



The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 64
December 2008

First Annual Report of Bird Survey Sent to Melbourne Water

Have you ever wondered what happens with all of the data from the Melbourne Water Wetland Bird Surveys that MELBOCA conducts each month for Melbourne Water?

At the end of each year, the data for all sites (including those being monitored by Penboc and Bayboca) are analysed by Dr Jenny Lau, the BOCA Conservation Officer, and the findings are summarised in a report that is submitted to Melbourne Water. The report is quite detailed and lengthy – the first Annual Report submitted in October was almost 60 pages!

The information contained in the report provides valuable information on what birds are using the wetlands and how they are utilising the wetlands (e.g., do they use the site for breeding or foraging). Records on how other animals (e.g., frogs, reptiles) use the wetlands are also included.

Looking at the data from the 'big picture' perspective, Jenny can draw conclusions on how the birds (frogs, reptiles, etc.) might use different wetlands for different purposes or time periods. In addition, the monthly surveys provide information on several so-called 'priority species'; these are bird species deemed important because they are either migratory (e.g., birds [especially shorebirds] that migrate long distances, use the East Asian - Australasian Flyway, and are protected by bilateral bird protection agreements with other countries) or threatened in Victoria.

The following are some of the highlights for the four sites that were monitored by MELBOCA during the first year of the survey:

Kilbery Boulevard Wetland: A total of 52 different bird species were recorded at the site. The highest number of individual birds seen during a single survey (this is the number of individual birds – not the number of bird species) occurred during December 2007 (170 individual birds). Non-wetland birds dominate the species population at this site. Two priority species (Eastern Great Egret and Latham's Snipe) have been recorded at this site.

River Gum Creek Wetland: A total of 76 different bird species (including five species of raptor) have been recorded at this site, and the highest number of individual birds (922) was recorded in March 2008. Wetland and raptor bird numbers were high in February 2008, and 11 priority species have been recorded here, including Australasian Shoveler, Hardhead, Little Egret, Baillon's Crake, Latham's Snipe and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

South of Golf Links Road Wetland: A total of 71 different bird species were recorded, and the highest number of individual birds (274) was recorded in April 2008. Five priority species were recorded, including the Eastern Great Egret which was sighted on six different surveys.

Frog Hollow Wetland: A total of 60 different bird species were recorded, and the highest number of individual birds (331) was recorded in April 2008. Most (275 / 331) of the birds seen in April 2008 were either wetland or raptor species. Priority species recorded at this site include Hardhead, Eastern Great Egret and Cattle Egret.

Graeme Hosken

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MELBOCA Branch Meetings

MELBOCA branch meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of every month (except December) in the Evergreen Centre, located at 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 Speaker

Tuesday 27 January 2009 8.00 pm

Chris Wichems 'Operation Migration: Whoopers on the Move'

Hailed as the 'wildlife equivalent of putting a man on the moon', Operation Migration's technique of using ultra-light aircraft to teach birds how to migrate is, literally, safeguarding the Whooping Crane from extinction in North America.

Come along as Chris takes us for a 'behind the scenes look' on the work being done to save the Whooping Crane.



Whooping Cranes following one of Operation Migration's ultra-light aircraft on the southward migration

Education Committee: Successful Spring Activities!

The Education Committee has been quite busy this spring with a number of outdoor activities. All of the events were widely advertised, well attended, and provided us with a wonderful opportunity to share our enthusiasm for birding and bird conservation with the community. It is my pleasure to tell you all about the fabulous events that we have hosted...

Breakfast with the Birds at Eltham Lower Park Sunday 28 September

Our spring activities began on Sunday September 28th when MELBOCA hosted our first 'Breakfast with the Birds' for the Nillumbik Shire Council at Eltham Lower Park.

Eltham Lower Park comprises various habitats ranging from woodland to wetland. Diamond Creek borders the park on the east, the Yarra River and Lenister Farm border the park on the south, a flora reserve borders the park on the west and Wingrove Park borders the park to the northwest.

On the day, the weather was perfect for bird watching with a light overcast sky and a slight breeze. Thirty people attended, with groups heading off in different directions: one going to Wingrove Park, another to the Flora Reserve and all visiting some parts of Diamond Creek or Yarra River.

An impressive total of 43 species were seen for the morning, including nesting Common Bronzewing and nesting Magpie-lark. An Olive-backed Oriole was heard – our first visiting migrant this season. Other sighted species included Australian King Parrot, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Brown Goshawk, Gang-gang Cockatoo and Chestnut Teal.

Nillumbik Shire Council supplied a wonderful spread for breakfast, with fresh fruit platters, baskets of croissants, trays of Danish pastries, tubs of yoghurt and litres of fruit juice. MELBOCA would like to thank the Nillumbik Shire Council, Lorene Arthur (the Land Management Officer for the Council), and Donna Stoddart (who assisted on the morning). This is our first combined activity with this Council and I hope this can become an annual event.

Thank you to the MELBOCA members who lead walks on the day: Pat Bingham, Chris Doughty, Anthea Fleming, Graeme Hosken, Joy Pagon and Howard Plowright.

Blackburn Lake - Monday 6 October

With rain and hail forecast (and the weather radar confirming it was rapidly approaching), a decision was made to change the walk around Blackburn Lake and treat visitors to a 'Birds of Blackburn Lake' PowerPoint presentation at the Blackburn Library. The library kindly contacted the 20 people booked, who were appreciative of the indoor venue.

However, as the local paper had advertised the walk without mentioning that bookings were essential, we still needed to provide guides for potential guests who might turn up for a walk around the lake. Thank you to Jenny Frohlich and Graeme Hosken, who met seven brave walkers at the lake (including two overseas visitors). Jenny and Graeme gave them a two hour grand tour yielding 21 species, including a Nankeen Night-heron. Though a brief shower occurred during the walk, the hail held off until everyone was safely home. MELBOCA would like to thank the Blackburn Library for coordinating this activity.

Templestowe Wildflower Show

On October 11 and 12, we spread the word about Australian birds and BOCA at the Australian Native Flower Show held at Templestowe College. This weekend event was organised by the Yarra Yarra Branch of the Australian Plants Society.

For some unexplained reason, the attendance was down by two-thirds this year – which was very disappointing for all concerned. Nevertheless, we had our BOCA and Bird Week displays up and played our bird call CDs to provide a garden / bush atmosphere within the college gymnasium. We provided information brochures on birds, plants, binoculars and nest-boxes to interested parties, while Field Guides and BOCA bird calls were used, as we sought to solve the attendee's queries about their 'mystery' garden birds.

I would like to say a big thank you to Jean Cuthbert and Geoff Russell, who assisted with the event.

Breakfast with the Birds at Banyule Sunday 26 October

On a balmy and overcast morning, 74 people arrived for a bird tour around Banyule Flats at the 10th Annual Breakfast with the Birds. The crowd was divided into eight groups and dispersed in different directions, but all finally arrived back at the pavilion for a 'feast' supplied by the Banyule City Council. Danish pastries, croissants, flavoured scones and platters of fruit were plentiful, along with fruit juice, tea and coffee. Displays and information from the Banyule City Council, Warringal Conservation Society and BOCA were located in the marquee.

As most people present were not BOCA members, Janet Hand gave a quick summary of BOCA history and provided a brief overview of our organization. This was followed by a Bird Call after which Anthea Fleming spoke on the work of the Warringal Conservation Society, while Bill and I tallied our bird list.

An amazing total of 78 birds were seen on the morning, including 12 breeding species. This was the largest species count since 2002! Three new species were added: a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagle was spotted near the Golf Course, while Baillon's Crake and Australian Spotted Crake were observed in the wetlands. Other species sighted included Hardhead, Australasian Darter, Spotless Crake, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Australian King Parrot, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Pallid Cuckoo, Yellow-rumped Thornbill (breeding), White-winged Triller and Little Grassbird.

On behalf of MELBOCA, I wish to thank the Banyule City Council; Belinda Moody (their Biodiversity Education Officer) who coordinated this activity; Ellen Mitchell, who assisted on the morning; the BOCA Office staff for taking the bookings; and the birding guides on the day - Pat Bingham, Lyn Easton, Anthea Fleming, Daphne Hards, Gina Hopkins, Graeme Hosken, Geoff Russell, Diane Tweeddale and Chris Wichems. Thanks also to Brian Fleming and Bill Ramsay for manning the scopes at the wetlands.

*Janet Hand
MELBOCA Education Officer*

Interesting Sightings

Entered 10 Nov 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 White-plumed Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Noisy Miner 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 23 September and 28 October 2008), via email or as WEB reports to the BOCA National Office.

MELBOCA is very interested in the apparent disappearance of the White-plumed Honeyeater from the Melbourne suburbs. Is this the case in your area – and, if so, are Noisy Miners present? Of the six sites that MELBOCA are surveying for Melbourne Water (see attached report), White-plumed Honeyeaters have been recorded at five sites; Noisy Miners have also been recorded at those same sites, but in small numbers.

White-plumed Honeyeater Sightings			
No reports this period			

Eastern Spinebill Sightings			
Twice Oct '08	2	Bennett Ave	Mt Waverley

Noisy Miner Sightings			
Daily	10-15	Highbury Park	Burwood East
Most Days	6-8	Tally Ho Reserve	Mt Waverley
08 Oct '08	2	Anderson's Park	Hawthorn East
<i>First sighting at this location in 53 years</i>			

MELBOCA is examining the spread of the **Little Wattlebird** from the inner-city and 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	Kew	Newport	Sth Melbourne
Armadale	Brunswick	Essendon	Langwarrin	Niddrie	South Yarra
Ascot Vale	Burwood	Essendon West	Lilydale	Nunawading	Sunbury
Balwyn	Camberwell	Ferntree Gully	Lower Plenty	Oakleigh	Surrey Hills
Balwyn North	Camberwell East	Fitzroy North	Lower Templestowe	Pakenham	Templestowe
Bayswater North	Canterbury	Frankston	Macleod	Parkdale	The Basin*
Beaumaris	Carlton North	Gembrook	Mentone*	Parkville	Thomastown
Belgrave Heights	Chadstone	Glen Iris	Mill Park	Patterson Lakes	Travancore
Bentleigh	Cheltenham	Glen Waverley	Mitcham	Point Cook	Vermont South
Berwick	Chirnside Park	Greensborough	Mont Albert Nth	Reservoir	Viewbank
Black Rock	Clifton Hill	Hampton	Montrose	Richmond	Westgate Park
Blackburn	Cranbourne	Hampton East	Moonee Ponds	Ringwood	Werribee
Blackburn North	Croydon	Hampton Park	Moorabbin	Rowville	Whealers Hill
Blackburn South	Doncaster	Hawthorn	Mooroolbark*	Rosebud	Williamstown
Box Hill	Doncaster East	Hawthorn East	Mount Eliza	St Kilda	Yarrambat*
Box Hill South	East Malvern	Highbett	Mount Waverley	Sandringham	
Brighton	Eltham	Ivanhoe	Murrumbeena	Southbank	

* Suburbs added, Sep - Oct 2008

Total: 100 Suburbs

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.

Interesting Sightings Cont'd

Other Sightings				
03 Sep '08	Pink Robin	1	Blackburn Lake	Blackburn
03 Sep '08	Song Thrush	1	Seet Ave	Footscray
03 Sep '08	Song Thrush	1	Olinda Wetlands	Lilydale
06 Sep '08	Spotted Pardalote	1	Bennett Ave	Mt Waverley
07 & 20 Sep '08	Song Thrush	1	Moorhead Dr	Mill Park
12 Sep '08	Red-capped Robin	1	South of La Trobe University	Heidelberg West
13 Sep '08	Song Thrush	1	Holmes Rd	Moonee Ponds
26 Sep '08	Grey Fantail	1	Holmes Rd	Moonee Ponds
30 Sep '08	Baillon's Crake	1	Koolamara Water Wetlands	Rowville
01 Oct '08	Song Thrush	1	Kernan Rd	Strathmore
19 Oct '08	Black-tailed Native-hen	1	Flemington Racecourse Wetland	Flemington
20 Oct '08	Straw-necked Ibis	20	Bennett Ave	Mt Waverley
04 Nov '08	White-winged Triller	1		Lilydale
04 Nov '08	Rufous Songlark	1		Lilydale

Additional Notes

- Craig Smith reports that a wetland has been developed at Flemington Racecourse. While there in mid-October, Craig observed Black-tailed Native-hen and Black-fronted Dotterel. Craig also witnessed a Purple Swamphen destroy the nest of an Australasian Grebe, breaking all the eggs. Unfortunately, the Grebe were no match for the Swamphen.
- Andrew Weiss reports Common Blackbirds calling before dawn, some starting as early as 3.00am and calling continuously for many hours. Andrew would like to know of other similar recordings, and also would like to know where the male Blackbirds go when they stop calling.
- Tawny Frogmouth sightings, October '08

Tyrrell Avenue, Blackburn	2 Adults, 2 Young
Susan Court, Mt Waverley	2 Adults, 2 Young
Bennett Avenue, Mt Waverley	2 Adults, 1 Young

*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.*

All MELBOCA Outing Reports may be found on the MELBOCA website: www.melboca.org.au

Graeme Hosken, Recorder

Conservation Update

Sonja Ross alerted me to a discussion on Birding Aus about a Bowerbird that had been sighted with a plastic ring around its neck. The ring was one that is used on drink containers as a safety seal.

passed on to Dr. Jenny Lau, Conservation Projects, at National Office for further action. The ring was removed from the bird in question and it fortunately survived the experience.

The discussion highlighted action taken in Tasmania by a concerned observer, who initiated a campaign that led to a local milk company adapting the ring so that it divided upon opening of the seal, thus rendering it safe for birds. Relevant extracts were printed and have been

*Arthur Carew
Conservation Liaison*

Past Meeting Reports

23 September 2008

Chris Wichems welcomed all to the meeting and introduced our guest speaker, Graeme Hosken, whose presentation was entitled 'Wildlife in Japan's North'.

In October 2005, Graeme visited the Japanese island of Hokkaido on a tour run by Destination Management, a company based in Queensland. October was chosen in order to experience the magnificent colours of the deciduous foliage during the Northern Hemisphere autumn – a time of year reputed to be spectacular in Hokkaido. At the end of the tour, Graeme managed to squeeze in a side trip to the large island of Honshu for a visit to Tokyo and Hiroshima.

Hokkaido is the second largest, northernmost and least developed of Japan's four main islands. Home to Japan's aboriginal Ainu race, Hokkaido continues to represent the untamed wilderness with many great national parks. These national parks are exceptionally well run, with copious information available in the park centres (unfortunately, mostly in Japanese, although the Latin names of the birds are displayed).

Between Hokkaido and Honshu (the largest of Japan's four islands), the Tsugaru Strait forms a zoo-geographical border called the Blakiston Line, which marks the southern limit of many northern bird species, notably the White-tailed Eagle, Japanese Crane, Blakiston's Fish-owl, Grey-headed Woodpecker and Pine Grosbeak. As a result, a visit to the island of Hokkaido can yield many species that can not be seen elsewhere in Japan.

The tour began in Sapporo, where the group was met by the tour guides. The first stop was Lake Utanoi, Japan's first wild bird sanctuary. Established in 1981, the site is near to the industrial city of Tomakomai. It covers 511 hectares and over 200 species of bird have been recorded there. In 1991, it became a RAMSAR site. Graeme showed photos of birds likely to be seen at Lake Utanoi, including Brown-eared Bulbul, Gray Heron, Mute Swan, Whooper Swan, European Widgeon, Reed Bunting and Nuthatch.

The next stop was Daisetsuzan National Park, which is Japan's largest national park. Located almost in the geographical centre of the island, this natural treasure boasts ten mountains and volcanos over 2,000 metres high. Within the park, Graeme visited the Sounkyo Gorge area, a spectacular, five mile long gorge with 100 metre sheer cliffs and numerous waterfalls, including Ginga (Milky Way) and Ryusei (Shooting Star) Falls. The autumn colouring was magnificent, ranging from pale green through bright yellow to deep scarlet. As some of the leaves had already fallen, it made seeing the birds easier; some of which are very tiny. Graeme showed some beautiful photos of a Brown Dipper and a Pied Wagtail skating on the ice. With a bit of luck, you might see also a brown bear in the area.

The group then headed to the north-eastern part of the island to the Sea of Okhotsk. On the way, they stopped in the city of Abashiri, a fishing port, where they visited the Abashiri Drift Ice Museum and learned about the drift ice that flows into the Sea of Okhotsk from the Sea of Russia during the winter

season. Lake Tofutsu, which stretches between Abashiri and Koshimizucho, was the next visit. This lake attracts many waders, as it is the breeding ground for the Japanese Gadwall and a great spot to see Whooper Swans. Its name means "a lake where birds are always there" in the Ainu language.

After an overnight stop in the fishing village of Utoro, the group visited Japan's newest World Heritage listed site: Shiretoko Peninsula. This unspoilt mountain wilderness is located on a peninsula that protrudes into the Sea of Okhotsk, and it is well known for its proliferous birdlife and other wildlife, including brown bears and deer. After visiting the Shiretoko Interpretive Centre, they stopped at the Five Lakes Conservation Area, a protected habitat comprising five small lakes grouped together between the sea and the mountains that attracts many birds, including waders, ducks and mergansers. During the afternoon, they enjoyed a boat cruise along the shores of the peninsula that afforded impressive views of the rugged cliffs and colonies of sea birds. They finished off the day with a bit of spotlighting.

Next, the group crossed the peninsula to Rausu, a small fishing village that once grew wealthy on herring fishing. Steller's Sea Eagles are frequently seen there in winter whilst the White-tailed Eagle can also be seen.

Heading south, they visited the Nemuro Straits on their way to Shibetsu. At Notsuke Hanto, a longshore drift, you might see the Japanese Red-crowned Cranes and waders on the tidal flats. In 1935, the Japanese Crane was declared a special national monument, which has resulted in the numbers increasing greatly. After overnighing in the most easterly point of Japan (where Steller's Eider regularly winter), they pushed on towards Kushiro, visiting Cape Ochishi, Kiritappu and Lake Akeshi (a vast marshland) along the way.

A trip highlight was a visit to the Wildlife Preservation Bureau of Hokkaido with a behind the scenes look and talk about the protection of Steller's Sea Eagle and the endangered Blakiston's Fish Owl. There is also a centre to rehabilitate injured owls, many of which have been hit by cars as they feed on frogs at the road edges. To remedy the situation, rumble strips have been placed near bridges to warn the birds of approaching cars.

From Kushiro, Graeme took a high speed train to Tomakomi before catching an overnight ferry to the island of Honshu. There, he visited Chosonji Temple before heading to Genbi Gorge, a 2 kilometre ravine on the Iwai River.

During the trip, Graeme not only enjoyed avian (and other) wildlife, but also the difference in culture. Japanese meals were taken in the traditional low-table manner with the food beautifully presented. At Genbi Gorge, there was a unique tea house. You order your tea – then wait for it to arrive from a small cable that connects to a house further up the mountain! In addition, Graeme enjoyed the different modes of transport, which included bus, rail, bullet train, ferry, foot, and Ferris wheel!

All in all, Graeme gave a fantastic presentation, highlighting a beautiful country with much to see. For those of you eager to

Past Meeting Reports Cont'd

plan a trip, BOCA has a DVD in the library showing 100 different birds of Japan. Further, field guides of Japanese birds are now in print, but not always fully translated.

Linda Stock

28 October 2008

Graeme Hosken opened the meeting and welcomed visitors and new members.

The Bird of the Evening was entitled 'Birds that make my heart go Pitta-patter', an interesting and amusing presentation by Chris Wichems. Chris has been conducting a 'love affair' with the different Pitta species ever since she saw her first Pitta (Rainbow Pitta) whilst on a trip to the Darwin area. In a gully, equipped with bird guides and plagued by bugs, she was so taken with the electric blue flash on the wings that she decided to learn all about – and view - the Pitta species that can be seen in Australia (the Rainbow Pitta, Noisy Pitta and Red-bellied Pitta). Pittas are restricted to the northern region of the country, are mainly terrestrial (tending to hop), usually 'loners' and can use anvils as tools. They are highly coloured and possess short, stubby tails. Worldwide, there are 31 species, which can be found in Africa, India, Asia and Australia. They are thought to have originated in South East Asia. Very attractive birds, indeed!

The guest speaker for the evening was Chris Lester, who spoke on 'Birding in China'. Chris has been a keen birdwatcher for over 20 years and would like to 'tick' all of the 9000 plus species of bird worldwide. He is, therefore, well travelled. During his travels, Chris not only concentrates on bird life, but he also enjoys the cultural differences and magnificent scenery of countries visited.

In April and May, 2007, Chris visited China. Previously, China had been a difficult country to access, especially from a birder's perspective. Chris noted that the country is catching on to the idea of ecotourism, and there are many people eager to help the ecotourist, including Chinese students.

Chris' tour started in the city of Chengdu in the Sichuan province, of recent earthquake devastation. He travelled up the Tibetan plateau and across to Xian to see the Terracotta Warriors, with a side excursion to see the Crested Ibis. All up, the trip took a total of three weeks.

Upon arrival, Chris began birding in the rain, amongst the temples and monuments of Chengdu. At Du Fus Cottage, he saw several species, including the White-browed Laughing Thrush and a Parrotbill in bamboo. Assisted by a university student, Kevin, and driver, Mr. Lee, Chris and his travelling companion travelled to Emei Shan, to visit the Wannian Temple and do some birding. The habitat was mountainous and one either had to take a cable car or walk over some very steep and slippery tracks. The weather was wet and sometimes snowy with the air pollution from industry not helping visibility. However, the Grey Bush Chat and Elliot's Laughing Thrush were seen.

Chris noted that half the Chinese people are sweepers of some form or another, often with the old fashioned besom

brooms on bicycles. Also, the road building is haphazard, to say the least, with the old roads just pushed over the hillsides and new ones laid on top – at the same time, still in use, not conducive to efficient travel. So the trip to Wawu-shan seemed to take a little longer than anticipated.

However, the Golden and Great Parrotbills were sighted, along with a single Red Panda, Rock Squirrel, Blue Magpie, and a Slaty-backed Forktail. At Wolong, Pied Wagtail, and the elusive Golden Pheasant were highlights, the latter of which Chris showed his best photo of one in full flight, running uphill.

The Panda Research Centre was visited and Darjeeling Woodpecker, Green-backed Tit and deer were seen. In the mountains, there is a Panda Valley walk for the tourists, along which one negotiates a somewhat rickety wooden bridge with a clear plastic panel in the centre, across a deep gorge. It was noted that most people avoided the plastic and kept to the wooden planking at the edges. The mountain scenery was spectacular, if very steep. Adorning the scenery are many Tibetan prayer flags. Rosy Pipits, Choughs, Bunting, Rose Finches and Redstarts were evident here.

Reaching the grasslands, they encountered (at a distance) the fierce Tibetan Mastiff that is employed to guard stock, Long-legged Buzzards, Daurian Jackdaws and Cinereous Vultures. It would appear that the land is vastly overgrazed by the Yaks.

Next stop was the Juizhaigou National Park, a huge set up for tourists, with a bus system as the mode of transport. Most of the Chinese tourists appeared to spend their time dressing up and taking photos of themselves, rather than exploring the park. Here, Chris encountered the Rufous-breasted Accentor, Blue-eared Pheasant, Hoopoe, Wallcreeper, and Redstart.

On the way to Xian, the Crested Ibis was seen. It was interesting to note that the local farmers are encouraged to look after them and indeed allow some of their harvested grain to be left out as feed. The Foping Biosphere Reserve was also visited with many birds seen including the Spotted Nutcracker.

The Terracotta Warriors were only re-discovered in 1972. All on show had been reconstructed after being crushed under their protective wooden roof many years ago. After a lovely visit, it was back to Chengdu and Australia via Hong Kong.

I am sure Chris has opened our eyes to another birding destination. At present, apart from a visa, there are no special restrictions on visiting for this purpose.

Announcements followed the talk, including a resume of the recent plethora of educational activities by Janet Hand. Also a Painted Snipe has been seen at Edithvale Wetlands and notes regarding its behaviour are needed – see the MELBOCA website for details.

Linda Stock

Outing Reports

Weekday Outings

16 September 2008

Cape Schanck

Although the drive to Cape Schanck was marked by driving rain, wind and hail, 13 of us assembled at the meeting point in windy but fine conditions. Our leader was Pat Bingham and she led us first to the boardwalk lookout point. As north-westerly gales had been blowing for several days, we were not optimistic about the possibility of sighting albatrosses near to shore. Australasian Gannets flew past and we 'got our eye in' following them. Then the cry went up: 'Albatross!' Eventually, all of us saw Black-browed Albatross and many also caught sight of Shy Albatross, despite the challenges of picking them out against the white caps and focussing on them before they soared out of sight. A single Pacific Gull was outnumbered by the 15 or so Kelp Gulls flying past.

Walking back to the lower car park in a flurry of rain, the bush was populated with Singing Honeyeater and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters. Crescent Honeyeaters were initially heard, but not seen until later. Brown Thornbills, Grey Fantails and Superb Fairy-wrens foraged in the dense shrubs, where flowering *Leptospermum* was no doubt attracting insects. Most of the party walked on toward Bushrangers Bay. The track yielded Striated Fieldwren calling on the crowns of bushes, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo perching in the open and both Australian Hobby and Wedge-tailed Eagle flying overhead. As well as birds, it was pleasing to catch sight of Swamp Wallabies and an Eastern Grey Kangaroo. Flocks of Little Wattlebirds were common in the eastern part of the walk. Lunch was eaten on the cliff top and then Bett Mitchell, of the Hooded Plover survey, offered to lead the group down to the beach to show us a Hooded Plover pair. It certainly pays to be well informed, and all managed good views of the pair.

Other pleasant memories were an Eastern Yellow Robin that posed in the sunshine in front of a tree trunk covered with bright yellow lichen (quite a composition!) and the pair of Silvereyes so neatly foraging. Given that there are several old buildings around, I wonder if the Welcome Swallows nest in the area. Near the carpark were Spotted Doves and at the east end of the track we spotted a Common Blackbird. By the bird call, the species total was 37. Pat was deservedly thanked for her preparation, which had led to a successful walk after an unprepossessing start to the day.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Monday 6 - Tuesday 7 October 2008
Overnight Weekday Outing in Daylesford area

Arriving at the appointed meeting place "Sailors Falls" on

day one, Celia Browne was disappointed that the assembled birdos numbered only two - Joan Peters and I! As the weather was both very cold and very wet, we decided to go into Daylesford to have a warming coffee in a café. This was really no hardship, as the three of us have been birding together for over twenty-five years at outings and surveys at various places. The chatter could have gone on all day!

We finally set off on a walk and were pleased to see White-throated Treecreeper, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Black Swan and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. I am not sure if we had hit our stride or the rain eased, but we soon added Crimson Rosella, Common Blackbird, Laughing Kookaburra and Pacific Black Duck; several of the latter were enjoying their swim down a fast flowing stream. There were quite a few smaller birds about but they were not easy to see. We did find several honeyeaters, including Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters as well as the Eastern Spinebill. The addition of Golden Whistler, Eastern Yellow Robin, Red-browed Firetail, White-browed Scrubwren, Grey Fantail, Striated Thornbill and Spotted Pardalote made the numbers look a bit more respectable.

On Tuesday, we visited a private property in a hilly, former gold mining area. The owners of this small property have done a great job of fencing and replanting. The grassy areas are currently quite green and the two dams are full. The day was still very cold with wind and occasional showers. The most common bird here seemed to be White-winged Chough, with one seen sitting on a nest. Also seen were Rufous Whistler, Jacky Winter, Spotted Pardalotes, Weebill, Red Wattlebird and Mistletoebird. When we got over the hill and out of the wind, we saw Superb Fairy-wren, Scarlet Robin, Striated Pardalote, Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Brown-headed Honeyeater. Driving out to the property, we had seen Galah, Crimson Rosella, Australian Magpie and raven (species unknown).

Considering the atrocious weather conditions, the number of birds seen wasn't such a bad effort. As the saying goes 'a good time was had by all'. We thank not only Celia, but also the property owners for allowing us the opportunity to see their property (with interesting improvements) and 'their' birds.

Anna Watt

21 October 2008

Gobur, via Yarck

Bob Tate was our leader and 14 of us followed him to the Gobur Flora Reserve in cool, sunny windy weather. We didn't even make it to the parking area before the convoy stopped to observe a Pallid Cuckoo perched on the fence, well fluffed out for the conditions. Welcome Swallows and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos flew over while black-backed Australian Magpies foraged in the paddocks adjacent to the reserve. These paddocks have been subdivided, but

Outing Reports Cont'd

as yet there is no development on them. They have formed a useful extension to the reserve in the past, so it will be with interest that we observe how the birds react to people in close proximity.

As we started our walk through the reserve, a Common Bronzewing flushed, White-plumed Honeyeaters called, Crimson Rosellas flew around and Brown Treecreepers flew down and foraged up the tree trunks. Grey Shrike-thrush and Olive-backed Oriole called as did Spotted and Striated Pardalotes, but our views of these occurred later in the walk. The call of a White-throated Gerygone had everyone searching the trees until it was finally observed by nearly all. A Grey Fantail was observed on its neat cup nest and a pair of Gang-gang Cockatoo seemed to be inspecting a large hollow. Several different nests were found on the ground, probably the result of strong winds recently in the area. A male White-throated Treecreeper brought material to a small tree hollow; was it nesting material or food?

The mournful calls of White-winged Choughs alerted us to their presence and glimpses were had among the trees as they moved through. Their departure was accompanied by that of a kangaroo. We also saw a female Koala and the scrapings of Echidnas were present in numbers of ant nests.

Plants were another source of pleasure, with rock ferns and flowering Dianella, Goodenia and fringe lilies competing for attention. Not many orchids were spotted, but Caladenia and Spider Orchids rewarded searchers, though the Hare Orchids had apparently been eaten (blame the kangaroo). As we turned back, a Sacred Kingfisher was added to the list and a pair of Leaden Flycatchers delighted us. During lunchtime, Tree Martins were swooping above and a Nankeen Kestrel flew past, the only raptor we observed this day. A Little Raven had clearly been too close to a Red Wattlebird, which attacked it for some time, initially joined briefly by an opportunistic Australian Magpie.

As we drove out after lunch, the fence again stopped the convoy. This time it was a Brown Songlark which obligingly perched for views and then flew, calling, to land in the paddock. We drove to McGuigans Rd where we hoped to find Rufous Songlark, and after a short walk we were not disappointed.

All day, wind had made observation, especially of small birds in the canopy, quite a challenge. Despite this, we saw Dusky Wood swallows, Brown Treecreepers, Grey Shrike-thrush, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Superb Fairy-wren and a Crested Shrike-tit in this area. The trees were badly lerp-infested and were doing poorly. Presumably the lower bird numbers due to drought have allowed the lerp to proliferate.

Walking on to some more open ground, we spied about 20

Australian Wood Duck in the paddocks near the old rail line. These were the only ducks seen and the only birds associated with any of the small dams in the area. Red-rumped Parrots were in this area and an adult and an immature Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike were also seen.

In total, the day's bird list was 44 species, a most rewarding effort for an area so long gripped by drought. We thanked Bob for all his preparation and local knowledge which made such a successful day's birding.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

5 November 2008

Koomba Park, Wantirna

With a not too promising weather forecast for the middle of the day, it was very pleasing to welcome 21 keen bird-watchers, complete with binoculars and rain coats. It was cloudy and cool when we set off, but the weather steadily improved throughout the day, reaching a temperature of 27°C. The raincoats were not needed but the binoculars certainly were!

Although Bell Miner, Noisy Miner and Red Wattlebird predominated, the numbers of other species grew steadily throughout the morning. Perhaps those catching the most attention were a young Grey Butcherbird on the ground that had fallen out of its nest, a Fan-tailed Cuckoo on a dead branch clearly showing its chestnut colouring, a Nankeen Kestrel in a large dead tree in the adjoining paddock and a pair of Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoos in full view at the top of a dead tree. I liked best a pair of Australian Wood Duck nestled precariously at the very top of another tall dead tree.

The round trip back to our cars took 2 hours and by this time several people were foot-sore, hungry and thirsty.

After lunch the bird call yielded 50 species, which was very gratifying. Ten members elected to do the boardwalk track and were rewarded for their effort. A further six species were added to our list – a Crested Shrike-tit, European Goldfinch, Grey Shrike-thrush, Little Wattlebird, Eastern Spinebill and a Silver Gull - making our final tally of 56. It was a most enjoyable day and much better than anticipated.

Norman Eyre-Walker
Leader

17 November 2008

Sugarloaf Reservoir, Christmas Hills

Clear skies, mild weather and a light breeze were the lot for fourteen enthusiasts under the leadership of Arthur and Pauline Spurgeon. We welcomed Julie on her first walk since joining the club, and were pleased that Lois had made time for the day. The predominant bird species at the Ridge car park where we assembled were Welcome

Outing Reports Cont'd

Swallow, Noisy Miner and Red Wattlebird; however a trio of Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and a couple of picnic ground-haunting Laughing Kookaburra also appeared. We drove in convoy to the Saddle Dam car park where the larger area promised more birds. The water level in the dam is depressingly low and has been low long enough for a considerable growth of trees and understorey plants to occur on the exposed edges and ridges. Water is flowing (being pumped?) in from the Yarra, otherwise the dam would probably be dry.

Australian Wood Ducks were the only birds using the deeply shelving edges of the water and Great Cormorants were both diving and perching. Some amusement was afforded by three cormorants in a line, each perched on its own buoy. Eastern Grey Kangaroos either watched us from the shelter of the bush on the water's edge or moved away quietly. Rabbits were evident and a few people caught a glimpse of an Echidna before it disappeared. Yellow-rumped Thornbills flew between the ground and the low trees. The bush within the reserve was very quiet but there were plenty of calls from the other side of the fence on the eastern side. It was a day for calls rather than sightings, but White-eared Honeyeaters were almost

insistent that we view them while they perched on the bare branches of dead trees. Calls heard included Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Bell Miner, Rufous Whistler, Grey Butcherbird and Yellow-faced Honeyeater. Mistletoe was fruiting and we were treated to close views of both male and female Mistletoebird eating the berries. This was unanimously voted 'sighting of the day'.

Lunch was at the Saddle Dam picnic area in the shade of a rotunda with Superb Fairy-wrens calling and foraging nearby. Then we drove back to the Ridge area and walked around. An Olive-backed Oriole was calling, but few new species were added to the list. Most people walked the slightly rough circuit track while a few declined and strolled back to the cars and birdcall, finding some hyacinth orchids in bud on the way. The tally was 33 species, more than 2 birds for each of us, and we thanked Pauline and Arthur for a most enjoyable day.

*Diane Tweeddale,
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings*

Your Letters ...

Unusual Feeding by a Purple Swamphen

During the October survey conducted at the River Gum Creek Wetland, a Purple Swamphen was observed feeding one of its young with pieces of a dead Purple Swamphen chick. The adult Swamphen carried the dead chick in its bill from a reed area and proceeded to pull the dead chick apart to feed the live chick.

Has anyone else seen this cannibalism action by this species?

Graeme Hosken

The Melbirdian is published six times a year

Member birding-related stories and articles (up to 800 words) are invited

January 1 2009 is the deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the February issue

Put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and send in your birding-related stories and articles!

Contact

Mailing address:

MELBOCA
C/O BOCA National Office
PO Box 185
Nunawading VIC 3131

The Melbirdian Editor can be contacted at the above address or via email at melbirdian@bigpond.com

MELBOCA Committee:

President
Graeme Hosken
info@melboca.org.au
tel: 9802 5250

Secretary
Janet Hand

Treasurer
Bill Ramsay

Conservation
Arthur Carew

Members
Sunny Fernie
Geoff Russell
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

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

**There will be no Wednesday Wanderings in December or January.
Wednesday Wanderings will resume in February.**

Wednesday 25 February 2009 - Westerfold Park, Templestowe.

9.45 am. Meet in Westerfold Park car park; the entrance is at Melway 33 F2. Enter park from Fitzsimons Lane, turning right and keeping the main road on your right. Park near the canoe launch at river (Melway 33 F1). There are toilets here. A morning wander downstream and around this attractive Parks Victoria park, visiting rapids to look for kingfishers and open paddocks to search for raptors. Please carry water if hot. Join us for lunch afterwards - BYO chairs and lunch.

Beginners Outings

**There will be no Beginners Outings in December or January.
Beginners Outings will resume in February.**

Weekdays Outings

Monday 8 December – Organ Pipes, Keilor North. (Melway 3 C4) 10am - 3pm. Enter from Calder Freeway. The Park is signposted. Toilets are available near the car park and near the Organ Pipes picnic ground. All welcome, no need to book.

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 7 December. Gates open at 10 am. Walk begins at 10.30am

No birdwalk at Yellingbo in January.

Sunday 1 February. Gates open at 10 am. Walk begins at 10.30am

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

**The MELBOCA Committee would like to wish
each and every one of you a happy and healthy
holiday season!!**



**As a reminder, the BOCA National Office will close on
Christmas Eve and reopen on
Monday 5 January, 2009.**

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

Table 1. Bird species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

Bird species	Site number						Bird species	Site number					
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6
Black Swan	X		X	X	N		Silver Gull			X	X	N	
Australian Shelduck							Galah	X	X	X	X	N	
Australian Wood Duck		X	X		N	N	Long-billed Corella					X	
Pink-eared Duck							Little Corella	X					N
Australasian Shoveler			X				Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	X		X			
Grey Teal	N		X	X	N	N	Rainbow Lorikeet		X	X	X	N	
Chestnut Teal	X	X	X		N	N	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet			X			
Pacific Black Duck	X	X	X	X	N	N	Musk Lorikeet						
Hardhead			X			N	Eastern Rosella				X		N
Blue-billed Duck			X				Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	N		N	X	N	
Australasian Grebe		X	X	X	N	N	Palid Cuckoo						N
Hoary-headed Grebe			X			N	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo						
Rock Dove	X	X	X	N	N		Laughing Kookaburra						N
Spotted Dove	X	X	X	X	N	N	Superb Fairy-Wren	X	X		X	N	
Common Bronzewing							White-browed Scrubwren					X	N
Crested Pigeon		X	X			N	Yellow Thornbill						
Australasian Darter	X					N	Yellow-rumped Thornbill						
Little Pied Cormorant	X		X	X			Brown Thornbill	N					
Great Cormorant							Yellow-faced Honeyeater						
Little Black Cormorant				X		N	White-eared Honeyeater						
Pied Cormorant							White-plumed Honeyeater	X	X	X		N	
Australian Pelican	X			X		N	Noisy Miner	N		X		N	
White-necked Heron							Little Wattlebird	X	X	X			
Eastern Great Egret			X	X		N	Red Wattlebird	X	X	X	X	N	N
Cattle Egret							Crescent Honeyeater						N
White-faced Heron		X	X			N	New Holland Honeyeater	X	X	X	X	N	
Little Egret							White-naped Honeyeater						
Australian White Ibis	X		X			N	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike						
Straw-necked Ibis	X		X				Grey Butcherbird						
Royal Spoonbill			X	X			Australian Magpie	X	X	X	X	N	N
Yellow-billed Spoonbill					N	N	Pied Currawong						
Black-shouldered Kite					N		Grey Fantail						
White-bellied Sea-Eagle							Willie Wagtail	X	X	X	X	N	N
Whistling Kite							Little Raven	X	X	X	X	N	N
Black Kite							Magpie-lark	X	X	X	X	N	N
Brown Goshawk							Flame Robin						N
Collared Sparrowhawk					N		Horsfield's Bushlark						N
Swamp Harrier					N		Eurasian Skylark					X	N
Little Eagle							Golden-headed Cisticola	X					N
Nankeen Kestrel				N		N	Australian Reed-Warbler	X	X	X	X	N	N
Brown Falcon							Little Grassbird	X		X	X	N	N
Australian Hobby							Silvereye						N
Peregrine Falcon							Welcome Swallow	X	X	X	X	N	N
Purple Swamphen	X	X	X	X	N	N	Fairy Martin			X			
Buff-banded Rail							Common Blackbird	X		X	X	N	
Baillon's Crake							Song Thrush						
Australian Spotted Crake			X			N	Common Starling	X	X	X	X	N	N
Spotless Crake							Common Myna	X	X	X	X	N	N
Dusky Moorhen	X	X	X	X	N	N	Red-browed Finch						N
Eurasian Coot	X	X	X	X	N	N	House Sparrow	X	X	X	X		
Black-winged Stilt	N		X		N		Eurasian Tree Sparrow			X			
Black-fronted Dotterel	X	X	X	N	N		Australasian Pipit						N
Red-kneed Dotterel			X				European Goldfinch	X	X		X	N	
Masked Lapwing	X	X	X	X	N	N	Common Greenfinch	X					N
Latham's Snipe	N		X			N							
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper			X				Feral Duck	X			N	X	
Pacific Gull		N					Feral Goose					X	
Total number of bird species seen at each site during the current survey months													
Total number of bird species seen at each site during the current survey months													
Total number of bird species seen at all MELBOCA sites to date: 113													

Table 2. Other species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

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

Key:

- X Denotes species seen at this site during the current survey months.
- N Denotes new species added at this site during the current survey months.
- (Shading) denotes species seen at this site on previous surveys.