



The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 61

June 2008

MELBOCA News in a Nutshell

The second MELBOCA AGM will be held on Tuesday, 24 June 2008, commencing at 8:00 pm, prior to the normal Monthly Meeting. The MELBOCA President's Report and MELBOCA Treasurer's Report can be found on pages two and three, respectively.

If you would like to get more involved with MELBOCA or simply have some great ideas you'd like to see implemented, now is the time to do something about it. Nominations for the members wishing to serve on MELBOCA Committee will be accepted up until the

start of the AGM. Contact Graeme Hosken, Bill Ramsay or Janet Hand if you are interested.

As always, there are some great outings, activities and volunteer opportunities on offer for the next few months – check out the list on page 11 and be sure to join in the fun!

Member contributions are warmly invited and **July 1** is the deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the August issue of *The Melbirdian*. Happy Birding!

Chris Wichems, Editor

Melbourne Water Wetland Bird Survey: Raptors Abound!

During March and April, a total of 11 additional species were added to the species count for the four wetlands being monitored by MELBOCA, giving a grand total of 96 species seen at these sites since June 2007.

Cattle Egret, a new bird for the area, was recorded at two sites in April. Four new raptors were added: Brown Goshawk and Little Eagle were seen at one site, Nankeen Kestrel at another, and Swamp Harrier was recorded at three sites.

Australian Shelduck was ticked at Frog Hollow both months; Common Bronzewing, Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Yellow-rumped Thornbill were ticked at Kilberry Boulevard, and Grey Fantail was ticked at Rivergum

Creek. Collectively, the 10 sites surveyed by BOCA now have ticks against 113 bird species, up six from February.

Frogs were also calling, a change from the previous two months.

European Carp was recorded at South Golf Links Road Wetlands. This species is problematic for diving ducks like the Blue-billed Duck because diving ducks prefer ponds with clear water and carp muddy the water when feeding. Future surveys will keep an eye out to see if carp penetrate other parts of the wetland chain. Water levels are also being noted at each site as levels can influence what species are recorded on a given day.

Graeme Hosken

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MELBOCA Branch Meetings

MELBOCA branch meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of every month (except December) at the Evergreen Centre, located 45 Talbot Avenue in Balwyn, not far from the library (Melway 46 E8). The meeting begins

at 8 pm and features a guest speaker and a bird of the evening segment – so be sure to attend! Entry is by a donation of \$4. Out of town members and visitors are always very welcome.

Upcoming Guest Speakers

Tuesday 24 June 2008 8.00 pm

Mike Carter 'Rare Birds and Twitching in Australia – the Mike Carter Way'

If there is a rare or vagrant bird in Australia, chances are Mike has seen it!

With an Australian bird list that recently topped the magical 800 figure, Mike's bird knowledge is second to none, and his passion for birding is infectious.

Do not miss what is sure to be a fascinating, entertaining and stunningly illustrated talk!

Tuesday 22 July 2008 8.00 pm

Lynne Kelly 'My Favourite Creatures are Bird Food'

Lynne is the author of several books, with the latest about spiders (*Spiders: Learning to Love Them*) about to be published. Previously arachnophobic, Lynne is now keenly interested in spiders. Come and meet her arachnid friends and learn about the interaction between spiders and birds. Her beautiful photos and passion for the subject may change your attitude towards spiders for life!

MELBOCA President's Report 2008

In last year's President's Report, I outlined achievements for the year and possible achievements, 'Looking Forward' to 2008. The following roles have continued with the help of the MELBOCA Committee and many Branch members.

Assistance to BOCA:

- Providing 'guest speakers' to various clubs, organisations, etc. An excellent opportunity to promote both MELBOCA and BOCA.
- New Members Day in July. An introduction to birdwatching with BOCA. Outings and activities. Use of field guides and optics.
- Education, in the form of school programs and talks.
- City of Banyule's Breakfast with the Birds in October. Provision of leaders / guides for an early morning walk at Banyule Flats.

MELBOCA Activities:

- Monthly meeting at the Evergreen Centre in Balwyn. A range of excellent subjects by guest speakers organised by MELBOCA's Speaker Coordinator, Sunny Fernie. Bird of the Evening presentations also consisted of a variety of subjects. David Plant organised this activity but will be resigning from the committee in June and I thank David for his contribution over the past years.
- Weekday Outings to birding sights within 150km of Melbourne with leaders organised by Dianne Tweeddale.
- Beginners Outings led by Michelle Judson with assistance from many members showing 'new starters' the finer points of bird observing in the field.
- Yellingbo on the first Sunday of the month. A survey, off and on, for over 50 years in a habitat for Helmeted Honeyeaters. Tom Morris has led this outing for the past few years. A new leader will be required as Tom passed away in March.
- Wednesday Wanderings tracing the 'birding spots' along the Yarra River from Warrandyte to Melbourne re-commenced in February, again led by Celia Browne. This two & half year project now takes place on the fourth Wednesday of the month.
- Coach Outings to various locations near Melbourne, some with overnight stays.

Achievements:

- MELBOCA Website up and running. Our Website organisers, Bill Ramsay, Damian Kelly and Christine Wichems have established an excellent Website for all to use featuring MELBOCA activities, birding sites in the Melbourne area, MELBOCA news and outing reports, plus much more. Members' input is always welcome.
- Melbourne Water Community Monitoring of Bird Utilisation of Constructed Wetlands. BOCA was awarded a three-year contract to monitor 10 Wetlands in the Dandenong Catchment, of which five are MELBOCA's responsibility. Monitoring commenced in June 2007 and is conducted once a month. As of April 2008, 95 bird species have been recorded over the five sites.
- *The Melbirdian*, MELBOCA's bi-monthly publication. Jennifer Rogers of BOCA National Office was editor of *The Melbirdian* since its inception several years ago. It was considered by the MELBOCA Committee that the role of editor be a Branch responsibility, to which Jennifer agreed, relieving her for National Office duties. MELBOCA Committee member, Christine Wichems, is now filling this role with the publication of *The Melbirdian* from February 2008. My thanks to Jennifer for the time you put into *The Melbirdian* as a 'no-named' editor.
- An updated membership list for MELBOCA was completed using Post Code information. Although all persons on the list pay their membership fee to BOCA, it allows the MELBOCA Committee to record the number of BOCA members in the MELBOCA area.

A successful year would not have been possible without assistance to the MELBOCA Committee from the many volunteers, including Barbara Longmuir who arranges and manages the 'Shop' on meeting nights; Heather Mitchener who arranges supper on meeting nights; Eleanor Stephenson who works the 'door' on the same night; and Veronica Goodwin, Jenny Mortlock and Lana Tinsley who organise Coach Outings.

In making the year run so smoothly, I thank the MELBOCA Committee for the time and effort in carrying out their duties.

Graeme Hosken
MELBOCA President

MELBOCA Treasurer's Annual Report 2007

Profit & Loss Account for 1 Jan to 31 Dec 2007

Income:

Payment from BOCA (financial adjustment between BOCA and MELBOCA)	\$ 609.42
MELBOCA Meetings (5 No)	909.60
Donation for MELBOCA Speaker	<u>40.00</u>

Total Income: **\$1,559.02**

Expenses:

Gifts for Guest Speakers	\$ 177.90
Miscellaneous MELBOCA Meeting expenses	52.49
Fun Night Prize: Meeting 27 Nov 2007	25.00
Materials for 50 name tags	<u>17.98</u>

Total Expenses: **\$ 273.37**

Net Income: **\$1,285.65**

Bank Balance at 31 Dec 2007 (as per Statement): **\$1,285.65**

Notes:

- MELBOCA opened a Club Cheque Account with the Bendigo Bank on 27 July 2007. MELBOCA's account is now separated from BOCA's accounts.
- The Profit & Loss Statement:
 - Includes income received on and after 24 July 2007.
 - Includes expenditure incurred on and after 14 August 2007 except as noted below.
 - Balwyn Meeting Venue hire charges were paid by BOCA on behalf of MELBOCA up to and including the meeting on 27 November 2007.
- MELBOCA received a payment of \$609.42 from BOCA being the agreed financial adjustment between MELBOCA and BOCA resulting from MELBOCA establishing its own bank account. This adjustment takes into account all income and expenses from 1 July 2006 (the date that MELBOCA was 'officially' formed) to the dates stated above.
- Printing expenses for *The Melbirdian* are paid by BOCA and do not form part of the MELBOCA accounts.
- MELBOCA is responsible for organising Coach Tours but all income and expenses for Coach Tours are included in BOCA's accounts.

Bill Ramsay
MELBOCA Treasurer

Interesting Sightings

Entered 28 April 2008

An Interesting Sighting is a sighting of a species not generally seen in that location that may be of interest to birdwatchers, but is not as significant as an Unusual Sighting. An Unusual Sighting is when a species is seen in a location where it does not normally occur, or at a time of year when it is not normally present. Unusual Sightings may also involve unusual behaviour or unusual numbers of the species in question.

Currently, we are collecting reports of Currawong, Corella, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Song Thrush, Brown Thornbill, Crested Pigeon and Little Wattlebird sightings within 60 km Melbourne, plus other Field Reports. The following reports were received from members attending the MELBOCA monthly meeting (held at Balwyn on 25 March and 22 April 2008). via email or as WEB reports to the BOCA National Office.

Currawong Sightings			
Pied Currawong			
Most days Mar '08	6	Appletree Dr	Glen Waverley
Most days Mar '08	2-8	Winters Way	Doncaster
Feb '08 – Mar '08	Heard	Camelia Cr	The Basin
24 Mar '08	5	Karabil Cl	Scoresby
27 Mar '08	1	Dandenong Creek	Glen Waverley
06 Apr '08	3	Mullaurna College	Mitcham
14 Apr '08	30	Taroona Ave	Mt Waverley
19 Apr '08	1	Cnr Hazel and Sevelle Sts	Camberwell
21 Apr '08	5	Laburnam St	Blackburn
22 Apr '08	1	Cnr Riversdale and Wattle Valley Rds	Canterbury
Grey Currawong			
07 Mar '08	2	---	The Basin
12 Apr '08	5	Moorhead Dr	Mill Park
20 Apr '08	1	Davey St	Box Hill

Corella Sightings			
Long-billed Corella			
09-10 Apr '08	6	Beaches Rd	Dixons Creek
Little Corella			
21 Feb '08	30	Woodlands Pk	Essendon
24 Feb '08	5	Royal Pk	Parkville
01 Mar '08	20	Power Ave and Huntingdale Rd	Jordanville
13 Mar '08	3	Dandenong Creek	Glen Waverley
20 Mar-04 Apr '08	100+	---	Sunbury
26 Mar '08	8	Warawee Pk	Oakleigh
04 Apr '08	Flock	---	Mitcham
08 Apr '08	60-80	Chadstone Rd	Chadstone
10 Apr '08	15	Bennett Ave	Mt Waverley
Corella species			
25 Apr '08	100+	Cooloongatta Rd	Camberwell

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo Sightings			
02 Mar '08	4	Andersons Creek Rd	Doncaster East
08 Apr '08	3	Andersons Creek Rd	Doncaster East
12 Apr '08	8	Village Walk	Mooroolbark
14 Apr '08	2	Village Walk	Mooroolbark
17 Apr '08	3	Andersons Creek Rd	Doncaster East
19 Apr '08	15-20	East of Blackburn Rd, Eastern Fwy Bike Path	Doncaster East
22 Apr '08	1	Deep Creek Dr	Doncaster East

Song Thrush Sightings			
No reports this period			

Brown Thornbill Sightings			
Daily since 2000	7+	Binalong Ave	Chadstone
Most days Mar '08	3-6	Bennett Ave	Mt Waverley
Most days 2008	3-4	Ringwood St	Ringwood
Early Mar '08	4	Plume Ct	Glen Waverley

Interesting Sightings Cont'd

Crested Pigeon Sightings			
?? Jan '08	20	Centenary Drive	Mill Park
Daily	up to 34	Doris St	Murrumbeena
Daily	7-13	Tally Ho Reserve	Mt Waverley
Most Days	15+	Everglade Ave	Forest Hill
Early Feb '08	1	Beaches lane	Dixons Creek
24 Feb '08	6	Royal Park	Parkville
01 Mar '08	12	Spring St Reserve	Sandringham
01 Mar '08	28	Sandringham Golf Course	Sandringham
Early Mar '08	1	Plume Ct	Glen Waverley
24 Mar '08	2-4	Camellia Cr	The Basin
30 Mar '08	12	Mullum Mullum Creek Reserve	Donvale
31 Mar '08	2	Elwood Canal	Elwood
07 Apr '08	38	Travencore Park	Ascot Vale
11 Apr '08	1	---	Mornington
15 Apr '08	6	Whitehorse Rd	Balwyn
21 Apr '08	22	Royal Park	Parkville

Other Sightings

10 Feb '08	Nankeen Night-Heron	1	Woodlands Park	Essendon
24 Feb '08	Nankeen Night-Heron	1	Woodlands Park	Essendon
?? Mar '08	Flame Robin	5	Banyule Flats	Viewbank
01 Mar '08	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	1	Laverton St	Williamstown
02 Mar '08	Powerful Owl	1	Yellingbo outing	Yellingbo
<i>First sighting of this species at Yellingbo since July '02</i>				
05 Mar '08	Indian Ringneck	1	---	Lower Templestowe
08 Mar '08	White-throated Needletail	Flock	---	Eltham
14 Mar '08	Powerful Owl	1	Haig St	Ringwood
14 Mar '08	Australian Hobby	1	Laverton St	Williamstown
20 Mar '08	Flame Robin	1	Hughesdale Railway Station	Hughesdale
21 Mar '08	Grey Fantail	1	Back Creek	Camberwell
24 Mar '08	Flame Robin	1	Maidstone St	Altona
24 Mar '08	Grey Fantail	2	Maidstone St	Altona
25 Mar '08	Zebra Finch	2	Laverton St	Williamstown
<i>Escapee?</i>				
26 Mar '08	Powerful Owl	1	Jumping Creek Reserve (WW)	Warrandyte
27 Mar '08	Indian Ringneck	1	Frankston Park	Frankston
29 Mar '08	Rufous Fantail	1	Hampton St	Brighton
29 Mar '08	Rufous Fantail	1	Norman Ct	Mt Waverley
06 Apr '08	Black-faced Monarch	1	Yellingbo outing	Yellingbo
<i>New bird species for this site!</i>				
07 Apr '08	Royal Spoonbill	3	Lilydale Lake	Lilydale
09 Apr '08	Flame Robin	1	Frog Hollow Wetlands	Endeavour Hills
13 Apr '08	Rufous Fantail	1	Wellington St	Kew

Abbreviation: WW, Wednesday Wanderings Outing.

Additional Notes

- In the Wicklow Ridgeline area of Croydon, Graham Bower reports that Pied Currawongs have been regular visitors for the past 25 years. They usually arrive in flocks of 30 to 40 at the end of March and stay through late spring. Recently, several (including one pair with fledglings) have stayed throughout summer. Grey Currawongs are less numerous and he reports that there is one pair of permanent residents.
- Gram Bower also reports that a conspicuous flock of Little Corella (60+) are using Croydon Town Park as a regular roost for the past couple of years. In addition, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos have been frequent but irregular visitors to Croydon, numbering two to ten birds. Song Thrush was heard in the 1980's, but not now. Brown Thornbills are permanent residents of this area.
- On 28 April at 8.35am, Len Robinson reported a Collared Sparrowhawk attacking one of the many Crested Pigeons in his backyard in Murrumbeena. However, it was not successful – breakfast delayed!
- How are White-plumed Honeyeaters faring in your suburb? Craig Robertson has noticed the disappearance of the White-plumed Honeyeater over the last four years in Holmesglen with the ingress of Noisy Miners along the railway line.

Interesting Sightings Cont'd

MELBOCA is examining the spread of the **Little Wattlebird** from the inner-city, coastal areas to the outer suburbs of Melbourne. The following is a list of Melbourne suburbs recorded so far where Little Wattlebirds have been observed.

Is your suburb listed?

Airport West*	Brighton East*	Elwood	Ivanhoe	Niddrie*	South Yarra
Armadale	Brunswick	Essendon*	Kew	Newport	Sunbury
Ascot Vale	Burwood	Essendon West*	Langwarrin	Nunawading	Surrey Hills
Balwyn	Camberwell	Ferntree Gully	Lilydale	Oakleigh	Thomastown
Balwyn North	Camberwell East	Fitzroy North	Lower Plenty	Parkdale	Vermont South
Beaumaris*	Canterbury	Gembrook	Lower Templestowe	Parkville*	Viewbank
Belgrave Heights	Carlton North	Glen Iris	Macleod	Patterson Lakes	Westgate Park
Berwick	Chadstone	Glen Waverley	Mill Park	Point Cook	Werribee
Black Rock	Cheltenham*	Greensborough	Mitcham	Reservoir	Whealers Hill*
Blackburn	Clifton Hill	Hampton	Mont Albert Nth	Richmond	Williamstown
Blackburn North	Croydon*	Hampton East*	Montrose	Ringwood	
Blackburn South	Doncaster	Hampton Park	Moonee Ponds	Rosebud	
Box Hill	Doncaster East	Hawthorn	Moorabbin	St Kilda	
Box Hill South	East Malvern	Hawthorn East	Mount Waverley	Sandringham	
Brighton*	Eltham*	Highett*	Murrumbeena	Sth Melbourne	

* Suburbs added, March-April 2008.

MELBOCA welcomes sighting and breeding reports for the Little Wattlebird. Please include your name, address, date of record, location of sighting (i.e., street, suburb, post code, Melway reference) and indicate how long you have noticed this species in your area. The number of birds is optional. Forward this information to MELBOCA, c/o BOCA, PO Box 185, Nunawading VIC 3131 or email info@melboca.org.au.

- Manfred Ruff reports that Little Wattlebirds were first seen in Glen Waverley on 7 May 1977. They are now seen regularly.
- Graham Bower reports that Little Wattlebirds are permanent residents of the Mingarra Retirement Village in Croydon.
- In an email received on 5 April 2008, Michael Norris of the Bayside Friends of Native Wildlife provided records of Little Wattlebirds sighting extending back to 1952. Little Wattlebirds have been sighted in: the City of Bayside from 1952; Beaumaris (coastal), December 1990; Brighton (coastal), before May 1992; Brighton East, between 1993 and 1995; Black Rock (coastal), between 1954 and 1958; Hampton (coastal), October 1993; Hampton East, January 1966; Highett, August 1995; Cheltenham, between 1975 and 1977; Sandringham (coastal), April 1991. The top count was approximately 200 in Beaumaris (coastal) in 1994.

Please note that all of the above records cover the area within 60 km of the Melbourne GPO.

Refer to Melway Street Directory, Pages 1 and 2.

Graeme Hosken, Recorder

What WERE those Caterpillars?

For those attending the BOCA camp in March, the variety of birds along the Goulburn River was not the only item of interest.

Hundreds of thousands of small caterpillars were swarming over the willow trees under which we camped. These 15-20 mm long green caterpillars had brownish stripes down the body, a cream coloured head and dark eyes. They soon swarmed over anything under the trees and had the annoying habit of dropping into our coffee! Lorraine, the property owner, had not noticed them in previous years and did not know their name. However, they attracted the insectivorous birds which consequently were found very close to our tents and vans. I was later informed by Sue Ap-Thomas that these mysterious wigglers are the larval stage of the Willow Sawfly (*Nematus oligospilus*).

The Willow Sawfly can defoliate willow trees. First sighted in Australia during 2005 in the ACT and NSW, they spread

to SA, Victoria and Tasmania by 2006. How they arrived in Australia is not known, but they have not been deliberately introduced as a control measure. The sawfly is native to much of the northern hemisphere and has also been reported in New Zealand.

In ideal (warm and dry) conditions, the sawfly can develop from an egg to the adult fly – a 7 mm long fly that is yellow-orange / brown and shiny green – in four weeks. Several generations develop each year from October to April. Fortunately, they are not thought to be a danger to native trees.

So, we now know!

The Department of Primary Industry and National Willows have asked that all sightings of the Willow Sawfly be reported to: Willow Project, Reply Paid 48, Frankston 3199. Telephone: 03 9785 0111; email: fiona.ede@dpi.vic.gov.au.

Linda Stock

Past Meeting Reports

25 March 2008

Chris Wichems welcomed the large audience, including visitors from Western Australia, and introduced the well-known artist, Janet Flinn, who delivered the Bird of the Evening address. Speaking on the Beach Stone-curlew, Janet said she loved this bird as its distinctive profile and magnificent camouflage pattern makes it a great subject for artists. The Beach Stone-curlew can be found around the north coast of Australia, mainly between mid-north Western Australia and north-east NSW. Janet showed some remarkable photographs of river scenes taken in the Northern Territory where the cryptic colouring of the Beach Stone-curlew made it appear 'invisible'. On closer examination (and some guidance) the bird was visible and we took a closer look at this thick-set wader. Because of its stout legs and prominent 'knees' (actually ankles), this bird used to be called the Beach Thick-knee. Janet showed some more lovely photographs and compared it to the related Bush Stone-Curlew.

The Guest Speaker tonight was Michael Seyfort, who has been a member of BOCA for many years. Michael started his Birdwatching career at the age of 11 years and took his first bird photograph at the age of 12. He is well known for his magnificent photos of birds in flight and his photos of landscapes. A member of the Royal Photographic Society, Michael has recently updated to digital photography. He included 'and shore' to the title of his talk ('Images from the Australian Bush and Shore') because he practiced his digital photography skills on the water birds that tend to 'stay put' better than the bush birds.

He started our journey at the 'shore' around the Werribee wetlands - which have both saline and fresh water areas that attract hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of waders. His stunning photographs coupled with his narrative made the birds - including Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-kneed Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Australasian Grebe, Spotted Crake and Black-winged Stilt, come to life. Moving to the Coorong region in South Australia, Michael noted the effect of the poor flow in the Murray River on bird life. Michael then showed a series of photographs of gulls (Silver, Pacific and Laughing) where he had captured them in flight.

Michael then took us to the bush. Along with his interest in birds, Michael also is passionate about native orchids, some of which can be found in Victoria's open forest regions. His orchid photos highlighted the complex and delicate nature of the flower. The Elbow Orchid, for example, has one of its petals specially adapted to look like a female wasp in order to attract the male wasp - which subsequently pollinates the flower! Fungi were also featured, or rather their above ground fruiting bodies - some of which were shown buried in mist water droplets. The bush birds included many Honeyeaters. He illustrated why the New Holland Honeyeater was previously known as the Bearded Honeyeater with a photo that showed the thin wispy feathers on the throat of the bird. He also

showed Brown-headed Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater; he had a beautiful image of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, as well as an amusing photo of three Blue-faced Honeyeaters enjoying breakfast of cake at Michael's feet. Amazingly, he showed a photo of a Regent Honeyeater and young taken 40 years ago at Blackburn Lake...just imagine seeing a Regent Honeyeater at Blackburn Lake!

In the bush, using a grey card placed on the ground to set the camera up for 'white balance', Michael managed to capture an immature Hooded Robin that had decided to perch on the card. The photos of an immature male Rufous Whistler illustrated how unlike the adult it was. Michael noted that this male could breed before acquiring mature plumage -so one shouldn't be confused when seeing what appeared to be two females in one nest! Another photo was of an Australian Painted Lady butterfly having a disagreement with some bull ants that were all aiming for the piece of icing off a cake. Apparently, although the butterfly frightened off the ants at first, they ganged up and by sheer numbers eventually evicted the butterfly. This photo and an ethereal abstract photograph entitled 'Flight' ended a wonderful pictorial and very informative lecture for which David Plant gave the vote of thanks.

We were reminded of the upcoming BOCA Annual General Meeting to be held at HQ on the 10th of May and also the MELBOCA AGM due on the 24th June - nominations for committee members are called for.

Janet Hand has been as usual very busy delivering lectures to various groups. Bird week in October this year will concentrate on Raptors and we are encouraged to approach our local library to see if a display could be mounted there. The Stickybeak Branch is again producing activities concerning owls suitable for younger members. BOCA HQ is appealing for any member who can devote time to help in either the library or the Blue Wren Gift Shop, especially on a Saturday.

The Wednesday Wandering group was off to a flying start last month with 56 observers observing a Powerful Owl at Jumping Creek, Warrandyte. Graeme Hosken provided details of interesting sightings and mentioned that the Melbourne Water wetland monitoring being undertaken is producing interesting results. At Hampton Park 66 species were observed including 4 raptors. A Powerful Owl has also been seen at Yellingbo.

A very interesting evening ended with the usual cuppa and socialization.

Linda Stock

Past Meeting Reports Cont'd

23 April 2008

Bill Ramsay welcomed all, including two new members, to the meeting. Unfortunately, the Bird of the Evening presentation needed to be postponed because it was in 'Vista' format which is not currently compatible with the BOCA software! However, Bill had some good news to relate: Xenia Dennett has achieved her ambition to see 700 different bird species before the age of 70. Xenia, a self-confessed myopic bird watcher, thanked the many who had helped her and stated that she greatly valued those pointing her in the right direction. Amongst those she especially thanked were Reg Johnson, Helen Aston and the late Roy Wheeler. When asked if she could offer any tips to others, she mentioned that the specialized tours were invaluable, pelagic trips were a must and that getting to know the bird calls was imperative.

The guest speaker was Ray Thomas who gave a most interesting talk on, 'The Regent Honeyeater Project 13 Years On'. Ray, a school teacher of chemistry, maths and science in the Benalla area, is a keen bush walker and botanist. In the 1990's, he became involved in environmental education. His presentation focused on the re-development of suitable habitat for the Regent Honeyeater and Grey-crowned Babbler, both of which are threatened species. The areas of regeneration have become ecosystems in their own right and are now providing nesting sites for Grey-crowned Babblers; hopefully some of the Regent Honeyeaters present at Chiltern will be attracted to this area. Along with the birds, he has been most successful in attracting the lovely little Sugar Gliders and other small marsupials to his nest boxes. Ray has involved the local schools, bush walking groups, other local communities and very importantly, farmers, in all he does; the latter donating 1000 hectares of land for replanting when they have seen the advantages the revegetation produces.

Much research into the type of planting has gone on over the past 13 years. The planting density has to be thick, with a heavy understory provided to the existing Box-ironbark and other eucalypt trees that have remained even after clearing for sawmills and the devastating 1952 bushfires. The thick understory is critical because it keeps domineering birds like Noisy Miners at bay while encouraging smaller birds to inhabit the area. An ideal density is about 800 stems per acre. Such planting densities have attracted Speckled Warblers, button-quail and the Grey-crowned Babbler.

Grey Box and Ironbark trees are planted next to each other as they have differing flowering seasons and thus provide a food source over a longer period, forming a seasonal movement corridor. Grazing in the planted areas causes devastation so the area has to be fenced off permanently; the optimum sites for revegetation include existing roadside vegetation and gullies.

Over 150 sites have been planted and some of the larger trees are now flowering. School children are involved in collecting seed, planting and growing the trees and grasses. Over 40 different indigenous species are grown, including eucalypts, wattles, grasses, peas and daisies. The school children also construct the nest boxes, of which 350 have been put up in carefully chosen sites; the boxes often are occupied by Sugar Gliders.

How are the sites chosen? Ray has found that now the farmers seek him out because the plantings – in addition to providing habitat for birds – provide a benefit to the farmer. A conversion of up to 15% of their land to a functioning ecosystem of bush actually *increases* the productivity of the land by lessening soil erosion, providing wind breaks, preventing the loss of top soil. Furthermore, shade is provided for the stock (not under the trees, though). Wattles fix the nitrogen from the air into the soil thus making it more fertile.

All this work has attracted State and National awards. The success of this project during some of the driest times on record show what can be done with knowledge, willingness and communal involvement. A bird survey in the area is due to take place in October.

Ray's talk gave us a lot to think about and was delivered along with many photographs of the planting sites and those involved. Of particular interest was the inclusion of quite young school children, who will hopefully grow up with greater respect for the land in which they live and the care that needs to be taken of it.

Bill introduced Juni Hoel, an honours student at Monash University, who needs to know where to find communal roosting sites for the Common Mynah – more than 3 birds roosting regularly together. Ideally, these sites should be in the inner and outer suburbs (preferably eastern); please give the Melway reference. She hopes that this information will lead to better control of these birds. She may be contacted on 9752 6626, 0419 371382 or Juni.Hoel@sci.monash.edu.au

Tom Morris' passing in March was notified and he is remembered as being a quiet and friendly member who was heavily involved at Yellingbo. Vale Tom.

Graeme Hosken provided details of interesting sightings. Rufous Fantails have been seen at Blackburn Lake, Kew, Brighton, Mount Waverley and the Royal Botanic Gardens. A new species, Black-faced Monarch, has turned up at Yellingbo and Darters are nesting at Kew Golf Links. Unfortunately Little Eagles are getting scarcer and Martin O'Brien is interested in any sightings – see The Bird Observer for details.

Linda Stock

Outing Reports

Wednesday Wanderings

26 March 2008

**Jumping Creek Reserve,
Warrandyte State Park**

On 26th March we had another great morning wander alongside the Yarra in Warrandyte. Bush birds, especially small honeyeaters, are becoming scarce; no doubt a result of the drought. However, 36 birders found 36 species which was commendable. This beat by three the number seen in July 2004. Again, Powerful Owls were the highlight of the morning. A pair was found roosting together, not too far from the track, enabling all to enjoy close looks. Do join us as we wander slowly downstream over the next three years.

23 April 2008

**Pound Bend,
Warrandyte State Park**

A very calm, slightly misty morning greeted us on arrival at Pound Bend on the 23rd April for the third walk in the second series of the Wednesday Wanderings. It should have been a wonderful morning for birding the banks of the Yarra. However, the drought is playing havoc with small bird numbers. We saw no scrubwrens, no Yellow Robin, only two Superb Fairy-wrens, and very few small honeyeaters. Two Ring-necked Parakeets were seen at 9:30am - identified with difficulty until Joy Paygon of Research said these 'foreign' parrots, probable aviary escapees, have been around the Research area for quite a while and are believed to breed there. BOCA is following this up. 38 species were sighted on the morning walk.

*Celia M. Browne
Convenor Wednesday Wanderings*

Weekday Outings

7 April 2008

Warringine Park, Bittern

Gradually our group formed in the car park by the ranger's office, birding while we waited for a quorum. The highlight of our wait was an over flight by an adult White-bellied Sea-Eagle as it was harassed by two Little Raven. The day was sunny at Bittern, which contrasted with the fog which had descended on Melbourne shortly after sunrise. Still air meant little wind and that assisted mightily when following small birds through the tree canopy. Birding in the car park was as usual very productive and the list before we started walking approached or topped 25, depending on who was counting. Red Wattlebird, Little Wattlebird, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Australian White Ibis and White-faced Heron were all seen in the sky above as we waited. Noisy Miner, Eastern Rosella and Australian Magpie flew among the trees. The traffic was noisy along the Frankston-Flinders Road, but it didn't seem to worry the New Holland Honeyeater, the White-eared

Honeyeater or the Masked Lapwing. We noticed that recent rain had promoted the growth of fungi beside the path, and some of them looked quite edible. Crested Pigeon were seen in the horse paddocks beside the walking track. Then we entered the reserve.

A Golden Whistler was more heard than seen near the entrance while Grey Fantail foraged aerobically. White-plumed Honeyeater was active among the leaves and Yellow-faced Honeyeater had been clearly studying the technique of the Grey Fantail; it showed a considerable talent for flying in erratic soars and dips. At this time of the year, the Grey Shrike-thrush was only calling simply, mostly with single notes while the White-naped Honeyeater only occasionally made its 'lolly-sucking' call. Brown Thornbill were active, as were groups of Striated Thornbill. A Fan-tailed Cuckoo obligingly stayed around until we all had good views before moving to another tree where it took a striped caterpillar and ate it after only a couple of bangs against the bough.

Spotted Pardalote were heard - then seen. A highlight for a few was a pardalote family beside the track in the bare twigs of a dead shrub, including the female, male and juvenile. How we hope that the photos are successful. Silveryeye and Red-browed Finch were seen near the creek bank. A male Golden Whistler came close to check us out as he called and as we walked back. This gave some of the group very good views. A pair of Laughing Kookaburra perched close beside the track on our return to the car park. The many small skinks along the path may have been an attraction for that pair. We lunched among the She-oaks then did the bird call - 44 species, even without any significant number of waterbirds due to the drought. Not bad for 15 birdos. Joan Peters, who led us, deserved our thanks for an extremely satisfying walk in an area that was new to many of us.

*Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings*

7 May 2008

Heritage Wetlands, Wonga Park

The road works at the intersection leading to the park were the first challenge of the day. Early arrivals were able to wait their turn for the 'Slow' sign to drive down but later cars had to master the 'magical mystery tour' of a wide detour. Eastern Grey Kangaroos stood on the hill beside the carpark at the end of the road, checking out the invasive humans. Soon, all 17 of us had assembled and we set off over the high stile. Though showers were a possibility, it remained calm and dry though overcast all day. Leonie Robbins was our leader and we all took her advice to take the stile carefully. Flocks of Crimson Rosella were active near the carpark, but the first stretch of bush near the river was very quiet. Birds using the golf course beside the park included Masked Lapwing, Magpie-lark, Australian Magpie, and Straw-necked Ibis. Then we

Outing Reports Cont'd

reached the dam with its bird hide. Maintenance had recently occurred and the invading blackberries had been removed during the last few days. This was appreciated, as otherwise it would have required Leonie to don her secateurs and gardening gloves. Ducks were plentiful on the dam; Australian Wood Duck mixed with plenty of Pacific Black Duck and a few Grey Teal. A solitary duck caused considerable debate before the jury decided it was an immature male Chestnut Teal. Another solitary bird, but one which occasioned no quibbles, was the Australian Pelican swimming near the bank. The muddy edges of the water were being foraged by numbers of Superb Fairy-wren, a White-faced Heron and several Dusky Moorhen. The highlight of this area was the Australasian Darter drying its wings on a stump by the near bank. Close views were had by all.

The trees around the path yielded many twitters with glimpses of Brown Thornbill, a male Golden Whistler and a Grey Shrike-thrush. At the farthest point of our walk, we were being overtaken by golf buggies purring quietly along the path towards their depot. Our turning point was the bridge over the river which proved a good vantage point for New Holland Honeyeater foraging among flowering mistletoe. The recent planting below the track was criss-crossed with paths and yielded many species. A Yellow Thornbill was a "lifer" for several of our number and obligingly stayed on the outer foliage, allowing good views. Large flocks of Red-browed Finch weighed down the herbs when they perched on the seeding heads and Yellow-rumped Thornbill was initially a fleeting glimpse but later 'obliged' a confirmatory view. An Eastern Spinebill flitted among mistletoe. While returning, two of our numbers were lucky enough to see an Azure Kingfisher. All up, 49 species were seen in the wetlands.

We drove in convoy past the intersection road works to Wittons Reserve. There was a road works team there too! But no hold-ups. We lunched beside the river where clouds of small insects were attracting Superb Fairy-wren, Grey Fantail and White-eared Honeyeater. The last two species seemed to vie in the agility of their hawking. After lunch it was planned to do a very short return walk along the bank before heading off in the opposite direction. Unfortunately, due to confusion over instructions, many enthusiasts set off up hill and down dale and then walked across the creek without meeting with the waiting organisers who had a worrying time wondering what was causing the delay! All rejoined ultimately but the 'bag' of birds from this location was only 19, of which at least 10 were observed at the lunch area. People were reminded to pay attention to instructions before we disbanded after thanking Leonie for leaving her convalescence to lead us on the day.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Coach Tours

19 April 2008

Werribee Plains Area

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a man who moves to Werribee to be nearer to the Treatment Plant must be a dedicated birdwatcher. Dave Torr, Werribee birding identity and area guide, shared the knowledge gained from such dedication by leading a trip to the Werribee Plains on Saturday April 19th 2008.

Our itinerary was to include birding in a Parks Victoria reserve at Melton (not usually open to the public), Melton Reservoir, and a special trip to the woodlands at Eynesbury for which permission was needed. This was accomplished before lunch. Clearly Dave is a man for whom doors are opened, although the reservoir gates were unaccountably shut. Serendip Wildlife Sanctuary was our lunch stop, where we were entertained by many active birds, including a party of friendly White-winged Choughs. After a stroll around the sanctuary, we moved on to the beach and salt marshes of Avalon Beach to add some shorebirds to our woodland and wetland tallies.

The healthy total species number of 83, defying the pessimistic predictions of some in the ticklotto competition, was reached after many memorable birding moments. The blossoming trees at Serendip gave us three species of lorikeet, and many other species, including waterbirds such as Magpie Geese, were seen in the grounds. Unfortunately, the Australian Bustard and the Brolga were not tickable. The Melton and Eynesbury woodlands provided typical autumnal birding – mixed groups of species, including Diamond Firetail. Avalon Beach gave us the usual species, such as Pacific Gulls and Masked Lapwings, with some White-fronted Chats, Black-winged Stilts and Yellow-billed Spoonbills for extra measure. And just to prove that birders know the 'hip' places to go, we ran right into a fashion shoot at Avalon Beach. Certain birders employed their binoculars to advantage at this point. On the journey home, we even managed to spot some Banded Lapwings in the distance in a paddock, thanks to the keen eyes of one on board the bus.

Thanks to Veronica Goodwin and Jenny Mortlock for their usual excellent organisation of the trips; to Diane Tweeddale for her forensic accountant-like skills in keeping and totalling the bird lists; and of course, to Dave Torr, our trip leader and Werribee Plains mentor par excellence.

Christine Shelley and Chloe Youl

Dates to Remember...

If you would like to get outside, see some fantastic birds, and meet friendly people, then MELBOCA outings are just what you need. Check out some of the outings on offer and we hope to see you in the field!

Wednesday Wanderings

Wednesday 25 June 2008 – Glynn's Road, North Warrandyte. (Melway 23 A10) 9.45 am. Drive to south end of Glynn's Road to Parks Victoria private property. Go through gate (opened at 9:30 am) and park neatly along track. The nearest toilets are in Warrandyte. Downhill walk to river and Bobs Wetlands, returning uphill to cars for lunch. Australian Owllet-nightjar, Tawny Frogmouth and Varied Sittella are possible highlights. Join us for BYO lunch after the walk.

Wednesday 23 July 2008 – Longridge Farm, Alexander Road, Warrandyte. (Melway 22 H10). 9.45 am (gate opened at 9:30 am). Parks Victoria private property. A downhill walk to picturesque camping area (toilets here), a meander by the river and back up the hill to the cars, approx 2km total. Azure Kingfishers have been seen by the canoe launch area. BYO chairs & lunch.

Beginners Outings

Saturday 14 June – Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. (Melway 2L A1). 1.30pm. Meet at Gate F near National Herbarium, Birchwood Ave.

Saturday 19 July – Jells Park, Wheelers Hill. (Melway 71 J5). 1.30pm. Meet near Visitors Centre.

Weekdays Outing

Tuesday 17 June – Braeside Park, Braeside. (Melway 88 D8) 10 am. BYO chairs & lunch.

Monday 7 July – Doongalla Forest, The Basin. (Melway 66 A6) 10am.

Birdwalk at Yellingbo Reserve (*we have been conducting monthly surveys at this key habitat for the endangered Helmeted Honeyeater for more than 30 years; Melway 305 G11*)

Sunday 6 July. Gates open at 10 am. Walk begins at 10.30am

Sunday 3 August. Gates open at 10 am. Walk begins at 10.30am

Stickybeak Activity (the Junior Branch of BOCA – for members up to 14 years of age)

Sunday 13 July – Blackburn Lake, Blackburn. (Melway 48 C11) 2.00pm. Come and learn all about Migrating Birds.

New Members Day

Saturday 26 July. A New Members' Day for all new BOCA Members, to be hosted by MELBOCA at National Office, is planned for Saturday, 26 July 2008, commencing at 10:00 am. All new members residing within reasonable travelling distance of Melbourne will receive invitations in July. If you haven't received yours by 11 July 2008, please contact Jenny at National Office.

Please consult the Bird Observers' Calendar for additional details about the above walks as well as for additional outings in the Melbourne area

Volunteers Needed!

Lyrebird Dawn Survey – Sherbrooke Forest. Time: 6.00am. Meeting place: Grants Picnic Ground (Melway 75 J4). Dates for the survey are: Saturday 21 June, Saturday 5 July and Saturday 19 July. The survey is approx 2 hours duration, followed by breakfast. Wear clothing and boots suitable for the weather; bring torch, pencil or pen and a compass if you have one. **Places are limited** – if you are interested, contact Norm Carter ASAP on 9754 4424 or 0417 326 620 or at ntcarter@alphalink.com.au.

Bird Survey – Royal Park. The Friends of Royal Park conduct several Bird Surveys during the year in Royal Park, the results of which are forward to MELBOCA for publication in the 'Interesting Sightings' section of *The Melbirdian*. MELBOCA members are welcome to attend and assist in the surveys. The winter survey will be held on Sunday 22 June and the pre-spring survey will be held on Sunday 3 August. Time: 9.00am -11.00am. Meeting place: Royal Park Wetlands car park, Oak Street, Parkville (Melway 29 C 11).

Contact MELBOCA

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Linda Stock
Diane Tweeddale
Chris Wichems

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.melboca.org.au



MELBOCA is the
Melbourne Branch of
Bird Observation &
Conservation Australia

Birding in the News ...

Beck's Petrel Back from the Brink

Ornithologists worldwide are excited by recent sightings of the Critically Endangered Beck's Petrel – and especially so since the last recorded sighting was over 79 years ago.

On a visit to the Bismarck Archipelago (located north east of Papua New Guinea) in 2003, Hadoram Shirihai observed 'possible' Beck's Petrels (*Pseudobilweria becki*). This sighting prompted his return visit in 2007 when he was able to observe and photograph 30+ individuals at sea. In addition, he found a freshly dead fledgling at sea that has become only the third specimen in existence. In a paper published in the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, Vol 128, 2008. Hadoram Shirihai reports his findings and 'announces the species' unequivocal rediscovery'.

Beck's Petrel is very similar to, but smaller than, Tahiti Petrel (*Pseudobilweria rostrata*), a species fairly regularly reported in north east Australian waters

since 1980 from December to April (*HANZAB* Vol 1A). The similarity to Tahiti Petrel and the small size difference makes identification of Beck's Petrel at sea difficult.

Given the Bismarck Archipelago's close proximity to Australia, the sighting of Beck's Petrel is of great interest to Australian birders. The challenge now is to be the first to observe a Beck's Petrel in Australian Waters and have it included on the Australian List.

More details of the rediscovery and some of the only photographs in existence of Beck's Petrel can be found online at the following link:

http://www.birdlife.org/news/pr/2008/03/beck_s_petrel_rediscovery.html

My thanks to Mike Carter who alerted me to the rediscovery and provided the above link to BirdLife International.

Bill Ramsay

Volunteers Needed!!

Community Planting Weekends for the Endangered Regent Honeyeaters near Benalla (2.5 hour drive from Melbourne)

Join with landholders, local schools and scores of other volunteers in this nationally significant project where everybody wins.

Share a weekend (or two!) planting with friends, enjoying the spring wildflowers...while gaining some fascinating ecological insights

Dates:

August 2-3
August 16-17
August 30-31
September 13-14

For more information, contact
Ray Thomas.

Telephone: (03) 57 611 515 or email:
raydavidthomas@hotmail.com

birds, birds, birds
exhibition
Sat. 5th July— Sat. 2nd August, 2008
BOCA Gallery
Opening hours
Mon.—Fri. 9:30am—3:30pm, Sat. 9:30am-12:00noon

OPENING
Sat. 5th July 2008, 2:00pm

Bird Observation & Conservation Australia
183-185 Springvale Road, NUNAWADING
Melways ref: 48 F10
(03) 9877 5342 or 1300 305 342
Janet Matthews **M: 0418 546 554**
Website: <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~wildlife>

Designed by Judy Great for Wildlife An Society of Australia