB, other community groups and the public. FOB contacted Heritage Vic in the past week and were advised that they had gone back to the applicant seeking further information and that a decision would be handed down soon.

Well, in September, Heritage Victoria handed down their decision, approving the developer's plans. This is despite receiving more than 70 objections from the community. Permission has been granted to build three three-storey townhouses. Speaking to the local paper, Friends of Banyule president Marion Ware described the development as "inappropriate and insensitive".

"The homestead was built in 1846 and is one of the earliest surviving houses in Victoria. This is a very disappointing decision for Banyule's, and the State's, heritage," Ms Ware said.

From 1977, until it was sold by the Kennett State Government in 1995, the homestead was used for National Art Gallery exhibitions.

According to Heritage Victoria executive director ,Jim Gard'ner, the proposed development area is not an "integral part of the homestead's garden setting." He also pointed out that the proposal included \$400 000 to go towards conservation works on the homestead.

But Friends of Banyule insist that this will "set an unfortunate precedent for development on or adjacent to heritage properties elsewhere in Banyule."

They point out however that the project will still require a planning permit approved by Council: If the packed gallery at a Council meeting earlier in the year is any indication of the strength of feeling amongst the community on this, the owners should expect there will still be strong and passionate opposition to this project, which has not diminished.

More information on the issue can be found at the Friends of Banyule site – <http://friendsofbanyule.wordpress.com>.



Banyule Homestead: looking up from Banyule Flats – photo courtesy of Friends of Banyule



Dates to remember

Weekday Outings

(There will be no weekday outing in January)

Mon. 7 Nov. – You Yangs Regional Park

10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel page 11 C12). Leader Peter Gibbon. Enter from Branch Rd, park near toilets. Convoy. *Contact Diane, 03 9836 8692.*

Mon. 29 Nov. – Mill Park Lakes, South Morang

10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel 183 A8). Leaders Pauline and Arthur Spurgeon. Enter The Promenade car park from The Lakes Bvd. No public toilets. *Contact Diane, 03 9836 8692.*

Wed. 7 Dec. – Karkarook Park, Heatherton

10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel 78 D8). Leader Diane Tweedale. Enter from Fairchild St off Warrigal Rd. Park near toilets. *Contact Diane, 03 98368692.*

Tue. 14 Feb. – Bellarine Peninsula

10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel 452 A11). From La Trobe Tce/ Settlement Rd take Barwon Heads Rd to Barwon Valley golf club. Park near toilets. Scopes useful. Convoy. *Contact Diane, 03 98368692.*

Beginners Outings

Sat. 26 Nov. – You Yangs Regional Park

10:00am (Mel key map page 11, C12). Meet in the first car park on the left, just past the Information Centre. *Contact Hazel. info@melboca.*

Sat. 28 Jan. – Point Cook Coastal Park

10:00am (Mel 199 E3). Beach Picnic Area, first car park on left. *Contact Hazel. info@melboca.*

Sat. 25 Feb. – Badger Weir, Healesville

10:00am (Mel page 10 R5). Meet in the first car park furthest from the entrance gate. *Contact Hazel. info@melboca*

Birdwalk at Yellingbo Reserve (Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080)

First Sunday of the month (6 November, 4 December, no outing for January)

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.

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).

See page two of this edition of *The Melbirdian* for more details, including upcoming guest speakers.

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. 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 that 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 through MELBOCA on email info@melboca.org.au.

SALE OF DUPLICATED BOOKS RESULTING FROM MERGER

As a result of the merger of the BOCA and BA libraries, approximately 500 books and many journals are duplicated. It has been decided that these duplicates from BOCA's Library will progressively be withdrawn from the shelves and offered for sale, the full list is on BOCA's website. More books will be added to the list as work continues. Prices will be listed as they become available, so WATCH THE WEBSITE! Books which are not yet priced will not be available until priced, no pre-requests. As books are priced, they will become available by coming in to the BOCA Shop or on mail-order by ringing BOCA National Office on (03) 9877 5342 or 1300 305 342 or e-mail information@boca.org.au.



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www.melboca.org.au



MELBOCA is the
Melbourne Branch of Bird
Observation &
Conservation Australia

Dandenong Catchment Survey

July to September 2011

As mentioned in previous newsletters, MELBOCA has continued with the monthly surveys for six sites of the 10 originally nominated by Melbourne Water as a three-year project, but extended to four to finish in June this year. MELBOCA teams decided to continue the surveys to December this year in the hope that funding would be available to continue the project beyond 2011. On the 13 October, Melbourne Water advised BOCA that funding has been arranged to cover the last six months this year. At this stage, a decision has yet to be made if the project will continue into and beyond 2012. Maybe the project could be "taken up" by BirdLife Australia in the New Year if funding becomes available.

In the past three months, all sites recorded new species to their lists with the following highlights (N = new to the site; Ns = a new species seen on a non-survey day).

Frog Hollow (FH): Fan-tailed Cuckoo (N), September

Kilberry Boulevard (KB): Brown Goshawk (N) July; Buff-Banded Rail (N), September; Eastern Rosella (Ns) September.

River Gum Creek (RG): Caspian Tern (N from an Ns), September.

South Golf Links Rd (SGR): Hardhead (N), August; Bassian Thrush (N), September – a new species for all MELBOCA sites.

Hallam Valley Rd (HVR): Brown Quail (N), August; Whistling Kite (N from an Ns), August; Spotless Crake (N), August.

Waterford Wetland (WW): Crimson Rosella (N), August.

Cuckoo sightings were down with only two species recorded for the period in September, a Fan-tailed at FH and a Horsfield's Bronze at HVR.

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet were recorded at RG in July, August and September, twice outside a hollow in an old River Red Gum.

Latham's Snipe were at two sites only. WW in August and HVR in September. Unusual? Hoping for more snipe sightings in the coming months.

By the end of September, MELBOCA sites had recorded the following numbers of species since the surveys began on *survey days*

FH-86(85), KB-71(69), RG-107 (106), SGR-102(101), HVR-107 (104) & WW-56(57) [end of Sep (end of Jun)]

Total number of species on *survey days* plus *non-survey days*:

FH-94, KB-89, RG-117, SGR-106, HVR-112 & WW-56. Combined total: 146(145)

Can you help?

MELBOCA has had a request from Jenny Lau, BOCA's Conservation Officer, that two more teams be arranged for surveys at Troups Creek, Hampton Park and Mordialloc Creek, Braeside. Both these sites were being surveyed by PENBOC, but their teams were unable to continue beyond June this year.

I shall arrange for surveys at each site in October, but would welcome starters for November and December. A survey is one day a month and the preferred starting time is before 9:00am. It may take up to three hours. If you are able to assist I may be contacted on 9802 5250 or email gahosken@bigpond.com Fuel costs are reimbursed by BOCA. Knowledge of frog calls comes in handy and there is a disc available from BOCA of calls you may encounter.

Troups Creek, in Hampton Park, is an excellent site. I received the following report from Robert Wright who lives in Hampton Park and is a team member covering

KB, RG and HVR. Robert visited Troups Creek from 1:00 to 2:30pm on 14 September and recorded 47 bird species, the highlights being Peregrine Falcon, Whiskered Tern (yet to be seen at a MELBOCA site), Eastern Great Egret, Australasian Bittern, Golden-headed Cisticola, White-necked Heron, Cattle Egret and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater.

A full tally of all the species recorded may be found on the MELBOCA website www.melboca.org.au

Graeme Hosken

The *Melbirdian* is published four times a year. Member birding-related stories and articles are invited. The deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the Autumn Edition is 16 January 2012.

